

News For Thought



Top U.S. Markets for Motorcycle Ownership

A new study from The Media Audit reveals that Spokane, Washington is the top market in the U.S. for motorcycle ownership. Among adults who live in Spokane, 18.5% own a motorcycle, compared to 9% for all U.S. adults. Other markets with a high percentage of motorcycle ownership include Riverside-San Bernardino, California (18.4%), followed by Reno, Nevada (15.2%), Boise, Idaho (14.8%) and Salt Lake City, Utah (14%).

According to the Motorcycle Industry Council (MIC), new motorcycle retail sales equaled an estimated \$10.7 billion in 2006, the highest level in 25 years. The MIC attributes the recent growth to the rise in popularity of motor scooters and increase in female riders.

Today, there are more than 450 models on the market, from cruisers to sport bikes to smaller fuel efficient commuter bikes.

According to The Media Audit, a majority of motorcycle owners are married (59.2 percent) with an average age of 41 years. Adults who own a motorcycle earn \$77,714 in annual household income, a figure that is \$12,424 higher than the average U.S. adult.

Rounding out the top ten markets for motorcycle ownership are Eugene-Springfield, Oregon (13.8% adult motorcycle ownership), Colorado Springs, Colorado (13.1%), Milwaukee-Racine, Wisconsin - home of Harley Davidson Motor Company (12.9%), Portland, Oregon (12.4%), and Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota (12.3%). www.ON-A-BIKE.com

Today's Motorcycle Owners Happier

Overall satisfaction with the motorcycle ownership experience has increased in the past five years, according to the J.D. Power and Associates 2007 Motorcycle Competitive Information Study released today.

The study finds that improvements made in product satisfaction and dealership service have helped drive the increase in overall ownership satisfaction across the industry. Service, build quality and product/performance primarily drive the overall motorcycle ownership experience.

Overall satisfaction with the cost of ownership has increased among motorcycle owners for a second consecutive year, with owners being most satisfied with the initial price and resale value of their bike. Satisfaction with maintenance/repair costs, cost of accessories and insurance has also increased.

Motorcycle owners are strong advocates of their brand and dealer, as 68 percent "definitely will" recommend their brand and 56 percent will recommend the dealer from which they purchased their motorcycle.

"Loyalty and advocacy levels are particularly high among motorcycle owners when compared with owners in the automotive and boating industries," said research manager Tim Fox. "For example, only 47 percent of boat and 35 percent of auto owners say they are loyal to their brand. The motorcycle industry is much more of a niche market where consumers have a particularly strong allegiance to a brand compared with automotive and marine industries."

Now in its 10th year, the study measures owner satisfaction with new motorcycles by examining five major components of the overall ownership experience: product; quality; cost of ownership; sales; and service. The 2007 Motorcycle Competitive Information Study includes responses from 8,796 owners who purchased new on-road motorcycles between September 2006 and May 2007.

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Unfamiliar Bikes Invite Problems

Experienced riders drastically increase their chances of crashing simply by riding a different motorcycle, an insurance study has found.

Even experienced riders can be pretty wobbly when they hop on an unfamiliar bike, according to data from the country's largest motorcycle insurer, Progressive, which conducted a study of almost 2 million motorcycle policies over a five-year period and found that riders who switch bikes are nearly 70 percent more likely to crash than riders who keep the same bike.

"Most people already know that riding can be especially dangerous for new bikers," said Rick Stern, a Progressive motorcycle product manager who is also a rider. "But our data shows that the less familiar you are with your bike, the more likely you are to be involved in a collision, regardless of your experience."

The study also found cruiser riders who switch to sport bikes are three-and-a-half times more likely to crash. That's more than double the risk they'd have than if they just switched to another cruiser.

Sport bikers, on the other hand, can reduce their risk by more than a third just by switching to a cruiser, according to Progressive's research.

"We want experienced riders to know their risks so they can take extra precautions when they replace their bikes," said Stern. "It's a good idea for riders to take their new bike out for a couple of shake down cruises in a parking lot before hitting the open road."

Even people who have been riding for years can benefit from practicing the basics on their new bike, Stern said, including low-speed riding, turning, shifting and swerving, and higher-speed panic stopping. www.ON-A-BIKE.com

Weird News: Angry Bikes Can Save Lives

Honda Motor Company scientists studying the way the brain reacts to different imagery found that motorcycles that resemble a human face - especially an angry one evoked with diagonal headlights and abbreviated nose - are "significantly" more visible to other drivers.

Measurements taken with functional magnetic resonance imaging confirm that a more lifelike front-end design "elicits a response similar to that when a human face is seen," suggesting that other drivers will more quickly recognize the motorcycle's presence and react accordingly.

"People in four-wheeled vehicles will see not just motorcycles coming at them but motorcycles with human characteristics and faces," says Charles Kenny, president of Right Brain People, a consumer psychology firm specializing in motor vehicles. "It connects to something very basic in the psyche that goes back to when they were little children."

By way of example, Kenny points to the Disney movie Cars, and to kids' toys such as Thomas & Friends trains, both of which cause youngsters to emotionally identify with inanimate objects.

"The human brain," Honda's 2005 study explains, "exhibits a strong response to facial patterns, especially to the eyes and mouth." The observation led to the extrapolation that human-looking bikes are more quickly recognized by motorists, making them more easily avoided.

Major manufacturers such as Suzuki, Kawasaki, Honda, Yamaha, Buell, Triumph and Ducati all feature 2008 sportbikes fitted with menacing cat's eye headlights, and according to Money.CNN.com the new Honda DN-01 deliberately incorporates a human look into its front view.

"The sportbike community really wants an aggressive, hard-edged design," says John Paolo Canton, spokesman for Ducati North America. "Nobody wants to buy a 300-km/h motorcycle that looks cute."

With motorcycle use worldwide near an all-time high, "conspicuity enhancement" as researchers call it, can help promote awareness and avoidance of motorcycles sharing the road.

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