



## FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO **BIKES, BOARDS AND BIG SKY**

BY ROB DINGMAN

**T**he most recent quarterly meeting of the AMA Board of Directors was held at a ranch in Montana managed by Board Chairman Russ Ehnes. Home to a world-class off-highway vehicle recreational trail system, the cattle ranch offered a perfect venue for the Board to conduct important business as well as bond while enjoying trail riding together.

It is always amazing to me when people are surprised to hear that members of our Board of Directors are enthusiasts who ride — and ride well! Board members don't get to ride together all that often, but when they do it's usually something special. In this case, some came a day or more early, while others stayed on after the meeting concluded.

AMA Chief Operating Officer James Holter and I arrived at the ranch on the Tuesday afternoon before the Thursday meeting. Russ treated us and other early arrivers to Wagyu steaks from cattle raised at the ranch (working there, he knows a thing or two about grilling steak), and then took us on a tour of the ranch in side-by-sides in the early evening.

The next day our riding group included Russ, AMA Board Member from the Northeast Region Hub Brennan, James and me. I was aboard a borrowed Husky TE300 two-stroke, which had quite a bit less engine braking than my four-stroke Husaberg FE450, so I really appreciated the compression release Russ had added.

Although I'd ridden with Russ and James (both accomplished riders) before, I'd never ridden with Hub, who is a physician in real life. Hub is an avid trials enthusiast and that

was apparent in his trail riding. Trials guys always make riding trails look easy, and Hub is no exception.

I have known Hub for a number of years but my interactions with him have been mostly in business settings. In addition to serving on the AMA Board, he also represents the AMA on the medical commission of the Fédération Internationale de Motocyclisme (FIM). It was great to ride with and see a different side of him, the side that has motivated him to be involved with the AMA and FIM.

More board members arrived on Wednesday and the evening's activities consisted of dinner and another side-by-side tour of the ranch. Relaxing together in this way rather than in a board room helped board members see the commonalities they share, particularly those associated with a love of motorcycling.

Thursday's meeting was extremely productive, the camaraderie developed outside the meeting clearly strengthening the bond among members. And this, I believe, has made for a much stronger board of directors. We finished early enough that we were able to get in a short, late-afternoon ride, the group this time including Holter, AMA Board Member from the North Central Region Gary Pontius, and AMA Board Member from the Southwest Region Byron Snider. A great meeting followed by another great ride and another great dinner. Hard to beat a day like that!

Traveling to this meeting I flashed back to the first time I visited Montana to ride over 30 years ago. At the time I had recently joined the government relations staff of the Motorcycle Industry Council as a land-use issues

specialist. The MIC was putting on one of a series of OHV workshops for public land managers, and Russ and his mom — AMA Motorcycle Hall of Famer Mona Ehnes — hosted a trail ride for us out-of-towners.

Riding Russ' wife's Yamaha RT180 (which I broke the kick-start lever on, embarrassingly), I had one of my first-ever — and best-ever — trail-riding experiences, riding some of the best trails, rocky terrain and creek crossings I've ever been on, then or since. As someone whose new job it was to work to keep public riding areas open, I recall sarcastically thinking, "it's a pity they don't have anywhere to ride out here."

From then on I was hooked on trail riding, and have been since. And that experience, at least indirectly, resulted in me becoming involved in legislation that created what is now the federal Recreational Trails Program, which provides funding for state trails programs. That involvement eventually contributed to me being hired by the AMA to run its Washington, D.C., office for a period in the 1990s, and after a few years in a public-sector job I returned as AMA president at the end of 2006.

In many ways, my interest in motorcycling and involvement in the AMA can be traced to that early trail-riding experience in Montana all those years ago. And that's why this most recent trip to Big Sky country was so nostalgic for me.

Russ and Mona... let's do it again soon!

*Rob Dingman is the President and CEO of the AMA, and a Charter Life Member*

