

Motorcyclists Of The Year

Our Youngest Riders Were At The Center Of The Year's Biggest Story
By Rob Dingman

The selection of our 2009 AMA Motorcyclist Of The Year (MOTY) was notable for the number of candidates that we considered. When we announced the MOTY last year, we said that the recipient should be someone who has had the most profound impact on motorcycling, positively or negatively. In other words, a contribution made—for better or worse—to motorcycling and its future by an individual throughout the course of the previous calendar year.

In a year marked by the struggling economy and a number of not-so-veiled threats to motorcycling, it wasn't hard to identify candidates. Some of you had excellent suggestions, and not all of them were heroes. Early in the year Congress passed the 1,300-page Omnibus Public Land Management Act that inappropriately designated some 2 million acres as Wilderness in several states. The "bad guys" were easy to spot. Our federal legislators are not done and, as I write this, efforts are afoot to close off 9.4 million acres of Utah's public land.

Yet, there was an even bigger story in 2009: the implementation of the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act (CPSIA), which was signed into law by former President Bush in August 2008. In a cruel testament to the "Law of Unintended Consequences," the CPSIA was the same bill that the off-highway vehicle (OHV) manufacturers lobbied Congress to pass in an effort to codify the voluntary all-terrain vehicle safety design standards that those companies have observed for two decades. Apparently unforeseen was that another section of the same legislation—which mandated the elimination of lead in children's toys—would ultimately lead to the banning of the sale of youth-model motorcycles and ATVs.

Suddenly, it became illegal for dealers to sell kids' OHVs because regulators feared that parts such as battery terminals, valve stems, engine cases and controls might somehow end up in a youngster's mouth. Just as suddenly, young riders were exposed to unnecessary risk because only adult-sized vehicles remained for sale. Also, no thought was given to the economic hardship small businesses and their employees would suffer in a depressed economy. Responding to the immediate threat, manufacturers, distributors, dealers, the aftermarket and tens of thousands of families mobilized to pressure Congress and the Consumer Product Safety Commission (which was charged with enforcing the law) to exempt these products from implementation of the CPSIA.

While it's easy to single out the villains, at the center of



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the biggest story in motorcycling of 2009 were the clear victims—kids. When 6-year-old AMA member Chase Yentzer spoke at a CPSIA protest rally in the U.S. Capitol Building in April, his words cut to the heart of the matter. "I ride dirtbikes with my family. I race dirtbikes. Please give me my dirtbike back. I promise not to eat it." On that day, young Chase spoke for the hundreds of thousands of youngsters who represent the future of the sport, lifestyle and pastime that we cherish and defend so passionately. A future that remains in jeopardy, as you will read about in one of this month's features (see page 46).

Because this devastating issue cast aside the hopes and dreams of thousands of young OHV riders in 2009, it was only appropriate that we considered bestowing the honor of MOTY to each and every one of America's kids who ride dirtbikes and ATVs. I am therefore very proud to announce that Kids are the 2009 AMA Motorcyclists Of The Year. In the spirit of "paying it forward," it is for them that we toil today, and it is for their future that we will fight tomorrow.

Rob Dingman is the AMA's president and CEO.