

SIGNS OF LIFE

Opportunities For Growth In Motorcycling

This is the time of year when the long winter's wait to throw a leg back over a motorcycle seems to be never ending for those of us in the northern United States. It is also a time of year when I am most envious of those of you who live in places where you can ride 12 months out of the year. The cold temperatures aren't what prevent winter riding in Ohio. It's the poor road conditions and the potential for black ice that are the deterrents.

Thinking I could extend last riding season, I didn't get around to winterizing any of my bikes until December. Once the cold weather comes, we usually get a few days of warmer weather before the snow flies that allow for a last ride or two. Once it turns cold again, I usually wait for a little warm-up in temperature before taking the batteries out and running an additive through the fuel systems before draining them. Once the red lights started to flash on the battery tenders, indicating that the cold was preventing the chargers from working as well as they should, I knew that there was no time left to wait for a thaw. I have waited too long previously, and that has cost me a battery or two over the years.

Neglecting the fuel systems can be bothersome in the springtime as well. It still amazes me that despite how much damage ethanol does to motorcycle fuel systems, our government wants to force more of this terrible stuff into what will likely, before long, be the only fuel available to us in the marketplace. I have paid the price on more than one occasion for not running an additive through my fuel systems before storing the bikes for the winter.

I have written previously in this space (September 2018) about a project bike

I picked up at AMA Vintage Motorcycle Days last year that had so much damage from ethanol that the carbs appeared to be covered in green moss. Now, that bike likely had been sitting longer than a few winter months, but it was really eye opening to see how much damage can be caused by allowing fuel to sit for too long.

While on the subject of that project bike, a 1985 Honda Nighthawk CB700SC, I made good progress with it in the summer and early fall. After getting it running, I had some decisions to make about which direction the project would take, and that's where the project stalled—when it became too cold for

it to be fun to work on in the garage. As I get back to it, hopefully, working on the bike will tide me over until the roads are clear of ice and snow and I can get riding again.

There are other things motorcyclists can do in the winter to get that motorcycling fix. It used to be that we had to rely mostly on motorcycle magazines to stoke the passion in the off-season, but the internet offers all kinds of things motorcycling. Remember, however, that just because you read it online doesn't make it true.

As an example, almost everywhere you look online, you can find stories about how terrible the motorcycle industry is doing. There is no doubt that the industry never fully recovered from the Great Recession of 2008 but there are signs of life that are not being reported or even blogged about.

Much of the focus has been on the challenges faced by one major American manufacturer. Because that manufacturer has historically enjoyed such a huge overall market share, when its sales numbers are down, those numbers have a substantial adverse impact on overall industry numbers. Although overall motorcycle sales were slightly down in 2018, there was continued growth in the dual sport, general off-road and competition off-road categories. This may bode well for future sales as these categories could be viewed as entry points

to other types of riding.

There is little doubt that the world of motorcycling is changing, and the industry must change with it. Motorcycling consumers have different preferences today than did motorcycling consumers 20 years ago. We are experiencing a transition to that new crop of consumer and an evolution to a new range of products to cater to them.

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The most obvious trend is toward electric motorcycles. When they first came onto the scene, I recall some in the industry proclaiming them an abomination. Now most, if not all, of the major manufacturers have an electric motorcycle or one in development. As battery technology continues to improve, electric motorcycles will become more affordable and more mainstream.

I have been impressed with the electric motorcycles I have ridden, but for the time being, I am still partial to the internal combustion engine. The future is coming, though, and it will include electric motorcycles. At least when it arrives, we won't have to worry about ethanol ruining our engines. That may not be too far off, but regardless, the future I'm most anticipating is spring.



By Rob Dingman

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