

MOTORCYCLIST OF THE YEAR: TRAVIS PASTRANA

Great American Daredevil

My interest in motorcycles started at a young age. As is likely the case with many motorcyclists who are around my age, Evel Knievel captured my attention early on and in a big way. While I am not quite old enough to remember seeing the Caesar's Palace fountain jump attempt, I can recall the excitement leading up to Knievel's later jump attempts of cars and busses.

I remember being inspired by Evel Knievel to build ramps with scrap wood and attempting to jump my bicycle. I don't know

that I ever got as far as trying to jump over anything, as it was an accomplishment just to ride over the ramp without crashing.

I also had the Ideal Evel Knievel Stunt Cycle. The Stunt Cycle allowed you to launch an Evel Knievel action figure on his motorcycle from a launcher, which was gripped with one hand while cranking to power the motorcycle with the other hand. I am certain I attempted to jump this action figure from every surface inside our house. This was, without a doubt, the coolest toy I had as a kid.

I recall once being told that Knievel had broken every bone in his body. While I am sure that this is a bit of an exaggeration, he apparently was declared in the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the survivor of the "most bones broken in a lifetime."

He truly was a daredevil and that was a big part of my fascination with him when I was young. One of my favorite things in the AMA Motorcycle Hall of Museum is a set of actual Evel Knievel x-rays that show the pins and screws holding his bones together.

Few things or people in motorcycling today capture the fascination of today's youth like Knievel did for me as a boy. In 2018, however, one individual performed a feat, in fact three separate feats, which

no doubt captured the attention of young people in a way that hasn't been done since the days of Knievel.

In one night in July of 2018, Travis Pastrana completed three jumps originally attempted by Knievel between 1967 and 1975. Rather than making these jumps on a modern-day motocross bike with modern-day suspension, Pastrana chose to make the jumps on a custom prepared Indian Scout FTR750, similar to the flat track style bikes used by Knievel.

The first jump, completed initially by Knievel in 1973 over 50-stacked cars, was improved upon by

Pastrana when he jumped 52 cars. On the second jump, Pastrana cleared 16 Greyhound buses in homage to Knievel's failed 1975 attempt to jump 13 busses. The finale to Pastrana's night saw him jump the fountains at Caesar's Palace that Knievel famously crashed attempting to jump in 1967.

Although flawlessly making these jumps all in one night is an accomplishment worthy of major acclaim, Pastrana achieved something that evening which is just as, if not more, significant. He drew positive attention to motorcycling through mainstream media in a manner that helps to promote motorcycling and the motorcycle lifestyle. It is for this reason that the AMA Board of Directors has named Travis Pastrana the 2018 AMA Motorcyclist of the Year.

It is always important point out that the AMA Motorcyclist of the Year is not a lifetime achievement award. Although Pastrana's various accomplishments certainly make him worthy of such distinction, the Motorcyclist of the Year is recognition for the profound impact an individual has had on motorcycling in the past calendar year.

Pastrana did more to generate positive

publicity for motorcycling in 2016.

In addition to his tribute to Knievel, Travis Pastrana also endeavored to bring attention to the devastation caused by Hurricane Maria in 2017 in Puerto Rico. By teaming up with AMA Motorcycle Hall of Famer Rick Johnson, off-road racer Ryan Sipes and former pro motocross and AMA Supercross star Kevin Windham to represent Puerto Rico at the Motocross of Nations, Pastrana helped to raise money to rebuild motocross tracks in the U.S. territory. Johnson served as team manager while Pastrana, Sipes and Windham, who came out of retirement for the event, competed for the team. The team had some success, winning the B Final, which was the last opportunity to qualify for the main events.

...PASTRANA ACHIEVED SOMETHING THAT EVENING WHICH IS JUST AS, IF NOT MORE, SIGNIFICANT. HE DREW POSITIVE ATTENTION TO MOTORCYCLING THROUGH MAINSTREAM MEDIA IN A MANNER THAT HELPS TO PROMOTE MOTORCYCLING AND THE MOTORCYCLE LIFESTYLE.

Although the rebuilding project was still in the works as this magazine was going to print, due to the support generated by their efforts, they planned to bring a crew of 20 people to Puerto Rico to help rebuild homes and a school playground, as well as donate books to one of the larger schools.

It is my hope that Travis Pastrana will continue to be an ambassador for motorcycling and continue to bring positive attention to motorcycling the way Evel Knievel did in the 1960s and 1970s.

Congratulations to 2018 AMA Motorcyclist of the Year, Travis Pastrana!



By Rob Dingman

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