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Riders, start your engines

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The deep-throated rumble of a Harley-Davidson V-twin engine and the call of the open road unfolding adventures ahead — this is motorcycling.

Much like the last day of school before summer vacation, freedom beckons as you sit astride your bike ready to ride out to parts unknown.

Melodramatic, maybe, but an accurate depiction nevertheless of the euphoria bikers experience on a ride.

Each year, I look forward to a long ride that's about six to 10 days in length. Over the years, rides have been to Sturgis, S.D., to attend the longest running motorcycle rally in the world. Anywhere from 400,000 to 600,000 enthusiasts visit Sturgis for this event that occurs the first full week of August.

Other rides, to name a few — the Great Smoky Mountains, the Ozarks, Pikes Peak, Toronto, New Orleans, Devil's Tower, Thunder Bay, Kenora, Daytona for "Bike Week," Key West and many others. Trips sometimes extend to three weeks.

How did this interest in motorcycling happen? It started out with a Fox mini-bike when I was 12, then I later moved to bigger equipment. From about 25 years after college, law school and working as an associate at my firm made me too busy for biking.

But one day at age 45, I got the bug again, some extra time and purchased a client's Honda Shadow Sabre. I later moved on to Harleys.

I still have the Harleys, but not the Honda — a 2002 H-D Softail/Night Train and a 2006 H-D Road Glide.

Funny thing about owning a Harley, you are always doing something to the bike — whether it's a new saddle, customizing the paint job or buying a GPS.

A Harley is always a work in progress.

And road trips are always an experience.

Maybe you remember the old Honda motorcycle ads in the 1960s with the tag line, "You meet the nicest people on a Honda." This is partially true — in fact, you meet the nicest people on motorcycles.

As soon as you slide off your bike, the odds are someone will walk over to you and say hello and talk about their motorcycle or that they have a motorcycle that has been sitting in their garage for 20 years, but their spouse won't let them ride it.

If you like to talk, a motorcycle is an excellent conversation piece to break the ice.

A bike gives you a different perspective of the environment around you. Cars — known as "cages" in the bike world — cocoon you from sights and smells around you.

But on a motorcycle, you are part of the environment and feel connected. Riding through a town early in the morning, you pick up the aroma of bacon and eggs several blocks before passing in front of the local diner. Passing through a valley with evergreens on each side of you immerses you in pine scent that awakens your senses much more than any expensive perfume.

Although trips can be to faraway places, nothing can take the place of an early morning ride on Lake Shore Drive starting at Hollywood Avenue and traveling south. The beauty of Lake Michigan in the summer is breathtaking.

Traveling closer and closer to downtown, the skyscrapers emerge



Carlton R. Marcyan prepares for another ride on his Harley.

as giants. Continuing southbound to South Shore Drive brings you past the museums, Soldier Field and the Museum of Science and Industry. Take a detour around the museum and pass the Clarence Darrow Memorial Bridge to pay your respects to a great lawyer and return to the drive to bring you to the former South Shore Country Club.

If you feel adventurous, keep going south into Indiana and then curve north into New Buffalo, Mich., for a great burger at Redamak's. Or feed your gambling craving by traveling a few miles east to the Four Winds Casino. There is lots of great riding going northeast on the Red Arrow Highway (U.S. Highway 12, named after the 32nd Infantry Division) across Michigan.

One of my favorite rides was a few years ago. It took me up Pikes Peak, just 10 miles outside of Colorado Springs, Colo. This seemingly endless ride of switchbacks finally delivers you to an elevation of just more than 14,000 feet.

Abrupt movements leave you lightheaded, but the view is spectacular. They say on a clear day you can see four states from the top — Kansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico

and, of course, Colorado. Once you reach the top, though, you realize you must go back down. Most of the road is without guardrails — you must keep your wits about you for the ride down.

If you are interested in motorcycles, you can sign up for free classes. Yes, free. They supply the motorcycle, helmet and instructors.

Go to www.dot.il.gov/cycle2.html for information. The instructors are excellent and the program is well-organized. There are advanced programs, as well. Local motorcycle dealerships also offer classes, but for a charge.

Motorcycling is not for everyone, but if you know how to ride a bicycle, the odds are in your favor that you can ride a motorcycle.

Just realize that this activity is inherently dangerous and must be taken seriously. Safety classes focus a lot of attention on detecting and avoiding potential problems.

It's best to check the website at the end of February and send in your application right away, as spots fill up quickly. If you are a former rider and have not ridden much in the past few years, it is a good idea to take a refresher class to retrieve your skills.

I hope to see you on the road. Ride on!