

# Chapter 1: Only a Biker Knows Why a Dog Sticks Its Head Out the Car Window

Every morning when we come into the kitchen to get ready for work, Murphy, our three-year-old Cavoodle, waits by the cupboard for his treat. The second it opens, he bounces in circles, anticipation buzzing through his body. His excitement jumps to a whole new level when we grab his leash or open the car door. As soon as he's in the back seat, he's practically vibrating, waiting for that magic moment when the window rolls down, the breeze hits his face, and his nose twitches as it savours the scents of the world. Tongue out, ears flapping, eyes wide open. He's completely alive.

In those moments, it's as if nothing else matters. No worries. No distractions. Just pure, unfiltered joy. Murphy is fully present. No ego, no thought, no identity, no self-doubt. Isn't that the state that mystics and meditators spend their lifetimes seeking? Just pure being, pure joy. Maybe our dogs are onto something. If Murphy could talk, I'm sure he'd be shouting, "This is the best day of my life!"

After watching him, I have realised that that kind of raw, uninhibited joy isn't just for dogs. I know that feeling, too. I feel it every time I ride a motorcycle.

You're flying down the highway. No roof. No walls. No sense of being trapped in a cage. Just you, the wind, and the hum of the engine beneath you. Every sense is alive. Every second is real. There's no pause button. Just the next corner. And the one after that.

That's why dogs stick their heads out of car windows, and why bikers chase the horizon. It's not just about speed. It's also about presence. Freedom. Aliveness.

Even after decades of travelling on two wheels, each new ride brings with it the same anticipation: the wind on my face; the smells of the world; the sense of freedom known only by motorcyclists (and dogs who ride with their heads sticking out car windows). It's not just the destination that matters; it's also every twist and turn along the way.

This book isn't just about motorcycles. It's about that feeling and so much more. It's about the lessons the road teaches us: how to be free; how to live in the moment; how to face risk and uncertainty with courage; and how to find meaning in every twist and turn. Motorcycling is the perfect metaphor for life because, just like the open road, it's full of surprises, challenges and moments that take your breath away. Over the years, I have come to understand that motorcycling is my teacher. Every stretch of road, every curve, every unexpected detour has carried lessons that go far beyond motorcycling.

On a motorcycle, you can't hide from the realities of the ride. You can feel every bump, every gust of wind, every change in the weather. You're not shielded by a steel cage, as you are in a car, nor can you be distracted by a screen or a book. You're out there, fully exposed, fully alive.

I invite you to join me on this journey – both on the road and within. Let's explore what it means to live fully, to embrace the unknown, and to discover the deep joy that comes from riding the open road within.

This is why we ride. Not because it's safe, but because it's real. And that's what this book is about: finding the real in a world that too often settles for comfort and conformity. It's about facing risk, being present and choosing to live more fully, no matter what twists and turns life presents to you.

For those who don't ride, all is not lost; maybe you've felt it in other ways. At a lookout at sunrise with the wind in your face. Skiing down a mountain. Sailing across a bay. Hiking a remote trail. Driving with the windows down and music up on a perfect day. The activity isn't the important thing; the aliveness and passion for life that it brings is what counts. Whether it's riding, surfing, rock climbing, running, or playing ukulele, many of us are drawn to pursuits that don't necessarily make sense to other people. Motorcycling just happens to be, in my non-biased opinion, the best activity that it is possible to pursue!

## Why we ride: The beautiful paradox of motorcycling

My best friend Ian lives on the New South Wales south coast, about four hours south of Sydney. I live in the Adelaide Hills in South Australia. For decades, we have gone motorcycle touring together. And when we have, we've often met up at Halls Gap in Victoria.

Why Halls Gap? Because it has a great Indian restaurant.

Are we mad?

Ian rides 1,059 kilometres over two days to get there. At a mere 487 kilometres, it's just around the corner for me, an easy day's ride. Of course, there are more convenient places to meet. And it's not really about the food at that restaurant. It's about the ride.

To many outsiders, motorcycling is illogical, and motorcyclists are insane. It's an impractical, inefficient, dangerous and often uncomfortable way to travel. You also need to dress like a cross between an astronaut and a gladiator. Cars are safer, warmer and more convenient, and you can hop into a car in shorts and a T-shirt if you want to. You're safely secured in a steel cage with airbags, entertainment and air conditioning – five-star comfort, comparatively. Planes get you there faster.

Trains allow you to relax while you travel vast distances. And yet, we ride. Not because it makes sense, but because it's a passion and it simply feels right.

This is the paradox of motorcycling: in a world obsessed with making things safer and easier, we riders deliberately choose the harder path, the path less travelled. We embrace the raw, the inconvenient, the risky and the unpredictable. As Robert M. Pirsig wrote in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*:

You see things vacationing on a motorcycle in a way that is completely different from any other. In a car you're always in a compartment, and because you're used to it, you don't realise that through that car window everything you see is just more TV. You're a passive observer and it is all moving by you boringly in a frame.

On a motorcycle, there's no safety net, no filter, just you and the road. You feel the heat and the rain, and you smell the smells. You're not a passenger; you're a part of the scene. That kind of immersion isn't just for riders. As suggested above, you can also find it walking silently in nature, painting without a clock, and dancing until you're breathless. Whatever the activity, it requires you to be fully present – in the moment. And we all need a sense of freedom. Some people think it's about the destination. For us motorcyclists, though, the ride *is* the destination. It's our way of experiencing a deep sense of aliveness, or as the mythologist Joseph Campbell put it, it's how we “follow our bliss”.

One of the most enjoyable and memorable rides I have ever been on took me through northern NSW and through the middle of a storm so violent that it added a day to my trip. The struggle against the elements – the rain, wind, and even hail at one stage – made it into an adventure. Adventure requires courage, risk-taking and resourcefulness. That's what that ride took, and many others like it. Although the conditions were miserable, I loved riding through the storm. And – maybe I am mad! – I grew as a person that day.

## The call of the open road

Ian and I have been riding buddies for fifty years. On a recent trip, we rode up to Longreach in northwestern Queensland, then across to Yeppoon on the coast. We covered close to 7,000 kilometres in twenty-six days. As usual, after about a week back at home, we were both itching for another long ride.

People who don't love riding (or driving, for that matter) simply don't get it. Why would anyone waste all that time when you can fly to anywhere in Australia in a few hours? And on a motorbike? I can hear them say, “You must be crazy!” or “You must have a death wish!”

No, not crazy. Just passionate about experiencing the freedom that comes with being on the open road.

“They” say that flying is more efficient. It gets you there in mere hours, and then you can start enjoying yourself. But efficiency depends on one’s perspective. In my experience, if it’s measured in terms of fun per minute, motorcycling is very efficient. “They” think that the destination is more important than the journey. However, the moment I leave my driveway, I’m having fun. Part of the fun of riding comes from the autonomy and sense of freedom it offers. Many (most?) people want autonomy and freedom, but they are stuck in the grind of their everyday lives. Touring, or even going for a day’s ride, gives a welcome break from that sense of captivity to the mundane of life.

Motorcycling – and for me, this is especially true of touring – provides the sense of autonomy and freedom that we all crave. It allows me the freedom to go where I want, when I want, and with whom I want. (You’ll see in the following chapter that I am a big advocate for planning, so it is an *organised freedom* – another motorcycling paradox.) There’s nothing quite like feeling the wind in your face and noticing slight changes in temperature as you ride an open road that stretches for kilometres in front of you.

Long-distance riding is a metaphor for life. It takes resilience, perseverance, courage and personal responsibility. And self-reliance. Many times, Ian and I find ourselves riding in the middle of nowhere, with poor reception (and in the early days, no phones) – places where, if something happens to us, we’re on our own. This is why we travel with a tool kit and a first aid kit. We get ourselves out of trouble most of the time, but we also carry a personal locator beacon so that if all else fails, we can call the cavalry. Thankfully, we have never needed to use it.

Every part of life comes with a myriad of risks, challenges and obstacles. Just like on the open road. The weather, accidents, roadworks, terrible accommodation, animals. And let’s not forget incompetent or distracted drivers. Facing these things requires focus, planning, good decision-making, riding skill, judgement and patience. And a host of other attributes.

## Motorcycling reflects the reality of life

Not everyone wants to ride. Many people never will, and that’s fine. This book isn’t a sales pitch for motorcycles. It’s all about what riding them reveals, the deeper human truths that are reflected. Riding

can even be used as a framework for self-inquiry or self-discovery. One's desires for freedom and purpose or to push through challenges and feel fully alive can be satisfied by activities other than riding on two wheels. But that's what does it for us riders. I believe anyone's life can be enriched by their pursuing a passion and aiming for mastery in it – whatever the passion.

Most of us want to live a full and happy life – to return to what many would say is our natural state of joy and peace. Many yearn for freedom and autonomy. But we all face a myriad of internal and external obstacles and challenges in the way of achieving these things. In Australia and New Zealand, we're fortunate that most of us have some degree of freedom and autonomy in our everyday lives. (Having lived in New Zealand for ten years, and being married to a proud Kiwi, I've experienced both countries firsthand.) Facing challenges and overcoming obstacles is, perhaps, the best personal development course there is.

True freedom comes from having control over our choices, our time, and our direction in life. It means pursuing passions without having to succumb to external pressure, maintaining strong physical and mental well-being, setting firm personal boundaries, and embracing opportunities to explore new places. Living in alignment with our values and principles, breaking routines, and seeking adventure also contribute to this sense of freedom. For motorcyclists, the open road embodies freedom perfectly. It offers movement, presence, and the pure exhilaration of unrestricted exploration. Freedom is not only about outer autonomy but also the inner liberation from fear, conditioning and unconscious reaction. It's choosing how you respond to life – not just where you go.

## What is a happy life?

Happiness is a broad, deeply personal and elusive concept that has been defined in many ways throughout history. If freedom and autonomy set the foundation for a fulfilling life, then happiness is the experience of living that life well. Philosophers, psychologists and spiritual traditions have grappled with defining happiness for centuries. Is happiness an enduring state of bliss? A life free from struggle? Or is it something more nuanced, something that isn't given but cultivated?

In today's world, happiness is often marketed as a product; an artificial state achieved through consumption, achievement or external validation. *Buy this, achieve that, buy enough "stuff" and you'll be happy.* But this illusion fades quickly. If this is your definition of happiness, you're probably stressed, bored and burned out. True happiness, as many ancient and modern thinkers have suggested, is not a static destination but a way of being. It's finding inner peace and true self-esteem that doesn't depend on external factors. It emerges not from fleeting pleasures but from how we engage with life itself.

Aristotle called it *eudaimonia*, a life of virtue and purpose. He argued that happiness is not about collecting the right set of circumstances but about striving for excellence in character and action. Living well means pursuing personal growth, building meaningful relationships and contributing to something greater than ourselves. Friendship, good health and even financial stability can enhance happiness, but they alone are not enough.

Centuries later, the Stoic philosopher Epictetus echoed a similar sentiment: “There is only one way to happiness, and that is to cease worrying about things which are beyond the power of our will.” A former slave, Epictetus understood firsthand that happiness was not dictated by external conditions but, rather, by one’s response to them. His fellow Stoic Seneca viewed happiness as living in harmony with nature and reason, accepting what we cannot change, and focusing on what we can.

The major religions have defined happiness in different ways. The Buddhist perspective offers a simplified definition: There is no path to happiness; happiness is the path. In other words, why wait to feel happy? Happiness is not some future thing to be chased; it exists in the present in the way we engage with each moment. Mindfulness, gratitude and a deep connection to life as it unfolds bring far greater happiness than any distant goal ever could.

Modern psychology builds on these ancient ideas. Brené Brown (researcher, storyteller, and presenter of one of the most popular TED Talks of all time) argues that happiness is built on courage, vulnerability and connection. In her work on vulnerability and wholehearted living, she argues that happiness is closely tied to courage and connection. True happiness, Brown suggests, comes from embracing imperfection, risking emotional exposure, and cultivating gratitude. Positive psychology pioneer Martin Seligman highlights meaning, flow and relationships as the core of a life well lived.

Alexander Lowen, the founder of Bioenergetic Analysis, a body-centred therapy, made a crucial distinction between pleasure and joy. Pleasure, he argued, is a fleeting sensation often tied to physical gratification such as good food, a warm bath or the rush of acceleration on a bike. It is temporary, dissipating as quickly as it arrives. Joy, on the other hand, is a deeper, more sustainable state arising from an authentic connection to oneself and the world. It is the sense of being alive, fully immersed in the moment, free from the constraints of ego and fear.

For me, happiness isn’t a finish line to be crossed; it’s the journey itself. It’s found in the freedom of the open road, the challenges of pushing beyond comfort zones, and the quiet moments of connection

and reflection. It's the deep sense of fulfilment that comes from embracing each twist and turn, being fully present, and learning from both the struggles and the open road ahead.

Happiness isn't about collecting more "stuff", nor is it about comfort or ease. It's not the absence of difficulty. Rather, it's the result of turning inwards, travelling the open road within, and living in integrity with your values. When you align with your true self, you find joy in the journey, an enduring happiness that grows from personal growth, meaning and fulfilment in everyday life.

Happiness is about joy rather than fleeting pleasure, presence rather than dwelling on the past or grasping for the future. Responding with courage instead of seeking to control every outcome.

For me, the motorcycle is more than a machine; it's a vehicle for the pursuit of happiness.

## Exactly what is the open road within?

The "open road within" is the path to deep joy and happiness. It is a metaphorical journey that each of us can take through the inner landscapes of thought, emotion, courage and character. It speaks to the path beyond the physical, of travelling the open stretch of inner terrain that we navigate as we grow, reflect and confront life's deeper questions. Just as motorcyclists lean into curves, adapt to changing conditions and find freedom in motion, so, too, can we all learn to face our fears, embrace uncertainty and discover who we truly are.

The open road within is a state of being – a mindset of openness, curiosity and conscious living. Ask yourself what drives you, what holds you back, what requires more courage to change, and what lies ahead when you ride with intention. On the open road within, the destination isn't somewhere "out there"; it's a deeper connection to yourself. If you are reading this book, you are on that road.

It is not just about emotion and psychology. It's the spiritual journey, too. The soul's ride through the terrain of being and possibility. Just as we navigate on physical roads, we also navigate purpose, presence, fear and love. The very act of riding a bike, which requires balance, flow, attention and surrender, is a metaphor for consciousness.

## The joy of motorcycling

I sat on a grassy mound near our rented cottage in Harrierville, Victoria, watching the dark storm clouds roll in. The wind picked up, the temperature dropped, and the scent of the forest – earthy, rich, alive – deepened in my nostrils. For a few magic minutes, I was fully present and immersed in the moment.

It struck me how often I feel this way when I ride: completely alive, grateful for the experience, present and in the moment, and joyful in doing something I love. Motorcycling has a way of amplifying life and making me appreciate the simple yet profound joy of existence.

On a motorcycle, joy is found not only in the thrill of speed but also in the rhythm of the ride, the harmony of body and machine connecting with nature as you ride through a forest, and the awareness of the present moment. A perfect corner taken with precision, the golden light of sunrise breaking over a mountain pass, the camaraderie of fellow riders at the end of a long day. These moments carry joy, not just pleasure.

Riding a motorbike gives me a profound sense of freedom and autonomy. It's impossible to be mindless while riding, because every moment requires presence, focus and awareness. More frequently than when I'm anywhere else, when I'm on my bike, I'm in the zone, fully alive and completely in the moment. It's exhilarating! My inner child gets to come out and play, relishing the thrill, the risk, the freedom, and the wind rushing against my face. I don't know if everyone has their version of motorcycling – an outlet, a passion, something that challenges them and fuels their growth. I suspect not everybody does, but I'm certain they all need one. However, you define happiness, one thing is clear: riding motorcycles makes me happy.

### Is riding a motorcycle good for your mental health?

It's not just me. There is plenty of anecdotal evidence, and it's now backed by scientific research. Research that highlights the profound impact motorcycling has on mental and emotional well-being. Studies have found that riding reduces stress, enhances cognitive function, builds emotional resilience and fosters a sense of freedom and community.

A study led by neuroscientist Dr. Don Vaughn at UCLA's Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behaviour found that riding for twenty minutes increased heart rate by 11 percent and boosted adrenaline levels by 27 percent – effects comparable to those of light exercise. It also reduced cortisol levels by 28 percent, which is significant, since high cortisol is linked to anxiety, depression and immune system suppression. Additionally, the study showed that motorcycling enhanced sensory focus and increased alertness, much like the effects of caffeine.

Beyond stress relief, motorcycling also sharpens the mind. Research suggests that riding enhances cognitive abilities such as spatial awareness, working memory and reaction times. The process of

navigating roads, making split-second decisions and processing varied sensory input keeps the brain active and engaged. The life lesson here is that growth often comes from challenge. Just as riding strengthens cognitive skills, embracing new experiences and pushing through difficulties sharpens the mind and fosters adaptability in all areas of life.

For many riders, including Ian and me, motorcycling acts as a form of therapy, a way to escape daily pressures and regain emotional balance. The rhythm of the ride, the sensation of movement, and the need to be fully present create a profound sense of relief and renewal. This highlights an important truth: healing is sometimes found in movement, not stillness. Whether it's riding, painting, hiking, or another passion, engaging in an activity that you enjoy allows you to disconnect from stress and find flow. It can be a powerful way to restore emotional well-being. One way of looking at emotion is to see it as energy in motion. That movement – whether physical or spiritual – shifts “stuck-ness”, unblocks emotion, and awakens parts of us long dormant. Perhaps the bike doesn't just carry us; perhaps it liberates us.

Another key aspect of motorcycling is the unparalleled sense of freedom it provides. The open road, the wind on your skin, and the ability to travel without confinement create a feeling of liberation, which is particularly beneficial for those who are experiencing stress, burnout or emotional stagnation. True freedom, however, starts with mindset. The open road serves as a reminder that breaking free from limitations, whether physical, emotional or mental, requires a willingness to ride the open road within and embrace adventure, take risks and step outside of comfort zones. And while riding a motorcycle is one way that points the way to the road within, it's not the only way. Find your version of the open road, whatever it is that breaks the routine, awakens your senses and brings you back to yourself.

### The hand wave connection

It's an unspoken rule of the open road. A silent bond among riders. When another motorcyclist passes in the opposite direction, you wave. Especially on country roads. Why? Because you're part of a tribe.

Humans seek out connection and purpose. Being part of a tribe gives us a sense of belonging, a shared identity that reinforces our values and aspirations. As a motorcyclist, you are part of something bigger – a brotherhood, a sisterhood, a community bound by the love of the ride. Riders get it. They understand why they're out there in the rain, pushing through the wind, embracing the elements. They recognise the effort, the skill, the passion.

And they know you do, too. That simple wave says it all.

## Other experiences of the biker tribe

I now prefer solo or small-group rides, but I've ridden with groups like the Ulysses Club for years. Motorcycling fosters deep bonds through riding together, sharing stories, and creating connections. Harvard's 85-year-long Study of Adult Development found that strong relationships are the most significant factor in long-term happiness. This underscores the principle that life's journey is richer when shared. Whether through motorcycling or any other shared passion, meaningful connections enhance our experience and remind us that we're never truly alone.

So, is motorcycling good for emotional and mental health? The evidence strongly suggests it is. As already indicated, that certainly is the case for Ian and me. My wife Miranda knows it, too. Although I don't experience anxiety or low moods very often, when I do, Miranda usually asks me, "How long since you've been for a ride?" If it's been more than a few days, she does what she can to support me to get out on the bike. While it's not a substitute for professional mental health treatment, it can be a valuable tool for managing stress, improving cognitive function and fostering emotional resilience. The road ahead isn't just about the destination; it's also a lot to do with the clarity, freedom and connection we find along the way.

## Happiness and growth occur through difficulty

Over the past couple of decades, stress and anxiety levels have risen significantly across many countries. Australia has experienced a sharp increase in mental health challenges across various demographics. In both the UK and the US, studies show that rates of anxiety, depression and stress among adolescents and young adults (ages 16–24) have more than doubled. Social psychologist Jonathan Haidt explores this troubling trend in his book *The Anxious Generation*.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing 2020–21, more than two out of five Australians aged 16 to 85 have experienced a mental disorder at some point in their lives. One in five has had a mental health condition within the past year, anxiety being the most common. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reports that the average mental health score for Australians aged 15 to 34 declined from 72 in 2001 to 65 in 2021, reflecting a worsening trend in the younger generations.

Life has always been challenging, but modern Western culture increasingly emphasises minimising discomfort, reducing risk, and prioritising safety. Programs like “Are You OK?” encourage conversations around mental health, but the topic remains difficult for many. Meanwhile, the constant drumbeat of tragedy and disaster on the nightly news reinforces the perception that the world is a dangerous and scary place, fostering a mindset of excessive caution. Have we, in our relentless pursuit of safety, inadvertently contributed to rising anxiety and stress?

Today’s technology shields us from discomfort. Our cars have climate control, safety cages, ergonomic seats, lane assist, parking assist and cruise control. Travel is optimised for efficiency, minimising effort and maximising comfort and security.

Motorcyclists, however, embrace the opposite. On every ride, we invite complexity and risk. We experience discomfort as we take the long way home, because it’s a better ride. We pack light because we must. We check the weather, because it matters. We accept the rain, wind and heat not as inconveniences but as part of the experience.

Perhaps, in stepping beyond comfort and control, we rediscover something essential: resilience, adaptability and the joy of embracing life as it comes. Henry Cole, a well-known lifelong English motorcyclist, author and documentary presenter, puts it best in his book *A Biker’s Tale*: “It’s not about speed or bravado. It’s about the visceral joy of riding when it’s just you, the machine, and the road.”

There is joy in doing rather than watching. In being fully part of the journey; not simply a passenger on the ride but engaging fully. In a world that too often encourages efficiency, detachment and getting to the next thing in life as quickly as possible, we embrace the challenge of mastering the moment. And if you’re not a motorcyclist, that’s okay. You don’t need an engine beneath you to chase that feeling. The deeper point is this: Joy often lives on the other side of effort. It’s there in the doing, the striving, and the engagement with what you’re doing. Whether you find that in a marathon, a gardening project, sailing on a rough sea or building something from scratch, the committed engagement, not the activity, is what matters.

## Breaking Free from Anxiety: A Stoic Approach

The Stoics didn’t use the modern term “anxiety”, but they discussed concepts related to it. They believed in the importance of mastering one’s emotions and cultivating calmness and tranquillity,

often using terms such as “disturbance” or “unease” to describe the kind of inner turmoil we might now associate with anxiety.

For the Stoics, the root of such emotions, including anxiety, was the attachment to things outside one’s control. They taught that we should focus only on what is within our power, for example, our thoughts, actions and responses, while accepting that external events are beyond our control. (I deal with this in detail later in the book.) This idea is central to their philosophy and is exemplified in the teachings of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, the Stoic Emperor.

Epictetus explained this idea well when he said, “It’s not things themselves that disturb us, but our opinions about them.” He believed that what leads to emotional unrest, including anxiety, is the way we interpret external events. If we view them as harmful or threatening, we react with distress. But if we change our interpretation and realise that we cannot control the events, only our reactions to them, we can find peace.

Marcus Aurelius repeatedly reflected on how to maintain equanimity in the face of external stressors such as duties, challenges and even human shortcomings. He writes, “You have power over your mind, not outside events. Realise this, and you will find strength.” This teaches us that by shifting our mindset, we can diminish the impact of external stressors on our emotional well-being.

### A motorcycling moment: Conquering fear with focus

There was a time when I was heading down an unfamiliar mountain road in Queensland’s hinterland, the kind of low-speed, winding, steep stretch that can intimidate even the most seasoned rider. It was a beautiful day, but I found myself gripped by anxiety. The tight bends and the thought of losing control had my mind racing. My heart rate was elevated, and I felt tension in my shoulders, the kind that you know isn’t just physical.

As I approached each curve, my body tensed up, but I knew from years of riding that this was a pattern; I had had this mind-based response before. Just as the Stoics taught, I knew I couldn’t

control the road or the curves, but I could control my reactions. I focused on breathing in deeply and steadily and breathing out slowly and deliberately, just as I would if I were meditating.

Then, in the midst of the ride, I remembered a key Stoic principle: *You have power over your mind, not outside events.* The road, the weather, the tight curves – none of those things were within my control. But how I responded, how I handled the fear, was entirely mine. I shifted my mindset, focusing not on the fear of the bend but on my ability to navigate it with mindfulness. Slowly, the anxiety began to melt away, and I found a rhythm in the flow between rider and machine.

By the time I reached the bottom of the hill, I had moved from tension to calmness. The road hadn't changed, but I had. The Stoic exercise of focusing on what I could control – not the road, but my mind – was a powerful antidote to the anxiety I had initially felt.

Here are a few Stoic-based exercises to practise when you feel anxiety creeping in:

### 1: Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

- *How it works:* Combine deep breathing with progressive muscle relaxation. This method helps to release tension from the body and calm the nervous system.
- *How to do it:* Take a deep breath in, tense a group of muscles (e.g. your fists or your shoulders) for 5–10 seconds, then release the tension while exhaling. Move through different muscle groups in the body.

### 2: “4-7-8” Breathing

- *How it works:* This technique is based on controlling the length of your breath, helping to regulate the body's stress response.
- *How to do it:* Inhale quietly through your nose for 4 counts, hold the breath for 7 counts, then exhale completely through your mouth for 8 counts. Repeat the cycle 3 to 4 times.

### 3: Reflect and Gain Perspective

## Ask yourself:

- Is what I am anxious about within my control?
- Which of the four Stoic virtues can guide me in this moment: Wisdom, Courage, Justice, or Temperance?
- Will what I'm anxious about matter in a month from now?

## 4: Reframe and Reflect

Choose one of the following quotes and say it out loud on your longest exhale:

“We suffer more in imagination than in reality.” (Seneca)

“You have power over your mind, not outside events. Realise this, and you will find strength.”

(Marcus Aurelius)

“It’s not things themselves that disturb us, but our opinions about them.” (Epictetus)

“Do not let the future disturb you.” (Marcus Aurelius)

Let these words help reframe your thoughts and ease your anxiety.

## 5: Change what you’re doing

Take one small, grounding action to change your feeling state. Even a small thing like taking a brisk walk, having a shower or having a drink of water can help. A simple task brings you back to the present moment.

## Riding and life: A mind game

Motorcycling, like life, is a mental game. Your mindset shapes your experience (more about this later). When you ride, you control your focus, your reactions, and your attitude. A ride made tough because of rain, wind, the terrain, traffic or fatigue can be miserable. Or it can be an exhilarating test of resilience. It’s often both (yet another paradox). You decide how you experience it.

On the bike, you become both rider and observer, conscious of your fear, your decisions, your breath. This ability to observe ourselves is the beginning of self-mastery, and for many, it's a doorway to something greater than the ego.

Challenges, both on the road and in life, are inevitable. You can either fight them, resist them, complain about them, or you can lean in, adjust your approach, and find the rhythm. A twisty road demands your attention, your presence, and your willingness to focus and adapt. So does life. Riding teaches you that you are in control – not of the world but of yourself and your machine. You can't choose the weather, the road conditions or the actions of others, but you can choose how you respond.

### The journey *is* the destination

For non-riders, the journey is usually something to endure, a means to get somewhere else. The real experience starts when they arrive. For us motorcyclists, the ride *is* the experience. Ewan McGregor and Charley Boorman, in their *Long Way Round* and *Long Way Down* adventures, epitomised this spirit. They could have taken a plane to their destinations, but anyone can do that! Instead, they chose the long, unpredictable path across continents with tough terrain – on two wheels. As McGregor put it, “When you're on a motorcycle, the journey is never just about getting from A to B. It's about everything in between.”

Everything in between. That's where life happens. It's where full engagement brings joy. Unexpected stops, small towns, breakdowns, the people you meet along the way. The beauty isn't just in reaching the destination - it's also in the struggle, the challenge, the adventure of getting there. Just like in other areas of life, I have learned more and created more lasting memories from when things have gone wrong on a ride than when they have gone perfectly.

### The risk, and why it's worth it

Motorcycling is risky. That's undeniable. Life itself is full of risks, and those risks are part of what makes it meaningful. As riders, we accept the danger not out of recklessness but because we understand the fundamental truth that safety is not the same as living. It's easy to trade in aliveness, joy and spontaneity for security. A safe and easy ride is good sometimes, but overall, I choose the challenging road.

We ride knowing that every journey requires focus, skill and awareness. That's the trade-off. The reward? A heightened sense of being alive. As Boorman said: "The world is meant to be experienced with the wind in your face and the hum of an engine beneath you."

And so, we ride. Not to escape life, but to meet it fully. Not because it's easy or safe, but because it's real. We ride because in a world that constantly tries to smooth out the bumps, we prefer to feel every twist and turn. Maybe motorcycling is a kind of madness. But if it is, it's one we wouldn't trade for anything.

Wind in our faces, hearts in our throats, souls wide open. That's not madness. It's freedom.

