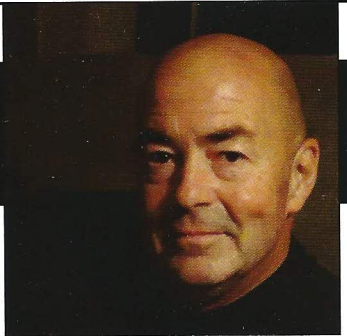


FREE WHEELIN'

BRIAN RATHJEN



WHAT'S IN YOUR WALLET?

At the American International Motorcycle Expo this past October, in Orlando, Florida, I happened to pass by the Vintage Japanese Motorcycle Club. They had a good number of beautiful old Japanese machines on display and, after the third time I moseyed by picking up more and more little details of the individual machines, I said to Shira that, "I need to join this club."

"You don't have a vintage Japanese bike," she replied.

"No matter," was my reply, "These guys are doing a great thing here and a little support never hurts."

So I walked up to the table to talk with the VJMC members and whipped out an American Express card and became a member.

A few days later it came to my attention that I had let another membership lapse – this one to the Concours Owners Group, for which we are Industry Members (whatever that really is).

I had first joined this club a few decades back - when we had one of the venerable Kawasakis - and quickly found out that this club, although they said they were about the bike, was really about the people. We went for day rides, rode to rallies and made friends at every turn.

We always had way too much fun with the COG-Lodites, so it might be time to re-up.

That got me to thinking about how many clubs, organizations and groups are out there in the motorcycle world and I wondered why many riders feel driven to join them.

I once listened to a TED Talk on Tribalism, and how all humans have a basic need to feel that we are part of something - whether it be our jobs, vocations or hobbies or just who we are - Christian, Jew, black, white or whatever. However we identify ourselves – positive or negative - we, as a species, tend to flock together and relate to each other. There was safety in numbers in the beginning and that is still true today.

Different organizations and passions draw membership for different reasons. A big national organization like the NRA has some four million gun-owning members. Our own American Motorcyclist Association has some 235,000. Unlike smaller clubs like VJMC or COG, these national entities sometimes seem to live on a Mount Olympus, still they help guide public opinion and, in general, help with the well being of all - firearms for the NRA and motorcyclists and motorcycle rights for the AMA.

If you are motorcyclist, and want to have someone watching a national and state level, then you might consider supporting becoming a member.

Some other national clubs have also gotten close to that MOA zip code as well. The BMW MOA allows thousand of Beemer bond at local and national events and as far as Owners Group HOG is enormous. Other brands have their clubs too like Kawasaki and the Honda Riders Club of America.

Most of these clubs offer members discounts on a variety of things, publish magazines for their membership to keep informed of what is going on and on the horizon for the club.

These big national clubs are far past the days of grass roots organization and they need to be, as they have come so far and so fast that they need boards and committees to do the stuff they need to do done.

For the good of the many I ignore the fact that these memberships can sometimes choose to participate locally, rather than nationally.

Let the hierarchy of these clubs sort out what you want to move along, help out and ride with on a more personal level.

Down here on Earth, with mere mortals, the COG, VJMC or any of the hundreds of their chapters offer a chance to really meet up with like-minded riders and partake in events, ride to wheel fun. More local clubs like Sport Touring Beemers or Ramapo MC and the like offer opportunities to put some serious and fun miles on the asphalt all the time.

Are you that Lone Wolf sort of rider looking for some new like-minded friends?

What do you ride? Where do you ride? I bet there is a club just for you – not just a club, but a club with a membership card and everything – you might consider joining and finding one that fits for you.

So...what's in your wallet?

This is just a very small listing - hit Google and you'll find more.

- American Motorcyclist Association:** www.ama-association.org
- BMW Motorcycle Owners of America:** www.BMWMOA.org
- Harley Owners Group:** www.HOG.com
- Gold Wing Owners Group:** www.g1800.org
- Iron Butt Association:** www.ironbutt.com
- Motorcycle Sports Touring Association:** www.sporttouring.org
- Vintage Japanese Motorcycle Club:** www.vjmc.com
- Antique Motorcycle Club of America:** www.antiquemotorcycleclub.com
- Women on Wheels:** www.womenonwheels.org



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