

One Bike and 88 Bikers Make Racing Luncheon

By John Gunnell

There was one motorcycle outside — and 88 motorcycle racing buffs inside — when the Legends of Chicagoland Motorcycle Racing Brunch got underway on Nov. 30, 2008. The wet snow frosting the parking lot of the Best Western in Hillside Ill., probably had much to do with four-wheel vehicles being the dominant means of transportation to the event, but at least there were some speedy two-wheelers to see inside, prior to breakfast and speaker presentations.

Perhaps the most famous racing bike there was the triple engine Norton "Hogslayer" 2 that T.C. Christianson of Kenosha, Wis., displayed. T.C. set several important speed records with the bike's twin-engine predecessor, Hogslayer 1, which now resides in the British National Motorcycle Museum.

On July 29, 1972 at U.S. 30 Dragstrip in Indiana, T.C. Christianson became the first man to exceed 180 mph in a quarter mile run. He went from 0 to 180.13 mph in 440 yards. On Nov. 19 of the same year, racing against 10 top motorcycle dragsters at Ontario Motor Speedway in California, he achieved an 8.52 second quarter mile. His bike — known as "The Worlds Fastest Norton" later broke its own marks with a 7.93 second, 176.12 mph run, also at the famous California strip.

Another attention getter in Hillside was Jim Fisher's all-numbers-matching 1974 Harley-Davidson Sportster XLH, which was purchased three years ago as a basket case and brought back to life as the "Gray Ghost" Project.

In 2007, at the Bonneville Salt Flats in Wendover, Utah, this old street fighter set the AMA class M/PP 1350 Land Speed Record. Running with its OEM Bendix carb, the bike ran a 123.70 mph two-way average and hit a best speed of 125.500 mph. In 2008, again with the OEM carb, the bike achieved 138.470 mph. It also appeared at the Harley-Davidson 105th birthday bash.

Brice Cooper, 2008 AHRMA Thruxton Cup Champion, brought a third racing bike for display to the legends brunch. His Championship winning Triumph Thruxton 900 was decorated with pin-up style nose art on its fuel tank. It drew many admiring glances, as did George Mack Jr's. white short tracker that mated a Wichita-built Kennedy Staracer frame with a Bultaco Astro engine. It was the type of bike raced by many of the attendees at Santa Fe Speedway back in the day. Staracer frames were financed and distributed by racing great and mentor of many, old No. 10 — Neil Keen.

In addition to the racing bikes on display, there were several interesting exhibits of motorcycle racing scrapbooks and memorabilia. A lot of the material was related to the aforementioned Santa Fe Speedway, a locally famous racetrack that was located in Willow Springs, near Hinsdale, Ill. It regularly hosted such motorcycle racing legends as George Mack Sr., Pat McHenry, Eddie Clifford, Gary Nixon, Fred Nix, Neil Keen, Charlie Chapple, Billy O'Brien, Mike Gerald, Robert E. Lee, Steve Eklund and many, many others.

Legends organizer Jim Viverito pointed out that this was about the 20th year for the Legends of Chicagoland Racing Brunch and the 11th annual edition in the current location (formally a Holiday Inn for those a bit confused). Jim pointed out that Warren White and Don Otto started the event and he reminded those in attendance that Don Otto had passed away since last year's brunch. Dan Schmitt also remembered "Big Daddy" Basil Proskin, long time owner of Ace Cycle World. A moment of silence was held to remember these legends.

Some very special guests at the brunch included speakers Jeff Fredette of Beecher, Ill., a twenty-eight-time ISDT/ISDE medallist and ice racer extraordinaire. Brice Cooper the 2008 AHRMA Thruxton Cup Champ who is also a motorcycle racing reporter and commentator for Speed TV. Legendary drag racer T.C. Christianson and speed record holder plus renowned engine builder and tuner Warner Riley. There were many known and not so well known flat trackers who were all alumni of Santa Fe Speedway and numerous enduro riders, motor crossers and road racers in attendance as well. Table talk included memories from Springfield, Daytona, Peoria and Meadowdale. Old timers spoke of the "cow pastures

scrambles track" in McHenry, Ill., Sycamore Speedway and the Turtle Park MX track in Elkhorn, Wis.

Joe Bucholz and Mike Bucholz came up from Indiana to enjoy the food and the camaraderie of old friends who laughed about the ice races at Mineola Bay on Fox Lake, Ill., and the memorable "Summer Bummer" enduro that takes place in Roselawn, Ind. and routes the racers through a nudist colony.

Buzz Walneck, the editor of Walneck's Classic Cycle Trader magazine was at the brunch and he and his son Ed were spotted visiting with George Mack, Sr. who raced at Santa Fe Speedway. Also,

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Left to right, Ed Walneck, motorcyclist racing legend George Mack and vintage cycle guru Buzz Walneck shared some history at the dinner.

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