

driftin' with frank

Are those people in cars watching you with beady eyes? Or aren't they watching you at all?

"Man, you couldn't pay me enough money to ride on the street! Those cars are out to get you. They'll run you down if you give 'em half a chance, and never think twice about it. No, street-riding's too dangerous. I'll stay on the trails."

Many, many trail-riders sing that particular song. But lots of street riders are very uptight about the motivations of drivers, too. If you listen to street riders swapping experiences after warming up with a few beers, the tales they tell sound like battle campaigns.

Are things really like that? Are the people who drive cars actually trying to murder us, as some riders seem to believe?

A few weeks ago, Paul Dean had an interesting experience. He was roadtesting an RD-350, riding in the outside lane of a six-lane street in Pomona. He had company: a bakery truck was trying to play touch tackle with his license plate, and alongside him in the next lane was a big Oldsmobile sedan piloted by a sixty-year-old lady with silver hair.

As they cruised along in the middle of the block, the lady turned her head and stared directly into Paul's eyes. Paul stared back. Then the lady whipped her steering wheel and cut suddenly into the outside lane. The side of the Oldsmobile hurtled toward Paul, who was trapped. He could not escape by speeding up, so he grabbed his brakes—which on that RD-350 were very good—and headed for the high curb. Somehow he found the right combination of time and place. The lady's rear fender brushed past him; instantly he turned on the throttle again to avoid getting rear-ended by the bakery truck.

Paul's nerves were screaming; it had been very close. He assumed that the lady had looked at him without actually seeing him, but he resented her error that had almost cost him so heavily.

They went through the next intersection: the lady in the Oldsmobile, Paul (still on her bumper), and the bakery truck (still breathing down Paul's rear fender). The next block was all industrial, with no stores or houses or driveways or parking places.

In the middle of the block, the lady in the Oldsmobile suddenly slammed on her brakes. Paul sensed that even if by some miracle he could get stopped in time, the bakery truck wouldn't be able to, so he flung the Yamaha into the middle traffic lane and prayed that nobody else would be there. Nobody else was. But as soon as

Paul got into that middle lane, the lady in the Olds sped up again.

The traffic light at the next intersection was red, so the lady had to stop there. Paul pulled up in front of her, killed his engine, and walked back to her car. He took a deep breath, ordered all of his nerves to stop twitching, and asked, "Lady, why did you do that to me?"

The sixty-year-old lady looked Paul right in the eye and said firmly, "I don't like motorcycles."

Paul waited a few seconds to calm himself all over again, and then said, "Yeah, lady, but you almost wrecked me. Aside from tearing up my motorcycle you seem to hate so much, you almost maimed—maybe killed—another human being. Me. Have I ever done anything to hurt you? Do you even know me?"

The old lady gazed steadily at Paul. She replied, "I told you—I don't like motorcycles. Now please move your motorcycle out of my way. I don't want to talk to you anymore."

Reader, what would you have done at that point? Hit her? No, you probably wouldn't have had the moral courage to do that. Neither did Paul. He says he'll hit almost anybody if he's given enough provocation, but he has a built-in mental block against slugging sixty-year-old ladies, even if they have admitted that they had just tried to murder him. Of course, the old lady was counting on that.

Would you have called a cop? Paul thought about doing it. In his mind he ran through the probable conversation between the sweet old lady and the cop: "But officer, I was just driving along in the middle lane, and I wanted to get into the slower lane on the outside, and this young man came out of nowhere—he must have been going very fast—and I just didn't see him in time, and..."

Paul thought about bellowing and shouting and hollering at the old lady. But he could see that she was prepared for that, waiting with a tiny smile on her lips. Her play would be to assume a martyred look, waiting for him to finish his tirade, at which time she would have won completely. Paul would have demonstrated his inability to retaliate against her in any real way. That old lady knew precisely how to exploit the oversimplified public image of helpless old ladies.

So Paul stood there and considered all that, while the lady waited for him to go away like a whipped child and climb on his motorcycle again. Then, in a neutral tone of voice Paul said, "Lady, I'm going to pull over to the side of the road, and I'm going to wait until you're three blocks away before I start moving, and I'm going to keep three blocks between us as long as

we're both headed in the same direction."

He continued, "You don't like motorcycles or the people who ride them. I've known a lot of motorcycle riders. Some of them are good people; a few of them aren't. But none of them are as sick and as miserable and as vicious as you are. You've lived all those years being afraid of people, and hating them instead of enjoying them. What a waste of a lifetime; I feel sorry for you." Paul shook his head, and turned and walked away. The old lady sat there in the Oldsmobile, her mouth hanging open.

That's scary, isn't it? And it goes to prove that there are a bunch of crazy people roaming the highways in cars, looking for street riders, right?

Wrong. What happened to Paul was a fluke, because the crazies very seldom operate the way that old lady did, and the odds are very, very strong that you will never run into a person like her, no matter how much of your life you spend exploring the roads on a street bike.

Nobody who is in close touch with reality will argue seriously that the average motorist is out to wreck motorcycles. How many riders has your next-door neighbor willfully squashed with his car? Exactly. If the average driver were seriously interested in collecting motorcycle riders, there wouldn't be any street riders left.

So it's the intentions of the crazies who own cars that some riders worry about so much. To learn whether or not that is a legitimate worry, we must now slip down beneath the surface and take a cool, hard look at the way a crazy's mind works, to find out if he sees street riders as targets.

But doesn't the mind of a crazy wobble all around, way off in orbit someplace? No, not often—and that's why Paul's experience was such a fluke. The crazy's mind usually works very well—as rationally as yours or mine—to enable that person to satisfy his crazy needs.

There is a label loose enough to fit the various kinds of crazies we're talking about: schizoid ("skit-zoid"). Everybody ought to know about schizoids, because the United States grows such large crops of them, and they do so much harm to everybody (although only the small percentage that we're interested in actively threaten the lives of their fellow men).

I think schizoids happen because of the double standard. We teach our children that everybody lives by a simple set of fairytale rules, and we write the laws of the land to enforce those rules. But we actually live by a completely-different set of rules, most of which boil down to "Anything goes as long as you don't get caught."

That basic contradiction confuses many

young people very badly. The kids who naively swallow the fairytale stuff we hammer into them, and then grow up to learn that they don't really want the things they were taught to want, and cannot live their lives the way they are supposed to do it, and cannot fit themselves into the rigid, unrealistic molds we have created for them—those kids often can't handle the terrific pressures generated inside them by that conflict.

So along comes the schizoid. He is loaded down with self-imposed guilt because he knows he's not whatever kind of person he is supposed to be.

Maybe a kid has a burning desire to become a poet, yet his family and his friends and his teachers expect him to become a football hero. If the kid doesn't have a whole lot of moral courage, he figures there's only one of him, and there's a whole world full of them, so they must be right. Further, there must be something badly wrong with him for not wanting to be what everybody else wants him to be. He doesn't fit the mold that society has built for him; he is a loser. But he assumes that everybody else *does* fit into their officially-approved molds, so he is inferior to them.

Sometimes the kid develops a deep fear of everybody else (because they are what they are supposed to be, and therefore are superior to him), but his subconscious mind plays a trick on him to keep him from realizing that he is afraid of everybody else. His subconscious believes that if he *does* recognize that fear for what it is, he will flip out.

But this schizoid's subconscious fear of everybody else prevents him from relating closely to any of those people, from sharing the human experience with them. All of his energy that should go into sharing his affection with other people gets blocked off. But that energy has to get used up somehow, so it turns into hatred. And the schizoid's mind plays another trick on him, to keep him from knowing the reason for the hatred (otherwise he might find out about the fear). So the type of schizoid we're talking about walks around aching for revenge against the other people, who have that infinitely-precious ability to express their love and affection for each other—the ability that he lacks.

The overwhelming majority of schizoids are not into killing other people; they are able to inflict vengeance upon humanity through their business and social dealings. Some of them are highly successful in business.

A small percentage of the schizoids are so frustrated that they cannot channel their hatreds into business. They must express their resentments more directly. These are the ones we must know about—the ones who would kill street riders with their cars, if their minds worked that way.

In most cases their minds don't work

that way. Their goal—retaliation by homicide—is utterly crazy. But the way in which most schizoids go about attaining that goal is not at all crazy. The person we're talking about wants to kill, but he doesn't want to get caught. He has a very strong drive for survival, which means staying out of psych wards and jails and electric chairs.

So if you're a violence-oriented schizoid, you generally select as victims the kinds of people whom society will never miss. You look for people from groups that society either hates or doesn't care about one way or the other. Then, if your victim gets discovered, officialdom won't

develop any real interest in trying to track you down and prosecute you.

The safest kind of target for a homicidal schizoid would be a quarrelsome person without any family, from the lowest income group. Nobody—nobody—cares about the fate of such a person.

Mexican farm laborers (Braceros) who have entered the United States at any point other than through a U.S. Immigration station are also prime targets; they forfeit their identities as human beings and their right to live when they cross the border without passing "Go." Who is going to get worked up about one wetback



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more or less?

There are many such categories of people whom schizoids can kill in relative safety.

Where do street riders fit into the homicidal schizoid's pattern of target selection? At one time, riders were very attractive as victims. There weren't many of them around, and people in general didn't know anything about them. People generally guessed that riders came from the lowest income groups in the worst parts of town. After all, anybody who could rub two nickels together was buying an automobile on time payments, and the only reason for owning a motorcycle seemed to be that it was cheaper than a car.

Then the climate grew worse: riders al-

most became public hate-objects in the mid-Sixties. Several mass magazines and some movie producers discovered that they could make a lot of money by publicizing the outlaw gangs.

Along came the motorcyclist-as-animal image, and for awhile the general public ate it up. Had that stereotype survived in the public mind, we would now be prime targets for those bloodthirsty schizoids who own automobiles (or a pickup truck, with shotguns racked in the cab, if you believed *Easy Rider*).

But it didn't work out that way. The outlaw role was milked dry by the mass media and then discarded. The public's sick fascination with that subject slowly died away. More important, motorcycling grew

and grew and grew. After awhile, almost everybody had a neighbor somewhere on the block who owned a motorcycle, and the public image of the demented-animal-as-rider just could not survive when confronted with the reality of the kid next door who owned a bike. Too, the public finally began to realize that the motorcycle is mostly a middle-class playtoy.

The middle-class pursuit of motorcycling is what removes the street rider from the schizoid's target list. Heat gets generated when an inoffensive middle-class guy is murdered outright, or killed in a suspicious accident. The officials stir around. And although they cannot work backward from motive when investigating a schizoid killing, it is amazing how many witnesses they can sometimes round up if they turn over enough rocks. That's why today's schizoid will ignore the street rider as a potential target.

There is one exception: the schizoid whose survival drive has broken down. He may lash out at anybody, anywhere. But people like that are so few in number that their terrible activities get front-page treatment in the newspapers. The average person, during his lifetime, will never encounter one of those self-destructing schizoids on a rampage. So if you want to worry about the odds of getting wiped out by one of them while you're riding a bike, you should also worry just as much about getting snuffed while eating in a restaurant, or getting a haircut, or walking on the sidewalk. In other words, you're paranoid.

Life is never so simple and neat that anybody can entirely describe any part of it within a few paragraphs of print. But this description parallels roughly what you would read in a handbook on aberrant behavior, although it happens to come out of my own background as an ex-schizoid.

In my opinion, the car drivers are not out to get us—not even the crazies; *so there is no reason for street riders to sit around and worry about the intentions of the people who drive cars.*

I have talked a lot about the ugly realities (which will shock those of you who have always made an effort Not To Know), to make the point that the drivers of cars do not deliberately crash into motorcycles. That point is extremely important.

If the drivers did want to hit us, then street riders would do well to stop riding on the street. However, the drivers don't want to hit us. But they *do* wreck us without wanting to, so how can we stop that from happening?

All the studies of car/bike accidents that I've seen agree on two points: most of the accidents are caused by the drivers of cars, and in most cases the accidents happened because the driver didn't see the rider. Why not? There are three reasons. Most drivers haven't ever been trained to watch out for riders; drivers sometimes forget to watch out for *anything*, including semi-

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trailers; and automobiles are very difficult things to see out of anyhow. That's why riders get run over.

Motorcycles have only been charging around on our highways in significant numbers for about ten years—before that time they were so rare that drivers never thought about them. So—as a person learning how to drive ten years ago (or even today, in many parts of the country)—you stopped at an intersection and glanced up and down the cross street to see if another car or a truck or a fire engine might be coming, and you just weren't prepared to watch out for anything smaller.

Only recently have driver-education courses begun to teach drivers how, where, and when to watch out for motorcycles. So the majority of the drivers on the road today have never had any training to teach them how to coexist on the road with motorcycles, and those same drivers never will receive any such training on a realistic level, wishful thinking to the contrary.

And drivers are people. They get tired, or bored, or angry, or lost in fantasies, while driving—and they forget to look. I don't see any practical way to make people stop being people while they're driving.

And even if the driver is trying hard to notice what else is using the road—as most of them are doing most of the time—automobiles aren't very easy to see out of.

The rear-view mirror, in its present form, is an abomination. Cars have all kinds of blind spots. For practical purposes, the driver of a car is virtually blind as regards anything he can't see directly through his front windshield. And since automobile design has been slanted heavily toward styling—at the expense of utility engineering—over the past forty years, the situation is not likely to change much in the years to come.

Those are the reasons why street riding is more dangerous than it should be.

I don't like it. I am tired of having to ride all the time as if I were invisible. I'm tired of having to be so extra-watchful, super-cautious every moment I am riding on pavement, so as to avoid accidents with the four-wheel vehicles that didn't see me coming.

I'm not a machine. I'm human, and I like to relax while I'm riding. I like to be able to look all around and enjoy the street scenes; that's what turns me on the most about riding. To me, this thing about not being visible to the cars is a real bummer. Especially since it isn't necessary.

The motorcycle industry could have gotten together with DOT (Department of Transportation) and solved the problem a long time ago, had they really wanted to. But I don't think that the top executives of the motorcycle factories spend a lot of time riding their products around on the streets of the United States. And that is the

reason why riding safety does not hit them where they live.

The motorcycle industry is programmed to think in terms of basic-versus-applied research; and market trends; and tooling costs per production unit, in 10,000-unit breaks; and mean-time-between-failures of parts populations. They don't seem to think about things like, "Can you ride our machine around on the street without getting creamed by a car?" But if other street riders (besides me) *do* value enjoying peace of mind while following the pavement, and the motorcycle industry becomes aware of that, then riding safety will become a marketing factor, and the industry will make street bikes safer.

Since the big problem with street riding is that the cars don't see the bikes, then the solution would seem to lie in making the bikes visible to the cars. Perhaps the easiest and best way to do that would be to follow the example set by airplanes, which use strobe-flasher lights to make themselves visible to each other.

Isn't that simple? Put small strobe flashers on motorcycles, so the cars will see them.

Even a very tiny strobe flasher will catch the eye—and that's all we're looking for. The strobes would be fixed (non-rotating), and they would put out clear (white) light, so as not to be confused with emergency vehicles.

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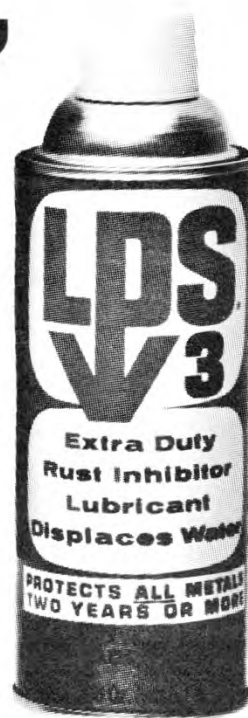


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If you overdrive a small neon bulb to turn it into a strobe flasher, you don't need to use much electrical current—so the existing motorcycle alternators would probably furnish enough—and the circuitry would be very cheap to build. So that kind of strobe flasher would be inexpensive.

It would probably not be difficult to work out two sets of flash intensities, durations, and repetition rates—one for daytime use, and the other for nighttime. All we want to do is grab the attention of the driver who has had a terrible day at work, and is now making a rolling stop through an intersection in which a street rider happens to have the right of way. That's all—no big thing.

Of course, if you look around hard enough, you can find all kinds of objections to that plan—as with any plan. But the real objection is that it would involve time and trouble that nobody in the motorcycle industry has had to spend before.

The other problem with such a plan is that government-agency people could make lifetime careers out of getting it off the ground. Think of the endless number of conferences—for planning, coordination, interagency liaison—that government employees could schedule for ironing out the details. And the staffs they could hire to maintain the records of all those conferences.

But if the motorcycle industry got *interested* in making motorcycles visible to cars, and if the government got *interested* in eliminating a lot of unnecessary car/bike wrecks, they could get the whole thing going in two years or less.

I would feel very good about that. It would double or triple the amount of pleasure that I get from street riding.

How would you feel about it? You can get the program going if you want to. All you'd have to do would be to send a letter or a postcard to the U.S. distributor of your motorcycle, and another one to the Department of Transportation, and ask, "Why isn't my street motorcycle more visible to automobiles?" The motorcycle distributors generally list their addresses in the motorcycle magazines. The part of the Department of Transportation we want to clue in lives at the National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration, 2100 2nd Street S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590.

There are many different attitudes you can adopt while thinking about yourself and street riding and automobiles. For instance, you can become a full-fledged paranoid about it all. "They're out to get me—they want to run me down." Of course, if you think like that, you'll miss most of the enjoyment of exploring the country from the saddle of a motorcycle.

Or you can go the macho route. "Ya gotta be a REAL MAN to ride a motorcycle. And REAL MEN don't weigh the

risks; that's petticoat stuff." Sure. That attitude is particularly useful if you hate yourself but can't directly contemplate suicide.

You can be an acceptor. "The way it is is a drag, but that's the way it is. So I guess I'll just have to be awful careful if I want to ride on the street."

Or you can be a changer. "The way it is right now just isn't good enough. I deserve better." You could do a lot to eliminate the worst problem faced by street riders, just by dropping a quick note to the distributor of your brand of motorcycles, and another one to DOT, asking why your bike doesn't have a device to make it more visible to the cars.

Letters like those would tell the manufacturers that safe riding, *enjoyable* riding, is important to street riders in this country. Once the manufacturers (and the DOT) got that message, they would probably be willing and able to make the street bikes more visible.

Street riding would be so great, if the cars could see us. *Frank Conner.*

Kickstand continued

month's issue. How can you lose the thrill of riding if it was never there in the first place? When my folks were alive I hounded them for hours on end to tell me stories about Dad's Harley "80," and I relived each story with them. When I came of age, I began with a fifth-hand Honda Dream, progressed to 250 and 650 Triumph, and now a BMW 750. After riding an average of 25,000 miles a year, I still delight in stuffing my bike into a curve at speed while snowflakes dance through the headlamp beam, or dipping up and down on a roller-coaster road next to Long Island Sound, feeling the damp evening air steal through my open shirt in the summer.

My bikes rarely let me down, and I've ridden them for tens of thousands of miles with little maintenance, in humid 100-degree weather, and through gales and snowstorms and 46-degree below zero temps.

I have no thought or need to go through the hassle of getting a car, or license for one. My bike is dependable enough, though parts are a hassle as I'm 70 miles from the nearest shop. The gas mileage is terrific, and insurance for my 750 is half of what I'd pay for a pickup truck.

And who says you can't put anything on a bike? Every other week I strap on three bags of groceries and a six-pack of dog food, and in four years have lost only one box of pepper, not that I use pepper much anyway. And that's without the benefit of luggage racks and saddlebags, too—just the bungee cords. And my 5'3", 105-lb frame leaves a few extra feet inside my leather jacket, and I'm not against putting the dog food in there... besides, it makes me look good.

I'm scraping up the necessary cash now