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Physics and the Art of the Motorcycle

Yes, it's true that physicist Charles Falco owns 15 motorcycles, and yes, he once posed for a photo astride a BSA Gold Star that had been wheeled into his University of Arizona lab. And yes, he did help curate the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum's hugely successful *Art of the Motorcycle* exhibition in New York City. But let's be clear about it: "Physics is my career," Falco insists. "Motorcycles are what I do in my spare time."

Having said that, Falco is happy to spend a few minutes talking about his passion for two-wheeled motorized transportation. It all began about 40 years ago, when Falco hopped a ride on the back of a friend's Triumph. He bought his first machine at the age of 15 "and I've never been without at least one ever since." To satisfy his intellectual bent, Falco began acquiring books about motorcycles as an undergraduate, resulting in what is said to be the world's largest private library of motorcycle literature.

Given Falco's scholarly approach to the subject, he seemed a natural choice when Guggenheim director Thomas Krens decided to stage a motorcycle exhibition. "Charlie brought [to the project] this incredibly detail-oriented personality with these unbelievable research abilities," notes Ultan Guilfoyle, head of the museum's film production department and a fellow motorcycle enthusiast. "We couldn't function day to day without his involvement." The two were responsible for researching and selecting the 113 representative specimens from the more than 10 000 models that have evolved since the first one, the steam-powered Michaux-Perreaux Velocipede, hit the road in 1868.

The show has enjoyed record-breaking attendance, as well as critical acclaim, since it opened in June. And, says Falco, the reactions of colleagues have been favorable too. "I was just talking to the head of the geosciences department about 30 minutes ago. He wants me to give him a ride to work on one of my bikes."

The Art of the Motorcycle runs through 20 September at the Guggenheim and will then be on view at Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History, from 7 November to 20 March 1999; after that, it will move to the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao in Spain.

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YES, IT'S ART: The Guggenheim Museum's *Art of the Motorcycle* exhibition benefited from the curatorial advice of physicist Charles Falco. Shown clockwise from upper left: Hildebrand & Wolfmueller (1894); Harley-Davidson *Easy Rider* Chopper (1993 replica); Yamaha GTS1000 (1993); Megola Sport (1922).



Web Watch

<http://www.aeat.co.uk/nct/csindex.htm>

Tribology—the study of friction, lubrication and wear—is the subject of Georg Hähner and Nicholas Spencer's article on page 22. Illustrating tribology's industrial importance, the UK's National Centre for Tribology's *Case Studies Index* identifies 18 real-life tribological problems and explains how they were solved. One study, "Leak Puts Drinks Maker on Orange Alert," recounts how lubricant-induced corrosion caused an industrial soft drinks cooler to fail.



The Periodic Table of Elements

appears on the Web at several sites, each with a different emphasis. David Hsu's *Chemicool* (<http://wild-turkey.mit.edu/Chemicool>), for example, contains over 50 entries of quantitative data per element. Less technical, the Los Alamos National Laboratory's on-line *Period Table* (<http://mwanal.lanl.gov/CST/imagemap/periodic/periodic.html>) contains summaries of the history, properties and uses of each element. And from the University of Kentucky's John Selegue and James Holler comes *A Comic Book Periodic Table* (<http://www.uky.edu/~holler/periodic/periodic.html>), which displays comic book pages that refer to chemical elements.



<http://www.nsf.gov/sbe/srs/seind98/start.htm>

Every two years, the National Science Board publishes *Science & Engineering Indicators*, a thick compendium of trends in science and engineering research and education. The 1998 edition, the 13th in the series, is the first to be fully and conveniently accessible on the Web. Using the clearly laid out table of contents, readers can quickly retrieve sections on, for example, "Mathematics and Science Achievement of the Highest Performers" and the "Internationalization of R&D and Technology."

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