

FLYING OLD GLORY ON MOTORCYCLES

By Shelly Horan

With special thanks to Princess of Chrome Angels

Bikers are an incredibly patriotic crowd. I often see the U.S. flag gracing the rear of motorcycles as we ride around... bringing a lump to my throat at the display of such pride. For those thinking about adding flags to your bike, consider this... there is a protocol for displaying this patriotic symbol. While it's

not specifically addressed in the U.S. Code, as it is when dealing with an automobile, you can read between the lines to determine how the flag should be flown on the back of your ride.

When the United States flag is flown alone on your motorcycle, flag etiquette calls for it to be either centered on the

bike or mounted to its "marching right"; its own right as the vehicle is moving forward (which would be the right side of the motorcycle to the rider's perspective when sitting astride).

If the U.S. flag is displayed on your bike with another flag of any type, it should be positioned to its "marching right;" that is, to the rider's right sitting on the motorcycle. When the U.S. flag is on your bike with other non-national flags (POW/MIA, service banners, fraternal flags, etc.), the U.S. flag is placed at the center and at the highest point of the group. According to the United States Flag Code, NO flag should ever be larger or displayed higher than the U.S. flag. If the U.S. flag is displayed on your bike with those of any other nation, the flags should be approximately equal in size and flown from separate staffs of the same height, with the U.S. flag to the marching right and other countries' flags arranged to the left in alphabetical order in English. International usage forbids the display of the flag of one nation above that of another nation in time of peace. The order of precedence for flags generally is nations first, states (host state first, then others in the order of admission) districts and territories (Washington DC, Puerto Rico, etc.), military (in order of establishment: Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Coast Guard, Air Force), then any others.

Also noteworthy, when the American flag is painted on the side of a motorcycle or other vehicle, the custom is that the stars face toward the front of the vehicle, regardless of which side the flag is on (giving the impression that the flag is flying in the wind as the vehicle moves forward). The flag of the United States of America represents a living country and is itself considered a living thing. Proper display reflects pride in country and respect for your motorcycle!

Taking this one step further, there are also proper procedures for disposing of U.S. flags when they are old, torn, worn, or dirty. The flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning.

Most American Legion Posts regularly conduct a dignified flag burning ceremony, often on Flag Day, June 14th. Many Cub Scout Packs, Boy Scout Troops, and Girl Scout Troops retire flags regularly as well. Contact your local American Legion Hall or Scout Troop to inquire about the availability of this service.

