

Seniors go hog wild Bend retirement home hosts a motorcycle rally

By Scott Hammers / The Bulletin
Published Oct 11, 2009

Mary Cook strolled among the motorcycles parked behind the Stone Lodge Retirement Community in Bend on Saturday afternoon, fingering their hand grips and admiring their chrome. But Cook always returned to one, a bright red Indian, the same brand she rode when she'd go roaring up the California coast with her husband more than 60 years ago.



J.T. Taylor, 65, and his wife, Tange Taylor, 54, right, both of Bend, help 86-year-old Stone Lodge Retirement Community resident Marion Ast into the sidecar attached to J.T.'s motorcycle. Local riders visited the Bend retirement community Saturday to put on a motorcycle show and give rides around the parking lot. Ast enjoyed the experience. "This is comfortable, nice, really nice. I may have to invest in one of these," she said.

Cook, now 85, said a fractured spine was the only thing keeping her from climbing on the back of a bike with one of the two dozen local riders who visited the retirement community Saturday for lunch, a motorcycle show and rides around the parking lot. Riding motorcycles was always a lot of fun, Cook said, and she wished she'd done it more. "My husband finally decided I should sell mine, because I was getting too much attention," Cook laughed. "Girls weren't riding motorcycles back then. He didn't like that, but I got a kick out of it."

Steve Foster, one of the managers of the retirement community on Northeast 27th Street and the coordinator of Saturday's event, said seniors have a particular fondness for motorcycles. "I'd guess because some of them rode when they were young, for the widows, they had husbands that rode," Foster said. "It just brings back their youth, I would say. It brings back memories of a happy time."

Elvira Norman, 71, said visits from groups like the motorcycle riders are one of the highlights of living at the retirement community. Norman was looking forward to taking a ride, and recalled how she used to cruise around Portland on the back of a friend's motorcycle. "It's been quite a while, years ago, but some of those motorcycles out there are fantastic," she said.

Resident Marion Ast, 86, said she'd only been on a motorcycle once before, years ago when she went hunting with her son. On the ride out of the forest with a deer carcass strapped to the bike, she put her hand on a hot exhaust pipe, an experience she wasn't eager to repeat. But in the days leading up to Saturday's event, she managed to commit herself to taking a ride, agreeing to go if Foster produced a motorcycle with a sidecar. Which he did. "I told him I didn't want to ride on the back. I wanted to be able to see," Ast said. "So I'm going to have to get even with him. I don't know what yet, but Halloween is coming up."

Outside in the parking lot, Ast squinted skeptically at J.T. Taylor's Harley-Davidson with attached sidecar as she donned a helmet and leather jacket. With help from assistants, she climbed up over the edge and settled in. "This is comfortable, nice, really nice," Ast said, grinning for her fellow residents. "I may have to invest in one of these." After a few false starts, the bike coughed to life under Taylor's foot, and they rolled out as Ast waved to her fellow residents. Though he never left the parking lot Saturday, Taylor, 65, said he was impressed by the residents' enthusiasm. "This one woman asked me, 'How fast are we gonna go?' And I said, '80?'" Taylor said. "She says, 'Is that all?'"

Greg Moe, another manager at the retirement community, said events like the motorcycle rally and classic car shows are a great tool to get residents to open up, serving as a trigger to get them talking about their lives. "Most of our folks had to go through the Depression and World War II, and remember, the first thing the guys did when they got back from the war was buy a bike to get around," he said. "They have all these stories, and some- times we just don't know, until you spring a little event like this."