

The Bookworm

Don't Miss This 'Wild' Ride

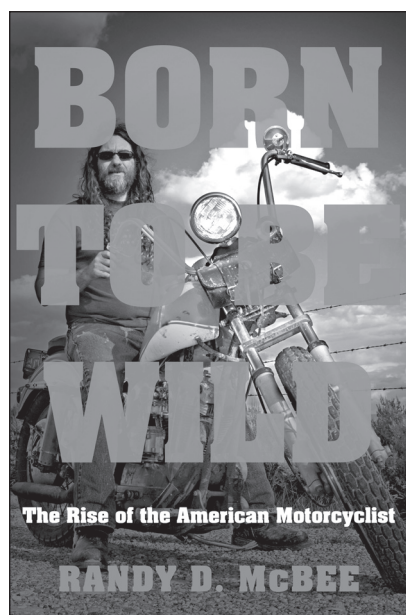
"Born to Be Wild: The Rise of the American Motorcyclist" by Randy D. McBee; © 2015, The University of North Carolina Press. 359 pages

BY TERRI SCHLICHENMEYER

You'll never be accused of missing adventure because you're too tired. Two, in fact, is just the right amount of tires; because the weather is perfect and it's summertime, you can't imagine riding on more. But how did a simple modification on a bicycle become something that's represented danger to many people? Read the new book "Born to Be Wild: The Rise of the American Motorcyclist" by Randy D. McBee, and you'll find out.

In the early years of the last century, when "gypsy tours" were organized for the benefit of motorcycle enthusiasts who wanted a scenic ride to a place where they could compete, riding was a fun pastime. That changed in 1947 in Hollister, California, when roughly 4,000 motorcyclists rallied, fought, disobeyed traffic laws and got drunk and disorderly. Quick-thinking police had the situation under control in no time, but the die was cast: motorcycling became near-synonymous with debauchery.

At that time, there were over 200,000 motorcycles registered for use on highways in the U.S.; by 1950, the number had more than doubled. In many American minds then, leather jackets, rolled-up jeans, white T-shirt and a



slouch (a la Marlin Brando and James Dean) personified hoodlumism, even though both the uniform and the bikes themselves had been part of "working-class communities for decades." Still, anyone sporting that look aboard a motorcycle was considered to be a "bum." By the early 1960s, motorcycles were more diverse, as were their riders. Japanese bikes were common; women, African Americans, and Hispanics took up riding; and it wasn't uncommon to see suited businessmen aboard their bikes. Clubs sprung

up in suburbs and cities, but although those riders were noted, they were not feared — not, at least, as much as the newly-named "bikers" for whom violence and crime were often attributed. Indeed, says McBee, some clubs became gangs that reportedly committed "unimaginable" violence and terroristic crime.

By the '80s, being a biker was more mainstream and, while gangs enjoyed notoriety, bikers learned to use their clout to help form laws and offer support. Women took up bikes in higher numbers, as did Black and Hispanic riders who, says McBee, now may be poised to change the future of motorcycling yet again.

Though I liked it, and though I learned quite a bit, I doubt that anyone would consider "Born to Be Wild" as light reading.

No, there's a lot packed into these pages: author Randy D. McBee offers readers a serious, detailed history of the culture of "biker," starting almost in the middle of the history of the motorcycle. That's a nice approach: bookshelves are full of the history of the machine but not much on bikers, other than of the outlaw sort. McBee encompasses many aspects of The Life, including politically-charged issues that might have surprised our forebears, and how riding has become acceptable once again.

Bikers, obviously, will rumble for this book, but they're not its only audience. Historians and pop-culture fans could also find "Born to Be Wild" is the best thing off two tires.

11th Annual Heritage Music Fest To Be Held At Elk Point July 18



ELK POINT — The 11th annual Heritage Music Fest — a festival celebrating country, gospel, Big Band/Swing and variety music — will be held Saturday, July 18, at the Elk Point-Jefferson Middle School Gym. The event runs from 11 a.m.-9 p.m.

Featured artists will be nationally renowned Nashville Singer/Songwriter Terry S. Smith, who is famous for Johnny Cash's recording of "Far Side Banks of Jordan." He is also the National Traditional Country Music Association Songwriter of the Year in 1995 and 1996. He will be backed up by Rick and Harriette Andersen of Underwood, Iowa. They have been back up duo for international, national and local fiddlers, singers and instrumentalists for over 20 years and have attended the Old Time Fiddlers Contest in Yankton for many years.

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