

## 100 YEARS OF THE AMA

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AND KEATON MAISANO  
PHOTOS: AMA ARCHIVE

**T**he biggest problem of the 1950s may have been simple boredom following all the trauma and craziness of WWII:

Do I *have* to wear this gray suit to my office job again, followed by another Swanson's frozen dinner and a Doris Day movie?

In the '60s, sadly, boredom would cease to be a thing: JFK's big plans were tragically canceled in Dallas in '63, followed by controversial wars on poverty and in Vietnam, the civil rights movement, and more, and all at once.

*Guns* was the most popular TV show in 1960, and by 1970, the No. 1 show was *Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In* — a boundary-pushing mash-up of pop comedy, free love,

and light counterculture. Boiling beneath all of it was Vietnam; by 1969 there were 543,482 pairs of American boots on the ground.

In that same year, Martin Luther

King was assassinated, followed a few months later by JFK's brother Bobby.

In short, the '60s offered an opportunity to tune out and tune in to motorcycles if one had that option; the first baby boomers turned 16 years old in 1962. At least one guy was in the right place: The rise of Japan Inc.

is foretold by pretty much one man, Soichiro Honda, who bookends the decade with Super Cub, Super Hawk and CB750. Harleys, Nortons and Triumphs will still need to be pried from our cold, dead hands, but notice has been served that as performance leaders, European and American days were numbered.

Inexpensive two-strokes from Suzuki, Kawasaki and Yamaha assisted Honda in erasing the Japan stigma, but it would take many years and more than a few brawls. In the meantime, *Easy Rider* (1969) and its pair of Harley



choppers defined cool for a whole other motorcycle culture to this day. We didn't start the fire in the '60s, but we did toss on quite a bit of accelerant.

And the AMA? It moved, twice, to bigger digs; moved to manage racing — then burgeoning in a big way — better with a Competition Committee, complete with rider reps; and formed the Government Relations Committee, designed to fight anti-motorcycle legislation more effectively.

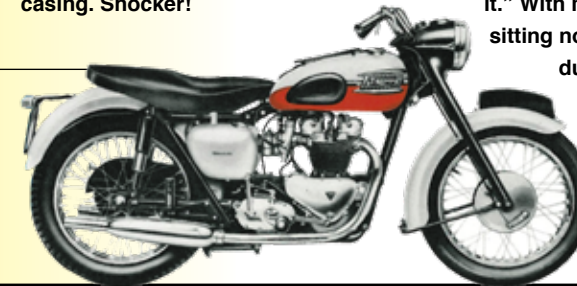
**THE BABY BOOMER TURNS 16, LICENSED TO THRILL; CULTURAL AND POLITICAL UPHEAVAL;  
THE RISE OF JAPAN, INC.; AND MEETING THE NICEST PEOPLE**

# BOSS

THE

### TRIUMPH BONNEVILLE

Named for the Utah salt flat where Johnny Allen went 214 mph on (in) the Texas Cee-Gar in 1956, the 1959 T120 Bonneville became an iconic motorcycle of the '60s. Now with two Amal carbs instead of one and a one-piece crank, the Bonnie was good for 46 bhp at 6500 rpm. In 1963, unit construction combined engine and gearbox in one casing. Shocker!



### DUES DOUBLE FROM \$1 TO \$2

For the first time in its history the AMA increased its dues in an effort to help fund the AMA's new public relations program aimed to "greatly increase the percentage of people in favor of the sport of motorcycling, and persuade many others to take a more tolerant and understanding attitude toward it." With membership sitting north of 70,000, dues increased from \$1 to \$2 on Jan. 1, 1960.



### GREEVES

Bert Greeves' first motorized vehicle was a lawnmower-powered wheelchair for his handicapped cousin, but in 1951 the Brit began producing motorcycles. By 1962, Greeves offered 11 models for all kinds of two-wheeled sport, but was known mostly for its offroad prowess. Villiers-powered Greeves won more than their share of Six-Days Trials and prestige MX events. In the early '60s, the leading-link fork was king. By 1968 and the beginning of the Japanese invasion, things were changing.



# 1960

### THE U.S. MOTORCYCLE MARKET

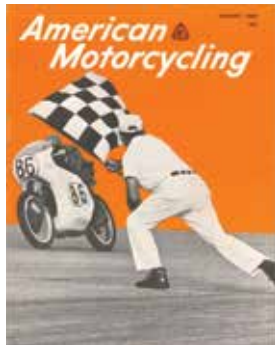
Number of motorcycles registered in the U.S.: 575,000.



HARE SCRAMBLES

### DAYTONA DREAMIN'

The prestigious Daytona 200 moves to the iconic Daytona International Speedway, adding to the overall allure of the event. In addition to the change in venue, the AMA also offered its first full \$10,000 expert purse in AMA history at the event. Hall of Famer Roger Reiman wins the first Daytona 200 not on the beach, averaging 69.25 mph for the 200 miles on



his Harley KR run on Daytona's infield course without the banking. Fairings are for the future. As a TT specialist, unlike most of his flat-tracker competitors, Reiman was accomplished at turning right as well as left.

### HONDA MAKES A MOVE

Just two years after his first forays into international racing at the Isle of Man, Soichiro Honda and his wife Sachi flew to Sweden in September, where they witnessed Mike Hailwood take Honda's first World Championship, in the 250 class. Four weeks later, Australian Tom Phillis took the 125cc title in Argentina. That year, Honda also won its first constructors' championships, in both categories. Hailwood's RC161 was a DOHC four-cylinder producing 38 bhp at 14,000 rpm, capable of around 136 mph, and weighing 282 pounds.



# 1962



### SOUTHEAST ASIA HEATS UP

In May 1961, President John F. Kennedy sent 400 Special Forces soldiers to Vietnam to train South Vietnamese soldiers.

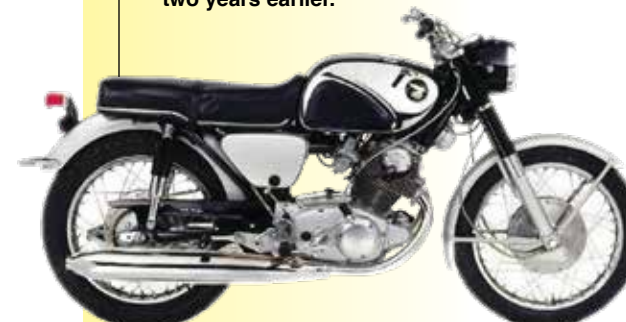
### DEGNER DEFECTS TO SUZUKI

Engineer and racer Ernst Degner defected to the west — specifically to Suzuki — with MZ's secret two-stroke tech. A month after construction of the Berlin Wall began, Degner accepted a large bribe and failed to return to East Germany after the Swedish GP. Meanwhile, his wife and two kids escaped in a secret compartment between the back seat and trunk of a large Lincoln Mercury.



### HONDA GETS NICER

American Honda, by then ensconced in its own modest building on Pico Blvd. in Los Angeles, introduced its "You Meet The Nicest People" campaign with ad agency partner Grey Advertising. The reputational results were immediate.



# 1963

### TRICKLE-DOWN TECH

Honda wasted zero time trickling its racing tech down in the form of the CB77 Super Hawk, a 305cc twin with 27 horsepower at an unheard-of 9000 rpm. The Beach Boys sang its praises in *Little Honda*, Elvis rode one in *Roustabout* to flaunt his squeaky cleanness, and Robert Pirsig extolled its virtues in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. Honda's first sportbike was a sign of things to come, even if no one at the time knew just how big that thing would be — least of all Kihachiro Kawashima, who'd established Honda's American beachhead in Los Angeles two years earlier.



### THE TORCH IS PASSED

President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas on Nov. 22. There were over 16,000 U.S. soldiers in Vietnam, with many more to come.

# 1961



### MOTOCROSSING THE POND

With rules largely borrowed from post-war Europe, the AMA approved the creation of a new form of racing called motocross. The Americanized version of the sport primarily resembled scrambles, with differing scoring methods being the only true difference between the two racing disciplines. The development of lightweight two-stroke off-road motorcycles and a growing enthusiasm for scrambles, enduros and desert racing within the United States helped the sport boom with its new American audience.

### AN AMA HQ OR TWO

The AMA started the decade with a transition to a new, more spacious home. After 15 years in the previous Columbus office, the new headquarters were located nearby at 5030 North High St. Spanning 3,000 square feet, the offices allowed for addressograph equipment to help with the mailing load. Seventeen AMA employees made the move to the space that housed both AMA and *American Motorcycling* staffers. At the time, Lin Kuchler served as the AMA's executive secretary and membership stood at 72,000. Just seven years later, the AMA would move once again, this time less than a mile up the road to a Worthington office.



### DEGNER TAKES A TITLE

As a factory Suzuki rider, Ernst Degner won four 50cc GPs in a row, giving Suzuki its first victories on the world stage and its first championship. Also, critically, the first one for a two-stroke in the World Championships. In 1963, Degner got Suzuki its first 125cc win. Later, four 125 single-cylinders lashed together would have an



outsized impact in racing in the form of the RG500. Meanwhile, MZ's Nazi-derived rocket tech combined three key technologies for the first time — the expansion chamber, the disc valve and the boost port — to make a lightweight engine capable of 200 horsepower per liter. The writing was on the wall. None of this did anything to ease Cold War tension.



### BEFORE ON ANY SUNDAY

*The Great Escape* made AMA Hall of Famer Steve McQueen a superstar as he leapt to freedom from a German POW camp on a Triumph TR6 disguised with olive drab paint, panniers and a big front fender to look like a German military motorcycle. Friend, stuntman, and fellow HOFer Bud Ekins performed the actual jump, and later returned to jump the green Mustang through the streets of San Francisco, repeatedly, in 1968's *Bullitt*.

### ELECTRA GLIDE DEBUTS

Harley-Davidson introduced the Electra Glide, its first motorcycle with electric start (the three-wheeled Servi-Car had electric start a year earlier). You were stoked not to have to kick anymore, but bummed when the '66 model appeared with the all-new and more powerful Shovelhead motor. Soon enough, you were smug, as the Shovel also came with some serious teething/oil-burning problems that did nothing for H-D's reputation just as the Japanese assault was forming...



### ROCK 'N' ROLL REBELS

The Beatles performed on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, where they wanted to hold your hand, sending many Americans into shock. Luckily, most of those people had not yet heard of the Rolling Stones, who were angry they couldn't get no satisfaction. Teen angst was born.

### HONDA RC166

How can we make our four-stroke GP bike as fast as the rising tide of two strokes? Easy, we'll spin it twice as fast! Honda's inline-six 250 GP racer used 24 valves and six 22mm carburetors to produce 60 hp at 18,000 rpm, but was no wider than the Yamaha twins it raced against. After a bit of refinement by Mike Hailwood, including some chassis lengthening and strengthening, and throwing its rear shocks into a lake, "Mike the Bike" bagged 10 victories in 10 starts to win the '66 250 world championship. His domination was almost as complete in '67.

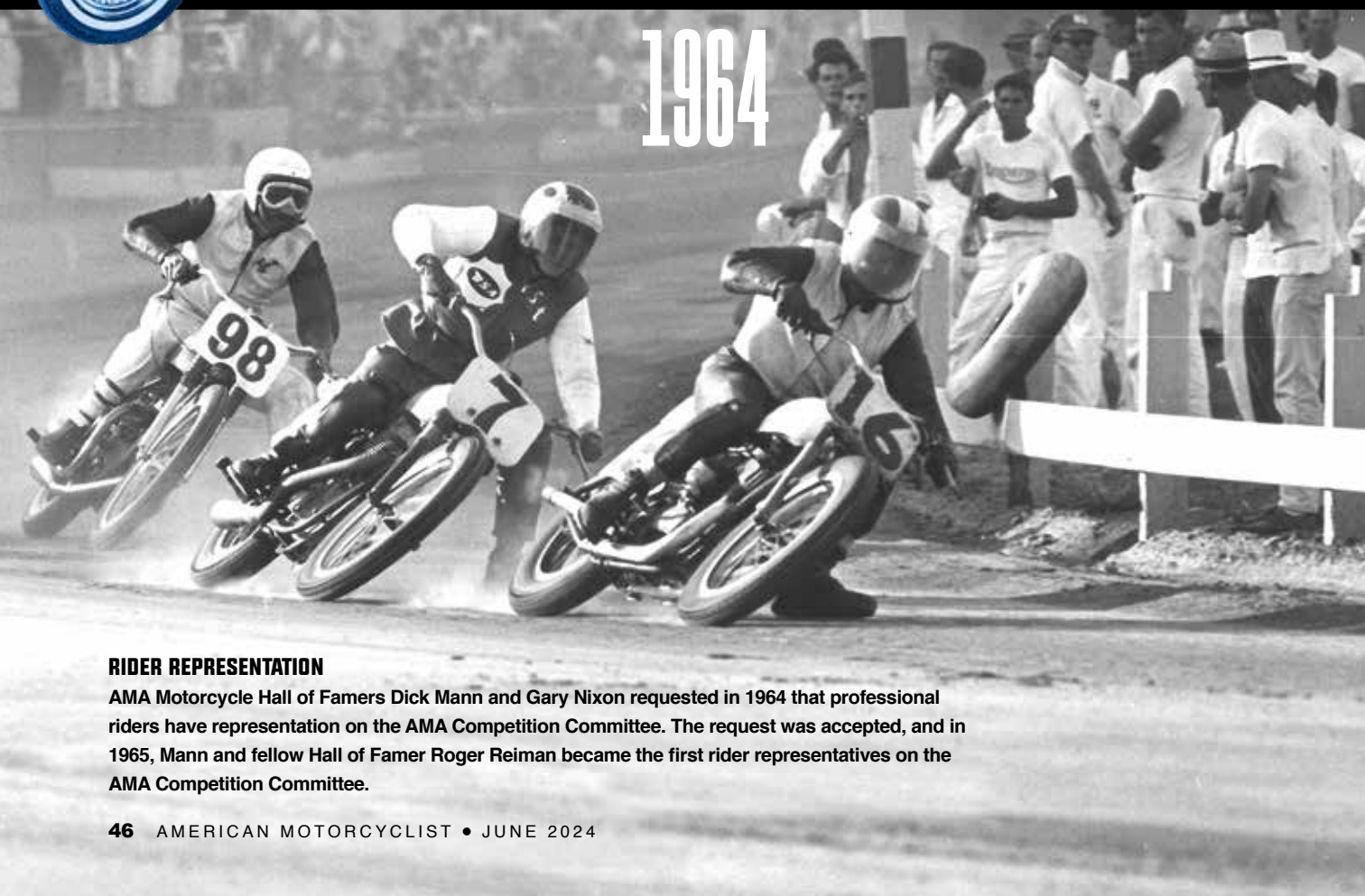


# 1965

### MOTOCROSS TAKES OFF

Big-time Eurostyle motocross met California when Swedish champ Torsten Hallman rode an exhibition event against top American TT riders at the Corriganville Movie Ranch, aka HopeTown, in Simi Valley, Calif. In '67, Hallman was joined by Hall of Famers Roger DeCoster, Joël Robert (shown here) and Dave Bickers, who crushed the American competition on their lightweight two-strokes.

# 1964



### RIDER REPRESENTATION

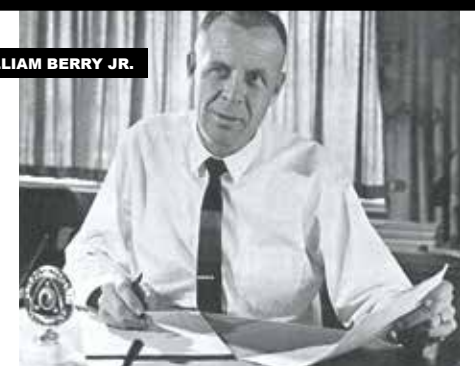
AMA Motorcycle Hall of Famers Dick Mann and Gary Nixon requested in 1964 that professional riders have representation on the AMA Competition Committee. The request was accepted, and in 1965, Mann and fellow Hall of Famer Roger Reiman became the first rider representatives on the AMA Competition Committee.



### TRIUMPH 'GYRONAUT X-1'

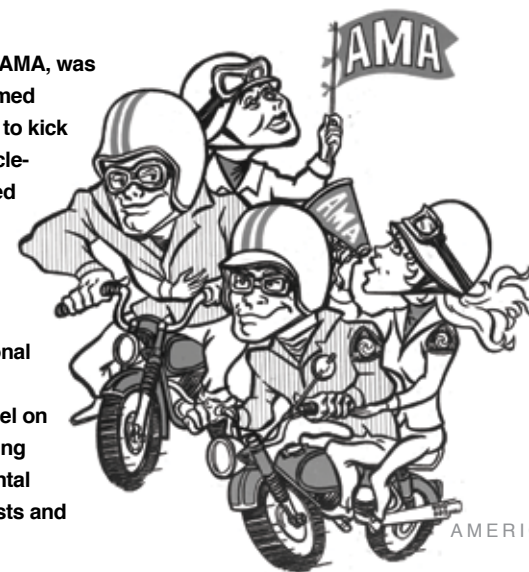
Automotive designer Alex Tremulis and Detroit Triumph dealer Bob Leppan plug a pair of highly modified 641cc Triumph TR6 engines into a chrome-moly frame wearing special Goodyear tires at Bonneville and set a new record that stands until 1970: 245.7 mph. Impressive.

WILLIAM BERRY JR.



### AMA GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

William Kennedy, president of the AMA, was elected president of the newly-formed Government Relations Committee to kick off 1966. With a focus on motorcycle-related legislation, Kennedy worked closely with the AMA Public Relations Committee. The mission of the AMA's legislative effort was to "coordinate national legal activity against unconstitutional and discriminatory laws against motorcyclists, to serve as a sentinel on federal and state legislation affecting motorcyclists, and to be instrumental as a lobbying force for motorcyclists and motorcycling interests."



### A TIME OF TRANSITION

Serving as executive secretary since 1958, Lin Kuchler stepped away from the AMA to become the director of competition for NASCAR in 1966. For Kuchler, this transition allowed him to better fulfill his love for racing. In the wake of Kuchler's departure, the AMA filled the void with William T. Berry Jr., who was a part of the American Motor Scooter Association at the time of its merger with the M&ATA in 1965 to become the Motorcycle, Scooter and Allied Trade Association (MS&ATA). Berry served as executive director of the AMA and MS&ATA.



**HONDA GOES OSCAR**

After experiencing positive results advertising about the nicest people in mainstream magazines like *Life*, American Honda became the first foreign corporation to sponsor the Academy Awards, spending \$300,000 for two 90-second commercials. The response was overwhelming, according to Honda, with people everywhere clamoring to start their own Honda dealerships and many requests for Honda motorcycle tie-ins and promotions from all sorts of industries.

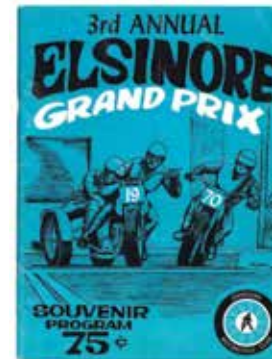
**AGO GETS BACK**

Honda pulls out of Grand Prix racing, but pays Mike Hailwood £50,000 not to ride for another team. MV Agusta's opposition comes from small teams that made their own motorcycles, such as Paton and Linto, or improved British single-cylinders, such as Seeley and Rickman. Giacomo Agostini has no problems with the opposition and wins all the 500cc Grand Prix...and becomes world champion again.



**ELSINORE GRAND PRIX**

In 1968, Harvey Mushman (aka Steve McQueen) and a couple thousand other maniacs descended upon a dusty little town in So Cal, just east of the coastal range from Orange County but a world away. The first Lake Elsinore GP started on Main Street and lapped the lake, mountains, and town for 100 miles. Wherever McQueen went, cameras followed, and when *On Any Sunday* brought McQ, ahhh, Mushman's exploits to theaters, it was game on for the '60s motorcycle boom. Malcolm Smith won on a new Husqvarna; Mushman finished a very respectable tenth.



**JAWA/ CZ**

Behind the iron curtain, Jawa and CZ were doing their best. After WWII, Czechoslovakia's two biggest builders became one, with both factories using the other's best design features, including the first two-stroke exhaust expansion chamber. By the '60s, guys like Joël Robert and Roger DeCoster were on their way to legendary status aboard 250 and 360cc CZ mx bikes.



**FULL FACE FOR ALL?**

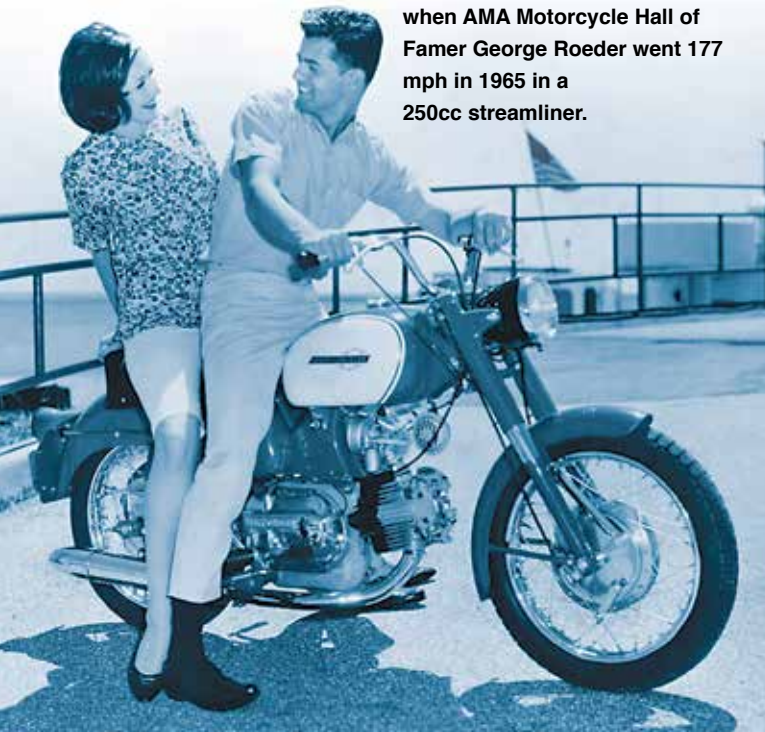
The Bell Star, the first full-face helmet, was introduced, with a fixed visor that's totally imperfect for foggy, humid mornings.



1966

**HARLEY-DAVIDSON AND ITALY**

H-D purchased 50 percent of Aermacchi's motorcycle division. The Italian branch was named "Aermacchi-Harley-Davidson," and the first bike was a variation of the 'Ala Verde,' suitably modified for the American market (with Harley-Davidson decals on the gas tank). The Sprint sold just okay, but was really popular with racers, who used them to win scrambles, flat track and road races — and even a land speed record at Bonneville when AMA Motorcycle Hall of Famer George Roeder went 177 mph in 1965 in a 250cc streamliner.



**AMA COMPETITION CONGRESS**

In 1967 the AMA announced the creation of the AMA Competition Congress, which would consist of the following members: two representatives from each manufacturer or distributor of two-wheeled vehicles, one AMA member from each of the 36 districts, six licensed professional riders, two AMA staff members, the executive director — who would serve as the chairman — and the director of competition. The first AMA Competition Congress met in October 1968 to settle on rules for the 1969 season.



1967



DAYTONA INTERNATIONAL SPEEDWAY

### 1968 NORTON COMMANDO

We're not taking sides, but according to the old bas, er, *riders* who were there, the Commando was the high-water mark of the British twin. During its 10-year production run, the Commando was popular all over the world, and won *Motor Cycle News'* prestigious "Machine of the Year" award five years running, from 1968 to 1972, until finally being displaced by the Kawasaki Z1.

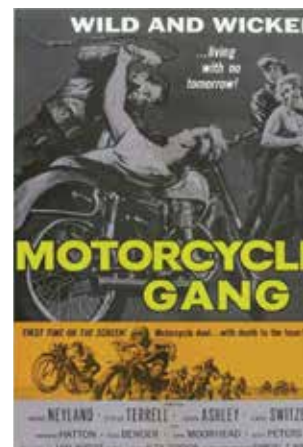
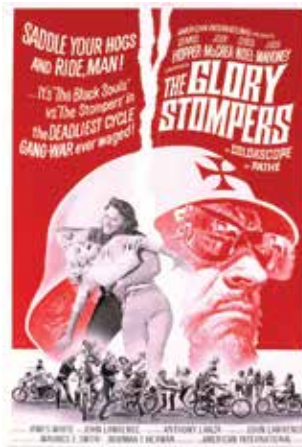


### MOONSHOT

Apollo 11 landed on the moon, and Neil Armstrong took "one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind." It was almost enough to blot out all the less savory current events for a bit. 'Natch, many who opposed the "moondoggle" weren't all that impressed, which was okay since the main idea was to impress the Russians.

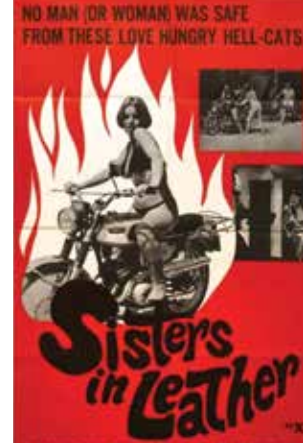
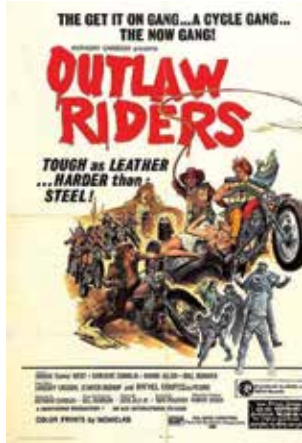
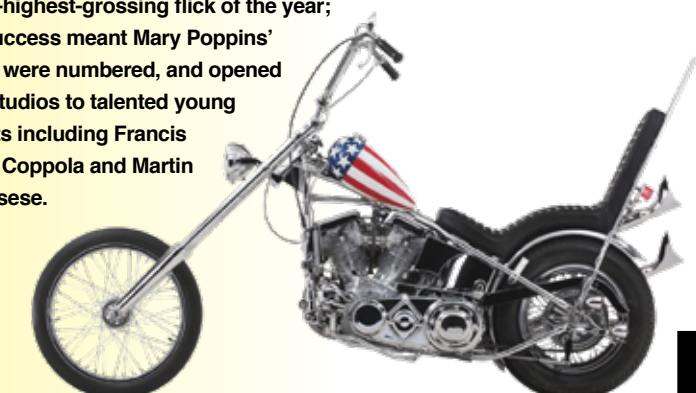
### TOKYO SHOW SHOCKER

Honda's soon-to-be-legendary CB750 appeared at the 1968 Tokyo Motor Show, where it knocked both socks off all in attendance, and promptly went on to be the first successful mass-produced four-cylinder, thus setting the architecture in place for the Japanese big-bike invasion and coming Superbike wars. Yours with front disc brake, \$1,495.



### BIKER MOVIES

Let's face it, nothing goes together like motorcycles and on-screen anarchy, but not everybody was on board. "We have to stop making movies about motorcycles, sex and drugs and make more movies like Dr. Dolittle," said the president of the Motion Picture Association of America in 1969. Peter Fonda — who may have felt personal affront as the star of 1966's *The Wild Angels* (motorcycles) and 1967's *The Trip* (sex and drugs) — disagreed. He wasted no time in putting *Easy Rider* down on paper and hiring his friend Dennis Hopper to direct. The low-budget film became the third-highest-grossing flick of the year; its success meant Mary Poppins' days were numbered, and opened the studios to talented young artists including Francis Ford Coppola and Martin Scorsese.

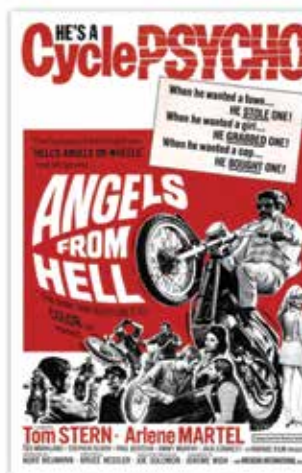


# 1968



### THE HELLACIOUS H1

The Guggenheim *Art of the Motorcycle* book called the Kawasaki H1 "one of the least useful motorcycles available," which was not inaccurate but of course entirely dependent on what you were planning to use it for. If it's drag racing, which was the use Kawasaki had in mind for the 499cc two-stroke Triple when they designed it to sell to crazy muscle-car addled Americans, the H1 was highly useful. Less so for slowing down or going around corners thanks to drum brakes and flaccid frame and suspension, but those things were back of mind on the shiny showroom floor when the \$995 price tag had your attention. Hubba...



# 1969

### AMF BUYS HARLEY-DAVIDSON

American Machine and Foundry (AMF) bought Harley-Davidson. Adding its AMF logo to Harley gas tanks didn't get the company off on the right foot with the Harley traditionalists, which all H-D fans were, and things went downhill from there. AMF ramped up production but didn't upgrade its plants, creating quality-control and labor problems; the new-in-'66 Shovelhead, not the Motor Company's best effort, needed constant Band-Aiding all the way until 1984. Meanwhile, the Japanese invasion was approaching breakthrough. For a while there, the future of H-D looked worse than grim.



### WOODSTOCK

The Woodstock Music and Art Fair was Three Days of Peace & Music with Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, Santana, The Who, and like 20 other acts in a giant field 113 miles north of New York City. Woodstock co-founder Michael Lang's BSA Victor is now on display at the Woodstock Museum. AMA

