

NEW VINTAGE ADVENTURE

Experiencing The Wonder Of AMA Vintage Motorcycle Days

By Rob Dingman

For the past few years, I have dedicated this column space in the September issue of the magazine to a recap of that year's AMA Vintage Motorcycle Days event. In reviewing previous September columns, I found that I had proclaimed that each event seemed to be bigger than the last in terms of attendees, vintage race entries, swap meet vendors and new event features. This year, I will not break the pattern, because the 2018 AMA Vintage Motorcycle Days, featuring Royal Enfield, was spectacular in every regard.

Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course was bursting at the seams. Race entries were up significantly, there were more swap meet vendor spaces sold than ever before and although we don't have an official count of attendees from the racetrack, there is no doubt that the 2018 event was the biggest yet by a large margin. Even the dinner ride to Ashland County Fairgrounds for the flat track races was bigger than ever, with more than 100 motorcyclists.

One of the primary reasons for the remarkable turnout was the great weather. It is rare not to experience some rain during the weekend, but Friday through Sunday this year was the best weather we have enjoyed in recent memory.

Another big factor in the success of the 2018 event was more new elements in the infield area, known as the Old Bike Barn Crossroads. In addition to traditional features, such as the American Motordrome Wall of Death, the AMA membership tent and AMA Motorcycle Hall of Fame tent, we built on last year's momentum to include even more vendors, bike builders, live music and seminars.

From all indications, everybody thoroughly enjoyed themselves. I don't know if I have ever seen so many smiling faces. So many people approached me to tell me how great the event was and what a great job our staff was doing. I was asked a number of times if I would once again compete in the pit bike race, as I had done

last year. My answer was that I had retired from pit bike racing. (Since, however, I have been lightly modifying my Yamaha TT-R50 to better accommodate adult riders so I *could* make a comeback next year. Hey, you never know.)

I want to acknowledge the grand marshal for the event: AMA Motorcycle Hall of Famer Scot Harden. With adventure riding as a theme this year, Scot was the perfect choice. The Hall of Famer made his name competing in multi-day, thousand-mile rallies such as Dakar, and it was great to have him on hand to preside over the event. Plus, Scot is always very generous with his time in support of the AMA and AMA Motorcycle Hall of Fame.

AMA Vintage Motorcycle Days, of course, is the most significant fundraiser for the Hall of Fame, the pinnacle of achievement in motorcycling. Scot frequently says that if we don't have a Hall of Fame, then we don't have a sport.

One of the coolest parts of the weekend for me was being interviewed by custom bike builder and Crossroads emcee Kevin Dunworth during the bike show about my custom BMW R8T. (I got second in the European Custom category this year.) I don't know if it was the positive energy from that discussion or too much sun and dehydration, but I ended up picking up another project bike in the swap meet. As things were winding down Sunday afternoon, I was making a final pass through the swap meet, when out of the corner of my eye, there it was: a 1985 Honda Nighthawk, CB700SC.

The vendor wasn't asking much, but the bike didn't run. I figured any price was a risk on a non-running motorcycle, but

it appeared to be all there. I offered half what he was asking, almost hoping he would reject the offer, because I didn't want the dilemma that decision would present. When he came back with a price just over half, I went for it.

One of my first bikes was a 1984 Nighthawk and I really enjoyed it. The Nighthawk CB700SC was only made for three years, from 1984 to 1986. That was a period of time when the U.S. government had imposed import tariffs on bikes larger than 700cc to help Harley-Davidson regain its traction in the U.S. marketplace. Honda sold CB750s in other parts of the world but the CB700SC was made for the American market. Maybe all the current news about tariffs and Harley-Davidson's response to them got into my subconscious to make me buy this bike.

The swap meet vendor said that the bike had an electrical problem, which turned out to be an unplugged starter button—probably unplugged to mask the clutch issues and the clogged carburetors I've since discovered. So far, I have only tackled the carbs, which could have been the centerpiece of a public service announcement espousing the dangers to motorcycle fuel systems of ethanol in gasoline. After cleaning these carbs, it has strengthened my resolve against government efforts to increase the amount of ethanol forced into the marketplace.

Another AMA Vintage Motorcycle Days is in the books. If the trend continues, next year will be epic, so you won't want to miss it. Make plans to be there for 2019 AMA Vintage Motorcycle Days. You'll be glad you did.

Rob Dingman is AMA president and CEO.

