

Billy Joel motorcycle collection in Sag Harbor

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Galleries



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Billy Joel didn't start out as a collector of motorcycles. It just turned out that way.

Like his passion for boats, cars and, of course, music, the Rock and Roll Hall of Famer's love of motorcycles has grown along with his firsthand knowledge and personal experience.

For his first exhibit, "Billy Joel's Motorcycle as Art and Icon," he hand-picked 20 bikes from his collection, including many that he designed himself, to display as art and as possibilities for other collectors.

PHOTOS: [Click here to see photos of Billy Joel's motorcycles](#)

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Are you excited about your motorcycle exhibit?

I don't know what to expect. I've never done anything like this. The motorcycles that I've designed are essentially new bikes that I've made look like old bikes. They're kind of retro-styled. . . . I've become used to all the conveniences of modern technology, but I still like how the old things look. I do the same thing with the boats. . . . I probably do the same thing with music.

It sounds like a pretty good formula. What attracted you to bikes in the first place?

I used to ride back in the '60s. I started out on British bikes. I had a BSA - that was my first bike. . . . They vibrated like crazy, but they were a lot of fun. They were kind of fast and they were zippy. I stopped and then I kind of got back into it in the late '70s. I picked up the habit again and I start just getting motorcycles. It's much less expensive than boats and cars and it's a fun hobby. . . . Little by little, it became a collection. I didn't really mean to be a collector. I like to ride these things. . . . I now have 31 motorcycles and it's kind of dopey, having that many bikes. I'm running out of space.

Is the thrill the same when you ride today?

I guess. There's an element of risk involved. But I really don't have a death wish and I have no desire to have an accident. I was in a motorcycle accident in '82 - a car ran a red light - and it messed up my hands pretty bad. I try to be pretty careful on a motorcycle. They're not the safest things in the world, and it's mostly the cars that cause the problems. Of course, I shouldn't talk with my accident record. (Laughs) You know, I could be one of the problems.

I'm going to guess you'd rather be out on a boat than on a motorcycle. Is that fair to say?

No, it's really six of one, half a dozen of the other. If I can't get out on a boat, I can just as easily hop on a bike and take a scoot. I like going places by motorcycle. It's green. They don't use anywhere near the gas a car uses. You can park anywhere. You can fit four or five motorcycles in one car parking space. . . . They're fun. You're actually more in touch with your surroundings when you're on a motorcycle.

Do you see motorcycles as art?

I remember when I was a little kid and seeing a full-dressed [Harley-Davidson](#). It was almost like seeing - I don't know - a buffalo. It was very impressive. I remember looking at all the detail on it. There's a famous painting by [Norman Rockwell](#), which is exactly that scene, these kids looking at a full-dressed [Harley-Davidson](#) - fringes hanging off of the bike and badges hanging all over it and lights and rails . . . and that's one of my favorite paintings.

The newer bikes are more about the speed and the handling.

They are aerodynamic and they are very fast. They're super fast. As a matter of fact, they're almost too fast for people to drive them. They don't even function well unless you're going over 70 miles an hour - a lot of these bikes. . . . It's not always about speed. A lot of it is just about the experience of two-wheeling it. It's

similar to when you were a kid and you got a bicycle. You were independent. All of a sudden you could get from Point A to Point B on your own - under your own power. The motorcycle is that multiplied.

So the speed doesn't interest you anymore?

Well, I can't say that. If I get to ride on a track or if there's a stretch of road where you can really open her up - one of these old Ducatis or these old Moto Guzzis - they go damn fast. WHAT "Billy Joel's Motorcycle as Art and Icon"

WHEN | WHERE 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily through June 20, until 8 p.m. Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, Christy Building, 3 Madison St., Sag Harbor

INFO Free; 631-725-7000, 20thcc.com

See photos of Billy Joel's motorcycle collection