

Checking Out the Past

A Journey to the Antique Motorcycle Club Gathering in Rhinebeck, NY

Story & Photos by GOMO

Normally when Father's Day weekend rolls around, folks in the Northeast and beyond have either returned from Americade, Laconia Bike Week, or both; and writers normally follow with an article about one or the other event. Though I was at this year's Americade and enjoyed myself (as usual) and haven't ventured yet to Laconia, I wanted to cover a fairly "new" and fast-growing event that happens locally, tucked in-between these two rallies.

For the third year now, the Antique Motorcycle Club of America and the Northeast Coalition of Chapters presents what they are calling "the Largest Antique Motorcycle Show & Swap Meet in the USA," held in Rhinebeck, NY at the Dutchess County Fairgrounds. I did attend the event last year for the first time and was thoroughly impressed with the turnout. With the word spreading that this year's event would top the last in size, I wanted to be sure I checked it out. I would have gone anyway, but with the thought of even more vintage motorcycles to gaze at, it was even more enticing.

A little background on the club itself is in order. The Antique Motorcycle Club of America (AMCA) was founded in 1954 by a group of interested motorcycle owners with a primary objective

to encourage the seeking-out, restoration, preservation and exhibiting of antique motorcycles of all kinds, regardless of country of origin. The AMCA presently has over 11,000 members worldwide, as well as a network of local chapters throughout the country that schedule sanctioned road runs in addition to national meets. If you're wondering if you have to own a vintage motorcycle to be a member, certainly not; just having an interest in old iron is all you need.



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So since the day was all about vintage, I decided to start it off with some breakfast in a nearby town at a local diner designed to bring back the good ol' days of eateries. The Eveready Diner in Hyde Park, NY is a fantastic combination of stainless steel, neon light and deco styling. Though the prices have left the Fifties behind, the food is always good, and at a fair price for today's economy, plus the service is pleasant and personable like that of days past. The Eveready has also been featured on the Food Network and, when the Hotrod and Custom car show is in town, all the folks scramble to get the right spot to photograph their car with the diner in the background. After listening to some small local talk I finished up my coffee and headed up to Rhinebeck for the event. Now, I did not take my oldest bike to the show; and even if I did it isn't considered a vintage motorcycle, as far as the AMCA is concerned. The club defines an antique motorcycle to be one that is 35 years or older. That standard is what they use for participation in event judging. My oldest ride, a 1986 Sportster is still 12 years shy of that status. Besides, I felt like zipping around the great local back roads after the event, so I opted to ride my Buell.

Once I got to the gates for the event, I could see already the increase in event size. There were definitely more vendors on my walk-in than last year, from those selling the normal bike rally items to a large amount of small independents that carry vintage parts to swap, sell or find a part themselves. The fairgrounds cover a large acreage with open fields and large buildings with plenty of parking. Pretty much every location had something set up, with the only exception being the animal viewing stables (remember, this is a county fair site). There were bikes being ridden of all age and makes, some with their riders dressed in gear of their bikes' era – pretty cool.



Getting back to the size of the event, yes, it was positively bigger than last year. The club was tagging this as the largest antique motorcycle show in the country, despite the fact that I had never gone to another vintage bike show, but with hundreds of motorcycles from every make and year either being ridden around

or on display it may be easy to lay claim to that fame. I spent some time checking out some of the old parts that were for sale or swap. To me a lot of these parts looked like rusted or tarnished pieces of metal and nothing more, but I could overhear

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some folks talking that seemed knowledgeable about certain parts and if they thought the prices were either too high or a “real deal.” Even when I heard what some items were going for my thoughts about them didn’t change much.

One thing I realized is that there are lots of folks at this event that really know a lot about these old scoots. Sure, I can tell the difference between engine models of Harleys. Flatheads, Knuckles, Pans, Shovels, and perhaps a few of the years that certain items were started or discontinued, but to recognize that a Knuckle sitting there for sale had parts that were from a Pan-head is beyond my capabilities. Speaking with a variety of vendors, I found out that an ample amount of them can tell you engine strokes, settings, piston sizes, spark and more specifications than I knew were worth knowing. It wasn’t just vendors, as club members and attendees were just as knowledgeable, if not more. If you are into old rides these people are history lessons of their own for you to explore. Something unique to this event is their Timeline. In one of the grounds open fields they display a motorcycle from every year starting from 1890 up to 1984. Now, I’ve only seen pictures of a 1902 “Camelback” style Indian, but in the Timeline there were two on display to check out. Other early century bikes included Thor, Cleveland, Sears, Flying Merkle, Rudge Multi, Yale, Ace, Excelsior, and of course, Harley-Davidson. While most of later years were compiled of a lot old Harleys and Indians, there were some beautiful old BMWs, Triumphs, Nortons, BSAs and Benellis, plus Hondas and the rest of the Japanese makers to help show the pride of Europe and Asia. So you know, it wasn’t all street bikes. I also checked out Rokons Bultacos, OSSAs and dirt bikes that I remember from my childhood days. Without a doubt a plethora of motorcycle history to enjoy, and you have three days to do it. You surely can get your fill of history and memories.



Besides the bikes, they have even more to check out.

In another large field on exhibit was old farm equipment, vintage Hit & Miss machines, vintage trucks and even a hand-crafted, three-quarter scale stagecoach that is drawn by Shetland ponies, and of course, more vendors. They even had WWI airplanes on display and you could head up the road about three miles to the Rhinebeck Aerodrome where, for about \$65, you could go for a ride in a vintage biplane over the event site. To top things off, what would an event at a fairground be without food and entertainment? Plenty onsite to keep you fed

and busy; the Wall of Death, Steel Cage Ball and stunt riders had masses of attendance for their acts. Fair-style eats not to your flavor? Not to worry -- the village of Rhinebeck (walking distance away) has a wealth of restaurants that will fit to your likings. I personally enjoy the Double O Restaurant across the street from the fairgrounds. In addition to places to eat, there are a bunch of shops to wander through to help pass the time away.

By the end of the day I've seen more old rides than I ever knew existed, such as an opposed V-Twin, shaft-driven Indian. I could see how folks could spend more than one day here and still not see everything. With the weather holding for the day and the rain coming later in the evening, it made for a great day. A chance to see some bikes I grew up with, look a some I only heard of and a large display of vintage motorcycles with great history behind them will have me coming back again next year. So, if vintage bikes are your game, or the interest in exploring some motorcycle history sounds like a worthwhile trip, then check the AMCA website for postings of the 2010 event dates and mark your calendar. Though you could easily keep busy with the event for more than a day, there are also amazing roads that include stretches of twisties and roads through rolling farm lands that are enjoyable to get lost on. Besides, they are already stating that next year is planning on being bigger and better. I can't see how, but bring it on.

Sites to check out:

Antique Motorcycle Club of America -

<http://www.antiquemotorcycle.org/>

Rhinebeck Aerodrome - <http://www.olderhinebeck.org/>

Rhinebeck, NY - <http://www.rhinebeck.com/>

Eveready Diner - <http://www.theevereadydiner.com/>

Dutchess County, NY - <http://www.co.dutchess.ny.us/>

