

THESE SANTAS WEAR BLACK LEATHER

Imagine the sound: not quite that of a train or a jet, but the growing roar of hundreds of engines approaching.

On December 4, the streets of Las Cruces will shake beneath a double line of gleaming motorcycles participating in the fifth annual Lots for Tots Christmas Toy Run.

From a 1932 Whizzer motor bike to \$18,000 Dressers—and everything in between—these bikers bearing gifts gather at Mesilla Valley Mall for a morning of socializing and eyeing each other's machines.

In the parking lot, black leather jackets bob around flashes of chrome as riders prepare for the slow trek across town. A Harley rider named Bob says he participates "'cause it's great people watching," while others talk of making Christmas special for the children.

Each participant must donate a new toy (the event collected more than 700 toys from 537 people last year) and local businesses donate food and clothing for the needy. A responsible organization is

selected each year to distribute the items to those who might otherwise have nothing for Christmas.

"To be honest," a young woman says, "I ride for the party, but I always get a real big, special toy to donate. Kids need a good Christmas."

The police-escorted parade leaves the mall just after noon and winds its way through the city streets to finish, 11 miles later, with a barbecue at Dickerson's Auction Barn.

The Toy Run is the project of Bill and Evelyn Duffy, whose hard work to prepare and organize the event begins around March. "People line up along the entire route," Bill says. "Parking lots fill with cars . . . everyone waiting to see the motorcycles."

And that long line of bikers with stuffed animals strapped to their scooters is indeed worth the wait to see.

The Duffys make sure that the party and barbecue remain family oriented, with the goal of helping area children and spreading the holiday spirit as priorities. Dinner brings together a diverse cluster of people, all possessing a love of

riding their motorcycles. Amid cheery decorations, participants eat, collect door prizes, tell stories and enter unusual contests designed for fun.

Someone might dance a little jig outside the barn, people laugh and hug each other. There are dozens of men with beards and bellies and "ho ho

hos" good enough to be real Santas if dressed in red (but most are in the dark leather that protects them from the elements when riding).

It's a time when the Christmas spirit takes to the streets on two- and three-wheeled machines.

—Katharine Lark



Bikers mount an annual toy run, drawing thousands of spectators in Las Cruces.

Dave G