

# ***TWO WHEELED WARRIORS*** **A HISTORY OF HARLEY-DAVIDSON® IN AUSTRALIA**

**until 22 September 2002**



Harley-Davidsons are legendary. This exhibition tells the story of how the world's most famous motorcycle has become part of Australian culture.

The first Harley model was manufactured by the Davidson brothers and their friend Bill Harley in a shed in Milwaukee, USA, in 1903. Harley-Davidsons began to appear on Australian roads about 1912. Rugged and reliable compared to other bikes on the market, Harleys thrived in the tough Australian conditions.

Almost a century since the first Harley was produced, a mystique has developed around Harley-Davidson — it has become a symbol of freedom and rebellion, with a loyal and passionate following.

### **For teachers**

This exhibition will be of particular interest to primary school students of HSIE, Science & Technology and Creative Arts and secondary students of Design and Technology, and History.

A hands-on touch table looking at helmets and why we need them is available weekdays between 10.00 am and 12.00 noon, and explainers will be present to talk about safety on bikes and motorbikes.

*(Left)* The 2002 V-Rod Harley Davidson (detail). Courtesy Fraser Motorcycles and Harley-Davidson Australia

### **'LIVE TO RIDE, RIDE TO LIVE'**

Harley-Davidson is the world's most widely recognised and imitated motorcycle brand. It has achieved icon status through clever marketing of Harley-Davidson as a way of life, not just a method of transport.

Harleys are adapted by their owners and transformed into personal statements more than any other motorcycle. 'Customising' is a vibrant and distinctive aspect of Harley culture — the style of bike, the parts, the paint, the clothing and body adornments all reflect the way Harley riders see themselves. They are living their dream.



Customiser Francois Jouy with the 'Orange mecanique', a European-style custom bike which he created with a Sydney team of mechanics, electricians and painters. The only thing Harley in this bike is the engine!

#### **Did you know?**

- Harley owners have been customising their bikes to express their individuality since the 1940s.
- Modified Harleys are sometimes known as 'choppers'.
- It was not until 1971 that the Harley-Davidson company became convinced that there was a market for factory customised bikes and released the FX SuperGlide.

#### **Focus questions**

- Why do you think people like to customise their motorbikes?
- Artist Frank Lee claims he can 'draw a skull in my sleep'. Why do you think skull, dragon and eagle motifs are so popular with Harley owners?

## **HARLEY-DAVIDSON IN AUSTRALIA**

When the first Harley-Davidsons were imported into Australia about 1912 the local market was dominated by English motorcycles. Harleys were more expensive than the English bikes, but with their bigger engines and sturdier frames they proved to be well-suited to the rough Australian roads.

Harleys have been used in a variety of roles in Australia, from family transport to endurance racer, from a workhorse delivering bread to a military-service motorcycle delivering wartime despatches. More recently, Harleys were used as an escort for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Torch Relay.

Although most motorcycles on Australian roads today are Japanese, Harleys remain sought after for their image, look and sound.



South Australians Frank Arthur and his wife in London for the speedway season, 1931. Courtesy National Motor Museum, Birdwood, SA

### **Did you know?**

- The first single-make motorcycle club in Australia was founded by Harley riders in 1916.
- Sidecars like the 1918 Model J outfit were a popular means of family transport before cars became affordable.
- The Australian government purchased US Army Harley WLAs for use in World War II.
- Ten Harley-Davidson Road King Police Specials were made for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games.

### **Focus questions**

- Apart from carrying your friends or family, what might be the value of a sidecar? (hint: look at the photos)
- Who was Dot Goulding and when was she first on a Harley?
- Compare the 1918 Model J with the 1965 Model FL ElectraGlide. What similarities are there? What are some major differences?

### *From the history wall*

- The Harley-Davidson company was founded in \_\_\_\_\_
- The number of motorcycles produced in the first year was \_\_\_\_\_
- What was first produced by Harley-Davidson in 1909? \_\_\_\_\_

## **HARLEYS AT SPEED**

From the earliest days of Harley-Davidson, Bill Harley and the Davidson brothers realised the promotional value of motor-racing. The first record of a Harley racing is in 1904. Since then Harley-Davidson has successfully participated in every type of motorcycle racing, including Grand Prix.

Harley initially developed racing bikes from its production models. It then used its racing experience to produce a number of models of sporting road-motorcycles that could be raced on the track by amateur riders.



Frank Arthur (*left*), Australia's speedway demon, on his Harley-Davidson Peashooter in 1932.  
Courtesy National Motor Museum, Birdwood, SA

### **Did you know?**

- There are four basic parts to a motorcycle helmet that work together to provide protection for the rider's head: the outer shell, the impact-absorbing layer, the comfort padding and the chin strap.
- The outer shell is usually made of tough fibreglass. Crushing the shell requires energy, so less energy is absorbed by the rider's head.
- Inside the shell is a dense layer of styrofoam that cushions and absorbs the energy of the impact.
- The comfort padding makes it easy to wear a helmet for long periods, and keeps the head securely fitted.
- The chin strap ensures that the helmet doesn't fall off on impact.
- 70% of serious head injuries reported at accident and emergency centres happened to people on bikes who weren't wearing their helmets.

### **Focus questions**

- Look at the two helmets on display. What are they made from?
- What makes the 1994 VR1000 different from earlier Harley racing bikes?
- Where was speedway invented?

## **TALK THE TORQUE**

The culture surrounding Harley-Davidson has given rise to a language not shared by other motorcycle brands. Many words relate to technical features and engines, such as the knucklehead, panhead and shovelhead. Others describe the places and people associated with Harley-Davidson.

The terms 'new nostalgia' and 'retro-tech' were adopted by Harley in the late 1980s to promote its practice of re-creating classic 'heritage' models using the latest technology.

Harley-Davidson's marketing language has been pivotal to the success of the company. By promoting the tough, street-wise image of traditional riders, Harley has been able to sell to a diverse and changing market.



The 2002 V-Rod Harley Davidson (detail). Courtesy Fraser Motorcycles and Harley-Davidson Australia

### **Did you know?**

- Harley-Davidson motorcycles sound different from other motorcycles due to the original design of its engine. The Harley engine has two large cylinders arranged at a 45 degree angle (which is why it is called a 45 degree V-Twin engine). The firing sequence used in this V arrangement creates an uneven cylinder firing sequence which gives it a special sound. The sound is also influenced by the design of the muffler in the exhaust system. Mufflers are generally used to reduce the sound of the engine. Harley mufflers are designed so that the higher pitched tones are absorbed, and the lower tones are not. This gives it the low 'grunted' sound that Harleys are renowned for.

### **Focus questions**

- Why do you think Harley owners like to buy 'add-on's'?
- What are some of the customised parts you can buy for your bike?
- What is meant by IGLOO, HOG and Sissy bar?
- What gave the flathead engine its name, and what made it special?

## **REBELS ON SCREEN**

An outlaw astride a thundering Harley has been the star of many films. *The wild one*, which starred Marlon Brando on a Triumph and an even wilder Lee Marvin on a Harley, was the first film to feature the mythical bad biker. Made in 1954, *The wild one* was inspired by photographs of a notorious confrontation between bikers and police at Hollister, California, in 1947.

Australia's only major film about bike culture is *Stone*. The story of a motorcycle gang who seek retribution for the murder of one of their members, *Stone* was made in 1972 and still enjoys a cult following.



Grant Eadie on his 1960s-style chopper. The chopper gained widespread recognition through the 1969 cult film *Easy rider* which featured the 'Captain America' chopper.

### **Did you know?**

- Harley-Davidson turns 100 in 2003
- About 95% of Harley riders are men. Of these, 62% are aged between 35 and 49, while 10% are 50 and over.
- Motorcyclists lean over when travelling around corners. This allows the rider to corner the bend safely at high speeds. The faster riders take the corner, the further they have to lean over, otherwise the motorcycle would tip over in the opposite direction and the rider would fall off. Racing motorcyclists lean over so far that they wear holes in the knees of their racing suits.

### **Focus questions**

- Who are the 'one percenters' and why are they called that?
- In which film did Arnold Schwarzenegger ride a Harley-Davidson?
- Films like *Easy rider* and *The wild one* helped to create a special image of the motorcycle rider. What characteristics do you usually associate with members of bike clubs? Do you think this is an accurate image?

## PRE AND POST VISIT ACTIVITIES

### Discover:

- How do you 'customise' a bike?
- How many main sections of a Harley-Davidson can be bought 'off the shelf' to create your own bike?
- What are the rules governing motorcycle racing in Australia?
- Are racing bikes more like stock cars or like formula one racing cars?
- Why should motorbike riders wear jackets, gloves and boots as well as a helmet? Is it just for looks?
- How many different kinds of motorcycle are available in Australia?
- How many of the rules for riding motorbikes also apply to ordinary bikes?
- When was the first motorbike created?

### Activities:

- Create a design for a Harley-Davidson fuel tank and/or mudguards that express the way you feel about motorbikes.
- Imagine you are setting off around Australia on a motorbike in 1929. Write several key diary entries about your adventures.
- Imagine you are an advertising executive in 1918, but with today's media available to you. Design a campaign to publicise the Model J.
- Look at the 1939 Model U solo, which has been restored to near perfect condition, and compare it with the unrestored 1930 Model

BA Peashooter in the section 'Harleys at speed'. Draw up a detailed plan for restoring the Peashooter. Where would you begin? How would you go about finding parts or checking authenticity?

- Design a track for motorcross, combining basic safety with exciting hairpin bends and jumps.
- Do a painting — abstract, surreal or realist — which expresses the colour and excitement of a motorbike race.
- Design a special outfit for your own bike club, including logo, jacket design, bandana, customising for your fuel tank and pennant.
- Draw up the rules for your motorbike club.
- Design a special outfit for a motorbike club whose members are mostly women. Does your outfit meet safety requirements?
- You own a roadside cafe, and want to attract the local bike groups. How would you redecorate and what kind of menu would you offer? Are there any special facilities, such as secure bike parking, you might want to offer?
- Write a theme song for a film about outsiders.

## RESOURCES

### Websites

- The Harley-Davidson web site:  
<http://www.harley-davidson.com>
- How an engine works:  
<http://www.howstuffworks.com/engine1.htm>
- How helmets work:  
<http://www.howstuffworks.com/tire.htm>
- How mufflers work:  
<http://www.howstuffworks.com/muffler.htm>
- How tyres work:  
<http://www.howstuffworks.com/tire.htm>
- Liverpool Hospital trauma website:  
<http://www.swsahs.nsw.gov.au/livtrauma>
- Types of motorcycle tyres:  
<http://www.dunlopmotorcycle.com>
- The physics of tyres:  
<http://www.autospeed.com/A-0996/page1.htm>

### Please note

These websites were available and suitable at the time of publication. We advise that teachers should check sites before recommending them to students.

### Books

*100 Harleys, Tod Rafferty's 100 hottest Harleys*, Tod Rafferty, CIB International, New York, 1999.

*The encyclopedia of the Harley Davidson: an illustrated directory of the legendary motorcycle marque*, Mac McDiarmid, Southwater, London, 2001.



It's one thing to have your customers buy your product ... its another to have them tattoo your logo on their bodies' Harley-Davidson website.

For more information on the exhibition *Two wheeled warriors: a history of Harley-Davidson® in Australia*, visit the Powerhouse Museum's website <http://www.phm.gov.au>

For more information about education support or your booking, contact Education and Visitor Services at the Powerhouse Museum:  
Telephone — (02) 9217 0222  
Fax — (02) 9217 0441  
Email — [edserv@phm.gov.au](mailto:edserv@phm.gov.au)

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