

# Aging bikers taking to the streets on beefy trikes

Three-wheeled motorcycles let seniors relish freedom of the road — safely

LOS ANGELES - Arthur McCoy didn't let the amputation of a **leg** because of cancer stop him from riding motorcycles. The solution to his disability came in the form of a third wheel.

McCoy is among a growing group of aging motorcyclists taking up trikes: three-wheeled motorcycles that provide the stability and nearly all the comforts of a car while still allowing riders to feel the wind in their face.

"For us older folks, it's better on three wheels than two," said McCoy, now retired from a maintenance job. "You don't have the tendency to fall over

A **motorcycle** rider since the 1960s, the 71-year-old from Lomita said his customized trike has made it possible for him and his wife, Dora, to go on long-haul trips to Arizona, Texas, Arkansas and Virginia at least once a month. They are members of Brothers of the Third Wheel, an international club for trike enthusiasts.

Motorcycle industry experts say they expect to see more trikes on the road in the coming years as **baby boomers**, the largest group of motorcycle owners in the country, age out of their two wheelers.

"Boomers are a very important segment of the motorcycle market," said Ty Van Hooydonk, a spokesman for the Motorcycle Industry Council. "They are staying more active than past generations."

## 4.5 million boomers ride motorcycles

People born between 1946 and 1964 make up 43 percent of motorcycle owners in the U.S., or 4.5 million out of 10.4 million, according to a 2008 survey by the Irvine-based trade group.

Trikes allow riders with arthritis, back pain and other physical ailments to go on long-distance rides comfortably. Some come with reverse gears so riders don't have to push the motorcycles into a parking space.

Their ample size make them hard to miss.

"People in cars tend to ignore motorcycles. Trikes are a fairly big and therefore more visible," said Jim McGrath, 75, of Chula Vista, whose bright red, low-riding Rewaco trike measures 12½ feet long and 6 feet wide.

He also relishes the attention he gets on the road.

"It's a real traffic stopper," the retired aerospace engineer said. "You pull into a gas station and people want to talk about it."

McGrath's daughter Sharon Sisemore, another trike rider, added that in heavy traffic she doesn't have to worry about putting her feet down to balance.

"There are several advantages, and you still get to have the 'knees in the breeze, the bug in your teeth' feeling," said Sisemore, 51. "You're exposed; you're out there in the elements. That's part of the fun."

California does not require a motorcycle license to operate a trike, although most other states do.

### **Trikes' history dates back century**

Three-wheel motorcycles have played various roles throughout American history. In the 1910s, Harley-Davidson made sidecars for American troops fighting in World War I. In 1932, the Milwaukee-based motorcycle maker introduced the three-wheeled Servi-Car, which became popular with police departments and delivery businesses. It was discontinued in the early 1970s.

In the years that followed, a lack of tricycles in the marketplace gave rise to conversion businesses that modify motorcycles with an extra wheel.

Recognizing the rising demand for trikes and the fact that many of its customers were aging, Harley-Davidson Inc. started selling three-wheel versions of its popular touring bikes last year. The \$30,000 Tri Glide comes equipped with cruise control, optional reverse gear, GPS navigation, stereo speakers, hand warmers, headsets to ease communication between the driver and passenger, and other luxury features.

A lower-priced Street Glide model costs about \$27,000.

Harley won't say how many trikes it has sold, but the company hasn't been able to keep up with demand, Chief Marketing Officer Mark-Hans Richer said. He noted that 23 percent of trike buyers are women, and trikes are gaining street credibility.

"Fifteen years ago people didn't know what to make of it," Richer said. "Now it's become a form of personal expression. The stigma of three wheels is gone."

Other companies are entering the three-wheel market. They include Canadian motorcycle maker Bombardier Recreational Products Inc., whose Can-Am Spyder Roadster features two wheels in the front and one in the rear.

Piaggio & C. SpA, maker of the Vespa scooters, also has a line of three-wheeled scooters with two wheels in the front. In 2008, the Italian company sponsored a ride across the U.S. by two road warriors in their early 70s. It dubbed the adventure on the three-wheel Piaggio MP3 500 scooters "No Age Limit."

Bob Thompson, 59, of Anaheim, who has a degenerative **bone disease** that's led to seven back surgeries, said a trike has helped him go beyond his physical limitations. The retired salesman sometimes relies on a cane for walking. So he says he gets on his Honda Goldwing, a two-wheel motorcycle converted into a trike, "every chance I get."

"If I didn't have it, I'd be stuck at home," Thompson said. "My trike gives me absolute freedom."

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