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Loyalty

I think I'd be on safe ground asserting that loyalty is a quality and a characteristic that we, as a culture of bikeriders, hold in high regard.

If you are blessed, you can count yourself as both having loyal friends and being a loyal friend. Over time you learn to distinguish acquaintances from friends and act accordingly. On that increasingly rare occasion where a connection is made, acquaintances move up in status, getting closer to the pinnacle of friendship, earning the prize—loyalty.

When you are young, in most cases, your circle of "friends" is generally as big as it will ever be, in some cases quite large. There is little in the way of distinguishing acquaintance from friend. Everyone is your friend.

As you get older and achieve a clear understanding of what you are about, your values and tastes are more defined. Your circle of friends becomes smaller, the relationships more meaningful, the circle tighter. Not to say that you don't make friends as you travel down the road, but it takes time and, as we know, time is at a premium for all of us.

The loyalty we direct at the favorite things in our lives—brands we identify with like H-D, Levis, and Dunkin Donuts—also flavor and telegraph to others who we are and project our personal values. I, like you, know some folks that wouldn't put on a pair of Wranglers (vs. Levis) or drink a Pepsi (vs. Coke) and they fly those flags proudly.

I've noticed loyalty extends to and affects the relationships we have with our machines, both two and four wheelers. My wingman and lifelong best friend Pupkin has traded bikes in on a regular basis since being on two wheels. A lot of bikes have passed under him and his commitment to these machines is absolute, for as long as they are under him. The moment they pass the critical nexus of value, mileage, and upkeep, they get sold or traded in. Pupkin tends to travel far and drive his machines hard and knowing that no one plays for free (payments vs. maintenance) he opts to spend his money on new machines rather than maintenance. I



am pretty much the polar opposite. I tend to dig in and stay past the due date, paying the price.

Daddy-O has a similar relationship to his machines and over the years many have passed through his hands. Not many people I know own more than two bikes, and those that are fortunate enough to be able to swing it tend to have a travelling bike and a fun, around town/day tripping machine. Sports car and RV if you will. Being able to maintain these older machines is part of the ownership experience and more often than not, unless you are fully in the loyalty game, you are not going to own a fleet of maintenance intensive machines. They are the ultimate time/cash soak.

Chucky owns two bikes; Frankenstein, an off-the-hook custom he built himself, and his TC RoadGlide. After driving the RoadGlide for two years in stock trim, Chucky went for it and turned the bike into a sweet, very cleanly done, mild custom. Having a choice of bikes to ride is great, although I've noticed that the "mean machines" some have tucked away don't see nearly the road time that our Dressers do. Comfort isn't so bad. Asked about his commitment to Frankenstein, Chucky says, "I love the bike but it kills me." Chucky's been in this game since the 70's, and I have a feeling that as loyal as he is to Frankenstein, the bike sees so little duty that it might just wind up on the block in the not too distant future. I never thought that would happen, but I see the relationship is getting strained. Loyalty is fading, showing cracks.

When I snagged my FXR, I just knew that I'd have the machine forever: well, at least for as long as I could ride it. When I picked it up nearly 20 years ago, my first Big Twin, I was ecstatic. I sat in my shop for hours staring at it when I got it home

that first night. I made a commitment to take care of and protect this machine from mechanical mishaps, mayhem, and theft. Better than putting a "ring on the finger," I made a special place for it in my shop, according to the machine the honor it was due.

Not all relationships start off smoothly and loyalty is often not returned in kind, as I was to learn again and again. The FXR treated me pretty badly. Running like crap, breakdowns, problems—this bike was a barnacle on my wallet and all the teething pains that visited my door were bumming me out. My loyalty and commitment to the machine was resolute, there was no way I was going to let any of this get me down. Advice from my friends was dictating I sell this problem child, but I just didn't cotton to that line of thought at all. I was true blue.

The final test to my loyalty was a crankpin whose hardness had worn off, leaving me with a nice bottom end "thump, thump, thump." Sweet. I wasn't really excited to be tearing down my motor and spending money I didn't have. My friends said, "Run, the bike hates you," and honestly, I was beginning to think that myself.

As it turns out, Tom Haner, a talented engine builder, demonstrated loyalty and friendship and worked with me to rebuild my motor into the stroker it is to this day. This was 1994 and that same motor is still in one piece and running as strong as ever.

After that test of loyalty, the relationship between my machine and me improved exponentially. It seemed that we'd turned a corner: from acquaintances to friends. Loyalty was rewarded and some 16 years later, we've become better friends than ever. I can't ever see selling my FXR. I'd rather give it away to family or friend when that time comes.

It's all good when the commitment and respect flow both ways, as it bodes for a long and healthy relationship. Loyalty—you can't fake it, force it, or buy it. It can only be earned and it needs regular upkeep.

Stay Loyal!

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CORRECTION: All of the images of the 1952 Indian Chief in the August issue (IronWorks, August 2010, page 32,) were taken by Traci Lovell.