

## 100 YEARS OF THE AMA

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PHOTOS: AMA ARCHIVE

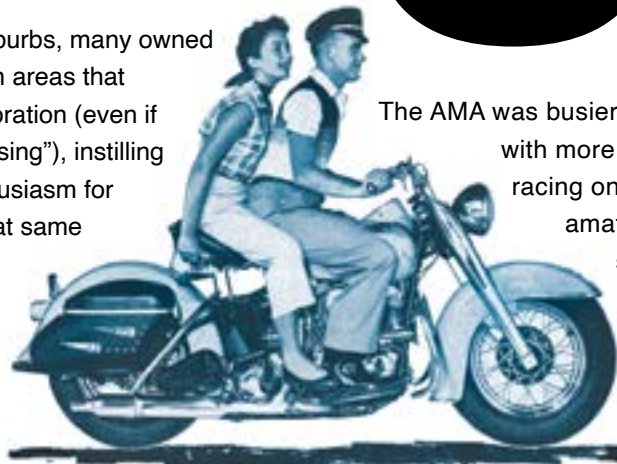
**W**ith the end of WWII in the mid 1940s, the U.S. experienced truly booming times during the 1950s.

Aside from being the planet's pre-eminent superpower, the U.S. economy was the envy of the world, with the country's gross national product more than doubling between 1946 and 1960, and the rise of a massive middle class allowing more people than ever to enjoy all manner of niceties — new cars, television, suburban homes, etc.

Of course, not all was Candyland in America. The Korean and Cold wars took up right where WWII left off, followed by great societal conflicts in the areas of civil rights and the crusade against communism.

Still, the country mostly prospered, and it showed in the “baby boom,” which began in 1946 with a record number of births — 3.4 million — and roughly four million more every year during the 1950s. By the time the trend tapered off circa 1964, the U.S. contained almost 77 million boomers, and those new Americans would have a huge effect on every aspect of American life through the decades — motorcycling included.

With the move to the suburbs, many owned homes surrounded by open areas that proved ideal for moto-exploration (even if the signs said “No Trespassing”), instilling in their riders an early enthusiasm for light civil disobedience. That same restlessness regarding the status quo reared its pompadoured head when Marlon Brando roared onto the big screen in *The Wild One* in 1953.



The AMA was busier than ever as it dealt with more and bigger events, more racing on the professional and amateur levels, the increasingly sticky PR battle, and its burgeoning government-relations efforts. Things in the motorcycling world were definitely heating up...

**DESPITE THE KOREAN AND COLD WARS, BABY BOOMERS AND A BOOMING ECONOMY IN THE 1950S SET THE STAGE FOR MASSIVE MOTORCYCLE INDUSTRY GROWTH**



THE

50S

### 1950 NORTON MANX

Norton had been building single-cylinder motorcycles successfully since 1927, but 1950 was the year the Featherbed frame arrived: A pair of Reynold's finest steel tubes led down from the steering head, looped under the engine, swung back up behind the transmission and then led around forward again to the steering head. At the rear, a swingarm and a pair of shocks; in front, a Norton Roadholder fork. “It rides like a featherbed,” proclaimed test rider Harold Daniell, who rode the new bike in the 1949 Isle of Man Senior TT to become the first-ever 500cc GP race winner.



### ARTHUR DAVIDSON PASSES

The decade kicked off with the tragic passing of AMA Motorcycle Hall of Famer Arthur

Davidson, who died at age 69 in an auto accident alongside his wife on Dec. 30, 1950. The January 1951 edition of *American Motorcycling* wrote, “Kindly, affable Arthur Davidson...has received the checkered flag.” Davidson was one of the four developers of the original Harley-Davidson motorcycle, and also served as president of the Motorcycle and Allied Trades Association

after 32 years in the role of M&ATA treasurer. “Arthur Davidson has passed on, but he has left his spirit of clean competition and good sportsmanship deeply imprinted on our sport,” *American Motorcycling* wrote in its conclusion.

### TELEVISION

In 1946, 7,000 TV sets were sold; in 1948, 172,000 were sold; and in 1950, 5 million sets were sold, says Encyclopedia.com. In 1950, just under 20 percent of American homes contained a TV set. Do we detect a trend?



1950



AMA GYPSY TOUR





### AMA AND THE KOREAN CONFLICT

While the Korean War (1950–1953) raged across the Pacific, American Motorcycle Association Secretary and AMA Motorcycle Hall of Famer E.C. Smith urged AMA membership to support the war and devote time to Civil Defense and Red Cross activities, just as he had during the Second World War. Following the war, the AMA launched “Operation Motorcycle” in 1959, which urged members to support the Red Cross by donating blood to build up America’s blood banks.



### WE LIKE IKE.. AND ELIZABETH, TOO

Seven years after leading the Allies to victory in WWII, General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower was elected POTUS. Meanwhile, in England, Junior Commander Elizabeth Alexandra Mary became Queen Elizabeth II of England.

### 1952 HARLEY-DAVIDSON KR

Expensive racing motorcycles were a hard sell during the Depression, so the AMA — in collaboration with Indian and H-D — invented Class C racing. Over-the-counter 750cc motorcycles could be used for flat track and road racing, and amateur racers would have access to all the same parts as the factory racing teams...supposedly. Class C remained popular after WWII, and when Harley needed something to compete with the rapid influx of British twins, the KR750 was born. The old side-valve 750 was nearly obsolete even when it was new, but AMA rules gave the KR a 250cc advantage over the OHV machines and made it competitive. The KR was also stone-axe simple and cheap to keep. KR750s dominated flat-track racing until the mid '60s, and faired KRTTs cleaned up in U.S. road racing, too.



### 1952 DUCATI 98

Some call it Ducati’s first sportbike, the one that bridged the gap between the Cucciolo strap-on-motor types and the first desmodromic Ducis. With its open-cradle pressed-steel frame offering for display a 98cc four-stroke single and a tiny carburetor, well, six horsepower would at least outrun a Vespa. The '53 98S grew faster, sportier, and sold well enough to give Ducati brass the idea to hire one Dr. Fabio Tagliani to lead its new racing program.



### THE INDIAN WRECKING CREW

AMA Motorcycle Hall of Famers Bobby Hill, Bill Tuman and Ernie Beckman won three AMA National Championships in a row from 1951-1953, racking up 14 National wins. Hill won the winner-take-all national championship Springfield Mile in 1951 and '52, and Tuman won in '53. Beckman was the last rider to win a national on an Indian, winning the 8-Mile AMA National Championship on the Williams Grove (Pennsylvania) Half-Mile in October of '53. Indian folded up its tent that same year — sad — but 64 years later Jared Mees rode the new-generation Indian FTR750 to victory at the Daytona TT in 2017.

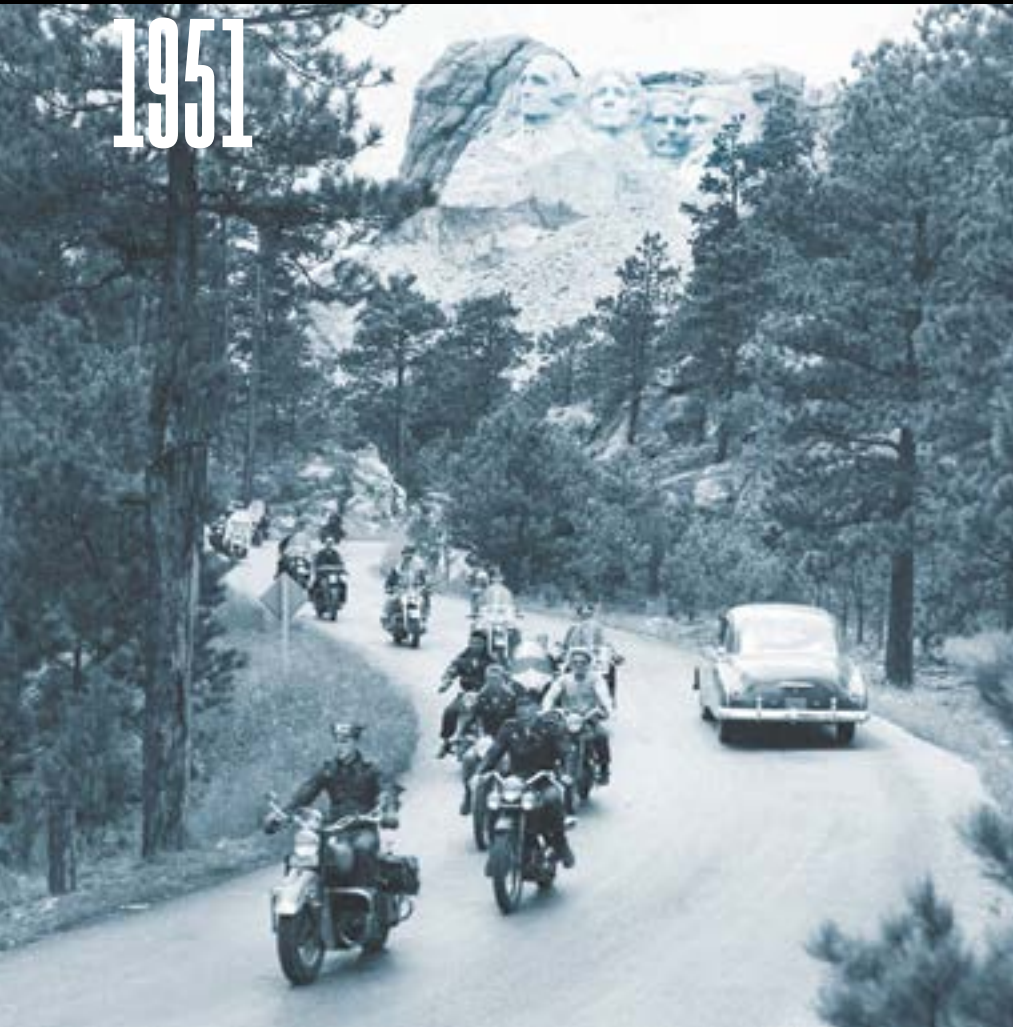
### 1954 VINCENT BLACK PRINCE

The final progression of the original Rapide of 1936, the fully enclosed Black Prince used the existing suspension and 998cc V-twin engine, but sported an aerodynamic body kit with leg shields and a fairing to give the idea that the successful businessman could ride it to work in suit and tie. Tragically, Vincent quit producing its prestigious motorcycles the year after the Prince debuted.



# 1953

# 1951



# 1952

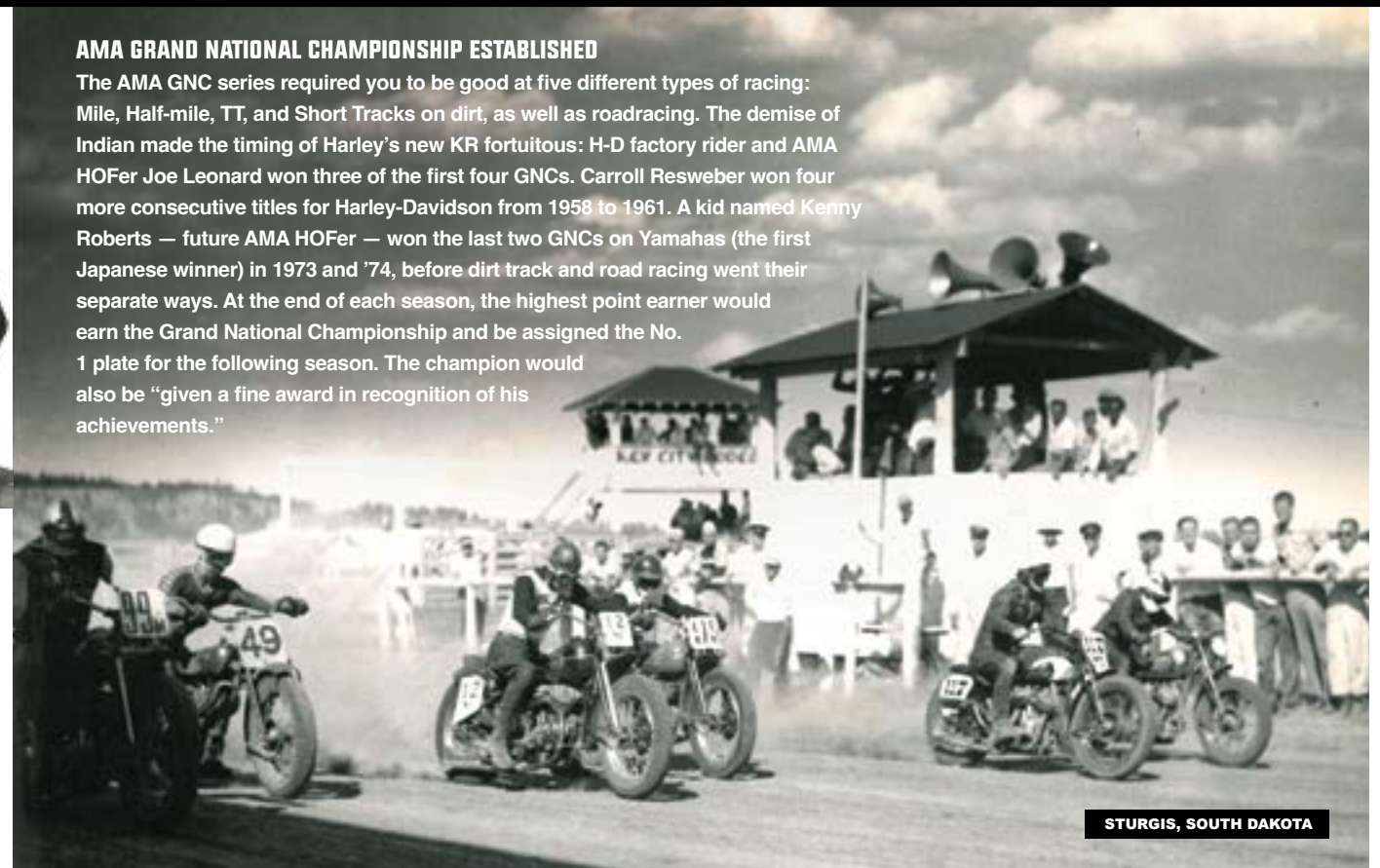


### THE BIKER JACKET

You’ll be the center of attraction in the Cycle Queen jacket, advertised Harley-Davidson. Warm and comfortable, too, thanks to the form-fitting weatherproof steer hide and nylon lining. Just \$25.95...but to really wow the crowd you’ll want the \$3.75 detachable fur collar.

### AMA GRAND NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP ESTABLISHED

The AMA GNC series required you to be good at five different types of racing: Mile, Half-mile, TT, and Short Tracks on dirt, as well as road racing. The demise of Indian made the timing of Harley’s new KR fortuitous: H-D factory rider and AMA HOFer Joe Leonard won three of the first four GNCs. Carroll Resweber won four more consecutive titles for Harley-Davidson from 1958 to 1961. A kid named Kenny Roberts — future AMA HOFer — won the last two GNCs on Yamahas (the first Japanese winner) in 1973 and '74, before dirt track and road racing went their separate ways. At the end of each season, the highest point earner would earn the Grand National Championship and be assigned the No. 1 plate for the following season. The champion would also be “given a fine award in recognition of his achievements.”



STURGIS, SOUTH DAKOTA



**LAST OF THE INDIANS**

Even with the Indian Wrecking Crew on the warpath, the general public had made up its mind. With a big boost from WWII, Harley-Davidson had become the dominating force in American motorcycles, outselling Indian five to one at war's end. Sadly, what had been the largest motorcycle manufacturer in the world in the 1910s (and winner of the top three places in the 1911 Isle of Man TT) ceased producing its final Chiefs in 1953.

**AMA AND SAFER MACHINES**

In 1951, the AMA introduced a program to establish dealerships as official motorcycle inspection stations, roughly 20 years before mandatory safety inspection laws became widespread across the United States. A year later, the AMA started Motorcycle Inspection Week — running April 14-19 — urging all riders to take their bikes to dealerships for thorough check-ups before beginning another season of riding. Furthering its commitment to expanding the national motorcycle dealer network, the AMA in 1953 began presenting awards to dealerships that sold the most AMA memberships throughout the year.

**1955 YAMAHA YA-1**

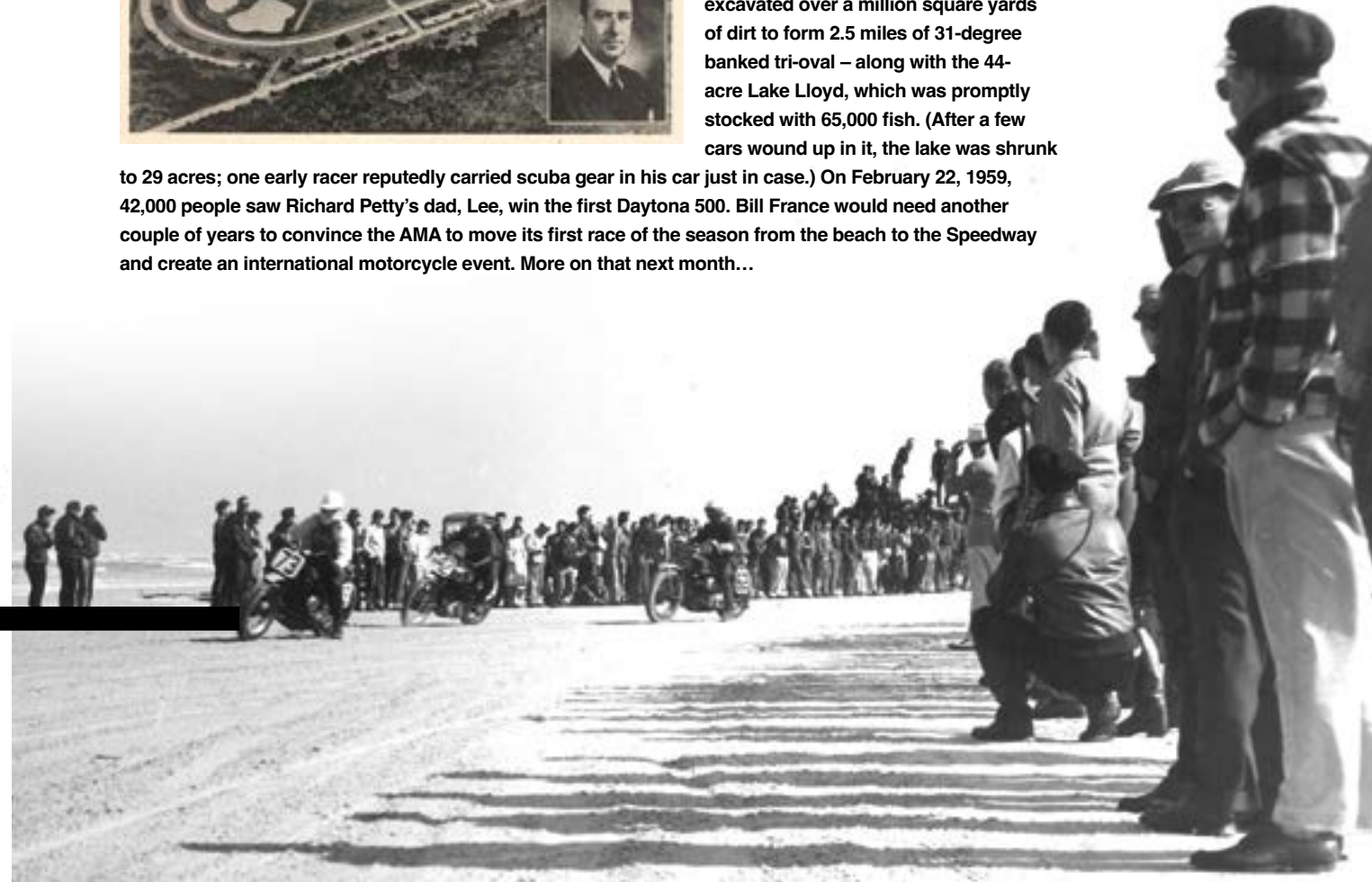
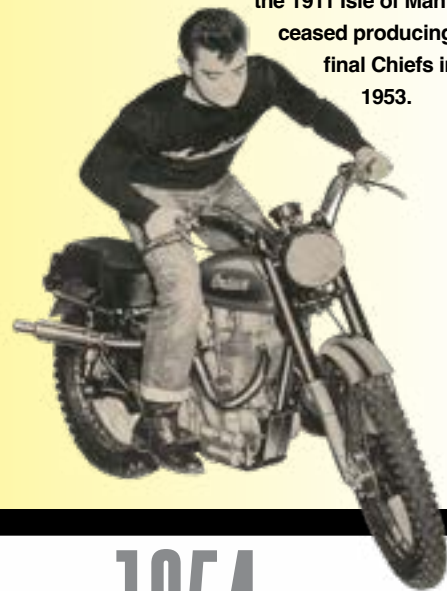
Yamaha's first motorcycle broke the boring-black mold with a chestnut red and cream paint job. The "red dragonfly" was powered by a derivation of the same basic 125cc two-stroke single used in the Harley Hummer, BSA Bantam and others, which had been purloined from DKW after WWII. At a time when there were a lot of fledgling motorcycle makers in Japan, the dragonfly distinguished itself by winning the '55 Mt. Fuji Ascent Race and finishing 1-2-3 in the ultra-light class at the Asama Highlands race later that year. Yamaha was literally off to the races.



**DAYTONA INTERNATIONAL SPEEDWAY**

NASCAR founder William France Sr. began looking for a way to get his "stock cars" off the beach around 1953. By 1959 he'd located a 447-acre plot of land near Daytona's airport and had excavated over a million square yards of dirt to form 2.5 miles of 31-degree banked tri-oval — along with the 44-acre Lake Lloyd, which was promptly stocked with 65,000 fish. (After a few cars wound up in it, the lake was shrunk

to 29 acres; one early racer reputedly carried scuba gear in his car just in case.) On February 22, 1959, 42,000 people saw Richard Petty's dad, Lee, win the first Daytona 500. Bill France would need another couple of years to convince the AMA to move its first race of the season from the beach to the Speedway and create an international motorcycle event. More on that next month...



**1954**

**BIG BEAR RUN**

That would be Big Bear Lake, Calif., which sits atop a 6,752-foot mountain just east of Los Angeles. The first Big Bear Run happened in 1921, and riders could choose their own route from the Saugus Cafe to the top of the mountain. By the 1950s it had grown into a big deal packed with racers and Hollywood celebs. AMA HOFer Bud Ekins won the Run three times in the 1950s. In 1959 he completed the 153-mile course half an hour ahead of second place, despite a flat tire and broken wheel.



**THE WILD ONE**

The original outlaw biker film starred Marlon Brando and his trusty Triumph Thunderbird T6 as the leader of the Black Rebels MC, who gets into an altercation with Lee Marvin and his scruffy, Harley-Davidson-mounted minions. The movie was based on the sensationalized-by-Life-magazine events of a 1947 motorcycle rally in Hollister, Calif., which put motorcycling and motorcyclists in a negative light. In response to the rally, *American Motorcycling* wrote this in its August, 1947 issue: "Motorcycling has come a long way over the years, and with thousands of riders who respect their chosen sport, we have a big majority on the right side of the picture...The future is bright...the sport is too big and too popular to permit a few to hinder its further progress."







### AMA FIGHTS FOR THE FREEWAY

When West Virginia state officials aimed to prohibit motorcycles on the newly constructed West Virginia Turnpike, the AMA stepped in on behalf of motorcyclists across the state. Ultimately, the AMA helped convince state officials to reconsider their stance and reverse the proposed ban.

### 1954 TRIUMPH TIGER T110

The Bonneville might be the most famous vintage Triumph, but would it have existed if Johnny Allen hadn't ridden his Tiger T110 streamliner at an amazing 214.17 mph at the Utah Salt Flats in 1956? Not only did the standard T110's 649cc twin receive a bunch of engine hop-ups compared to the T100, but it was also the first production Triumph with a swingarm rear suspension system and Triumph's first centerstand. It was cool enough that James Dean's first move upon moving to LA (to star in *East of Eden*) was to buy a Tiger T110.



### STEIB SIDECAR

Steib Metalworks of Nuremberg, Germany, began making sidecars in 1928 for now-extinct Ardie motorcycles. During the 1950s, Steib really hit its stride; it claimed to have manufactured 92% of all sidecars sold in Germany, and a Steib was what you got if you ordered your BMW *mit beiwagen*.



### HONDA AND THE ISLE OF MAN TT

After a Honda managed to finish its first international race, in Brazil at what's now the Interlagos circuit, AMA HOFer Soichiro Honda declared that he had been thinking "like a frog in a well that knows nothing of the sea." Honda had no products to export to advanced countries yet, but racing suddenly seemed like an opportunity to compete with the rest of the world. That summer, Honda traveled to the Isle of Man TT, at the time the world's biggest racing event, to eyeball

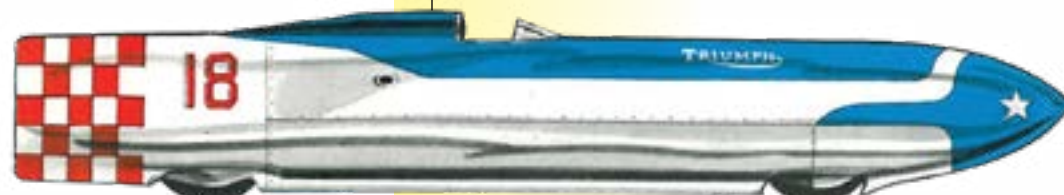
his competition. "We were astonished that the motorcycles were so much more powerful than we had imagined," he wrote years later. Honda returned to Japan to develop a motorcycle fast enough to compete at the TT. Five years later he sent a small team of riders and engineers back to the Isle, a first for Japan, where Honda's RC142 finished sixth, seventh, eighth and 11th in the 125cc lightweight class and won the Manufacturers' Team Award.

### 1955 BMW R69

A good idea is a good idea; BMW built its first boxer, the R32, in 1923. After a long period of postwar recovery (its Munich factory was destroyed in WWII) the Bavarian factory began cranking out this modern 594cc, 35 hp, shaft-driven gentlemen's express. In June 1959, AMA HOFer John Penton (yes, *that* John Penton) set a new coast-to-coast record, riding 3,051 miles from New York City to Los Angeles in 52 hours and 11 minutes on an R69. Of the sportier R69S version, *Cycle World* wrote: "Whatever the BMW's merits in a contest of speed, it is still the smoothest, best finished, quietest and cleanest motorcycle it has ever been our pleasure to ride. To be honest, we think that anyone who would worry much over its performance-potential is a bit of a booby."



# 1955



### CATALINA GP

In 1951, a few California-based race promoters thought bringing an Isle of Man-style race to the U.S. would be a good idea. Just 29 miles from Long Beach, Catalina Island seemed a perfect, slightly exotic place to hold the 10-lap 100-mile race through the city of Avalon and the island's mountain fire roads and trails. Motorcycles were shipped over via barge, and participants and spectators took a short ferry ride from LA to reach the island. The Catalina GP was a big hit during its eight-year run, which ended, reportedly, with the mayor of Avalon being mugged in '58. But not before Yamaha entered a few 250cc two-stroke twins in the lightweight class that year — Yamaha's first official U.S. race effort. After that, the writing was on the wall for the British scramblers that ruled the '50s. Crazy, the CGP did manage to return once more, in 2010.



### AMA PUBLIC RELATIONS EFFORTS

Much of E.C. Smith's tenure as AMA secretary involved a dedicated effort to improve the perception of motorcyclists and motorcycling. In line with Smith's work, a poll in the '50s revealed that 51 percent of AMA members believed the most important way individuals and the organization could help the sport of motorcycling was by generating favorable publicity. One of the AMA's most successful public relations efforts came during the fight against polio. Smith had close relationships with the officials of the March of Dimes — a nonprofit founded by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to combat polio — and the AMA was annually involved in the ceremony to name the poster child for the year's fundraising drive. Many times the young child chosen was given a motorcycle ride, and local AMA clubs collected funds for the cause. On the December 1956 cover of *American Motorcycling*, racers Dick Bowman and Paul "Red" Allen were seen posing with poster child Marlene Olsen. Thirteen months later on the cover of the January 1958 issue, the AMA displayed its award of merit given by the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis for the AMA's outstanding service in the fight against polio.



E.C. SMITH

# 1956

### GYPSY TOURS ON HOLD

Although Gypsy Tours reached the height of their popularity during the 1950s, they began to attract the attention of motorcycling's bad elements. One instance stood out in particular, when outlaw gangs flooded an AMA Gypsy Tour event in Angels Camp, Calif., causing a general disturbance to AMA members and the town's public. As newspaper outlets rushed to pass blame upon all motorcyclists, the July 1957 edition of *American Motorcycling* stated that "had it not been for the organized efforts of AMA members, AMA officials and law officers, this handful of outlaws would have activated another Hollister." As a result, the AMA decided to cease Gypsy Tour operations. Instead, a series of alternate programs were introduced, which ultimately led to the wide range of road and off-road events currently offered by the AMA.





### 1956 MATCHLESS SCRAMBLER

Associated Motor Cycles (AMC) established a formidable reputation in off-road competition with its Matchless and AJS brands in the 1950s, winning the British 500cc Motocross Championship four times. Desert racing victories in the U.S. by riders like Walt Fulton and Bud Ekins meant AMC's Matchless G80CS and AJS 18CS competition scramblers were an easy sell in the era of the "desert sled." In fact, one of the guys who was sold was Hall of Fame Legend Malcolm Smith, who cut his teeth on a '49 Matchless 500 – primitive compared to this '56.



### SPUTNIK 1

The Sputnik launch marked the start of the space age and the US/USSR space race, which led to the creation of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Never has a polished metal sphere 23 inches in diameter caused a bigger stir.

### 1957 HARLEY-DAVIDSON SPORTSTER

Where to begin? Descended from the Model K of 1952, the original XL received a powerful 54 cubic-inch (883cc) overhead-valve V-twin; the "Ironhead" would power Harley's new lightweight hot rod all the way to 1985, blowing past the English imports then encroaching on the U.S. market along the way. At first, anyway. Performance became less and less of a selling point as the Sportster evolved, but Harley's original air-cooled bad boy lived on in various guises until 2022, with its upstart attitude intact right up until the end.



### MOTO GUZZI V8 OTTO

Before 2012, your 500cc GP bike could have as many cylinders as you wanted. In 1955, Moto Guzzi decided on eight, building a 499cc, liquid-cooled 90-degree DOHC V8 with bore and stroke of 44mm x 41mm: 78 hp at 12,000 rpm could send the 326-pound Otto to 178 mph thanks to the magnesium dustbin fairing. Unfortunately, MG's earlier racing success did not translate to the Otto, which frightened its riders when it wasn't experiencing mechanical failures. MG withdrew from racing in 1957.



### BSA SUNBEAM / TRIUMPH TIGRESS II

Who knew Triumph built scooters? BSA bought Triumph in 1950, but they both kept building their own machines; the scooter collaboration was intended to take advantage of both makers' distribution networks. The Triumph Tigress was identical to the BSA Sunbeam all but cosmetically.



### 1958 HONDA SUPER CUB

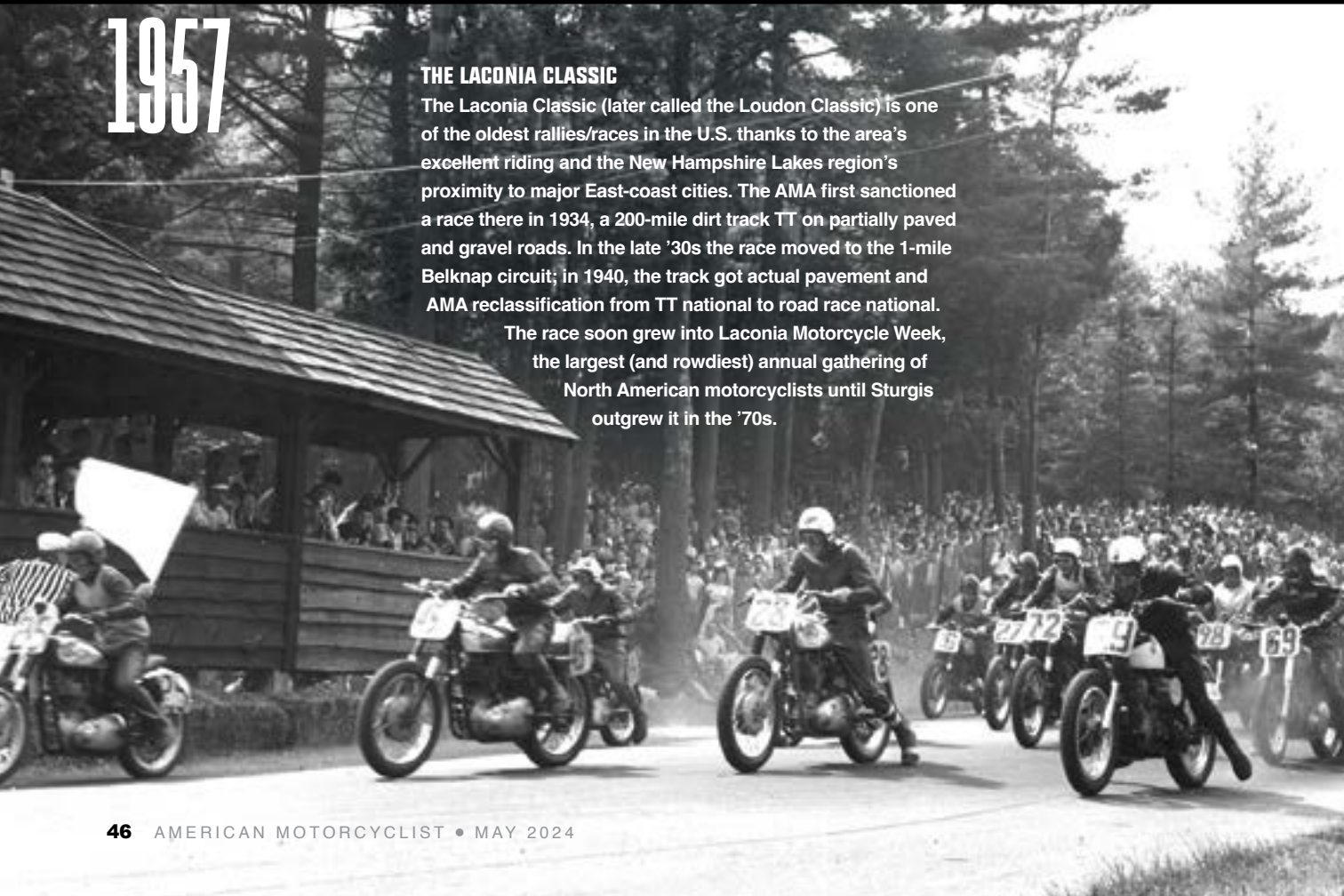
While they were scouting the Isle of Man, Soichiro Honda and partner Takeo Fujisawa couldn't help noticing all the mopeds and small motorcycles buzzing all around Europe. Their own small-capacity scooter was introduced in 1958 and has been keeping the world moving ever since. The Super Cub was the motorcycle that spawned the famous slogan "You meet the nicest people on a Honda," and as of 2017, more than 100 million Cubs have been sold worldwide – making it the highest volume motor vehicle in history.

# 1957

### THE LACONIA CLASSIC

The Laconia Classic (later called the Loudon Classic) is one of the oldest rallies/races in the U.S. thanks to the area's excellent riding and the New Hampshire Lakes region's proximity to major East-coast cities. The AMA first sanctioned a race there in 1934, a 200-mile dirt track TT on partially paved and gravel roads. In the late '30s the race moved to the 1-mile Belknap circuit; in 1940, the track got actual pavement and AMA reclassification from TT national to road race national.

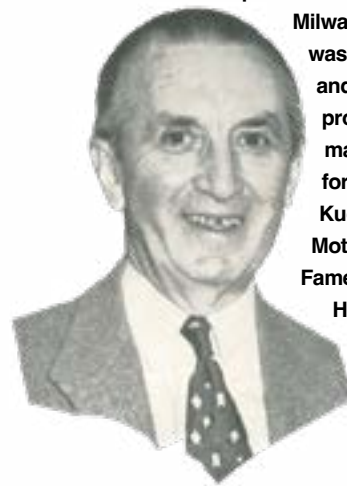
The race soon grew into Laconia Motorcycle Week, the largest (and rowdiest) annual gathering of North American motorcyclists until Sturgis outgrew it in the '70s.



# 1958

### E.C. SMITH RETIRES

After 30 years of service as executive secretary of the American Motorcycle Association, E.C. Smith announced his retirement – capping off an illustrious career of motorcycle involvement. Filling the mammoth void left by Smith was Linton A. Kuchler, who brought 26 years of his own motorcycle experience to the position. Growing up in Milwaukee, Kuchler was an avid rider and worked as a production layout and management planner for Harley-Davidson. Kuchler, a 2003 AMA Motorcycle Hall of Famer, later owned a Harley dealership of his own in Ann Arbor, Mich.



### LIFE MEMBERS RECOGNIZED

Effective Jan. 1, 1958, the AMA announced that "every member who renews his AMA membership after 24 or more years of continuous membership will be presented with a fully paid up membership card with his Life membership pin." Life Members would receive most of the regular AMA privileges without any further membership fee required. *American Motorcycling* wrote, "We feel that this gives deserved recognition for the outstanding and whole-hearted support the AMA has received from so many of its active and loyal members."



### THE DAY THE MUSIC DIED

American musicians Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens and J.P. Richardson (the Big Bopper) died when their Beechcraft Bonanza crashed into a cornfield near Clear Lake, Iowa; Waylon Jennings and other band members were on the tour bus. Don McLean's subsequent "American Pie" became a huge hit in 1971. AMA

# 1959

### 3 Rock 'n Roll Idols Perish in Plane Crash

