



THE WAY I SEE IT *by Genevieve Schmitt*

Sharing The Passion

Riding alongside your son or daughter adds an extra layer of joy to the motorcycling experience.

MOTORCYCLING OFFERS many incredible enhancements to life, but there's one that I know I'm missing out on: having a family member like my mother, father, sister, or brother ride with me. I remember one

year, as I was planning to ride to the Sturgis rally, a friend of mine told me he was going to ride with his dad. "His dad," I repeated to myself silently, my heart drooling with envy. "How cool is that?"

I would love to share the passion of motorcycling with family members, especially my mother and father. I came to motorcycling on my own, not through any two-wheeled roots in my family tree. My folks are the furthest you'd get from riders. They're Florida retirees who golf. During my two decades in the saddle, I've met several families who ride together. While on the road to Milwaukee for Harley-Davidson's 95th anniversary celebration, I remember meeting a mom, dad, 19-year-old son, and 18-year old daughter with three bikes among them. Dad and mom rode two-up, brother and sister rode their own. Talk about a family vacation.

Then there's my friend Susan whose entire family rides, including her cousins, aunt, uncle, and grandfather. The only one who doesn't ride is her grandma, but she's still part of the fun: she drives the SUV hauling all the gear. Susan's grandfather inspired his whole clan to take to two wheels when, upon retiring, he bought the Harley-Davidson Sportster he had always wanted. He eventually handed down that Sportster to Susan when she was in her early 20s. "At that age, it was a cool thing to do," recalls Susan. "For my mom and aunt, it was the freedom they were attracted to. It's so important for us to spend time together and motorcycles are the way to do that."

Street riding is not viewed as a family sport like dirt bike riding is. With dirt-biking there are local races designed to attract youngsters, and manufacturers, like Honda, advertise dirt bike riding as a family event. All this focused marketing makes it easier for dad and mom to consider it a family activity and to encourage their children to ride. Why, then, are parents not influencing their 20-something sons and daughters to take up street motorcycling? I pose this question because the biggest challenge facing the motorcycle industry today is attracting young people to the sport. The largest segment of riders is aging baby boomers, those 46 to 64 years old. The smallest segment is those aged 21 to 30. The concern is once the baby boomers get on in years, they'll buy fewer motorcycles. So the manufacturers are looking for a new crop of buyers, and right now that's the Millennial Generation, sometimes called Generation Y, GenNext, the Google Generation, or the Tech Generation.

The Millennials are those born between 1981 and 2000. They are 76 million strong and are the largest segment outside of the baby boomers. The Millennials are growing up questioning authority and asking why every chance they get. This generation of women view men as equals in the boardroom and in the game room, and men see women the same way. They have a greater awareness of financial issues than the generation before them, so they're savvy about money and what they want to spend it

on. The Millennials are the group marketers are trying to reach right now.

What happened to Generation X? Its time came and went before I realized I was one of them. Guess our population numbers didn't rate, because I don't recall a lot of marketing focused on me. I was born in the first year of Generation X, so marketing messages were skewed too young for me to relate. Plus, marketers didn't spend a lot of time with Gen Xers once they realized baby boomers had more money, more stability, and were a much larger group than Generation X. They moved right passed us to cater to the boomers. My birth year also falls on the high side of the baby boomer years. However, boomer marketing messages didn't catch my attention either because they skewed too old. Call those of us born in 1964 the forgotten generation.

While we might have gotten lost in the marketing shuffle, those of us in our early to mid-40s and late 30s can do our part in assisting the motorcycle industry by passing along our love of motorcycling to our Millennial children. Encourage your kids to take the MSF Basic RiderCourse. Children are more likely to give motorcycling a try if their parents serve as role models. I don't have any children, but if I did, you can bet I'd sign them up for the class and buy them a motorcycle. How fun would it be to ride side by side with my son or daughter to Sturgis, sharing the passion every mile of the way? Those of you who get to do that are lucky. Riding alongside your son or daughter adds an extra layer of joy to the motorcycling experience. Kudos to you for sharing the passion with them.

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