

Now

WHY DO WE RIDE? Did you ever ask yourself that question? I've been reading a book lately that makes a lot of sense, called *The Power of Now* by Eckhart Tolle. He explains that many of us enjoy dangerous activities because the threat of harm keeps us in the present, in the Now. Although I know it's possible to be concerned about distractions in the past or future while we ride, it's the immediacy of riding hard that I value most.

When I'm flying down my favorite canyon road, reading the turns, feeling the tires, rolling the throttle, I have no time for other thoughts. When I'm fully present in the experience, an hour's ride can be a tonic that has no equal, raising my spirits and clearing my mind, enabling me to return home and tackle other jobs with renewed energy.

Riding with others, it depends on the company if I feel this same sense of free expression as I do alone. I'm not fond of riding with a large group for this reason. I chafe at being subjugated to the will of a crowd, even if they are fellow motorcyclists. Finding another rider whose demeanor, machine and ultimately, pace, is close enough to my own is difficult. I'm very lucky that my own brother is such a person, even if we do live so far apart that our riding time together is limited. Our competitiveness with one another always drives us to ride hard enough that we never just kick back and cruise, tempted to focus on distractions in our lives.

But, like Jerry Seinfeld always said, "Not that there's anything wrong with that." I'm sure other personalities get into the same zone at other speeds and circumstances, and that the pace that gets my full attention can also be much slower than someone else's. Maybe I'm lucky my skills are not so great that I can ride in the Now without risking my driver's license!

I've always been fond of mysteries, like the dumbfounding talent of someone like Matt Mladin, who can ride Daytona slipping and sliding milliseconds away from disaster without mishap for all 200 miles—talk about being in the Now.

Trying to write sensibly about this is also notoriously difficult. Zen monks wouldn't have invented their seemingly senseless *koan* puzzles if it were easy. I occasionally get letters from those who regard my thoughts as mystical—a sour criticism in their minds. Although I do have an affinity for certain philosophies, I believe that all religions emanate from the same root experience, and a direct appreciation of the wonders of creation and our place in its scheme is tantamount to knowing its Creator.



Time is a powerful concept. Without it, the intellectual construct of who we are, based on our past and imagined future, simply disappears into Now. But have you ever done anything that wasn't done Now? Unconsciousness of the present; endless conversations in our head of our situations in our past or some hoped-for future can lead us to the looney bin, or worse. Justifications for all kinds of violence are pinned on utopian visions of the future, because the possibilities of the present are ignored.

I'll never forget watching a pinstriper working at a car show in Pennsylvania. His concentration was so total that his brush strokes were flawlessly steady, and his design was both intricate and beautifully conceived. He was working on the vertical support panel at the rear of the roof. Transfixed by his artistry, I felt a rush when he finished. It was then that he moved around to the other side of the car and proceeded to duplicate the design in mirror image, exactly in the same position! Do you suppose he was in the Now?

Conquering our fears, whether we admit it or not, is probably also why we ride. We have to consider our vulnerability versus vehicles much larger and more stable, often driven by people surrounded by distractions both physical and mental, every time we mount up. But we choose to take charge of our situations, and by being fully present to everything, control them to move safely on crowded roads. In fact, riding is an excellent way to exercise the muscle that wrestles all kinds of fear. I worry when I see timid people take up riding. For whatever reason, they have been compelled to put themselves in harm's way, but are insufficiently bold to

deal with it. Riding is dangerous enough that I would never hold it against someone who didn't want to ride.

My own daughter, when she was 21, had a friend who wanted them both to learn how to ride together. Beautiful, small and slightly built, I worried about her safety, but felt obliged to offer support. I finally told her that if she felt she must ride, to do it, and I would help her in every way I could. But, if she didn't really *need* to ride, not to do it. Unless someone is prepared to actively take control, be decisive and aggressively make a safe space for themselves on the road, they are just asking for trouble, in my opinion.

I have other friends whose spouses made them stop riding. If this outlet was their only connection to being in the Now, whatever imagined security was meant to be achieved was a bad bargain. As Benjamin Franklin said with such foresight, "The man who trades freedom for security does not deserve, nor will he receive, either one." I saw one such friend for the first time in decades just two years ago, and he had aged into a frightening curmudgeon since we'd last ridden together in our Army days. Better the risks, and tonic, of riding than the predictable illusion of security.

None of us knows what the future may truly bring. But motorcyclists know the rewards of truly living and seizing the moment. In the final tally, our sense of Time makes us rush to an imagined future, acquire more things, hoping some thing or person will finally bring happiness to our lives, but only leaves us filled with frustration, boredom or anger, and ages us. It must somehow be released or it will surely kill us.

I long to find enlightenment watching a sunset or climbing rocks beside a waterfall, so that it is not necessary to place myself in danger. That shouldn't be necessary. I will continue to explore for other means, but for now, I know of no better way to dissolve the past and future and live in the Now than motorcycling.

There are no doubt many forms of such experience, rock climbing, surfing, glider flying and the like, but I'm either not inclined or not equipped to do any of them.

We have our Way, and I'm so very happy to share it with you.

Ride Now.

DAVE SEARLE

—Dave Searle
Editor