

THE STATE OF YOUR AMA

The Future Is Bright



By Rob Dingman

The AMA turned a crucial corner last year. Despite the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression of the 1930s, your association reported improved revenues and lowered expenses. While we still reported an overall loss in the 2011 fiscal year, we have narrowed the gap significantly and the trend is toward profitability. This has been possible because the AMA has steadfastly remained true to its vision of being the premier advocate of the motorcycle lifestyle.

Although the AMA suffered membership losses during the recession, we now serve 225,000 dedicated members. Had our decline mirrored the precipitous drop in U.S. sales experienced by the manufacturers over the same period, we would have suffered much greater attrition. While never good, the decline tells us that we must do everything possible to increase the value of AMA membership.

Thanks to a number of significant decisions made by our board of directors that fundamentally altered the course of the association, our organization now enjoys responsible guardianship, and today we are on a path that adds greater value to AMA membership. As I've written here in the past, the decision by the board in 2008 to sell the assets of AMA Pro Racing to the Daytona Motorsports Group removed a significant drain on our resources while placing the future of AMA Pro Racing in the hands of motorsports entertainment professionals with a proven track record.

The AMA board also made wise investments in key areas to upgrade our infrastructure. We launched new accounting software in 2009 and fully implemented a new association management system (AMS) software package in 2011. These improvements were augmented by significant hardware upgrades as well. Today, these systems provide immediate checks and balances and enhanced capabilities, and are another reason why we are able to operate more efficiently and effectively.

Another important action taken by our board was the decision to move our investment portfolio to a new management firm in 2009. That decision helped soften the blow caused by the recession, and has paid dividends during the economic recovery. At the same time, we decided to stop budgeting earnings from our investments to offset annual operational losses. This kind of sound stewardship, undertaken in concert with our strategic planning process, is another reason why the AMA is in better financial condition today.

Our board has been particularly effective because we have enjoyed the strong and capable leadership of Chairman Stan Simpson. Stan has worked closely with the board's committees as well as its individual members, who collectively represent the right balance of member-elected, corporate and at-large directors. I am equally proud to report that, at the end of 2011, the board selected Northeast Region Director Maggie McNally as vice chairwoman, the highest position held by a woman on the AMA Board of Directors.

Our mission to promote the motorcycle lifestyle and protect the future of motorcycling has been strengthened by our renewed commitment to member retention and acquisition. Beginning in 2010, we improved our responsiveness and outreach to existing members by strengthening our Member Service Center and adding out-bound calling. Last year, we undertook several new affinity programs designed to appeal to key segments of our membership.

While our AMA Life Member program continues unchanged,



Life Members seeking increased benefits and communications were pleased to enroll in our new AMA Life Member Plus program beginning in April 2011. Competition members now receive the quarterly amateur racing magazine, *AMA Racer*, bound into their monthly *American Motorcyclist*. We introduced programs with KTM and Kawasaki to reward the loyalty of AMA members who ride these brands, and more brand affinity programs are coming.

Women riders continue to be a vital and growing segment of our membership. In addition to giving special focus to women riders in AMA publications, the sixth AMA International Women & Motorcycling Conference will be held July 26-29, 2012, in Carson City, Nev.

Finally, our guardianship of the AMA Motorcycle Hall of Fame—and the raised profile it is enjoying thanks to our efforts to significantly enhance the annual induction ceremony—is attracting new members who value the legacy of motorcycling's heroes and legends.

Recent victories on the advocacy front demonstrate the power and appeal of the AMA brand. Overturning key provisions of the federal lead law in 2011 that had banned the sale of kids' dirtbikes saved the future of motorcycling. The elimination of motorcycle-only checkpoints is occurring in many states, and federal funding for such checkpoints may soon end. Our battle to retain dedicated funding for the Recreational Trails Program is ongoing, but recent congressional action is promising. Last but not least, the AMA is at the forefront of the E15 (15 percent ethanol, 85 percent gasoline) debate to ensure that motorcycle engines are not damaged from inadvertent use of this fuel.

The AMA is on the right track to fulfill our vision to be the premier advocate of the motorcycle lifestyle. We've arrived at this point because we have strong support from the motorcycling community, excellent guidance from our board, a strong management team, and the willingness to engage our members in discussion about the value of AMA membership. While we continue to face a challenging economic environment, I am very optimistic about the future of motorcycling and the expanding role that the AMA will take in shaping that world.

Rob Dingman is AMA president and CEO.