

Maddog Unleashed

Bike Shop Fits a Fred, But Motorcycle Dealers Cause a Squid to Scoot

A fascinating aspect of the pursuit, not in the least bucolic, was the bike shop where one went for mechanical service, and which was a meeting place for the bike people, whose machines were poised out front in carefully conceived rest positions. At first, of course, no one would talk to me...—
Thomas McGuane, “Me and My Bike and Why”



BY PATRICK O'GRADY

We're still well short of \$6-a-gallon gas here in Colorado, but one fill-up too many finally drove a neighbor to the bike shop. He has a \$100 limit on his gas card, which he uses to feed a voracious Chevy Suburban. The other day, the pump shut off at the C-note mark without filling the tank. Ouch.

I suppose we could sneer at him for driving a suburban battlewagon that swills \$400 a month in go-juice. But he and his wife are fine neighbors with three excellent kids, and you can't shoehorn a mob like that into a Prius—not when there are soccer matches, track meets and a full slate of other such activities on the calendar.

Still, there's a tipping point for everyone, though it usually takes a couple of nudges to shove a guy over the edge. And so it was with my neighbor.

First, his eldest boy went off to join the Army, and the middle son is college bound come August, so the wife's thrifter VW will suffice for shuttling their teenage daughter around. Second, like the rest of us, my neighbor could do with a little more exercise. Last, but hardly least, there was that pricey pit stop.

So he marched down to the bike shop and bought a Cannondale Bad Boy.

(49)CC Rider. Meanwhile, I was contemplating my own two-wheeler purchase: a 49cc scooter. I don't drive nearly as much as my neighbor, but that doesn't mean I enjoy paying four smacks a gallon to fetch my grog and groceries.

I can always do my little bit of business on the bike, but sometimes a guy just wants to sit down and twist a key. And while these scooters may be underpowered and invisible, they're also said to get 100-plus miles per gallon. Plus they're popular with the urban hipsters, and I always wanted to be one of the cool kids.

So I marched on down to the motorcycle shop and bought myself—well, nothing. Because my shopping experience was very different from my neighbor's.

Of Freds and Squids. My neighbor spoke at length with the shop owner and a couple of employees, enjoyed a few test rides, got a proper fit and even had some OE parts swapped out to give him a comfortable riding position.

I was ignored at the two motorcycle shops I visited. Nobody asked if I required assistance as I wandered about; hell, nobody even greeted me, which made me wonder whether motorcycle dealers possess some internal retail radar that squeals “squid” the way ours does “fred.”

At the one actual scooter dealership I toured, a harried employee rattled off a range of options and prices in that “What the hell, I've been talking to fools all day, one more won't kill me” tone and then scuttled back into the shop.

I sat on one, getting a feel for it. I felt like John Belushi squeezing into one of the Penguin's grammar-school desks in “The Blues Brothers.”

Boys and Their Toys. Come tomorrow, my neighbor and his college-bound son will be cycling off to work together, while I will be scooting precisely nowhere.

No biggie. I'd probably be better off redirecting my scooter budget to building up my custom Nobilette, resurrecting my Voodoo Wazoo or hunting down a decent suspension fork for my ancient DBR Axis TT mountain bike.

I'll still be underpowered and invisible. But a bicycle doesn't use any gas at all. And if I just have to have that scooter feel I can always clip cards to the spokes or make “vroom vroom” sounds.