



THE WAY I SEE IT BY GENEVIEVE SCHMITT

Packing Protection

I haven't done a long overnight solo ride in almost 10 years, about as long as I've known my now husband. When you have a significant other who rides, it's kind of expected that you'll go on all

your big motorcycle trips together, certainly not alone. As I write this, the countdown is on for my summer three-week motorcycle trip. I'll be riding part of it solo as the husband's tied up this time with work. I guess because I'm older now, the thought of packing something for protection has crossed my mind. What is it with age that makes us think more about our mortality? Actually, what put the thought in my head was when I ran into a tough-chick rider friend of mine at the Laughlin River Run earlier this year who had a 10" Buck knife hanging from her belt. "What's that for?" I asked. She explained that for as much as she rides and camps alone, she likes to have it visible in a sheath "to deter anyone who thinks about messing with me." Hmmm, I thought, wondering if something like that could do more harm than good. You've heard the expression that having a weapon can invite trouble.

Years ago, another friend of mine, a pretty tough blonde who rode a Road Star, shared with me that she kept a loaded gun under her motorcycle saddle when she rides alone. It made me wonder how many other riders, men and women, do the same thing. For all the solo riding I did in my 20s and 30s, it never crossed my mind to pack heat. So why now? When I was single, I did plenty of solo trips, not always by choice, though. One time a girlfriend ditched me for a guy on our ride back to Los Angeles from the Hollister Rally. (She broke one of the cardinal girlfriend rules doing that, by the way.)

Another time, a couple who had planned to ride with me to Sturgis backed out at the last minute, so I ended up riding the 1,000 miles one way from my home in the Midwest, where I was living temporarily. I never had any fear about riding alone; never gave it a second thought actually, as I was used to riding by myself. When I moved to Los Angeles in 1990 and got into motorcycling, I rode alone a lot of the time until I found a group of riders to hang with. And even then, I was in a new city, anxious to discover it, so if I wanted to ride, I had to venture out on my own. I remember many times cruising up and down the Pacific Coast Highway in Malibu on my new Sportster 1200 all by myself, in awe of the beautiful coastline. I was new to riding, new to LA, and was on a Harley in one of the country's

most scenic locales. Did I care that I was by myself?

But those were day trips close to home. What about riding in the middle of nowhere by yourself? Just the other day, a woman sent me an e-mail asking my advice on riding solo. She heard that "it's not safe for women to ride by themselves." I responded, "Who told you that, and what's the proof?" In all my years of riding (20) I have never heard one story, not one, of a woman getting into danger or a compromising situation being alone on her motorcycle. If it's happened, I'm sure I'd have heard about it. Actually, I think the "awe factor" kicks in when people see a woman on a motorcycle riding alone, and to that end, people stare from afar rather than mess with her. If she's the "smiley catch people's glances" kind of woman, well, yes, then she'll invite conversations in gas stations and hotel parking lots. If she's like me, she's oozing attitude and walking tall with her shoulders back like she means business. And I don't camp alone. I forgo any girly-girly gear, as I believe that may indicate that I'm a softy. Living in a big city like LA you learn to be careful and watch out for yourself. So, I like my friend's idea of a knife on her belt, but will I have the time to shop for one in between the other gazillion preparation tasks consuming me right now? Doubt it. But check out what recently happened to me. I got a press release e-mailed to me for a Harley-Davidson folding knife! A light bulb went off in my head. I respond by asking if I could get one to do a review as I'm heading on a three-week motorcycle trip, and it might come in handy. Three days later, a brand-new folding knife showed up on my doorstep in a box. It even has a belt clip. Not that I was really worried, but it will be interesting to see the reaction from people who see that I have a knife attached to my belt. Will I feel safer? Probably not. I never was fearful in the first place. By the way, if you carry a weapon of any kind on your person or motorcycle, even a folding knife, be sure you know the laws dictating its usage. They vary from state to state!

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