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# The Street Legal Comedy Of Russ Nagel

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## All His Best Shoes Have Steel Toes

Get your motor runnin'  
Head out on the highway  
Lookin' for adventure  
And whatever comes our way  
Steppenwolf  
Born To Be Wild

Biker born and bred, Russ Nagel, the self-proclaimed Funniest Biker in America, has counted himself among the motorcycle minions since the age of seven. This should not deter you appreciating his comedic style though, even if you don't know the difference between a Panhead and a Fatboy. Some might have the preconceived notion that all bikers are the Wild One/Altamont Hell's Angels variety that are ready to club you into submission with pool cues. Russ is more of a warm and fuzzy type than that. Kind of like a Biker Barney. (Damn, I just know he's going to club me with a pool cue for saying that!) Anyway, Russ is a comedian first and foremost, who began his career with a much more subdued persona replete with a clean shaven face and a series of suits and sport coats. This changed quite by accident I learned during a recent telephone interview with him.

J.T.: When you used to share the stage with the likes of Robert Schimmel, Bobcat Goldthwait and Ron Shock, your appearance was quite different.

Russ: Yeah, I started off as an opener in jeans and a T-shirt and when I went on the road, I wore nice vests. Then I graduated up to a suit and tie. Then I went to my Harley boots, my jeans with a nice shirt and a sports coat. I always looked nice and clean shaven. I was living in Las Vegas at the time and I was on my motorcycle and a friend of mine was coming into town to perform. So I've got my leathers on and my doo-rag and crap and I ride up to the show and he was like, 'Hey, what're you doing?' and I said, 'Nothing. Just came to see you and hang out.' He said, 'Do you want to go up? You want to go on stage and do some time?' and I'm like, 'What? Look at me, man! I look like the Hell's Angels!' He's like, 'Eh, go up! It's just like a rock and roll show anyway.' I went up and did ten minutes and it went well and I came off stage and I thought, 'I just found what I've been looking for!'

J.T.: For those who have not seen you live, is your humor strictly motorcycle related or is it topical as well?

Russ: Yeah, I'll do topical humor, but I don't dwell on it a lot because my philosophy is that jokes are easily written and you end up coming up with the same stuff as other comics all the time, like the obvious joke. I just don't want to do some topical joke that just popped into my head today and then that night, Leno and Letterman are doing the same joke, then people are like, 'Oh, you stole that from them!' 90% of my show is observational humor from traveling and marriage to flying and driving and basically my life. Then there's 5% topical and 5% motorcycle related. Like, there are times when I don't do any biker humor because there are no bikers in the crowd and I don't want to alienate people doing that. Although the biker humor I do, even if you don't ride, you'll understand it. Like last night, we had a bunch of bikers show up and they were all bikered out, so I threw in the biker humor. After some shows I've had people say, 'Hey, you didn't do any biker jokes!' and I'm like, 'You know what? Larry the Cable Guy doesn't do any cable jokes!'

J.T.: So your comedy draws a wide cross section. Do you ever have any problem from drawing "biker crowds"?

Russ: I hope we draw some, but a lot of times when I draw bikers, a lot of clubs are like, 'I don't want that kind in my club.' First of all, I'm not drawing any of the hardcore 1%. I'm not saying that they haven't been to my shows. I've had motorcycle clubs come to my shows and if you put that in print, it's a motorcycle club and not a gang. Like I said, I've had motorcycle clubs come to my show, but what I draw are the doctors and the lawyers and the dentists and the real estate agents that ride their motorcycles on the weekends. Now, I call myself a biker because I've got more miles backing up to the curb than a lot of people do just riding. But like you, you're a motorcycle enthusiast, and that's fine as long as your head is in the wind. I don't care if you ride a Harley. I don't care if you ride a moped!

You can catch the chromed-out comedy of America's Funniest Biker at Wiley's Comedy Niteclub May 8th through the 11th. Wiley's is located at 101 Pine St. in the Oregon District in Dayton, OH. Call for show times and tickets information at (937) 224-JOKE (224-5653).

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