



Passing The Time

BY GARY MCKECHNIE

I'm not sure how long it took Albert Einstein to come up with the theory of relativity, or for Crick and Watson to unravel the secrets of DNA, but I bet if they had been doing it astride a motorcycle, it would have taken them half the time. Why? Because every rider knows that once you clear the city limits and there are no traffic or lights to contend with, you get something you won't find at the office: time to think. But as Isaac Newton realized (I'm on a science kick now), every action has an equal and opposite reaction, and the introduction of free time also introduces the problem of filling it. When your ride's running on autopilot, you can employ tricks like these.

Total Recall

I once read about a prisoner of war who, while in solitary confinement for several years, saved his sanity by remembering trivial things from his past. He recalled each aisle in his hometown supermarket and remembered what was on each shelf and what kind of plants and trees his neighbors grew.

Using that for inspiration, on one long and remote ride, I started to picture every kid I knew in elementary school. While riding in the middle of a desert or running through a forest, I'd enter a kind of fugue state where I was aware I was on a motor-

cycle, but I was also sitting at my first grade desk and seeing every 6-year-old in Mrs. Byrnes' class. With an estimated 30 kids in each class and six grades of elementary school to remember, there were roughly 180 kids to name. Beginning on that ride and adding new entries on subsequent expeditions, within a few months I had recalled the name, face, and some identifying trait of 164 kids I had not seen in more than 30 years.

While I try to remember the final 16, I'm fielding requests to share my gift of recall at research labs and private parties.

Do The Math

Sometimes, when I tune out on longer rides, I mentally test-drive my mathematical aptitude through a variety of self-designed tests that are fantastically clever and ultimately useless. Sometimes, I'll hit a steady 60 mph, check my watch, and then start counting the stripes in the road so — one minute later — I know how many stripes are in a mile. If I find myself passing a standing freight train, I check my speedometer and odometer and determine the total length of all the cars based on my speed. For some reason, I'm always anxious to let the train companies know how long their trains are, but so far no one's asked.

One calculation that gives me the most practice

requires distances and speed limit signs. Say a sign reveals that I'm 97 miles from a town. If the speed limit's 65, I mentally break down where I'll be in an hour and then reduce the remaining miles until I've calculated my ETA within a few minutes. Usually, though, equations like this prove too difficult so, using the example above, I solve it by speeding up to 97 miles per hour so I can accurately predict that I'll arrive in exactly 60 minutes.

Bikercise

Sometimes my muscles let me know they need shifting around, so, with a kind of motorcycling Kama Sutra, I create new positions to enjoy the ride, starting with a simple left-handed "wave against the wind" before switching to release the throttle and stretching out my right hand. Sometimes I take my feet off the pegs and pump them like I'm running really fast (once I hit 97 mph). I've also become an amateur contortionist with the ability to turn my torso nearly backward while facing dead ahead. My favorite? Downhills. On a good descent, I can stand on the footpegs and become an Olympic ski jumper.

Notes To Self

Singing is a pastime that most riders (especially those of us who can't sing) prefer to keep private. But after you've remembered the kid who was next to you on the swing set, calculated how fast you'd reach the next town at 85, and completed two sets of 10 hand waves, when the sound of the engine and wind confines the soundtrack to your helmet, pretty much all that's left is singing.

My mental iPod stores thousands of songs, and although I've been stuck in a loop singing *Norwegian Wood* for three hours straight, I've also belted out every track on K-Tel's *Back to the '70s*. I never know what's coming up on my playlist. I can tune out of the ride and by the time I've realized I had started singing Slade's *Cum Feel the Noize*, I'm already halfway into the second verse of Chuck Berry's *Nadine*.

Sometimes, I wonder how my mind works. Most of the time, I try not to think about it. Unless I'm on my motorcycle. Then I have plenty of time to mull it over. **RB**