

# MEAN MACHINES *nice guys*

By DIANE HERBST

**D**AVID Himber dreamed of having a motorcycle since he was a child. But there was a problem: his overprotective Jewish mother.

"She would not hear of me riding a motorcycle," says Himber, 68, dean of students at Yeshiva University. However, after several decades, Himber finally bought a bike. "She was very worried," he says, laughing. "That was her nature."

Himber is president of the Chai Riders (Chai is

## Chai Riders rev up for the parade

the Hebrew word for life) — a group of Jewish bikers from the Tri-State area who share not only a love of choppers but a passion for doing good works.

"We are very far from the Hell's Angels," says Himber. "As far as I'm concerned, we're not in the same category."

Adds Steven Gottesman, 48, a financier from Law-

rence, N.Y., and the club's vice president: "Everybody looks at motorcyclists like tough bad guys, but we're just family guys with motorcycles."

At the Israeli Day Parade, a contingent of some 50 bikers is expected to cruise the route. "I'm a short person to begin with, but being in the parade makes me feel 10 feet tall," says Himber. "Motorcycles and Jews don't always go together; Jewish people on motorcycles is unbelievable and it's a way of demonstrating my support for Israel, something I love."

Inevitably, viewing a

group of Jewish bikers draws quite a reaction from the crowd. One year, recalls Gottesman, as the group passed the viewing stand filled with dignitaries, Dr. Ruth Westheimer was so excited she hopped down and jumped on the back of one of the bikes for a block. Riding in the parade, Gottesman says, "is letting other Jews know that Jews ride motorcycles. The emotional connection is huge. The biggest hit is 'Oh my God, a Jewish motorcycle club, I didn't know, I didn't know.'"

Once a month, the Chai Riders meet at a kosher restaurant to bond and kibbitz. A group of choppers arriving en masse sometimes takes other patrons by surprise. At least at first. "We pull up with our motorcycles and people talk to us; they realize we are a group of nice friendly people," says Himber. "They're fascinated that we're Jewish

as well. Your average traditional Jew does not ride a motorcycle. There are exceptions to that rule but they're exceptions."

In addition to taking to the open road for the



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thrill of a ride, this group of riders — many of whom are doctors, lawyers and accountants — also perform mitzvahs (good deeds) throughout the year. Recently, the Chai Riders swept up ten women visit-

ing from Israel, all of whom were injured in war or by terrorists. Riding on the back of the choppers, the women cruised from Manhattan to West Point and back. "Seeing these girls' faces was amazing," says Lauren Secular, treasurer of the Chai Riders. "It was very touching."

Each summer, the Chai Riders trek to the Hebrew Academy for Special Children in Parksville, N.Y., a camp for children and adults with severe mental and physical disabilities. "We go up to camp and there are guys with shiny Harleys and Hondas, and the kids climb all over the bikes, press the buttons; you should see the look of the faces of these kids, it's incredible," says Gottesman. "It's the best day of the summer for the kids. You don't realize how you can impact someone."

Since its founding in the '90s, groups of other Jew-



Bikes and their riders will be adding some noise as they throttle up on Fifth Avenue on Sunday.

ish motorcycle groups have formed throughout the world, resulting in the Jewish Motorcyclists Alliance. Many of the members will be in Toronto the first weekend in June for a Holocaust remembrance ride. One of those groups is a band of Jewish British bikers, who will zoom down to the parade and join the Chai Riders. Following the parade is a film crew creating a documentary of their journeys.

Gottesman, who rides a Harley, will have one of his daughters sitting behind

him during the parade. The experience, expects Gottesman, will be another one for the memory books. "You feel like a celebrity; every block you hear, 'Here are the motorcycles, it's my favorite part,'" says Gottesman.

"You honk your horn, little kids' eyes get as big as saucers," he continues. "When you pass little boys, they get excited. Especially little Jewish boys whose mothers tell them from infancy, 'No motorcycle for you.' And it's a show of support for the state of Israel. It needs our support every day."