



400 YEARS OF RIDING FREE — sorta

By L. Clayton Johnson

I think it's about time we bikers were reminded of our origins and took a long look at where we come from, how we got here, and probably most important, just where we're headed.

Take the latest couple of rounds of the citizens (and their helmet-use laws and superbike bans) vs. bikers, for example. Another round is just what it is, too, seein' as how the squabble's been an ongoin' battle for a lotta years.

So pull up a seat, pass the Jack, pop a cold one (or two), and pay real close attention to this here history lesson. It's about the past 400 years of bikin'.

Now before you start losin' it over the fact that motorcycles have only been around for a hundred years or so, and therefore bikers could only have been around for a little less than that — or for you purists who think that there weren't any bikers till riders started bandin' together in clubs — I'd like to say that bein' a biker is a matter of heart. It's a way of life that doesn't have as much to do with bikes as it does with the people who ride 'em — people with a free-spirited outlook on life that includes how they feel about the world and how they think people oughtta live and move around in it.

For simplicity's sake, and to make this narrative easier to follow, I'm gonna separate the people of the world into two groups: bikers and citizens. I already told you what I think we bikers are, so

Citizens are the people who're always sayin', "Stop it," and not exactly like your ol' lady says it, either. Citizens wake up in the mornin' sayin', "Stop it." All day, every time they see somebody enjoyin' life or enjoyin' bein' alive, they say, "Stop it."

here's the way I see citizens: Citizens are the people who're always sayin', "Stop it," and not exactly like your ol' lady says it, either. Citizens wake up in the mornin' sayin', "Stop it." All day, every time they see somebody enjoyin' life or enjoyin' bein' alive, they say, "Stop it." They're sayin' it for the same reasons your ol' lady does — they're on the rag or they got a headache. The only problem is, unlike your ol' lady, they're *always* on the rag, and they *always* have a headache. And almost always, bikers are the reason why.

Just like now, back in the old days (the 16th century, not the '70s), there were

bikers bein' hassled and pushed around all over the world, which at that time was mostly just Europe. The citizens didn't care much for the bikers 'cause bikers liked to take a turn at the ol' mead cask. Okay, okay — mead was kinda like beer, so from now on I'll just call it beer. Also, the citizens didn't like the bikers 'cause they were womanizers, or they worshipped the wrong god, or they looked or dressed different, or just 'cause they were different. The known world was pretty crowded at the time, which meant the poor fuckin' bikers didn't have a lot of places to run, so they just kinda moved around, tryin' to stay outta sight of the citizens.

Right after ol' Chris Columbus figured out he'd discovered a new land and some early-day "Deep Throat" leaked the news about it, some of the bikers got together and said (and I believe this is a direct quote), "Whatdafuck, let's jam over there and check the place out."

So began the first important event in biker history, and coincidentally, the first-ever major biker run. Because of the magnitude of the undertakin' and the fact that they'd never really planned a major run before, they had a little more than the usual problems to overcome. Gettin' some dependable transportation. Gettin' enough beer and eats. Talkin' the ol' lady into the trip. Gettin' some more beer. Doin' a pre-run check on the transportation. Gettin' enough whiskey. And

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some more beer. You've been there, you know how it goes. Eventually, though, they got all their shit together and shoved off.

Now, if this was a run tale instead of a history lesson, we'd go into more details of the trip. I will say, though, that it was a typical biker run. Some snivelin' of ladies. Not enough food packed. Not enough beer. Fucked-up, rainy weather. Like I said, you've been there, you get the picture. But this ain't a run tale, so we'll leave it at that and get back to the lesson at hand.

Suffice it to say they got there — here — the New World.

They found . . . nuthin'. Oh, there were trees, lotsa open space, and suspicious natives, but nuthin' else. No taverns. No houses. No parts shops. No shaker bars. Nuthin'. It was the first recorded case of "bikers in the wilderness," and that was kinda the bad news and the good news at the same time. The bad news was there wasn't nuthin' here, and the good news was, of course, that because citizens absofuckinglylutely won't go into the wilderness, there weren't any citizens anywhere to be found. Ya see, citizens need comfortable. Citizens need tame. Citizens need *safe*.

Anyway, the bikers were here, and they had to get to work to make a home for themselves. Bein' bikers, they set about fixin' the place up so they'd be comfortable livin' in it. They pitched in like the brothers they were and built some houses. Some of 'em started farmin'. Some took up their old trades as gunsmiths, bootmakers, and tailors. Some took advantage of the new land

and began new trades, like the meat and poultry procurement business. They made friends with some of the natives, and generally went about the business of livin', without any citizens around to hassle 'em.

It was a hard life. It was a rough life. Some of the native population took a dim view of the newcomers and made life as uncomfortable as they could for 'em. They were almost as bad as citizens. And the weather was a bitch. The first winter in the New World was a real nut-buster, especially since the bikers hadn't ever experienced really hard weather before. A lot of 'em died that first year: the natives got some and the weather got a few more. But the rest of 'em didn't even consider quittin'. They stuck it out like the bikers they were. They overcame the environment and built stuff — taverns, roads, dams, taverns, and some settlements to live in.

I don't want to make it sound like this all happened right away. They got a lot done that first year, but hey, this didn't all happen overnight. I'm talkin' a couple hundred years here. These people worked hard and played hard, and they developed the land into a bitchin' place to live . . .

And that's how they fucked up.

They forgot history.

They made the place tame. *Safe*. Word got out, and sure enough, here came the citizens. The bikers watched 'em tricklin' in and thought, "They won't stay long. This place is too wild for 'em. They don't like bikers, and there's more of us here than citizens." So the bikers went on about their business without payin' too much attention to the citizens.

"Big Citizen Government in Europe" was watchin' what was goin' on in the Colonies and decided that those bikers were onto a pretty good deal and weren't gonna get off light, no sir. "Big Citizen Government in Europe" decided to really fuck with the bikers in the Colonies. They taxed the hell out of 'em. They passed laws against the bikers and their lifestyle. Of course, "Big Citizen Government in Europe" didn't want to come over here to administer the rules, 'cause the land was too wild, but there

were plenty of citizens in the Colonies to do the shitwork.

Right about here is where the second important piece of biker history takes place. Some of the bikers said, "Fuck this!" and jammed west. Some of the bikers, men like Thomas Paine, Paul Revere, and John Hancock got together and said "Fuck this!" and declared that they were free men in a free land and weren't takin' any more shit from "Big Citizen Government in Europe" and declared their independence. At this particular point in the history of bikin', a few of the citizens who were in the Colonies kinda joined up with the bikers and fought shoulder to shoulder with 'em until they won the freedom the bikers had come to this country to find.

After the War of Independence was won, though, the citizens kept comin', and the next thing you know, they outnumbered the bikers. And because they never really did like bikers in the first place, they started passin' laws, mostly anti-biker laws. You can't carry guns in public. No late-night, loud parties. No drinkin' in public. No runnin' with loose women. Then, no loose women at all, or drinkin' either . . . period!

What do you suppose the bikers did? Resist, you say? Fight back, you say? .

Nope. They had forgotten history.

The ones who were still around and

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hadn't conformed into "good citizens" finally said "Fuck this!" and moved. They headed out to Ohio or Kentucky or Tennessee. They were called frontiers-

men. They had the spirit I was tellin' you about earlier, so they were really bikers. They wanted to roam free, unencumbered by the citizens' restrictive lifestyle. They were men like Daniel Boone, Jim Bowie, and Davy Crockett. They started over. They either tamed, ran off, or killed the natives. They tamed and cleared the

the rest of 'em. The names and the stories could go on for days.

And yeah, you guessed it: History repeated itself . . . again.

Again the bikers conformed or moved. Again the citizens won the round.

So, you see, the citizens have been at it a long, long time. I don't think citizens

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land and established some farms. They built taverns, roads, and towns to live in. You gettin' the picture? They fucked up again.

They made the place safe. And you know what happened next — the same bullshit as before.

Again, the bikers headed out to Nebraska, Kansas, and the Dakotas. At first they were called mountain men, and then later cowboys. You've heard the stories about 'em. Jim Bridger, Wild Bill Hickok, Doc Holliday, Buffalo Bill, and all

remember history any better than bikers do, it's just that citizens start feelin' threatened by our spirit and our lifestyle, and they start hasslin' us. They start passin' their anti-biker laws to get us to stop livin' the free lifestyle that threatens 'em. They created "Big Citizen Government" to control everybody and to make life comfortable, tame, and safe for themselves. Citizens don't care if they lose their freedom, as long as they're safe. Hell, citizens don't care if we lose our freedom as long as they are safe.

"Big Citizen Government in State Capitols" now says that mandatory helmet-use laws are for our own good. "Big Citizen Government in Washington" says that banning fast bikes is savin' our lives. I'm sure that bike bans in parks are for our own good, too, but the "Big Citizen Government in Wherever," who

passes those bans, won't even talk to bikers, so we'll never know. The wilderness protectionists who constantly try bannin' bikes from wilderness areas "for the good of future generations" are, I suspect, the biggest threat to the biker lifestyle.

Like the bar and beanery owners who

ban leather jackets or patches from their eatin' or drinkin' establishments, I suspect that "Big Citizen Government in Anywhere" is actually tryin' to pass anti-biker laws for its own good. If "Big Citizen Government in Anywhere" succeeds in regulating us out of the cities and "Big Citizen Government of Wherever" closes down what has for 400 years been the bikers' refuge, the wilderness . . . we're finished.

Bikers left Europe 'cause citizens didn't want, even refused, to live with 'em. Bikers started moving west in this country 'cause citizens didn't want 'em around. Bros, it's time to stop and look around. There ain't no place left to go. We're backed right up to the big blue Pacific. Bros, we've gone as far west as we can go.

Study history. It's time to make a stand. Join ABATE, or MMA, or CMA, or whatever rights organization is active in your piece of the world, before you don't have a piece of the world left anymore. If you can't find a rights group, find some bros who are willing to make a stand and start a bikers' rights group.

Don't forget history — or bikers and the biker lifestyle will be history, a history that our own children, and especially their children, will never know or enjoy. ■

Esquiviers

