



The Winter is Our Discontent

LARRY MACKE

You 12-monthers have no idea. Can you even begin to understand how good you've got it? Most people like me, people who face honest-to-goodness winters every year, are preparing to put their bikes in hibernation. They're taking them to dealerships for storage or doing one last cleaning, plucking out the battery, and tucking them away in the garage for a long winter's nap. But you, you're just going along like nothing's happening. You didn't even know you were a 12-monther, did you?

I know that some of you are transplants from cooler climates and can sympathize with our plight, but most of you are blissfully ignorant of having to be away from the saddle for months at a time. Try to imagine it. Let's say that work has been unbearable lately. Your family is driving you nuts. Your worries have worries. All you need is a few hundred repetitions of clutch-shift-throttle-clutch and everything will be okay, right?

Well, sorry, friend, but you've got *several more months* to wait. And they're not those "whoa, where did the time go?" months that come increasingly with age. They're more like the school months that stood between you and summer vacation when you were young. More like a sentence.

So now what do you do? I can hear you start to nervously protest, "That'll never happen to me," but I suggest that you hear me out. We never truly know what life has in store for us, and you may find yourself one day plugging in a battery charger, swallowing hard, and asking yourself, "Now what?" And even if you don't end up there – and goodness knows, I don't wish it on anybody – reading about how those of us in colder climates survive winter withdrawal might give you some ideas about how to cultivate your inner enthusiast.

Some of us get by with the help of Fly & Ride.[™] It's no coincidence that this popular H.O.G.[®] program was hatched in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, most likely in the dead of winter. What could be greater than leaving your cold, motorcycle-free climate for a warm one with a clean, gassed-up cruiser waiting? My wife and I honeymooned in the Florida Keys by way of Miami. Other than being an outstanding ride, the trip was her first time lounging on the back of an Electra Glide[®] Classic,[™] effectively numbering the days I would own my 1985 Sportster[®] XLX-61. So it's not an exaggeration to say that a Fly & Ride could change your life.

Many of us have learned that non-riding travel, too, can have the power to soothe aching hearts. Sometimes we have to go to our favorite dealership just to gaze at the chrome and breathe in that distinctive motorcycle shop smell. Occasionally we go to swap meets or motorcycle shows, where we can stagger around with the other lost souls and focus on the coming season. It helps to be with people who understand.

Others among us survive the Great Void by spending quality time with our machines, mentally and/or physically. We may be considered planners or doers, depending upon whether or not we have access to a climate-controlled workspace. We're identified by the worn condition of our P&A catalogs, especially the planners. With several weeks of down time available, there's ample opportunity to explore every bit of the big book, and develop two or three distinct customizing concepts.

And it's easier to become a doer than you might think. A good place to start is a pledge that your bike will become cleaner than it's ever been. Spend a long time, don't miss a spoke, and you'll be amazed by how much you'll learn. Before long, you'll be buying books to learn about basic maintenance, and the emptiness of the off-season will soften as deeper appreciation of your machine grows.

Books, magazines, and videos are other ways we scratch this seasonal itch. We go to the bookstores because there's always another telling of Motor Company history or a coffee table book with big, juicy photos you can stare at for hours. (Speaking of great photos, do yourself a favor and pick up a copy of *100 Years of Harley-Davidson*, the official book for the Harley-Davidson 100th Anniversary, by Willie G. Davidson.) We lean on the snow-covered mailbox for new issues of *Hog Tales*[®], the *Enthusiast*[®], and maybe another motorcycling magazine or two. We also rent motorcycle movies or watch our videos from rallies past, preferably on a large screen with large speakers.

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Many of us this winter will be working on our travel plans for next year's Anniversary celebrations. Others are prepping for rides to Sturgis, Daytona, or maybe the Blue Ridge Parkway. Still others are organizing photos or videos from the previous season's travels. I don't know any of these organized people personally, but I hear they're out there.

Just like I've heard that there are some 12-monthers in these colder climates. Not people who are ready to ride any day that the temperature's at freezing or above, but those who ride regardless of temperature. Remember us all, please, as you warmer folk count your blessings this holiday season, and we'll return the favor. The same goes for any invitations to visit you that you might be considering. Not that we're desperate or anything.

Larry Macke is a full H.O.G. member and long-time Harley-Davidson enthusiast.