



Driving along the Chuo Expressway. The weather was extremely mild for February and the snow on the mountains seemed strangely out of place. The sudden increase in the number of hills in the road indicated that we were approaching our destination.



An Urban Cowboy Mounts his Iron Horse and Heads out West.

There are lots of different reasons why people ride Harleys. A friend had one, a favorite singer rode one...I think everybody has their own rationale for riding. Of course there are those who just like motorbikes and one day find themselves riding a Harley, but I think that a majority of bikers are attracted by the fashion and lifestyle, they are influenced by American culture and therefore they choose to ride a Harley. I know that this is the category I belong to.

However, the term "American" covers a whole range of different concepts, for instance even American music can be divided into a variety categories such as rock, blues, jazz, country, etc. In my case, my Harley naturally comes first, but I also like Western clothes. I love the image of the cowboy galloping across the prairie. I admire the pioneers who moved westwards in search of a land of freedom. I must admit, I have not read American history in any detail, I only have a rough grasp of it from what I have seen on the TV, movies or magazines, but I like the image that cowboys

project, retaining the tough spirit of the frontier while continuing to preserve the same lifestyle. I have only ridden a horse at a riding school, but I feel that riding a Harley, an "iron horse", is just as good.

Talking of western style, there is a person in the advertising section of VIBES who is also a secret fan. His name is Murakami, but he usually answers to the nickname, Biron. Just to look at him, you would never guess that he was into Western culture, but when he went to college in the States he liked country music and he has a whole Western outfit hidden away in a cupboard at home—a hat, jacket, shirt, boots, buckle, the lot! When I dragged Biron out to go on the first run of the year, I suddenly remembered another Western fan, Ryu, who owns a secondhand Western clothing store named Tex Mex. Tokyo bikers do not go in for Western clothing much, but Ryu is different. He looks like one of the actors out of "Young Gun" and when I invited him to come with us, he agreed without a moment's hesitation. While we could hardly be described as three

pioneers heading out West, we would at least be riding our iron steeds westwards. We arranged to meet at a service area on the Chuo expressway, and no doubt to American eyes we must have made a strange trio. If I think about it coolly, I realize that it was as if three Westerners, who liked Japan, had gone out drinking together, one dressed as a samurai lord, one as a ninja and one as a Neolithic farmer. However, the temperature was about twenty degrees, there was not a cloud in the sky and as we drove along, little details like that disappeared into the wind. Yatsugatake and the Southern Alps still had snow on their peaks while nearer at hand was a small isolated section of snow marking an artificial ski slope. We carried on past all this, heading for Gifu Prefecture where we were going to visit a friend called Kudo.

Kudo has been riding a Harley since 1980; he used to work for the railway but then he became an apprentice carpenter in order to build his own house. He is now a professional log house constructor. I cannot remember if I knew him before I joined VIBES or not. I often ran into him at various meetings and I was a bit worried when I did not see much of him last year, but he told me that he had been out riding on his own. I had visited his house once before and was knocked out by the atmosphere there; it was my ideal Western home.



Biron: Vibes Advertising Dept. He loves country music and cowboy boots, but he never shows this at work.



Ryu: After traveling off and on for ten years, he now runs a secondhand Western clothing store called "Tex Mex". He visits the U.S. and Hokkaido every year.



Tetsuya: Vibes editorial staff. He does not own any shirts without snap buttons and a back yoke.