

CHAPTER FOUR

MOTOTYPES, STEREOTYPES, AND EXHAUST PIPES

The question at the core of the consumer culture is “Which?” It is not simply a matter of value for money, or ensuring reliable performance of whatever sort the product promises. It is a question of identity, of ‘positioning.’ This is rarely more important than in vehicles, especially ones purchased primarily for recreation. When we choose this one

over that one, we make a public statement about our values. This is why some advertising people think of cars as fashions or fashion accessories the owner drives, then changes not when they wear out, but when the owner's fashion changes. It is also why many who think seriously about motorcycle culture have come to believe that, for new riders, the primary guidance in selecting a specific bike is cultural associations. Once the urge to ride has been realized, people choose the specific motorcycle—thus their preferred public image—because they want to be like or look like someone they admire or wish to emulate.

Style always matters for those who can choose it, and motorcycle culture has always provided an array of styles from which to choose. Most who scrutinize the image-selection process attend to the visual details that define those styles. This is understandable, because getting the details right determines the success of the style to be 'worn' and the details are always in flux. But those details cannot illuminate their behavioral bases. Culture can make someone want to ride a certain kind of motorcycle and thus seek a certain kind of style but, as shown in the previous chapter, only the person's genetic inheritance can make the experience of the ride itself immediately into what is translated as pleasure, or fun.

Thus the process of finding fun and style is complicated, because a rider or would-be rider has to work through the cultural overlays that make one kind of machine or moto-mode more attractive than others. This process can take a long time, because the way to discover the right stimulus package is by experience, and the experience being sought changes with time and place. This phenomenon is not just an artifact of