



Salute? Absolutely.

KEN SCHMIDT

I bet this has happened to you. You're out on your Harley® and you eyeball another bike blasting toward you in the opposite lane. Its massive headlight, wide bars, beefy front end, and vest-clad rider trigger within you a seemingly inborn response: Your left hand surrenders its grip on the bar and slowly (because you have to do it slowly for the full effect) starts to trail out, down and away from you in the low-handed salute – call it a wave if it makes you feel better – that has been used to acknowledge fellow members of the Harley-Davidson tribe since Day One. The oncoming rider's left hand is also moving away from the bar. Your eyes rise to meet his or hers, and at that exact instant, your brain screams, "Aaaack! That's not a Harley! Improper salute!" But your arm's already extended well past halfway, so you feebly yank it back toward the grip then jiggle it a little in a blown attempt to cover your blunder.

Calm down, friends. I know what you're thinking, and I totally agree: It's always in good form to honor passing motorcyclists, regardless of tribe. But let's be honest, too, and admit that the salutes we offer to other Harley owners differ in motion and feeling from those tossed to riders of other brands. And they have their own salutes, too (picture the quick two-fingers-above-the-bar wave). In cases like the above, where we feel we've been duped, it's hard to not feel a tad embarrassed and to think that, even though our wave was warranted, it was not quite worthy of the extra effort put in to make it Harley-Davidson-esque. No disrespect intended, but to me it's always seemed proper to shower a bit more love on close family than on distant relations. That's what we do.

Let's try another one. You're out on a run and see a group of riders coming toward you who are (this time, there's no chance of error) on Harleys. Immediately, your arm starts its instinctive down and out

float while your head starts its knowing nod. Whoa! The approaching riders – all of them – keep eyes locked straight ahead and pretend to not see you. In two seconds, you've shot straight from too-cool-for-school to Ralph Malph. Your ego's been stomped. You've been deemed unworthy of a returned salute by your own tribe. Your arm just flaps a bit, then recoils (or maybe you scratch your leg like that's what you intended to do in the first place), while your shoulders slump. Wow, what just happened here?

Now, follow along closely while I talk out both sides of my mouth. I feel like all motorcyclists should acknowledge each other, but at the same time, I willingly perpetuate a caste system that in effect says some riders (*my* brand) are worthy of a little more effort than others. I don't see that changing any time soon.

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Adding to the conundrum, I wholly respect the rights of those "aren't into waving" to not wave, but I hate like hell when my wave doesn't get returned.

So allow me to propose a compromise solution in the form of a question: You don't have to initiate a wave if you don't want to, but what's the harm of returning one? Or at least a head nod? How 'bout a little love for the home team, eh? For old time's sake?

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