

ENGAGING OUR AMA LIFE MEMBERS

Introducing Life Member Plus

By Rob Dingman

Over the years, the AMA has faced an “entitlement” challenge. In fact, in an August 1982 column in this publication, former AMA President Ed Youngblood compared the AMA’s challenge to that of Social Security. Mr. Youngblood explained in his column that the Life Member Program was created in the early years of the Association to allow full membership privileges for life to any member after 25 years of paid dues. At the time, such seniority was built through payment of dues that were \$1 or \$2 per year. He further explained that benefits to members were far less numerous at the time—there was no free monthly magazine, and no Government Relations Department. There certainly wasn’t a Roadside Assistance Program.

In the mid-1970s, the Association began sending the magazine to every member. Shortly after, the leadership of the Association began to recognize the cost of providing this benefit for free to life members as a potentially serious long-term financial liability. Mr. Youngblood’s column laid out a plan to discontinue the “earned” Life Member Program and offered an 18-month window for members to convert to “paid” Life Membership, for a fee that would be based on a sliding scale depending on length of membership.

Despite a sincere effort to explain the problem and address this challenge, strong opposition emerged. At a February 1983 meeting of the AMA Board of Trustees (now called Board of Directors), Mr. Youngblood proposed the retention of the “earned” Life Membership with the caveat that “earned” Life Members pay for the magazine. At some point during 1983, it appears that a decision was made not to require Life Members to pay for the magazine. Instead, they were asked to make a voluntary contribution, which only a small percentage actually made.

The result was that the Association now had two Life Member Programs, an “earned” and a “paid” program—and a continuing financial liability from the “earned” program. Exacerbating the problem was a Financial Accounting Standards Board rule requiring that a benefit producing a long-term financial liability be accounted for, and that funds be set aside to meet such a liability. In 1994, the Association commissioned an actuarial study to determine the extent of this financial liability. According to that study, the long-term cost of continuing to provide a magazine to Charter (earned) Life Members would grow to \$4.5 million by 2020.

In a May 1995 column, Mr. Youngblood laid out the dilemma once more, this time requesting input from members as to the best way to address the situation. The documented response to this request was overwhelmingly positive, with nearly half of those who provided input suggesting that Charter Life Members be required to pay a fee to receive the magazine. Mr. Youngblood therefore announced in his November 1995 column that Charter Life Members would be required to pay a \$10 annual subscription fee to continue to receive the magazine. While this solution averted a financial catastrophe, another serious problem soon emerged. With roughly only one-third of our Charter Life Members subscribing to the magazine, two-thirds do not receive monthly communication from the Association and have become disenfranchised. It is most unfortunate that our most committed and loyal members, those who have continuously supported the organization for at least 25



consecutive years, no longer feel a part of their Association.

I want to stress that we have never stopped supporting our Life Members—and we never will. We fight against unfair laws and promote a positive image for motorcycling on behalf of all riders, including Life Members. Life Members also enjoy the other significant benefits of AMA membership, from money-saving discounts to racing privileges. We have even taken steps to ensure that Life Members can read this magazine online for free.

Now, we intend to re-engage our Life Members, and demonstrate the respect and appreciation they rightly deserve. To that end, we are announcing the Life Member Plus Program, which is exclusively available to AMA Life Members. Now, any Life Member will be able to receive both an annual subscription to the magazine, as well as AMA Roadside Assistance, for \$29 per year. This price is substantially lower than what a regular member pays and does not require automatic renewal, which is required with other memberships that include AMA Roadside Assistance.

All current AMA Life Members will soon receive a new AMA Life Member Plus membership mailing. In order to receive the magazine and the AMA Roadside Assistance benefit, Life Members can simply call (800) AMA-JOIN (262-5646) to activate a Life Member Plus membership. “Paid” Life Members are also eligible for the program, allowing them to enjoy the benefits of AMA Roadside Assistance.

Of course, there is no obligation to participate in the AMA Life Member Plus program. The current AMA Life Member programs aren’t going away—they’re not even changing. Yet we hope Life Members will recognize the value that this new program represents, and once again feel an honored and respected part of the Association they spent so many years helping to build.

Rob Dingman is president and CEO of the American Motorcyclist Association.