

THE HISTORY OF THE AFM

Part 1: The Early Years 1954-1959

Editor's note: Through an unusual set of circumstances I became the caretaker of a bunch of AFM material dating back to 1959. I had the brilliant idea of using the stuff to make an article for the Lap Times about the history of the club, but I am beginning to feel like Dr. Frankenstein must have when he created his monster. The club's history is long and varied, and the article has turned into a project of overwhelming proportions.

Anyway, I'm going ahead with it and here is the first of a series. If I'm lucky it will be finished this year. A special thanks to Richard Renstrom who donated some of the material from this era.

The American Federation of Motorcyclists was organized and incorporated on November 27th in 1956, although the club's origins go back two years earlier, to 1954. In that year a club with the unwieldy name of American Association of Grand Prix Riders was formed in Southern California.

The AAGPR was organized to bring European style road racing to the West Coast. The AMA had a few road races in those days, such as Daytona (on the beach), Laconia (through the streets) and Dodge City (at an airport), but their rules did not allow overhead cam machinery or streamlining, and there was no interest in the smaller classes. The AAGPR provided owners of such machines as Manx Nortons, Matchless G-45's, AJS 7R's or any small machines a place to compete.

The main organizer of the AAGPR appears to have been Alan Tompkins. Soon after the beginning of the club Tompkins began talking to the FIM, motorcycle's international organization, about becoming the U.S. representative. The AMA, who is the U.S. representative to the FIM now, wasn't interested back in the 50's. The FIM required that any representative had to include all facets of motorcycle activity and not just one aspect, such as road racing.



So in November, 1956 the AAGPR was disbanded and reformed under the name American Federation of Motorcyclists, with Tompkins as the first Chairman of the Board.

Tompkins must have had big plans for the AFM. In a 1959 letter he talks about the renaming of the club and says, "The AFM title was chosen in preference to the U.S. Motorcycle Association, due to my feeling that the name could feasibly include all of the Americas and not just the United States alone."

Not much is known about the years 1957 and 1958, but they seem to have been years of rapid growth. By May of 1959 the AFM included chapters in the Tampa Bay and Miami areas in Florida, New York City, Chicago and Biloxi, Mississippi, as well as four chapters in Southern California (The Bay Motor Club of Manhattan Beach, San Fernando Valley, San Gabriel Valley and San Diego). Road races were being held at Willow Springs near L.A., Hourglass Field in San Diego and at several Florida tracks, including Gainesville and Sebring. The Chicago Chapter was running flat track events (yes, flat track!) at O'Hare Speedway and was road racing at Meadowdale Raceway.

The AFM was still talking to the FIM and in 1958 made a formal proposal to become the U.S. representative. The application was "most sympathetically considered" but "there was still some doubt as to whether your club, active as it is, can at present be truly regarded as representative of your great country." A letter from Major Goode, then Secretary-General of the FIM, states the condition for membership to be, "evidence that your club has an active membership amongst motorcycle clubs in at least 15 states in the U.S.A."

The machines raced in those days were quite different than now. The Japanese makes were just beginning to make an appearance, with some Yamahas in the lightweight classes, but European brands dominated. The

smaller classes were an Italophile's delight, with Ducalis and Parillas most common along with an occasional Rumi or M.V. Agusta. Other small bikes included Yamaha, Puch, NSU and Triumph Terrier.

The 500 class was all English — Manx Nortons, Triumph twins, Matchless and BSA Gold Stars. The 500 class was the "glamor" class of the club in those days and featured some close battles between Buddy Parriott and Don Vesco, names that should be familiar to most AFMers even today. A quote from a Jan. '59 newsletter describes a Dec. 7th, 1958 race at Willow Springs. "Buddy Parriott, consistently one of our fastest riders, cut another notch for himself by winning the Senior Heat and Main, in each case fighting off a determined assault by Don Vesco. Both rode 500cc Triumphs. Buddy would go by with his nose buried in the gas tank, while Vesco would cruise past sitting up like he was out for a Sunday afternoon ride. Wonder how fast he'd go if he really tried?" Who could have guessed in 1969 that 17 years later the answer would be over 300 mph?

The end of the 1950's also marked the resignation of Alan Tompkins as Chairman of the Board. He left in October of 1959 to take a job with Riverside Raceway, and his place as chairman was taken by Wes Cooley, who was elected by unanimous vote of the Board of Directors.

Next: The Cooley Era — 1960 to 1965. □

THE HISTORY OF THE AFM

Part 2: The Cooley Era, 1960-1964

The early '60s was a turbulent time for the AFM. Still very young, the club was changing as chapters appeared and disappeared. Also the political climate with regard to the FIM and other organizations in the U.S. was unstable.

Through all this flux and flow the club was guided largely by the efforts of one man, Wes Cooley (Wes Cooley, Sr. that is, not to be confused with the current young AFM star, Wes Cooley, Jr.). Cooley became the Chairman of AFM, Inc. in late 1959 and held that position until the end of the 1964 season. During this time the AFM was also known as "the Wes Cooley Club," as Cooley was the Chairman and had assumed the duties of secretary and treasurer as well. In Southern California the AFM was Wes Cooley. Cooley's dominating style made a lot of people unhappy and eventually led to a show-down, but it seems clear that the AFM probably would not have survived without him.

In the '60s the scope of the club narrowed a bit. In 1960 the Florida Chapters left the AFM, probably to join a new group called the United States Motorcycle Club. The USMC was based in Florida and was backed by some of the same people who had started NASCAR. Also the Chicago, New York City and Biloxi, Miss. Chapters dropped out. In their place came the San Francisco Chapter, chartered in 1960. The S.F. Chapter was also known as the Mill Valley Chapter or the Point Reyes Cafe Racer's Society — obviously refugees from the Sunday Morning Ride.

The next year a chapter in St. Louis, Mo. was added, and a charter was granted to a group in Portland, Ore. The Portland club never got it together as far as is known, but the St. Louis chapter was very active and would become one of the more stable AFM Chapters. They were a bit of an oddity for the AFM, as they didn't roadrace at all! The chapter's specialties were road rallies and observed trials.

In early 1963 the Sacramento area members of the club formed their own group and became a full fledged chapter. Later that year the S.F. Chapter had their charter pulled; then, after a special election, it was re-issued. The reasons for this move are not clear from the available notes, but it looks like a personality clash between National (i.e., Cooley) and Pete Adams, then the S.F. President. In any case, after the special election Adams was gone and the charter re-issued.

On the racing side of things the club was very active in California during these years. Racing events were held at an amazing number of locations. During the 1960-1962 time span Willow

Springs was apparently inactive but races were held at these tracks: Santa Maria Airport, Vacaville, Santa Barbara Airport, Pomona, Hanford, Riverside, Stockton Airport, Cotati, Oakland, Port of Stockton, San Luis Obispo and Stead AFB in Reno. All these events were combined car-bike races, a common practice at that time. The cycle activity was usually limited to a short practice and heat races on Saturday and another practice and one or two Mains on Sunday. This may not seem like much racing compared to today, but remember that the fields were small, maybe 30-50 bikes, and only 5 or 6 Grand Prix classes were supported, usually 125cc, 175cc, 250cc, 500cc and Open. The bike races gave the spectators something to watch while the car guys took a break, and the bikers had a place to race without having to worry about getting together a course worker organization. It worked out quite nicely, for a while.

Frequent winners in those days were Buddy Parriott, Don Vesco and John McLaughlin (Steve's father), with names like Ron Grant and Tony Murphy appearing in '62. The big class was still dominated by British iron, with G50 Matchless and Manx Nortons fighting it out. In the smaller classes most bikes were of Italian origin, but the Japanese makes were making inroads. In 1961 Don Vesco appeared with a Honda RC161, a four cylinder, twin cam, 16 valve 250cc which was totally dominant in that class, and in the combined races gave the 500 class bikes a hard time as well. The next year Vesco moved up to the 500 class with a G50 but kept on winning his share of races.

The introduction of the Honda 305cc Super Hawk gave the 350cc class a real shot in the arm. Previously the class was the domain of the hard to get AJS 7R, and the class was under-subscribed. By 1963 the Hondas, fitted with 350cc kits, were filling the fields in that class.

On the "political" front things were a bit confusing. The USMC was named by the FIM as the U.S. representative and the AFM became affiliated with the USMC in late 1961. USMC put on some "U.S. Grand Prix" at Daytona which drew some top European riders like Mike Hailwood, but the spectators stayed away in droves and USMC folded in 1963. A new group called MICUS (Motorcycle International Committee of the U.S., I think) was going to take the place of the USMC. By this time the AMA was also getting interested, and in 1964 a new group on the East Coast called Association of American Motorcycle Road Racers (AAMRR) was forming. It isn't clear just what happened with MICUS and the

FIM, but through the whole confusion the AFM just kept doing its thing.

In 1963 the relations with the sporty car types began to sour. Both car and bike racing were growing and the car guys wanted the time the bikes used. The bikers, in turn, wanted more time for their bigger fields. The newly formed Sacramento Chapter began running all-bike races in 1963 at Vacaville, and Willow Springs became available for all-bike events again. By 1964 the AFM was mostly on its own — races with cars were still held occasionally but for demonstration only. The 1964 season schedule was set up with eight National Points events, 4 in North California at Vacaville and Cotati, and 4 in the South at Willow Springs. The S.F. Chapter began a new trend by running the first AFM Production race, a 100 miler at Cotati on July 4th, 1964. The rules required the bikes to be very stock and the event was quite a success. Production races have been part of the AFM ever since.

In 1964 things looked good on the surface; the club was growing and had shed its dependence on car clubs. However, the internal organization of the club was not in very good shape.

The Board of Directors of AFM, led by Cooley, was running the races in South California as well as trying to run the National organization. The Southern California chapters seemed to have been reduced to purely social groups, and there is very little mention of them in the notes. With Cooley acting as Chairman, Treasurer, and Secretary as well as organizing racing activity, things weren't always done on time, if they got done at all. All during the period covered by this article there were complaints about short notice of race dates, the lack of a published schedule, inability to get copies of the rules, mail not being answered, the lack of any financial reports, and so on. The Northern chapters were unhappy because they were not represented on the National Board, which was appointed by Cooley. Even some of the board mem-

bers were displeased and at one point tried to get Cooley to hand the secretarial duties over to someone else, with no success.

The simmering unrest broke out in the open in 1964 when the S.F. Chapter proposed that the National Board be re-organized so the members would be elected representatives of the chapters. This plan was rejected by Cooley on the grounds that

people who are willing to be elected are not necessarily willing to do any work, an argument that didn't go over very well.

Fed up at last, Cooley quit in late 1964, and AFM National promptly vanished. It was very nearly the end of the club as the AFM, but there were some people who were willing to step into the void left by Cooley's abrupt departure, as we shall see.

Next: The Years of Rebuilding, 1965-1969.

THE HISTORY OF THE AFM

Part 3: The Rebuilding Years, 1965-1969

1965 was a pivotal year in the AFM's history. The collapse of the AFM National organization in late 1964 left the club badly disorganized, and it could have been the end.

Fortunately a group from the San Francisco Chapter, led by Dee Davis, Brent Stockwell and Harry Webster, picked up the ball that Wes Cooley, Sr. had dropped. By February of 1965 the club had been re-incorporated with the state, a new set of Articles and By-laws had been adopted and the group was working on the race schedule for the year. The AFM started 1965 with the S.F. Chapter, the small Sacramento Chapter and the trials-oriented St. Louis, Missouri Chapter.

The new organization must have been successful. By July of '65 two new chapters had been added, a Santa Barbara Chapter and the Bay Cities Motor Club. The BCMC was based in the San Francisco area, but was a scrambles club, not a roadrace group, so they kept separate from the S.F. Chapter. Later in 1965 the Los Angeles Chapter reformed and rejoined the club with Gene Wise as president. Wise, incidentally, was one of the original members and helped found the club back in the mid-fifties, and is rumored to have been the first to roadrace Yamahas in the U.S.

That year the club ran road races mainly at Cotati and Vacaville, but there was one race each at Hanford and Santa Barbara. The Santa Barbara race was one of the last races held in conjunction with the sports car group, and was sadly the last AFM race at Santa Barbara, as attempts to hold bike-only events at the track never worked out.

The AFM was *not* only a road race group during this period. The aforementioned St. Louis Chapter held several observed trials, the BCMC promoted a few scrambles at Champion Speedway in San Francisco, on Nov. 28th the club ran an enduro and

on Jan. 1, 1966 there was an AFM motocross!

In 1966 the National organization moved from San Francisco to Santa Barbara as a sidecar racing Englishman named Reg Pridmore became the National Chairman. Things had settled down compared to the hectic time a year before. The L.A. Chapter began running road races at Orange County Raceway on a nearly monthly basis, with Jim Manning providing the organizational lead. In north California Cotati and Vacaville were used, also on a nearly monthly basis, although Cotati seemed to be more popular. The track was at an old airport and several different courses could be constructed by combining different runways and taxiways into a circuit.

This was the basic pattern for the club in the years 1966-1969, with road races at Orange County, Cotati and occasionally Vacaville. From time to time there were some interesting variations to this pattern, however.

The BCMC reported trouble finding new members, as the AMA was putting pressure on scrambles riders not to join "outlaw" groups. The BCMC dropped out after 1966, at least in part due to this pressure. At this time it was first suggested that the AFM should concentrate on road racing, since "the AMA doesn't care about road racing."

In 1967 a Las Vegas Chapter was added and a road race was run at the small Stardust Raceway. The L.V. Chapter seemed to disappear quickly, as the only other race run at Stardust was organized by the S.F. Chapter.

The L.A. Chapter also ran a few races at Carlsbad Raceway during this period. They tried tying in with a motocross group to run motocross in the morning and road races in the afternoon at Carlsbad, but this setup didn't last. The late Cal Rayborn ran in

these Carlsbad events, using them for development of the 350cc Harley Sprint roadracers.

Besides Rayborn, other familiar names racing with the AFM included Ron Grant, Tony Murphy and Don Vesco. Youngsters Art Baumann and Steve McLaughlin were beginning to appear more often near the top of the results sheets. In 1967 Reg Pridmore tried his hand at solo bike racing with a Honda S-90 in the 100cc G.P. class. In '68 Hurley Wilvert was winning 350cc Production events on a Bridgestone while Ron Pierce and Don Emde were racing against each other in the 250cc G.P. class.

In 1969 a new San Diego chapter joined the AFM as the racing at Carlsbad increased interest in that town. The S.D. Chapter added something new to the AFM's repertoire — a speed trials, organized by the chapter in April of '69 at Laguna Salada in Baja, Mexico. The Clerk of the Course was none other than Don Vesco. Don set a speed of 147.05 mph on a 350cc Yamaha, and apparently caught the speed bug in a big way. He has been a Bonneville regular ever since, and currently holds the absolute motorcycle speed record at over 300 mph.

The machines of the period showed that the European bikes were on the way out. By the end of the '60s only the Open G.P. class was still a British stronghold. Elsewhere the winners were more and more often riding Japanese machinery. In the lightweight classes there was some fairly exotic stuff. Double overhead cam, four valve per cylinder Honda twins were available, and many races were won by the CR110 (50cc) or the CR-93 (125cc) Hondas. Haruo Koshino had an ex-works Suzuki 50cc bike, with 9 speeds and a top end of 105 mph. The Yamaha TD series racers were in production and Kawasaki came out with its A-1R for the 250cc class. Hopped up 305 Hondas

were scoring well in the 350cc class, and Suzukis and 450 Hondas were beginning to push the British bikes out of the 500 GP class as well. The Manx's and G-50's were nearly gone and would soon disappear, only to be seen at shows and vintage races.

Another important trend during this period was the increasing popularity of Production road racing. Introduced in the early sixties by the San Francisco group, Production was considered "support" to the G.P. classes, where the "real" racing took place. By the end of the 60's there were Prod races at every race, and the 250 miler at Cotati, for Prod bikes only, was somewhat of a classic.

So that's how the 60's ended. Starting with next to nothing in 1965 the club was comparatively healthy and active by the end of

1969. There were chapters in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Diego and St. Louis. But the real measure of the club's success was the abundance of talent it had. The top ten riders for 1969 looked like this:

1. Don Emde
2. Hurley Wilvert
3. Ron Grant
4. Rudy Galindo
5. Ron Pierce
6. Don Vesco
7. Ralph LeClerc
8. Art Baumann
9. Stan Smith
10. Jack Simmons.

Of these ten, six went on to become AMA Expert ranked roadracers, and five of them rode on factory racing teams during their careers. A seventh, Vesco, went on to become the fastest man on two wheels. Not too shabby for a small racing club. □

Next: Into the Seventies, 1970-Present.

THE HISTORY OF THE AFM

Part 4 - Into The Seventies: 1970-1972

Editor's Note: This is the fourth article of a series that was started last year. The first three parts were printed in the March, July and October issues in 1977. Many of the current members of the AFM were not members last year and probably haven't seen the first three parts. The complete text of parts 1, 2 and 3 can be obtained by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to the *Lap Times*' P.O. Box. In the meantime here's a summary of parts 1-3.

I — THE EARLY YEARS: 1954-59

The A.F.M. was organized and incorporated on November 27th, 1956, although the club's origins go back two years to 1954. In that year a club named the American Association of Grand Prix Riders was formed in Southern California. The AAGPR was organized to promote European-style road racing in the U.S. In those days the AMA had only a few road races and their rules differed considerably from the European rules.

Two years later the AAGPR was expanded and renamed the American Federation of Motorcyclists. The organizers had decided to include other forms of motorcycle competition and the old name would not do.

Road racing was still the primary activity, however.

In 1959 the AFM had chapters in Florida, New York, Chicago and Mississippi, as well as four chapters in S. California. The Chicago group held road races and flat-track events, while the California groups road raced at Willow Springs and the Florida chapters ran events at places like Sebring and Gainesville.

II — THE COOLEY ERA: 1960-64

At the end of 1959 Wes Cooley, Sr. (father of the current AFM star) became chairman of AFM National. Chapters kept coming and going, with the Florida, New York and Chicago chapters leaving the club while San Francisco and St. Louis chapters were added. The St. Louis chapter was a bit of an oddity. They held road rallies and observed trials but did not road race at all. In 1963 a Sacramento chapter joined the club.

Races were usually held in conjunction with auto races, with the bike event being one race on the otherwise all-car schedule. Races were held at an amazing number of places, including Santa Maria, Willow Springs, Vacaville, Santa Barbara, Pomona, Hanford, Cotati, Oakland, Stockton, San Luis

Obispo and Reno, Nevada. Membership was small compared to today, with starting fields of 30-50 bikes in the combined races. Only 5 or 6 Grand Prix classes were supported, usually 125, 175, 250, 500 and Open displacements.

By 1964, the AFM had begun to hold races apart from the cars. The S.F. Chapter began a new trend by running the first AFM Production race, a 100-miler, at Cotati.

Things looked good on the surface, but the organization was bad. Wes Cooley was running things almost single-handedly at AFM, National. Between acting as Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary of National and organizing racing in Southern California, there was so much to do that things weren't always done on time, if at all. Mail went unanswered, rule books were non-existent or hard to get, there was no published schedule, events were added or cancelled with short notice, there were no financial reports, and so on.

At the end of the 1964 season Cooley, apparently fed up with the objections, quit and AFM National promptly vanished. The club nearly vanished as well.

III — THE REBUILDING YEARS: 1965-69

A group of riders from the S.F. Chapter stepped in to pick up the ball that Cooley had dropped. By February of 1965 the club had been re-incorporated with a new set of By Laws and Articles that provided for elected officers. The club began the year with chapters in S.F., Sacramento and St. Louis. By July a Santa Barbara chapter was added, as well as a scrambles-oriented chapter in San Francisco. Later in 1965 the Los Angeles chapter was reformed.

By 1968 a pattern had been established. During the racing season races were held almost monthly at Orange County Raceway in S. California and just as frequently at Cotati or Vacaville in N. California. There were occasional races at other locations, including Stardust in Las Vegas and Carlsbad near San Diego.

Although road racing was the main thing, the AFM was not exclusively pavement-oriented. The St. Louis chapter held trials, and between 1965 and 1969, the AFM sponsored scrambles, enduros, speed trials and a motocross in California. In road racing the GP classes were still supported and production racing was steadily gaining popularity.

The organization was still a weak point, with a lot of animosity between the Northern and Southern groups. But racing was held regularly and the club was full of talented riders. The top ten riders in 1969 included Don Emde, Hurley Wilvert, Ron Grant, Ron Pierce, Don Vesco and Art Bauman.

At the conclusion of the 1969 season, the AFM nearly folded. The two chapters were separated both geographically and ideologically. Communications between north and south officers was minimal, and the St. Louis Chapter existed in name only. Most of the racing took place at Orange County International Raceway for L.A. Chapter events, and Vacaville for S.F. members. Cotati was in near ruins, and Sears Point officials would not talk to AFM. The track, so the ownership felt, was destined to become a superdome for AMA and sports car events. Ditto for Riverside and Ontario.

About the only bright spot for 1970 was the formation of the Norton Gang. Three riders, Jack Simmons, Bill Manley, and the late George Kerker rode their Norton Commando 750s with limited sponsorship from Norton-Villiers Distributors at all OCIR events. The trio put on some vicious displays of road racing and gave L.A. Chapter president, Jim Manning, something to promote. The Norton Gang dominated racing in the Open Production and Open G.P. events, rarely losing a race. Later John McGillivray and his Johnny of Bakersfield-BSA triple, and Rolan Pegan's Triumph Trident added more seasoning to the stew.

Jim Manning pretty much took charge of the affairs for the L.A. Chapter, keeping the club meetings as low-profile as possible. His philosophy was keep racing once a month, and leave politics at home. The less he had to worry about playing political chess with members and track owners, the more time and energy he would have to run AFM races. He was the chapter president and race director, a common policy in those days.

by Dain Gingerelli

Manning's singled-handedness to do things, and general membership apathy, meant slow growth for the AFM. One bright spot throughout this time was Manning's ability to group together sponsorship — as limited as it was at the time — into providing free advertising or small support money for race events. Such companies as Gatorade, Castrol, Oil, and Norton-Villiers annexed their names to L.A. Chapter events. Castrol Oil was also noteworthy for sponsoring the California Grand Prix, first held at OCIR November of 1968.

Cycle Guide Magazine, under Bob Braverman's editorship, helped the southern chapter promote a two-day event (called the Cycle Guide G.P.) in September 1971. Forty percent of the gate was paid to various classes. The main event was won by Hurley Wilvert, on a 350 Yamaha. Howard Lynggard, a top West Coast novice that year, was third, also on a Yamaha, with former Daytona winner, Ralph White, riding a new Kawasaki H2-750 to third just ahead of Reggie Pridmore on his Norton 750. White's ride on the Kawasaki was the bike's inaugural race. He won the Open Production event earlier in the day.

While Manning was busy promoting the sport of road racing, gathering potential sponsors and pumping the Norton Gang, quite discreetly the *Lap Times* was formed. Initially, it was to be the official newsletter for the Los Angeles Chapter. The first edition appeared April 3, 1971. I was the editor the first year of publication, working with the appreciable budget of \$30 per month. Manning wanted one issue every thirty days, to appear the week before each chapter meeting.

continued on p.5

THE HISTORY OF THE AFM

from p.4

The object was to inform members — both north and south — of chapter meetings and stimulate interest for race events. As with today's *Lap Times*, members were entitled to a free classified ad, and encouraged to contribute letters, announcements of sponsors, etc. Few did.

At the conclusion of the California Grand Prix in November 1970, Manning approached me and said he was resigning as L.A. Chapter president, and would assume responsibilities as amateur race coordinator for the AMA. He was to leave for Ohio by the first part of December.

Since he was calling all the shots for the southern chapter at the time, he asked if I would want to be president. Although I was hesitant at the time, he assured me that I would have very little problem gathering the votes for the office. Which made sense, as very few people wanted to help out (although there were several small groups, such as the corner marshals and tech crews at the time that did more than their share of the load).

The next month and a half was a true learning experience. Jim had revealed the financial books to me, and things didn't look too promising. He told me the track owners at OCIR would not allow the AFM to race there unless someone personally signed for all debts incurred race day. Secondly, the insurance program appeared a bit shaky, more than I wanted to risk my life and fortune (?) on. Finally, the checking account showed a credit balance of 90 dollars and some change. The can of worms was getting messier each minute. It also cinched the presidency for me, although I really didn't want it. But nobody else would want to touch this jigsaw puzzle, and to be frank, neither did I.

During the winter of '71-72, certain things were transpiring within the AFM. First, Bill Cleghorn was preparing himself to step down from National Chairman (or whatever title was given him at the time) of the AFM. Prior to his official departure, he had met with Russ March of the AMA, and paved the way for the AFM to become an affiliate club of the AMA. It was to be a partnership/business package to help both organizations. The AMA would benefit by incorporating one of the largest road racing clubs in the country, in the hopes of establishing a means by which new road race stars could learn, without creating congestion on the AMA National tracks. Road racing, the AMA felt, was on the rise. They wanted a grassroots club for their minor league.

On the other hand, the AFM sought the AMA's help in the insurance department. The AMA

provided a rather handsome insurance deal for track coverage. And too, AMA riders had many hospital benefits AFM could not provide. The deal looked good on both ends.

Jim Manning was out from Ohio on business, and introduced me to Bill Cleghorn at the Long Beach M.I.C. show that January. Also in attendance was Gavin Trippe, from Trippe-Cox Promotions. Jim made all the introductions, said I was the new L.A. Chapter president, then took off. Bill and Gavin looked at me, must have thought I was some wet-behind-the-ears college kid (which I was) then went about their business. Trippe-Cox, it was decided that evening, would promote all AFM races for 1972. At last I was beginning to see the light on the other side of the tunnel. First, the insurance matter was settled with the AMA/AFM tie up. And second, since Trippe-Cox would promote the racing, they, not me, would sign the bottom line of the track contract.

So I called the first chapter meeting, via *Lap Times*, for February 10. More members than I had counted on showed up. The bit about the AMA and Trippe-Cox I mentioned in the newsletter must have worked.

There were several points of order I wished to discuss. I first talked about (a) Jim Manning had left, and things didn't appear to be very solid. (b) The AFM had, indeed, hooked up, so to say, with AMA. I outlined the benefits, and hoped the general membership would agree, because in reality, the agreement rested on the final votes of everybody in that room plus S.F.'s vote. I told myself if they voted it down, I wouldn't run for president. The risk was too great. (c) Cleghorn had stepped down, and Trippe-Cox would promote our races, at which there were many loose and generally poor comments passed around the room. That didn't surprise me, then I gave my reasons for why we should go with T-C, again, emphasizing the financial benefits. (d) That the first race was scheduled, if all of the above did come through, for April. (e) A general chapter election must take place, to fill all offices.

I suggested we begin at the top, and opened nominations for president. My name was tossed in the ring, then I waited for others. There were no others, so by virtue of no competition, I began my first and only term as chapter president.

Dave Roesch, a sidehack rider, was elected V. Pres., owing most of his votes to the sidecar lobby present. Brad Grote served as treasurer, and I passed on to him the \$90-plus, and my blessing. Gretchen Walti became our secretary. Her husband,

Fred, and his close friend, Bob Crossman and girlfriend (now wife) Ninnette, all pitched in to help. All of these people, and myself, began preparing for the first race and the season.

The chapter kitty was antied up with membership dues. AFM National got a certain portion, we got the rest. To maintain the money we had, which reached about \$500 by the time I left office, we charged everything we could to Trippe-Cox — stationary, *Lap Times* printing, office equipment, new flags, turn worker lunches — everything.

T-C didn't want to promote races up north, and it seemed to me they were trying to split the AFM into two separate clubs. The late Jerry Gordon, who was acting as National Chairman, kept in close touch with us, and tried to keep a mutual relationship among both chapters. He too kept a low profile, but we both knew that we had to keep OCIR open at least once a month in order to maintain the AFM. I think the north chapter staged one race at Vacaville that spring. It was a non-points event, and a dismal failure, much to Gavin's delight.

The AFM had to act fast, to stimulate north-south relations. I felt the best thing to do was to promote a money race. I talked it over with T-C, and they didn't seem too excited about sinking more money into the organization. Not that I could blame them.

So I suggested a sponsor for a race. "They said who?", followed by a long song-and-dance that the AMA rules, which we were governed by, required \$2600 (I think that was the exact figure) be posted for any professional event for junior and novice riders. Aha! That was why they were so intent on hooking up with the AMA, so they were almost a sure bet to promote all AFM races under their name.

We didn't give up there. I had a friend that worked for a public relations firm who had several clients looking for something different to sink their money into. Why not motorcycle racing, I suggested? Great idea, Gregg thought, then went to work on the several clients, certain that one would support his new whim.

One did; Taste Freeze. This chain of ice cream outlets was in the process of changing their name and logo to just plain Taste, and wanted to reach the youth market at the same time. I gave them my price, and waited for an answer. They didn't flinch, and said, "Let's go!" The Taste Grand Prix was set for mid-July of 1972.

This caught T-C off guard, and also won their respect, plus that of the entire AFM membership. In less than four months we had raised the

treasury five-fold and at the same time increased gate receipts at each event throughout the spring. When the May race showed over 125 entries, we were ecstatic! As I recall, Ron Pierce won the main event at the Taste Grand Prix.

I was especially pleased with the way things had turned out for us that spring. We reached our goals, and managed to win the blessing and support of the San Francisco and Sacramento chapters, plus AFM National. Knowing this I made my first mistake of the year; I put a down payment on a formula car. That's another story, but I began making plans to resign from my office, at which Dave Roesch would assume control, with a new vice-president elected.

I dropped out of sight for the next two years, and became a starving auto racer. During this time Brian Duran and Dick

Lewis helped carry the chapter into an even more forceful role, while Bill Ralston and others did their share up north. The AFM owes these men quite a lot. They have formulated a standard of rules and procedures for incoming officers of the club, allowing the business of racing to continue without having to waste precious time organizing a program. 1972 was a pivotal year, in which the club began its transformation into a sound, unified body. Membership has doubled, and we now race on three of the best road courses in America. And what is most important is we do not have to rely on outside aid to support the club. And that, more than anything, is the major difference between AFM 1978 and AFM 1972.

Next installment: 1973 to present.

THE HISTORY OF THE AFM

Part 5 - The Years of Growth: 1973-Present

Things did not look too rosy for the AFM at the end of the 1972 season. Cooperation between the two halves of the state was perhaps at its lowest point, and there was the distinct possibility that there would be no racing in Northern California at all in 1973! The two tracks that had been the mainstay of AFM racing in N. Cal were gone. The airport track at Cotati was being torn up to make way for a housing development and Vacaville Raceway had deteriorated to a point where it was no longer safe. The pavement was so bad that the chapter had to put warning cones in the middle of the track to mark the location of the worst potholes. The Sacramento Chapter was even offering a cash award to anyone who could find a location suitable for a roadrace course.

Things were definitely better in the Los Angeles area with the availability of Orange County Raceway, but there was stiff competition from two other amateur roadrace clubs, the ACA and CMC. The only bright spot in late 1972 was the running of an exhibition race at Ontario Motor Speedway during the week-end of the USAC Ontario 500, witnessed by 177,000 people.

Early in 1973 two things happened to boost the sagging spirits of AFMers. The most important was the re-opening of Sears Point Raceway in Sonoma, giving the S.F. and Sacramento Chapters a place to race. When the track was built in 1969 the owners had a vision of Sears becoming some sort of Daytona-West and weren't interested in talking to clubs as small as the AFM. The vision went bust and the track lay idle during the years 1970-1972. Thankfully, the new owners in 1973 had "lowered expectations" and were happy to negotiate race dates with both chapters. Several events were run at Sears in 1973, including a 250-mile Production endurance race.

Another big plus for the AFM was the first AFM race at Ontario Motor Speedway held on Jan. 20-21 of 1973. The previous year's exhibition race had left a favorable impression and the L.A. Chapter was able to schedule a few races at OMS, a track that was definitely a step above the Orange County course.

Also in 1973 the Lap Times, at the urging of Dain Gingerelli and under the editorship of Bob Crossman, went from being a L.A. Chapter newsletter to a

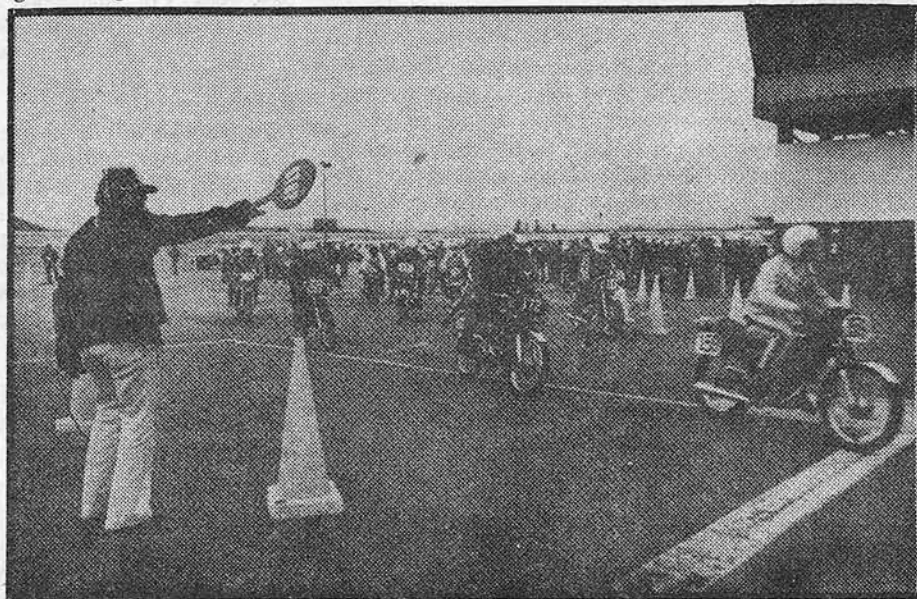
state-wide publication mailed to all members. For the first time in many years the AFM members could feel that they were part of a statewide organization.

On May 20th of 1973 the L.A. Chapter staged its first race at Riverside Raceway, giving the club three tracks in the L.A. area and one track near San Francisco. The S.F. Chapter was also negotiating with Laguna Seca, al-

though nothing came of this in 1973.

On the political front things were improving, but there were still problems. The structure of AFM, Inc. ("National") at that time included only one voting member for each chapter, the chapters being L.A., S.F. and Sacramento. This arrangement gave the two northern chapters two-thirds of the vote even

though the L.A. Chapter had more members than the S.F. and Sacto chapters put together, which caused some bad feelings. The club was affiliated with the AMA, and received a pretty good deal on race insurance out of the association, although it made licensing and registration difficult — the chapters had to verify that riders were bona-fide



The AFM's first race at Ontario Speedway was on a cold day in January in 1973. Notice how bundled up the course worker is. When this photo was taken the garages apparently were not yet built. The banking of turn one is in the background, and the tower in the right of the photo no longer exists.

AFM HISTORY

from p.4

AMA members before they could race. Since AMA memberships expired at any time during the year and AFM memberships were good to the end of the year riders had to show both cards at every race.

The 1974 schedule looked much like it does today. The L.A. Chapter ran 10 races at Ontario and Riverside, including the very first running of the Ontario Endurance race on May 11-12. The inaugural of this event was a 300-miler for Production bikes only. Orange County Raceway was off the AFM schedule. With the club receiving firm commitments from Ontario and Riverside there was little rider interest in continuing to run at Orange County. The S.F. and Sacto Chapters had scheduled eight events at Sears Point, dropping the 250-miler from the itinerary.

The '74 schedule did include one event that is missing these days. On Sept. 15 the S.F. Chapter ran the one-and-only AFM race at Laguna Seca. The Chapter had gotten into Laguna much the same way the L.A. Chapter had broken in at Ontario. Early in the year the Chapter staged an exhibition race during the lunch break of the Oly

Sprints, a popular sports car event. The bikes made a good impression on the crowd and the bike-only race date was negotiated. The lure of the famous Monterey track drew just over 200 entries, a big success in those days. There were hopes for an annual AFM event at the picturesque track, but the changing ownership (from U.S. Army to Monterey County) and noise complaints made negotiations difficult and the chapter gave up.

In the political area there was one major event in 1974 that significantly affected the make-up of the club — the charter of the Sacramento chapter was pulled. The chapter was informed that it no longer existed and all Sacramento chapter members were now members of the S.F. Chapter. The official reasons for such a drastic move included charges of fiscal mismanagement, non-cooperation with AFM, Inc., and unsafe race-day organization. As usual in a case like this the official reasons only cover part of the story — the other part is political. (Editorializing starts here.) The Sacto chapter was small, only one quarter the size of the S.F. Chapter. The L.A. members wanted to combine the two

northern chapters to reduce the "northern vote bloc" from two to one. The S.F. Chapter officials wanted Sacto out because the two chapters had agreed to run all Sears Point events jointly in 1974, but there developed a difference of opinion as to how races should be run. (End of editorializing.)

Regardless of the why or how, the fact is that the Sacramento Chapter, part of the AFM since 1964, was declared inoperative. This action left the AFM, Inc. with only two voting members, not a very stable condition. The AFM By-Laws were rewritten for 1975, largely through the efforts of Dick Lewis. The new structure allowed for two voting directors elected from each chapter and three members elected from the membership at large, giving a total of seven directors.

The ousting of the Sacramento Chapter and the rewriting of the by-laws was the last major reshaping of the AFM. Since 1975 the club has been composed of the Northern Chapter (renamed from the San Francisco chapter) and the Los Angeles Chapter operating under the umbrella of the AFM, Inc. Board of Directors, which is made up of members from both groups.

That's not to say that there haven't been changes in the last four years. There's been plenty

of change, it's just been of a more gradual kind.

At the end of 1975 the club decided to terminate its affiliation with the AMA. The AFM would remain a AMA Charter club but would no longer run AMA sanctioned races. The underwriter of the AMA's nice insurance package had decided not to renew in 1975, meaning the AFM had to buy its own coverage for the riders. Aside from the insurance, there was very little tangible benefit to having the AFM events sanctioned by the AMA and it was decided that it wasn't worth the hassle of enforcing the dual membership.

One of the important changes during this period has been the evolution of the AFM's class structure. In 1973 there were only 15 officially supported classes, nine in Grand Prix (50cc, 125cc, 200cc, 250cc, 350cc, 500cc, Open and Sidecar) and six in Production (125cc, 200cc, 250cc, 350cc, 500cc and Open). Occasionally there would be a Thumper race (for single cylinder bikes) or a Superstreet event, but these were optional races put on by the sponsoring chapter. During the last five years the following changes have taken place (not necessarily in this order): 100cc G.P. was added as an official class; the Open Production class was split into two classes, 750cc and Open Produc-

tion; the Superstreet class was made an official class and split into two divisions (600cc and Open); the 350cc and 500cc G.P. classes were combined into a single class; the 350cc and 500cc Production classes were changed to 410cc and 550cc respectively; and most recently three Box Stock classes (410cc, 675cc, Open) were added to the official list. There are now 20 officially supported classes, with enough variety to have a spot for just about any motorcycle.

The other significant change from 1973 to present has been the steady growth of the AFM. The club's membership has nearly doubled, going from around 600 in 1973 to around 1100 this year. Race entries have gone up accordingly. In 1974 the record entry was just over 200; today the record is a hair shy of 400. That's 400 entries in a one-day event!

The AFM has grown from a few dozen members in 1954 to become the largest amateur roadracing group in the country. The club has certainly had its ups and downs in the 24 years since its birth, but right now it's on an up. The club is probably in the best position it's ever been, with the largest membership, the best tracks and the most stable financial condition since the beginning. It's all been done by lots of hard work by many people through the years. May it just keep getting better!