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Bodies in Motion

Evolution and Experience in Motorcycling

by Steven L. Thompson
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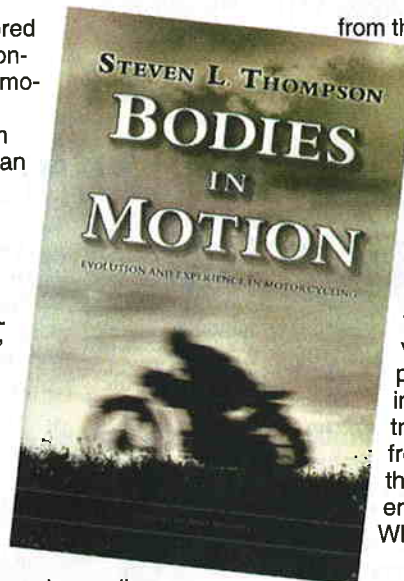
“Why” we ride is a question most motorcyclists have been asked ... if not by others, then by themselves. Whatever answer comes up, it’s usually a variation of “because I like it!” But ... why? That’s the question that has bugged Steven L. Thompson for years.

Thompson, whose resume lists stints on the editorial staffs of “Cycle Guide,” “Cycle World,” “Car and Driver,” “Road Test,” “AOPA Pilot,” “AutoWeek,” and “Technology and Culture,” plus six published novels, has made a career of thinking about how and why we put our bodies in motion. In his newest book—certainly one of the most ambitious examinations of man and machine relations ever attempted—he makes some bold, even astounding assertions. Then he backs them up with well-reasoned, extensively researched, copiously footnoted, oftentimes eloquent prose.

This is not an easy book. But like “Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance,”

another book that explored the psychological relationship between man and motorcycle—albeit from a wholly different direction—“Bodies in Motion” is an edifying read.

The basic premise of “Bodies in Motion” is simple: “... we ride primarily for physical—or more precisely, psychological—reasons ...” Thompson traces our attraction for the particular “automobility” that draws certain humans to motorcycles all the way back to our primordial ancestors cavorting through the treetops. The narrative can be as dizzying as swinging from vine to vine, too. Thompson fast-forwards through the eons,



from the times that man forgot to modern times—to future times—like referencing Woody Allen’s classic comedy about times to come, “Sleeper,” and its “Orgasmatron,” which automatically induces ... well, you know. Somehow, Thompson makes a perfectly logical connection from that fanciful device to our own endorphin-producing machines, pointing out that “... the Orgasmatron is no different in principle from any artificial stimulant ... that we make or use to generate pleasure for ourselves.” What fun!

Fun, in fact, is what ultimately motivates our choice of motivation. But why different people feel different vibes from different bikes is an

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BOOK REVIEW

entirely different question. Thompson devotes chapters to how and why various engine types appeal to people, and to why motorcycle styles ("mototypes," in Thompson's parlance) both fit into and create various lifestyles. He postulates that, since we interact with motorcycles through the "human-machine interface components"—the seat, handlebars, foot pegs, and fuel tank—the way different motorcycles rattle their chains is the reason they rock our individual worlds.

Since there had never been a scientific study of vibration as it relates to motorcycles, Thompson commissioned one. Over 35% of the book's 417 pages are devoted to the "Stanford University Vibration Study" appendix, performed by that institution's Smart Product Design Lab. The graphs are fascinating and extensive, providing visual representations of vibration intensity and frequency through three axis and various modes of operation for nine different motorcycles, from boxer twins to transverse sixes

to V-4s to big singles to ... well you get the idea. This may seem like more than anyone would ever want to know, but it's not. If we are to get beyond platitudes about "wind in the hair" and "feeling free" to actually quantifying the "why" of our attraction to motorcycles, this is exactly the sort of deep thinking that is required.

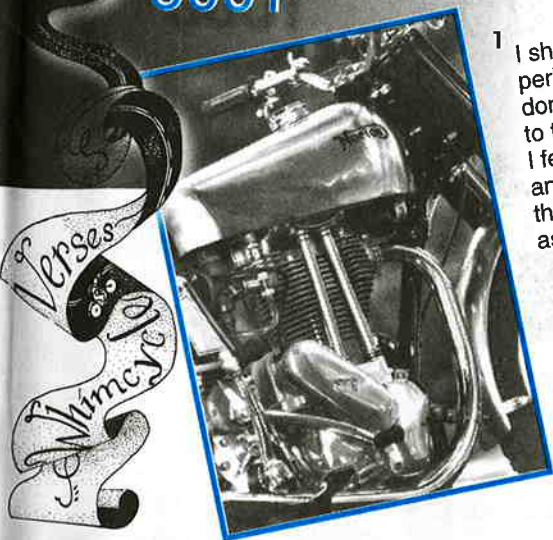
"Bodies in Motion" is a unique book, a necessary book, a book that will challenge your mind and shake up your feelings about motorcycles.

WRMT

500T

by Art Sirota, © 2008 Art Sirota, photo by Tim Coburn

WHIMCYCLE VERSES



- 1 I should've knocked 'er back a tad perhaps I just forgot don't need a fancy compression gauge to tell she's got a lot I felt 'er shake and heard a bang and the next thing that I knew the bike was fallin' over as through the air I flew
- 2 500T, 500T you kicked back and made a cripple of me over the handlebars and away I went now my back is broken and my toes are bent
- 3 I'd put 'er on the sidestand and tickled the 276 pulled in the compression release and gave 'er several kicks with confidence and hubris exuding from each pore I swung my leg down hard and found my buttocks on the floor
- 4 the cast is coning off next week they say I'll have a limp so now I'll join the other Norton owners with a gimp no hard feelings, though, because I must be sentimental the next time I kick 'er over I'll be a bit more gentle

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