

HOLIDAY SHOPPING MADE EASY: GIVE THE GIFT OF AMA MEMBERSHIP. SEE PAGE 45.

DECEMBER 2009

# AMERICAN MOTORCYCLIST



**AMA MOTORCYCLE  
HALL OF FAMERS**  
MEET THE CLASS OF 2009

THE JOURNAL OF THE **AMA**



# FAST & FAMOUS

Every Year, The AMA Motorcycle Hall Of Fame Honors the Best Riders, Racers And Luminaries In All Of Motorcycling. Meet The Class Of 2009.

A seven-time off-road champion. Brothers who pioneered one of the best-known brands in MX. A motorcycling safety author. A lifelong rights activist. A parts and accessories pioneer. A legendary dirt-tracker. A suspension innovator. A builder of racing championships.

These are the brightest lights in motorcycling as recognized this year by the AMA Motorcycle Hall of Fame, and you can read about their accomplishments in the pages that follow. Even better, you can meet them in person this Dec. 5 at the Hall of Fame's gala induction ceremony at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas.

The once-in-a-lifetime chance to rub shoulders with the fast and the famous will be hosted by actor and motorcyclist Perry King, who will preside over the induction of the Hall of Fame Class of 2009 and the presentation of new commemorative rings for inductees.

The event also features an autograph session and cocktail hour with new and existing Hall of Famers, along with other enthusiasts.

The induction ceremony is just part of a special weekend dedicated to AMA motorcycling. The day before, on Dec. 4, we'll salute the racing community at

the AMA Racing Championship Banquet, which honors the best amateur and off-road racers on the planet. The weekend also includes the 2009 AMA Motorcycle Hall of Fame Concours d'Elegance, where you can feast your eyes on some of the most beautiful bikes ever created.

It all happens amid the glitz of Las Vegas at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino. Tickets are \$49 per person for one event, or \$89 for all weekend festivities. Special room rates are available at the Hard Rock.

Tickets and event info: [AmericanMotorcyclist.com/LetsRock](http://AmericanMotorcyclist.com/LetsRock).



CHUCK PALMGREN

## THE FLAT-TRACKER

Chuck Palmgren Made Yamahas Work in AMA Dirt Track Racing

A dirt-track racing ace who won five Nationals in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Palmgren placed in the top 10 in national points in 1968-70, 1972 and 1974, and was an innovator of the Yamaha 750cc motor and frame design.

### On how he got his start

My brother, Larry, was involved with racing. As a kid, I was just impressed with that stuff, and it just kind of grew from that. My first ride was on my brother's scooter, a doodlebug. He had left it at my dad's business, and one of the guys asked me if I could ride it home. Of course I said, "Sure!"

The racing I blame on my brother, too. He and a cousin worked for a dealership in Colorado Springs. They'd go racing, and I would follow along.

### On learning to race

My first race was an hour-long endurance race when I was 13. I think the two older fellows in front of me slowed down and let me win it. They probably had more fun following me and watching me mess up than they would have winning it themselves.

### On what it was like to be a pro

It was full-time. If you were going to do it at a high level in those days, it was a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week job. Everybody worked on their own equipment, and the rider knew the mechanic really well because they were the same person.

### On his racing career being put on hold

I was ready to turn pro after my amateur year in 1965, and at the end of the season I had three letters: one from Harley-Davidson, one from Triumph, and one from Uncle Sam. I got drafted, and that kind of put a damper on my career for a while. I was in the Army in Alaska, and in 1967, I hadn't even touched a motorcycle since I was drafted, and I wrote to Gary Nixon, who said he'd have a bike for me if I came to Sacramento. I went on leave, and if they'd have caught me, I'm sure I would have gone to jail. But I raced it, finished seventh or eighth.

### On winning the Indy Mile on a Yamaha

The Harleys were all there. They won everything leading up to the main event. The race was very clean. It was never scary. I was second a few laps from the end, and between three and four, I found a way to gain some ground, but I turned the throttle back so I didn't show it. A few laps later the leader slowed a bit and I got past. It was great. It was kind of a shock to the Harley guys that they got beat by a Yamaha.

## THE CHAMPION-BUILDER

Gary Mathers Is One Of The Most Successful Team Figures In American Motorcycle Racing

While with Kawasaki, his keen eye for talent discovered fellow Hall of Famers Eddie Lawson and Wayne Rainey, who both went on to become 500cc Grand Prix road racing world champions. Then, at American Honda, Mathers produced a total of 48 championships in dirt track, motocross, Supercross and road racing, winning two championships every year except for one.

### On how he was introduced to motorcycling

I rode dirtbikes as a kid. I had a Harley-Davidson two-stroker dirtbike. I was doing some cross country. About two years after I graduated high school, I converted a BSA into a dirt-tracker. I was sponsored by Tribers Cycle out of Spokane, Wash., and when the owner opened a new store, I ended up managing it for him.

I was never any good at racing. I was a B main guy. I could go to a National like Castle Rock and make the B main, but I could never make the A main.

### On how he moved into the industry side

I raced snowmobiles in the winter, and I won some races. I went to the championship twice and raced against the Polaris team. I impressed them somehow, and they hired me as a service rep.

I traveled a lot, and when I wasn't on the road, I was back hanging at the race shop. One day the guy running the race team, Bob Eastman, wanted to get back to racing, so they offered me the team management.

Then Kawasaki in California called me, and I went to work in motorcycles. Road racing was the big deal. On my second day with Kawasaki, I was asked to go hire Freddie Spencer. But Honda had just picked him up, and I had to call my new boss and tell him that I missed Spencer by a day.

We went back and compiled a year's worth of race results, and the name that kept coming to the top was Eddie Lawson. We paid Eddie \$25,000 for the year for superbike, and we beat Freddie Spencer the first year for the championship.

### On where he found his best racers

Dirt track. You take kids like Ricky Graham, Bubba Shobert, Rainey. By the time they're 21, they probably have 200, even 400, races under their belt. A pure road racer might have 35 or 40. The dirt trackers are used to going 110 mph sideways on a mile, so getting on a road-race bike was nothing to them.

GARY MATHERS





big part of it—but what we would call today situational awareness. There's a lot going on out there on the public roads, and to survive, you need to know what's around you.

Then the Hurt Report came out in 1981. It was interesting that some of the things I came up with were backed up by that. Traffic was a big hazard. Back then, about three-quarters of crashes were collisions with cars and one-quarter were single vehicle accidents. What that means was the emphasis should be on traffic.

#### **On the acceptance of safety training**

It's always been a shock to me that the average motorcyclist riding up and down the road would not be interested in safety information. But some are resistant to it.

There's this sentiment with some motorcyclists that they are these devil-may-care risk takers. Well, if you're going to ride, and you're not going to wear your crash pads, then you'll have to accept the possibility of enduring people picking parts of the road out of your flesh with a wire brush.

#### **On where the safety message needs to be directed today**

The demographic that we need to reach is the sportbike rider. The military is addressing that with the sportbike course because of returning soldiers crashing and killing themselves on sportbikes. They've been able to reduce the fatalities, but we're not doing enough to address that in the civilian world.

## THE SAFETY EXPERT

David Hough Turned 25 Years Of Experience Into Books And Stories On Motorcycle Safety

Author and rider Dave Hough stands out for his series, "Proficient Motorcycling," in *Motorcycle Consumer News*. His books include *Street Strategies: A Survival Guide for Motorcyclists*, and two *Proficient Motorcycling* titles.

#### **On his early lessons on safety**

For me, early on, the discussions were not only about controlling the bike—that's a



DAVID HOUGH

# THE MX BUSINESS PIONEERS

## Geoff And Bob Fox Created An Empire with Fox Racing

Brothers Geoff and Bob Fox are responsible for two of the most recognizable brands in off-road motorcycle racing: Geoff Fox gave the world the Fox Head logo and launched one of the most well-known MX brands today, while Bob Fox, with Fox Factory Inc., made his mark producing suspension components for off-road motorcycles.

### On the start of Moto-X Fox

**Geoff:** When I started in 1971 after being a physics professor, MX was just an infant industry. In those days, when you fell off your bike, everything broke—the tank, the fenders, the handlebars. People really needed parts.

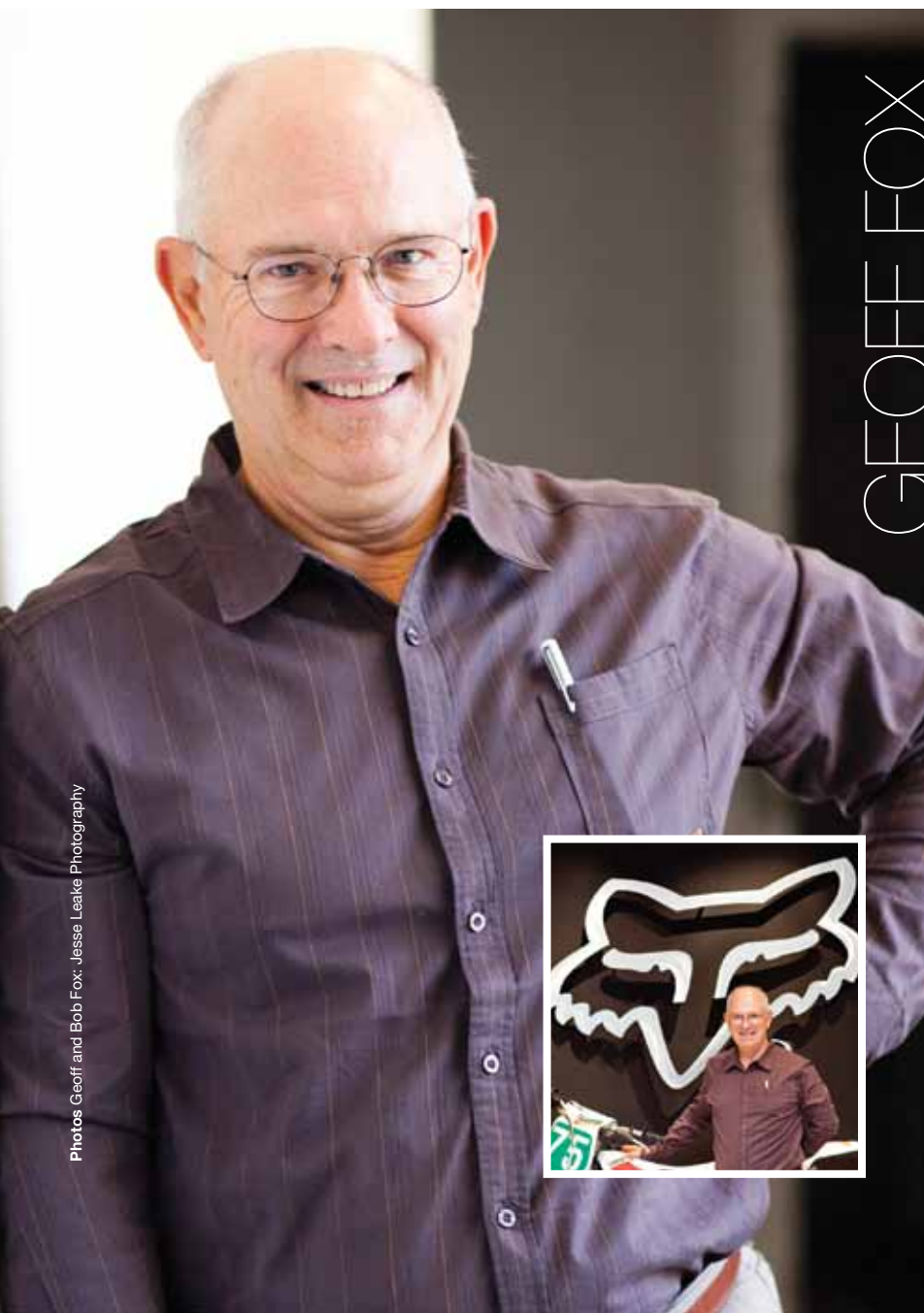
**Bob:** When we started the company, I was an engineer who had become a professional poker player. Being away from a regular job, I was in a position where having fun riding motocross and not having a day job, I was able to start with the company.

### On how the Fox Airshock took off

**Bob:** Geoff brought me into it. At that

time in the early and mid-'70s, wheel travel went from 4 inches up to a couple feet. That was overworking the shock absorbers, and a lot were breaking. So, as an engineer, I thought that was something I could work on. We started working on shocks, and one thing led to another, and we wound up winning the 500cc national championship with Kent Howerton just two years later. It was amazing.

With the Fox Airshock, what launched our sales was simple. We had (AMA Hall of Famers) Kent Howerton win on it in 1976 and Marty Smith win on it in '77. We learned that if you get some big name guy winning on your stuff, it takes off. We went



Photos Geoff and Bob Fox, Jesse Leake Photography



from 400 shocks a year to 20,000 shocks a year after those guys won. There was zero sponsorship. If they were using our shocks, they did it because they felt it was the best.

### On the creation of the now-famous Fox logo

**Geoff:** The Fox logo came relatively early. We were working with a local ad agency, and they had a freelance graphic artist who designed the logo. The funny thing is, I remember wondering back then if it was really worth all the money they were charging—and I think it was about \$300!

### On diversifying

**Bob:** Through the '70s, that was my first business experience ever. I was like, "Wow, this is easy." But then reality set in,



BOB FOX

in the early '80s, when sales went down, and I realized it wasn't easy after all. We were struggling to stay afloat, so we got into off-road vehicles, Indy 500 stuff—we actually had our stuff on Tom Sneva's car when he won. We did snowmobiles through the 1980s, and now bicycles are the biggest piece of our business.

**Geoff:** By 1977, we started getting into clothing. That started because to compete with the other teams with our shocks, we had to have a race team. And they had to have uniforms. So we made clothing. As soon as they showed up on the track, we started getting requests from people who wanted to buy the clothing. So we made a very conscious decision to go into that market. It's pretty amazing to see that grow all over the world.

## THE ACCESSORY BUSINESSMAN

### Robert Bates Sowed The Seeds That Became Bates Leathers

**R**obert Bates got his start with scooter accessories in the 1930s, and went on to create the company that ultimately became the well-known Bates Leathers.

Motorcycling attracts individuals, and that individualism often manifests itself in how we customize our motorcycles. This social phenomenon was not lost on Robert Bates, who developed a broad range of products that connected with motorcyclists, from aftermarket pillion seats to leather jackets. As one of the first businessmen to leverage this affinity for personalization, Bates helped fuel an aftermarket industry that still thrives.

Bates started Bates Manufacturing Inc. in Los Angeles in 1939 to service and overhaul motor scooters and sell accessories. Almost immediately, he began designing and building scooter windshields. When the

metal for his windshield rims was no longer available during World War II, he developed a plastic rim that he later patented. In the late 1940s, the company began publishing a popular catalog that featured motorcycle accessories and leather apparel.

According to Bob Rudolph, who purchased Bates Manufacturing from Bates in the late 1950s and renamed the company Bates Industries, Bates' early innovation and business relationships established the foundation that helped the firm thrive when it began manufacturing the popular Bates colored-racing leathers that most people remember it for today.

"Robert Bates founded the company in a 600-square-foot garage, and from there it grew into a business that had a reputation for quality jackets, pants, aftermarket seats, a popular headlight, windshields, fairings and saddlebags," Rudolph remembered. "He also had a strong rapport with the dealers, and he stayed with the firm to help manage our dealer network after I purchased the company. Bates was a true pioneer in the motorcycle accessory industry."



**Main photo:** Robert Bates (right) and his daughter, now Diana Jean Bates Rogers. **Insets:** AMA Hall of Famer David Aldana caused quite a stir when he showed up to race in his custom Bates skeleton leathers, and a few of the products in the company's early line.



GILLES VAILLANCOURT

## THE SUSPENSION INNOVATOR

Gilles Vaillancourt Built Works Performance Into A Winner

A pioneer in modern motorcycle suspension development, Vaillancourt created Works Performance, which makes custom shocks for dirtbikes, ATVs, streetbikes and cruisers.

### On his start in motorcycles

When I was about 13 years old, I got a job working in a motorcycle dealership cleaning up after hours. In Quebec, Canada, business dies off in the winter, so from November until March, we'd fix up the bikes we got in on trade so we could sell them. By age 16 I was a pretty good mechanic.

### On coming to the U.S. and ultimately starting Works Performance

In 1960, my family decided to immigrate to the U.S. I rode my motorcycle down, following my parents in the car. I worked as a motorcycle mechanic until 1967, when I got a job with the Los Angeles *Herald Examiner*. By 1973, I was riding motocross at the time, and in those days I couldn't buy shocks I was happy with, so I started modifying shock absorbers with my own valves. The system I used then, I still use today, the basic parts of the system.

### On Works Performance's early success

We got in on the ground floor of the suspension revolution and did very well. I started with cross-country shocks, then roadrace shocks. In '80 and '81, we won the American Superbike Championship with AMA Hall of Famer Eddie Lawson. We went on to dirt track. We had AMA Hall of Famers Scotty Parker, Chris Carr, and the entire Honda team, with Ricky Graham, Bubba Shobert and Ted Boody, all using my shocks, and we won so many Nationals.

We designed both a flat-tracker for Honda and a TT bike, with a single-shock rear suspension that was underneath the carb with no linkage and adjustable ride-height. Bubba won nine Nationals on it. Ricky Graham won 10.

On the off-road side, we supplied the Suzuki team for years at the International Six Days Enduro races. We got so many gold medals.

### On his success these days

I do my best work on napkins. I go to lunch with someone and design the whole thing on napkins. These days we do all kinds of things. We even make landing gear for aircraft, for military spyplanes. We've made bicycle shocks—40,000 of them for Cannondale.



## THE FREEDOM FIGHTER

Mona Ehnes Has Protected Riders Rights For 40 Years

**M**ona Ehnes charged into the fight for motorcyclists' rights in 1967, when controversial legislation was introduced that would have restricted off-highway vehicle (OHV) riding opportunities in her home state of Montana. Ehnes has been at the front line of the OHV rights battle ever since, as a founding member of both the Great Falls Trail Bike Riders Association and the Montana Trail Vehicle Association, and as executive assistant to the National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council.

### On how she discovered motorcycling

My husband, Vic, had a Triumph Cub that he rode in the mountains. After we got married, we got an old Honda 50 step-thru that

I rode. I had a couple kids, and when the kids got bigger, they would ride with us.

### On what riding taught her kids

They learned a good respect for the land and the resources, the scenery and for just Montana in general. We camped, fished, rode, and it all involved motorcycles. My kids were never in the sports scene. They rode motorcycles and snowmobiles in the winter and they turned out pretty good.

### On what pulled her into fighting for off-road access rights

They added a section onto the Bob Marshall Wilderness area called the Lincoln Scapegoat Wilderness that closed off access. That was when I became active. But there were so many places to ride at the time that people weren't really concerned about it.

Then there was a space of time, through our local club, the Great Falls Trial Bike Riders Association, that we had a lot of trail

projects. We had an adopt-a-trail project in the Highwood Mountains.

Those areas didn't have any value to anti-riding activists then, but now that's changed. These days, they've taken this approach that they want to be able to go into the forest and not hear anything. We now have more areas where the Forest Service has recommended Wilderness designation, so we've lost more trails in those areas. It's really been a battle.

### On how to effect change

You need to be active on a personal level with the local land managers. You need to be active with your legislators. It's important to non-riders that we demonstrate what a family sport this is.

The non-riding public has such a misconception of what our sport is. They think it's what they see in freestyle competitions on television. They don't know it's mom and dad and kids on quiet trailbikes in the woods.



Photo Davey Morgan Photography

RANDY HAWKINS

## THE OFF-ROAD POWERHOUSE

### Randy Hawkins: 7-Time Champ

A seven-time AMA National Enduro Champion, Hawkins won 13 International Six Days Enduro (ISDE) gold medals and 73 AMA Nationals. He works today as team manager of AmPro Yamaha.

#### On how he got started in racing

I grew up on a farm, and we had the opportunity to ride a lot. My dad had me on an XR70 as soon as I could touch the footpegs. Before motorcycle racing, I got into go-kart racing. I went to a national race in North Carolina, and the kid behind me crashed right in front of my dad, and my dad said I was going to do something else. I probably would be a car racer now if that kid would have crashed anywhere else on

that track.

Then it was motorcycle racing. When I got older, I asked my parents to just let me focus on that for a year, and then I talked them into another year, and I was then able to support myself. I won my first National, in Texas, in '86, signed my first deal in '87 and won my first championship in '88. By '89-'90, I felt like I had finally made it as a racer. I was being paid a salary, had my pictures in all the magazines and was focused on my goal, to win races.

#### On what he got out of racing

I just loved to ride my motorcycle. I loved winning. I also really enjoyed the friendships, being able to be part of something, the racing community and a family-oriented group. Those types of friendships are something you can't put a price on.

#### On his greatest accomplishment

I don't think I have just one. From being

a gold medalist at the ISDE to winning a national race to winning a championship to being a part of the Hall of Fame, it would feel unfair to put one thing ahead of the others. Not to be corny, but I'd have to say it's what all of that makes me, or has given me an opportunity to be. The most proud I feel is when a fan or parent of a fan comes up and thanks me for being a good ambassador for the sport.

#### Advice for the next generation of racers

As a racer coming up, winning the races, you may think you're the one, you're the one riding the motorcycle, you're the guy making it happen. But if you didn't have the support of friends and family, where would you be? You have to be over-appreciative of the people who have helped you achieve your goals.

Take the time to thank somebody. Even when people make mistakes, remember all the good they did for you.