

Dealing in Irony

By Jim Scott

It is early October as I write this. We have just had a bit of a cold snap, if you can call the low 40's that. But on a bright Tuesday morning, I decided to ride a prospective poker run route for next year's event. It dawned on me about the time I was crossing the National Wildlife Refuge near Waupun that the end was near. Not the apocalypse, though watching and listening to the news would lead one to consider the possibility. No. I mean the end of my summer of riding.

The trees are turning, the massive flocks of wild birds are either out of the marsh already, or flocking to leave. The chill that cuts through my jacket when the sun is hidden by a cloud conjure memories of what is coming next. Yet, the ride becomes the dominating focal point for the very reason it is so close to the last one. Every curve in a rural road is more fun. Every burst of acceleration out of a wooded glen is a rush. It is as if the more I ride, the more I am escaping the inevitable. I am clinging to what I love like life itself.

How do we get to a place like that? I read of study of snowmobilers and safety measures. It was found that the more efforts that were made to keep riders from injury or death, the more they seemed to work around it all. More machine stability only lead to more aggressiveness on the rider's part. More investment in safer gear lead to disregard for conditions that could cause harm. It seemed to the researchers that riders made a concerted effort to flaunt death and injury, no matter how hard the bureaucrats and the engineers tried to design and mandate things to avoid it. In the end, the notion that the closer they got to personal injury, the more exhilaration and life they felt.

Maybe that's it. Maybe we ride these iron horses for the irony they provide. We can control how far we want to push the envelope. In a world that increasingly attempts to control our behavior, our choices, our options, and which bathroom is appropriate, we can figuratively give it all the single-digit salute and twist the grip. It is like the folks who have beaten back cancer (I am one). We cherish every breath we take and every day we are alive. But not to wallow in pity. Rather to do all we can in the second chance we have been given. We know something will take us down someday. We just try harder to get all we can out of the ride we have left.

I went to the funeral of a relative recently. He had a rich, full life, and left his family mourning but secure after the 88 years he was given on this earth. When I left for the 170 mile ride home, I took a route I had tried to ride a few years ago, but was denied by a detour. Because of weather, I did it in a four-wheeled conveyance. I will be back to do it on two. Again irony struck. While honoring the end of one life, I found reason to look forward in my own. The hills, the turns, the scenery, and even the blind stretches had me smiling. Oh, to be here on the scooter!

I think that study of snowmobilers was pretty much right on. I know more than a few of those folks. Even have a brother and his wife who spend a lot of time and money pursuing what the sport has to offer. All that was said about them applies to those of us who ride cycles. We are aware of the statistics. Hell, I see more and more cycles left in the parking lots of taverns early mornings than ever before. We can reason. Fred Rau, a writer for Motorcycle Consumer News, reports seeing more helmets at Sturgis during the 75th than ever before. Yet the industry is making and selling machines that top 200 mph, corner like cheetahs, take us to the edge of the world, and we buy them. The irony continues. But is it irony? Or is it something else.

Those of us who have to endure a dormant riding season know how much it means. I once talked to a golf professional who left a gig in Florida to take a job here in Wisconsin. When I asked him why the hell he would do something like that, he said he wanted to work some place where people appreciated what they had when they had it. I think that's a big part of it. Those of us who ride appreciate life because we get nearer to the edge of it than others. We don't want to leave this life and our loved ones any more than the next person, but we treasure what we have because we get the most out of it.

I am hoping for a few more rides before the dew freezes in the corners, or the frost coats my tent in the mornings. I have a heated vest, heated seat, heated grips, but there are rules.... I know that when I change the oil and put the steeds away, the count-down to spring will begin. When it comes and I am back on board, it will be like the soldier coming home to the waiting arms of a loved one. The absence makes it all so much more meaningful. Is that really so ironic?

Federal Highway Bill headed to the President's Desk

The U.S. Senate approved the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act by an 83-16 vote within a few hours of the U.S. House voting 359-65 in favor of the highway bill compromise - one day before the current funding extension was set to expire.

It now heads to the President's desk for signing. Indications are that he will sign it; giving us the first highway bill spanning longer than two years since 2005. The 5-year bill is a \$305 billion dollar fully funded reauthorization of federal highway and transit programs.

" Re-establishing the Motorcycle Advisory Council to advise the U.S. Department of Transportation on motorcycling infrastructure issues

" Continuation of the funding of motorcycle safety grants

" Funding distracted driving grant programs

" Language titled Share-The-Road Model Language that requires the Secretary within 1 year of passage of the FAST Act to provide to the states model Share the Road language on the importance of sharing the road safely with motorcyclists


" Stops Motorcycle Checkpoint federal grant funding for any program to check helmet usage or to create checkpoints that specifically target motorcycle operators or motorcycle passengers

" Limitations and owner definition on data retrieval from vehicle event data recorders

Kirk "Hardtail" Willard, MRF President

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