

The wind in my hair

David Gaynes

1969

I ride a bike. Not the kind you pedal—I used to do that. I mean a motorcycle. There's nothing like it. Motorcycles mean a special thing to the people who ride them.

Some people (I suspect fewer than one might expect) use their scooters primarily for transportation. Undoubtedly they are economical, easy to park, and maneuverable: Nonetheless, in a nation used to traveling in commodious comfort, rolling houses with stereo entertainment centers and sexadelic pin-striping are far more the norm.

At the other end of the scale, some people undoubtedly see their machines as rolling, fire-breathing phallic symbols. It's hard to miss that—the chopped Harley, its rigid frame in eternal erection, its huge Neo-Gothic exhaust pipes ejaculating flame and thunder, is one hell of a thing.

For most of us, I think the reason we put up with a vehicle more dangerous than a car, and less comfortable than a crummy DSR bus, is freedom.

I ain't no fool. I don't claim that a bike can cure the heartbreak of psoriasis, or fill an empty stomach. In fact, all a bike can do is be a bike, but when you're on it, that's enough.

At that point when there's nothing but your white knuckles and sore haunches, footpegs scraping blacktop—hundreds of pounds, parts and principles merging in a single white-hot arc around a favorite corner, each second is unbearably full—a kinetic orgasm.

At the end of an endless day in a sweatshop-braintomb, kicking a big thumper over and knowing that it won't kick back cuz you took a wrench -to the timing that morning makes it alight. It doesn't change anything, but it's a way of coping.

Maybe the nicest thing of all is the wind. Dogs sticking their heads out of car-windows on the E-way, their ears flapping in the wind like your long hair, know something with you that their car-bound masters will never know.

Now the State of Michigan wants to take that away. The penalty for failure to wear a helmet on a motorcycle is 90 days in jail and/or \$100.

As unquestionable as it is that helmets contribute to the rider's safety, there can be no doubt that this law is but the most recent attempt to harass those who ride motorcycles and an abridgment of personal freedom.

First of all, it must remain the province of an individual to decide how he deals with his life to the extent that other people are unaffected. Whereas a drunk driver or defective car is a murderous menace to all who use the roads, a helmetless biker is prone to hurt no one but himself.

By the same token, if legislators were so damn uptight about saving lives, they'd outlaw cigarette smoking and make seat-belt wearing mandatory. But legislators smoke cigarettes and sit on their seat-belts, so they're not about to. Legislators don't ride bikes.

In fact, if they really cared about our safety and welfare, they'd do things like getting rid of hydrogen bombs, automobile factories and all the other things that make riding a bike the important symbolic statement it is.

In the soon to-be-released movie, "Easy Rider," a man remarks on how hard it is for people to accept freedom, that is, other people's freedom.

If it's on two wheels, people better learn to smile when they see it go by.

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