

2012 MOTORCYCLIST OF THE YEAR

Jon-Erik Burleson



By Rob Dingman

As the motorcycle industry continued to battle back from its worst downturn in history in 2012, one individual's innovation and leadership have put him and the company he leads at the forefront of the industry's resurgence. The 2012 AMA Motorcyclist of the Year is Jon-Erik Burleson.

Burleson is the president of KTM North America. During 2012, KTM's off-road model sales grew significantly over 2011, while industry-wide off-road model sales have dropped. The success that KTM has enjoyed

under Burleson's leadership is, however, only part of the equation.

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 over the last year. It is also important to recognize Burleson's lifelong passion for, and commitment to, motorcycling in order to understand what has made him so successful in the motorcycle industry.

The mission of the AMA is to promote the motorcycle lifestyle and protect the future of motorcycling. The words "motorcycle lifestyle" frequently conjure up images of some of the worst motorcycling stereotypes. The use of the word "lifestyle" in the context of our mission statement is intended to embrace a broad range of responsible motorcycling interests, from riding clubs to motocross families and everything in between.

The motorcycle lifestyle is often something passed from one generation to the next. Jon-Erik Burleson exemplifies the motorcycle lifestyle. He was raised in a motorcycle racing family and has been around motorcycling his whole life. His passion for motorcycling is like a family heirloom passed from his father to him that he is now passing on to his kids.

Jon-Erik is not only passionate about motorcycling, but he is also passionate about the AMA. When I became president of the AMA at the end of 2006, Jon-Erik was serving on the AMA Board of Directors. There are always a variety of interests represented on the AMA Board. The line between the business or personal interests of board members and what is in the best interest of the AMA and its membership has historically been somewhat blurry. Jon-Erik not only proved himself very capable of taking his KTM hat off and putting his AMA hat on when in the AMA boardroom, he was instrumental in holding other board members accountable to do the same. Jon-Erik approached every issue, not from the perspective of a corporate member, but from the perspective of someone who has been an individual AMA member since he was a little kid and is in the process of passing his passion for motorcycling and the AMA on to his kids.

The AMA Board of Directors functions much differently today than it did before Jon-Erik joined the board. Burleson served as chairman of the Finance Committee of the Board of Directors. In that capacity, he helped the AMA improve its fiscal management. As a member of the board's Executive Committee, he helped to bring about the



Photo Scott Hinko

many improvements made to your association over the last several years. While he has left the AMA Board, reflecting his commitment to term limits, Burleson currently serves on the Board of Directors of the American Motorcycle Heritage Foundation, which oversees the AMA Motorcycle Hall of Fame.

Jon-Erik has his famous father, Dick Burleson, to thank for getting him involved in motorcycling and a former KTM president, the late Rod Bush, to thank for giving him a job in the motorcycle industry. Jon-Erik's accomplishments give his father reason to be proud, and they honor the memory of Rod Bush. It is fitting that Jon-Erik Burleson be named AMA Motorcyclist of the Year for the same year that Bush was recently inducted into the AMA Motorcycle Hall of Fame.

While the achievements of Jon-Erik Burleson in 2012 are impressive, I think he would be the first to tell you that the impact motorcycling has had on his life is every bit as profound.

Rob Dingman is president and CEO of the AMA.

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