

## AN ELECTRIC EXPERIENCE IN LAS VEGAS



By Rob Dingman

There was one thing on my schedule for the AMA Legends Weekend, presented by Husqvarna, in Las Vegas that I was looking forward to almost as much as the AMA Motorcycle Hall of Fame induction ceremony itself. This was a very busy weekend that included a Board of Directors meeting of the American Motorcycle Heritage Foundation, an AMA Board Executive Committee meeting, an AMA Board meeting, a breakfast with the 2013 inductees, the Dave Mungenast Memorial

Legends Reception featuring dozens of Hall of Famers and the Monster Energy Cup AMA Supercross event at Sam Boyd Stadium—all in addition to the induction ceremony that anchored the weekend.

The thing I was most looking forward to in the midst of all these official duties was an opportunity to ride a Zero electric motorcycle with Zero Global Marketing Vice President and AMA Motorcycle Hall of Famer Scot Harden. Zero was a sponsor of the induction ceremony and Scot had promised to have a few bikes on hand and lead an early morning ride around his hometown of Las Vegas.

I have been curious about electric bikes for a while but never had the opportunity to see for myself if they really could be considered “real motorcycles.” While I have been pretty open minded on the subject, I personally know some purists, including a very respected member of the road racing community, who believes that electric bikes are an “abomination.”

We met outside the hotel at 7 a.m. on the Saturday morning after the induction ceremony. In addition to Scot Harden and myself, AMA Board member Perry King and Kawasaki Senior Product Specialist Paul Golde came along on the ride. Scot had two Zero DS dual-sport models that Perry and I started out on while he rode a Zero S streetfighter model. Paul rode a gas-powered Kawasaki Ninja 1000 that he had ridden to Vegas from southern California.

From the minute I threw my leg over the DS, it was an entirely different experience for me. When the key is turned to the on position and a switch similar to a kill switch on a conventional bike is in the run position, the bike is on and ready to go. Sitting in a parked position, there is no noticeable difference between on and off. The only difference is that if you twist the throttle when it's on the bike will go.

The ride is smooth and silent. The lack of any engine noise and no vibration from the motor is surreal. There is no clutch, and there are no gears to shift through. The power delivery is instantaneous,



allowing the bike to accelerate with an incredible quickness that I had never experienced on a conventional motorcycle with a manual transmission.

Scot took us past his boyhood home and explained how there had been a dairy farm where we now saw widespread development. He then stopped around the corner from this home to show us an estate that was once occupied by Wayne Newton. Scot and his friends may have scaled the security walls a time or two to swim uninvited in Mr. Newton's swimming pool when they were kids. We then rode through Sunset Park, which Scot's grandmother was involved in creating. From there, we rode on to an area overlooking Paradise Valley called the Mesa. It was here that we got the opportunity to experience the bikes' capability off-road. Although we only briefly rode the bikes on dirt, it made me hope for a future opportunity to spend more time with an electric bike off-road.

We had traded bikes throughout the ride so each of us had the opportunity to try each bike. Entering the highway on the way back to the hotel on the Ninja, I had a hard time keeping up with the electric bikes, which accelerated onto the highway much quicker than I could, having to shift through the gears.

As we were pulling back into the hotel driveway, I was riding next to Scot, and we were having a conversation. Neither of us needed to raise our voice and neither had any trouble hearing the other. The ability to have a conversation while in motion was an aspect of riding an electric motorcycle that hadn't occurred to me.

The happy feeling you have after riding a motorcycle is one reason we all ride. I definitely had that feeling after riding the Zeros. No matter what mechanical differences there are between electric bikes and those that run on gas, one thing they have in common is the ability to provide that happy feeling and the enjoyment we all get out of riding a motorcycle.

I don't know what the future holds for electric motorcycles. Battery technology, which is the limiting factor with respect to operating range of electric bikes, seems to improve year after year. While I don't expect electric motorcycles to replace their gas-powered predecessors anytime soon—and they likely never will—I do think electric motorcycles are here to stay.

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