

Community Columnist: Lincoln's biker subculture exposed as fairly mainstream

BY DAVE FISCHER, *Lincoln Star Journal*, March 1, 2008

Warning: This column contains statistics. I'm afraid I don't know any better way to create the perception of fact than to sprinkle in some numbers, so that's what I'm going to do.

Oh, and those statistics you see with asterisks by them? I made them up. I'm figuring I have a fair amount of leeway here, accountability-wise.

Anyway, it's time for the truth to come out about bikers.

A lot of time, money and energy has been invested over the years to create and foster the image of bikers as tough, scary, drug-crazed, leather-clad, tattoo-covered rebels. Well, the fact of the matter is, we're pretty ... wait for it ... wait for it ... normal. Yup. We have jobs, kids and house payments, just like everybody else.

At least 92 percent* of us do, anyway. Tattoos? Well, sure, many bikers (17 percent*) have them, but hey, you're likely to see as much body art down at the local sorority (18.2 percent*) as you might at a typical poker run.

Yes, the sport of motorcycling has gone mainstream and continues to grow in popularity in spite of, or maybe because of, rising fuel prices and a slow economy.

I gotta admit I sometimes feel a little nostalgic for the days when I stopped at a red light and glanced over at a station wagon next to me just in time to see the windows go up and the power-door locks slam down while the white-knuckled male driver and his passenger/wife froze their eyes straight ahead.

Of course, the kids in the back seat were smiling and waving, and I waved back until Mom hissed something over her shoulder and they slumped down in their seats. This is amusing because I'm not what you would call a very tough or intimidating person. Stunningly handsome, yes (in a Homer Simpson kind of way), but tough? Not so much. The only fight I ever lost was when I tripped going around a corner. Anyway, once the light turned green, I revved the motor, did a mild burn-out and zoomed away. I bet those kids became bikers.

Now don't read me wrong: Just because motorcycling has gone mainstream doesn't mean we're boring. Far from it. Truth be told, it's that spirit of adventure and camaraderie that always has defined bikers and continues to do so today. No couch potatoes in this group, no sirree. We like to be outdoors, we like to travel, we like to socialize (and by that I mean eat, drink and tell lies about how heavy that last rainstorm we got caught in was), and we like to support our community by raising money and awareness for worthy causes such as muscular dystrophy, breast cancer, the Humane Society, the Lincoln Food Bank, the Shriners, juvenile diabetes, Make-a-Wish and the Audubon Society, just to name a few.

And we do it all with a measure of positive environmental impact compared with other motor vehicles. Ours can get 50 miles per gallon or more and can fit four to a parking stall if only the city would let us.

Ninety-nine percent* of bikers are honest. This is especially so in Lincoln. I dare say that Frontier Harley-Davidson will have the lowest shoplifting losses in town. Thank you.

Bikers are 44 percent* more interesting than economists. (Sorry, Dad.)

Twelve percent* of bikers are rich; 79 percent* are good-looking. Very few are both.

Thirteen percent of our local customers are women riding their own bikes. Our female bikers, whether passengers or riders, are 37 percent* more charming than nonbikers.

Bikers are all about safety. In another month or two, motorcycles will be hitting the streets and highways in large numbers, and cars and trucks invariably will be hitting the motorcycles. Most of us (51 percent*) do not believe you are intentionally trying to kill us, but the rest of us aren't so sure. Please be careful.

The majority of motorcycle accidents are caused by cars and trucks, often as a result of pulling out in front of us, changing lanes rapidly without signaling, or running stop signs or traffic signals. Regardless of which side of the helmet debate you might be on, we can all do a better job of reducing the number of motorcycle accidents that happen in the first place, and you car and truck drivers need to be a bigger part of that effort. Much obliged.

Well, there you have it. Another myth busted. Contrary to popular perception, bikers don't live in a mysterious and secretive subculture; they live next door. And 82 percent* of them wish you would turn the loud music down after 10 o'clock.

If you found this column at all enlightening, then stay tuned for my next exposé: Hockey players — America's misunderstood sweetie pies.

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