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THE VOICE OF POWERSPORTS RETAILERS

VOL. 50. NO. 8 AUGUST 2014
DEALERNEWS.COM

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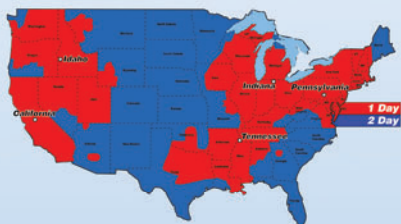
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FROM THE EDITOR

Mary Slepicka

Did that get your attention?

YES, THAT'S RIGHT: The deadline for the 2014 Top 100 Dealer competition is just a few weeks away. And if the cover of this issue didn't get your attention, then I don't know what will. Wait, yes I do. Here's what you receive if you win.

- All Top 100 Dealers get a certificate, marketing collateral, tickets to the grand Top 100 Awards Dinner Gala Dec. 4 in Chicago, VIP access, meals and concierge services at the 2014 Dealer Expo, and a national and regional marketing program through general media releases, Dealernews accolades, the Progressive International Motorcycle Shows and more. We tell the world that you are a preferred retailer.
- Merit Award winners receive special honors at the Gala for their achievements in marketing, customer service, showroom displays and more. And remember, we're giving out Merit Awards in TWO size categories this year, so you smaller retailers have the same shot as the big stores.
- Our Top 100 Dealer of the Year receives an all-expenses-paid trip to the Gala and Dealer Expo, the big crystal trophy, and the coveted Dealer of the Year rings.

Here's what everyone gets by entering: a document that not only serves as your entry but which may help with a future business proposal, or even a loan application. Your entry is evidence of your strengths. Head to dealernews.com and click on "TOP 100" to access the en-

try form. Don't have time to fill it out? I bet you've got an employee, or a team, or a daughter, or a nephew who would do a fine job. Take the opportunity; seize the day. You might surprise yourself.

HOUSE NEWS: We welcome Jim Savas to Dealernews as vice president and general manager. Jim also is VP/GM of our company's large automotive group, which includes Motor Age, Aftermarket Business World and SearchAutoparts.com, and now also will be leading the publishing and sales efforts for Dealernews.

"Creating a program that capitalizes on the heritage and love for Dealernews is one of the things I'm really looking forward to in this new role," he said. "I want to enable affordable programs for advertisers to take advantage of during the 2015 year-long 50th anniversary celebration." I've known Jim for more than a decade and am delighted to be working with him.

Tracy Harris, our senior VP, continues to lead the Powersports Group. This new structure enables me to focus on content direction for Dealernews, Dealer Expo and the Progressive International Motorcycle Shows. We will continue to deliver news, information, analysis and sometimes a wake-up call, whether you're accessing it via print or online, viewing a video or attending in-person. There's much more to come.

Mary Slepicka, mslepicka@dealernews.com



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Arctic Cat dealers frustrated with inventory, margins: Baird survey

ARCTIC CAT dealers painted a bleak picture for researchers conducting the latest Baird/Dealernews research survey of the brand's retail network in June.

Dealers said that prices and inventory demands set by the OEM were too high, while demand and market share were dropping. The Baird/Dealernews Dealer Sentiment Index reported pessimistic outlooks for current conditions (an index score of 15 out of a 100) and three to five years out (20 out of 100).

Dealers' main complaint: inventory. Respondents told researchers that they're forced to carry too much and, with the exception of the Wildcat Trail, none of the models is in particularly high demand.

"They are forcing us to take more products in order to qualify for programs, but the sales have remained flat," one dealer said. "This is making our inventory grow, but our sales trends have not followed."

A dealer noted that its margin on lawn-

mower sales is better than the margins offered by Arctic Cat.

"Need better margins on product," another dealer said, "at least 12 percent."

According to the survey respondents, Polaris weighs heavily on the competitive landscape. "Arctic Cat needs to be more price-competitive," one dealer said. "We are getting killed by Polaris on all SxS product."

Polaris is also offering better financing terms and is "blowing the prices out on their UTVs," respondents noted.

The survey was conducted shortly after Arctic Cat announced the departure of CEO Claude Jordan and the return, albeit temporarily, of longtime leader Chris Twomey. "Good move," one dealer said. "Chris Twomey has good leadership." Arctic Cat was still conducting a CEO search at press time.

"We need someone who will be a dealer advocate, rather than dealer crusher," a dealer said. – *Vince Guerrieri*

Kawasaki's new Mule features convertible passenger carriage

IRVINE, Calif. – Kawasaki's 2015 Mule family includes a new configurable Trans Cab for conversion from three-passenger capacity to six. Available 2015 Mule configurations include the PRO-FXT (\$12,999), PRO-FXT EPS (\$13,999), PRO-FXT LE (\$15,599) and PRO-FXT EPS Camo (\$15,599).

The 2015 Mules are powered by a new 812cc, three-cylinder engine coupled with CVT, producing 48 ft. lbs. of torque and better engine braking over previous models, the OEM said. The engine has digital fuel injection, and the CVT is connected to electronically selectable 2WD, 4WD and dual-mode rear differential options.

The Trans Cab mechanism that converts the passenger capacity is, according to Kawasaki, designed to be so easy that one person can make the switch in less than a minute. A latch on the rear seat allows it to be folded forward, making room for the cargo wall to slide forward and lower into its new position.

The three-passenger configuration increases the steel cargo bed length from 22 inches to 42.7 inches. The cargo bed measures in at 53.7 inches, and there are integrated steel cargo bed rails. In all, the Mule's cargo bed will haul 1,000 lbs., while the towing capacity ranges up to 2,000 lbs.

Both the front and rear feature bench seats with three-point seatbelts. Other passenger-centric elements are four doors, a tilt steering wheel in the EPS models, handholds and storage under the front seat. The LCD instrument cluster is a new addition, with all of the engine and fuel information at a glance. There are two 12V power outlets in the Mule's interior, except for the LE and Camo models, which have four.

Kawasaki has more than 60 accessories that fit the 2015 Mule, including three special packages for the Mule PRO-FXT. Accessories include hard and soft roofs, a Warn winch package and ProVantage Plow System, windshield variations, and audio systems.

POLARIS DEALERS TEETER BETWEEN PRODUCT INNOVATION, OVERSTOCK?

POLARIS dealers appear to be among the most satisfied of all brands, according to Baird researchers conducting a Polaris Dealer Sentiment Index survey (in partnership with Dealernews) in June.

Dealers recorded a Dealer Sentiment satisfaction Index of 73 (out of 100) for current conditions, and 81 for the three-to-five year outlook. Dealers registered a 92 score on Polaris innovation.

"We feel very good about being a Polaris dealer," one dealer said. "Their innovation is great, promotions are good."

The lowest Dealer Sentiment score for Polaris dealers was 69, for return on investment. One dealer attributed the lower ROI to Polaris having "the largest group of discounters in the industry."

Demand for Indian Motorcycles led the pack, dealers said, but weather, government and local economic factors were doing their best to quash customer traffic.

Dealers reported declining demand and thus increased inventories for Brutus vehicles and Victory bikes.

"The increase in inventory levels is overloading the dealerships, which causes dealers to sell units below invoice just so they will have room to stock incoming inventory," one dealer said.

"Polaris does not know what my marketplace will bear, but insists on jamming product down my throat," another said.

The OEM set its annual dealer meeting and new model reveal, including the anticipated Slingshot three-wheel roadster, for July 27-30 in Minneapolis. – *Vince Guerrieri*

Read all the dealer comments and follow-up discussion on [Dealernews.com \(Home Page > News > OEM\)](#)

TO HELP YOU SELL: Bruce reviews the Honda CBR650F

REMEMBER THE CBR600F2/3/4? Honda's middleweight sportbikes earned a solid reputation by combining competitive performance with daily-driver usability. The mount was capable of everything from daily commuting to fun weekend riding to the occasional trackday. And it wasn't just Honda, either, as bikes like the Yamaha YZF600R and Kawasaki ZX-6E offered similar all-around performance at reasonable price points.

But racing technology trickled down to the street, and sportbikes got more and more focused as customers demanded the sharpest, most aggressive machines that money could buy. Soon, track-focused supersports like the YZF-R6 and CBR600RR completely replaced their more broadband siblings on dealership floors.

And although prices have remained remarkably stable for these new machines when adjusted for inflation (a 1999 CBR600F4 retailed for \$7,899, or just over \$10,900 in today's money, making the \$11,490 MSRP for a CBR600RR look quite reasonable), there's no denying that the \$11,000 to \$12,000 MSRPs of a new 600cc supersport bike are out of reach for many young, new riders.



So to bring back both a do-anything middleweight sportbike and provide a high-quality, four-cylinder sports option for budget-minded riders, Honda has created the 2014 CBR650F (see photo). Compared to the standard approach of using a detuned sportbike engine, Honda developed the 649cc inline-four specifically for its new middleweight — the first four-pot Honda engine built in Thailand.

Honda's engineers tuned the CBR650F powerplant to produce exceptional low-end torque for a middleweight four, with decent pulling power from as low as 4,000 rpm. This low-end flexibility makes the engine easy to manage for less experienced riders, while still providing the high-revving sound, feel and prestige of a four-cylinder compared to twin-cylinder options in the class. The EFI, clutch and transmission all do their jobs as expected from a Honda inline-four middleweight.

Holding the new engine is a compact twin-spar steel frame surrounded by high quality bodywork — again, differentiating it from traditional budget-minded middleweight sportbikes. Sportbike-spec wheels and tires mount simple, but very effective, brakes complete with optional ABS. And suspension parts, while rudimentary compared to the cutting-edge components found on a CBR600RR, are plush, balanced and more than up to the job of commuting and modest sport riding. In particular, the linkage-less rear shock was underwhelming under a heavy rider at speed, but the basic damper-rod front fork offered surprisingly good feedback and wheel control.

In short, the CBR650F is directly channeling much of what made the CBR600F4 such a great all-around package. The 650 is smooth, easy to ride, handles well and looks like an aspirational product, not just a machine a rider is expected to own for a season before moving on.

Of course, Honda does describe the CBR650F as a "mid-sports" product, a machine that bridges the gap between entry-level bikes like the CBR500R and supersports like the CBR-RR. But although the CBR650F doesn't offer the cutting edge performance that the CBR600F4 did in its day, the new bike retails for \$8,499 (\$8,999 with ABS), a price that significantly undercuts the F4's MSRP in both current and 1999-value dollars.

The real question is how well the CBR650F will fair against the established "mid-sport" middleweight options in the market. Compared to the Kawasaki Ninja 650 and the Yamaha FZ6R, the CBR-F offers a significant boost in peak power, but will retail for \$800 more than the Yamaha and \$1,000 more than a Ninja 650 ABS when similarly equipped. Whether the Honda's combination of torquey four-cylinder performance and classy styling win fans will quickly become apparent. — Bruce Steever

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Husky gets huskier for 2015

MURIETTA, Calif. - Husqvarna in late June broadened its lineup from 10 motorcycles to 14 as it introduced two new dual-sport bikes and an expanded lineup of enduros and motocross models.

(For a list of technical upgrades to the entire 2015 Husky lineup, visit Dealernews.com > Dealer Operations > Sales)

New to the North American market are the FC 350 four-stroke MX bike, the TE 125 off-road two stroke, and two street-legal dual-sport models, the FE 350 S and FE 501 S.

Dual-sports. The FE 350 S and FE 501 S are street-legal options for the FE 350 and 501. The 350 S has a DOHC four-stroke engine with a heavier crankshaft than the off-road version to improve traction. The 501 S is powered by a SOHC four-stroke engine with titanium intake valves and diamond-like carbon-coated rocker arms, and is also tuned for improved traction and maximum durability with a three-layer head gasket. Both dual-sports have the same suspension components as the rest of the FE family — the 4CS WP fork and link-mounted dual compression control WP shock — but are optimized for the specific demands of dual-sport riding, the OEM noted.

TE 125. The new 125 carries many of the features from the larger TE machines, including the 4CS WP fork and linked rear suspension featuring the DCC WP rear shock. CNC-machined triple clamps ensure optimum clamping surface and precision

control of the front end while enabling four different handlebar positions, the OEM announced. The eighth-liter mill features a high-performance cylinder and power valve. The Vertex piston is designed to deliver

healthy bottom-end torque and top-end performance. And in keeping with its simple and lightweight nature, the TE 125 uses a kick start.

The bike's Magura hydraulic clutch offers smooth, consistent actuation of the six-speed gearbox, and Boyesen reed valves ensure crisp throttle response and maximum durability, the OEM added.

FC 350. Husky's new middleweight four is based on the 250 platform and is powered by a DOHC engine with lightweight titanium valves and DLC-coated finger followers. A CP-Carrillo-forged box-type piston combines maximum performance and reliability with minimum weight, and cranks out 54 hp.

The FC 350 carries the same 2015 upgrades to the 250, including the CSS clutch and one-piece machined steel clutch basket. The 350 shares suspension components and key features such as electric start, Brembo brakes and hydraulic clutch. Unlike the 250 and 450, however, the 350 will carry Husqvarna's fiberglass-reinforced polyamide composite rear subframe.



TWO-TONE CHIEFS.

Indian revealed the first 2015 models during July's Vintage Motorcycle Days in Ohio with two-toned paint schemes for the new batch of Chiefs. "Two-tone paint schemes are among the most iconic elements of vintage Indian motorcycles dating back about 80 years, giving the bikes a look and feel that is instantly recognizable and beloved by motorcycle fans," said Steve Menneto, vice president of Indian Motorcycle.

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Tornado swipes J&P Cycles one day after big Open House rally

ANAMOSA, Iowa - A summer storm caused heavy damage at J&P Cycles June 30, forcing the retail center to close temporarily for cleanup and the distribution center to switch briefly to manual processes. The storm hit just one day after J&P's annual open house, which drew about 45,000 visitors, according to retail and events director Tara Blanchard. Visitors and vendors had gone home, but J&P was still dismantling the outdoor showroom area.

"The rally ended at 5 [on] Sunday and the storm started around 1 p.m. Monday," she said. "The team was working to get the extended showroom out of the tent. Unfortunately we can't tear that down in one day. They had gotten maybe through half of it before the storm took place."

By 3 p.m. Monday, employees and four shoppers had to take shelter in the J&P facility's storm shelter for about half an hour as the worst of the storm hit.

"It does feel like forever when you can hear things hitting the side of the building," Blanchard said. When they emerged, the storm had picked up the tent outside and vaulted the tentpoles into the building in several places. (Think magician's sword box act.)

"We had a significant amount of water damage that was caused from the different metals making holes in the building," Blanchard said. "This team worked incredibly hard through the night to make sure the holes were fixed and no more water was getting in."

J&P was able to resume business by midweek. — Holly Wagner

Beta overhauls 4-strokes for 2015

PASO ROBLES, Calif. — Beta USA's 2015 model lineup introduces significant changes for the four-stroke models and small updates to the two-stroke RR models.



The four-stroke RR models (350 RR EFI, 390 RR, 430 RR and 480 RR) have a long list of updates, many of which are taken from the 2014 RR Factory models. Beta aimed to develop a motorcycle that was lighter, easier to control and had better handling characteristics.

Weight savings and reduced rotating mass were achieved with a lighter, redesigned engine center case and internal components. Virtually every aspect of the engine has been redesigned or modified for 2015.

Engine sizes were reduced, as well, although Beta says the power and torque figures remain the same as those on the previous model thanks to a new camshaft profile and exhaust system. The 350's size remains the same, but the 400 has been reduced to 390cc, the 450 is now 430cc and the 498 has 480cc.

Another significant change for the 350 RR EFI is the introduction of electronic fuel

injection. Beta developed the system with Synerject, and it has a 42mm-diameter throttle body.

In the suspension department, the Sachs forks have a new compression piston for improved oil flow and progressive shock absorption. A new spring-support release system, redesigned sleeves and bushings, redesigned spring profile and adjusted valving are other changes. The rear shock was not forgotten: it has a new internal piston for improved oil flow and reduced overheating.

The RS Dual Sport four-stroke models have the same engine, frame and suspension as the RR bikes. Like the RR line, the RS line also has different displacements for 2015: 390, 430 and 500. Each model comes with a Voyager GPS unit that includes the tachometer, engine coolant temperature, compass, air temperature and maps. The RS models also have a cooling fan kit and Michelin Enduro tires.

Beta's 250 two-stroke has technical updates and the 300 has special parts taken from the 2014 racing model. Beta said its intent was to increase the smoothness and improve power across the rpm range.

The 300 RR's engine comes from the 2014 racing model and includes a new cylinder, combustion chamber and CDI. The exhaust port is reduced and the power valve has better sealing, resulting in improved throttle response. The 250 RR has a modified exhaust valve adjustment system so that the two springs in parallel match the 300 engine. A new silencer has a smaller diameter internal pipe.

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| 90/90-21..... | 50.46 |

| | |
|----------------|-------|
| 80/100-12..... | 29.10 |
| 90/100-14..... | 37.90 |
| 90/100-16..... | 40.27 |
| 110/90-19..... | 63.28 |
| 120/80-19..... | 61.79 |
| 130/70-19..... | 67.00 |



SX TIRE RETAIL \$

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|----------------|-------|
| 80/100-21..... | 50.46 |
|----------------|-------|

| | |
|-----------------|-------|
| 100/100-18..... | 63.70 |
| 110/100-18..... | 68.32 |
| 120/100-18..... | 77.77 |
| 100/90-19..... | 67.42 |
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SPEED READ

WHAT'S TRENDING ON DEALERNEWS.COM

DEALER OPERATIONS > SALES

Quadski adds XL. In addition to seating for two, the new XL has 11.8 inches of additional wheelbase, is nearly a foot longer than the solo Quadski and has increased storage capacity. The Quadski and Quadski XL each feature larger hood-mounted air scoops that boost engine cooling and overall performance, along with new, more resilient front bumper systems.

DEALER OPERATIONS > SERVICE

Busy time in Harley service departments. Motor Co. recalls 66,000 tourers that may have been assembled in a way that pinches the front brake line between the fuel tank and frame.

Suzuki recalls some V-Stroms. A drive chain link may not have been riveted by the OEM's supplier during manufacturing on certain 2014 DL 650A models.

Maxi-Scooters called back. BMW is recalling certain 2012-14 C 600 Sport Maxi-Scooters and C 650 GT Maxi-Scooters made between August 2012 and February 2014 because the camshaft chain tensioner may not function properly and possibly stall the engine.

BMW follows 'do not sell' order with recall. BMW has recalled '14 R1200 RTs

made between Nov. 27 and May 6, because the piston rod within the rear shock absorber can break without warning, the OEM announced.

HOME PAGE > NEWS > AFTERMARKET

FLY expands MX line. FLY Racing's 2015 gear lineup, available this month, includes updates on motocross lines and a collaboration with Johnny Campbell. The JCR Offroad line features a jacket and pants made of Three Thirty XD material for durability and flexibility, and everything is covered by a waterproof-yet-breathable HydraGuard X10 shield.

Davy does Dallas. Tucker Rocky/Bikers Choice hired former O'Neal, Rental, ICON and Leatt executive Phil Davy to head up its house apparel brands, which include MSR, Answer, Pro Taper, River Road and Firstgear. "Tucker Rocky/Bikers Choice has been a company I have competed against, yet respected, for over 20 years, and I am proud and excited to start on this new path," Davy said.

High power from Yuasa. The company last month launched the GYZ series of absorbed glass mat batteries, which offer increased power and longer shelf life, ideally suited for high-power accessories like GPS units and audio systems.



GEORGIA – Gene Preston, co-owner of **Thunder Tower Harley-Davidson** in Columbia, S.C., has bought **Clayton County Harley-Davidson**, the biggest Motor Co. dealership in the Atlanta metro area.

FLORIDA – **Scott Fischer Enterprises** revealed plans for a 16.5-acre complex in Fort Myers that includes a 54,000

sq. ft. store, onsite rider training course, Riding Academy, entertainment venue and retail complex. And in Satellite Beach, a new online retailer, **Thumperbay**, said it will specialize in gear and accessories for adventure-touring riders.

IOWA – Talk about fans: The owners of **McGrath Hawkeye Harley-Davidson** want the City of Coralville's permission to build a new dealership that will resemble Kinnick Stadium, the home field for University of Iowa's football team.

MISSISSIPPI – **Southern Thunder H-D's** grand re-opening in Southaven generated \$110,000 for Boys & Girls Clubs of Northern Mississippi. Owner Bob Parsons contributed \$100K of the total, and announced that his foundation will also provide funds to remodel three BGCNMS clubhouses in the area.

NEW MEXICO – Dealer/racer Evan "Evo" Rahm will take over management of the Aztec Motocross Track on Sept. 1 from No Limit MX Racing. The 30-year-old owner of **Evo's Powersports** in Aztec is a pro MX racer that opened his second repair and retail shop in 2013.

OHIO – Top 100 Hall of Fame Dealer **Iron Pony Motorsports** (Westerville) hired former AMA national riding manager Dave Hembroff as special projects director. He'll be responsible for customer and internal team engagement, special events and marketing.

TENNESSEE – **Cool Springs H-D** dropped plans to build a store in Brentwood after residents protested that noise from bikes and dealer events would intrude on the neighborhood.

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NIGHTLY PARTIES AT DEALER EXPO — AND THE FUN'S ON US!

LAST MONTH I took you through the extensive education program at Dealer Expo, kicking off on Thursday, Dec. 4, with the National Retail Conference presented by Dealernews, and then continuing with the interactive learning environments on the show floor. But enough of all that serious stuff — let's talk about the FUN!

We have four (Yes, four!) evening events planned for you that focus on having a good time — time when you can relax, meet new people, re-connect with old friends and just have the fun YOU deserve. The best part is each event serves up some of Chicago's finest food and drinks in an iconic location. Here's what we have in store:

The **WEDNESDAY** event is for retailers already in town — whether for one of the 20 Group meetings, annual association meetings or for those who've already arrived for Dealer Expo. Join us on the 94th floor of the Willis Tower for a "Pie-in-the-Sky" pizza party. Iconic Chicago deep-dish, beer (and other beverages) and stunning views of one of the world's most beautiful cities — what could be better?

When: Wednesday, Dec. 3, 6 p.m.

Where: 94th Floor of the Willis Tower

Cost: Free for registered Dealer Expo attendees and exhibitors

Attire: Casual

**Dealernews
TOP 100**

EXCELLENCE IN
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THURSDAY night honors the best retailers in the country with the Top 100 Dealer Awards Gala. The evening kicks off with a cocktail reception, followed by a formal sit-down dinner and live awards presentation. All 2014 Top 100 winners and Top 100 Hall of Fame Dealers will receive complimentary tickets.

Those who would like to acknowledge these leaders (and pick up some winning ideas) will be able to buy tickets in October.

When: Thursday, Dec. 4, 7 p.m.

Where: Downtown Chicago (location to be announced in August)

Cost: Free to 2014 Top 100 winners and Hall of Fame dealers. Paid seating available to registered attendees and exhibitors; tickets go on sale in October

Attire: Business/cocktail



Getty Images

All I can say about FRIDAY'S super-secret party is that Millennium Park in downtown Chicago will be heating up in December. Be prepared for a surprise as we unveil the party details Friday morning. Free transportation will be provided from McCormick Place to the event. Plan for appetizers, drinks and lots of fun.

When: Friday, Dec. 5, 6 p.m.

Where: Millennium Park

Cost: Free for registered Dealer Expo attendees and exhibitors

Attire: Casual

SATURDAY is a special Annual Industry Party you won't want to miss. This year we honor the industry pioneers who are the reason we're all here today. They criss-crossed the country, roped in the willing and cajoled the unwary, and didn't stop until they shaped and built the dealer networks that are the foundation of our modern retailing landscape. If you should come to Chicago this December for no other reason (but there are plenty of really good reasons to be here), it should be to meet these mavericks, shake their hands and thank them for creating the world in which we get to work. We'll be offering lots to eat and drink, hosting plenty of Chicago blues music and promising a good time for everyone. And convenient? It's in the Skyline Ballroom at McCormick Place West — right across the hallway from Dealer Expo.

When: Saturday, Dec. 6, 6-10 p.m.

Where: McCormick Place West

Cost: Free for registered Dealer Expo attendees and exhibitors

Attire: Casual

Dealer Expo isn't just a trade show – it's an annual gathering of your "tribe," your people. There will be a fun event every evening, and there will be something to learn, new people to meet and new products to consider every day. Be reminded of all the wonderful, exciting and fundamental things that drew you to motorcycles and all things powersports.

Be recharged by swapping ideas, re-connecting with old friends and telling tall tales. Be *there*.

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Tracy Harris
Senior Vice President
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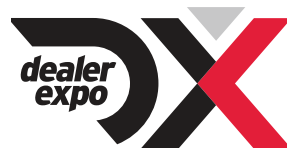
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Fixing F&I

IT CAN BE THE MOST PROFITABLE SQUARE FOOTAGE IN A DEALERSHIP, IF YOU GET OUT OF YOUR OWN WAY



Tory Hornsby is the executive vice president of Dealership University and Powersports Marketing. Dealership University.



See Tory Hornsby and the rest of the team at Dealership University/ Powersports Marketing in December, as they bring a three-part Local Store Marketing Workshop to the National Retail Conference at the 2014 Dealer Expo, Dec. 4-7 in Chicago. To register, visit www.dealerexpo.com

WHEN WE FIRST STARTED Dealership University in 2004, before the creation of Powersports Marketing, we focused exclusively on training dealers in all aspects of operations. One of the most popular areas dealers wanted to improve was the finance and insurance department, labeled “the most profitable square footage in the dealership.”

I worked with many dealers who averaged less than \$100 per unit sold in backend profit. This was a sore spot for them, and it was also a passion for me. Dealers can't afford to be indifferent about this profit center.

In 2006 a Midwest dealer requested onsite training for its sales staff. While there, the dealership's F&I manager was averaging \$76 per unit sold, including a doc fee of \$58. The F&I manager bumped into an extended service contract every once in a while, but his attention was clearly more on doing the paperwork than on selling. The dealer principal told me he'd been fighting to increase backend profit for months and was extremely frustrated. He then told me if I could get his backend number up to an average of \$300 per unit, he'd sing Dealership University's praises and shout his success with us from the rooftops.

I ended up changing my flight, hotel and rental car so I could stay an extra day to work one-on-one with the finance manager. He knew which products were legal to sell in his state (I had double-checked this as well), so we worked on a menu selling system to offer 100 percent of the products to 100 percent of the people 100 percent of the time. If you don't offer it, they won't buy it, and the protection your F&I products provide should not be the best-kept secret in your dealership.

I was working with the finance manager on product knowledge and handling objections when a large problem stopped us in our tracks. They weren't signed up with a vendor to sell any of the backend F&I products, except the OEM extended service contracts. Seriously.

So we spent the rest of our time getting everything they needed to sell the products. The following day, back in my office, I verified that all the paperwork to sign up with a vendor had been received. They said they would fill it out and fax it back that day, but they didn't. Over the next few weeks I made multiple phone calls and sent emails to the finance manager and the dealer principal. I even shipped the printed agreements directly to them with arrows where he needed to sign. Nothing happened and I moved on. You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. Fortunately, this dealer has been the exception and not the rule, but take a look in the mirror: Are you in your own way of being more profitable?

YOUR LIST OF BACKEND PRODUCTS

Improving your F&I profit center is one way to become more profitable overall. One of the foundations of increasing backend sales is believing in the products. You can't sell them if you don't truly believe in them, so below is a list of some of the more popular backend products:

- **Extended service agreement.** This is a common backend product that provides an extension of the manufacturer's warranty. An extended service agreement protects the buyer from having to pay to repair mechanical breakdowns for a specified amount of time. It often includes towing, battery boost, fuel delivery and lost key assistance, and can actually increase the resale value of the machine.
- **Priority maintenance.** This prepaid maintenance package generally covers all parts and labor on the factory-recommended maintenance outlined in a the owner's manual. It may include priority scheduling, and it also protects the customer from future parts and labor rate increases. There are many different variations to this program.
- **Guaranteed asset protection.** This product covers the deficiency between the amount financed and the market value of a unit in the event of a total loss.
- **Theft protection.** This is an insurance policy that provides financial benefits to a customer if the unit is stolen and not recovered within a certain timeframe.
- **Tire and wheel.** As the name indicates, this provides wheel and tire replacement if damaged by road debris, metal, nails, screws, potholes, glass or blowouts.
- **Finance reserve.** This is profit that can be made from marking up the interest rate of each loan your F&I department generates.
- **Credit life insurance.** This covers the full balance of a loan in the event of the death of a signer or co-signer.
- **Disability insurance.** This protects credit history by paying benefits if the policyholder becomes incapable of working.

There are other products that are available to sell as well; just be sure to check your state laws first to determine what's legal.

At the end of my last Dealernews article I offered a training plan for sales associates, and dozens of dealers responded. I'd like to offer the same thing here for F&I. If you'd like a job description, two-week training checklist and performance evaluation for an F&I manager, shoot me an email at thornsby@powersportsmarketing.com. **D**

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'We want people to love motorcycles'

KTM'S BURLESON ON COMPETITION, YOUNG RIDERS — AND THE DEALERS ON THE FRONT LINE

By Beth Dolgner

The buck stops here: A chief executive officer is the single person responsible for a company's performance. He or she is the leader of the entire organization and the main link between the business and its board of directors (and usually the media). The CEO's job security hinges on whether the business succeeds or fails.

Dealernews launches its CEO Series with a look at the executives who are responsible for what their businesses will be tomorrow.



JON-ERIK BURLESON HAS been president of KTM North America Inc. since 2005. His career with the company began in 1996, when he was 21 years old. Now, Burleson also oversees Husqvarna North

America and WP Suspension North America. KTM has about 340 dealers in the United States and 65 in Canada.

Burleson, who still races KTMs and is helping three of his four children race, discusses KTM, Husqvarna, introducing youngsters to motorcycling and why competition is a good thing.

What led you to a job with KTM?

I grew up in a motorcycle family. My dad was a racer for a number of years, so I grew up around dirt bikes and never thought the world was anything else, really.

In the late '90s, I liked racing — a little bit of this, a little bit of that, different kinds of racing stuff — and decided to go to college because I wasn't fast enough to do anything in racing.

I got a phone call from Rod Bush, who at the time was president of KTM North America. We knew each other — we had gone on a trail ride together, and he had been asking me about college and what my plans were. He called me up and said, "Hey, do you want to help me out? I need a sales rep in Michigan, and I know you live in Michigan." I said, "Well, I don't really know a lot about sales, but I like dirt bikes."

He said, "If I let you go racing on the weekends and give you bikes and parts to go

racing, would you come to work Monday through Friday?" I said, "OK, let's give that a shot."

And then you became president.

I got to kind of grow as the company grew. When I was hired, I was the 22nd employee. We had gone through a restructuring in '92, so it was a very small company. As we grew up, there were a lot of business needs, so I took the opportunity to go back and get my graduate degree and spent a lot of time in finance and logistics with KTM.

I developed into a role of supporting Rod as his right-hand guy. Then in '05 he was diagnosed with a pretty severe stage of lung cancer, and in three short months went from diagnosis to passing away. There was a pretty big need inside the company, obviously.

I've said it quite often that I was for sure too young, for sure not experienced enough, but the time was then, so I said OK.

How was KTM North America affected by the U.S. recession?

We were really growing like crazy in '05, so in units we were quite good. The market was going like crazy, so everybody was growing. We didn't have that much market share; we were just growing like crazy.

A couple of things happened that set us up to be successful. The U.S. dollar devalued about 18 months prior to the financial crisis, and that meant that we kind of prepared the groundwork. We were more prepared for the financial crisis because we had already batten down the hatches.

When the market crashed, we were in a situation where we were already implementing change.

One of the things I believe pretty strongly is that your biggest market gains and losses, and your position in the market, change at the low points, not the high points. During the crisis, we saw opportunities to do things

differently and take off and go different directions.

How do you balance both KTM and Husqvarna?

We have a platform strategy, so the main, core engine components are not radically different. There might be execution differences, but not radical differences in production. Ultimately, that means you have to differentiate yourself more at the front end. So we've started to develop a separate leadership team for the Husqvarna brand.

We recognize the importance of having that differentiation from a brand perspective and having people that focus on either.

Our goal is to be bigger and stronger as a group by being a little competitive. I have four kids, three sons, and those three boys are always going to be a little better because of the competition amongst themselves, but we're still a family. I look at this as two brothers trying to one-up each other in front of the parent and show they're the better one, and I think that drives both to better excellence. I hope we achieve that.

What has it been like for you to take on the Husqvarna brand?

I was born in a Husqvarna family. My dad raced for Husqvarna for the better part of about 15 years. Everything I knew was 'Husqvarna' when I grew up as a kid, and then we all kind of transitioned over. It's been really fun, actually.

The first step [to integrate Husqvarna was], how do we do this operationally? And that was a year and a half of learning and structural things we had to put in place. We got that settled out, and now it's been fun. One of the things that's really beautiful about the relationship is that Husky lets us be something different to different people, which means KTM can be more pure to what it is, which is the ready-to-race brand.

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I'd say the KTM brand is probably going to benefit the most from the Husqvarna project. It allows us to be more pure.

So as a racer, and the son of a Husky racer, how do you feel about the brand's return to Supercross?

Super exciting! At Glen Helen, the first motocross round this year, the Friday before we announced that Jason [Anderson] and the Rockstar team would be riding on Husky. Then we went to the race, and KTM in the 450 class was perfect, literally perfect. We went one-two. And kind of all I heard that day, even with that kind of success, was how cool it was that Husky's coming back to Supercross. People I hadn't seen in 15, 20 or 30 years even came up and talked about that.

That's a neat part of our company, being able to be a part of that history and rebuild it. If you go all the way back to the beginning of motocross and, really, Supercross, it was kind of a battle of the European brands and the Japanese brands. In the '80s, the European brands kind of disappeared.

Now we have the chance to rebalance, and it's like a replay of the old '70s kind of time when you had the European brands — for which we have the responsibility of two of them — fighting against the four Japanese brands. I'd rather have two brands going into a six-man fight than one brand going into a five-man fight.

How do you educate dealers about the Husqvarna brand?

You have to have separation as much as possible at the dealer network level, the sales staff level. From a training perspective we've got to learn from the strengths that KTM has structurally. We have to be able to be smart enough to use the assets on the backside, and on the front side have as much separation as possible.

From a customer service perspective, we're going to use a lot of shared resources, but brand ourselves very uniquely. That separation is going to be key, because otherwise you lose the opportunity for that natural competition that I mentioned earlier.

Are there any markets where you want to expand KTM's presence?

The Midwest got hit by the financial crisis pretty hard, and I would say that historically was KTM's strong area, and it's something we need to get back to. It's a formidable market.

So I think we have a job to do in the Midwest to rebuild something there. That takes time. We don't just want to set up a dealer for the purpose of getting a pin on a map; we want to grow it in the best way that's going to develop the market.

You also have WP Suspension.

That's been an interesting side of the business for us. It's been able to teach us that everything in our OE business is a certain way, and there are these other aftermarket and service sides of the industry that we never really think about.

I'm quite proud of the team over there. About 18 months ago we hired our first em-

"I'd rather have two brands going into a six-man fight than one brand going into a five-man fight."

ployee, incorporated and built this little subsidiary of WP in Austria, so it's not a daughter of KTM. Trying to build the WP brand starts with pro racing, but obviously we have a number of authorized centers that have come on, from Factory Connection to Race Tech to Super Plush and PG Suspension. We've built this relationship with tuners in the market that really look after the suspension service. The plan is to have WP stand on its own two feet and develop its own brand.

As we build this thing, it teaches us a lot about a different side of our business, about how the consumer reacts to the product in a way that we wouldn't have known normally.

How can the industry foster the next generation of riders?

I think KTM is in a unique spot there. We have a very broad line of youth motorcycles. All of my kids learned to ride at the age of 4 on KTMs. You have to start them young.

As a kid, if you're playing hockey, soccer, football, basketball, whatever, and you're into it, you're probably going to start playing year-round pretty soon. As that happens, there's less and less time to go racing dirt bikes and enjoy family time riding motorcycles.

I think we could do a lot more with the street side to develop kids. When you try to attach yourself to a consumer, let's say at the age of 24 who's never spent a lot of time on a motorcycle, it's tough. I don't know many kids that drive a stick shift anymore, so when they look at that clutch on the motorcycle, they go, "What are you talking about?" If you get them

young, they don't know any different. They just know motorcycles are amazing.

And now you're expanding your track and roadracing program for young riders.

We're going to be rolling out a program with some new bikes we have coming next year where we'll go after the 14 to 16-year-old kids, which are a big group. We've already started a discussion with some of the more regional racing series and track day clubs as well as AMA, working hard to try to get in at the ground level.

Europe [has] a 390 Cup. I think that's a good model for what we're trying to do here.

We're going to do it a little different because, obviously, our market is different and the structure is a little bit different.

We had one year when we did the Red Bull Rookies Cup, and if you look at the pro paddock now, that group — so many of the kids racing now went through that one year. And it proves to us the importance of that stair-step program. It's really critical. I think motocross has got it dialed in. We have a great feeder system there. I think offroad is similar. Probably on the street side we could do a lot better to get people excited about getting into a track day.

Ultimately, we want people to love motorcycles. It's who we are as a company.

What are your thoughts on some Harley dealers adding KTM to their lineup to attract younger riders?

I'm happy to join arms with any manufacturer that would like to work on projects that are going to bring more people to motorcycling. It's a high tide that raises all ships.

From a dealership perspective, we look for the best dealer. They've got to have good management, they've got to have good capital. Of course, Harley dealers, they're some of the best in the business, so if they look after our brand, that's great.

You've been active in industry-wide discussions. What's the larger picture?

We're not a big enough industry that we can throw billions of dollars [at an issue] like some of these financial and lobbying groups can, so we have to really show who we are. And who we are is not just the industry, it's the dealers and the businesses — the brick-and-mortar businesses doing it at the front line. **D**

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NOT NECESSARILY, BUT DO YOUR HOMEWORK SO YOU KNOW ENOUGH



FUEL FOR THOUGHT

Dave Koshollek teaches sales and service classes for dealers. Contact him at dakoenterprises@cs.com, or via editors@dealernews.com.

'TIS THE SEASON for new motorcycle releases and the accessories that accompany them. In that regard it doesn't hurt to ask ourselves, "What do my customers expect me to know about the new products we sell?" I bet your answer to that is a somewhat sarcastic "Every freakin' thing!" That's impossible, so what's reasonable and how should we prepare for the work and questions ahead?

If you're working in service as an advisor or a technician, we can all agree that the first step is to become familiar with the changes in the new vehicles. Motorcycle manufacturers differ in how they distribute service information to the dealerships. If your brand is late to the party with service manuals and parts books, then at least review the setup, pre-delivery and inspection manual front to back, along with the owner's manual.

Yes, I said the owner's manual. It's reasonable for customers to expect that we know what's in their owner's manual. Of special importance are the manufacturer warnings, instructions for new accessories such as an audio system or GPS unit, and information such as what's performed in the first vehicle service and whether special lubricants or fluids must be used.



Harley-Davidson Reduced Reach Seat for Street models

NEW ACCESSORIES

As far as product information about the new accessories, it's as simple as reviewing the new accessory catalog and identifying the accessories that are different from last year. Hopefully the catalog publisher notes the "new" accessories in some manner. I know Harley-Davidson does, and that makes it much easier to focus my attention on the few hundred new accessories in the mix of more than 6,000 accessories in their big catalog.

Now that you've identified which accessories are new, get up to speed on the 20 percent of information that 80 percent of our customers expect us to know.

ACCESSORY FITMENT

A common customer question is, "Does it fit mine?" So get comfortable with the accessory's fitment by brand, year and model, and know whether there could be a conflict with other accessories.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

Sure, the customer can read the ad copy in the catalog, but what they really want is the inside information from you, the expert. To start, decipher the marketing verbiage and deliver, in your own words, two to three features and benefits that tell the story of what the product does, what makes it unique or better, and why this product is good for the customer.

For example, let's use the Harley-Davidson Reduced Reach Seat for the new Street models (see photo). First

up is to answer the obvious question created by the name.

1. This seat positions the rider 1.5" lower in the saddle and 1.25" forward compared to the stock seat. For shorter riders, this makes it easier to reach the hand and foot controls, and manage the bike when stopped.
2. The seat nose is 1.25" narrower, so the rider's legs are closer together, which makes it easier to lift the bike off the side stand.
3. The rider's seat width is 10.25", which provides good support and comfort, and the passenger width is about 7".

AVOID MIXED MESSAGES

You may sell several brands, which can create some customer confusion. In this regard, simplify shopping by streamlining your product or service choices of the same category. I've been to a number of stores that display the OE version of engine oil along with after-market brands. They all sit nicely side-by-side on the shelf. This leads customers to have conversations with dealer staff that can make matters worse, such as when the parts guy says, "Pick whatever you want, they're all good" and the service guy says, "I only use this brand in my bike." If that's your scenario, just realize that 1) You are supposed to be the expert, so why does the customer have to decide? and 2) If a product sucks, then why are you selling it?

If this describes your dealership, you need to get parts and service on the same page so they deliver identical recommendations to customers. This can be a decision made by management rule or vote, including all parts and service staff.

EXTRA FUEL FOR THOUGHT

- It's reasonable for customers to expect you to know about any product on display, especially high-profile items near the parts or service counter. Before putting any new product on display, the department should hold a training session so staff knows fitment, F&Bs, price and cost to install.
- When talking about a product or service, lead with F&Bs, not price. Otherwise it's an uphill battle for customers to recover from sticker shock on the higher priced items.
- Communicate one feature, one benefit at a time to make it easier for customers to digest and retain the information. Example, "This luggage rack is chrome-plated, which is an attractive, tough surface that's easy to maintain."

Finally, deliver the information with a smile. Your customers are in this sport to make their life more fulfilling, so follow my simple rhyme, "Make it fun and make it easy, and your sales will be pleasing!" **D**

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Dynamometers...explained further

IN THE FINAL PART OF OUR SERIES, WE PIT TORQUE AGAINST HORSEPOWER

By Tracy Martin

IN PART ONE of “Dynamometers explained” (July), we covered the history of the dynamometer and the various types used in the industry. Dealers may hear customers ask, “Which is better, more horsepower, or more torque?” or say, “I don’t care about horsepower. I just want lots of torque.” We’ll provide you with definitions of both terms, as well as the answers to the above question.

It is a misconception that an engine makes horsepower. In fact, engines only produce torque at specific rotational speeds, or engine revolutions per minute (RPM). Horsepower is merely a calculation using the results of a formula that factors in engine RPM — and torque.

ENGINE TORQUE

Torque is the twisting force or energy that an engine produces. Torque as a force can also be used to describe a pushing or pulling motion. In pure engineering terms, torque is also called *moment* or *moment of force* and is defined as energy required to rotate an object (an engine’s flywheel, for example) about its axis. We’ll define torque as the twisting force measured at an engine’s crankshaft or a motorcycle’s rear wheel. Torque is measured in foot-pounds (ft. lbs.). In addition to measuring the rotational output of an engine, service manuals provide specifications for tightening a bolt in foot-pounds or inch-pounds.

A torque wrench is used to measure how much twisting force is applied, in ft. lbs. or inch lbs. When tightening a bolt, a torque wrench doesn’t read the final torque value until the bolt stops turning. This type of torque is called static torque because there is no rotational acceleration involved when tightening a bolt.

Dynamic torque is different; it involves acceleration as the speed of the rotational force increases. An engine can produce static and dynamic torque. For example, if a motorcycle is being ridden at a steady throttle opening on a flat surface, the engine produces static torque, because there is no acceleration of the engine. When the throttle is opened, and the bike accelerates, dynamic torque is produced. Torque can be measured from the engine’s crankshaft, flywheel, transmission output shaft, or most commonly at the rear wheel of a motorcycle.

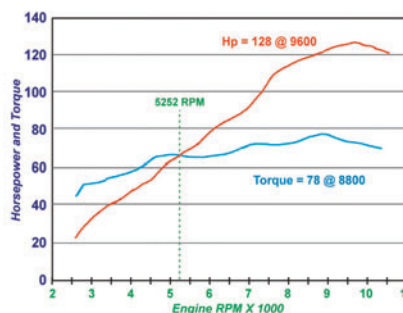
HORSEPOWER VS. TORQUE

In engineering terms, power output is expressed as torque multiplied by rotational speed around an axis. **The formula for horsepower is: Torque x Engine Speed, divided by 5,252.** The number 5,252 is the result of lumping several different conversion factors together, while taking into account the 33,000 ft. lbs. of work that a single horse can perform in James Watt’s formula for horsepower (as discussed last month). For the details regarding how the number 5,252 is derived, search online for “horsepower formula.”

One activity that many motorcyclists participate in is bench racing, using horsepower and torque numbers to spar verbally with one another. Owners of cruisers, whose bikes might have lower horsepower than racing bikes, might say “Torque causes acceleration, not horsepower.” This thinking, which may make some kind of intuitive sense, is incorrect. Horsepower and torque are linked by the fact that horsepower is calculated from torque in ft. lbs. and engine rpm ($hp =$

$T \times rpm / 5,252$). Because of this formula, horsepower and torque are not independent from each other in relation to engine power.

Before we discuss how torque and horsepower are related, let’s review. *Work is the application of force over a distance. Power is the rate at which work is accomplished within a finite time. Torque is the twisting force applied to an engine’s crankshaft.* Torque is always



All horsepower/torque graphs produced by dynamometer software should show horsepower and torque crossing at 5,252 rpm. This happens because at that rpm, torque and horsepower are equal to each other. In fact, below 5,252 rpm the torque will always be higher than horsepower and above 5,252 rpm the horsepower will always be higher than torque. A chart that doesn’t show these characteristics has a math problem and is highly questionable.

listed at specific rpms because no work or power is produced unless the engine is turning. Once an engine is turning fast enough, the force exerted against a load (like accelerating the drum on an inertia dynamometer) and speed at which its work is being accomplished can be measured.

Keep in mind the connection between torque and horsepower in this example: Two identical V-twin cruisers, with riders that weigh the same, are trying to pass a truck on the interstate. At 60 mph, both riders are in fifth gear, with their engines running at 2,500 rpm as they pull into the left lane to pass the 18-wheeler. The first rider, Dick, believes that acceleration is caused by torque, and he knows from reviewing a dyno chart for his bike that torque increases from 2,500 rpm to 4,200 rpm. He leaves his motorcycle in fifth gear, whacks open the throttle and starts to pass the truck.

The second rider, Jane, believes that horsepower, not torque, causes acceleration, and she downshifts into third gear, and opens the throttle all the way. When Jane downshifts, her engine is turning at 4,000 rpm, 1,500 rpm faster than Dick’s engine. She has looked at the same chart and knows that torque from Dick’s engine will decrease when it reaches 4,200 rpm, but her engine’s horsepower will increase as the engine turns faster.

When passing the truck, Dick accelerates at a constant rate as his engine torque increases. Jane accelerates at a faster rate than Dick, even though her torque is decreasing as her engine turns faster, because her engine’s horsepower is increasing. Which rider passes the truck first?

Even if you don’t ride a V-twin cruiser you probably know the answer — Jane, who downshifted into third gear and watches Dick trying to catch up to her. To make the most power, an engine has to turn at a higher rpm, and Jane starts to pass the truck with her engine spinning at 4,000 rpm vs. Dick’s engine that is only running at 2,500 rpm. Horsepower is the rate, or rpm, at which work is performed, and more revolutions per minute equal more horsepower.



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'HORSEPOWER UNHAPPINESS'

Almost all motorcycle reviews list hp and torque numbers. When riders bench race, these same numbers are thrown around with bravado as each owner brags about his engine modifications. Manufacturers use the numbers to sell performance, image and technology.

Because there are so many variables when performance testing a motorcycle, it is not easy to make true comparisons. The same motorcycle tested on different days, measured on different dynos with different correction factors, tire pressure and dyno operators can generate different numbers. So how can any horsepower and torque numbers be useful? Remember that a motorcycle manufacturer uses horsepower and torque numbers to sell motorcycles. It tests its engines under ideal conditions, measures power at the crankshaft and does not account for power loss due to the rear tire, shaft, belt or chain drives. Manufacturers can't "adjust" numbers too drastically due to legal issues with advertising claims, and most use SAE correction factors to level the playing field.

Magazines are a mixed bag regarding how they get their performance numbers. The better magazines will use the same dyno and operator to get all the hp numbers for the bikes they test and with correction factors (air temperature, barometric pressure, humidity) applied. Comparing one magazine's numbers to another is pointless because of the variables in just about everything related to testing.

The only time horsepower and torque numbers become serious is when a rider is going to spend money. If an aftermarket exhaust system and other performance parts are going to be installed, and the desired outcome is a different exhaust note and some bragging rights, then hp numbers are immaterial. If the gain, or loss, in power

is important, then measuring power output needs to be approached with some common sense.

Even if your dealership doesn't have a dyno, you can still have your customer's motorcycles tested by contracting with a portable dyno services. When choosing a service, interview the operator before sending your customers over. The hp and torque numbers you get are only as good as the operator. Ask how long he/she has operated a dyno, what types of bikes they have experience testing, what correction factors are used, what brand of dyno they have, how they maintain it, and what charts and graphs will they provide to your customers. Most importantly, will they take time to explain what the numbers mean, so your customers will understand?

Whether you have a dyno or not, you need to provide basic education to your customers about what they can expect from having their bike dyno-tested. Are they looking for all-out performance, better street-riding performance or fuel mileage? If customers don't know why they want their motorcycle tested, and what they hope to discover from the hp and torque numbers, the dyno operator won't either. The only numbers that really matter are the ones that are consistent and trustworthy.

Dyno runs can be used to see if a new exhaust system, or other component, helped or hurt an engine's power output. Tell customers that comparing horsepower and torque numbers with riding buddies or magazine test results is a zero-sum game and can lead to "horsepower unhappiness." Instead, dyno testing should be used to educate your customers about their performance goals and to keep your dealership informed and up to date about the parts and services it provides. **D**

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DEALERNEWS ISSN 0893-2522 (print) ISSN 1939-1870 (online) is published 12 times per year by Advanstar Communications Inc., 131 W. First St., Duluth, MN 55802-2065. Subscription rates: \$50/yr United States/ possessions; \$66.50/yr Canada and Mexico; \$103.25 all other countries (surface mail). Digital subscription rates: \$40. For air-expedited service, include additional \$89 per order annually. Single copies (prepaid only): \$8 U.S.; \$13 Canada and Mexico; \$18 all other countries. Back issues, if available: \$18 U.S. and Possessions, \$25 Canada and Mexico; \$30 all other countries; include additional \$6.50/order plus \$2/additional copy for U.S. postage and handling. If shipping outside the U.S., include additional \$10/order plus \$3/additional copy.

Periodicals postage paid at Duluth, MN 55806 and additional mailing offices.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to **DEALERNEWS**, P.O. Box 6050, Duluth, MN 55806-6050. Canadian GST number: R-124213133RT001, PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NO. 40612608. Return Undeliverable Canadian Addresses to: IMEX Global Solutions
 P. O. Box 25542
 London, ON N6C 6B2
 CANADA
 Printed in the U.S.A.

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One in four (yes, that's right)

MORE WOMEN — AND MORE YOUNGER WOMEN — ARE RIDING



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WHEN I STARTED riding 50 years ago I never thought much, if at all, about the gender of other motorcyclists. I just assumed they were men. In the 1980s, when I began my stint as Kawasaki's director of marketing, I began to see more women riding and participating in events across the country. Still, marketing to women as a discrete segment had never occurred to me.

Sometime in the mid-'80s, Bob Moffit, my then-boss who was in charge of market research, shared a document that listed the percentage of women who either rode or owned motorcycles at that time and broke the percentage down by brand. I don't remember the source of that document or what the exact percentage was, but I suspect it was part of a readership study done by one of the major motorcycle magazines, which would account for the difference between a 1990 Motorcycle Industry Council number of 6 percent, and the earlier, larger percentage from this report.

I think the gross percentage from that report was around 10, which surprised Moffit and me. But more surprising was that Kawasaki was second in brand popularity among women riders, behind Harley-Davidson.

Admittedly, we were pretty far behind, but we were way ahead of everyone else. So we started placing ads in magazines and on TV that featured women as owners and primary riders rather than as just passengers. The ads featured two models we felt would be most attractive to women riders, the Ninja 250 and Vulcan 1200. I don't know if the ads increased our sales to women, but we did get feedback on them, positive and negative.

SLOWLY RISING TIDE

The participation of women as owners or riders of motorcycles kind of slipped off my radar for a number of years. I would have seen the numbers when I worked at Triumph, but our focus then was on building a brand and a dealer organization, and there was little money for advertising. In any case, I felt that whatever advertising appeal was made would apply equally to both sexes.

For the past 24 years we've seen the percentage of women riders grow slowly, to an estimated 12 percent in 2012, according to the MIC. But what does that percentage mean, and how is that number derived? There's no requirement for gender on the registration application, nor (to the best of my knowledge), is there a little box that dealers check when they forward the paperwork to the DMV, OE, or finance company (though that may have changed). I was able to clear all this up with a recent call to the MIC.

For 24 years, in roughly five-year increments, the MIC has conducted an extensive market study asking both motorcycle-owning and non-owning households about such things as reasons for ownership or non-ownership, buying influences, other interests and demographics.

Which leads us back to the subject of this month's column.

This MIC report was a real eye-opener for me. I can't say I ever sat down with a pencil and tried to figure out what 12 percent, let alone the percentage of females who ride without owning, meant to the market as a whole. Obviously, many of them who aren't listed as owners probably "own" motorcycles in the sense that a motorcycle was purchased with the idea that they would be the rider.

ONE IN FOUR RIDERS

According to the study, the number of female owners has inched up from 8.2 percent in 1998 to 12.5 percent in 2012. At the same time, the number of operators, which include not only female owners but female riders of motorcycles that might be registered to someone else, has grown at almost twice that rate.

Combined, they equal almost 25 percent of all riders on the road — close to 7 million enthusiasts.

Generationally, I would have guessed that baby boomer women lead the pack. But in recent years the Gen Y women have stepped up and now constitute close to 20 percent of women owners. Male and female boomers still command almost 50 percent of the motorcycle market as a whole, but we should note that women owners are, on average, younger than their male counterparts by 11 years.

As a one-time marketer of motorcycles, the other activities in which motorcyclists participate has always been of interest to me, and here the MIC report provides a list of more than 30 recreational activities or hobbies in which people engage. Women dominate in just about every category, with the exceptions of hunting and fishing, cars and auto mechanics, and boating and sailing. They absolutely crush the men in the personal fitness category. (No surprise here: in my tri-weekly exercise class of more than 20 participants, only three are men.)

So here's the takeaway: The outerwear brands and dealers who have recognized the potential of catering to women riders likely will be the biggest beneficiaries of this slowly rising tide. Whether a person owns a motorcycle or not, if she is going to spend any time on, or off-road, either as a rider or passenger, she will need gear. And if you're a savvy dealer, you'll be able to fill that rising tide of demand. **D**

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