

You Spoke, the AMF Listened

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Early in 2015, the Antique Motorcycle Foundation conducted a survey of vintage motorcycle enthusiasts. Well over 2,000 fellow devotees—sourced from all over North America—took time to share their stories and help us gain a clearer understanding of who they are, what piques their interests, where they go for information and how they got into old bikes in the first place.

By learning more about what attracted them, we also uncovered ways that we may best be able to engage and encourage the next generation of passionate vintage bike lovers. Here's some of what we learned about ourselves as a vintage motorcycle culture:

Many of us are "accidental" vintage bike enthusiasts.

Where does the time go? One day we are enjoying our new bike and the next thing we know that bike has become vintage. (What does that say about us?). Thirty-six percent of respondents told us they got hooked on old bikes simply because the bike they owned got old.

For some (21 percent), a bike they longed for as a kid is in their garage today because they now have the means to buy it. For others (14 percent), it was the exposure to old bikes owned by family that sparked their interest.

As we look at emerging enthusiasts, it just might be that Honda Transalp in the garage, the childhood dream of having a Ducati 900SS, or the uncle with the old Harley-Davidson XLCR that might trigger their interest in the world of vintage motorcycles.

We like it all.

When asked, "Do you have a particular focus or interest?," half of respondents (50 percent) indicated they "like it all." And that's true even if they have a particular brand or model that drove their initial interest in the hobby. They have developed an appreciation for older machines and that seems to naturally spread. More than a particular brand, it appears to be a mindset.

It's not just about the bikes.

We were curious; is it the iron itself or is it the culture and all that goes with it? Half of our survey respondents told us it's the machines and the people who rode them that really spark their interest. There's little denying that old bikes seem to have souls; perhaps that comes from the many people and places

those machines have seen in their day.

We enjoy getting involved.

Really involved. And that means both physically and virtually. Survey participants told us consistently that they actively participate in vintage bike gatherings, events and swap meets (62 percent). They also enjoy perusing specialty content online and engage in online forums about old bikes (58 percent). It's no wonder most vintage bike owners become experts themselves.

We like riding, tinkering and talking.

We wanted to know what old bike nuts enjoy about their bikes and what keeps them hooked. With the ability to select multiple answers, their top three answers were that they like riding them (77 percent), enjoy tinkering (69 percent) and value the camaraderie of sharing their passion with others. More than half (52 percent) routinely get together with like-minded friends to talk and tinker. Sounds like fun!

But we're not joiners.

This may come as a bit of a surprise (admittedly, it did to us). Although enthusiasts clearly enjoy the camaraderie of others and value the expertise of fellow devotees, when asked if they belong to a vintage motorcycle organization, a surprisingly large 60 percent told us no, they do not, and 45 percent of respondents indicated they have never been a member of a club. Another 14 percent told us they once belonged to a vintage bike organization, but no longer do.

We have our "go-to" resources.

Where do enthusiasts turn for vintage bike knowledge? We gave our survey takers the opportunity to select multiple options. Overwhelmingly, today's vintage bike enthusiasts use books, magazines and specialty publications (79 percent) and online search (72 percent) to find the info they need. Other trusted resources include original literature (43 percent), vintage parts suppliers (43 percent) and vintage motorcycle events.

We have hope for the next generation.

When asked why young people should be interested in the old motorcycle hobby and business, our respondents were enthusiastic to share what is so special about our passion. Here are the top things they would like the next gen to know:

- It's fun! And old bikes are really cool. You get great satisfaction and pride in the "doing."

- The learning is rewarding, they tend to be simpler than modern machines and there is satisfaction in keeping them running.
- It's an honor to preserve the history; to have our chance to carry the torch.
- The people of this hobby are fascinating (other enthusiasts and the historical figures).
- There is value in riding and owning something that has a history and a story to it. And you get to become part of that ongoing story!

While much of the feedback was validation of what we believed about ourselves, there were a few surprises. The AMF will use this discovery to guide strategies that will encourage loyalty and activism as well as attract new enthusiasts to our industry. We can't wait to show them how rewarding this world of vintage motorcycles can be!