

AMA MEMBERS HAVE SPOKEN

Future 'Motorcyclist Of The Year' Designations Will Honor Positive Actions

By Rob Dingman

Few issues have generated the kind of response we have seen to the designation of California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger as the 2010 AMA Motorcyclist of the Year (MOTY). Rest assured that we are listening to you and your concerns as members more than ever before. I, myself, have been critical of the AMA over the years for its inability to recognize its mistakes, own up to them and reverse course if necessary. I confess to you that I now believe this designation to have been a mistake. I take responsibility and apologize to you for it.

Perhaps, the only thing we accomplished, as I read in one blog posting, was to heighten awareness of a new law signed by the former governor requiring all California-registered motorcycles and exhaust systems built in 2013 and later to display a federal Environmental Protection Agency label somewhere on the exhaust itself, certifying that the exhaust meets the federal sound standards. Frankly, drawing attention to this issue was our intention with the MOTY designation. The California law sets this nation down the wrong path to reducing excessive motorcycle sound because it is discriminatory and will do little to solve the problem. Unfortunately, too often other states look to California and replicate their overly restrictive laws.

Some who have written or called the AMA about this issue got the impression that the AMA was in favor of this new law and was pleased with the actor-turned politician for signing it. Quite the contrary—make no mistake, the MOTY was given in this case for a very negative reason. The AMA opposed SB 435 and continues to oppose this ill-advised approach.

Much of the confusion likely stems from the cover photo depicting a smiling former governor astride a heavyweight cruiser, leaving the impression that he had cooperated with the story and consented to a photo shoot with the AMA. In fact, the photo was a stock photo purchased by the AMA. Understandably, some people didn't even bother to read the story based on the cover photo. The photo on the cover should have conveyed our dissatisfaction with the actions of its subject.

The intended negativity of the distinction was further blunted by our efforts to provide editorial balance. Early on in his tenure as governor, Schwarzenegger did do some positive things for the off-highway riding community, but the MOTY recognition was for something negative he had done in the previous year and not for his overall body of work. The adverse actions of the former governor in the waning months of his administration arguably overshadowed anything positive he may have previously done for motorcyclists. This too should have been more clearly communicated.

Some of the comments we have received suggest that the MOTY story came off as smug and communicated a "we told you so" attitude. This was not at all the intention. What we hoped to convey was that this approach to addressing excessive sound was the kind of "wrong answer" we have been concerned about. For years, the AMA has encouraged the self-regulation of sound,



and since 2009 we have endorsed and promoted the adoption of the SAE J2825 sound measurement standard as a practical and economical solution. Unfortunately, California's EPA-labeling law will do little to solve the problem.

Although Gov. Schwarzenegger was not my first choice, a persuasive argument was made that he met the criteria due to the far-reaching negative impact his action would have on motorcycling for years to come. The criteria established when the MOTY was created in the January 2009 issue of this magazine was that the designation would go to the person who has had the most profound impact on motorcycling, *positive or negative*, in the previous 12 months. Despite this criteria, some have complained that the "honor" of 2010 AMA Motorcyclist of the Year was wasted.

The MOTY was created as a "distinction" rather than an "honor." Many of you, however, have told us that the MOTY should be an honor bestowed upon someone for positive reasons. Given the reaction to the 2010 choice, I agree with you. In fact, in February the AMA Board of Directors adopted a policy that awards and key designations such as AMA Motorcyclist of the Year be given for positive reasons. Going forward that will be the case.

The American Motorcyclist Association is your organization. It is my responsibility to ensure that the Association is reflective of our membership and responsive to your input. I recognize this mistake and take responsibility for it. In an effort to be responsive to your input, we are changing the MOTY designation to always be an honor for its recipient. This decision is another demonstration that the AMA is becoming more responsive to your concerns, and I encourage you to continue sending us your thoughts and opinions on what the AMA can do to best serve our members.

Rob Dingman is president and CEO of the AMA.