



Robyn Tully and Claudio Sousa officially founded Scootering Manitoba

Born to be not-so-wild

Scooter and moped set have new Winnipeg club

TIM GARDNER
ALACOTT/PHOTO COLLECTION
tgardner@winnipegjournal.com

A new scooter and moped club in Winnipeg is living proof of the growing popularity of scooters in the city, say the club's two founders.

Claudio Sousa and his wife Robyn Tully founded Scootering Manitoba on Aug. 8. The couple founded the non-profit club for scooter and moped enthusiasts to organize group rides, provide information to scooter and moped owners, and to promote safe riding practices.

"At last count, we had just over 20 members," Sousa was saying earlier this week. "We're growing right now at about a member a day, but I think that will level off at some point."

Maybe not. Gerald O'Neil, a salesman with Winnipeg Yamaha Sport & Leisure, says his store has sold almost 80 scooters so far this year, almost double the number of machines Winnipeg Yamaha sold for all of last year.

And Aaron Hull, a service technician and salesman at Winnipeg's Wildwood Motorsports, says that his store has sold close to 60 scooters so far this year, considerably more than Wildwood moved during all of 2002.

Demand growing

Both O'Neil and Hull also say they foresee no immediate drop in consumer demand for scooters.

Tully has no idea why scooters have become so popular, but she remembers it wasn't that long ago when they were a bit of a rarity on Winnipeg streets. She got her scooter — a 2000 Yamaha BWS — as a birthday present from her husband and as an alternative to a car in the spring of 1998.

"We could go a whole season without seeing anybody else," says Tully.

Adds Sousa: "And around that time, I could only find three scooters

for sale in the city at the dealerships. They only had three in stock."

But after Sousa became enamored with scooters while driving his wife's a couple of times, he had a chance to buy a classic 1974 Lambretta Italian scooter in the fall of 1999. And as the couple drove around, they began to notice more scooters on city streets.

Sousa thinks he knows one reason why scooters have become popular again in Canada after reaching semi-popularity in the early to mid-1980s.

"Name me one person who doesn't admire a classic car," he says. "In recent years, you've seen the popularity of vehicles like the (new) Mini Cooper, the Volkswagen Beetle and the PT Cruiser... There's a nostalgic kind of trend you can call it. You see it in vehicles and you see it in scooters as well."

But Tully believes the fuel economy of scooters is a big attraction, too. And club member Jill Graham strongly agrees. Graham bought her 2002 Yamaha BWS last summer.

"I always wanted one (and I guess it was just the economics," Graham says. "It was cheaper than having a car and stuff like that — cheaper on gas and cheaper on insurance... I buy gas with my pocket change instead of my credit card now, so I've noticed that a lot."

In fact, Tully says she can travel approximately 100 km on three litres of gas on her scooter while a car equipped with a four-cylinder engine might have to burn 10 to 13 litres to go the same distance.

"My typical bill is \$2-30, more or less," says Tully.

Graham also claims there's just the enjoyment factor of driving a scooter.

Like Sousa and Tully, Graham also owns a car, but began riding her scooter this year during the first week in April and plans to continue doing so until the end of September.

"In my car, I feel claustrophobic," Graham says. "On my scooter, I feel free and I feel like I'm going fast, even though I'm not. And I don't get mad rage. You get frustrated in your car. You don't on your scooter."

Demand growing

Club member Joseph Tabo says he too enjoys the freedom of driving his scooter, although he also owns a car. Tabo just bought his 2003 Yamaha Vmax Classic six weeks ago, after watching the movie *Quadrophobic*, which prominently features scooters.

"In those six weeks, I've put on about 1,700 km," Tabo says. "It's just so fun that I can't stop riding it."

For motorists interested in speed, a scooter may not be the ideal vehicle, Sousa says. Most are fitted with a 49-cubic-centimetre engine and maximum speed has been restricted to 50 km/h.

However, an average new Japanese scooter costs approximately \$2,300 (excluding taxes) and is much cheaper than a car. It also is much more environmentally friendly than a car or truck.

People interested in joining Scootering Manitoba should call 298-8329 or go to the club's Web site at www.scooteringmanitoba.com. Membership is free.

Sousa has a couple of ultimate goals for the club.

"For me, it's to see safer scootering and to see 80 scooters driving down Portage Avenue some day."



Scootering Manitoba members Jill Graham (back left), Joseph Tabo and Rolf Zarrin out for a cruise on Cockburn St.

TIM GARDNER