



Respect?

BMW Goes Over The Top

It's always exciting to see how a company introduces a new model of motorcycle. Normally, they show the bike's features and benefits, its engineering and specifications and its potential niches. Not particularly exciting, but it's what the media and dealers want to know. That way they can determine how to market the bike.

Over the years, advertisers have tried to attract potential consumers by producing "edgy" ads. More often than not, the edgier ads failed to do the job; creating controversy and dissent rather than promoting a particular product.

The reputation of motorcyclists appears to be a function of time. Back in the very early days (prior to 1950), motorcyclists were considered free thinkers and exciting risk takers who believed in chivalry. Then came the movie *The Wild One* starring Marlin Brando. This 1953 film was created after a 1947 event in Hollister, California, where a gang of motorcyclists was credited with destroying the town. Never mind that the *Life* magazine photographs of the Hollister "riot" were later proven to be staged shots. The big screen and the *Life* cover promoted an image of all motorcyclists as sociopaths.

Not only did this film negatively impact the reputation of all motorcyclists and take years to even begin to overcome, but it also set the stage for an entire genre of B-grade biker movies.

In 1969 *Easy Riders* came to the screen. Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda brought choppers and the drug culture into the picture. It too became a hit. Both films have achieved cult status and can often be seen on cable TV to this very day. The characters in these movies inspired many young motorcyclists so much, in fact, that they created "outlaw" clubs of their own. More reputable bikers found their reputations changed from exciting risk-takers to outright sociopaths.

Thanks to efforts by the AMA and the MIC over the years, our reputations improved. These days our strongest detractors seem to be focusing on the noise we make rather than perceiving us as a Mongol horde looking to rape and pillage towns like Hollister. To that end, the OEMs are doing all they can to dissuade the use of loud exhaust systems, again, with some success.

Enter BMW, the last company one would expect to see as opting for the "bad boy" image. Previously, BMW seemed to be focused on engineering expertise, high quality and technical features and benefits. Perhaps this approach no longer works? Perhaps their sales are suffering worldwide?

Perhaps the company who produced the film is testing the waters of online guerrilla marketing? After all, TiVo, TV remote controls and magazine page flipping have allowed the consumer to ignore, mute or spin past the commercials that cost tens of thousands of

dollars to produce. Regardless of the reasons why, BMW's latest infomercial goes over the top. Although it may never be aired "officially" in the U.S., the six minute video clip has certainly generated a great deal of attention, created controversy and aroused moral indignation.

Now, I've read the letters to the editor of this magazine from those who object rather strongly to the photos of scantily clad young ladies used to highlight motorcycle-related products. BMW's video clip eclipses anything ever presented in this publication! The video is available on the Internet. See it for yourself, and then come to your own conclusion. The site is: www.respect-movie.com.

Perhaps I'm only from a different generation and have different values, but this film (in my opinion) is way over the top. It depicts everyone and everything in a negative light. It's dark and brooding with an obvious Middle Eastern flair if one considers the musical sound track. Then it degenerates to a nude show, vivid sex and the apparent lack of respect for anything or anyone including BMW's own new K1200R.

Will this film encourage other OEMs to follow suit with virulent online marketing campaigns? I hope not. Will it affect dealers and consumers? I believe it might, and that affect will not be positive. Any mother of a potential buyer that sees the film will use her influence to have her son or daughter stay clear of motorcycles, whatever brand. If any wife sees it, her BMW-riding husband may find himself defending his brand choice.

I expect to see BMW riders insisting their dealer "do something" about this new direction or suffer the consequences. I expect reputable BMW dealers to inundate management with a demand to pull the film from the web. I expect the AMA and the MIC who have worked so hard to show that motorcyclists are responsible, caring enthusiasts will weigh in with some strong opinions.

Are we considerate and caring members of our society who enjoy our motorcycles and the freedom they give us, or are we junkyard sociopaths only interested in our bikes? Have we become so jaded by suicide bombers in Iraq, road rage killers here at home and political divisiveness in Washington that we've become fatalists and believe that anything goes?

I don't want to appear as a moral guidepost. I do want those of us in this industry to know and understand that it takes years to establish a reputation but only about six minutes to destroy one. We may not be able to change the way BMW wants to focus their advertising, but as one philosopher said, "We will surely fail if enough good people choose to do nothing."

Editor's note: Public outcry has since resulted in the video clip being pulled offline, noting, *Diese Seite ist zur Zeit nicht erreichbar*. 🚗