

Cruising without the gas-guzzling

A weekly Thursday night event shows that scooters aren't just frugal, they're fun

BY MATT GLEASON
World Scene Writer

From the back seat of a shiny orange scooter, I waved at cars waiting for red lights to turn green and a happy kid on a yellow bike in Brady Heights. Then there was the kindly pregnant lady and her beau strolling through their midtown neighborhood.

Actually, I waved to just about everyone as my scooter gang eased on by — and the folks waved back.

That's really not my style, waving to strangers and all, but it was hard not to smile and wave as I tagged along with almost two dozen scooter lovers during their regular Thursday night ride through Tulsa.

Heck, you try not to grin like a finger-painting toddler as you cruise with a swarm of scooter riders, who greet passersby with chipper, beeping horns. It's like frowning at a puppy dog.

Now, I've never ridden a motorcycle — and don't plan on it, either — but given the chance to hop on the back of Jonathan Robinson's retro-looking scooter, well, I couldn't resist. However, I did resist clinging to the long-haired 21-year-old's torso as we sped down the road. I don't roll like that, especially in a scooter gang that sounds like a roving band of weed-wackers.

So with a video camera in hand, I and Mr. Robinson began our ride about 6:15 p.m. at the Tulsa Scooters storefront on 15th Street. Then we continued through downtown;

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ONLINE

Watch a video of what happened during a recent Thursday night scooter ride.
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CRUISING

To join the next scooter cruise, meet the group at Tulsa Scooters, 3024 E. 15th St., 747-2668.

went up and over Reservoir Hill and finished the ride at a Peoria Avenue eatery, where everyone sat down for an Italian dinner.

Well, almost everyone. The toughest scooter rider you'll ever see, Steve Cook, and his pal went for burgers instead.

A fancy place like Ciao isn't for a Harley-riding fellow like Cook, who rides a custom 110cc scooter that's got the swagger and looks of a Harley without the hefty gas bill.

"They're just a blast," Cook said of the scooters he builds and sells.

Sure, motor scooters like Cook's, and the conventional sort, get amazing gas mileage. They sip the stuff, really.

Robinson's 150cc Stella, which cost about \$4,000, gets about 90-100 miles per gallon and can zip at 60-plus mph.

Robinson owns a Mazda 3, which gets almost 30 mpg. But the Tulsa Scooters salesman leaves it at home 75 percent of the time.

"They're just really fun to ride," he said. "They're light, they're easy to maneuver, and they get great gas mileage."

The morning of the ride, Robinson's friend, 24-year-

old Cara Linton, chatted with three drivers as she waited at stop signs. They each rolled down their windows just to ask about her burnt-orange 125cc Buddy.

"It makes people smile," Linton said of scooters like hers. "They make people happy. It's so much fun."

And the Buddy makes her happy, too.

"I just like the fact that it makes me feel stronger," she said. "It makes me feel awesome. I've always ridden on the back of motorcycles, like, a lot. I don't know, it's much more fun driving. It makes you feel a lot cooler than riding on the back."

Like Robinson, the effervescent Linton revels in the open-to-the-public Thursday night rides. She's also a member of the scooter gang — the Tulsa Hairy Chiefs.

The Chiefs are a fun-loving scooter gang of four that includes fellow Tulsa Scooters employees Robinson and Nathan Gray, along with her friend Brandon Coleman.

"We're a wily group," Robinson said of the Chiefs.

Robinson and Gray are known for their scooter tricks, like laying flat Superman-style on their moving scooters or standing up with their arms thrown wide.

Nancy Christy's not one for stunts, though. She's an eighth-grade English teacher who rides a baby blue 125cc Buddy. She named it Bubbles.

"She's kind of bubbly," Christy explained before a Thursday-night ride, "and, I guess, so am I — so she's Bubbles."

"They're light, they're easy to maneuver, and they get great gas mileage."

Jonathan Robinson,
on riding a scooter

Bubbles' accessories include rhinestone "earrings" on her tire valves, and a cute basket, complete with blue ribbon, attached to the back of the "totally girled-out" scooter.

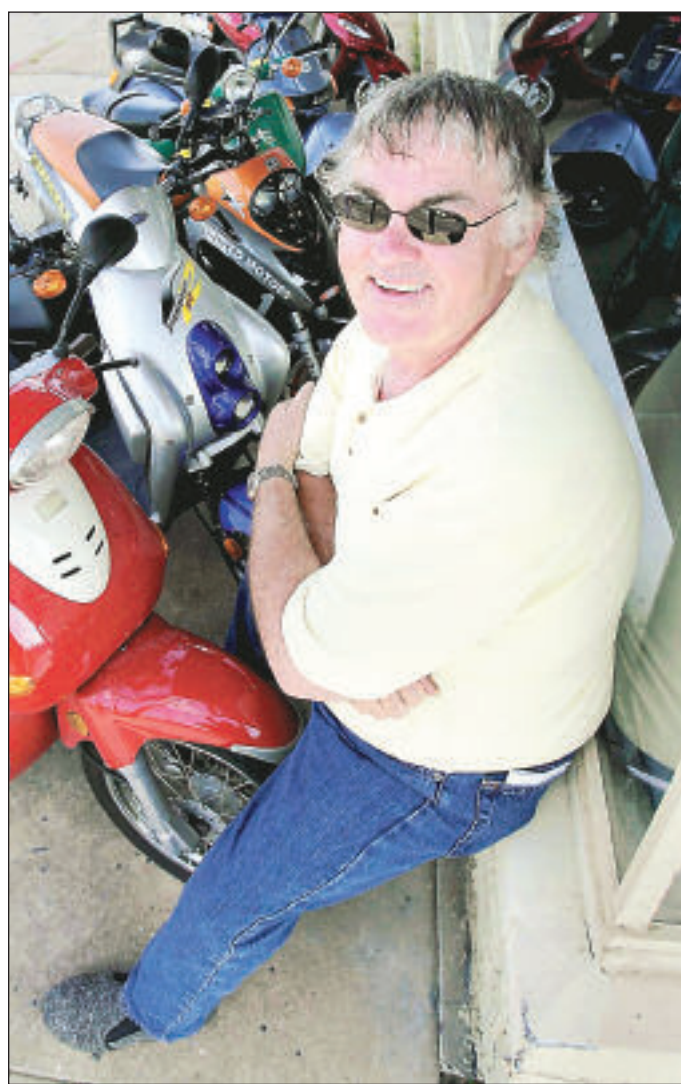
Christy rides Bubbles so much that her charcoal gray Audi TT is "real jealous now because I'm driving the baby."

At the end of the Thursday-night ride, Christy and her gang found their way to Peoria Avenue, where they pulled one by one onto the sidewalk out front of Ciao.

"You lived," Robinson kidded me as we came to a full stop.

Later, after giving me a lift back to my Camry, that same long-haired fellow left me behind as his scooter melted into traffic and buzzed away like a content hummingbird among metal giants in need of a refill.

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David Wycoff, owner of Tulsa Scooters, sits outside his shop before the start of a weekly scooter ride through Tulsa.
MICHAEL WYKE/Tulsa World

Buying tips: Don't go too small

BY MATT GLEASON
World Scene Writer

If you're ready to park your car and hop aboard a gas-friendly scooter, here's a beginner's guide to buying one at either Tulsa Scooters, 3024 E. 15th St., or at Vespa Oklahoma, 3743 S. Peoria Ave.

TULSA SCOOTERS

Price range: About \$2,000 to \$6,000

Salesperson Nathan Gray's advice for beginners:

"A common mistake of people just getting started out riding scooters is to assume that the smallest thing that they get, or 50cc, is smaller, slower and is going to be the safer thing. That's not necessarily so.

"A 50cc can be ideal if you're using it on a campground, a college campus or just in your neighborhood.

"It can be downright dangerous if you're riding out on main streets in the city, where the speed limit is 40 mph and maybe 50 mph in some areas.

"You want to be able to ride along at 40 mph, but still have a little throttle room leftover to be able to move out of the way if you have to."

Gray recommends: "A perfect example would be the Buddy 125, Buddy 150, or the 150cc Kymco.

"A Buddy 125 costs \$2,799 and gets 80-100 miles to the gallon.

"A Buddy 125 or a 150cc Kymco is good for a beginner because they are easy to learn on — they are automatic; they are electric start with a back-up kick-start.

"They are really easy to learn on, but there's plenty of growing room. You don't grow out of it. If that meets your needs, it's something



A Buddy 125 is a good scooter for a beginner because it's easy to learn on. Courtesy

that is always going to be satisfying."

VESPA OKLAHOMA

Price range: \$3,000 to \$9,500.

For beginners, Vespa Oklahoma owner Jan Tupps recommends the \$4,700 LX 150:

"It's for people who just want to drive around town. "It's a 150cc scooter capable of going 55 to 60 mph and getting 80 to 90 miles per gallon.

"The important thing about the LX is that you have enough power to keep up with traffic in the city.

"If you need to go faster than that, we have a GTS 250. It's a fuel-injected 250cc scooter. It's capable of going 90 mph.

"If you have a commute where you need to get on the highway for a short distance, it's the best choice. It costs about \$6,300 and gets 80 miles per gallon."

Beyond always wearing a helmet and staying alert, Gray had one more bit of advice:

"All the motorcycle riders, when they pass by each other, they give a little wave.

"Some bikers complained to us the other day — we were joking about it. They said, 'A lot of these new scooter riders don't wave at us. We think they are snobs.'"

"Don't be a scooter snob."



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