

PRO RIDER

WHY DO WE RIDE?

Words: Howard Mansell



I was asked the other day, “Why do you ride?” Seems such a simple question. Often asked by someone trying to talk us out of riding. But for someone who does ride trying to tell someone who has never ridden the answer seems both obvious but also incredibly complex, almost impossible to answer.

On the face of it, we get wet, cold, overheated, and covered in dead bugs, perhaps at times all on the same day. We are at all times in a much more vulnerable situation with no protection from harm except the clothes we are wearing. We do what those who don’t understand would see as incredibly dangerous things, like lane splitting or passing on very short straights. We are seen as idiots and “temporary New Zealanders”.

The answering of the question is challenging, partly because at times it’s

a mystery to ourselves. Ask me why on a frosty morning with my hands balls of pain from the cold or on a 32-degree Auckland day on the Southern motorway (carpark) with sweat stinging my eyes and I’m wondering myself. I’ll still get home with a mixture of relief and sadness that it’s over, and the thought that I’ll have to get out on the bike again sometime soon.

I think the answer can be brought back to the word “passion”, and this can take many forms.

I’ve spent the last 50 years riding motorcycles and the last 16 of them being involved in large clubs and in motorcycle rider training. These last 16 years have really given me a chance to talk to thousands of motorcycle riders. Passion is the common theme, although often disguised in other forms of expression.

For some it’s the passion of going fast, challenging the mind and body to achieve speeds way above the norm, getting the knee down.

For others there is a passion for a particular brand, be it Italian, British, German, Japanese or American, there is a love for the brand that is equal to the love of a Football or Rugby team that others have. There’s the prestige of riding a certain brand and these people have been manipulated by their bike companies to love that brand by glorifying it in movies, on billboards, in advertising, media, branded clothing, success in competition, just as other sports and brands have created their brand allegiance. It really doesn’t matter if they are manipulated, the passion is real.

For yet others, it’s the “zen” of having total focus and leaving the minutiae of the



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world behind for a while, the single-minded focus of riding.

I have found that many of us do it because there is pure joy in achieving total control over a potentially dangerous and difficult beast, we are elated by developing the skill set required to ride well, to know how to control the beast and the dangers around us. Much as the riders of spirited stallions probably feel.

We are enthusiasts, risk-takers and lovers of motorcycling. For the poor lemmings who are eagerly awaiting the driverless car, I feel great sadness, it will be another grey and colourless event in their grey and colourless lives.

We ride because the act of riding gives us joy, it lifts our lives out of the grey, it frees our minds from the humdrum of life, it lets us be individuals in a world of grey crowds, it makes us feel alive, makes us feel a

camaraderie with like souls, makes our lives worth living.

All of this can make answering the question difficult because it requires us to reveal ourselves to the other person, our inner, secret self, our love, our passion. We tend to avoid doing that with acquaintances and strangers, will they accept this love of something alien to them? Will they ridicule it? Can they even begin to understand, or will they just dismiss it as stupid? How can we open that door and take that risk, expose our deepest thoughts like that? Will it just come out sounding lame?

For us it's real, it's part of our core, we love to ride because of our own particular focus and that focus can be many things, it's what we are and it's what we do.

At the end of the day, no matter the individuals' focus, or driving motive, the ultimate reason for people to ride these

wonderful machines is passion. In a grey world of rules and regulations, PC philosophies that have reached the level of ridiculousness, of automated driver-less cars that look like sterile metal boxes, of insane safety campaigns that appear to be heading for an open road speed limit of somewhere between 0 and 10 km/h, the motorcycle is a thing of beauty, an individual creature that we can become one with, which lets us express our need to be independent passionate beings.

Owning and riding our bike inspires us and it enriches our lives. We love our machines and we can't imagine life without them. We are bikers, and it's a life sentence, take us or leave us, your choice but you won't change us. Don't ask us why we ride, just accept us and perhaps our joy and passion will help you by putting some colour into your grey world. ■■■