

# The Holy Land Bikers



By Wassim Razzouk

It is not very common to see a large group of people riding shiny motorcycles in formation under one patch in the Holy Land. The Holy Land Bikers Motorcycle Club (HLBMC) was founded in 2016 by Wassim Razzouk (who serves as its president), George Behnam (who serves as vice president), and a few others. HLBMC is the only official motorcycle club (MC, an internationally recognized term for clubs of similar conditions) in Jerusalem.

Wassim and George have been riding side by side for more than ten years now; they and their beloved motorcycles have been to all four corners of the country multiple times and have toured Jordan and the United States as well.

Wassim is a wellknown tattoo artist from the old City of Jerusalem who inherited the art of tattooing from his ancestors who have tattooed pilgrims in the Holy Land for 700 years. Together with his two sons Anton and Nizar, who by the way are also members of HLBMC, he owns "Razzouk Tattoo Since 1300," the world-famous tattoo studio located on one of the Old City's narrow alleys. Also an avid car and motorcycle enthusiast and collector and a former Palestinian car racing champion, Wassim started motorcycling in 1994, riding fast bikes until he bought his first Harley Davidson in the year 2000 (which he still rides). He was the first East

Jerusalemite ever to ride a Harley and rode solo for many years, discovering and scouting the magnificent routes, secret roads, and stunning locations of this beautiful and exciting land. Slowly, more people started taking an interest in what Wassim was doing and thus started joining him on his journey. They eventually formed a riding group that morphed into an official 3-patch MC that is highly respected and widely known in the country and the whole region.

of this part of the world. HLBMC has furthermore participated in many events in the West Bank, such as Christmas, Ramadan, and Hanukkah celebrations, visited orphanages and schools, and engaged in charitable activities that help underprivileged children. It has organized runs and rides to raise awareness of these children and supported them by bringing their plight to people's attention, and what attention! Imagine the happiness on children's faces when they see a large



The proud Holy Land Bikers.

Members of the HLBMC have participated in several motorcycle events both in the country and outside of it, including the Jordanian HOG Rally tours, motorcycle rallies in Europe, and the Sturgis Rally in the United States (arguably the biggest motorcycle rally in the world, based in South Dakota). In the Sturgis Rally, they participated with their American friends who offered them their bikes and rode alongside them, starting in San Francisco, riding across seven states and 6,000 kilometers, along with 300,000 other bikers who usually ride from all over the country to reach the small town called Sturgis, exploring the never-ending beautiful scenery

group of shiny thunderous motorcycles with tough-looking bikers wearing leather jackets and vests, heavy boots, long hair, and beards enter through the gates of their schoolyard; when these riders park their loud bikes side by side in a display of chrome and metal, dismount and approach to gently greet and talk to them, offering their bikes to climb on and letting them feel their power and the caring and love that the bikers have to offer.

The club's main activity, however, is riding motorcycles as a family, with brothers riding side by side.



Early every Saturday morning, club members meet for a coffee and a chat. When they first see each other, they never shake hands like regular people. Instead, they exchange an upward-facing hand grab, tightening their fists as much as possible (in fact, tighter means more love). Then, with their hands still holding, they hug each other with the other arm, gently and respectfully tapping each others' backs, usually once, but sometimes more (the more they tap, the more they have missed each other, as they might not have seen each other for a while). If you witness this greeting, you automatically feel the power of the brotherhood, the respect and love they feel for each other! The clapping sounds of the hands that meet and tap backs celebrate the beginning of yet another day of the excitement that marks the MC lifestyle. Imagine the energy of such an event when twenty, thirty, or even more members of different friendly clubs meet, all members exchanging this greeting to show each other respect and express their love. Everyone feels the power of the brotherhood, even – and especially – if they come from different clubs or backgrounds.

Once all members have finished their morning coffee, they head towards the winding roads on the mountains that surround Jerusalem. They ride between the trees and forests, taking in



the fresh air, letting go of life's stresses, and enjoying the beautiful views of this precious land. With the soundtrack of Harley exhaust notes in the background, the ride feels as if you're in a movie: cool, exciting, relaxing, and fun! Every hour or two, the riders take a break somewhere. The brothers enjoy a cup of tea, coffee, or delicious cold water as they rest, talk about the ride, and then continue the journey. Sometimes they have a destination, a previously chosen location they aim for; at other times, the destination is unknown, and they go wherever the wind takes them, wherever the road leads. The trip is always about the ride, not the destination! Many interesting things happen on these rides. Sometimes, the bikers meet other groups that come from the opposite direction. When that happens, they usually greet with a common sign that they signal at each other: they flash the V-sign, but their fingers face downwards, toward the asphalt. This signifies the moto "keep the rubber side down, the shiny side up," which means, "may you stay safe,

keep the bike upright, and have no accidents that will cause the bike to lie down!" If at any time a members' bike breaks down or falls, the whole group stops and helps, no matter what the circumstance or how long it may take. They never leave a brother behind! In the case of an emergency or if a biker needs help, a common signal is given by placing the rider's helmet on the side of the road where other riders can see it from afar. This signals that a biker is in urgent need of help, and it would be disgraceful for another biker to pass by and not stop and help, even if the biker in distress is from another group or even an adversary MC. The protocol is to stop and offer help. In such an instance, all conflicts, if any, are put aside, and the riders become brothers in the brotherhood of bikers.

HLBMC has nomad members and honorary members in different parts of the world as well as support riders who join and support them as friends. Support riders can wear a special support patch that the club offers if someone is considered a truly loyal supporter. This patch is usually given to those who would like to be around but cannot commit enough time to become full patched members of the club. HLBMC has a strict rule of prospecting people before admitting them to full membership status (allowing them to become full patched members). After hanging around for a while and getting to know the club members, a biker can ask to prospect for the club. He then has to prove himself, ride along, and help his fellow biker brothers for at least nine months in service of the club. The prospect has to earn the members' respect and eventually their love before the patched members can consider taking a vote to fully patch him in. When that happens, the club meets in its clubhouse, takes its vote, and calls in the prospect to

patch him in as their new brother. This is done in a special ceremony before everyone has a few drinks, cheering and celebrating the growth of their beloved club!

HLBMC members share a common ideology, ethics, and beliefs and live by a code of honor, loyalty, and respect. They believe in their brotherhood in which each member is devoted to the club; they help each other and are there for each other when the time beckons. Their main goal is to create a family of bikers with common goals and beliefs and to share this life of honor, respect, and brotherhood. Contrary to the common stereotype, this motorcycle club is not a gang of outlaws, as seen in the movies. HLBMC is a group of motorcycle enthusiasts who share their journey on the road, the ride, and the patch.

As with any other motorcycle club in the world, HLBMC has no specific political, ethnic, or religious background. Its members are Christians and Muslims, Arabs and non-Arabs. As long as you share the club's common goals and ethical beliefs, you are welcome to join for the ride and may eventually be accepted and prospected by them.

*Wassim Razzouk is a Coptic Christian who was born and raised in Jerusalem, has two sons and one daughter, and currently runs a tattoo shop called Razzouk Tattoo Since 1300 and a new café called Bites and Bucks, both located in the Old City.*



SCAN  
TO SHARE