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Wandering, All Right, but on Harleys; September-8-2003

Jewish Bikers Band Together to Enjoy the Company and their Cycles By GLENN COLLINS ARMONK, N.Y. - Their T-shirt motto? "My hog is kosher." Their slogan?

"We're loud, we're proud, we're Hebrew." But relax already. The members of the Star of Davidson Motorcycle Club will not be rattling windows here as March roars in like a lion. Instead, the guys with the mezuzas on their Harley-Davidsons will be riding for the first time as a group in Daytona, Fla., during Bike Week, the annual bikers' Woodstock for half a million motorcyclists. "It's the place to go vroom vroom," said Drew Rayman, the club's founder and leader. "When I was at Daytona last year, I was offended that there weren't any Jewish bikers, though they had every conceivable group: Christian bikers, Hells Angels, Neo-Nazis. We are the silent minority. We are devoid of any organized presence." Star of Davidson - Star of David meets Harley-Davidson - is only a little more than a year old. In the two months since it put up its Web site

www.starofdavidson.com, the club has attracted 60 new members from around the country, to bring its membership to 100. And the group hopes to use the Web site to organize more members. The goal, Mr. Rayman said, is "to make the Jewish riding heritage more apparent." The, um, Jewish riding heritage? "I know, I know, good Jewish boys aren't supposed to ride bikes or get their hands dirty," Mr. Rayman said, laughing. "But there are a lot of us out there who like to get their hands dirty." To Mark Starr, the 47-year-old owner of Hunting Ridge Motors in neighboring Bedford who describes himself as "a gearhead," "a lot of people think of the typical Jewish guy as the doctor, the lawyer, the guy behind the desk." He smiled. "Well, I'm not the typical Jewish guy." This is hardly a group of schleppers. Most Star of Davidson members own their own businesses and have the time and wherewithal to indulge their hobby. "I'm a nice Jewish boy who likes motorcycles, shoots guns from time to time, and kills things for a living," said Seth Tokson, 43, of Armonk, owner of Absolute Pest Management Inc. They are suspicious of the angst explanation. "There are many reasons we ride," Mr. Rayman said, "and the idea that we're rebelling against our parents after a protected childhood is not one of them." Howard Rozins, 47, co-owner of the Bagel Emporium on Main Street in Armonk, likes the rush. "The speed, the freedom, the openness of it," he said. "You can't believe the beauty of riding up here." The Armonk Biker Boyz fire up their motorcycles almost every week there isn't snow and ice "and just pick a direction," Mr. Tokson said, usually toward scenic beauty, culinary payoff, or both. Astride one of his Harleys, Mr. Rayman, 43, bears a passing resemblance to the pre-"Adaptation" Nicolas Cage. Mr. Rayman sold I33, his Web site and marketing business, in 1998, before the virtual bubble burst. He found himself with enough money and, he said, "enough time on my hands to start tinkering with motorcycles," and began hanging out at Puff's Auto Salon (carwash \$13, window tinting \$200) on Main Street. "I told Drew that if he wanted to hang here, he'd better have a bike," said Kurt Puff, the salon's 43-year-old owner, a motorcycle enthusiast. "I think Star of Davidson started as a gag, but pretty soon I could see Drew was very serious." Soon Mr. Rayman, who had ridden



Star of Davidson member Steve posing with two of his grandkids on his 2003 RD Classic.

motorcycles sporadically since college, bought a Harley, and then another. Like-minded bikers began hanging out at Puff's as well. Star of Davidson is not limited to Harley owners, and even those who don't own motorcycles can join the, er, gang (they borrow others' bikes). The club welcomes goyim, too, like Mr. Puff and Bill Knudsen, 39, owner of Knudsen Plumbing and Heating here. "It's a great group of friends," Mr. Knudsen said. "We've taken some long rides together, and all of us have gotten a sore butt." Star of Davidson is even joined from time to time by a Muslim biker who rides his cherished Indian motorcycle. Women have signed up, thanks to the Internet, but so far, there are no regular female riders. "Of course, a girl could ride with us," Mr. Rayman said expansively, then laughed. "But we're not asking! It's guys' night out!" Which they say does not always go over so wonderfully with their wives. "The guys say they're going out riding for a couple of hours and then they take the whole day," Mr. Puff said, not terribly remorsefully. The wives can speak for themselves, thank you. "I didn't want my husband to have a motorcycle, and now he has two," said Laurie Rayman, Drew's wife of 11 years. "But look, he loves this. These guys still need their toys. And they can afford bigger toys - I mean, what's more fun than a toy you can ride around on? I just wonder where is it ever going to end?" (But she has been known to ride with her husband on the back of his Harley Fat Boy.) Mr. Rayman admitted that "no Jewish mother wants her kids to ride a motorcycle." He himself is not sure he wants his three children to ride. "I am an overprotective Jewish father," he said. Hospital surgeons have a black-humor nickname for motorcyclists: organ donors. So what do the club members think of the risks? "The danger is relative," said Mr. Rozins, a motorcycle addict since the age of 17. "You have to be cautious, and be respectful of conditions on the road." Mr. Puff pointed to the Harley's often annoying defense mechanism: "Loud pipes save lives. Motorists don't seem to notice us at all and don't give us room on the road. Look, there is loud loud, and then there is loud. My bike is just loud." How does all this vrooming go over in Armonk, 30 miles from Midtown Manhattan and part of the town of North Castle, the buttoned-down corporate community of I.B.M.? "They aren't the Hells Angels," said Gerry Geist, a town councilman for 17 years. "I haven't heard of any complaints, since they respect the rules." He added, "I think they are making a statement, and I think it's refreshing that they're having fun with the whole idea, making light of themselves." In summer, the motorcyclists sit in front of Puff's at the white lawn table with the green umbrella in front of the Coke machine. They watch life go by, and discuss motorcycles incessantly, especially the totemic Harleys. Here is what they ponder: custom front forks, flame-engraved master-cylinder covers, triple-chrome skullhead petcock lever covers, studded low-rider tank bibs, chromed clutch levers, taillights (smoked, ambered, flame-lensed, blue-dotted), cloisonné gas caps, chrome grommets and teardrop mirrors. All the talk, and all the riding, "is cheap therapy," said Steve Karl, 50, a retired former director of marketing for Verizon. "No, no," riposted Mr. Knudsen. "It's expensive therapy." Indeed: Mr. Starr has put \$23,000 into his 2002 red-and-silver Fat Boy (no-frills price: \$18,000) "to give it a personality," he said. For the Jewish biker who has everything, the Star of Davidson Web site offers "My hog is kosher" T-shirts and chrome and gold bike mezuzas. The Internet has also led to a connection with another group of about 50 local bikers: the Chai Riders, a club "of predominantly Jewish riders from New York City, Long Island and Connecticut," said Lauren Secular, a Manhattan accountant who was a co-founder five years ago. The Chai Riders' Web site www.chairiders.com and Mr. Rayman's Web site plan mutual links. "We are in favor of an alliance," she said, "with other Jewish groups." They include, Ms. Secular said, Hillel's Angels in Wyckoff, N.J., a club of Jewish lawyers in Ulster County, N.Y., named the Goniffs (Yiddish for thieves), and a Canadian group called the Yowies, "which is an abbreviation for Yiddim on Wheels," she said. In Daytona, Star of Davidson members aren't expecting trouble, because, they say, they aren't looking for any. "I ignore the booths full of Nazi memorabilia," Mr. Tokson said. The club is going in style, of course - the bikes are too pampered to be ridden there, so they'll be shipped in a trailer - and the members are staying in a beachfront house with an indoor heated pool. "Maybe it's a bit much," Mr. Rayman pondered, "considering we hope to be riding all day. And maybe all night." Copyright © 2003 [or year published if other] by The New York Times Co. Reprinted with permission.

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