

Who Had The Most Impact On Motorcycling In 2008?

by Rob Dingman, President and CEO

With the renewed focus of our Association on the people of motorcycling and our fellow members, it only stands to reason that we name an AMA Motorcyclist of the Year. This inaugural selection may seem self-serving—and in a way it is—but I am confident that you will agree that there is only one clear choice for this distinction.

One of the criteria used to select the AMA Motorcyclist of the Year is that the motorcyclist should be the person who has had the most profound impact on motorcycling. This could be a positive or negative impact on our chosen lifestyle, sport or favorite means of transportation. This award is not intended to be recognition of a lifetime of achievement. Rather, it is intended to recognize a contribution made, for better or worse, to motorcycling and its future by an individual throughout the course of the previous calendar year.

If you have been paying attention to AMA Pro Racing this year, you may be thinking that Roger Edmondson deserves to be the AMA Motorcyclist of the Year. Certainly, Roger deserves an honorable mention because of his tremendous impact on professional motorcycle racing this season and beyond. Yet there is another individual without whom Roger would not have been in a position to have the impact he's had.

Our 2008 AMA Motorcyclist of the Year has had a greater impact on the AMA and motorcycling than any single person in America.

As we've often said in these pages, motorcyclists need a strong advocate against adverse government action, and that a strong, unified national association can best provide this. To put it mildly, the AMA has been anything but strong and unified in recent years. It had become mired in racing controversy and was no longer equipped to fend off adversity, let alone adverse government action. The Association's menu of benefits was paltry at best. This very publication was less than what our membership deserved. The lack of fiscal controls allowed the former chairman of the Board of Directors to help himself to a great deal of money (before we got it back). With our organization in disarray, who would stand up for the future of motorcycling?

For one man, there was no option but to fix the AMA once and for all so that it could serve all motorcyclists—whether they were members of the AMA or not. He saw the need to change the AMA from a giant club into a professional organization. Realizing that he had enjoyed a lifetime of motorcycling because of the programs and efforts of the AMA, he decided that it was time to give back not only to the AMA, but also to motorcycling and its future.

With the urging of friends, this man got himself elected to the AMA Board of Directors and soon rose to a leadership position. Soon, he became chairman of the American Motorcycle Heritage Foundation (AMHF) Board of Directors, which guides the AMA's Motorcycle Hall of Fame Museum. Shortly after that, he was thrust into the position of AMA Board Chairman in the wake of the resignation of the aforementioned chairman who was caught submitting fraudulent travel reimbursement claims. Our 2008 AMA Motorcyclist of the Year, by the way, accepts no reimbursement from the AMA for his travel. In fact, he contributes a great deal of his time and money to both the AMA and the AMHF.

This one man had the wisdom and courage to do what needed to be done, rather than follow the path of least resistance. He realized that the Board of Directors was complicit in keeping the AMA weak, and that something had to be done about it. He became convinced that the AMA's professional racing properties had become a significant drain on the Association and its identity.

As Board chairman, he guided the AMA through a very tumultuous time, and his efforts are now paying dividends. The professional racing properties are in the hands of people who are very capable of elevating the sport. The fiscal side of the AMA's house is now in order. The menu of member benefits continues to grow. This magazine is a much better representation of the AMA and its members.

Perhaps most importantly, the AMA is now in a better position to focus on protecting the future of motorcycling. Without a doubt, this one man has had the most significant impact on motorcycling in all of 2008.

I ask all of you to join me in honoring the AMA Motorcyclist of the Year: AMA Board of Directors Chairman Stan Simpson.

