

Grennell/Bx 4007/Covina, CA 91723

Caveat — as always — Lector, y'all!

The Lewd Book I Almost Wrote/and Wrote Anyway

It turgled to the cringing surface of the desk with the provisional title of "Law Enforcement Officer's Handgun Manual," so, for a while, we called it LEOHM and didn't fret overly. It had been conceived on the eastern seaboard and carried part-term but, no-way, was it going to make 320 pages without one helluva lot of force feeding, in the mode of Strasbourg geese. Diagnosing on assignment, I pointed out that there was little sense to restrict it to handguns when useful pages could be wiped out in coverage of related equipage.

So it was re-christened "Law Enforcement Weapons Digest," and I forget which glittery pair of eyes at Intrepid Promulgating first espied the lurking acronym. But it was fairly diverting to scrawl large reminders on 3x5" file cards and tape them to the Buick dash -- my unfailing system for mnemonic stimulation -- shouting

SHOOT LEWD PHOTOS TOMORROW!

And then, along the way, the client happened to discover what he deemed to be an unfortunate set of initials and, for the present, it has once again been re-christened (still without benefit of clergy): Law Officers' Digest. What can you do with LOD?

Well, I suppose, a lit-tul sho'tnin' bread ...

By way of sporting offers, since it will be original at the time of publication, if 33 members petition to accept it as my activity credit for the next forty years, I'll skurm up 68 copies for circulation through the mailing. Don't all crowd forward at once, now.

De Baskerville II

or

The Pink Panther Rides Again (any week now)

Back in the spring of '70, the poor old CB450 Honda was coming down with the hard hobbles in every protesting joint. The electric starter -- that most sybaritic of all scooter accessories -- had ceased to function long since and estimates for restoring it to vestigial vigour ran about \$30: Just enough, and a bit, to justify going back to the stomp-crank, but that can be a strenuous go on a cold morn. The transmish was worn all but toothless, so that you had to hold it in second cog with a hooked toe, gritted teeth and main force. There were other megrims, as well.

So I fell prey to Satan's whispered inducements, and to the glowing test reports that had been popping out in the cyclemags like acne on adolescent epidermis, to

the gist that the most sultry super-sickle so far spawned was something called a Kawasaki Mach III; a three-cylinder, two-stroke with a modest 500cc displacement that, by subtle alchemy, churned forth 60 whinnying horses, as against the 450's creditable 43. Like, 0-60 in 4.4; top end around 118, flat-out, etc., &c.

With much the set fixity of expression that rictated the features of Toad of Toad Hall, I set forth on the ailing but ever-faithful Panther (so named because of the paint inherited from its former owner: a spectacularly garish metallic copper color) and, after a hiatus I recall tenebrously, if at all, came foompling back astride a white-and-royal-blue Mach III.

The friendly neighborhood scooter-seller had allowed \$350 for the Panther: not dreadfully bad for a machine which had cost \$480 bid at a repo' auction, three years and thirty-odd thousand miles back. It had been in for repair twice, once due to the fact that its ten-thumb'd rider had cross-threaded a sparkplug into the soft alloy head. On a two-bang, it would've been no-sweat (or negative diaphoresis, as a cultured associate prefers it) to yank off the head, run a tap through from the inside and back to work. But the mill they hung on the 450s is one of the most fanatically sophisticated powerplants ever designed for a production machine: double over-head cams, torsion valve springs, all them goodies and getting the head off a 450 is more than a matter of torquing off six headbolts with a ratchet wrench. It is, in fact, a cool C-note minimum to tackle in the first place, plus labor and parts from there. Ahr well, I cheered myself, I've paid more tuition for less education, on occasion.

Economics of cycling: Really, anyone who kids themselves that going to 2-wheel transport is a long-run saving is clean stonkers. Any way you look at it, the basic cost-supplies-upkeep-insurance-miscellaneous on even a humble motorcycle is enough to buy uncountable cartons of high-octane cream for a Buick Wildcat and the most practical way of saving money is to buy the car, which you need anyway, and make wistful mooneyes at the intrepid types tearing past like humpyback centaurs on their Boanergistical bikes. That is what one does if one is smart, shrewd, canny, crafty, level-headed and all those other tedious virtues. It is not what one does of one has ever grokked the sublime soulbalm of merging with a cycle into that utterly indescribable symbiosis into a whole that is the sum of the parts, raised to at least the seventh power.

Trot out all the weary cliches about describing color to a blind person; quote Satchmo's "If you has to ask, you'll never know!" And then come up with the feckless mumbles when you try to put into mere words how it is to feel the texture of the road beneath your tires -- feel it through your nerves and way up into the brain. Saunter among the hurtling juggernauts on a busy freeway, with no more conscious thought or effort than another might thread his way among shoppers on a crowded sidewalk; only at 65 mph and perhaps a scantling over, with a cautious eye to the rear for the omnipresent Enemy. The bike becomes part of you and, better yet, you become part of it and you sense that it shares your enjoyment. Rowrbazzle.

Even so, when you've picked up all that tab, it's nice to hit gas mileage that

can beggar the boasts of a Volksbug jockey. If the Panther ever dropped below 50 mpg, I didn't catch it, usually shading the YDS-3 Yamaha by a good 10 mpg, despite having edges of 200cc and 16 horses over its two-stroke stablemate. The two-bangers make more horses with less cubes, but at the expense of efficiency. Oil consumption is a coin-flip thing. On the Yumyum, you pour oil in a tank and it sips as it goes, blowing it out the back pipes after one pass through the works. A quart of oil will take you about 300 miles and the tank holds about two quarts, so all you need is gas, pumped straight into the tank topside. When I bought the Honda, I hoped for a bit of saving on oil, but fohgitt-it. The crankcase held three quarts of 40-weight Torco and they strongly urge an oil-change every 900 miles. So what's to gain?

All of these things, I should've remembered when I joined up with the Kawasaki; but didn't. Early in the game, I checked the petrol consumption at a disgraceful 30 mpg and lost much of the enchantment for my new mount about then. The dealer had counseled 40-weight Kendall for the oil reservoir and a quart'd go through about every 180-210 miles, depending on how high you turned the wick. Meanwhile, weather sattelites could track you by the slowly settling contrail of blue smoke. Birdlime.

Oh, it was true that it got off the dime with alacrity -- if it happened to feel so inclined; which was not too darned often. When all went well, the front wheel would still lift gaily if you happened to have a handful of revs and dropped in the clutch hastily going into third.

On the other hand, it began to appear that it was all too rare to have the logs crackling in all three jugs simultaneously. I learned that it would still do about 68, with time and patience, on two out of three and, with careful nursing, one live cylinder was good for a painfully nursed 23 mph -- faster than pushing along the berm (you get a flat zero when all three furnaces bank-down) but nothing very great.

I began to grieve, ever more keenly for the sturdy, uncomplaining reliability of the faithful Honda and I found myself, ever more often, electing to take the Buick on any pretense at all. And I fretted over the grotesquery of a car with ten times the weight and six times the horsepower that placidly put out half the gas mileage of the highly touted "fastest thing on two wheels." All that moxie, I found, was a dubious delight because, as you edged over into the tridigital velocities, it tended to become extremely goosy and hysterical and you became painfully aware of the abrasive effect inherent in that sizzling concrete down there. At an honest hundred and a mile or three, the Honda felt as solid as a garbage scow on a placid millpond: eagerly responsive to the controls, as always, but with no slightest delusion as to who was in charge.

But the poor old Panther had been sold down the river and it became ever more galling to reflect that I had more loot tied up in the 'saki than in the Buick. More, I was putting ten miles or more on the Buick for each that went onto the Kawasaki. I caught myself referring to it as a 'Kawaski,' hailing from Warsaw...

So catching the Sakitume during one of its brief interludes of running after a trip to the garage, I sold it to a private party; for \$40 over the going retail bluebook and only losing maybe a paltry \$300 or so on the deal, what with registration, sales-gouge, insurance and suchlike. Yes, motorcycling really can save you money. Birdlime.

I had unloaded the Honda 90 to help float the Kawasaki purchase and, with the White Sloth gone, that left the venerable Yamaha with the garage all to itself. When I'd gotten the 450 Honda, I had negotiated with #1 Son to take over the Happy Bluebird, as the YDS-3 is called. One dollar and the usual valuable considerations. The title stayed in my name, as he wasn't 21 at the time, while I was with a bit to spare. In the interim, he had acquired a Volvo and was giving it the vast bulk of his business. So we had to keep hooking the Yamaha battery onto the trickle-charger every week or so in lieu of exercising in the normal manner. Let a bike sit still for a couple of months and the battery dies dead for eternity plus six months.

So I lived a fairly 4-wheeled existence for quite a while, along in there and tried to find happiness, but it proved elusive. Oh, I'm not bad-mouthing the sinewy-flanked Wily-Kat, as he remains the most grokkable auto I've ever encountered, bar none. But something had leached out of life and I decided it was what we call fun. Wily begins to flatten out at around twice the local, lawful speed limit, but the sound effect remains a sort of gloating purr. What I missed was the windblast, the olfactory kaleidoscope of scents, aromas and plain smells, the interplay of shifting thermal layers, the wild, unconquered howl a willing bike makes when it's taking a healthy bite of the separation between points A and B.

I kept finding excuses to borrow the Yamaha to run errands upon. Chuck didn't mind, as he preferred to take the beloved Volvo. But, on taking charge, he had exercised his due prerogatives by removing the windshield -- which he held in deep disdain -- peeling off the little Dymo nameplate identifying it as the Happy Bluebird, peeling off the red Scotchlite delta insignia and, most assuredly, unbolting the ludicrous big box from the luggage rack. I could ride his Yamaha, no strings except I was not to muck it up with any of those gaucheries that marred the hard image.

And so it came to pass that I commenced to ply him with blandishments and with plausible logic until, at last, we consummated another subtle shift of mutually advantageous considerations (no actual cash changed hands and Ronnie was denied his rakeoff of 5%) which resulted in my reassumption of titular control of the Happy Bluebird. Chuck came out with clear title to 3000 yards of the Miracle Mile on Wilshire, both sides of the street, but tha's another story. As our respective haggles of solicitors ironed out the final details, I excused myself and retired to the garage. Chuck followed in a bit and confirmed his darkest forebodings: I was bolting the windshield back on. He sighed a reedy sigh and slumped back toward the house as I began cutting triangles out of red Scotchlite tape...

The Yamaha's total displacement amounts to a bit more than one-third that of any one of the Buick's eight big jugs, but it will claw up to nearly two-thirds of the

Feral Feline's all-out pace, meanwhile covering three times as many miles on a gallon low-lead Union 76 regular as Wily can make on the same amount of the same refiner's premium: not fantastic, but reasonable; acceptable.

One flea materialized amid the White Cloverine: It had been many a year and enough miles on brawnier bikes to have taken me around the world once and almost around again, since last I had ridden extensively on the B'bird. I didn't recall it from before but, now, it had an annoying trait. Somewhere around 65 mph, it would go into the same skittish tantrums which had afflicted the Kawasaki in the neighborhood of 110 and, if you happened to be rounding a bumpy curve, as on a freeway, it took considerable rigid arms and shoulder to keep the front end from going into some sort of supernova oscillation. What they call it is a speed-wobble and what they do is try to avoid the derm' things; with all possible assiduity. It can put you into violent contact with the planetary mass and that smarts.

Back in '67, when the Bluebird was freshly acquired and several months before the Pink Panther hove onto the scene, it had been my number one bike and I had pushed many kilometers to the rearward aboard it. We had shared some memorable and improbable adventures, e.g., the time I had to run a minor errand to Diamond Bar, some eight miles from Covina, and had returned via Tijuana ... We were compadres viejo, the 'bird and I, but inbetween, it had had had another human topside and I had had somewhere between three and five other bikes with anywhere up to thirty grand apiece on them; one loses accurate track. We had to get acquainted all over again and I was darned if I could recall that nasty yen for twitching the bit at 65 or so. But I reflected that the Panther had spoiled me rotten and perhaps it was just that I didn't remember that sharply.

Trouble was, the more I rode the Bluebird, the more I faunched for the stolid stride of the ever-more-sadly-mourned Panther and yearned to hear the sonorous whunkle-whunkle of pistons making their leisurely rounds. I began to make the rounds of cycle dealers, I caught myself turning to the classified section before the comic section of the paper, checking out ads for Hondas and skipping on if it was for any size except 450.

So the day came when a boxed entry appeared, something like: Honda CB450, needs work, \$350 or best offer. Phone-----. I called, as I had called many times before. This time, for once, it had not been snapped up by a typesetter at the newspaper, or something. The bike was still in the guy's yard, the address was so&so, over in Monrovia. We climbed aboard the Bluebird, shoving the checkbook in the pannier and sallied off to shop for Hondas.

To anyone but a retired Panther-pilot, it would not have been very impressive. For one thing, it was Black. All Honda 450s started off black in '65-'66, same as Hank Ford's Model Ts of an earlier era. Sheeg, of all the dreary, mournful colors: black. The only more turn-offy hues, imho, are things such's maroon, gray-with-an-a, or that grisly shade which I term vulture-vomit-green. At long last, I even could find it in my heart to forgive the Panther's first owner for having selected that atrocious coppertone. Almost anything is better than, ecch, black.

But it did have a custom-upholstered seat -- it leaves the works with something pretty slabby -- and someone had cut off the hard, skimpy little grip cushions and replaced them with the Italian onion jobs that I always install, a.s.a.p. It had the old, oggly, whaleback gastank of tender memory. What it didn't have was a running engine -- something a proper motorcycle has to have. The battery was dead, the owner said, and the engine might need a little work. I noted a cam cover dangling by one screw and winced, trying to ignore it. No question, I had the hots something fierce for a reunion with one of Mr. Aitch's DOHC delights. We muttered a bit, I mentioned 275, he made agreeable noises. Chances are, he could have sold me a dead mule, had it borne the same nameplates. We made with the checkbook and the pinkie-slip, he hunted up an ignition key and I foraged up several useful components which were lying about the garage in odd corners: the little battery retaining strap, the top engine mount; small stuff like that. We oofed it aboard the back of his Datsun pickup and convoyed him over to offload it at the local Honda hospital.

Which (gentle, martyred sigh) is where it remains, as camera pans to the here&now, some six weeks later. To date, it has yet to emit its first whunk. In fact, the engine with which it left its Nipponese homeland will never whunk again, after a paltry 9000-odd miles. Remember that loose cam cover? Well, appears it'd been loose for quite a while and the dissection showed that the cams were hopelessly shot; not only rusted but some niddering yawp had ridden it dry of oil and the delicately sculptured surfaces were fatally galled. Going on down, the pistons were rusted, corroded, as were the wristpins, the conrods and that took them down to the crankshaft, upon which the light of day has yet to shine in the present sense. But it looks bleak for an intact crankshaft and 450 cranks tab out at a C apiece. Up to that point, the estimate had climbed to about \$225; at least.

Well, in the meantime, the cheerful optimist had sprung for \$29 to the DMV for transfer, license, saletax and such, plus another \$20 for two nearly-new tires. Exotic additives to the local atmosphere turn the stoutest rubber into a brittle alligatorhide in a year or two; thank Foo one does not have rubber lungs. Call it to the point of reluctant return. Color it Panicville.

And now. Are you ready for this? A week or so ago, returned from a ride on the hairytrigger Bluebird, rolled it into the garage, kicked it up on the center stand and, for some reason, on the way out the door, turned and gave the back tire a nudge with toe to spin the wheel Whaaaaa??! Unbelieving, stooped and grasped the tire and::: Sheeg, you could wobble it about a good 3/4" in either direction. Ah, ssso. Here is a broken spoke and, along the last gosh-knows how many miles, all the rest of the spokes have come loose and the relationship between outer wheel and inner spoke is so bloody tenuous and casual you could not possibly believe! Business of lightbulbs, enclosed in cartoonist's balloon, glowing fitfully above head.

So, for the first time in at least two years, Hon. Bluebird goes off to the Yamaha hospital for corrective surgery. Son Chas. follows in Volvo (he refuses to drive the Buick, perhaps it's not Hard)(says he disgroks power brakes) as the

current B'bird rider tenderly nursed his footsore mount the three miles. Yes, you can bloodywell betcha I used only the frontwheel brake and eased in the clutch with a feather touch. It rode no worse than usual and I winced apologies to an uncomplaining, totally loyal Friend all the way.

Got it back a couple of days later. While they were at it, I sprang for a new chain and pair of sprockets as the old cogs had worn all but toothless in the course of 18,000-odd miles and 4-1/2 years. Small change back from a fifty. Well, hell, first repair in at least two years? Not to fret. Run Chuck down in the Buick, have him ride it back, off to work. Home that night; tennish; early, really. Can't wait to find out something. Even in SoCal, nights are cool in late October, so peel on the cherished old bottle-green ski sweater, now worn ravelly all over, pull on the leather jacket which Ron Ellik's mother bought him as a graduation present from high school; traded years ago for a Craig tape recorder. Light off the boilers so the mill can warm while I'm donning helmet and gloves. Climb aboard, cut the choke and vroom the gas to keep it going. Two stroke engines awake with bitter reluctance, but this I can forgive, being built the same way. Drag back the clutch, dunk the shift down into first and ease off the left lever. One of these days, really going to have to have something done about that clutch; getting awfully touchy. Out the drive, down La Serena, right up Baseline, stop and touch a toe to pavement at Barranca, then up the stretch to Citrus which brings the powerplant reasonably close to normal temperature. Wait for the light at Citrus; green and go, with a deft swipswop to edge into the onramp for the Foothill Fwy. Down the ramp and let it hit those screaming six-grand notes for each shift. Here's the main route and check the mirror plus a physical turn of the head for clearing the lane. All go so hit it.

Now, then.

Up and (there), hook. One more time; top cog now, no place left to go. Onward, Xtian Sojers; forward & slaunchwise. There goes 65 and 70 right behind and... Holy Moley. This is the BLUEBIRD??? And here comes the moment of fairly durable verity: the gently banked left-wend where the Foothill crosses Azusa Avenue, some mean-muthah bounces which had really sent the Bird into towering tizzies, every week in the world. Halfway through and, like Gibraltar is one gone jitterbug by comparison. The SuperChief, on new track has got St. Vitus and palsy but, man, that effing Bluebird is running smooth, tracking straight and whining for just a bit more petrol, if you please, up there?

From there, it's anti-climax, all the way. Zip into the Vernon Avenue off-ramp, zag across and make the dive back east to enter again. Vripp the trottle watch the needle hook at six thou. Vroom/vroom/vroom/vroom & vroom. There goes 65 and check for bandits at 6 o'clock level; looks clear so let her go a bit. Indicating eighty in a mile and that's about it but s-t--e--a--dy? Can't believe.

So, like, little man, wot now? Drop back to a sedate, law-abiding if screechy 63 (the Bird's speedo's a shade pessimistic) and ponder. You've put at least

three thousand miles on this staunch little stallion since the most recent change of ownership and it's been going all the way. Enough to take it clear across the country with the back wheel coming very slowly unglued all the way. Can you forgive it a few lurches and staggers? Well, rather.

And, really, who needs a 450 now? What do we do about three and a quarter down a rathole and nada to this point? Beardmutterings as the ~~Bb~~ drills its blunt beak through the chilling night air, sparse car drivers wonder where that nut is going at this hour. So does he.

One thing is clear. Trying to revive the original plant is beyond any sane justification (sanity? votz dot stuff? we're talking motorcycles, nu?). So program for scour and scrounge and, in a week or three, patient inquiries turn up an auto bodyshop in Covina that has a few wrecked bikes huddled in the rear. No 450 Hondas but the guy says, waitabit, we've got a loose engine back here. Go look and, begob, the unmistakable lines and contours of Mister Aitch's one and only venture into DOHC design. Cross fingers carefully and negotiate. Call Bob Niemann to check it out, thinking what a flaming pity you didn't think to do that with the original engine in the first place.

Stop by next morning and Bob is there, having a look before going to work. Zips off the covers and we see sparkly parts, gleaming with clean, healthy oil. Silky-satin surfaces, machined to that Swiss-watch precision and still as new. Miraculous. Go make with the checkbook, one more time. Question of blow a bit more and have something or pinch off and drop a bunch for nada. Birdlime, why not?

The mill carries the later, five-speed transmission in place of the original four-pacer and comes off a totaled scrambler. Close as it can be dated readily, circa 1969. Price? An even hundred and not necessary to add a fiver for the sales tax. No argument there. After all, that's what they get for the crankshaft alone and this's got all the contiguous components.

And so it stands. Bob says about the middle of next week, plate number 555 152 ought be ready to take the road again. I look forward to that and it is hoped that the total tariff won't be much over the first Panther, liberated by a shrewd bid at a finance company's repo auction. If it does as well as Panther I, no beefs are coming.

Meanwhile, how does one ride two motorcycles? Well, it turns out there is an answer. Besides LEWD (I'll always think of it that way), there's another book, Motorcycle Digest and we keep needing a bike on hand for odd photos. This time of year, no one likes to ride their cycle to the office site in Nether Boondocks, due to the spooky trek up the canyon after dark. But there's room to store a bike on the premises and that'd give something to ride on errands dayside, home at night in Wily-Kat and, meantime we've a resident scooter to model for photos. Don't know which goes where. Decide that if, after all this folderol, PP2 gets operational. Mental note: Gotta do something about getting it repainted ...

DAG