

# STARTING A CLUB

Share your favorite pastime with your favorite people, cruising down the road.

> By **Alisa Clickenger**

**S**unshine on your shoulders, warm wind buffeting your helmet, everything running right and feeling tight as you ride down the road. Whether it's around the neighborhood or across the country, riding with the people you closely connect with can be one of the most rewarding motorcycling experiences. Starting your own motorcycle riding club might be the ticket to finding that rich experience of commonality in our lives. Here are a few pointers to get your wheels rolling.

First, create a vision for the club and craft a mission statement to maintain the focus of the group. Do you want to take weekend jaunts through local hill country, or perhaps more challenging and daring riding on dirt roads? Connect with existing like-minded riding pals to determine their buy-in. Ask for firm commitments from your friends to assist in forming a club, so you can share the workload, leadership responsibilities and to create a contingency plan to keep the club going when you are indisposed.

Next, develop a logo and consider trademarking it. "If your logo is original and your club takes off, you may want to get trademark protection for it," said Dave Rankine, a retired lawyer and member of the Airheads Beemer Club, who has put several entities together.

It is best to find a lawyer or paralegal who knows intellectual property law. You can guess which is cheaper. Register your logo either with your state or the federal patent office. Trademark protection is good for 10 years and is renewable indefinitely, but you must refile each time and indicate that the mark is still in use, if you want to keep it.

Perform both online and offline research to discover clubs and other

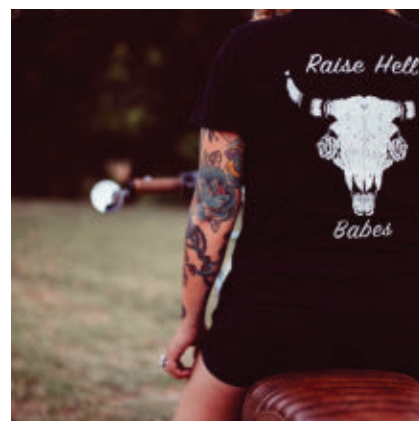


**Clubs often have a shared common interest that goes beyond a love of riding motorcycles. Increasingly, women's clubs are forming, nationwide.**

businesses in your area, so you're not inventing an entity that already exists. Check with local motorcycle shops to find out what they know about other groups. Then, contact the clubs in your area and let them know of your intention to start a new organization.

Good community relations are important between clubs, riders and within the nonriding community. If you are interested in starting a 1-percenter (outlaw) club, there's a more formal process for gaining permission from existing clubs to protect your interests.

Next, define how you want to construct the club. Clubs can range from casual internet or email-based meetup groups to full-on formal organizations. Social media has made organizing groups and meetings equally fulfilling and less time consuming with less formality and a tailor-made communication infrastructure. An entire club can be



informally operated from social media, or it can be used as a tool to further advance the cause of a more formal club.

On the formal side, your club can be a dba, or it can be incorporated, in which case most states require there be officers such as president, treasurer and secretary. A paralegal or attorney who has incorporated other entities can also set this up for a fee. If you decide to incorporate, you have to file annual paperwork with the state to keep your corporate status. It is also possible to



**Though essentially a solitary pastime, riding with a group as a member of a club—as big or as small or as organized as you want it to be—can be quite enjoyable.**

start a new chapter of a bigger club, where much of the legwork has already been done.

“We wanted to grow our tribe,” said Jen Dalton, co-founder of The Litas Austin. “We wanted more amazing female riders to ride with. We had an amazing group of female riders already, but when we discovered what Jessica Haggett was doing with The Litas worldwide, we became very eager to grow and help empower women. A couple of us were sitting around thinking of group names, group ideas, logos, and we agreed that The Litas best represented what we wanted to stand for. We all wanted to be a part of something bigger than just our small group.”

Many motorcycle clubs choose to become an American Motorcyclist Association chartered club. The charter fee with AMA in 2018 is \$50 and they have a complete set of online guidelines to make starting a club easy for founders. This is a good option for enthusiasts who ride together, particularly if they will be hosting events, as sanctioning and economical event insurance coverage can be obtained through the AMA.

Another way to protect yourself is to get certified by the IRS as a 501(c)(7) social club for liability protection. “The club can’t be sued for negligence, only for intentional or reckless conduct,” said Rankine. “To do this you have to be

incorporated as a nonprofit.

“You’ll need articles of incorporation and bylaws that will be acceptable to the IRS. There’s a 20-plus page application form that is best prepared by a CPA who has done that kind of work before. Eventually the IRS will tell you if you qualify, and then your club is officially a tax-free entity. Don’t forget to file paperwork with the IRS annually, or they will negate your status as a nonprofit.”

If you decide to charge membership dues, it’s important to develop a dues structure and a purpose for the funds. Make sure everyone pays the dues, even the president, treasurer and your best friend. Feeling equal is important for everyone in the club, and this investment in your group generates trust and allegiance.

Funds can be used for organizational expenses, to rent space, to host events, to support the educational, mechanical or gear needs of members, or can be donated to charitable organizations. The only limit is the imagination of the members.

There are few things better than exploring our passion for motorcycling with like-minded people. Bringing people together is something to be proud of, as is dedication to transforming a vision into reality. Have a good time riding with friends and know that the legacy you’ve created might inspire several generations of riders. **MCN**

## GETTING MORE MILEAGE FROM SOCIAL MEDIA

**E**llie Rains just wanted some folks to ride with. What she ended up with was a community. Four years later, Rains’ Facebook group has almost 14,000 members and is adding new members daily.

The group evolved to have several regional subgroups and has become a hub of information for all types of riders. Many women think of the group as a club and, in response to increasing demand, Rains has developed patches for the women to show their pride in the organization.

New riders, women wanting to get started riding, experienced riders and long-distance riders all post to the group. “Our group is a good tool for all types of riders,” Rains said. “It takes a village, and inside the group, the support happens organically. We’re a safe haven, with moderators, no drama. It’s an excellent place to find information, people with whom to ride and stay, if you’re a woman traveling on a motorcycle.”

“To hear a woman say, ‘I’ve always wanted to ride a motorcycle; I’ve always been a back-seat rider and I never thought I could do this,’ and giving them the inspiration or push to do it is so fulfilling,” group member Jen Dalton said. “I’ve been told that watching my journey has given them the courage to start riding, to ride harder, to make a difference. These are rewards that no one can take away, and are not counted by likes or comments, just pure happiness.”

—Alisa Clickenger

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