

Scooter Tribes

Before I started selling scooters for a living, I thought I had a fairly good idea of the kind of the people who ride them. One year later and I now know how wrong I was!

I really started to notice when an advertiser asked me what my target market was. And like many, the initial assumption is that buyers are predominantly young men between 18 and 25. Maybe I have just watched Quadrophenia too many times, and that had clouded my judgement. But when I really started to think about our customers I realized that I was way off the mark.

The fact is that the ever growing ranks of scooter riders are represented through the entire range of Australian adults. Riders are as likely to be female as male, and almost as many sixty year olds as sixteen year olds. The original intention as a means of transport appropriate for all actually still holds true. But whilst all scooter riders are individuals, there do appear to be certain groupings that many scooter riders seem to fall into...

The Teen Racer

Everyone knows the Teen Racer. Crouched behind the handlebars and sitting far back on the seat to assume the most aerodynamic shape possible. Throttle wide open so as to exert every last ounce of power that their sporty looking 50cc machine can muster. Almost always males, and commonly seen in packs, when not actually riding they can be seen atop their machine their brightly patterned full-face helmet still worn at a jaunty angle the chin guard resting comfortably on the forehead. Always requesting advice on derestricting and power kits, and frequent purchasers of replacement brake levers and indicators, the Teen Racer is a common visitor to most scooter dealers.

The Scooter Chick

Visually the most eye-catching group are the Scooter Chicks. Again often seen in packs, the scooter is the means of getting to the beach or to the mall. Skin protection provided mainly by factor 30, bright thongs and their thankful inability to hear their mobile ringing whilst wearing a helmet. Fortunately the lack of clothing tends to make them highly visible to car drivers, as youth, naivety and an all-over tan sadly don't prevent tarmac burns. Retro-style scooters are generally the must-have, and colour is all important and easily the most difficult part of their scooter selection process. A higher preponderance than any other group for top-end engine rebuilds due to a common inability to understand the need to top-up the 2 stroke oil. Common statement - "so that's what that little red light meant!"

The Uber Pro

Moving up the age bracket, the next group is the UberPro. Both male and female, and not long out of university, they are the latest work hard, play hard

generation. Apartment-based in the liveliest part of the city, and with no room to keep a car, these office workers need transport that zips them around the congested streets, and can be parked with ease. Compared to the tinheads scratching around for parking spaces, the UberPro is clearly the superior being. Although there is a tendency for scooters European, it's fundamentally the right look that is most important. Most still need to learn that cappuccino is only a morning beverage, but they all know the best way to travel to the coffee shop to buy them.

The Metal Heads

The list would not be complete without the Metal Heads. To these guys, if it ain't pre-1970 or metal paneled, it ain't a scooter. Though hardly any of them were actually old enough to have ridden during the sixties (unless of course they are currently in their sixties), they are more than a little fanatical about the motor scooters previous heyday. Some purists will go to great extremes to acquire authentic spare parts, and would prefer to have them hand-tooled at great expense rather than use a ready made but unoriginal substitute (even where those parts will never be seen). And though a touch on the zealous side, let's not forget that these are the guys that have been holding the torch for scooter riding in Australia all these years.

The Economisers

Ever increasing petrol prices have, of course, been a great encouragement to many people to try life on two wheels. The first group of these are the Econo-Smilers for whom every trip to the till at the servo is one of great joy. However amongst these enlightened converts are a less delighted group whom I will call the Econo-Misers. With a V8 sitting in the garage, these people aren't short of a bob or two, they just don't seem to want to spend it on petrol. The reality is they don't really want to be riding scooters either, and are only happy when they have a problem so that they can grumble about it and try to get it fixed under warranty.

The Convert

The penultimate group is the Converts. This lot has been riding motorbikes since they were knee-height to a grasshopper, and even the thought of riding a motor scooter would have been enough to have brought them out in a rash. That is, until they actually have given it a go! Often a back-injury has meant a need for a different seating style, a desire to get their wife onto two wheels, or the realisation that Wayne Gardner rides a scooter when resident in Sydney, has been enough to make them curious. And a test-ride is often all it takes to make them understand that this other two-wheeled discipline may just have something going for it after all. Some, indeed, never go back. The Convert is easy to spot in the changeover phase, when their instinct to grab the clutch actually activates the rear brakes, giving a peculiar kangaroo-like appearance to their riding style. Thereafter throwing their leg over the saddle when mounting and dismounting is the only telltale sign that reveals their previous existence.

Scooter Mums

The final group is the one that surprised me the most, not only because of how many there are, but their attitude to the whole scooter concept. I've struggled to come up with a catchy name, but the best I've come up with is Scooter Mums. Why? Well firstly because we all love our mum's, and I've come to realize that this is the group of riders that I really like the most. And it's all in their attitude. They know what they want, and they come in and buy it – and they don't care what their friends, neighbours, kids or husbands think about the idea. The whole scooter concept is extremely clear in their head – and they use them exactly as they are intended – cheap, easy-to-use, practical and fun items of personal transport. Whether they are ferrying a kid to a tennis class, picking up a pint of milk, or grabbing a coffee with the girls, they know the scooter beats the car every time. But the other reason I call them Scooter Mum's is because their little darlings are always well turned out and, of course, have names. If scooters had noses, you can rest assured that theirs would be snout-free.

So whilst none of us are actually any of these caricatures, I am sure that we may recognise certain character traits! But unlike other groups where tribes divide, scooter riders of every type will wave, chat or beep their horn. Just as the French shouted when they stormed the Bastille, "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité" – Freedom, Equality and Comradeship is just as appropriate for the scooter riding community. "Long Live the Revolution."

There is nothing worse than stereotyping, but I reckon that most scooter riders will know, or at least recognise some of the rider types depicted in this light-hearted article. The point is that anyone and everyone can ride a scooter, and age is certainly no barrier. One worrying trend is the decline in "the nod" – the customary form of communication between riders on two wheels. So if you have a scooter, or are thinking of getting one, please remember to nod whenever you pass someone else on a scooter or motorbike. You might not get a return every time, but be satisfied in the knowledge that you are continuing a tradition and helping keep a community spirit alive!