

Richard Schultz

Mr. Henderson

As the AMCA approaches its 60th anniversary in 2014, AMCA Pioneers highlights some of the volunteers who have helped build the Club from an idea in the minds of four founders in 1954 to a 10,000-member organization today.

"I bought my first motorcycle, a 1934 Harley VL, back in 1945," says AMCA Honorary Member Richard Schultz of Le Mars, Iowa. "My then girlfriend (and now wife) and I loved riding it around in our carefree days, and we've been riding ever since.

"But my second motorcycle came some years later," he adds, "when I paid \$85 for a 1913 Indian and made my wife cry. Back then, that was our food money!"

While that price sounds cheap today, Schultz says it was a major investment at the time.

"I was 28," he recalls, "and I had gone back to college, so I had no real financial support. What I did have was a wife and two kids.

"Back then," he adds, "I was so dirt poor that I didn't look very hard for other old bikes. Instead, I'd stumble across a basket-case machine for a few bucks, restore it, then sell it and take the money to buy two basket-cases.

"Bit by bit, I began working my way into the black," he adds, "learning a lot in the process."

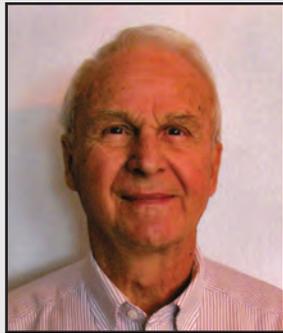
Schultz notes his process of reinvesting what he made continued for many years. Which raises the question: How many bikes has he owned?

"I tried to count just the other day," he says, "and I think I've owned about 85 motorcycles in my time. I've restored about 80 of them, including 20 Hendersons, plus a dozen or maybe 15 Indian Fours.

"But I'm 85 now," he adds, "and it's time to start going in the other direction. So I've been selling down to about 20 motorcycles I keep today."

Schultz is one of those people whose roots with the Club go back—way back. And he's seen the AMCA grow from a small regional organization into a major international community of old-bike fans.

"My history with the AMCA dates
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In 1994, Schultz published "Hendersons: Those Elegant Machines."

"It was an act of love," he says. "When I was doing the book, it wasn't about how much money I could make with it, but rather how I could lose as little as possible of my own money.

"It's been out of print for a long time," he says, "yet I get calls every week from people who want to know if I have any left to sell. I understand there is a used copy on eBay or Amazon for something like \$950."

Does that make him proud?

"No," he laughs, "it makes me sad that I didn't keep a few boxes of books back.

"Today," he adds, "there's more information, and I've thought about reprinting it. But at my age, I don't know."

So out of all the bikes he's owned, which one is his favorite?

"It's hard to pick any one," he says. "I'm down to just one Henderson, a '31 KL, that I still love to ride. But really, I always like the one I'm riding at the time, no matter what brand it happens to be. Each is different and that makes them all fun.

"Now, my wife and I have really enjoyed the early Hendersons, with the passenger seat up front, like the 1912," he adds. "While riding down the road, we've had many times when we both got to laughing so hard that we had to pull over to avoid crashing."

In addition to the old bikes in his collection, Schultz and his wife still tour the country two-up on his modern Honda Gold Wing. He's also a civic leader, plays in a local brass band, founded a local college and was named "Citizen of the Year" in his town. Did we mention he's 85?

We could have talked for a long time, but Schultz had to finish the interview so he could go back to his garage and continue work on a stubborn carb off a '40s Harley.

Richard, thank you for what you've done for all of us who ride.—Greg Harrison

back to the '60s, when I got in touch with Ted Hodgdon," he says. "In fact, I got to know all the original founders.

"I went to my first meet in Medina, Ohio in the late '60s," he says. "I had a 1919 Excelsior that I still have, and Medina was then held in the apple orchards of Doc Cleveland's property.

"It was very small. I think they had one vendor who sold decals, with maybe a couple of old parts in the trunk. At those early meets, the game was to try to ride everybody else's motorcycle, which was a real treat.

"My youngest boy, who was maybe 11 or 12 at the time, said he was the luckiest kid in the world because he got to ride bikes nobody had even heard of."

Schultz served on the AMCA Board from 1969 through '76. And he helped start the Blackhawk Chapter and establish the Davenport Meet.

"Eventually," he says, "I moved up to Minnesota, where I helped start the Omaha Chapter."

Schultz has been an integral part of the AMCA for decades. But to antique motorcyclists around the world, he will probably always be known as "Mr. Henderson." Because, you see, he wrote the book on them.

"Hendersons have always fascinated me," he says. "When they were built, they were such elegant motorcycles. My first was a 1914 long-wheelbase model. Then I bought a few more, including a '12 (the first year of Henderson production). And it suddenly occurred to me that with just a few more, I could own all of the Detroit versions (1912 through 1917) by year and model!"

Schultz decided he had accumulated so much knowledge on the subject of Henderson restoration that he should put it down in a book.

"Problem was," he says, "I had a whole bunch of information that I couldn't verify as accurate and original.

Back then, the companies were building machines for transportation, and not to be exhibited in a museum. If they ran out of a certain part, they would often substitute another in its place in the middle of the production run. But without the actual documentation from back then, who knew what was stock and what wasn't."

In late 1917, William Henderson sold the company he created to Ignatz Schwinn, who already owned the bicycle manufacturing firm for which his name became famous, plus the Excelsior motorcycle brand. Schwinn ordered the original Henderson plant in Detroit closed, and production was moved to the Chicago home base for his other brands.

"Back when Henderson was sold," Schultz says, "they crated up all the original plans and specifications for the motorcycles and gave them to Schwinn. I called Schwinn about that documentation a number of years ago, and was told that they were going to try to open a museum in Chicago that would include all of their information from back in the Henderson days. But when I called back some time later, I was told the company was broke and there would be no museum."

Eventually, the AMA was able to buy those documents, which included many of William Henderson's original drawings. And they went into the archives of the AMA Hall of Fame Museum. But Schultz continued to pursue this valuable information.

"One day," he says, "I got a call from Ed Youngblood (then AMA president), who kindly told me I should come over to the museum. I went and copied everything I could find about Hendersons, and took all that home with me.

"Now that I had the actual data, I could compare and verify just about anything. So at some point, I thought it was time to write a book and share