



Lake Riding

by Anika (Slininger) Hanisch

A cloudless sky. Great friends. The thrill of the open road.

For motorcycling enthusiasts in the western suburbs, summertime simply doesn't get any better. Good company and exceptional routes are in plentiful supply in the region. So when mother nature provides a sunny day, these folks hit the road.

"Minnetonka is such an easy place to ride around; there are so many places to stop at," said Patrick Palm, the General Manager of Hopkins Tavern on the Main. The Tavern, a known biker hangout, hosts Meet-and-Go rides twice a week during the summer months.

Open to any riders, The Tavern is often a meeting place for a diverse crowd. Palm, who rides a 1300 VTX Honda, shared that there have been times when he thought conflict might be inevitable, only to find himself pleasantly surprised.

Whether riding Hondas, Harleys, Choppers or any other custom bike, the gatherings often take on the flavor of a car show, Palm explained. Riders check out each other's motorcycles and, of course, brag about their own. "Long hair, short hair, every creed and color... I've never seen a group of people get along so well in my life!"

No matter what make or model, they are all familiar with a unique way to enjoy some beautiful routes in this area. David "Too Tall" Carlson, whose preferred ride is an '87 Harley Davidson Heritage Softtail, recommended several county roads and highways weaving through the Minnetonka area, south along the Minnesota river and west toward Lake Independence. "Most of these can all be made in a long afternoon. Or start in the morning, and have lunch on the road," he said.

Carlson is a member of American Bikers for Awareness, Training & Education (ABATE) of Minnesota, an organization that promotes motorcycle safety. "We jealously guard our state's reputation for being in the top ten in the nation as far as our motorcycle safety record," Carlson said.

Safety is high on the list for the group rides at the Tavern as well. "We're there for the miles and the sun and the wind. (At stops) you'll see a lot of riders just having a diet coke," Palm said. "The slogan is 'Ride safe, not sorry.'"

Both Palm and Carlson emphasized that rider safety, whether that's technical skill or a wise choice at a mid-ride stop, frees everyone up to enjoy riding more.

Serving as the Chairperson for the ABATE State Rally, a Labor Day weekend gathering of motorcyclists in Litchfield, Carlson has also enjoyed the parties, events and charity fundraisers that ABATE hosts. "They're good people, very involved in the community," Carlson said. "I've gained so many wonderful friends through the

organization, and they're not brand conscious about what you ride.”
For many motorcyclists, friendships and camaraderie seem to be almost as important as riding itself. “They share the joy with me,” Carlson said of his riding buddies. “It represents what America was built on ... people with independent minds who desire to maintain liberty and freedom.”