



A MESSAGE FROM
Jim McCaslin

PRESIDENT AND CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER
HARLEY-DAVIDSON MOTOR COMPANY

Something We Never Want to Lose

It must be primeval. The way it touches us so deeply, we must have some ancient hardwiring inside us that's a direct feed to our very core. Maybe it's some leftover evolutionary seventh sense that's triggered when we hit the ignition and fire brings our V-twins to life. Or maybe the rhythmic rumble reminds us of some distant thundering herd. The chase is on. And our hearts automatically race not wanting to be left behind. Or our soul goes hungry.

Whatever else it is, this authentic part of the Harley-Davidson experience really is something. And it's something we don't ever want to lose.

Now comes the troubling part. How can the sound that embodies so much of what we love about Harley-Davidson® motorcycles be so offensive to others? And it's even more troubling that those negative feelings are spreading throughout the country and around the world. Some people just don't like motorcycles. Period. We can accept that. But isn't there something we can do to keep their numbers from growing?

Negative news stories regarding motorcycle noise have increased 400 percent over the past 10 years. Communities across the United States have continued to up their efforts to curb motorcycle noise. Some communities have instituted outright bans on motorcycles. Others have found new ways to enforce noise laws. Even traditional motorcycle rally locations like Laconia, Daytona, and Myrtle Beach have had controversies regarding noise at their events.

Worldwide, motorcycle noise is becoming more heavily restricted. Europe and Japan now require lower than U.S. dB(A) levels for new motorcycles right out of the box. In Australia (New South Wales), a permanent tag must be affixed and remain on to signify legal pipes and annual inspections are required. No tag, \$200 fine. And if the pipes exceed the legal dB(A) level, there is an additional fine up to \$500.

Looking into the science of sound, the perception of sound varies according to multiple factors; volume is the single factor that most often sends hearing from barely noticeable to unbearable. Understandable. That's why many riders are fitting themselves with earplugs for longer rides. But what's really interesting is that the sound impulses we generate ourselves seem less of a nuisance than those generated by others. We're also more indulgent when it comes to a "friendly" sound or noise – music, for example, if you happen to be a musician yourself. So, the "friendly" sounds of our Harleys are not so friendly sounding to those who don't share our passion for riding. We can't change that. But what can we do?

It seems that we, not just The Motor Company, not just the Harley-Davidson dealers, not just a handful of riders, we all, every Hog lovin' one of us, must do everything we can to protect our sport and keep it as strong as it is today. We must take our turn, as more than a century-worth of Harley riders has before us, in guarding our sport.

In those very early days, Harley-Davidson was born as a form of basic transportation. When you added a sidecar or a delivery box to the back, they became utility vehicles. Then the weekend was invented. Well, you were lucky if you got one day off. But you made the most of it and discovered the sheer joy of motorcycling. And you discovered that there were others just like you who carried that dominant riding gene. You were born with it. And proud of it. You owned your own kind of freedom. But even then, there were many who didn't understand.

There were literally hundreds of motorcycle manufacturers in the early days. Far more than there were automakers. As the number of motorized vehicles grew, so did the issue of noise. The confounded machines were upsetting the still-main-means-of-transportation horses. Farmers complained about machines disturbing their livestock. And the general population became very vocal about their right to a good night's sleep. To achieve social acceptability of their new modes of transportation, the manufacturers developed ... the muffler! The auto industry had plenty of space to carry all manner of bulky noise suppression devices. For motorcycles, it was an entirely different challenge. The Motor Company put its engineering staff to work and came up with the best mufflers in the motorcycle industry. So successful, in fact, that they built a motorcycle that became affectionately known as The Silent Gray Fellow. That moniker stuck, and during those early years the entire Harley-Davidson model line became known as The Silent Gray Fellows.

“... the issue of excessive motorcycle noise continues to grow, and it's creating a real threat to our rights as individuals.”

Today, Harley-Davidson motorcycles have more power and performance than our predecessors could have ever imagined, but with all due respect, we love to hear them coming. That doesn't mean louder noise equals even more power, however. It's an interesting misconception. Testing has proven that straight pipes do not necessarily outperform pipes with lower noise levels. Pick the wrong pipes and you can severely reduce your horsepower and/or your torque. And while you're doing it, you'll awaken the sleeping giant of social concern that lives next door to all of us.

So what if you've picked the wrong pipes?

Then you have a very important individual decision to make. We all do. No one expects everyone to change out their straight pipes overnight. But we all must consider changing out our thinking. We need to think about the consequences our actions have on others, before others take action against us. As tempting as it is, maybe we resist cranking up the revs at the next stop signal. Maybe we fall in love all over again with the unique and mesmerizing sound “quality” of our own V-twin, not just the volume. Maybe we think about how we can assure that all those riders coming behind us can enjoy the same level of freedom we do today. Maybe we just take a time-out to remember that this is really something. And it's something we never want to lose.

