



Going hog-wild

As motorcycle sales increase among women and young adults, residents in southern Indiana embrace diversity and a love for the open road

By Leslie Benson | November 04, 2004

Over the last decade, it has grown as a couple sport -- a recreation that men and women share equally. Not only does it cross gender barriers, it also transcends the borders of race, ethnicity, age and status. No longer reserved for baby boomers wearing beards and bandanas, now everyone seems to want to feel the whip of wind across their bodies while winding along the back roads of southern Indiana on a motorcycle.

The roar of individuality clad in metal and machine, motorcycles attract Monroe and Brown counties' residents, as well as visitors from all over the country, to the scenic backdrop of curvy roads such as Indiana 135, connecting Bloomington to Nashville, Ind. The growth of motorcycle culture, especially among women and young adults, has increased the number of bikers in southern Indiana, unifying people of diverse backgrounds with one shared interest -- the thrill of the ride.

"Motorcycles connect people," said Jim Markland, 40, general manager of Harley-Davidson/Buell of Bloomington. "We have one of the most eclectic mixes of people -- from the local merchant to the surgeon. On a sunny day when they're out riding, they don't look any different."

"I've seen people from all walks of life riding bikes," said Jackie Dixon, who owns a 2000 Electra Glide Classic and runs a gymnastics studio. Originally from California, Dixon treks 500 miles via bike on a regular basis. She is a member of the Bloomington-based Hoosier Hills Harley Owners Group Chapter 1171, whose members include doctors, construction workers, electricians, plumbers, truck drivers and self-employed business owners.

According to a Harley-Davidson press release from Oct. 13, 2004, the company's third quarter revenue earnings increased by 22.4 percent. Markland reports that for 2003, Indiana motorcycle registrations increased by 31 percent.

"Growth has been amazing in this community," said Markland, who rides a Buell XB9R Firebolt. "Our demographic was skewed to the 35 to 60 year olds. Now it's including more women and young people."

"I was one of the first women to start riding from our group," said Danetta Reynolds, of Bedford, Ind., a member of the HOG Chapter 1171. She said, the group, which formed in 1989, now has 234 local members, and nearly half are women. Her husband, Director Norris Reynolds, cited that international HOG membership has risen to 750,000 chapters, and motorcycle support has drastically expanded in Europe and Japan.

Danetta Reynolds, who works in social service, rides a 2004 Heritage Softail Classic, and Norris Reynolds, an Information Technology Specialist with the Department of the Navy, rides a 2003 Anniversary Road King Classic. They have ridden motorcycles for 10 years as a couple.

According to the Motorcycle Industry Council, more than 4.3 million women operated motorcycles in 2003. The Motorcycle Safety Foundation reports that one out of every three new riders enrolled in a motorcycle safety training school is female.

"Ladies of Harley began promoting motorcycle riding among women in the early '90s," said Danetta Reynolds.

However, for both female and male bikers in southern Indiana, the consensus agrees that Indiana 135 attracts motorcyclists as one of the best rides in the Midwest. The stretch of road between Nashville and Story, Ind., on Indiana 135 South, portrays a picturesque explosion of color. The scenery looks as if a painter's palate dripped orange, yellow and red over the leaves along the corridor of trees, and the rural row of sweeping farms, cornfields and woods offer bikers backdrops to the curves, hills and narrow roads they explore.

Along the ride, bikers often stop at the Story Inn, a turn-of-the-century country store, barn and grain mill, featuring a restaurant and bar, which hosts live band performances.

Darrick Day, bar manager of the Story Inn and bassist for Texas-style blues band Harsch Reality, which plays for bikers regularly outside the bar, has counted 100 bikers at The Story Inn on weekend afternoons.

"SR 135 is one of the best rides in the country, and this is a perfect place to grab a beer and cheeseburger along the way," he said. Day, who owns a Honda Shadow Aero 1100 and a 1971 Ironhead, has ridden motorcycles for 11 years.

Les Wadzinski, recreation program manager of the Hoosier National Forest, believes motorcyclists drive through southern Indiana's back roads as a means of getting off the beaten path.

"They are the arteries that go through an environment," he said. "Back roads are quieter, more primitive and have less traffic than highways."

With the wind whipping past their bikes and the seasons painting orange, brown, white or green on the leaves lining the roads of southern Indiana, one thing is for sure -- Men and women of all races, ethnicities, ages and statuses can enjoy the outdoors on their individualized motorcycles together.

"On the bikes, we'll find the longest routes to get everywhere," said Norris Reynolds. "It's more about the journey than the destination."

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