

# City Cops Hit Hog Riders

Fifth Estate staffer

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Ah rode all night, and all day long,  
'Cause ah'm in love with you."  
—old ballad

They wouldn't let us into the bar. It was 2:30 a.m. and we wanted to get one last six pack of beer. We climbed on our scooters, pulled our "safety helmets" (as the state law now required), kicked over our hogs, and rolled out onto 14 Mile road. The light at Gratiot turned green, and with a healthy jerk of the right wrist, smoke and noise began to vomit forth from our high-rise pipes, as our rubber ground into the asphalt and the combined thirty-six hundred cubic centimeters of our three vintage Harley-Davidsons growled across Gratiot.

As the light changed, a blue Chevrolet sedan turned off Gratiot onto 14 Mile in the direction we were going. In the lead and "feelin' groovy," I swept by him, pushing him off to the shoulder a wee bit. As I moved down 14 Mile, I noticed my buddies weren't behind me, but a pair of headlights was gaining on me. Having a slight phobia about being hit from behind, I accelerated, and he kept coming. I accelerated some more, and then noticed his flashing light trying to push me off the road. That blue Chevy was an unmarked police car—I couldn't hear his siren over the roar of my exploding cylinders. Within two minutes, two more cop cars, neon lights blinking on their roofs, saying this is authority and those shrill organ-grinders bleating in the night—had me hedged in on all sides.

This was their big moment. You understand, cops get tired of giving tickets to little old ladies for illegal left turns. Busting a machine gives them an opportunity to live up to the romantic American notion of the tough defender of law (and convention) they possessed when they first joined the force. They put you up against their car, frisk you and harass you; and always leave those goddam blinking lights on, long after they've stopped you.

"What are you hitting me for?"

"You name it, Buster. Reckless driving, speeding 60 in a 40 zone, dragging, excessive noise—does that brake light work? Your license is on wrong. Are you in a gang—give me all the identification in your wallet." You don't resist such intrusions of privacy, for as a friend says, "Let 'em search you or go to jail."

Michigan cops are waging their own Vietnam style "undeclared war" against the big bikes. And, they seem to savor the prospect of a long war and total victory. At the recent hate-in, the fuzz almost outnumbered the scooters. Some clubs were afraid to even show their colors on the scene.

There are those, in fact, who won't even ride in the city anymore. Cops have pulled me over for no reason but to check my "registration and serial number"—and then give me tickets for technical offenses: "That motorcycle's a wreck, buddy; you'd better get it fixed up and looking decent."

Around the Detroit clubhouses, the talk is bitter. "I'm on my scooter, and they'll pull you over and start beating the shit outa you," an Outlaw complains. "If the police would have left things alone" another club member defensively comments on the "love-in" fiasco (for which bike-riders were blamed, even by the hippies), "it would have been fine. But they saw the crowd and they had to bust it up." Chopper fiends all have their personal collection of stories. One bearded cyclist, with 40 pounds of chains and metal studs dripping from his leather-laced denim

colors, relates the following story: “A group of our hogs were parked outside this scene on 8 Mile. The Maps came by and figured they were illegally parked. They started taking these tow chains, and wrapping them through the bikes, and dragging them- away. \$180 paint jobs, and two thousand dollar machines, but they didn’t care. Now if you wear a suit and drive a Lincoln, you’re somebody, and they’d better be careful.”

“I’ve just about had it; I’m selling my bike and quitting,” a friend in the Renegades lamented over a beer the night before he was sentenced for violations.

Fed up with the scene in Detroit, a few of us recently decided to go outstate. Considering our points and future court dates, we figured that in another month the cops would have accomplished their aim; and we’d all be walking. In the mountains of West Virginia, we hoped, we’d find some reprieve from the man.

But we hadn’t been in mountain country a day before a local cop hauled one of us in front of the mayor—at twelve midnight—for “reckless” driving: a faulty clutch had caused an abrupt start in the heart of town. We raised hell in three states all right: helmets hanging from our handlebars stuffed with beer cans; dragging through the mountain roads at up to 120; but everywhere we went it was the same story.

We almost pushed our bikes through the towns, but bars would refuse to serve us, and cops would escort us to the city limits. Don’t go to DC, we were told. Maryland has passed a series of laws designed to outlaw choppers, and break the Pagans, the local club.

The scene is the same all over the country. On the West coast, cyclists don’t dare ride in groups anymore, or show their colors on the road. At a recent national police convention, it was decided that what is needed is a “crackdown” on hippies and big bikes. “It’s supposed to be the United States,” a leader of the Outlaws relates. “I’ve got so many fuckin’ free rights I can’t even ride my bike down the side street.”

Tensions are getting worse all over; cops have talked at me about an “open confrontation” between the Man and the machines. But the bike-scene in America is opening up. Though they receive less publicity, in numbers alone, those committed to the pleasures of the big bikes probably match the numbers of the hippies.

Yes, out on the highway, with your pipes belching like the guns of Navarone, arms comfortably floating up around your ear lobes, motorcycle boots cocked forward on your chromed foot pegs—you’re the king of the road, Daddy, and until the fuzz pulls you over again, it’s free, and easy, and fast. As they say: “Bikes are where it’s at.”

# fifth Estate

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