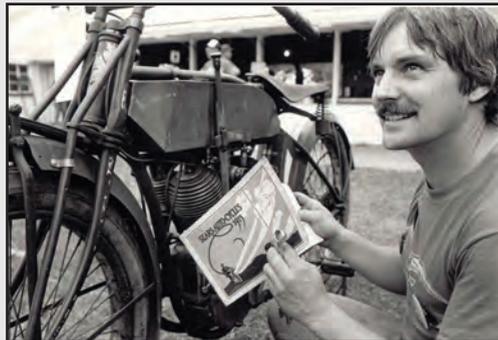


# AMCA Pioneers: Doug Strange



*The first antique bike Doug Strange bought was this 1948 Indian Chief (far left). It came to him as a basket-case, and he turned it into a machine worthy of the Guggenheim Museum's "Art of the Motorcycle" exhibit. By 1985, Doug was already specializing in unusual brands, like this 1913 Sears (left).*

## Early Learner

Doug Strange of Maxatawney, Pennsylvania, has a very quick answer when you ask how he got interested in motorcycling.

"Simple," he says. "I turned 16, and motorcycling just clicked with me.

"There was a contest on a radio station in Harrisburg," he adds, "and the prize was a 50cc Suzuki. I entered, then I talked a friend into entering, too. And he ended up winning! That was the first bike I ever rode. And believe it or not, he still has it."

Not winning that Suzuki may have ended up being a good thing, because it meant Doug could borrow the machine when he wanted to go riding, since his parents had made it clear he was strictly forbidden to own a motorcycle.

"I rode other people's bikes from the time I was 16 to 18, when I was finally able to buy a Suzuki T200 of my own," he says.

During that time, Doug started hanging out at the local Suzuki dealership, where the mechanic taught him basic skills.

All of this sounds like a common story of a teenager getting involved in motorcycling back in the '60s. But in the midst of all that, Doug's motorcycling path suddenly veered away pretty sharply.

"I got my hands on an issue of Cycle Magazine from 1967," he recalls, "and they had a story on old Indian motorcycles. I opened that up and went, 'Wow, what's this?'"

"I was hooked at 17," he adds. "I started reading everything I could about old bikes. And I joined the Classic Antique Motorcycle Association on the West Coast, because I didn't know about the AMCA then."

Doug recalls that he was at a car show in Hershey, Pennsylvania, trying to generate interest in an East Coast Chapter of CAMA when he ran into AMCA Honorary Member Ernie Biddle.

"He said, 'Why don't you join the AMCA?' Then I met (Past AMCA President Emeritus) Doc Patt and his brother, Bill,

and they ended up being the two most influential people in the hobby for me.

"At first," Doug notes, "I was just a kid, and I would listen to them talk. But I picked up everything I could, and I wanted to learn more."

Doug admits that in those early years, he didn't know exactly what he wanted to collect.

"I liked Indians, but when I was in graduate school, I rode my Suzuki 500cc Titan (a bike he still owns and rides regularly) out to the national AMCA meets for the weekend.

"I'd stop before I got to the event and buy a box of cereal, and that was what I planned to have for every meal. But I'd go by Doc's trailer, and he'd always say, 'Hey, kid, want to eat something?' The same for other guys I knew. These folks fed me, and I appreciated it. We became friends forever, and I still think of myself as one of their kids."

Doug finished grad school in '77 and took a job on an ocean research vessel (these days, he works in research for a chemical company, preferring to call himself a "lab rat"). It was about that time, though, when he went to the AMCA meet in Medina, Ohio, and ran into AMCA Honorary Member Dick Winger, who had an example of an Ace four-cylinder on display.

"I went, 'Wow!' all over again," says Doug. "It was love at first sight.

"The Ace and I were both born in Philly, and that made it a natural. So I was going to build one up from parts. But instead, I saw an ad in the paper for a '48 Chief. So I called the guy, bought it sight-unseen, then got hired on the ship and had to leave before I could even see it.

"The bike turned out to be a basket-case, and the guy delivered it in a bunch of boxes to my parent's house. I remember they sent me a picture and wrote on it: 'You bought this?'"

"That bike was my first restoration. Later, it was in the Guggenheim Museum exhibit, and of course, I still have it."

All this took place during the formative era for AMCA Chapters, and Doug

joined the Perkiomen Chapter in Pennsylvania, where he found some familiar faces.

"There were the Patts again," he says, "and I got to know so many great people, like (AMCA founders) Ted Hodgdon and Emmett Moore, and (honorary Member) Red Wolverton was a good friend of mine. (Past President Emeritus) Bob McClean would come and stay at my place, and I'd stay at his.

"I just had a lot of wonderful people around that befriended me and taught me so much, plus the AMCA has put me in touch with motorcycle people from all over the world. I go visit them, and they come visit me. My friends and co-workers can't understand why all these people come to see me, but it's really neat, and it wouldn't happen without the Club."

Doug says he now has about 40 antique machines.

"I don't have a lot of money," he says, "but I have some unique bikes. One of the things I've learned, though, is that you can't have everything.

"I'm a Pennsylvania guy, so I have always been interested in bikes made here—Ace, Merkel, Reading Standard. When you focus on one area like that, you become something of an expert.

"I'm lucky to own the earliest remaining Reading Standard—it's an '05 or '06, we're not quite sure."

That bike ranks as one of Doug's two favorite finds.

"Paul Mervine found it for me," he says. "I'd go visit him—he's now 90—and he told me he knew where this '05 Reading was, and I said, 'Sure you do.' This went on for a year and a half. Then one day, I said, 'Hey, let's go look at it.' And he took me right to the house!"

His other most-memorable machine is a very special Ace he owns.

"Charlie Kohl was the Ace dealer in Reading," he says. "In 1923, he, along with Red Wolverton, ended up with perfect scores on their Aces in the National Six Days Trial.

"Charlie's bike, now my bike, still wears the number plate from that event."

Doug laughs today when he thinks about the fact that he's gone from the young kid in the Club to an AMCA Pioneer in a pretty short time. But he's pleased with what he's been able to accomplish in the antique-bike community, ranging from service on the AMCA Board to promotion of antique motorcycling in many other ways.

"One of my proudest moments," he says, "was my association with the Guggenheim Museum's 'Art of the Motorcycle' exhibition. I was an adviser on the collection when they asked if I could loan them my '48 Chief.

"Following my last term on the AMCA Board of Directors, I was asked to serve on the nominating group for the AMA Hall of Fame Museum, where I now chair the committee for Ambassadors and Industry.

"Also, not knowing when to sit on my hands every time they ask for volunteers, I have coordinated several local museum exhibits for motorcycles, and am on the Board of Directors for the Boyertown (Pennsylvania) Museum of Historic Vehicles."

On a local level, Doug provides much of the creative input for the Perkiomen Chapter, designing shirts and other memorabilia that are marketed during their National Meet and producing the promotional advertising and flyers.

"I also publish WOW, the newsletter of the 101 Association (for fans of Indian's famed 101 Scout model)," he adds, "and freelance writing has had me submitting articles for international motorcycle publications, along with contract work for several major auction houses like Bonhams and Goodings."

Like so many of the AMCA legends who befriended him over the years, Doug Strange is himself an Honorary Member of the AMCA. And the incredible zeal he showed for antique motorcycles at an early age is an example for the next generation of antique-bike enthusiasts the Club hopes to attract for the future.

Thanks for all your hard work and enthusiasm, Doug.—Greg Harrison