

100 YEARS OF THE AMA

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AND KEATON MAISANO
PHOTOS: AMA ARCHIVE

Just when the Great Depression was losing its grip and people were beginning to get enough of what it took to make ends meet, somebody in 1939 had the bright idea to invade Poland, setting off an unfortunate series of armed conflicts in Europe. Two years later, some other genius on the other side of the world deduced it would make sense to bomb the U.S. fleet in Pearl Harbor. That move pushed the United States into the nasty conflict known as World War II, which wound up making a significant dent in the world population — 3 percent dead out of 2.3 billion, according to estimates.

In addition to all the death and destruction, WWII also assured we wouldn't be getting any shiny new toys for the foreseeable future, including motorcycles, as all that steel and rubber (and man- and woman-power) would be going into our Arsenal of Democracy, as it spooled up to take on authoritarianism around the planet.

When it was all over, though, the other 97 percent of us were ready to celebrate on new motorcycles that were better than ever. Racing improves the breed. So does fighting, turns out.

The AMA was plenty busy during the decade, at first lending a helping hand to the war effort in several important ways (cooperating with the government by halting racing to conserve precious resources, helping to develop a Civil Defense Organization, and more), and later super-charging its promotion of club and riding activities for members and the industry.

The AMA also began mailing bi-monthly newsletters to members and



40s

THE

those fighting overseas to keep them up to speed and engaged during the conflict.

Professional and amateur racing got added horsepower, too, with the hiring of full-time Race Director Jules Horky. Government and public relations got help, as well, with the AMA's very public emphasis on quiet and legal mufflers.

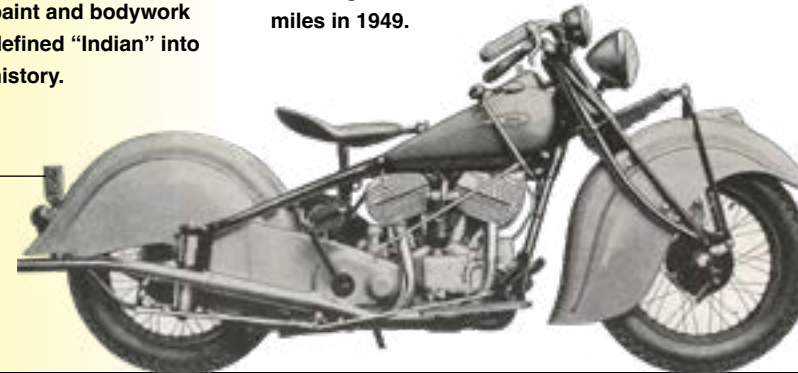
Motorcycling took off in the late '40s, and was a trend that would continue.

1940 INDIAN CHIEF
Indian's new Chief was a prestigious ride at the time, renowned for quality and durability. Powered by a 74ci V-twin (1210cc) that could push it upwards of 85 mph, its new plunger rear suspension left the hardtail competition behind in terms of comfort, and its paint and bodywork defined "Indian" into history.



AMA MILEAGES SOAR

As Americans shifted into post-war life, the AMA saw an immense increase in club mileage. In 1943, with GIs still overseas and rationing requirements in place on the home front, the AMA registered only 12,326,000 miles amongst its member base. In the post-war world, that number jumped to 123,670,000 miles in 1946, and further grew to 238,768,929 miles in 1949.



1940



THE AMA BEFORE PEARL HARBOR

Despite the unrest and military aggression happening in Europe, AMA Secretary E.C. Smith reported a membership base of 22,612 and 760 chartered clubs in 1940. In addition, Smith reported 1,300 sanctioned events and over 6 million people having attended AMA races — which saw a slight decline in both dirt track and hillclimb activity. With an increased interest in field meets, turkey runs and reliability runs, clubs saw a surge. The AMA also continued its emphasis on safety programs and accident record keeping in the early '40s. Safety-Program participants covered nearly 110 million miles in 1940, but once the U.S. officially joined the war, the reported miles decreased by more than 60 percent in 1942.

WAR AND PEACE AFFECT THE MOTORCYCLE INDUSTRY AND THE AMA IN MAJOR WAYS

1940 GILERA SATURNO SPORT

Giuseppe Gellera was successful enough as a racer to start his own motorcycle company about 1909, which he later moved north of Milan to Arcore, near Monza, and changed his name to Gilera. Racier. From the beginning, his Singles were simple, beautiful, and fast: By 1940 the first Saturno was ready for prime time. Designed to compete in Italy's new 500cc production class, the new Single's pushrods were hidden within its cooling fins in tubes that also carried oil to the overhead valve gear. Its three-speed gearbox is in unit with the engine. *Brevetto Gilera* parallelogram rear suspension uses horizontal shocks. Pre-war models are rare; production ramped up again in 1946, and kept on until 1958.



ZUNDAPP KS750

The BMW R75 gets all the infamy, but Zundapp's K series of motorcycles contributed even more to the German war effort — the K referring to their enclosed driveshafts with U-joints at either end. That was one of the things that made the K just right to serve as the basis when the army needed a shedload of rugged two-wheel drive sidecar rigs, and *right now*. You really can't watch a WWII documentary without tripping over a KS750 — or bumping into quite a few still on the road in Europe. Wiki tells us series production started in the spring of 1941, and in eight years Zundapp produced 18,695 KS 750s in their Nuremberg factory (in greatly reduced numbers after 1944).



INSURANCE, YES!

The AMA announced liability and property damage insurance for its members in 1941. Prior to this development, insurance for motorcyclists was hard to come by; but years of careful accident-statistic compilation by the AMA helped alleviate the concerns of insurance companies, and created a path for insurance viability and availability.



1940 HARLEY-DAVIDSON WLA

Harley had already made its bones with the U.S. Army in 1919 when it outfitted Gen. "Black Jack" Pershing with a few hundred H-Ds to chase Pancho Villa around Mexico. The old model J did well enough that, when the smell of WWII began drifting in, the army awarded H-D another big contract. The WLA was a militarized version of the existing WL model, which supplied not just the U.S. Army but also those of most of its allies — including 30,000 provided to the Russians via Lend-Lease.

Over 100,000 US troops were trained to ride and repair the side-valve Hogs, which provided a nice customer base when Johnny eventually came marching home. All that patriotism set H-D up to thrive in the postwar period, while mostly leaving its only U.S. competitor, Indian, hanging out to dry. Source: *The Harley-Davidson Story: Tales from the Archives* — by Aaron Frank



COMPETITION NUMBERS

Near the end of 1941, permanent numbers were assigned to AMA dirt track riders. AMA Motorcycle Hall of Famer Woodsie Castonguay — who hailed from Springfield, Mass. — received No. 1.

1942

AMA & CIVIL DEFENSE ORGANIZATION

AMA Secretary E.C. Smith offered the services of the AMA to serve as a Civil Defense Organization for the United States government during WWII. AMA publications were filled with patriotic messages and stories of how motorcycles and motorcyclists were impacting the war effort. In April 1941, *The Motorcyclist* showed images of American motorcycles being produced for war and wrote, "Some of the motors pictured here will undoubtedly be for use in our own Army. But others may end up in some far corner of the world."

1941



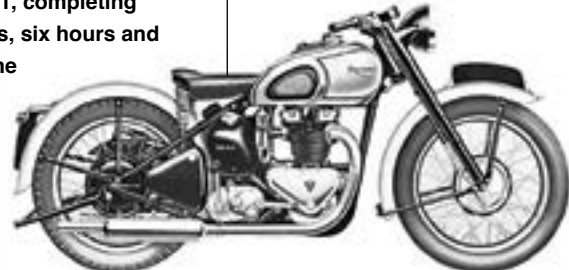


CANNONBALL BAKER

At age 60, AMA Motorcycle Hall of Famer Erwin "Cannonball" Baker registered his fastest LA-to-NYC motorcycle trip in 1941, completing the journey in six days, six hours and 25 minutes. Despite the incredibly fast time, Baker held that the trip was made without breaking any speed regulations.

TRIUMPH TIGER T100

Right when Edward Turner was really getting rolling with a hopped-up 34-hp, chrome-tank version of the two-year old Speed Twin, the same jerk who'd invaded Poland flattened the Triumph works in Coventry via aerial bombardment, putting a halt on production 'til a new factory could be built in Meriden. Most of the few '40 Tigers that were built were exported to the U.S., though, where they made a *big* impression.



CASABLANCA

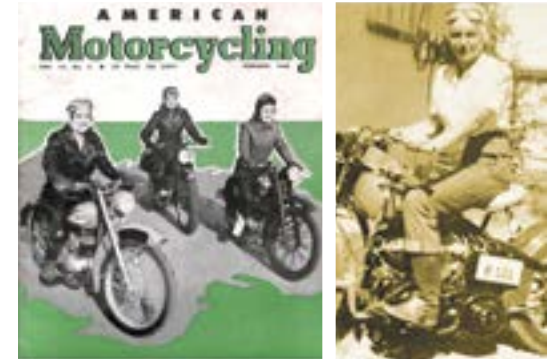
The Bogart/Bergman classic about star-crossed refugees fleeing WWII is released Jan. 23, 1943. Luckily for the film's success, the Allied invasion of Casablanca, along with North Africa, had happened two months earlier as Operation Torch got underway. Also, an historic meeting between Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill happened to be going on in the Moroccan city from Jan. 14-24. Great movie, or greatest marketing coup of all time? You make the call.

WOMEN RIDERS/MOTOR MAIDS

Born from the mind of Hall of Famer Linda Dugeau, who reasoned that women riders would be interested in getting to know one another, the Motor Maids were formed in 1940 with over 50 charter members and AMA Motorcycle Hall of Famer Dot Robinson serving as the organization's first president. In 1941, the club was chartered by the AMA and received charter No. 509. Despite the onset of World War II, the organization continued to grow and thrive.



LINDA DUGEAU



1943



AMA & THE WAR EFFORT

The United States Office of Defense Transportation (ODT) placed a ban on motor racing, halting AMA racing pursuits across the country. Without hesitation, the AMA and Secretary E.C. Smith agreed to cooperate with the government's prohibition in order to adequately support the war effort. To maintain interest in motorcycling during this period, Smith frequently checked with the ODT to determine what motorcycle activities were permissible. While they were ultimately canceled, the widely popular Gypsy Tours continued in the early years of the war, given that competitive events were not included.



1944



AMERICAN MOTORCYCLE ASSOCIATION NEWS

In an effort to stay engaged with members during the war, AMA Secretary E.C. Smith started the *American Motorcyclist Association News* publication, which was delivered bi-monthly to both members at home and those fighting the war overseas.

The four-page publication was a free benefit of membership and served as a “word from home” for military members.

Although this was an expensive decision for the AMA, it allowed the organization to boom following the war in 1946.

The success of *AMA News* also led Smith to pursue a post-war, monthly magazine titled *American Motorcycling*.



1945

A Letter From Over Yonder
Solomon Islands
April 5th, 1945

Helllo AAAA—
Whoever started the AMA News program deserves the thanks of every member in the service. Every day in our company has read it through as it is news from home. Keep it coming regular. We are rather sad here although (censor). We are in an immense coconut grove. Coconuts for copes is the chief product here, in fact the only one. The jungle is very accurately described by the mystery story writers as damp, hot, steaming, disease infested with millions of insects, lizards and beautiful birds and flowers, where the white man goes crazy and dies. However, our medics take the best of care of us and we are practically immune to it all. Everything moulds in a few days. Our pocket books and contents mould right in our pockets. Money is of no value here at all. I know of one man offering another a hundred dollars for a box of cigars. He didn't get the cigars. There are no towns of any kind. These islands were never developed by white man and are mostly swamps and jungles. The natives are small blacks and very timid and shy. They speak a little of our language taught to them by missionaries. They'll trade most anything for a pipe. When they ask for a cigarette, they keep the whole pack and put it in a small sack they carry around their neck. Their hair stands straight up on their heads as high as six and eight inches. They are very friendly toward the Americans. Their dress varies from a cloth around their waists, to G. I. under shorts, C. K. C. pants, fatigue pants and the inside of a helmet or garrison cap, or a monkey cap on top of their mop of hair. Some have field hats or a war helmet once in a while. Some even wear G. I. shoes but almost invariably on the wrong foot. They are sure amusing to see. The Japs He is a much over rated fighter not as good as they would have you believe. He is no good with his equal as compared to the American but he is good at sneaking around looking hid in the jungles. So folks back in the States keep up the end, we can't lose.
Keep 'em rolling.
("Hutch") (MILES HUTCHINSON)

MUSTANG MOTORCYCLES

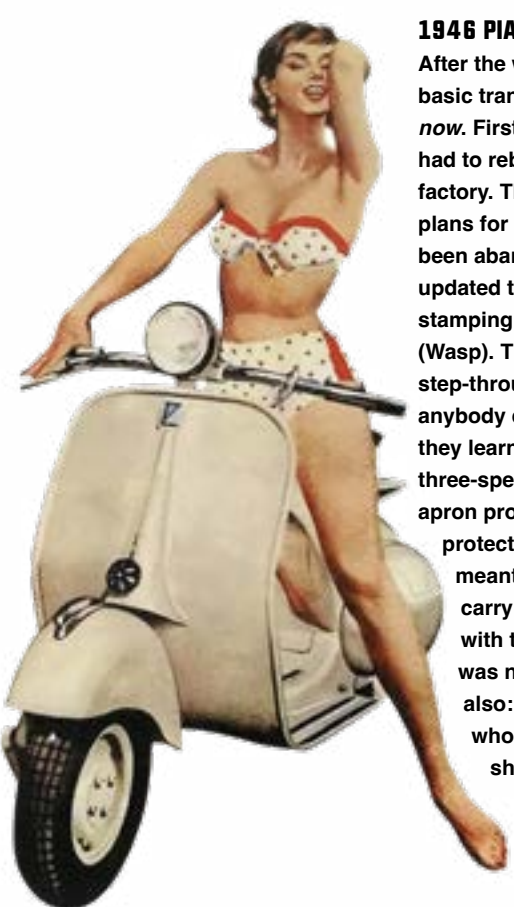
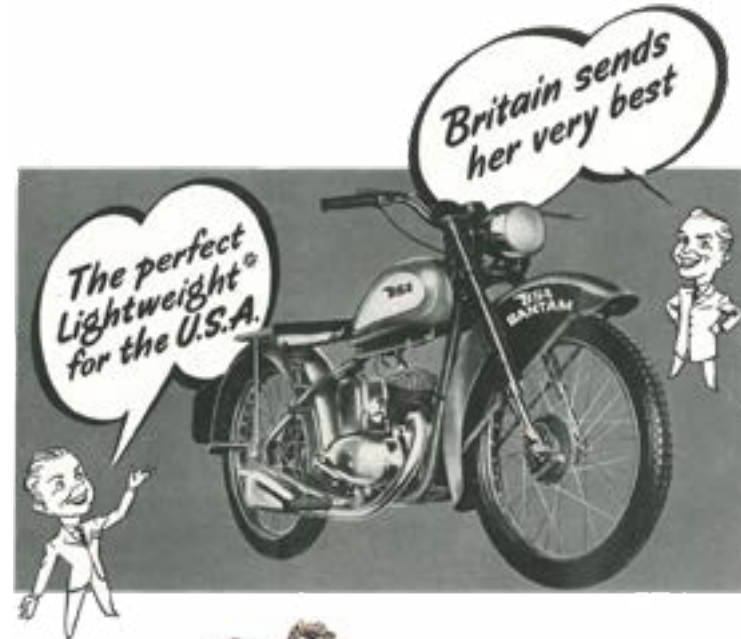
Howard Forrest built a motorcycle powered by an engine of his own design in 1936, which he used to commute to his defense plant job in Glendale, Calif., at Gladden Products. With the end of the war and thus much of the defense industry, company president John Gladden had Forrest design a bike for sale, and Mustang Motorcycle Corporation was in business, cranking out various small-displacement models from 1947–1965.



HARLEY-DAVIDSON 125S AND OTHER LIGHTWEIGHTS

To the victor goes the spoils, and so Harley-Davidson, Indian, BSA, and others began cranking out inexpensive little motorcycles powered by the cute little two-stroke Single whose plans had

once been the property of German manufacturer DKW. These were simple and affordable, and it didn't take long for them to develop cult followings. Later, more advanced two-stroke tech was smuggled from behind the Iron Curtain to Suzuki by one Ernst Degner, a great spy story: See *Stealing Speed*, by Mat Oxley.



1946 PIAGGIO VESPA 98
After the war, Italy needed basic transportation *right now*. First, Enrico Piaggio had to rebuild his destroyed factory. Then he resurrected plans for a scooter that had been abandoned years before, updated them, and began stamping out the Vespa (Wasp). The tiny wheels and step-through design meant anybody could ride it (once they learned to work the three-speed shifter). The front apron provided a little weather protection, and the flat deck meant you could actually carry stuff. Italy, along with the rest of the world, was never the same. (See also: Innocenti Lambretta, whose first scoot showed up in 1947.)

1946



1947

GYPSY TOUR

While they continued in the early stages of the war, the rapidly growing Gypsy Tours were ultimately canceled as the war effort reached a fever pitch. The ever-popular events returned following the conclusion of WWII.

AMA BUDGETS

The AMA's 1947 financial report showed a budget of \$63,000, and a year-end net profit of \$168. Ninety percent of the income was derived from rider membership and sanction fees. The executive secretary received \$4,680, while the eight full-time secretaries were paid a total of \$12,700.

"GREATEST BUY in the 125 c.c. field!"

THE CHEK

See your Indian dealer. Compare the CHEK with any other 125 c. c. motorcycle and see how much more it offers in style, engineering, performance and economy.

The Chek 125 is an outstanding product of one of the largest foreign manufacturers. It is attractively styled and beautifully built throughout. The 15 cubic inch two-stroke engine turns up 4 horsepower, gives smart acceleration through the gears, and will deliver up to 90 miles per gallon of gas and over 500 miles per quart of oil. The Chek has a pressed steel valve link, bush-mounted headlight speedometer and touring frame. It is sold and serviced in the United States and Canada through Indian dealers, and genuine replacement parts are available at all times.

Sold and Serviced by Indian Dealers in the United States and Canada

Indian MOTORCYCLE COMPANY
Springfield 9, Massachusetts

GO, ROLLIE, GO!

The most famous picture in motorcycling, probably, is of Roland Robert "Rollie" Free breaking the American motorcycle land speed record on the Bonneville Salt Flats, Utah. His very special Vincent HRD produced something like 55 horsepower, and rolled Rollie along at 150.313 mph. More importantly, that photo inspired one of Peter Egan's greatest *Slipstream* captions in *Cycle World* magazine: "I think it's stuck in second."



HONDA FINDS HIS WAY

Meanwhile, in Japan, Hall of Famer Soichiro Honda stumbled upon a stash of small generator engines used to power wireless radios that the Japanese Imperial Army wouldn't be needing anymore. Modifying the 500 or so engines to fit, he produced and sold auxiliary-powered bicycles as fast as he could build them. By 1947, Honda had developed an original engine; the A-Type, emblazoned with Honda's name for the very first time.

At the same time, in Italy, Ducati started building its own little bicycle engines, the *Cucciolo*, or puppy.

1949 HONDA D-TYPE

Better known as the Dream, the first Honda without bicycle pedals was powered by a new 98cc two-stroke Single pumping three horsepower through a two-speed semi-automatic transmission and chain drive. Honda became Honda with the introduction of the D-type, its first real motorcycle.

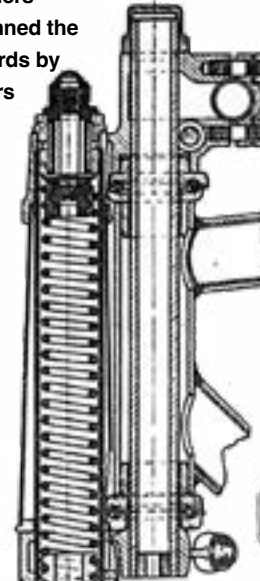
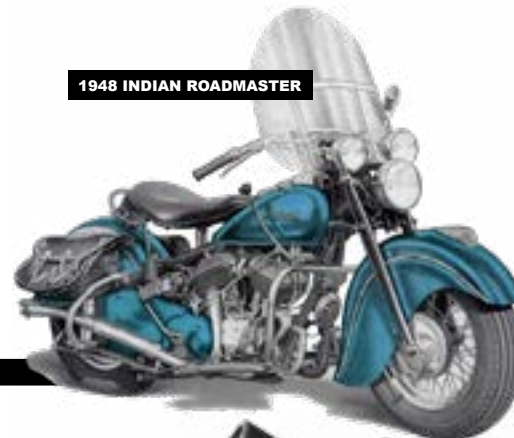


JULES HORKY: FULL-TIME RACE DIRECTOR

The AMA hired AMA Motorcycle Hall of Famer Jules Horky in 1946 to oversee all AMA-sanctioned competition, kickstarting a period of exponential growth and innovation in the world of motorcycle racing. In this role, Horky established the numbering system for all AMA competition riders —

which ensured no two competition riders donned the same number — and improved safety standards by placing riders in easier-to-see colored leathers while advocating for the use of high-quality helmets. Horky became just the second full-time member of the AMA's staff, serving alongside AMA Secretary E.C. Smith.

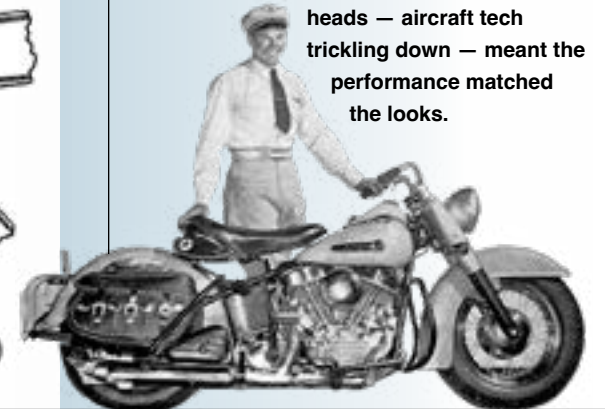
1948 INDIAN ROADMASTER



HARLEY-DAVIDSON HYDRA GLIDE

The all-new Panhead engine was the big news a year earlier, in '48, but that engine's insertion in the new Hydra-Glide of '49 laid down the classic American cruiser architecture that lives to this day. The new hydraulic fork had twice the travel of the antique springer front end and much better damping, giving the FL chassis greatly improved ride and handling characteristics — not to mention its truly iconic look. The new Panhead, with its first motorcycle hydraulic valve

lifters and cool alloy cylinder heads — aircraft tech trickling down — meant the performance matched the looks.



AMA FIGHTS NOISY EXHAUSTS

With noise levels at the top of public relations issues for motorcyclists at the time, the AMA created Muffler Mike, a cartoon character that encouraged AMA members to use legal mufflers. On the government relations side of the ledger, the AMA successfully lobbied against a bill in Iowa that would double the license fee for motorcycles.



AMA HELPS INJURED RACERS

In 1948, the newly formed American Motorcycle Riders Mutual Benevolent Association (AMRMB) paid out \$28,351 in medical benefits to racers injured in AMA professional competitions.

1948



THE PLUNGER

While some earlier bikes had rear suspension, it was really the end of hard times that did away with the hardtail. A plunger rear end was one of the 1940 Indian Chief's main advancements (also BMW, BSA, Norton, etc.), and if you need further proof of how tough our ancestors were, ride a hardtail sometime.

1949

THE TELESCOPIC FORK

Hydra for hydraulic: Not only did the Hydra Glide's new fork massively improve its ride and handling, the swell chrome covers and front fascia went on to define the Big Twin look right up to the present day, as well as the "Glide" nomenclature. Springs sealed inside a pair of telescoping tubes, squeezing oil through small orifices for controlled damping, turned out to be a pretty successful design. Next decade: Rear suspension!



AMA'S 25TH ANNIVERSARY

1949 marked the AMA's Silver Anniversary. The organization arrived at the milestone with 1,500 AMA-chartered clubs — a vast difference from the 62 chartered clubs it had at the start of Secretary E.C. Smith's tenure in 1928. AMA