



THE WAY I SEE IT

BY GENEVIEVE SCHMITT

An Inexpensive Vacation

True motorcyclists are a fortunate breed, and I'll assume that if you're reading this magazine, you're a member of this group. We've chosen an activity that's relatively inexpensive to enjoy

once we've bought into the lifestyle, compared to other outdoor motorized summer activities like boating or RVing. And in this recessionary economy, most of us are looking for ways to have fun on a budget. Motorcycling, with its high gas mileage and minimal maintenance (assuming you don't own a clunker or a lemon), can transport you to lots of interesting places you've never been before at relatively low cost. You can choose to stay in a hotel, or do what many cyclists do to save money, camp. Now there are people who like to camp and people who don't. For those who don't, this might be the year to break out of your comfort zone and consider it. It might be time to erase those limiting thoughts like "I'm just not the camping kind of person," or "I have to have a warm bed and a hot shower" and expand your motorcycling horizons. Isn't that what motorcycling is all about, finding new and exciting adventures that involve our two-wheeled passion? If saving money isn't a motivating factor in considering whether to rough it, then try it as part of your endless pursuit of doing something new.

I was recently speaking with a friend who was sharing his summer motorcycle travel plans with me, which included camping. He reminded me that a big benefit of camping is all the people you meet. Unlike at a hotel, where you're cloistered away in your room, camping forces you to be outside, usually within sight and sometimes earshot of other campers. Traveling by motorcycle always invites conversation; for me, once I'm in the motorcycle road trip mentality, I'm having fun and want to talk about my experiences with other people.

If people aren't your thing — and there are a lot of you who fall into this category — there are plenty of remote campgrounds where you don't have to be subject to others' attention. Don't let the social aspect of camping turn you off, because perhaps the most life-changing benefit to camping, I think, is the magic you feel when sleeping under the stars and feeling the night air on your face, and hearing the sounds of the darkness all around you. If you've camped, you know what I mean. If you haven't, you won't know until you try it. If you've set up camp where there are no bugs, a clear night sky, and warm, dry air, then sleep outside your tent. It's an incredible feeling to fall asleep while gazing at the constellations, and to roll over while your sleepy baby blues get a glimpse of that magnificent night sky. Whether outside or inside your tent, sleeping outdoors can feel natural, almost primal. If all you've

ever known is a roof over your head while catching some Zs, then falling into a slumber out of doors can be life changing, and something you should do before you die.

For women who usually need a lot of stuff — hair dryer, hairbrushes, makeup, creams, mirror, clothing options, etc. — camping can be a freeing activity. Take it from one who knows. There's something liberating about having to choose what the most basic essentials are, and then living with them for a week or more. At first, you might get frustrated because you don't have both your day and night cream, but if you're open to what the universe is teaching you about this experience, you quickly realize that one cream can suffice, and you'll do just fine.

Dollar for dollar, camping is way cheaper than staying in a hotel night after night, even if you stay at el-cheapo motels. Camping requires just a tent, sleeping bag, and mattress pad. You can certainly go all out with a camping stove, camping dishes and utensils, and a camp chair, but when you're on a motorcycle, you have to think about how to pack all that, so I buy my dinners at the local grocery store, and sit at the picnic table or on a rock at the campground.

I know a lot of people who've had to sell their motorcycles in the last 12 months because money is tight. Either they couldn't make the payments anymore, or they needed the money for bills. No matter how much of a crunch I'm in, I'd never sell my motorcycle. I don't understand the mentality of people who can do that. I'd sell my TV, my stereo, and my skis before I'd part with my motorcycle. To me riding is my escape, my therapy, and one of my lifelines. To sell it would mean selling part of my soul, selling part of who I am. It's amazing how what is essentially just a metal machine can represent so much in one's life. Actually, it's not the machine, it's what you do with your machine and how you spend your days with it. So, in these penny-pinching times, remember the benefits of the lifestyle you've bought into. It has a huge return on investment, so make the most of what your motorcycle can do for your mind, body, and soul, and find peace in knowing you're not breaking the bank in the process.

Genevieve Schmitt is the founder of WomenRidersNow.com, the leading source of motorcycling lifestyle news and reviews. E-mail her at gschmitt@womenridersnow.com.