



Brave new biker

I'm not alone anymore. No matter where I travel I have a big family of attentive satellites homed in on my whereabouts and tracking my every move, and I have a cheerful little monitor jutting out from my dash like a fetal television showing me cartoons of where I am and where I'm going and what's around me, and I have a comforting woman's voice in my ear directing me and correcting me and reassuring me, gently but firmly. No, folks, I haven't joined a cult. Not yet. Rather, I have become the thoroughly modern biker; connected, wired, tuned in and touring through the brave new world of global positioning. We are two for the road, me and my GPS.

Now if I could just figure out what I need the damn thing for.

It's a mind-blowing technology, this GPS, and just super for vectoring in bomb strikes or supply drops in Lower Slobovia, which is what the whole satellite array was originally shot into orbit to do. And when this military wizardry was first made available for civilian use and primitive GPS units were offered as consumer products they proved an immediate sensation among tech geeks who would, without prompting, whip them out and give you the exact global coordinates of whatever Starbucks they happened to be in at the time. To tech geeks the GPS offered conclusive proof of the postulate that wherever you go, well, there you are.

It's come a long way since then, and the current high-end GPS offerings can not only give you the coordinates of that Starbucks, they can show it to you on a rudimentary map and then give you detailed directions to the next Starbucks—or just about anywhere else you want to go. The designers of these devices have gone to great lengths to make them of some practical use to the public because this is one of those gee-whiz technologies that are so advanced there just has to be some reason and some way to assimilate them into our daily routines. And once you have one in your possession, you get so wowed by its cleverness you feel morally obligated to use it even if it offers no demonstrable improvement over the way you got things done before it came along. Examples abound of that type of insidious technological insinuation. Still, it's important to keep an open mind and remember that there were once

those who questioned whether the Internet was any less trendy than CB radio, and so I get myself this GPS and spend some time getting familiar with its operation and features, sitting at a table outdoors so the satellites can see me, and I am quickly awed at how much this little box knows. It can, in short order, devise a route from where I sit to just about anywhere in North America and even give me options as to how I want to go about the trip. Do I want the shortest route? The quickest? A route that avoids toll roads? How about a route that eschews the Interstate altogether? And all that's just for starters. This miraculous device will give me the exact distance and time to the destination, and at any point along the route will list every single proximate gas station, restaurant, motel, convenience store, hospital, lawyer, dentist, zoo and a whole list of other things. It's absolutely incredible.

And it gets more incredible from there. This unit also has a wireless earphone device through which a voice prompts me at every turn. I even get to choose the voice I hear from among a menu of domestic and foreign-inflected females and males. I opt for an American gal named Lori, figuring she'll be better acquainted with the local roads, and I jam the little earpiece into my ear and as I'm fiddling with it to make it stay in place, the GPS unit falls off the table to the patio cement. And Lori says, "Turn left."



Good and bad apples

In regards to the letter by Dana Morrison entitled "They Ain't Choir Boys" (June issue): Of course they're not; they're bikers! I'm not a Hessian, but I have friends in the club. If you watch the DVD that you are so against buying, you will see that it shows their dark past and the initiation ritual that you wrote about. They are not trying to hide anything! I think they are changing

Plucky gal, this Lori. And now it's time to mount the device on the bike and take a trip to see what this baby will do, and I mount it with the screen in my near vision and I jam in my earpiece and I turn the GPS on and, sure enough, it shows me where I am. Which I already know. And now it wants to know where I'm going, and I know that too, and what's more, I already know how to get there since I made the routine preparation of looking at a road map. It is in this moment that I realize I'm staring at a little TV, poking at its touch-screen with my finger and feeling the earpiece wedged uncomfortably in my ear, and I say aloud: "This is stupid."

Some biker I turned out to be. And here's the thing: I ride a motorcycle with all of my senses directed outward to the landscape, the sky and the horizon—not focused and condensed in the cockpit of my bike. I pore over big paper road maps to get a sense of where I am and where I'm going in the grand geographical scheme of things; I don't ride intent on getting from point A to point B and I don't conceive of the journey as a sequence of left and right turns. I don't like to ride with a synthesized voice in my ear telling me where to go—it tends to get perilously confused with the voice in my head telling me to kill the neighbors. And if I need gas, I find a gas station, and the same goes for restaurants and motels. I rely on my experience and instincts and highway signage to get these things done, and if I do lose my way I stop and ask directions from locals who are invariably only too happy to oblige with some wrong ones. And that's just part of the adventure. There's a lot to be said for getting yourself lost. You'll get yourself found soon enough and like as not get a story to tell out of it. After all, touring on a bike ain't rocket science, folks. Global positioning, on the other hand, is.

It's all right here in the diaries. ♦

with the times in order for the club to survive, but that's just my opinion.

The chapter I know is a good group of guys. I don't know Virgil or your cousin's situation, but it sounds to me like domestic violence. You can't blame the whole club because of one or two patch holders.

See "Letters," page 26, column 4

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