

## 100 YEARS OF THE AMA

BY JOHN BURNS, JACK EMERSON  
AND KEATON MAISANO  
PHOTOS: AMA ARCHIVE

All the amazing things going on in the 1960s blasted right into the '70s as if powered by two nitromethane-gargling engines running WFO — much like AMA Hall of Famer T.C. Christensen's "Hogslayer," a twin-engined Norton drag racer and the first motorcycle to break the 7-second barrier, circa 1972. And that one was tame compared to Hall of Famer Russ Collins' "Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe," a triple-engined Honda CB750 dragster that blew minds every time it ran.

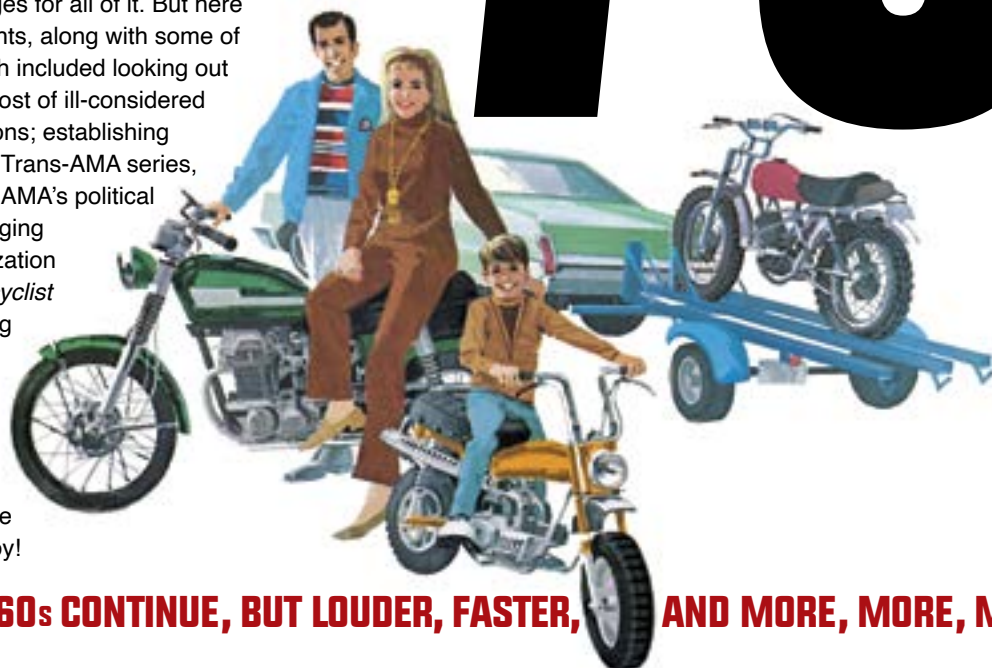
None of that was any more radical than what was going on in the non-moto world: Vietnam, Watergate, stadium rock-'n'-roll and more, and all of it backlit by blacklight posters and movies that could be unsettling to even the hippest teenager. Could anyone ever be

scared again after seeing *The Exorcist* on the big screen in early adolescence? Not until *Jaws*, anyway.



Motocross and road racing exploded into the '70s, as Japan grasped that winning on Sunday meant selling on Tuesday, and proceeded to overrun the old Euro/American brands with inexpensive bikes of all kinds that mostly *didn't break*. Japan's Big Four put a chicken or two in every pot that wanted one, except for the poor, old-before-their-time souls whose parents said *not under this roof*.

There was so much going on in the '70s we don't have room in these pages for all of it. But here are some of the highlights, along with some of the AMA's moves, which included looking out for motorcyclists on a host of ill-considered legislation and regulations; establishing official Supercross and Trans-AMA series, along with AMPAC, the AMA's political action committee; changing the name of the organization to the American *Motorcyclist* Association; and moving to an even larger HQ in Westerville, Ohio, to house the then-50-person staff. (We're just a tick over 50 now, which says a lot in these inflationary years.) Enjoy!



# 70S

THE

THE SWINGIN' '60s CONTINUE, BUT LOUDER, FASTER, AND MORE, MORE, MORE

### BYE-BYE BEATLES

The Beatles broke up, leaving a giant crater to be filled by all manner of other musical styles, including disco, stadium rock, punk...

### JOEL ROBERT AND SUZUKI

Suzuki claimed the first Motocross World Championship for a Japanese factory when Belgian ace and HOFer Joël Robert won the 250cc crown on a specially built Suzuki RH250 said to be worth \$20,000 at the time. Robert won the championship again for Suzuki in '71 and '72; his record of 50 motocross Grand Prix victories stood for more than 30 years until broken by fellow Belgian Stefan Everts in 2004.

### DICK MANN WINS DAYTONA

Hall of Famer Dick Mann won the Daytona 200 on a factory Honda CB750 Racing Type, which is swell since it was Racine, Wis., dealer (and HOFer) Bob Hansen's idea to build the very first CB750. Hansen convinced Honda to hire Mann, who'd just gotten the ageism boot from BSA at age 35. The new CB750, with its chain-driven SOHC engine, was never meant to be raced, but Honda sent four special, hand-built bikes for Daytona, dripping with titanium and magnesium race-kit parts. Mann's bike was the only one of the four to finish, and just barely; Hansen told Mann to take it easy during his last fuel stop. The smoking and spent CB finished just ahead of HOFer Gene Romero's rapidly closing Triumph Trident. Hansen, who was sure he'd be fired for insubordination during the race for telling Mann to slow down against orders, resigned from Honda and was snapped up by Kawasaki, where he'd have even more racing success. Ironically, Honda had planned to promote him.



1970





**AMA EYES LEGISLATION**

In an effort to protect the political interests of motorcyclists across the nation, the AMA formed a Legislative Department — now known as the Government Relations Department. According to the December 1970 issue of *AMA News*, this new Legislative Department was tasked with “coordinating legal activity against unconstitutional and discriminatory laws against motorcyclists.” The article went on to describe the department as “a sentinel on federal and state legislation affecting motorcyclists that will be instrumental as a lobbying force for motorcyclists and motorcycling interests.”

**DEATH OF THE MUSCLE CAR**

After calling out the automobile as “our worst polluter of the air” in his 1970 SOTU address, President Richard Nixon signed the Clean Air Act. If the technology didn’t exist to meet the EPA’s new clean-air standards, his administration told Detroit, they should invent it. Ignitions were set back, carburetors were leaned out, compression ratios plummeted, and car enthusiasts were aghast. Electronic fuel injection and catalytic converters were years in the future. New cars were suddenly boring. This probably didn’t hurt motorcycle sales, which didn’t yet have to deal with emissions regulations.

**WINDJAMMER FAIRING**

AMA HOFer Craig Vetter spent the winter of 1970–71 developing a fairing design that would fit nearly every motorcycle. Over the next eight years, more than 400,000 Windjammers would be produced in six variations. Eventually, some motorcycle manufacturers deduced wind protection was a desirable thing.

**FIRST FACTORY “CUSTOM”?**

The Harley-Davidson FX Super Glide might be the first factory custom. Mating a Big Twin chassis with a Sportster front end gave a lean, custom profile. The optional Sparkling America color was a base of birch white with red, white and blue mylar panels on the tanks and fenders. A total of 4,700 Super Glides were built in the 1971 introduction year.



**GOING INTERNATIONAL**

After reaching a new agreement with the Fédération Internationale de Motocyclisme (FIM), the AMA returned to the international racing scene. In 1970, the AMA organized the Trans-AMA Series (later known as the Trans-USA Series) in motocross. The series allowed American riders to race against the European competitors. In its inaugural year, AMA Hall of Famer Dick Burleson finished fourth — best of any American — in the season standings.



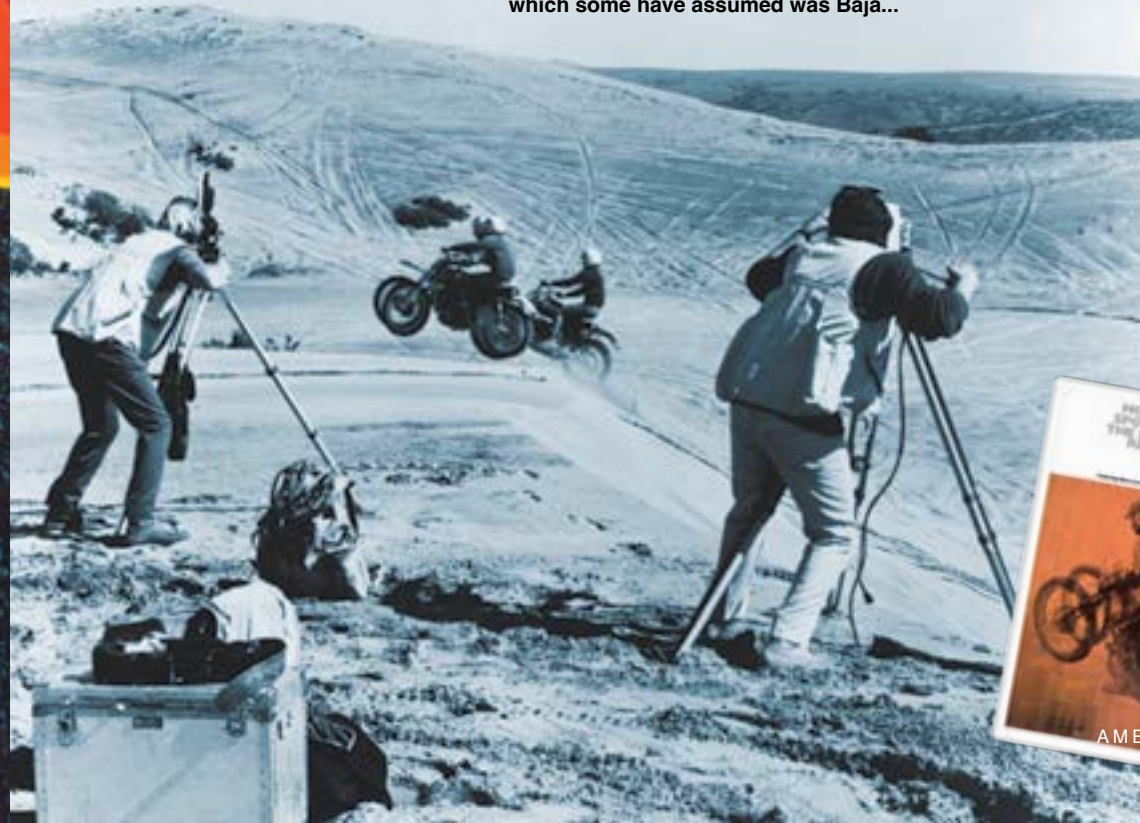
**“OPERATION ALERT”**

When President Richard Nixon announced plans for public land regulation in Executive Order 11644, the possibility of motorcyclists being excluded from public land use became real. The AMA got involved immediately, calling upon members to act and write letters to D.C. officials. It worked, because in response to the outpouring from the motorcycling community, Nixon penned a letter to the AMA in August 1972 that described motorcycling as “one of our nation’s fastest growing and most popular outdoor recreational activities.” He also assured the motorcycling community that they would not be forgotten in the decisions made about public land: “It is only proper that the interests of those who enjoy motorcycling be taken into account as we initiate steps to enhance the use of our parklands for all Americans.” Operation Alert proved once again that the AMA could mobilize members for the betterment of motorcycling.

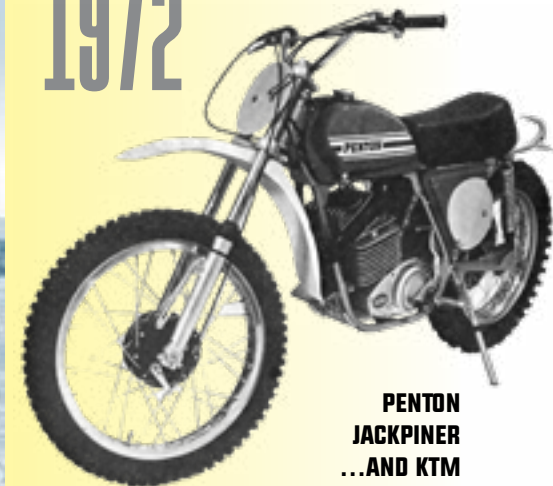


**ON ANY SUNDAY**

AMA Hall of Famer Bruce Brown’s epic moto-documentary *On Any Sunday* was released, possibly single-handedly igniting the ’70s motorcycle boom as well as Hall of Famer Malcolm Smith’s business career. A call from HOFer Steve McQueen to a general at Camp Pendleton resulted in the famous sunset beach-riding scene, which some have assumed was Baja...



**1972**

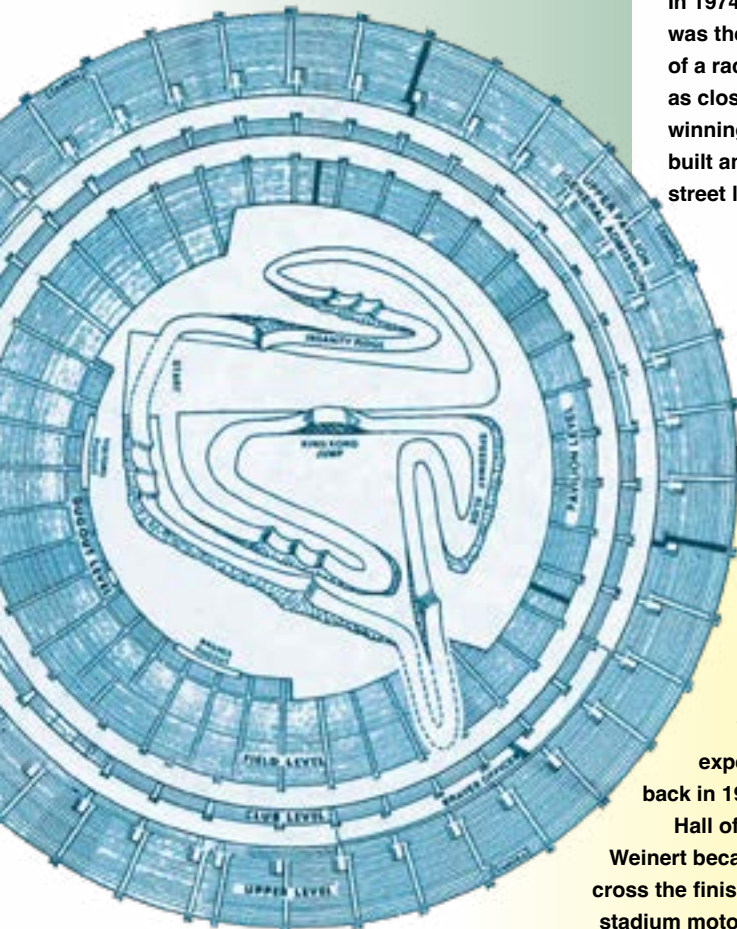


**PENTON JACKPNER ...AND KTM**

The first motorcycle that Hall of Famer John Penton talked the tiny Austrian bicycle/scooter builder KTM into manufacturing used a 125cc Sachs motor. By 1972 the company had built its own 175cc single, and the first real KTM came into being, even if the tank said Penton Jackpner.

### AMA MOTOCROSS CHAMPIONSHIP

The AMA started up the AMA Motocross Championship, aka AMA Motocross Nationals, in response to the exploding popularity of motocross. The first AMA Motocross Championship race was held at the Los Angeles Coliseum. After eight rounds, Hall of Famer Brad Lackey took the 500cc championship and fellow HOFer Gary Jones won his first of three straight 250cc titles. Supercross was about to become a big deal, packing thousands of fans into venues that didn't require long drives into the country.



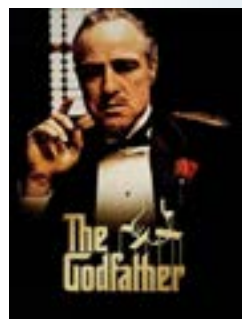
### HELLO DESMODROMICS

In April 1972, a brace of specially prepped Desmo 750 racers took on the world's best at the first Imola 200, the "Daytona of Europe." Paul Smart and Bruno Spaggiari finished one-two on their new V-twins, transforming Ducati from an obscure purveyor of small-capacity singles to a high-performance Italian marque to be reckoned with. In 1974, the 750 Super Sport was the first factory replica of a race-winning machine, as close a copy of the Imola-winning racer as could be built and remain street legal.



### THE GODFATHER

Nineteen years after playing rebel biker Johnny in *The Wild One*, Marlon Brando evolved into Mafia Don. The breakdown of Hollywood's studio system



and the restrictions on violence and obscenity helped make it possible, as did the success of the low-budget-but-hugely-popular *Easy Rider* in 1969.

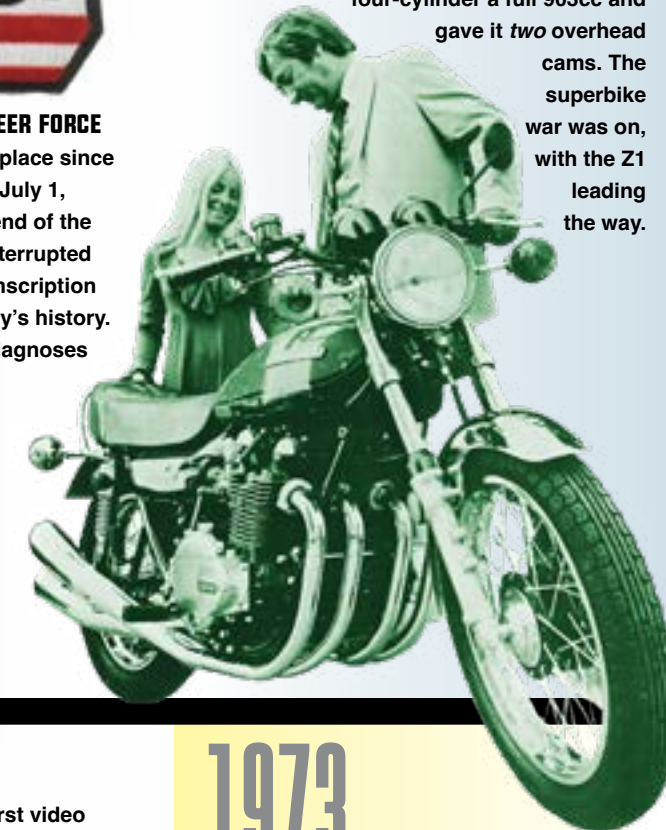
### HARLEY-DAVIDSON XR750

H-D's XR750 launched in 1970, but replacing its iron heads with alloy ones (and more) for '72 set the XR on a path to greatness. That year marked the first of 29 of the next 37 AMA Grand National Championships, until 2008, making the XR one of the most successful racing motorcycles ever developed. HOFers Jay Springsteen, Scott Parker, Cal Rayborn, Evel Knievel and others owe part of their success to the XR. Initially, its 750cc (45ci), air-cooled, 45-degree OHV V-twin was good for 82 hp, and the bike weighed 295 pounds; constant evolution made it faster and sharper for nearly four decades. It was yours for \$3,200 at your H-D dealer.



### ALL-VOLUNTEER FORCE

The draft, in place since 1940, ended July 1, 1973 — the end of the longest uninterrupted period of conscription in the country's history. Bone spur diagnoses plummeted.



### KAWASAKI Z1

Justifiably stunned after rival Honda beat it to the punch at the 1968 Tokyo Motor Show with the smooth, fast and reliable CB750, Kawasaki made its first four-cylinder a full 903cc and gave it two overhead cams. The superbike war was on, with the Z1 leading the way.

### HONDA CIVIC

The first CVCC-engined Honda Civic appeared in the U.S., rolling on tiny 12-inch wheels and claiming 40 mpg.



### SUPERSIZED

While it got an experimental start back in 1972 when AMA Hall of Famer Jimmy Weinert became the first to cross the finish line at a new stadium motocross event at Daytona, AMA Supercross was officially added to the AMA program as a full series of races in 1974.



KENNY ROBERTS

### KENNY ROBERTS

A cocky, 19-year-old kid from Modesto, Calif., won his second professional race at the Houston Astrodome Grand National short-track on an underpowered Yamaha XS650, finished the season in fourth place, and was named AMA Rookie of the Year. Later that year, young Kenny (in the early stages of his Hall of Fame career) grew inquisitive when he saw Finnish 250 road racing champ Jarno Saarinen ride at a Champion Spark Plug Classic AMA-sanctioned road race at Ontario Motor Speedway, shifting his weight toward the inside of the bike in the corners. Interesting...

### PONG

The first video game came to a Shakey's Pizza near you. Somebody would have to go get a whole shedload of quarters...



### 1973



### MASSACHUSETTS MILESTONE

For the first time in the event's history, the International Six Days Enduro (known as the International Six Days Trial prior to 1981) was held outside of Europe when its 1973 running occurred in Dalton, Mass. The American riders did not disappoint the home crowd, either, as they earned the Silver Vase Trophy. The trophy-winning team was made up of AMA Hall of Famers Dick Burleson and Malcolm Smith, as well as Ed Schmidt and Ron Bohn.

**HONDA ELSINORES: CR250M AND CR125M**

A certain editor we know could go on all day talking about how these silver bullets (the 250 in '73, the 125 in '74) were a perfect blend of the two-stroke power and purposefulness of the finest European MXers, along with the lower price, high build quality, and the wide availability of Japanese motorcycles. So, we won't do it again here. Moto for the masses had arrived, and just in time for the masses to become massive.



1974

**YAMAHA RD350**

Yamaha already had a rich history of small but fierce two-stroke twins when Hall of Famer Don Emde and Jarno Saarinen rode theirs to victory in the '72 and '73 Daytona 200s, beating up all the 750s that wore themselves and their tires out. It only made sense to celebrate with a new version for the street in 1973, with Autolube oil injection, Torque Induction(!), and most importantly, an \$839 price tag. Those were the days, kids.



**EVEL KNieVEL**

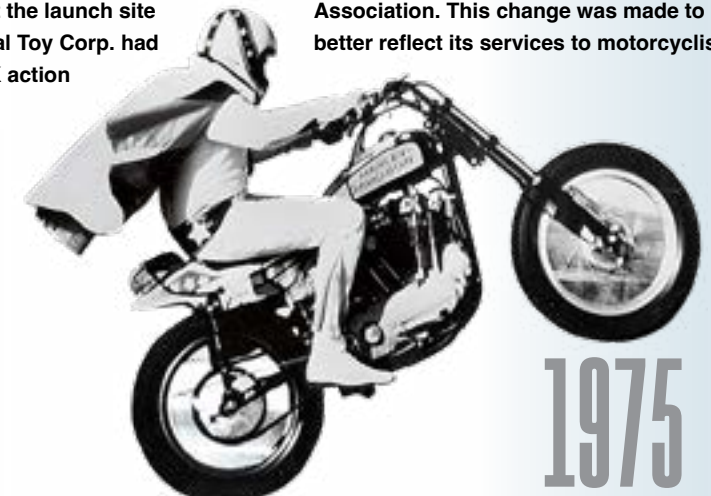
Hall of Famer Evel Knievel did *not* jump the Snake River Canyon when his X2 Skycycle's parachute deployed prematurely. All was not lost for Evel, though: Research tells us the Sunday afternoon jump was covered live by Top Rank on paid closed-circuit TV in several hundred theaters and arenas, with an average admission price of \$10. Taped coverage by ABC was shown on *Wide World of Sports* later that month, and the ticket price at the launch site was \$25. The Ideal Toy Corp. had introduced its EK action figure in 1972. *Ka-ching!*



**MOTORCYCLIST, NOT MOTORCYCLE**

After spending the first 52 years of its history as the American Motorcycle Association, the AMA made

a small but significant tweak to its name, becoming the American *Motorcyclist* Association. This change was made to better reflect its services to motorcyclists.



1975

**THE ENERGY CRISIS**

Instigated by warring Israeli and Arab factions and with assists by United States Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and President Richard Nixon — who thought giving \$2.2 billion in aid would distract attention from the Watergate scandal — Saudi Arabia cut off all oil supplies to the U.S. in October 1973, at a time when the country was heavily dependent. Gas lines, rationing and civil unrest resulted, most of those positives for motorcycle sales. The more things change...



**BATTLE OF THE SEXES**

Billie Jean King defeated Bobby Riggs, the best tennis player in the world 30 years earlier, in a much-publicized "Battle of the Sexes" tennis match in front of a TV audience estimated at 90 million. King took the \$100k prize money and became America's first superstar female athlete.

**AMA TURNS 50!**

The year 1974 marked the AMA's golden anniversary.



**BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS**

Diane Cox of Salem, Ore., became the first woman in AMA history to earn an expert license in dirt track, obtaining it at only 18 years old. Cox set another first just one year later, becoming the first woman to qualify for an AMA National Championship program at the Houston Astrodome Short Track National.



DESERT RACING

**YAMAHA YZ250**

This first serious Yamaha MXer led to *Cycle World's* first motocross comparison test, in January of '74: "This new YZ is virtually identical to last year's "factory" bikes, with all the trick parts and goodies... the most radical departure from current two-stroke design in the YZ250 is the reed-valve induction system... Our testing was conclusive. The YZ Yamaha was undefeated in the race to the first turn, and it was, on the average, a faster machine on timed laps, with four different riders. Times were close, but then, so are the bikes." Except in price: Honda CR250M, \$1,145; Yamaha YZ, \$1,836!

**KEEPING EYES ON THE ROAD (RIDER)**

The 1970s included several efforts to grow the AMA road-riding program, including the institution of the Road Rep Program in 1977. Road reps would serve as AMA ambassadors, and facilitate communication between the AMA and actual riders in the field; their mission was to keep the individual road rider in mind.



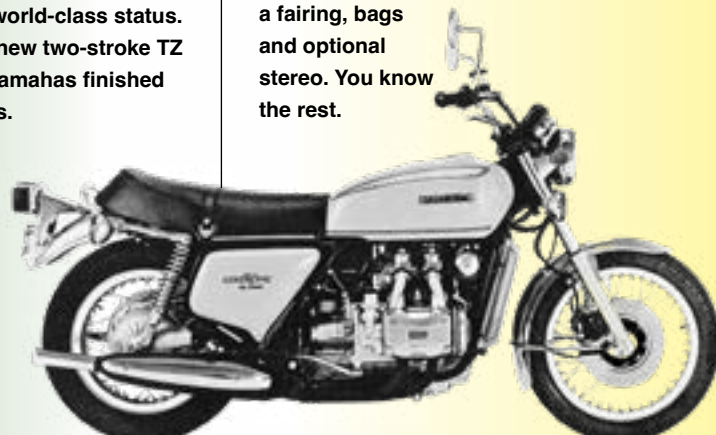
**TZ750-POWERED  
DIRT TRACKER**

In a desperate attempt to find speed at the Indy Mile in 1975, Hall of Famer Kel Carruthers built fellow HOFer Kenny Roberts a TZ750-powered dirt tracker. Roberts tamed the beast, barely, broad-sliding spectacularly out of the final turn past HOFers Jay Springsteen and Corky Keener for the win. KR said it was the wildest ride of his career and that Yamaha didn't pay him enough to ride it. The AMA promptly banned the bike.



**DAYTONA 200 AND YAMAHA'S TZ750**

In a totally gratuitous gesture acknowledging the gas crisis, the Daytona 200 was shortened to 180 miles. Having left MV Agusta's employ following a bazillion championships, HOFer Giacomo Agostini traveled to America to debut Yamaha's new TZ750. In a ding-dong battle involving Hall of Famers Kenny Roberts and Gary Nixon as well as Barry Sheene and an international field of big-name racers, the TZs of Ago and KR finished one-two. Winning the 200 not only made Ago a household name in the U.S., but it elevated Daytona to world-class status. It also launched Yamaha's new two-stroke TZ on its legendary journey; Yamahas finished in 16 of the top 20 positions.



**HONDA GOLD WING**

It was supposed to be Honda's flagship sports bike, an indirect riposte to Kawasaki's Z1. Bigger, torquier, quieter and more comfortable with its liquid-cooled, 999cc flat four and shaft drive, the GL1000 was way more civilized than any other motorcycle, producing 80 vibe-free horses at just 7500 rpm. It cried out *road trip*. HOFer Craig Vetter's phone rang off the hook. Honda took note; for 1980, the Gold Wing Interstate was born, with a fairing, bags and optional stereo. You know the rest.

**OBSERVED TRIALS**



1976

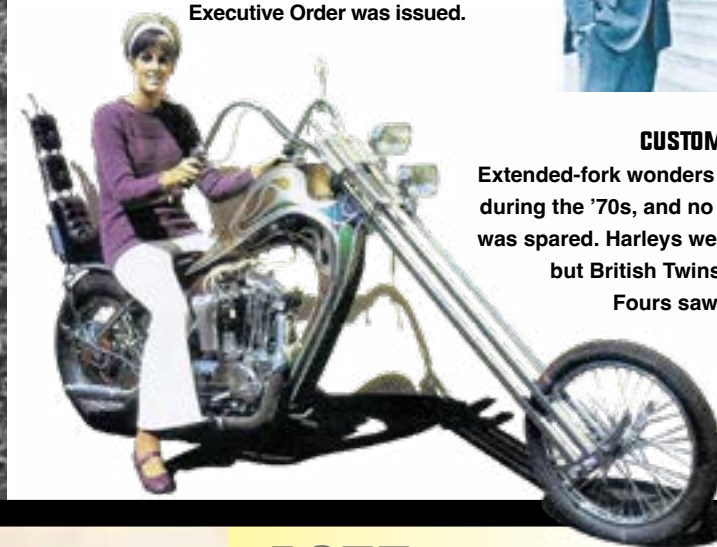
**AMA MEMBERS, 80,000 STRONG**

Sparking what *AMA News* called "one of the most intense political action campaigns in the history of organized motorcycling," a Council on Environmental Quality draft of a potential Executive Order from President Jimmy Carter contained language that would open the door for off-road vehicles to unfairly lose access to public lands. When the AMA got word of this draft, it alerted its members, and 80,000 letters and telegrams flooded the offices of officials in Washington, D.C., within days. The dangerous language was subsequently dropped when the Executive Order was issued.



**CUSTOM CHOPPERS**

Extended-fork wonders proliferated during the '70s, and no engine type was spared. Harleys were common, but British Twins and Honda Fours saw action, too.



**AMA SUPERBIKE DEBUTS**

The first official AMA Superbike series race happened at Daytona on March 5, 1976; Hall of Famer Steve McLaughlin narrowly beat fellow HOFer Reg Pridmore at the line, both on bright orange Butler & Smith R90S BMWs. Pridmore became the first AMA Superbike Champion, and he repeated in 1977 and 1978 after switching to Kawasaki. McLaughlin went on to start the World Superbike Series and various other endeavors.



**YAMAHA'S BIG THUMPER**

Yamaha's XT500 won the Paris-Abidjan-Nice Rally, followed by the 1979 and 1980 Paris-Dakar rallies, under Cyril Neveu (right). Bengt Åberg campaigned the big four-stroke single in the 1977 500cc motocross world championship season, winning one moto at the first round. Dead-simple, stone reliable and highly stylish, this precursor "adventure bike" remained in production until 1989.



**TRIUMPH TRIDENT/BSA ROCKET 3**

This technically advanced, high-performance roadster hit the market just before the new Honda CB750 stole the limelight in late '68. It was the first modern superbike and the last major motorcycle developed by Triumph Engineering — a 750 triple cleverly wrought from the bones of the 500 Twins that preceded it. Financial problems, though, led to a government-sponsored Norton Villiers/Triumph merger, followed by a strike at Triumph's Meriden factory in 1974 that threw various spanners in the already sketchy works. The last Trident rolled off BSA's line on Dec. 18, 1975...the end of an empire.

1977

**NOISE ON WHEELS**

In 1977, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released its *Noise on Wheels* publication — which used misleading sound data harmful to the motorcycling community. In the years to come, the AMA — with the help of its members — battled and won against the EPA. See the March 2024 issue for more details on this AMA rights win.

**BOB "HURRICANE" HANNAH**

The AMA Hall of Famer blew in from the high California desert to take the first of his record-breaking 70 AMA National wins, on the way to seven MX/SX championships in every class. After bouncing off a jagged rock while water-skiing in '79 nearly cost him his right leg, the unsinkable Hurricane returned after a year of recuperating to keep on winning races well into the '80s.



## SUZUKI RE5

Plenty of manufacturers toyed with Wankels, but Suzuki was the only one to put its RE5 into large-scale production... and sales were disappointing despite the massive effort and financial investment. A conventional period standard aside from its liquid-cooled single-rotor Wankel, the RE did sport some interesting details courtesy of famed designer Giorgetto Giugiaro.



## COOK NEILSON

*Cycle* magazine Editor-in-Chief (and AMA Motorcycle Hall of Famer) Cook Neilson won the Daytona Superbike race in 1977 on a Ducati 750SS called the "California Hot Rod." It was tuned by Managing Editor — and fellow AMA HOFer — Phil Schilling, the pair documenting the very hands-on hot-rod endeavor in a series of articles in the magazine's pages.

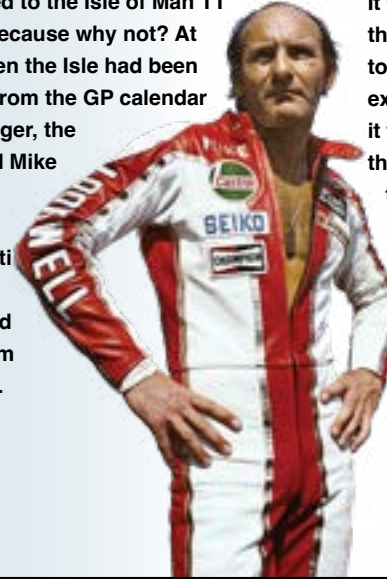


## BMW R90S

Before the R90S, built from '73 to '76, BMW had a Teutonic rep for building solid motorcycles that just didn't generate much excitement in performance or appearance. The '73 R90S changed all that. Suddenly, here was a BMW that was fast, well-suspended and in a shocking two-tone paint job complete with a bikini fairing.

## MIKE "THE BIKE" HAILWOOD RETURNS

Hall of Famer Mike Hailwood had been around the track a time or two: He'd won his first World Championship in 1961, riding for Honda in the 250 class before winning the 500cc title four years in a row, from 1962 to '65, on MV Agustas — 76 GP wins, nine world championships... He'd been retired from F1 car racing since 1974, after a crash mangled his right leg. At 38, he returned to the Isle of Man TT anyway, because why not? At a time when the Isle had been removed from the GP calendar for its danger, the celebrated Mike the Bike's TTF1 win on a Ducati might be what saved the TT from extinction.



## THE HONDA CBX

In homage to its World Championship-winning six-cylinder RC engines of the '60s, and in response to Honda's design and performance lethargy in the years following the original CB750, Shoichiro Irimajiri and crew swung back into action to create the now-legendary, 103-horsepower CBX. It was a technical tour de force then and is an absolute legend today, but an outdated chassis and extreme complexity kept it from having little more than an aesthetic impact at the time.



## APPLE COMPUTER

Apple Computer in Silicon Valley, Calif., introduced the Apple II computer, which became a best seller.

Who knew?

**AMPAC**  
As the AMA's legislative efforts increased during the 1970s, the organization capped off the decade with the creation of the American Motorcyclist Political Action Committee (AMPAC). Created by the AMA to financially support legislators who champion motorcyclists' rights, AMPAC remains the AMA's connected political action committee to this day.

# 1979

# 1978

## BARRY SHEENE

Swinging '60s icon Barry Sheene won Suzuki its first two 500cc road racing championships on the 498cc liquid-cooled, square-four rotary-valve two-stroke that soon gained fame as the RG500 (and just one year after Hall of Famer Giacomo Agostini won the first 500cc title for a Japanese bike on his Yamaha).



## SUCCESSFUL SUPPORT

The Legislative Supporter Program — which allowed members to contribute funds toward government relations efforts — was started in 1978. The program saw great success, totaling nearly \$380,000 in its first six years. In return for a contribution, members would receive a sticker or patch depending on their supporter level.



## SONY WALKMAN

The world's first low-cost personal stereo, goes on sale in Japan on July 1, 1979, for around ¥33,000 or \$150. Sony sales estimates were about 5,000 units a month; 30,000 were bought in the first two months, and 220 million cassette-type Walkmen were sold by the end of production in 2010.



## STEVE BAKER

American HOFer Steve Baker won the 1977 Daytona 200 and the 1977 Formula 750 World Championship (of which Daytona was the first leg), and he finished second to Barry Sheene in the 1977 500cc World Championship, competing in 21 F750 and 500cc GP events while racing nine weekends in a row.



SILVERSTONE, ENGLAND