

AMA VINTAGE MOTORCYCLE DAYS

The Best Keeps Getting Better by Rob Dingman

A certain weekend in July is circled on many motorcyclist's calendars. AMA Vintage Motorcycle Days held at Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course in Lexington, Ohio, each year has become a must-attend event. It is a motorcycling event unlike any other on the planet. There is something for everyone, including almost every discipline of vintage motorcycle racing, a bike show, motorcycling seminars, the American Motordrome Wall of Death and North America's largest motorcycle swap meet, and that just scratches the surface.

Plus, AMA Vintage Motorcycle Days is the largest annual fundraiser for the American Motorcycle Heritage Foundation, with proceeds benefiting the AMA Motorcycle Hall of Fame.

This year's event was, in my opinion, the best ever. Despite some bad weather on Friday, complete with a pop-up windstorm that littered the swap meet with more EZ-up frames than could be counted, the rest of the event was amazing by all measures. The facility appeared very full even on move-in day on Thursday. This means there were more people who stayed for the whole weekend. In my recollection, Saturday drew the biggest crowd ever seen at AMA Vintage Motorcycle Days.

There were a lot of improvements made this year, including a much better infield presence. In addition to the AMA tent and AMA Motorcycle Hall of Fame tent, we featured an exhibit by our presenting sponsor, Riders of Kawasaki, powered by the AMA. The Wall of Death was a major attraction and there were numerous vendors, including the Vintage Japanese Motorcycle Club, pinstripers, and a bike show sponsored by the Old Bike Barn, with more than 100 bikes occupying the space. And our popular entertainment acts kept everyone in good spirits.

All this activity drew

more people into the infield than in past years. Our great AMA staff, particularly Creative Director Mark Lapid, Marketing Manager Kaitlyn Sesco and Marketing Coordinator Hannah Saunders are to be commended for all the improvements.

We saw similar improvements in the competition elements in terms of the class structures, much of it organized by Racing Projects Manager Alex Hunter. These included the scheduling, layout and presentation of the tracks and registration area, highlighted by the AMA Off-Road Racing Hangar that featured the podium, merchandise sales, a bike show, displays of vintage memorabilia...and a wedding.

That's right, a wedding! If everything else wasn't enough to make this the best AMA Vintage Motorcycle Days ever, we had one of the most authentically moto-inspired weddings ever as AMA Off-Road Manager Erik Kudla and AMA Member Services Representative Ocean-Breeze Santillano were joined in matrimony in a ceremony officiated by AMA Director of Racing Kevin Crowther.

This year I made an effort to experience AMA Vintage Motorcycle Days as a participant as well as someone working for the organization responsible for the event. I entered my project BMW that I have written about in this space in the bike show after riding it in the Lap for History, and I raced my bone-stock Yamaha TT-R50 in the pit bike race.

As soon as the bike show was over, I made my way over to the staging area for the organized ride to the Ashland Fairgrounds for the vintage flat-track

races. Also on the ride were a number of AMA Board members, as well as U.S. Congressman Tim Walberg (R-Mich.) and his wife, who both have attended the event a number of times. At a scheduled stop, the congressman's wife hitched a ride in a sidecar rig with AMHF board member Perry King at the controls. Perry

was riding our newly delivered Ural that is being raffled as a fundraiser for the AMA Motorcycle Hall of Fame (see page 33).

Although I really didn't expect to bring home any hardware, my BMW took second in its class in the bike show. (I should point out that despite more than 100 entries total, there were only three in the relatively sparse European Custom class.) Similarly, I finished on the podium in the pit bike race, but while there were dozens of entries in the 110cc and 125cc classes, only four of us lined up for the 50cc class (and the rider I beat, I am a bit embarrassed to admit, was an 8-year old).

I even sold a trail bike there that my kids had outgrown. Some of that money was invested to have pinstripes added to the tank of my BMW by one of the vendors in the infield.

I wasn't the only one who enjoyed the event more this year than in past years. I never have had so many people stop me and complement the AMA and our staff on how great the event has become.

If you have never been to AMA Vintage Motorcycle Days, you owe it to yourself to circle the date on your calendar and be there next year. At press-time a 2018 date had not been announced, but look for that news soon.

While AMA Vintage Motorcycle Days was an amazing event this year, it's important we remember a man who is perhaps more responsible for the charity the event supports than any other. In early July, AMA Motorcycle Hall of Famer, seven-time AMA Grand National Enduro Champion, former AMA board member, former AMHF board member and co-founder of the AMHF itself Bill Baird passed away.

I had the good fortune to have known Bill and his wife Millie since my days in the AMA's government relations department in the 1990s. They were wonderful to me, and both worked tirelessly on behalf of the AMA and the Hall of Fame for decades. Bill will be sorely missed and my thoughts and prayers are with Millie and her family.

Rob Dingman is AMA president and CEO.

