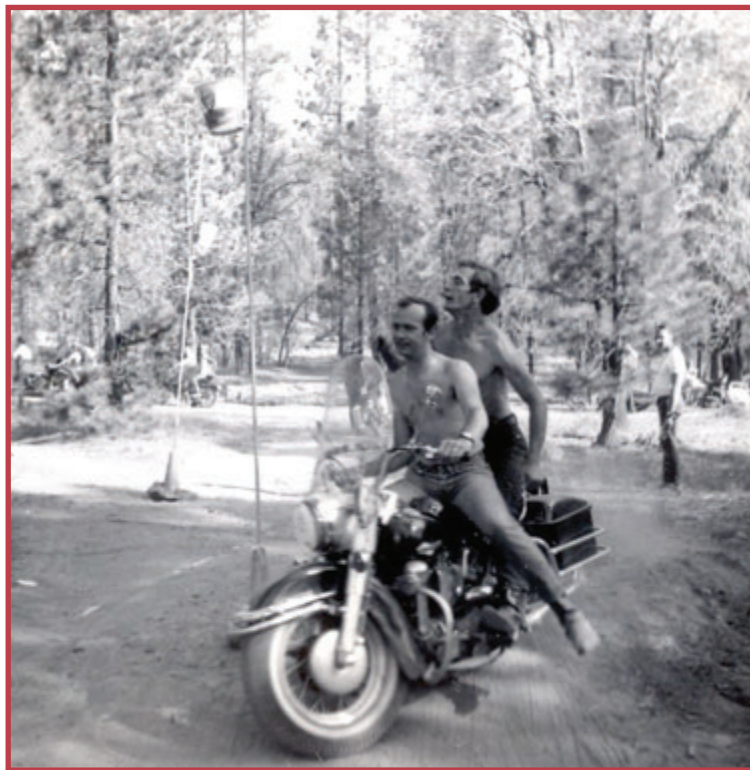


ONE WILD Mother

L.A.'s Oedipus Motorcycle Club celebrates 50 leather-clad years

BY FAITH LANSDSMAN



YOU FIRST HEAR THE SMOOTH MOAN of the sport bikes, and within moments, their colorful polycarbonate shells follow the sound around the corner. A few seconds later, as the racers are separating themselves from their machines, the low rumble of cruisers prefaces the arrival of chrome sparkling in the mottled sunlight from around the bend. It is 50 years, almost to the day, from the founding of Oedipus Motorcycle Club, and although the bikes may have changed, their mission hasn't.

Andre Rigden is the 75th leader (or Rex, as they are called) of a club that he says "has gone through several phases. The original focus was on riding motorcycles and then in the 1960s the club was known for its grand events including runs with enormous stage shows and Rex Coronations with 400 to 500 people in attendance." He adds that Oedipus "has really gone full circle back to riding." Today, members also participate in events throughout the year, supporting the efforts of other clubs. In 1958, there was not nearly this assortment of options.

Two years after Dr. Evelyn Hooker presented her paper to the American Psychological Association reporting her finding that gay men were as well-adjusted as straight men, Los Angeles Police Department vice was closing bars throughout Los Angeles. Lured by advertising and the widespread stories that there was a place in Los Angeles for men who didn't conform to the pastel and picket fence principle of 1950s America, gay men streamed into L. A. undeterred.

While Harry Hay and the Mattachine Society worked to end harassment of especially "presentable" and "nonswishy" gay men, another group was gathering on their Triumphs, Indians, and Harley flat-heads dressed like Marlon Brando and Elvis Presley to ride up the coast of California and into the Angeles National

Forest.

In April 1958, Jack Freed, John Hopkins, Jack Kaufman, Chuck Bennett, and Don Gath met at the Colonial Bar to talk about starting a new motorcycle club. These particular men were considered on the radical end of the spectrum, insisting upon using both first and last names on their membership rosters, an audacious statement at the time.

The story of the group's unusual name is repeated as an oral tradition among members. Freed, as the legend goes, greeted everyone with the salutation, "Hey motherfuckers!" as he walked into the Colonial Bar while the group was trying to decide on a name for the newborn club.

"That's it! We'll become The Mother Fuckers!" and while they laughed, they did adopt the name of Oedipus, recalling the man who did have sex with his mother. The movie starring Douglas Campbell had been released the previous year.

And so Oedipus, the second oldest continuing gay motorcycle organization in the world, was christened. Satyrs Motorcycle Club, also of Los Angeles, is the oldest by four years.

The 26 active members of Oedipus today hail from Silverlake to Chatsworth, Laguna Beach to Lancaster

and on the last Sunday of every month, 10 or more men suit up in leather to ride the waves of Southern California's mountains and back roads.

This Sunday, Oedipus has ridden over 200 miles to Julian, Calif. in 100-degree July heat. Men take off their helmets revealing sweaty faces of all ages and colors. Jeff Emery is the taller half of Jeff and Tuan, who will be married in August under the watchful (and playful) eye of their son, 5-year-old Anthony. Jeff and Tuan alternate rides so that one can be with Anthony, but usually meet up with the

group for lunch where Anthony is referred to as Oedipus Rex 2022. This family is the embodiment of change that this group has witnessed within the last 50 years.

The group will be celebrating their 50th anniversary with a gala at the Friendship Auditorium in Los Feliz on Sept. 20. Video from the club's current crop of members will be shown at the event as well as archival footage from a 1960s Oedipus event. Jim Burroughs, the senior member at 73 years old, and his partner Howard teach throughout the year at the California Superbike School at Willow Springs Raceway, near Edwards Air Force Base—their knee-to-the-ground stunt racing is exhilarating. The event will also feature photographic archives dating back to 1958 including photos of the 1964 Rex Coronation at the first Gauntlet on Highland Avenue. Books crowded full of photos, member lists, and event programs have been kept by every secretary throughout the years and will be displayed. Looking back at the men in jeans and leather jackets, the photos could be from a scene at this Sunday's beer bust but it is, in fact, a rare look at the lesser known Los Angeles gay scene of the '50s, '60s, and '70s. For tickets to this event, go to www.omcla.org.

