



FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO IT'S ELECTRIC

BY ROB DINGMAN

It's been more than a decade since I covered the topic of electric motorcycles in this space after sampling a Zero-built machine with then-Zero Marketing Vice President and AMA Motorcycle Hall of Famer Scot Harden.

I wrote that I didn't know what the future held for electric motorcycles, and that I didn't expect e-motorcycles to replace their gas-powered predecessors anytime soon. But I *did* think electric motorcycles were here to stay.

Well, that future is upon us, and despite the fact that electric cars are losing rather than gaining popularity, government mandates continue a push away from internal combustion engines and toward electric vehicles. While the federal government is intent on putting an end to the purchase of new gas-powered vehicles by 2035, California already will require that 35% of new vehicles sold be zero-emission by 2026, and that percentage is increased to 68% by 2030 and 100% by 2035. Rhode Island, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Washington, and the District of Columbia have all adopted the same rules.

Most of the e-motorcycle activity of late has been on the racing front. With the introduction last year of the Stark VARG electric dirt bike and its ensuing popularity, the Spain-based company with Swedish roots is making a push to race in various disciplines, and at all levels. While the company will be allowed to race in other countries against their internal-combustion counterparts, we in the U.S. are taking a more measured approach.

When its bike was introduced several years ago, the now-defunct Alta company demanded to be allowed to show up at Anaheim 1 and race AMA

Supercross against the 250cc bikes. At the time there was no comparative data available, and there were important safety considerations that had to be explored, as well.

Stark has taken a more collaborative approach, and seems to want to work with the AMA and other sanctioning bodies around the world to develop rules and safety protocols that make racing safe and fair. This is an effective model that worked in the development of rules for the electric micro classes currently in the AMA amateur rulebook. Both Cobra and KTM came to us during the development of their respective electric minis, and worked with us to develop the rules.

Competition rules aside, protocols to ensure the safety of race officials and crews that are unique to electric machines must also be in place. Things like the use of rubber gloves to avoid electrocution, and specialized fire extinguishers designed to put out chemical fires caused by lithium batteries, are good examples.

Although electric bike manufacturers will tell you their bikes won't catch fire, it will inevitably happen, and we must be prepared. Since chemical fires aren't easily extinguished, they may be required to burn out. And while it may be possible to plan for this outdoors on a track or in a wide-open area, this is not something easily accommodated in an indoor AMA Supercross or Arenacross venue. Imagine the impact this would have on a live broadcast.

At the AIMExpo convention in Las Vegas earlier this year, for instance, an electric bike caught fire...and when it couldn't be extinguished quickly, it caused the entire convention hall to be evacuated.

We have recently issued guidance to AMA amateur event organizers



While e-MXers like the \$12,900 Stark VARG offer impressive performance, they include some challenges and unknowns that need to be addressed.

regarding e-motorcycles that requires any non-micro classes allowing e-motorcycles (micro classes are already in the AMA rulebook) to be approved by the AMA at least two weeks prior to the event. The guidance encourages organizers to create stand-alone electric classes through supplemental rules where appropriate demand exists. Such rules must include electric bike-specific safety protocols that will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis and require pre-approval.

Unless addressed and approved in supplemental rules, organizers are prohibited from combining internal-combustion engine motorcycles and electric motorcycles on track together in either the same or separate classes in motocross.

The intent here is to allow organizers to meet demand without sacrificing necessary safety protocols. Hopefully, this limited activity will provide valuable data that will inform our rules-making process going forward.

E-motorcycles present an exciting new facet of motorcycling. We are embracing them and will provide opportunities for them to compete.

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