

Performance stressed in new motorcycle line-up



The wind in your face, the sun on your back; the eventual return of spring to Nebraska will signal the return of another seasonal phenomenon: motorcycling.

But the sport of motorcycling is changing rapidly — more rapidly, perhaps, than ever before.

For one thing, the emphasis on reliability and economy that brought motorcycling out of the greasy shops and biker bars is being replaced by the new emphasis on performance.

Gary Biscup, manager of Jerryco Motors, 2400 N St., said the decline of the high-performance automobile since the end of the 1960s has caused many people to turn to motorcycling for performance-oriented vehicles.

Doug Nelsen, manager of Dormer's Suzuki Center, 1750 West O St., said 75 percent of motorcycles are now being used for recreation, and that usually means performance.

"It seems like the manufacturers are finally catching on to that fact," he said.

Evidence of this is found in the new, sleek styling that is showing up on many of the new bikes, and in high performance op-

tions like turbochargers, available on some models. Manufacturers also are bringing out more models with large (more than 900 cc.) engine sizes.

The motorcycling public also has changed. The "tough" image of motorcyclists is gradually dying out.

"Motorcycling is more accepted now," Nelson said. "It's more common now to see guys riding around in suits."

Nelson said the average age of people buying motorcycles now also is increasing, probably because the high price of the motorcycles prohibits younger riders from buying.

Lincoln dealers say that the largest- and smallest- sized bikes are selling the best, while sales of mid-sized bikes are doing worse than in previous years.

Motorcycles also are becoming more sophisticated, with more electronics and more advanced suspensions and engine designs.

While the poor weather this spring, coupled with high interest rates, have hurt early sales, Lincoln dealers said they expect sales to improve soon and remain strong throughout the summer.

Motorcycle safety awareness becomes focus of special day

"I didn't see him officer . . ."

That statement is probably familiar to most people who have been involved in car-motorcycle accidents.

The Nebraska Department of Roads said that 278 motorcycle accidents were reported in 1981 in Lincoln. Of these, 35 resulted in fatalities. Of the 155 citations issued in those accident cases, 96 went to the auto operator while 59 went to the motorcyclist. Most of the accidents, 165 of them, happened at intersections and most involved a failure to yield the right of way or negligent driving.

With these figures in mind, the Lincoln City Council Tuesday voted to proclaim May 1 Motorcycle Safety Awareness Day.

The proclamation was brought about mostly by what some might consider an unlikely source, the ABATE motorcycle group of Nebraska.

ABATE, which stands for A Brotherhood Against Totalitarian Enactments, is probably best known for its efforts to block passage of mandatory helmet-use laws in the Nebraska Legislature, an effort that has so far been successful.

John Bonebright, public relations officer for ABATE, said his group is concerned with motorcycle safety.

"We are not against the wearing of helmets," he said. "We are against the mandatory wearing of helmets."

Part of the problem with helmet laws, Bonebright said, is that if helmet use were made mandatory, many people would just buy the cheapest helmet possible to comply with the law, rather than invest in a quality helmet that offers better protection.

"If you've got a ten dollar head then you can wear a ten dollar helmet," Bonebright said.

"The other problem is that the rider may be wearing his helmet, but still be riding around in a swimming suit and shower sandals," he said.

"We believe that you must educate for motorcycle safety, not legislate," he said.

Of 24 motorcycle fatalities involving head injuries last year, 22 of the victims were not wearing helmets.

Last May, ABATE sponsored a motorcycle awareness day ride in which more than 250 motorcyclists, both ABATE members and non-members, paraded in pairs on O Street from the parking lot of Dormer's Suzuki/Yamaha to the Gateway Shopping Mall. That was the forerunner of

the newly proclaimed Motorcycle Safety Awareness Day.

This year's event will feature a similar ride, but will include members of the Sesostri Shrine, and Lincoln Mayor Helen Boosalis, who plans to ride in the sidecar of one ABATE member.

"He has promised to keep all three wheels on the ground," Bonebright said.

In addition to the parade, this year's event will feature booths and displays that will be set up in the shopping mall parking lot. One display by the Nebraska Department of Transportation illustrates body reactions in a collision, and another answers questions about the motorcycle safety course offered by both ABATE and Southeast Community College.

The course was designed by the Motorcycle Safety Foundation, a study group put together by Honda, Kawasaki, Yamaha and Suzuki.

Bonebright said the course is designed to show riders, particularly young riders, how they can improve communication with other motorists and how to avoid dangerous situations. A study in Wyoming showed that chances of survival for the motorcyclist improved by 30 percent after completion of the course, Bonebright said.

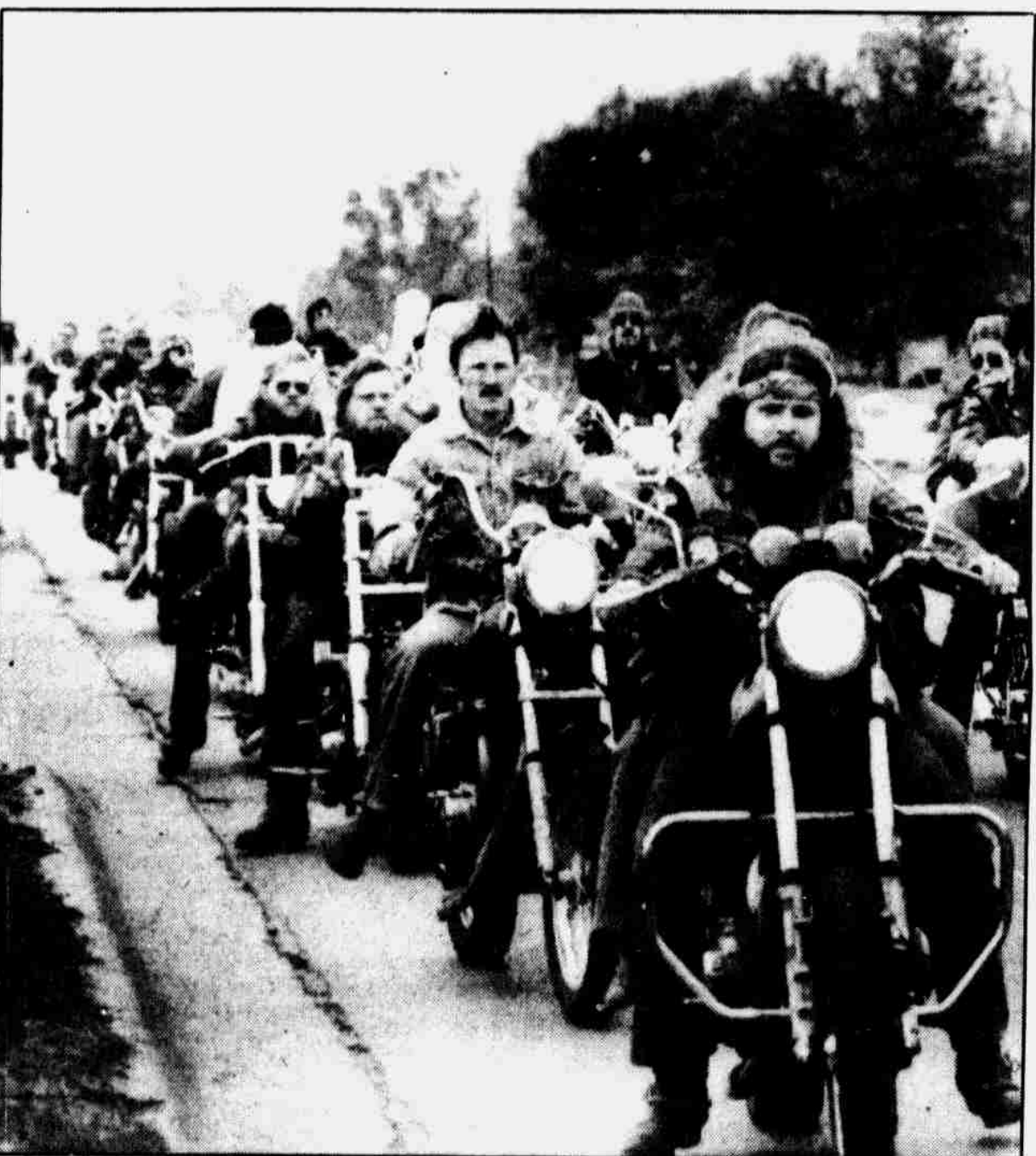
"Drivers pull up to an intersection and look, and their head is programmed 'car, truck, bus' " Bonebright said. "They look right through a motorcycle."

The cost of the three-day course is \$20, which includes instruction expenses, a motorcycle on which to practice and a helmet if the student doesn't own one.

Another major problem the course aims to correct is a lack of motorcycling experience. Nationwide, more than half of the motorcyclists involved in accidents have less than five months experience with the motorcycle they are riding. About 92 percent of those involved in accidents are self-taught, and the 20 and 24 year age group accounts for nearly a third of all accidents.

One report, released by the U.S. Department of Transportation, found that rider error was a factor in nearly two-thirds of all motorcycle accidents. One of the most common errors is failure to use the front brake sufficiently. This causes the rear wheel to lock during hard braking and throws the motorcycle into a skid.

Nebraska also has taken steps toward improving the skill of the average motorcyclist by introducing new, stricter standards for licensing tests.



Top: Suzuki's GS 1000 Katana stands in the doorway of the service department at Dormer's Suzuki Center as snow falls outside.

Middle: About 250 motorcyclists rode in last year's ABATE Motorcycle Awareness Day parade, the forerunner of Lincoln Motorcycle Safety Awareness Day, set for Saturday.

Bottom: Students' motorcycles stand parked in the motorcycle parking area in front of Love Library.

*Stories and photos
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