

SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL DEALER

What Goes Around, Comes Around

It is the time a year again to make final preparations for the upcoming riding season. In addition to regular seasonal maintenance on your motorcycle, it is also a good idea to inspect your riding gear and be sure to replace anything that's worn out or no longer provides the same protection it did when it was new.



By Rob Dingman

This also offers a great excuse to buy some new gear.

If you are like me, you likely spent some time on the internet over the winter months looking for ideas for something new to add to your bike or shopping for new gear. For us frustrated motorcyclists who live in states that can't enjoy riding all year-round, this activity helps us get through the winter.

Online eCommerce sites make it so easy to purchase just about anything you want and have it promptly delivered to your doorstep. Although the process of buying online is easy, the experience isn't always exactly fulfilling. Who hasn't purchased something online that didn't fit or the color was misrepresented? For many, the solution is to check something out at a motorcycle dealership, try it on, and then purchase it online. There are reasons to do this—for example, the dealership has the wrong color or shipping is delayed or additional stock is unavailable. I know for me, if the dealership has what I am looking for, I will generally buy it on the spot. If not, it is hard to ignore the convenience of having an online purchase delivered directly to your house.

While this type of transaction does not directly benefit the dealer, some of us make up for this because we rarely leave a dealership empty-handed. I almost always end up buying something I didn't know I needed.

Unplanned purchases aside, this

situation represents a very significant problem facing motorcycle dealers and that is competition from online retail outlets. In this world of instant gratification, it stands to reason that the preference of most would always be to buy it from the dealer and start using it right away. If that isn't possible, it is too tempting and too easy for would-be

customers to revert to the online option.

For motorcycle dealers, this situation is now the new normal. Online retail is here to stay which means motorcycle dealers need to be creative in finding ways to compete with online retailers.

The landscape has changed dramatically for motorcycle dealers over the past 20 years. In addition to online competition, many non-motorcyclist businesspeople are buying dealerships.

Fewer and further between are the traditional motorcycle-enthusiast-first dealers that provide better customer service because they understand the needs of the motorcyclist from the motorcyclist's perspective.

That is not to say that customer service has to go completely out the window if the business owner is not a motorcyclist. There are a lot of great motorcycle dealers across the country who really understand the importance of great customer service to their business.

I have read a fair amount online lately about how bad the dealership experience has become. Some seem to paint all motorcycle dealers with the same brush and trash them all. They even go so far as to blame motorcycle dealers for the motorcycle industry not yet returning to pre-recession sales numbers.

This criticism is neither fair, nor accurate. What this view fails to recognize is that motorcycle dealers are on the front line of the slowdown in the motorcycle industry. They felt the pinch long before



Mike Mauro (left) and AMA member Gion Engelmänn, 21, from Ashtabula, Ohio, drove three hours to Reynoldsburg, Ohio, to buy a 2018.5 KTM 450SX-F Factory Edition from Wally Wilson at Wheelsports.

everyone else and many are struggling for their very survival.

Just like riding a motorcycle should never go the way of the fully-automated vehicle, that ever-changing competitive landscape cannot result in the replacement of all brick and mortar motorcycle dealerships by online retail outlets.

We are all motorcyclists because we enjoy the experience of actively riding a motorcycle. Living the motorcycle lifestyle includes having all the necessary equipment to make motorcycling safe and enjoyable. How we acquire that equipment is also part of the lifestyle.

Especially in the winter months when riding isn't possible where I live, I enjoy getting my motorcycling fix by visiting a motorcycle dealership. Not always, but often, that visit results in the purchase of some new part, accessory or gear and that helps to get through the period between riding seasons.

Dealers are finding new and creative ways to compete in the online world in which we now live but it is a work in progress. Your local motorcycle dealer is an essential part of the motorcycle lifestyle and he, or she as the case may be, needs you now more than ever. Next time you are about to click the "buy it now" button, think about making a trip to the dealership first. In the long run, you'll be glad you did.

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