

Jim Roberson found this article on the Sound Rider magazine web site (<http://www.soundrider.com/>). It is reprinted here with the permission of the author.

The New 1%ers

by Dave Preston

Well, the killing season is winding down. By that I refer to the summer months, when tragically high numbers of motorcyclists fall prey to various horrors, many of them brought about by their own errors, and many of them young males on sport bikes.

Statistics? Ain't got none. I'm simply going by what the Seattle Times (admittedly a flawed source) chooses to print, but there are enough such sad stories you can almost write them yourself. Usually late at night, usually a young male, and usually a result of very high speeds. They do not bother to mention alcohol, but you can fill in the blanks.

Beyond the loss, and the sadness, and the damage to property, lie the effects on the rest of us – particularly those who ride sportbikes. It all reminds me, as so many things do these days, of a time long ago and far away.

People in the 60s spoke, often in hushed tones, of "the 1%ers." This

phrase was minted by the Hell's Angels and others of their ilk, as they wreaked havoc on the reputation of all motorcyclists far beyond the reach of their numbers. And, of course, 1% was a grossly optimistic assessment of their bulk.

Sonny Barger of the Hell's Angels may or may not have been a master criminal, but there is little doubt of his genius in marketing. He parlayed sound bites and costumes with acts of incredible savagery by those claiming to be of his group, and became an outlaw icon. Along with Billy the Kid and the James Gang, his name and legend will live for centuries, and the facts – well who cares about facts when you're dealing with legends?

He was assisted in large part by the California Highway Patrol, which issued dire press releases that stirred up the citizenry and also added heft and power to their annual budget requests. Then along came Hunter S. Thompson, a drug and booze-fueled "rebel" of a writer. His reporting of various mis-adventures with the Hell's Angels became, and is, a best seller. It was to literature what a train wreck is to transportation – people could not help but stop and take in the horrific details. And so, all three of these unlikely partners gained from their alliance.

At some point, Barger and others realized that the bad-ass image (and reality) had been milked for all of the coin available, and it was time to present a more respectable facade. Since nobody believed it, this also made good press, but over a period of time it actually worked.

Along with this came the organized response of the 99%, most notably by the growth of HOG Chapters. Same bikes, same black leathers, but totally and completely different

people, of course. In a recent survey of high school students asked who they pictured as riding and owning Harley-Davidsons. The responses fell overwhelmingly into only two slots:

- "Greaseball thugs" (their words, not mine)
- Their grandparents

The authors of the survey, high school students themselves, made

the point to Harley-Davidson's marketing departments that the group that young people did not see as riding Harleys – at all – was... young people, and that this should be a concern. Harley-Davidson's marketers chose to deny the validity of the survey, which ironically taught the young people more about the real world than did the actual assignment.

The 1%ers are still here, of course, and in this area are represented by the Bandidos and other groups. I list the Bandidos first because I know some of them, and because they were the recent targets of a fairly massive ATF investigation that resulted in arrests and on-going legal cases.

I have nothing personally against the Bandidos. I am opposed to the activities they are accused of, but in an era when "Innocent until proven guilty" is rapidly being replaced by "Jailed until we get around to charging you," it does not take a rabid civil libertarian to withhold judgment.

If you are a serious and committed motorcyclist, as opposed to a person who merely owns a motorcycle, you're probably concerned with the image motorcycles present to the great unwashed public, and you serve as something of an unpaid missionary to the masses. As such, you have to realize that the greatest threat to the image of motorcycling today is not the 1%ers – but... the sport bike riders. Specifically, those sport bike riders referred to with the pejorative title of "squid." There are several explanations for the etymology of "squid." I have no idea, which one is correct, but my favorite explanation is that SQUID is an acronym for "Surely Quicker Until I Die."

Before you set your keyboard on fire typing a denunciatory response, please read to the end! First of all, sport bikes are my "home" motorcycles – the ones I enjoy riding the most. There is nothing inherently evil or criminal in the design of sportbikes, and yet the most frightening sights I see on the roads these days usually involve sport bikes.

Try to think for a minute like a person who has never ridden a motorcycle. When such a person sees a motorcycle being ridden well, the visual image is frightening. You may be comfy gliding by them and changing lanes, but from inside the car you appear to be way too fast and on the verge of disaster. That is true if you are riding responsibly. Now imagine the impact of a "squid" passing at 85pmh or so, switching and darting between lanes, clad in shorts and a t-shirt, with the occasional wheelie lofted in for good measure.

People do not like being scared. Men in our culture are given a lot of subtle encouragement never to admit to fear. Anger and violence are OK, however. That is why

many people, especially men, learn to hate motorcycles, all motorcycles, based on the actions of a very few – because that is simpler and more acceptable than thinking through the process of "Golly, the way that fellow rides really raises my fear levels."

The other day I was riding along in the commuter lane on my bike at a comfy 70 mph or so. Along comes Joe Squid with his girlfriend of the week on the back. He is weaving in and out of the busy traffic at about 85, but everyone he passes sees only the girl – because she is wearing some very short and very tight pink shorts in a terry cloth fabric – with a pair of very long and tanned, slim legs.

Ever seen skin after it has been abraded by asphalt at 80mph? I have – not mine thankfully – and it is a sight you will never forget. As I watched this little pink derriere disappear into the traffic ahead I became so angry! This clown and his ill-advised date were creating new motorcycle haters every mile. Worse, as a fan of the female form for decades, he was putting an item of great beauty in imminent peril. I had the image of them crashing, and I would come up, call 911, help the girl if I could – and then kill the rider for being such a jerk!

What to do? Some of the problem is self-eliminating due to a few factors:

- The weather turns for the worse, and the squids rarely ride in the rain and cold.
- Some of them are dead.

But, spring will return, so here are some ideas you could try:

- Be a good example. Always wear the proper gear – for you AND the passenger.
- Be aware of the perceptions of non-motorcyclists in cars, and try to frighten them as little as possible.
- Be a resource for people you work with – no, we do not all ride like that, and no, it is usually not that dangerous, and yes, the police do give tickets for reckless riding, etc.
- If you are somewhat older and an experienced motorcyclist, be open to young riders who may ask you questions. Answer, but try to avoid lecturing.
- Avoid lumping all sport bike riders into the "squid" bucket!

After all, I suspect most of us would have to admit that, back in the day, we did something squid-like at one time or another.

Ride safe, and ride often!

Dave Preston is the Public Relations guy for the Cycle Barn Motorsports Group. He's also the author of "Motorcycle 101," available from your favorite magazine and web site: www.SoundRider.com/store. Buy a copy for yourself, and several for your friends! Dave can be reached at (425) 678 – 4748 or at fanatic@cyclebarn.com