

The Skull and Crossbones take to Two Wheels

Nevin Power

There's football, both Gaelic and association (or soccer for people whose eyebrows have used raised a bit), there's rowing, there's tennis, there's even a winter sports club here in UCC and you have probably heard of all of them. Anecdotally it seems that when people think of clubs they automatically think of green pitches and lots of bodies running around kicking or hitting something but this is not always the case and so it may come as a surprise to you but among the many clubs here in UCC is motorcycle club. No green pitches, no running around and although I can't say that kicking or hitting things never occurs (after all these are fantastic ways to take out your frustration on a broken motorbike), there's plenty of fun to be had.

Why is there a motorcycle club here in UCC then? Simply put it is here because there is enough interest for it to be here. Motorbikes have always had an air of the exotic about them, the balance of two wheels seeming to hold a sense of adventure, of excitement and engineering and artistic brilliance. Walking through campus everyday you will see many different types of motorbikes whether they be outside the Kane building or outside the library (my own favourite parking spot!). Not all of them are familiar to the motorbike club but quite a few are with our workshop two doors down from An Scolaire on College Road being fully equipped to rebuild whole engines and repaint bikes from the ground up. This is where the fun lies – the club exists to make it possible for students to take on the challenge of rebuilding motorbikes, repairing motorbikes, repaint motorbikes and also, even without a bike of their own, to get out on one. After all, are you really going to want to see the bike you just had a hand in repairing just sit there in the workshop? No, you want to be able to get out and feel what it's like to not just turn through a corner, but to lean through a corner as the bike angles in towards a bend and you see the world from a whole new angle. Literally.

Clubs more so than societies always have an end goal whether that be to win a league, climb a mountain or simply run faster than the next guy. It might not seem obvious at first but rebuilding a motorbike is right in there with the rest of them – the goal is to make the hundreds of different parts that make up a motorbike, work together in unison so that when the start button is pushed the engine roars into life, the electrics spark up and the wheels turn and the brakes stop them. It could be described as a giant jigsaw but motorbikes, more so than your average car, work within very tight tolerances – every part of it has to be just so and this requires that everyone in the club work together as a team from the sourcing of a new part to the hammering of an engine back into place. If you drive a car you've probably had niggling problems before that you have put on the back foot. A warning light on the dashboard covered up with some tape, a tyre that has seen better days, an oil change...what's an oil change? With a motorbike everything has got to be perfect in order for it to work as safely as possible. On Wednesday nights, drawers of tools open out and work continues on the jigsaw in a way that is just so.

Teamwork is social though and without a load of room everyone has to work together in order to complete various things but it has to be fun. When things go right you can hit the bar

afterwards feeling like things are really starting to move along, that your effort has moved the project that bit further. When things go wrong you boil the kettle in the workshop, offer tea and coffee around and curse the makers of the bike while wondering if anyone else has an idea on how to get it done. Various expletives are thrown about and tools hit the ground. If you have ever seen Orange County Choppers then you have some idea except that we have no money, a much smaller workshop and no TV cameras around the place. And none of the dodgy moustaches either, in fact some would say that we're a rather attractive bunch of guys and girls.

Besides working on things in the workshop the club, like many other clubs, gets out at the weekend. On Saturday or Sunday we hit the road on our own motorbikes, have breakfast together and set off on a route that is generally predetermined and agreed by everyone. There are a lot of people who only see cars and bikes as machines which should get you from A to B with no fuss and no drama. They are a means to an end. For us though the end is the saddle and the destination is not really a major concern because the joy is being on the road. It doesn't mean you have to break the speed limit and it certainly doesn't mean you should ride dangerously but being on a motorcycle ensures that you are much more in tune with the environment around you because you are part of it, you are IN it, not looking out AT it. You might be powerless to change the date of your next assignment but when you twist the throttle handle you feel like you have every power in the world and you do – your world. You control how fast or slow you want to enter a bend, you control how far the bike leans, you control how much brake you want to use and whether you want to change gear now, or let the engine scream just a little more before you push it into the next gear.

Many say you can only really understand if you straddle a bike yourself and this is made a lot easier by the presence of a motorcycle club here in UCC. It's those hundreds of parts working in unison and you sitting on the saddle, your left foot controlling what gear you are in, your right foot hovering over the back brake pedal, your right hand controlling the throttle and front brake and your left hand ready to use the clutch. And your whole body ready to sway one way or the other, to crouch down or to sit up straight. It's an intricate dance of human and machine and you know exactly how it works because you helped to rebuild the machine, you learned how best to ride a motorbike and you know there are plenty of laughs to be had between you and the machine in front. Not to mention the movie nights, the overnight trips away, the fantastic roads and scenery and the nights out. There's something about motorcycles in there too apparently.

UCC Motorcycle Club is open to anyone with any interest in having a bit of fun and no, you don't need to own your own motorbike to enjoy it. We meet at 7:30pm in the workshop near An Scolaire (you'll see the driveway and the bright lights!). Do a search for UCC Motorbike Club and see our Facebook page for more information. Unless you prefer not to have any fun, in which case we don't think we can help you out at all.