

Bruce on Bikers' Rights

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September 2009

HARLEY-DAVIDSON AND CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY TO FALLEN RIDERS

Another Open Letter to Bill Davidson



11 August 2009

William J. "Bill" Davidson
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Dear Bill,

A kind assessment of your response to my letter of June 6 entitled "**Why Should Motorcyclists Support the MDA?**" incorporated by this reference...

<http://tinyurl.com/pgny4n>

...would be that what we have here is a failure to communicate:

<http://tinyurl.com/navt4s>

And if you consider my replies to your surrogate somewhat harsh, you can attribute that to the condescending attitude pervading the dismissively evasive answers proffered for my direct and serious questions.

I am no enemy of Harley-Davidson, Bill. I have been a biker at heart since I watched my first episode of "*Then Came Bronson*" as a boy, and a motorcyclist in fact since my father helped me buy my first ride in 1969. I bought into living "the dream" promoted by the Motor Company hook, line and sinker, and perhaps in some small way have contributed to "the legend" by completing over 40 IBA-certified distance and endurance rides on my '99 FXDS:

<http://distanceriding.ldrlongdistancerider.com>

That is not to say, however, that you should expect me or any circumspect member of your core market to continue to give carte blanche approval to H-D's corporate direction by mindlessly marching to the Piper's tune, and overlooking if not embracing every misstep along the way. Yes, Bill, it goes without saying that the Motor Company has profited greatly from the blind allegiance of its baby boomer base for many years. But as Bob Dylan sings, *the times they are a-changin'*...

The **Sturgis Motorcycle Rally** (more aptly now the **Black Hills Trailer Classic**) celebrated its 69th year last week. And while touring Main and Lazelle, I observed more than a few attendees of comparable longevity. As you know, Bill, the median age of Harley riders is pushing 50. That means that even

before making actuarial adjustments for those we will lose to the right-of-way violations of cellphone/texting/nail-painting/otherwise distracted cagers who'll likely go unpunished for their crimes...

<http://tinyurl.com/locmth>

...you can expect about half of your current customer base to expire within 28 years. So even if you prolong your sales and service revenue stream by convincing us aging graybeards to trade in our born-to-be-wild two-wheelers for the "threedom freedom" of Lehman-built Tri Glides, you'll still be selling into a shrinking market:

<http://tinyurl.com/nq9lw6>

Unless Harley-Davidson connects with a new generation, Bill, it will die along with the old. That means not only offering products that appeal to a more youthful demographic, but marketing them to more discriminating minds. The younger riders of the Internet era are web-wired and world-aware. That makes them less likely to need or even accept "reasons to ride" spoon-fed to them by H-D corporate's entertainment marketing, and more likely to respond to initiatives evidencing corporate social responsibility ("CSR").

A key component of CSR is proactive consideration of the welfare of those who purchase your products and services. In your case, that means motorcycle riders. And every year, in the U.S. alone more than 108,000 biker households suffer loss of income, limb or life in motorcycle accidents. These accidents are not caused by Harley-Davidson, of course, and often not the fault of the rider...

<http://tinyurl.com/9fsz6s>

...but there can be no debate that the losses suffered are directly attributable to motorcycling. Yet every year, millions of hard-earned biker dollars that H-D could be channeling to the aid of fallen riders and their families are instead diverted out of our community to fill the bloated coffers of the wastefully inefficient Muscular Dystrophy Association and other "charities" from which motorcyclists derive little if any benefit.

From a social responsibility standpoint, Bill, this is not only a marketing mistake but a moral outrage. And until the error is corrected in Milwaukee, its impact will be reflected in your market share.

Your Loyal and Long-Standing Customer,

Bruce Arnold

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