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The Introverted Motorcyclist's Guide to Dealing with Civilians

After almost 30 years on two wheels, I've been approached on the road by many non-riders (aka "civilians") who are curious about my machines and sometimes, even curious about me! Occasionally, despite my introverted nature, I am curious about them too. Recently I started thinking about the patterns of these encounters, and I realized that old, middle-aged, and young people respond in predictably different ways.

The Old

This, sadly, is a scenario that doesn't occur nearly enough! Axiomatically, the adventures of a young man are the stories of an old one. When "extra mature" ex-riders come up to me, I always assume that I'm in for a treat, and I'm rarely disappointed. They regale with tales of motorcycles that boomed and shook and left oceans of dripping fluids in their wake. They spin yarns about MacGyver-style roadside repairs of

mysterious things called "points" and "carburetors," using only a paper clip and a cap from a Bic pen. They rode for days in treacherous storms, before rain gear was ever invented. I love hearing every minute of it. Maybe because I see that regardless of what time has done to their bodies, there is still a sparkle in their eyes as they recall the thrill of riding on the edge - and so we share the same adventurous spirit. For me, it's always a pleasure tapping into the continuum of hardcore riders from the past, when men were men and motorcycles were death traps.

The Middle Aged

This, sadly, is the most common



scenario, and the most annoying. A middle-aged man, almost always stepping out of a nondescript minivan or SUV, cautiously advances towards my motorcycle. I watch him, wearily, just waiting for the predictable exchange. "Man, that sure is a pretty motorcycle!" he exclaims while walking slowly around it. Annnnd here it comes, like clockwork: "I always wanted a motorcycle," he says wistfully, "but my wife said..." By this point I've already tuned out and, as with any other hazard on the road, I'm planning an efficient escape route.

The Young

This, sadly, is the most depressing scenario by several orders of magnitude. On my last such encounter, I was passing through a quaint college town in the early morning when I decided to stop at an outdoor café. I ordered a strong black coffee, sat at a miniature table next to my RT, and started planning the day's route. Suddenly, I spied a gaggle of toned, tanned co-eds giddily bouncing towards me and pointing at the

motorcycle. "FINALLY!" I said to myself inside my head.

Allow me to put this "FINALLY!" into proper context. You see, like every other red-blooded male motorcyclist, when I first started riding, I was under the impression that motorcycles were a mechanical aphrodisiac to the opposite sex. Only through the harsh reality of experience did I resign myself to accept that no throngs of groupies would ever materialize for me - only old men who wanted to talk about farkles. It was a bitter pill to swallow, but I had in fact swallowed it.

Back to the co-eds. "Could it be, finally, after decades on two wheels, that my time has come?" I asked myself eagerly. My mind was racing with possibilities, and not one of them was appropriate for this publication. Now finally within speaking distance, co-ed #1 introduced herself. "Oh my gawwwwd! Is that, like, your motorcycle?" she queried. "Yes... yes, it is," I replied, as I glanced towards my Teutonic steed, its paint gleaming in the sun just so. "It's... a BMW," I added, pausing for dramatic effect. How could

they resist? My fantasy was coming true!

Now co-ed #2 pointed at my bug-splattered Shoei and piped in: "Like, that's your helmet too, right?" "Yes... yes, it is," I replied, realizing that the end was nigh. It was now co-ed #3's turn: "OMG the helmet literally has, like, a CAMERA on it!" She was referring to an ancient GoPro Session I had installed on my helmet eons ago, in order to record my brutal New Jersey Turnpike commutes in case of the unexpected. "A CAMERA!!!" they squealed in unison. They began peppering me with questions: "Can you, like, take pictures AND literal videos with it?" and "I can't believe it fits on a helmet! How does it stick on there?" and "*CAN YOU TAKE A SELFIE WHILE, LIKE, RIDING LIKE LITERALLLLLLLAAAYYYYYYYY??*"

I felt the blood rushing back into my brain. I wrestled my gaze away from the mesmerizing co-eds, looked up at the sky, and listened. As usual, God was laughing at me, as He always does. And I was laughing at me too, because what else is there to do?

