

RESPECT.

Now that's a word that every biker should be familiar with. The definition in the dictionary doesn't seem comprehensive enough for me, it just says; think highly of; show concern for. I think in the motorcycle community it's about so much more. We need to show not only respect for each other, but respect for others on the road and in our communities as well. Living in the largest metropolitan area in our state I'm constantly challenged while on the road by people that have very little respect for others that they share the road with. Normally, this is cagers I'm talking about, but this month I'd like to share some of the disrespect I've seen from motorcyclists. Some of it seems almost comical now, but either way, we should all be above the kind of things I've seen lately.

Motorcycle clubs, one percent or not, live and breathe respect. There are hundreds of m/c clubs in Wisconsin and I'm proud to associate with more than a handful. Biking and brotherhood speaks volumes to me, as does respect. When I'm invited to a club event at a clubhouse or anywhere for that matter, it's customary to shake hands and introduce yourself before you enter. I actually find it odd that the rest of the world doesn't seem to work like this anymore but I'm glad the biker community still holds this in high regard. Just last month I was invited to a National event held for the fiftieth anniversary of a one percent club in Milwaukee. I couldn't attend because of other obligations so I don't know if it got crazy but there were probably a thousand club members there from all over the country and there wasn't a peep of it on the news. The locals weren't in an uproar and the police scanners weren't going bananas with complaints of mischief. Why do you think that was? Respect. Go have fun, leave others alone, hope they leave you alone.

Unfortunately some clubs in the Milwaukee area must not have gotten the memo on how to act, or just didn't care. The second weekend of August once again brought the Milltown Throw down to Milwaukee. This event is loosely organized and focuses on hundreds of mostly sportbikes parading the streets on the edge of the city. Anything goes, stunting, speeding, reckless behavior, it's up to the individual to decide what they want from the ride. Now seeing this is a parade of sorts, they have roadguards blocking the lights. Now, I'm not against that, and I've respectfully done it with and without law enforcement support many times. Keeping a group of bikes all going to the same place together makes it safer for everyone, as long as there's respect. Eight cycles of a light (nearly ten minutes) isn't respect, it's rude. Treating our streets like a playground isn't respect. Disregard for others that are sharing our crowded roads on a Saturday afternoon isn't respect. Disregarding law enforcement that's acting in the interest of public safety isn't respect. And the ultimate disrespect was probably the fact that every biker with a go-pro recorded it and posted in on social media for all the world to see how disrespectful bikers can be. That disrespects each and every one of us that fights for equal rights on our roadways and begs the public to watch for us and help keep us safe. I would like to believe the organizers of this event didn't expect it to get so crazy but it did, and now every

biker is going to have to deal with it. We are currently working with city leaders that are talking about a heavy handed approach to group events with additional city ordinances and possibly even state sponsored legislation because we didn't have enough to do. All because of a complete lack of respect. I don't blame all sport bikers in our area for this, in fact many that I know left when things go out of hand, but I hope they are willing to fix the problems that were caused by working with us, not hiding behind us.

The next shocking act of disrespect came while I was driving in my work van with my youngest son after dropping some things off on the south side of our city. As is often the case in Milwaukee we came upon about a dozen bikes on their way to a bike night at a local dealership. Rush hour was just ending but the roads were still packed pretty tight as we entered the freeway behind this group. As is normally the case, I explained to my son the different types of bikes and riders as we pulled into the lane next to them, explaining why they're riding a certain way and even a few comments as to things I wish I didn't have to see. As we wound our way north on the freeway I settled in behind a semi-truck in the left lane and drove next to the bikes using the center lane. Further along as traffic thinned a bit, the bikers made their move to the left lane in front of the semi causing him to hit the brakes quite abruptly and then decide to signal a lane change to clear out of their way. As the truck driver waited for the bikers to pass, his signal still on, it seems that a few of them thought they would take their sweet time and hold up both lanes, oblivious to their surroundings. As the last bikes made it past the semi, the trucker started to move to the center lane. Unfortunately, there were still a few stragglers hanging back that decided to twist the throttle about the same time as the trucker initiated his lane change. As these bikers hugged the left side of the center lane approaching us significantly faster than their buddies had, there was almost no way the trucker could see them. I slowed a bit to allow the bikes to just pass in front of me and go around the semi, but once again, they were oblivious. I actually reached over and covered my son's eyes. I thought they were going to hit the back of that truck at speed. Nobody should have to see that. But, thankfully they swerved at the last minute and avoided being the latest statistic. By now, you may be wondering where the disrespect comes in to this. Well, the last biker that must have been going 80+ mph in everyone's blind spot decides to ride next to the cab and use hand gestures to express his feelings. All while driving seventy behind a dozen bikes. Thought he may hit them too. What do you think this truck driver now thinks of bikers? How do you think he will act next time he's in this situation? We don't own the road, we're sharing it with others. And some of the people we're sharing it with are just trying to make a living.

My final story happened just down the block from me. I was driving my truck running some errands on a Sunday afternoon. At the end of my road I stopped at the sign before looking both ways to pull out onto the four lane divided highway that runs past my neighborhood. I've done this thousands of times in my life and I'm a good judge of traffic speed as I prepare to enter the highway. I noticed a sportbike coming down the hill but as he was better than a hundred yards away and there was no traffic in either lane besides him, I pulled out. As he passed my truck, significantly faster than the speed limit, he flipped me off. Not a good idea young man. I caught up to him at the stop light and proceeded to let him know how I felt about his driving skills. He almost

hopped off his bike but I think he knew that wouldn't go well. As we argued back and forth he said how I have to watch for motorcycles, and he was only going nine over, I should learn how to drive...blah, blah, blah. Of course the light eventually turned green and he took off like a bat out of hell and weaved in and out of traffic to prove to me how well he rode. Nice job. Everyone respects that. I have taught over a thousand driver's education students how to share the road. I've been riding for thirty years without incident. If I thought he was a disrespectful jerk, what do you think other cagers thought? It's about respect. If you want it, you have to give it.

Bad statistics bring bad legislation. Currently in WI we are keeping our accident/ fatality count lower than normal and I would like to think some of the many programs that ABATE of WI has initiated has helped this. There is always room for improvement from both bikers and other roadway users. Staying sober and alert, driving within your means, and showing a little respect may save your life as a biker. And, if we want everyone else to continue looking out for us and sharing the roadways, we're going to have to continue to show some respect toward them and ourselves. If you want respect, you have to give it. It should come as second nature to a biker. If you agree, share it with someone else. Our lives just may depend on it. Until next month....Ride Free

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