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Riding Like You Stole It

The phrase "ride it like you stole it" recalls the time Ira, who was raised on government cheese and religious charities, worked at the carnival as roadie for a rock band. Ira talked to the promoter about hiring me. I wasn't making any money just hanging out so I signed on for the duration of the tour. Ira had no illusions about rock bands, he had been on tour since he was fifteen and was now in his thirties. I suffered nothing but illusions. I thought the money I made that night would change my life, some new dimension, some lucky break that would propel me toward my destiny. At the end of the show the promoter short-paid us, and mumbled something about not collecting enough gate receipts, then hurriedly split to another venue to short-pay another hapless crew. Later an irate truck driver caused a commotion because he was trapped in the alley. The promoter had left his Harley blocking the entrance. Ira tried to move the bike but it wouldn't budge. He called me over and as I neared he explained the predicament.

"So you just need the bike moved?" I asked in mid stride, swung my leg over the saddle, sat down and fired it up. Revved the throttle, felt good. Kicked it in gear, just moving it. Moved it a little down the alley, hit second. Felt real good. Twisted it way over but had to hard brake at the intersection. At that point I could hear the cries from behind. It was Ira and the truck driver yelling that I didn't have to move it that far away. Even though the alley was strewn with dumpsters and fire escapes, in that brief moment of acceleration I already had visions of cornfields and wide-open emptiness. Man, I wasn't moving it, I thought, I was taking it for a ride. I came to my senses and turned around.

"I thought you was stealin' it dude," said Ira, but in fact my conscious self wasn't involved at all. Unfortunately, the term "joy ride" has negative connotations, however that's about the sum of it, the joy of the ride. It had nothing to do with gate receipts or promoters. More like rock and roll, rip and blaze the highways. Ira, who was named after the great Pima warrior, asked how I got the thing started. I pointed to the on/off switch. Ira was bummed. He thought I knew sinister tricks to accent my biker tendencies. Ira incessantly tried to prove that I was a biker. "Dude, you don't own a car, you ride all winter, and you park your bike in the living room."

"There's no garage, Ira, and I ride all winter precisely because I don't own a car." My protests sounded suspiciously supportive for his theory so I just shut my mouth. I rarely see Ira of late; he's shackled up with a rich woman in Colorado. I'd like to say he's studying Zen and creating cool music in the mountains but he's just getting fat.

I'm lounging in a low rise on the near north side of Chicago. A place I really don't belong. I take a shot of Everclear as the elevated train roars past full of suckers in suits and ties. Twilight is upon the city. The government has decreed that over indulgence in grain alcohol may endanger your health. And it's extremely flammable, as anyone can tell by the taste. The apartment is empty, the entire building is empty except for me. I step out onto the ledge over-looking Milwaukee Avenue, a siren wails in the distance, below a boom box blares briefly. A guy with a flute dawdles on the sidewalk as he strains to hit a note, any note, but he just wheezes and stumbles slowly out of view. I scramble to the rooftop as the city lights begin to burn downtown.

A Harley bagger labors eastbound, belching, farting, un-syn-copated like a slow idled farm tractor washing machine Tommy gun, if ever there was such a sound. But I'm stuck up here, waiting for a part for my Triumph. I suspect they've sent all the way to England for it. Everyday this week, I get calls from friends with grand plans for rides to

Ohio, Kentucky, Missouri or Minnesota. I feel like it's the best night of the year, perfect weather and all happening just beyond my grasp. When a little moped with a wild haired young girl whizzes toward downtown I feel envious of the air embracing her very being.

All the world is in motion but me. Finally, my part arrives and with a few modifications and a hammer, it fits right at least by the second attempt. My bike is ready in time for the arrival of 300 FRPs from Preacher. I head out immediately to inundate the ravenous masses with motorcycle literature. Each time Preacher sends rags, I embark on a sojourn of sorts to bring the biker philosophy to the faithful. This time I decide to go nowhere in particular, just ride. I catch up to random riders at the red light and hand them a FRP already folded to fit under their ass. "Just sit on it until you can put it in your saddlebags. Read it when you get time." At the next traffic light, I throw down my kickstand and leap off my bike. I was able to pass out FRPs to 5 other bikers before the light changed green. So don't freak out, if while you're cruising down the road, some wild eyed scraggly biker pulls up alongside and hands you a Free Riders Press. Don't miss a beat, just stuff it under your seat and read it when you stop for a bite to eat.

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