

TESTED: BMW G650 X-COUNTRY – KTM 690 SUPERMOTO – YAMAHA MT-03

# MOTORCYCLE

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# BIGGER BETTER BUELL?

EXCLUSIVE: FIRST RIDE ON THE 1125R



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## What killed 'Ride to Work' magazine?

In bookstores, there is a new kind of magazine focusing on luxury touring by motorcycle. These glossy monthlies showcase routes and destinations for Road King, Gold Wing and K1200LT riders — folks who can afford to travel any way they like but choose to ride. The new magazines aren't much different from other travel publications, except that, they're about motorcycle riding.

Nowhere in these magazines does an editor or interview subject so much as mention that bikes can be used for transportation. No wonder. Motorcycles, lest we forget, are toys. The motorcycle industry and the magazines showcasing the newest, fastest, most badass bikes and gear are grateful that they are toys.

Toys can be sold to excited customers. Newer, more expensive toys can be sold to the same easily bored customers — long before the old toys are worn out.

Motorcycle commuters certainly don't matter in these new luxury touring magazines — or in mainstream US moto-mags. Those magazines are supported by transparently butch truck ads and ads for the newest, noisiest posing and risk-taking gear and bikes. Gear and bikes for smoky burnouts and corner-carving.

You will not see much about bikes appropriate for daily use. "Those bikes suck. Ride to work? No way. Dude, that's what V-8s are for!"

Non-toys like commuter bikes are more like tools. Once you've bought a 10mm socket, you probably won't tire of it. Your tool works; your bike works. You won't buy a more expensive, sexier replacement for either. As a consumer, Ms Moto-Commuter, you're a flop. As a human being, you're a hero.

You're a hero because riding is good for everyone, for the water and air and the landfill and the level of chaos and hostility we endure. Riding preserves dwindling resources, especially oil. Everyone knows all that, but few people care. Many say they care, but when no one's looking, it's homes far from jobs, three cars per family and ever-larger Energy Star appliances.

A moto-commuter, is not going to buy a new MV when the prestige wears off her old 650 Seca. She's not trying in some veiled way to

meet Mr Right or even Mr Right-Now. She's not even trying to make an impression. She's trying to stay warm and dry riding back and forth to work. So, she's happy with her old Yamaha. Didn't cost much to buy, doesn't cost much to maintain. Shaft drive, starts right up, no plastic.

Nor is she lusting for replica helmets, fringed vests or carbon airbox covers. Companies offering those products won't advertise in a magazine for near non-consumers like her. Let's call it Ride to Work magazine. Ride to Work would fail before the first printing. Motorcycle commuters don't buy much so they don't matter much in the marketplace. In a consumer society, the marketplace means the world. Motorcycle commuters make the world yawn.

Restraint does not impress in an age of excess. No one will praise you for your commitment to riding your motorcycle to work year round. No one cares.

We become noticed by buying goods and services. Spend and the world sits up and takes notice. Don't, and nobody loves you.

Perhaps that's as it should be. If a few of us are not participating in this terrific system, why should anyone notice? We buy, therefore we are. What we buy is who we are.

Motorcyclists overwhelmingly buy bikes and gear that present us as rogues or racers, gear and bikes that may not excel in any area except evident coolness. We pay big money for public coolness.

I'll bet there are more brands of pricey aftermarket exhaust systems than of affordable, durable all-weather gear. There may be \$50,000 in exhaust system inventory hanging in your local shop, but you have to hunt for two-dollar anti-fog to rub on your face shield.

Can't blame the retailer; he's stocking what sells. Who needs foul-weather stuff anyway? Why ride in the rain?

Try this: Ride to work (47mpg) in a rainstorm, then stand dripping at her desk, helmet in hand, and ask the hot, unmarried receptionist out to dinner. Tell her you'll pick her up. Brad Pitt couldn't get a yes.

Consumer green is commuting in a \$35,000, 22mpg, hybrid SUV. True green is commuting on a lovingly maintained, virtually worthless 1971 CB350.

Here's how to be consumer cool: Buy a racer replica or custom. Weekends, ride your scooter to taverns in the country or haul it to track-days. Haunt the moto-hangouts. Always ride in plumage. Monday through Friday, forget your bike. Drive your F250. Act as if oil is plentiful and cheap, there's no war, roads are empty and pleasant and the air is clean. Hey, you're cool. You've got friends. Enjoy the acceptance, the respect. You can see in the eyes of others the meaning motorcycling brings to your life.

Or, you can become invisible. You can stand for something but make no statement. You can ride a bike for transportation. You won't impress anyone and it's my bet you won't care.

Granted, that receptionist is hot. If she were cosmically hot, she'd reach up to muss your helmet hair. MSL

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