

# Truly, it's a numbers game Toronto

*Free parking for motorcycles. Now you have it, now you don't. Riders in the Greater Toronto Area deal with a stubborn issue as their numbers increase.* ~ By Nancy Irwin

At the Toronto Motorcycle Show in February I saw a flyer that looked a lot like a Monopoly board, but instead of Get Out of Jail, there was No Free Parking in the corner, and different fees if you land on certain streets. It was an invitation to attend a meeting held by concerned bikers. The subject: a proposed change in Toronto's bylaws that would dramatically affect riders.

I saw the flyer at the exact time the meeting was to start so walked quickly across the showroom floor to Salon 109. There I found a meeting hosted by Dave Millér from the Motorcyclists Confederation of Canada, Peter Swinton (independent) and Bob Ramsay representing the Motorcycle & Moped Industry Council.

Turns out some people don't like the fact that motorcycles enjoy free parking here in Toronto. I can understand that. Envy comes in many shades and forms. If you're driving a large pickup truck, for example, it would be upsetting to watch a motorcycle slip into a small space between cars that no small car could fit, then watch the rider walk away without a care (but that their bike might be knocked over). Some city councilors think we are a cash cow! We used to park between cars for free. We just had to make sure the marked spot was paid for. If not, we paid for the car that was parked there. Generally, we were not ticketed.

Since the city started with the cellular meter system where you pay by coin or credit card and get a slip, we riders had trouble. Our slips could be stolen off the bike, taken by the wind, or sometimes simply not found by the parking patrol. We started getting tickets—so much so that many of us stopped riding downtown. Might as well drive a car, pay the same price, and not get a ticket.

In 2005, council without fanfare passed a bylaw proposed by Toronto City councilor Case Ootes. Council encouraged the smaller vehicles that consume less fuel, reduce gridlock and occupy less space when parking. Our troubles were over. We were encouraged to ride downtown and leave the car at home.

It took a few years, but there are now streets (like Temperance) that have a long line of motorcycles parked in summer. I fear one being knocked over, producing a domino effect. And while it seemed the cost of motorcycle insurance was killing new sales, as was evident by the closing of long established businesses, in the last few years, motorcycle registration in Toronto has nearly doubled. (The same is not true of cars. For those who want figures, from 2005 through 2012, car registration went from 1,017,117 to 1,023,775. Motorcycles went from 13,488 to 21,380.) If you happen to like bikes, this jump is encouraging.

I might add that the streets of Toronto have also seen a dramatic increase in e-bikes, and bicycles. Slowly, designated bicycle lanes have appeared. And therein lies another problem. Bicycles and e-bikes are allowed in those lanes, but not motorcycles. We are to sit patiently behind cars when there's a large clear path beside us. I'm not suggesting we run over bicycles, but if we are capable of traveling at speeds of one mile per hour or less in traffic, surely we could travel at bicycle speed

along with the bicycles. Many do when uniforms aren't in sight.

Back to the parking issue. In 2013, a city staff report recommended charging motorcycles. They wanted a Pay By Plate system in place, where we type our plate into a computer and then pay. It was suggested that motorcycles get 300 designated parking spots downtown, which might mean 10 bikes per location. Bikes there might pay 25 or 50 per cent of what cars pay. But there are way more than 300 motorcycles that park downtown on a good day. So what about the other bikes? Do they pay car rate downtown? Will bikes pay full car rate outside of downtown? Or will they park for free? In downtown Toronto, people who drive to work park in underground lots, rather than run out to the meter every three hours. But those lots have signs saying no motorcycles allowed.

This is not encouraging motorcycles. Canada is committed to the Kyoto protocol. Toronto's new mayor John Tory is committed to reduced traffic congestion as well as better public transportation, or so



**NO FREE PARKING:** e-bikes such as the one on this page have seen a dramatic rise on the streets of Toronto in the last few years, and so have motorcycle registrations. That should be good news for a highly congested city, but there have been reversals of municipal policy that might have allowed free parking for two-wheelers.

he stated pre-election. Motorcycles take up less space, and use less fuel. Free parking definitely encouraged me to ride downtown.

A study was done in Brussels back in 2011 that concluded congestion could be reduced by 40 per cent if they could get 10 per cent of people to switch from cars to a bike or scooter. And more bikes made car drivers more aware of them, which made bikes safer. When I think of the reverse, 10 per cent of people switching from bikes to cars, congestion increases!

Right now we have free parking, that is until the proposed new Pay By Plate comes in. But then Deputy Mayor Norman Kelly made a motion to remove charging us, which council approved. Phew! A year later staff said they would start charging anyway, and Mayor Tory agreed. The staff report talks of charging in the 300 dedicated spaces but says nothing about the rest of street parking. Now there's a Public Works and Infrastructure Committee comprised of six city councilors dealing with this plan to charge bikes. (GTAMotorcycle.com forum Motorcycle Parking Fee will keep updating.) The public can voice an opinion, in person, if we know when the meeting is going to happen, but we don't. It will be at one of six meetings throughout this riding season, and there will be five days notice given on the city's website. We can only speak at this hard-to-find committee meeting. After that it goes to council. If you care, contact your councilor and Mayor John Tory—every voice counts.