

ROAD RACING'S CHAMPION

Announcing The 2015 AMA Motorcyclist Of The Year

When the AMA sold its rights to select professional racing series in 2008, it was not without controversy. In fact, controversy was among the primary reasons for the sale. The AMA had become mired in controversy for its handling of professional racing. Much of that controversy stemmed from the fact that the AMA was attempting to be both the sanctioning body and series promoter for several of the various disciplines.

There is a great deal of financial risk associated with being a professional racing series promoter. Everyone has heard the phrase, "The show must go on." That financial risk is the reason. No promoter wants to lose his or her investment in an event or series of events.

The primary task of the sanctioning body is to ensure safe and fair competition. It is difficult to do this in a manner that doesn't at some point adversely affect the interests of the promoter. If a racing star is penalized for a rules infraction, or if bad weather causes unsafe conditions that lead to an event cancellation, for example, there is an inherent conflict with trying to be both the series promoter and sanctioning body. Add to this that the AMA was risking members' money to promote professional racing, and you get an idea why something needed to be done. Particularly since most of the professional racing series were losing a great deal of money.

When the decision by the AMA Board of Directors to sell the professional racing rights to the Daytona Motorsports Group was announced, there was reason for optimism. DMG was backed by Jim France and there was a belief that with the backing of a member of the famed France family, DMG would do what the AMA couldn't, and make AMA professional racing successful and profitable.

Although DMG faced many challenges caused at least in part by its own missteps, perhaps the greatest challenge was a faltering economy. Just as DMG acquired the rights to AMA Pro Racing,

the bottom fell out of the U.S. economy, making a challenging situation much more difficult. There is no doubt that, had the AMA continued as both professional race sanctioning body and series promoter during the worst economy since the Great Depression, the organization would have been decimated financially.

By the end of the 2014 season, the AMA-branded road racing series being run by DMG was in a difficult place. Series and team sponsorship was elusive. The television package was not what the teams needed to attract sponsors. Tracks and event promoters were unwilling to commit to sanction agreements for the following year.

Fortunately, for all parties involved, a partnership called the KRAVE Group stepped forward. A deal was struck late in 2014 between and among the KRAVE Group, DMG and the AMA that enabled KRAVE to take over commercial and promotional responsibility for professional road racing in America and restored the AMA as the sanctioning body for professional road racing.

In 2015, the KRAVE Group operated the first season of its MotoAmerica professional road racing series sanctioned by the AMA and FIM North America. The MotoAmerica series was not without its own challenges in its inaugural year, but it built a strong platform and set professional road racing in America on a new path for success.

The KRAVE Group and MotoAmerica are headed by three-time MotoGP World Champion and two-time AMA Superbike Champion Wayne Rainey, an AMA Motorcycle Hall of Famer who was honored in October as a Hall of Fame Legend. Rainey was the driving force behind the KRAVE Group, MotoAmerica and getting the deal done.

While Wayne Rainey is one of the most accomplished racers of all time, it is due to his efforts as an executive rather than his greatness on the race track that he is the 2015 AMA Motorcyclist of the Year. It is always important to point out that the AMA Motorcyclist of the Year is not a lifetime achievement award. Rather, it is recognition for the profound impact that an individual has had on motorcycling in the last 12 months. While Rainey was under serious consideration for the honor last year for his efforts to acquire the rights to the road racing series, the AMA Board

Wayne visits his AMA Superbike Championship winning Kawasaki GPZ750 at the AMA Motorcycle Hall of Fame Museum.



Jeff Gucciardo

wanted to be sure that his efforts and the series were successful.

Over the last year and a half, I have had many discussions with Wayne about the future of American road racing. One thing that stood out early in our conversations was Wayne's motivation. He said that he wanted Americans to again be competitive on the world stage. He wanted to build a ladder from the amateur racing ranks to national professional racing to the world championship level. He has been instrumental in helping the AMA bring the various amateur road racing organizations around the country together to develop a path to a professional road racing license that runs through the AMA.

Wayne has not traded on his multi-time world champion status to accomplish what he has on the business side of road racing. Certainly, his name and racing success have opened some doors and gotten people to return his phone calls, but that can only get you so far.

Given three world championships and two national championships and the fact that a crash while racing ended a phenomenal career, it would be understandable for someone in these circumstances to be driven by the worst combination of arrogance and bitterness. This could not be more contrary to who Wayne Rainey is. He is the most down-to-earth and humble person, let alone world champion, I have ever met. He is also perhaps the most optimistic person I have ever met. There is no doubt in my mind that the strength of Wayne's character and his personality have made him successful.

It is, therefore, my great honor to present Wayne Rainey as the 2015 AMA Motorcyclist of the Year.

Rob Dingman is AMA president and CEO.



By Rob Dingman