

MEMBERSHIP MILESTONE

Earning Life Member Status

In September, my credit card was charged for my 25th year of membership in the AMA. This means, I am proud to report, that I have finally achieved Charter Life Membership status in the AMA.

I originally joined the AMA in 1994, shortly before coming to work for the association as its Washington representative. I had been working at the Motorcycle Industry Council at the time and, like many who work in the motorcycle industry today, didn't fully appreciate the importance of membership in the AMA until I joined. The annual dues at that time were \$29, which were raised to \$39 in my fifth year in 1999. The dues went up again in 2011 to the current fee of \$49.

According to a column in the May 1995 *American Motorcyclist*, when the AMA was founded in 1924, the directors of the new association set the dues at \$1 per year and created the Life Membership Program. Under the program, you would become a Charter Life Member and not have to pay dues for the rest of your life if you paid your annual dues for 25 years.

In August of 1982, the AMA announced that as of Oct. 1 of that year, there would no longer be an "earned" Life Member Program and it would be replaced with, what was called at the time, a "choice" Life Member Program. The "choice" program allowed members to purchase an AMA Life Membership for \$250 and allowed existing members to convert to Life Membership for a pro-rated fee based on the number of years of membership.

This change was intended to address the growing financial liability associated with continuing to provide a rapidly increasing number of Life Members with a monthly magazine, which itself had become increasingly costly.

By the end of 1983, in response to member feedback, the AMA reinstated the "earned" or Charter Life Member Program, and chose to retain the paid Life Member option as well, making two options for Life Membership available. The looming fiscal ramifications that then-AMA President Ed Youngblood had sought to address by eliminating the "earned" Life Membership option were deferred but not averted.

In a subsequent column in November of 1995, Youngblood announced that Charter Life Members would be required to pay a \$10 subscription fee to continue to receive the magazine. While this addressed the financial challenge, since only about a third of Charter Life Members subscribed to the magazine, the majority of Charter Life Members no longer received monthly communication from their association.

Over time, many of the AMA's most loyal members became disenfranchised and even disgruntled.

To address this problem, in April 2011 we announced the creation of the Life Member Plus Program. While Charter Life Members can still subscribe to the monthly magazine, we bundled the magazine and participation in the popular AMA Roadside Assistance Program into a new exclusive program only available to Charter Life Members for just \$29.

Since the roadside assistance benefit was implemented long after the changes to the Charter Life Member Program, those members weren't able to take advantage of the benefit. (The AMA Roadside Assistance Program had previously only been available for members who signed up for automatic membership renewal, purchased a three-year membership or paid a \$35 fee.) It's important to note that AMA Life Member Plus participants also receive AMA

Roadside Assistance Plus, which covers more tows than the base roadside program that is provided for no charge through the auto-renew program.

There is of course, no obligation for Life Members to participate in the Life Member Plus program, and every Life Member still receives all the other great member benefits, including discounts on products and services, competing in AMA-sanctioned races and the protection of our right to ride.

I have always viewed the AMA's Charter Life Member Program as our most significant member retention tool. Once you have invested a number of years and paid annual dues for a period of time, you don't want to lose that time or the dues paid and have to start over again. This motivates members to continue renewing even if they have stopped racing, for example, or even stopped riding.

When I left my position at the AMA in 1998 to return to my home state of New York to accept an appointment in state government, I maintained my membership. I remained loyal to the AMA, even through a period that saw the association mired in litigation that ultimately cost AMA members a considerable amount of money. I maintained my membership through a period that saw the AMA create a for-profit subsidiary to manage its professional racing activities—activities that failed to serve the interests of AMA's individual members.

I, like many of you, came to believe that the AMA had lost its way. But the promise of Charter Life Membership for continuing to maintain my membership for 25 years prevented me from giving up on the organization through that difficult period.

The AMA today is a much different organization than the one I joined in 1994. One thing that has never changed, however, is that the AMA is the only national organization that represents the diverse interests of all motorcyclists. I want to thank my fellow Life Members for their long-term dedication to the association. I am proud to be an AMA Charter Life Member!

Rob Dingman is AMA president and CEO and is an AMA Charter Life Member.



By Rob Dingman