



Immerse Yourself

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So there we were. Five of us. Americans on Harleys, riding at parade speed down the main drag of a tiny mountain village somewhere in northern Italy. Heads bobbing from side to side, nervously looking for passersby on the darkened streets. We didn't know where we were, but we were fully aware that we were far from where we needed to be and in dire need of directions. ("Where's the map?! I thought you had it!")

We couldn't find anyone who understood or could speak English, but we eventually found a few local guys who were willing to try to help us, drawn in either by our friendly facial expressions or to protect their kinfolk. (Helpful observation: Even in these enlightened days, five strange men on Harleys pulling up to the curb next to an older woman tends to make said woman walk faster than she has in decades. That's somebody's precious Nonna being chased up the street. You'll want to avoid this.)

Ever try to communicate with someone when neither of you speak the same language? The ugly American approach is to talk real loud and slow, hoping the higher volume and delayed cadence will somehow make your completely incomprehensible babbling understandable. What it does is make you look very, very stupid. Eventually, your hapless target just turns away with a shrug (no doubt confused as to why you were yelling so loud at him). It can be very frustrating.

The long and short of it is, we eventually found our way, after some expletive-laced disagreements at a very rural fork in the road, to a main highway and a gas station with a map. There, we fortified ourselves on the Italian version of Hostess Fruit Pies and were on our way. Lesson learned.

I'm reminded of this because I recently spent a good deal of time traveling around the U.S. of A., doing research for the Motor Company by talking to Harley-Davidson® owners. In doing so, I was struck by an amazing new reality: There are a lot of new riders among

us who never owned a motorcycle prior to buying their Harley®. As a consequence, some are having a tough time understanding the language of motorcycling and a much harder time with the language of Harley-Davidson.

Harley-speak, we all know, is like nothing on earth and takes some time with other riders to uncover its subtleties and to "learn the secret handshake." This can be intimidating for new riders and can, in some instances, discourage them from actively joining in H.O.G. activities or group events. Nobody likes to feel like an outsider or risk being exposed as someone who doesn't know the language.

If you're a new rider having trouble finding your way, there's plenty of help available for you. Hands down, the easiest way to get

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acclimated is to join your local H.O.G.® chapter, if you haven't already. They'll gladly welcome you aboard and you'll be conversant – and comfortable – in no time. And don't worry: Many of the riders you'll meet will know exactly where you're coming from because they were once you. Spending an hour or two each week at your local dealership serves the same purpose. See, in foreign language circles, they call this "immersion." Soon, you're jabbering away like a native.

Those of us who know the ropes owe it to everyone who rides a Harley-Davidson, regardless of their experience level, to help them along. If you find a lost soul, shepherd him or her into our flock. It's just not right for anybody to feel like a foreigner among friends.

And, by the way, should you ever find yourself tempted to eat those Italian fruit pies, avoid the fig-flavored. Especially if you're doing a lot of riding. Trust me on that.

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