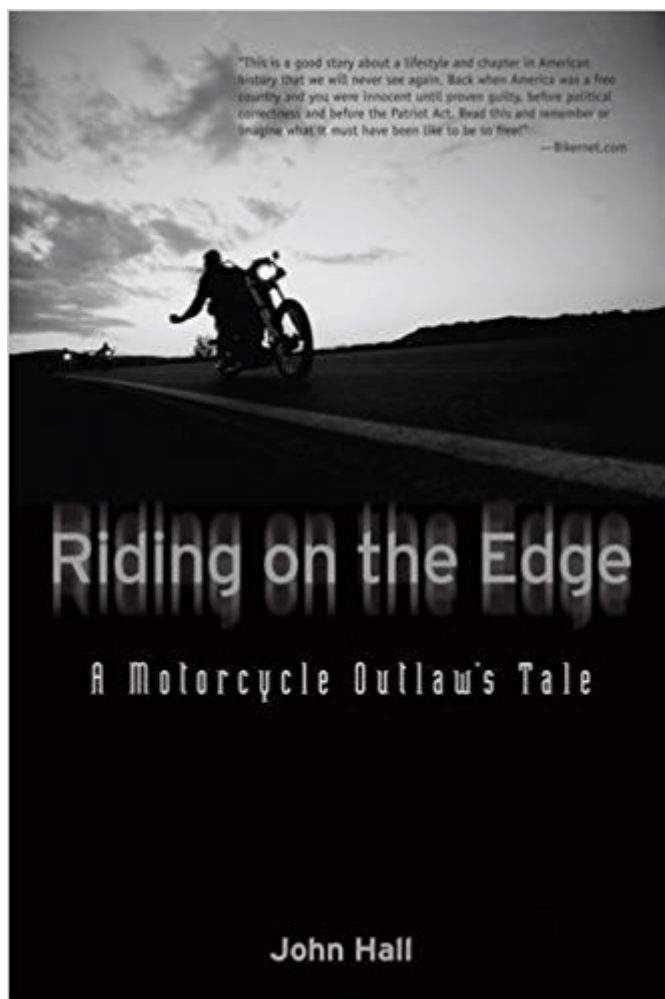


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# Riding On The Edge: A Motorcycle Outlaw's Tale



## Synopsis

Ride with author John Hall into the turbulent world of 1960s bike club culture, from his beginnings at an upstart motorcycle club to his rise to the Long Island chapter president of the Pagans, a club that the FBI called “the most violent criminal organization in America.” Follow him into the Pagan heartland of Pennsylvania where he fell in love, got in a roadhouse brawl over a honky-tonk angel, and eventually went to jail for “taking care a club business.” Now after a career as a journalist and college professor, he returns to the violent days of his youth and smashes up stereotypes like he once smashed up bars, resurrecting long-dead brothers in a style reminiscent of Jack Kerouac and Mark Twain. Hall presents them as they really were: hard living, hard loving, hard drinking, hard fighting rebels, but also hardworking, patriotic, loyal, and lovable characters. Outlaws, yes, but outlaws as American as apple pie.

## Book Information

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: Motorbooks; First edition (October 7, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0760341338

ISBN-13: 978-0760341339

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.8 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars 80 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #347,994 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #27 in Books > Engineering & Transportation > Automotive > Motorcycles > History #106 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Reference & Collections #624 in Books > Engineering & Transportation > Transportation > History

## Customer Reviews

Motorcycle.com Review by Dustin Woods (5.28.09)"Few people are able to retrospectively recount the life of an outlaw biker with such accuracy and candor as John Hall, mostly because few people so deeply entrenched within such a culture ever make it out alive. If rival gangs, bar brawls or bike accidents don't kill them, years of hard drinking and hard living usually do. Hall is an exception to these rules as he successfully transcended this great divide. Proving that sometimes our justice system actually works and men can be rehabilitated, Hall turned his life around from being the leader of an outlaw motorcycle gang the FBI called “the most violent criminal

organization in America and being incarcerated to becoming an acclaimed journalist and college professor. Hall demonstrates eloquence and intellect, traditionally unheard of with first person recounts of biker culture. Documenting historical sociological connections to the beliefs and brotherhood of medieval Vikings, Hall paints a sometimes entertaining, occasionally chilling picture of men who live beyond the boundaries of our society yet will do anything to uphold the sacred values and tradition of their heritage. While other biker clubs were merely cruising for chicks and looking for kicks, Hall explains how the Pagans became one of the most feared and respected clubs in the country. Men who lack the fear of pain, death or any consequences whatsoever create a truly unruly and terrifying opponent. The often vulgar yet intuitive book definitively explains where biker culture stems from within our society and more specifically the individual, offering incredible insight into the hearts and minds of men who were vicious and violent, while at the same time adamant at preserving the structure and sanctity of their brotherhood, at all costs. Not merely anarchy for the sake of it, Hall effectively describes this truly fascinating dichotomy. While often glorifying a lifestyle that shocked and terrified the dreams and towns of law-abiding citizens, Hall also portrays the grim reality of the consequences that befall the men who live outside the laws of society. Whether you are interested in the sociology of such sub cultures or just want to read a firsthand account of life within an outlaw biker club, *Riding on the Edge* will surely quench this thirst like a cold beer at a biker rally. "RoadRUNNER Magazine" "If you've ever dreamed of being an outlaw, you might think each chapter of *Riding on the Edge* is a badass bedtime story for adults. But if anecdotes of beer drinking and womanizing don't appeal to your inner rebel, then the thought-provoking reflections of author John Hall might interest you. A college professor and political columnist, Hall's "first life" was spent riding a Triumph in the 1960s with the outlaw club, the Pagans. Ever wondered why bikers get a bad name? *Riding on the Edge* breaks down the stereotypes and newspaper headlines to reveal the raw moments in time which spawned them. And there is no shortage of historical references or interesting facts in this book. However, John Hall's writing is so down-to-earth it seems as if you're listening to a favorite uncle spin a tale. And with characters like Satan, Big Dutch, & Sleepy weaving in and out of the storyline, you may never want that tale to end. "Steppin' Out Magazine" "Unlike a ranting hoodlum who might say whatever he feels like saying or exaggerate details, this author did his homework with regard to facts, figures and dates. This is truly a smart, solid and just plain damn good read! If you would like to take a look back through the window of time to the late 60's biker scene at its most intense level, you should pick up a copy of Mr. Hall's book."

In the 1960s, John Hall, a Harley-riding hell-raiser, hooked up with the Pagans, a group of like-minded individuals who went on to become the largest outlaw motorcycle club on the East Coast. Hall and the Pagans rode roughshod across the Eastern Seaboard throughout the 1960s, until John and six other Pagans ended up in the Pennsylvania State Penitentiary. While in prison John began taking college classes and earned several degrees. Now after a career as a journalist and college professor, he returns to the violent days of his youth and smashes up stereotypes like he once smashed up bars, resurrecting long-dead brothers in a writing style that is part Raymond Carver and part Jack Kerouac. Hall presents the Pagans as they really were: hard-living, hard-loving, hard-drinking, hard-fighting rebels, but also hardworking patriots, loyal, lovable characters, a band of brothers whose outlandish behavior forged an all-American outlaw legend in the tradition of Jesse James, Doc Holliday, John Dillinger, and Pretty Boy Floyd. *Riding on the Edge: A Motorcycle Outlaw's Tale* tells the story of John and the Pagans as they rode hard through the tumultuous decade of the 1960s, doing their damndest to die young and leave good-looking corpses. "This is a good story about a lifestyle and chapter in American history that we will never see again. Back when America was a free country and you were innocent until proven guilty, before political correctness and before the patriot act. Read this and remember or imagine what it must have been like to be so free!" *Motorcycle.com* "Few people are able to retrospectively recount the life of an outlaw biker with such accuracy and candor as John Hall, mostly because few people so deeply entrenched within such a culture ever make it out alive. If rival gangs, bar brawls or bike accidents don't kill them, years of hard drinking and hard living usually do. Documenting historical sociological connections to the beliefs and brotherhood of medieval Vikings, Hall paints a sometimes entertaining, occasionally chilling picture of men who live beyond the boundaries of our society yet will do anything to uphold the sacred values and tradition of their heritage. Whether you are interested in the sociology of such sub cultures or just want to read a firsthand account of life within an outlaw biker club, *Riding on the Edge* will surely quench this thirst like a cold beer at a biker rally." *RoadRUNNER Magazine* "Riding on the Edge breaks down the stereotypes and newspaper headlines to reveal the raw moments in time which spawned them. John Hall's writing is so down-to-earth it seems as if you're listening to a favorite uncle spin a tale."

The headline pretty much sums up the entire book - "Bunch of dirty guys drinking beer". Some good history though, especially since there's so little written about the Pagans. I enjoyed it since I grew up on Long Island where a lot of this took place. Book was ok if you enjoy reading about unshowered

thugs that are perpetually drunk and beating people up for really no reason whatsoever.

With the noteworthy exception of Donald Charles Davis' biographical "Aging Rebel" John Hall's 'Riding On the Edge' stands apart in literature. As a period piece it is a uniquely poignant and deeply drawn a portrait as will ever likely ever emerge from the crucible of the 1960s, on any subject, much less centered in as rare and esoteric a life as Dr. Hall once lived. It is a striking, vital, and profound tour de force extraordinaire.

Solid read, fairly detailed. The guy grew up in my neighborhood. Except this was in the 60-70-80s. Some of the places he mentions still exists and i knew all of the streets. Polak alley still exists and is called just that. Recommend for anybody who enjoys motorcycles and lives in Queens/Brooklyn.

Boring book. It was not interesting and I had to force myself to finish it. I've read plenty of true crime (mafia, serial killers, outlaw mc, etc) and this was dry and uninteresting. It felt like the author was hiding much of what went on in the club.

It's a fun book with some stories about the beginning days of a lesser talked about m/c. Knowing many of these guys from around my way, I have a few doubts about the validity of some of the stuff.. Well written fun read. Just don't take it as 100% historical fact.

One of the best Biker Books I've ever read. No Back Stabbing. No Squealing. No Dealing. Finally a Biker Book that pretty much tells it like it is. Honest with no hidden agenda. Not trying to beat a rap. Or written by some Rat Informer. Not some undercover bust gone sour. First hand description thru the eyes of a 1%er MC member

They all read the same, no very interesting facts..read one, read them all.. just from different folk..They are all "gangs"..yes they are..

There are several books available that detail the more sinister side of outlaw motorcycle clubs, but John Hall's story is not one of them. Rather than portraying a criminal history of the Pagans Motorcycle Club, "Riding on the Edge" reads more like a recollection of a roaming band of gypsies' grand adventure with a Jack Kerouac or Charles Bukowski edge. While it does delve into some criminal activity, the tale parallels more with the rebellious nature of youth growing up in the

turbulent 1960s than the organized-crime element associated with outlaw motorcycle clubs today. Hall presents the early days of the Pagan Motorcycle Club in Pennsylvania in somewhat of a romantic and innocent manner: a culturally-mixed band of local misfits hitting the road in search of adventure in the mid-to-late 1960s only to find trouble every stretch of the way. The entire book details a fleeting period of time when "outlaw" behavior consisted more of beer guzzling and barroom brawling with local fledgling outlaw clubs who violate Pagan "turf" ... not the RICO qualifying activities of today's outlaw clubs. Hall proves himself to be an intelligent and gifted storyteller as he tickles the reader's senses with such vivid detail. One can almost smell the grime on the greasy denim vests, taste the stale Iron City swill and clearly see the beauty and beast nature of the various women encountered along his journey. The experiences are exhilarating, raucous, dangerous and often humorous. With the Vietnam War, hippies and burgeoning drug use as a backdrop, Hall paints a last-gasp scenario of life being lived to the fullest before an anticipated end to all the freedom and fun ... more like sex, booze and brawling. Artistically woven throughout the book is the heavy influence of European culture (mainly Dutch and German) that colors the world of Hall and his fellow Pennsylvania Pagans. The constant reference of Dutch lore and colloquial words/phrases oddly tempers the stereotypical image of outlaw bikers being militant Aryan thugs. While Hall admits many fellow Pagans adorned swastikas, either painted on helmets or, like Hall, inked into his flesh; he admits the purpose is more for outlaw shock value rather than adhering to a radical ideology. "Riding on the Edge" reads as a lamenting tale of times long gone. The locale of Hall's chapter is depicted more as a Pennsylvania version of Mayberry where the bikers were more or less treated as local nuisances than part of a criminal empire. The looming change in society becomes more evident the later-half of the book as the brawling gets more violent, law enforcement gets more serious and drugs become more prevalent. As the book draws to a close, there is definite sense that the fun is over as many of the colorfully-named characters that factored so heavily into Hall's life back then (SweetWilliam, Davey SuperMouth, Gums, the Mortician et al) drop-out, disappear, are imprisoned or die. With the final chapter Hall graciously treats us to an update on several of the individuals that survived the bulk of his adventure, but I was hoping for more details. "Riding on the Edge" is old-school outlaw life, not the hyper-violent visage of the modern 1%er. It is a truly unique perspective of life during the infancy phase of arguably one of the more secretive outlaw clubs. The tumultuous and degenerate 1960s fueled the anything-goes lifestyle for John Hall and his fellow Pagans, setting up a myriad of wild adventures that Hall vibrantly recollects in his book

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