



GARY PORTER/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Rob Van Tuyle recites his poem "If Jesus Rode a Motorcycle," which speculates whether a Harley would be the favored mode of transportation, at a Biker Poetry Nite Tuesday in Centennial Hall of the Milwaukee Public Library.

Road rhymers: Biker poets open it up

Readings at library
cover range from
proctology to angels

BY MARY CAROLE MCCAULEY
of the Journal Sentinel staff

There's no force on Earth powerful enough to make us violate the sanctity of these pages by printing even one syllable of biker Ted Aliotta's poem "I'd Hate To Be a Proctologist."

Oh, all right.
"Occupational hazards? Every job has some./My daily bread and butter/Is pressed between two nuts."

You get the picture. Or maybe you don't, because Aliotta embellished his recital with appropriate hand gestures. Perhaps it's a good thing that newspapers aren't a visual medium.

That's the way it was at the Milwaukee Public Library's first

"I have good news," Library Board member Michael Hupy told audience members before the event began. "On Saturday, the day of the Harley-Davidson 95th Anniversary Reunion, the library will be open until 5 p.m. If you get tired of all the biking activities, you can come here and read a good book."

It's a tempting offer, but judging by Tuesday night's attendance, it's unlikely many people will take Hupy up on it. There were many more biker-poets and library administrators and reporters and film crews in the 700-seat Centennial Hall than there were actual members of the audience.

City officials had closed N. 8th St. so it could serve as a parking lot for audience members' bikes. But 8th St. was tastefully lined with chunks of construction-related concrete. Instead of a home for chrome, it looked like a shelter for unwanted asphalt. The street held all of two motorcycles and, as biker-poet Hack (like Cher, he has just one name) noted with disgust, "They were on trailers."

leather in the combined audience than there is on the average cow.

Some attendees seemed motivated by curiosity, including two sweet middle-age ladies in sweater sets whose sotto voce comments served as a kind of Greek chorus to the evening.

Sensing that the Centennial Hall audience was different from the usual motorcycle clubhouse crowd, poet Jean Howard warned, "There will be adult language tonight."

"Adult language," the ladies said, and leaned forward in their seats.

Rob Van Tuyle launched into a poem that began, "It's always December in Ed's Garage," which sounds innocent enough. But as the poem quickly and graphically made clear, it always was winter because Ed couldn't bear to turn the page on his favorite calendar. As for the pin-up . . . well, let's just say that it wasn't Santa Claus.

"Who's he talking about?" the ladies asked. "Is that a real person?"

Only Miss December's gene

Biker poets are nothing if not surprising, and Aliotta preceded his irreverent riff on the medical profession with another poem that made reference to Albert Einstein and Thomas Alva Edison. And he followed it with a poem about guardian angels.

"I hear one of these poets is a doctor," one lady said, "A Ph.D."

The ladies seemed touched by Jodi Wilson's recollection of a motorcycle ride at age 3 while cradled in her brother's arms, and didn't even bristle at this spiritual reflection by Van Tuyle:

"If Jesus rode a motorcycle, would it be a Harley?/I don't think so, considering his first choice of transportation was a donkey."

"Oh," the ladies said. "He's handsome."

But it was Hupy who summed it up best when he said at the end of the evening:

"This was more fun than a library board meeting."

Or, for that matter, visiting