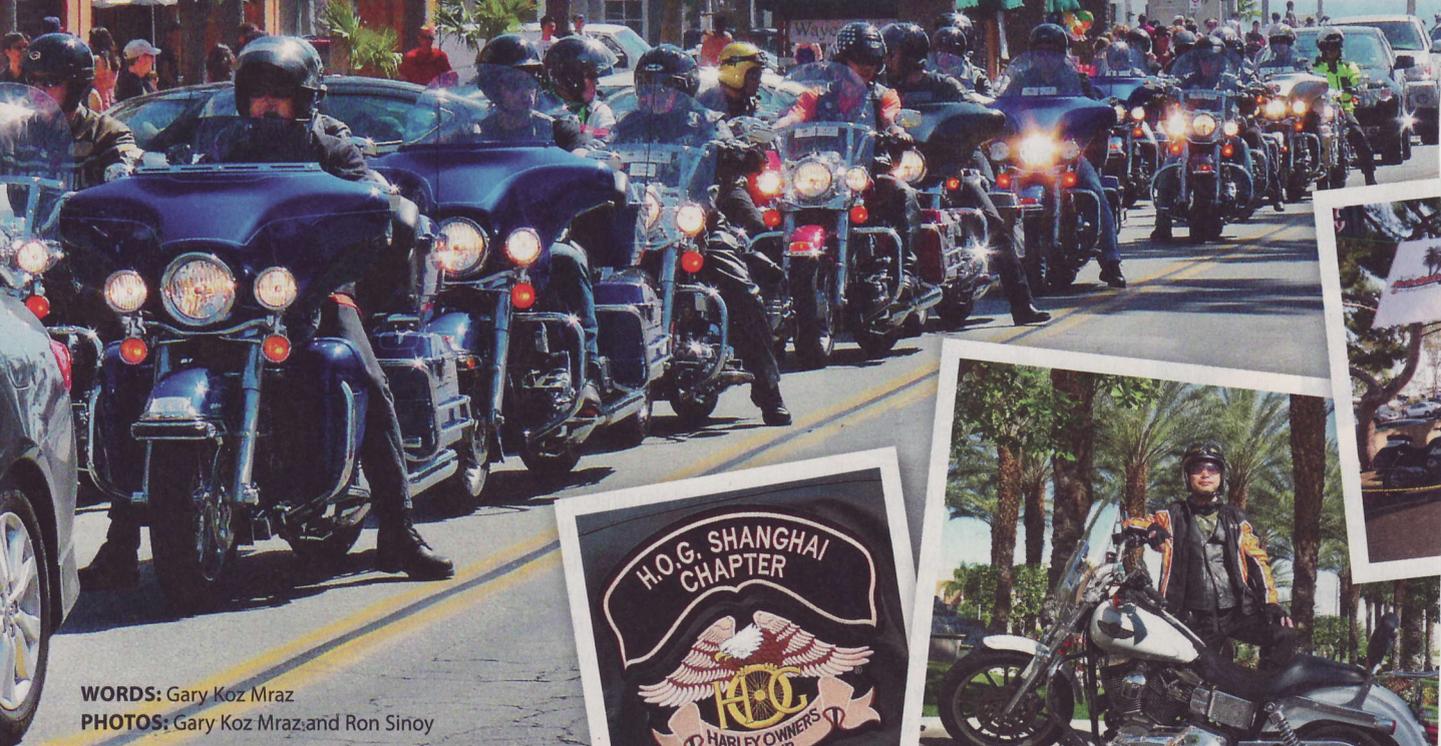


SHANGHAI HOGS

“ I do not have long hair or a tattoo, but I have freedom in my heart ”



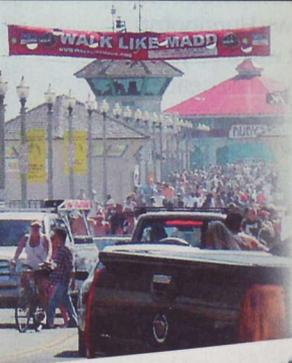
WORDS: Gary Koz Mraz
PHOTOS: Gary Koz Mraz and Ron Sinoy





Shanghai HOGs at Surf City Harley in Huntington Beach

RIDING FREEDOM DREAM MACHINES IN THE USA



For the first time in the annals of American motorcycling, a Chinese Harley Owners Group (HOG) Chapter visited the US. They rolled through Orange County, California, to Surf City Harley on Main Street in downtown Huntington Beach, then headed to San Diego, Palm Springs, and on to Las Vegas. Most of the riders had never been to America and didn't speak English. Steve Wasser, director

of business planning and former managing director of China at Harley-Davidson rode with the Shanghai HOGs for a day. "Harley-Davidson has opened seven dealerships in China already with two more slated for this year," Steve stated. "Time will tell what the Chinese Harley-Davidson user community will look and feel like, but without a doubt, Chinese motorcycle riders have embraced Harley-Davidson as a creative expression of personal freedom." The group was led by American Jim Rice, governor of the American Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai, CEO of CSM foods, and more

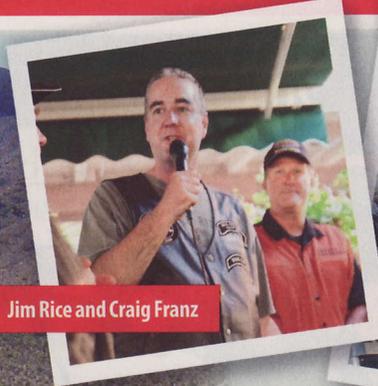
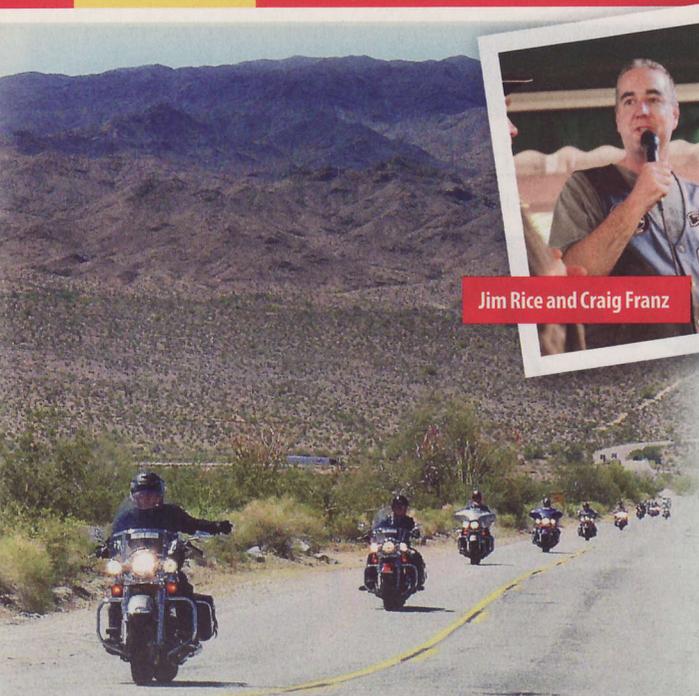
importantly, road captain of the Shanghai HOG chapter for the past two years. Jim has been living in China for 20 years and is fluent in Mandarin and other Chinese dialects. A Southern California native, Jim has a residence both here and in Shanghai. "Basically, these are all my friends," Jim affirmed. "We ride every weekend in Shanghai, and I wanted them to experience riding a Harley-Davidson in my home turf."

Sweet and Sour Pork

The Shanghai HOGs can enjoy the sweet taste of motorcycling freedom in the US, but in Shanghai that freedom is soured because motorcycles are restricted from Chinese highways and many roads inside the outer ring road of the city. In the congested urban



Long Beach motorcycle officers and Shanghai HOGs



Jim Rice and Craig Franz



streets across the rest of China, city officials restrict motorcycles rather than cars in order to decrease traffic. The largest 80 cities across China have some sort of motorcycle licensing, riding, or ownership restrictions. But surely, that will change and touring China will become big business.

Consider that in 1999, China had only 3,800 miles of highway; now it has more than 40,000 miles of highway and 2.3-million miles of paved public roads. In three years, China will have the most extensive highway system in the world, passing the United States. All the major motorcycle manufacturers

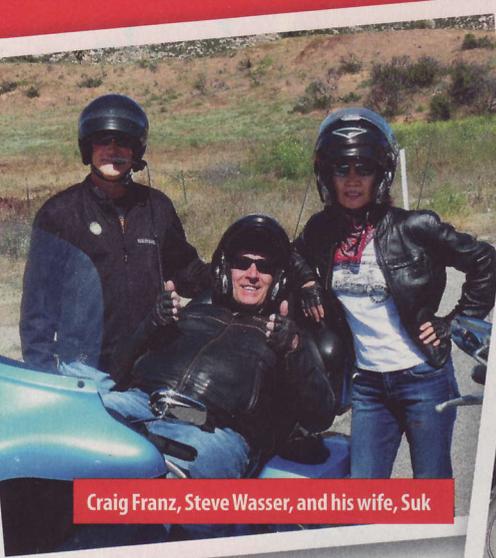
are now vying for a place in the Chinese motorcycle marketplace but only one carries such allure and mystique. With more than one-million paying members, HOG is the world's largest motorcycle riding organization and Chinese Harley-Davidson sales and the Chinese HOG chapters are on the rise. "I am a member of Shanghai HOG, and we will develop our own biking culture," Alden Yan, sales representative at the Shanghai dealership says. "I do not have long hair or a tattoo, but I have freedom in my heart."

The Adventure Begins

Twenty-eight Shanghai HOGs took possession of their shiny Harleys at Laidlaw's H-D (EagleRider) in Baldwin Park, California, and rode to Orange County Harley, then Harley of Westminster's retail shop, followed by Surf City Harley, on Main Street in downtown Huntington Beach. It was a very hot Saturday at the beach and these HOGs realized they were not in Kansas (I mean Canton) anymore. "Very



Palm Springs scenic overlook on Hwy 74



Craig Franz, Steve Wasser, and his wife, Suk

Living the dream, Jun and Zhang Yi



small clothes," one rider remarked as two stunning bikini-clad beauties passed by; no need for translation. Surf City is the companion store to Westminster Harley and owner Craig Franz had adopted the Shanghai HOGs from day one. From Huntington Beach they headed to Long Beach with lights flashing and sirens blaring. Long Beach police motorcycles escorted the Shanghai HOGs to the Forbidden City restaurant to a rousing welcome by the Long Beach Qingdao Sister City Association. Long Beach is the sister city to Quindao, or more well-known in America by the spelling of the beer produced there, Tsingtao. There Craig received a flag of Shanghai and an invite to visit and ride on their home turf. "This is an honor to be part of history," Craig beamed. "I will fly this flag proudly." He helped plan all their routes, stops, and ended up riding with the Shanghai HOGs for five consecutive days.

The next leg of our adventure took us from San Diego to Palm Springs, miles of mountain roads on big Harley Electra and Street Glides. I was concerned this would be challenging for the uninitiated, until Jim

reminded me: "That's the terrain Shanghai HOGs feel most at home in, remember, they can't ride the highways in China." I can't imagine what was going through their minds, leaving the expanse of the blue pacific of Del Mar, climbing 7,000 feet into the San Jacinto Mountains, then dropping into the desert basin. Stopping at the scenic overlook, their excitement was obvious. I've ridden that route many times and always marvel at the spectacle and diversity we motorcyclists have here in SoCal.

Up-close and Personal

Finally sitting down to dinner and spending time with the riders, I was captivated by their enthusiasm and was fortunate to meet Jun and Zhang Yi. Jun grew up sharing a bicycle with his father who made \$30 a month to clothe, feed, and house his family. At 39, Jun is the sales manager of a large marine paint company. Zhang, 36, is a doctor of



traditional medicine and a teacher; both actively raise their eight-year-old daughter, Shelly. When I queried how he first learned about Harley-Davidson, Jun replied, "Terminator 2." But it wasn't until the movie *Armageddon*, some eight years later, that he knew what the brand-name was. "I freeze-framed the DVD until I could read the logo on the tank, and it said Harley-Davidson." As the economy and his family grew, that image of his

dream freedom machine never left his mind. Jun calls it "his first eye," translated to "love at first sight." Now a successful businessman, he recalls the evening dinner with his family when he broached the subject. "I want to buy a Harley-Davidson motorcycle," he proclaimed. Zhang looked at him quizzically and replied, "I saw the Harley-Davidson sign, it's a new store, and we can go there and look at motorcycles tomorrow." To his surprise, not



Slow-speed spill



High-speed thrill

only was Zhang informed, she wholeheartedly supported the idea and they purchased an 883 Sportster. Paying the equivalent of \$18,000 dollars (double the U.S. price), he waited four months for a motorcycle he never even got a chance to testride. Purchaser #60 at the Shanghai Harley Dealership, Jun described his first ride home as "a nervous groom on wedding day." He rode only to work and home for a month to gain his confidence and control. Zhang had absolutely no reservation about hopping on back and riding the shiny new Harley with her husband. In fact

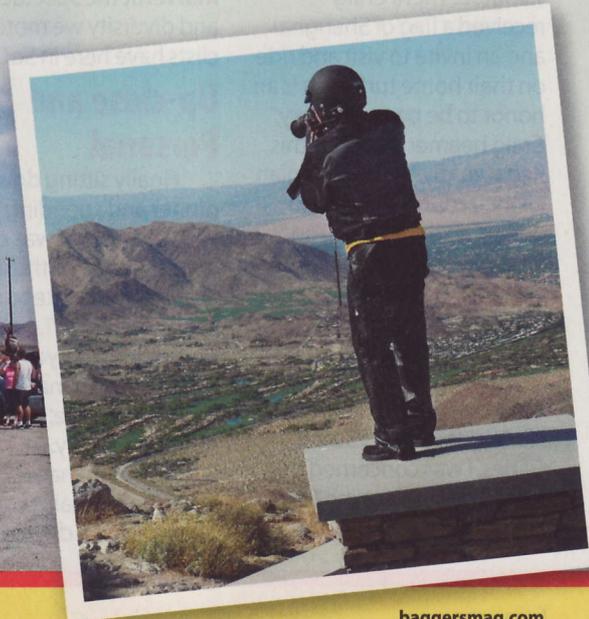
it wasn't long before they both decided to sell the Sporty and purchase a more spacious Dyna. The couple just glowed while recounting their story. Zhang is learning to ride the Dyna herself—a very rare sight in China.

Viva Las Vegas

The next morning we rode through Joshua Tree National Park, and the scenery was surreal. The rocks take on a strange liquid-like form as if floating gravity free. It's incredibly diverse, filled with tall wispy Ocotillo, Cholla, and Joshua Tree armies that loomed before us

as if defending their arid empire. It was an absolutely beautiful ride. Yeah, there were a few spills along the way. The Chino-tourists just didn't realize that straying 1-inch off the pavement into desert sand meant no recovery, but no one was worse for the wear, and a few battle scars make for good stories back home. The back way to Vegas via Amboy is probably one of the most iconic rides in Southern California. Between the small two-lane roads, sweeping desert panoramas, and a stop at Roy's on Route 66, it just doesn't get any better...

until Vegas. As much as I loved riding with the Shanghai HOGs, I knew they would disappear into the pulsing electric fabric that is Vegas, and we bade farewell. I felt a sense of loss as they rode off into the sunset—the Shanghai HOGs changed me. I had been to China in the early '90s, visited the Forbidden City, the Great Wall, and Summer Palace, but I was an outsider, a curiosity. I now felt a connection to the human element; the faces and lives of these Chinese were no different than my neighbors next door. They, like me, want nothing more than





Yours truly, contemplating my freedom dream machine



to ride freedom dream machines into the wide-open expanse.

There's much debate about China's role in our global future but that's generally between big government and big politics. The heart of China is people; people who want better lives for themselves and their children. I admire how the young Chinese businessmen and women embraced growth and opportunity. Jun's brand-new Harley-Davidson Dyna Wide Glide cost twice

as much in China than in the country it's made. In China he and Zhang eat pastries at their local Starbucks imported from CSM, the very company their Shanghai HOG road captain is the CEO of. These Shanghai HOGs are willing to pay more as consumers for Western products and culture. Competing with price isn't necessarily a solution, competing with quality, innovation, branding, and compelling media is marketable, and that's what we in the West do best. **B**