

# FORT SUTTER NEWS

FORT SUTTER CHAPTER, AMCA

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2014

VOLUME 32, NUMBER 6

## 2014 OFFICERS

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## From the President

My time as president of the FSMC is nearing the end. I am up for reelection this December and I have decided not to run for president again. I enjoyed being president, it has been an interesting experience but my hearing, even with my hearing aids, is getting worse. At the meetings, if I don't hear a question right I will answer it wrong and I don't like that. I will still run for a position on the board of directors and, if the members vote for me, I will still work at the road runs and the swap meets and other tasks as needed.

Like most of you I started riding motorcycles when I was young, fifteen years old. My first bike was a Ambassador with a Villers 200cc engine. I had to go past Joe Sarkee's motorcycle shop on my way to school, so one day I stopped and went into Joe's, climbed up on a new Triumph and started pulling on the brake and clutch levers. Joe came out from the back of the shop and said, "Stop pulling on those levers and get off that bike!" I did and left. The next week I was working for him. Norman Jones, my close friend Jim's dad, was a friend of Joe's, and Joe told Norman he needed a kid to help around the shop. Jim told me and I went to work for Joe. Joe was not the easiest person to work for, but he was always fair and good to me. I worked for Joe for about seven years, and raced for him for about twenty-five. He was a life long friend.

My interest in antique motorcycle did not start until I stopped professional racing. I belonged to the original Fort Sutter Club and when I got involved in antique motorcycles I joined the AMCA. I still enjoy riding in the dirt more than I like riding on the road and, like all of you, as long as I can walk I will ride motorcycles.

The December meeting will be a very important one. We will continue discussing the possibility of discontinuing national judging at our meet plus the possibility of changing the location from Dixon to Lodi. Please come and help discuss these issues.

AGAIN, THANKS TO ALL OF YOU FOR SUPPORTING ME DURING MY TIME AS. . .

YOUR PRESIDENT,

Our Next Meeting Will Be  
**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6**

At Sam's Hof Brau  
Watt and El Camino Avenues

**Lunch at Noon • Meeting at 1:00 p.m.**

# Minutes of the General Meeting

## October 4, 2014

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 by president, Rich Hardmeyer. There were twenty-four members in attendance.

**Minutes:** The minutes of the last meeting will stand as written.

**Treasurer's Report:** Marie Moore reported that our bank account remains healthy.

**Old Business:** Marie Moore, reporting for Jim, said that so far we have thirty bikes lined up for the Sacramento Auto Show but we still need volunteers to staff the booth. We will be in the same building we were in last year.

Nominations for board of directors was opened. Nominated to fill the slots left open by out going directors, Rich Hardmeyer, Dave Kafton, and Mark Loewen were: Rich Hardmeyer, Jim Inman, Dave Kafton, Gary Kubodera, Mark Loewen, and Bob Pratt. Additional nominations may be made prior to the election which will be held at the December 6 meeting.

Rich Hardmeyer read a letter from AMCA Director of Chapters, Fred Davis congratulating us on the success of last year's national meet at Dixon.

Tracey Kleber will begin looking for an alternative location for our annual dinner and hopes to have a report of her findings at the next meeting.

After continued discussion on what the theme for next year's Dixon meet should be—choppers, customs, bobbers, etc.—It was finally agreed that we would use the term “Vintage Period Modified.” Which, hopefully, will be a broad enough term to cover all the possibilities without upsetting anyone.

**New Business:** Jim Inman brought up the idea of moving our Dixon National Meet to a new location at a KOA campground on Highway 12 eleven miles west of Lodi.\*\* On the plus side, the location has 300 camping spots larger than the ones at Dixon, showers and rest rooms, cabins for rent, a restaurant, fuel availability, and a small store. In addition, the KOA people would take care of the clean up for us. The down side is that we would have to reserve a minimum of twenty-five spots at \$10.00 each. Each spot then has a cost of \$63.00 per day, however, if we reserve more than twenty-five spaces there is a 25% discount bringing the total cost of a space down to \$47.25 per day which is higher than the \$45.00 we now charge for two days. But, then again, the \$47.25 includes camping for which we charge extra. This raises the problem of how many spaces would we reserve. If we reserve too many we will loose money (\$47.25 per day for each space not sold) if, on the other hand, if we don't reserve enough spaces we will have to turn vendors away at the door.

Other things that might pose a problem are the amount of noise we would make, the possible lack of a public address system, and the absence of a meeting hall for the Friday banquet although there is a pavilion that might serve our purpose. But, again on the plus side, there are some things KOA offers for free that the Dixon fairgrounds charges extra for such as hall rental and cleanup.

After a lengthy discussion regarding the various pros and cons of relocation, another question was brought up: Should we remain as an AMCA National Meet or should we revert back to just being a regional meet? The basic question was what was to be gained and what would be lost if we were to revert back to being a regional. Looking at a discussion that was showing signs of going on for hours, president Hardmeyer suggested forming two committees. The first, to be made up of Dennis Gill, Leonard Miller, Mark Wiebens, and Greg Wood will look into the question of exactly what our problems at Dixon are (clean up, toilet patrol, and judging for example) and how they can be corrected. The second committee, consisting of Dave Kafton, Rich Ostrander, Dennis Gill, Jim Inman and Joe Mans, will look into the advisability dropping our national meet statues of reverting back to being a regional meet.

The one thing we all seemed to be in agreement on was that as long as we remain in Dixon we will be willing to pay to have someone else do the after meet clean up.

**TOM GREEN**  
Secretary

\*\*If you would like to get a better idea of where the campground is located, just Google: KOA Lodi and you'll find a map and aerial photograph of the site.

# THE 2014 SACAUTOSHOW



Again this year, thanks to the efforts of Jim and Marie Moore and over twenty club members, our display at the Sacramento Auto Show was a real crowd pleaser. Fortunately, as we did last year and the year before, we had a whole room to ourselves giving us plenty of space to put thirty bikes on display. Also as part of our exhibit were the story boards built by Rich Ostrander describing the history of motorcycling in the Sacramento area in general as well as the history of our club in particular. It was interesting to note that, at least on Friday morning, the older spectators were quite interested in Wes Allen's 1910 Yale and 1910 Emblem—the oldest bikes there—while the younger crowd headed towards the three modifieds owned by Jim and Ed Schenken and Galen McGhee. If attracting a younger crowd is what we hope to do, we may be on to something by deciding to honor vintage modifieds at Dixon next year

Showing bikes were: Wes Allen (2 bikes), Ed Bailey (1), Bill Cruz (2), Dennis Gill (2), Rich Hardmeyer (4), Ken Heuser (1), Andy Kleber (1), Rich Kinney (1), Mark Lowen (1), Martin Lund (1), Tom Lund (1), Galen McGee (1), Jim Moore (3), Tom Pettibone (2), Bob Pratt (2), Ed Schenken (1), Jim Schenken (1), Mark Wiebens (1), Greg Wood (2).

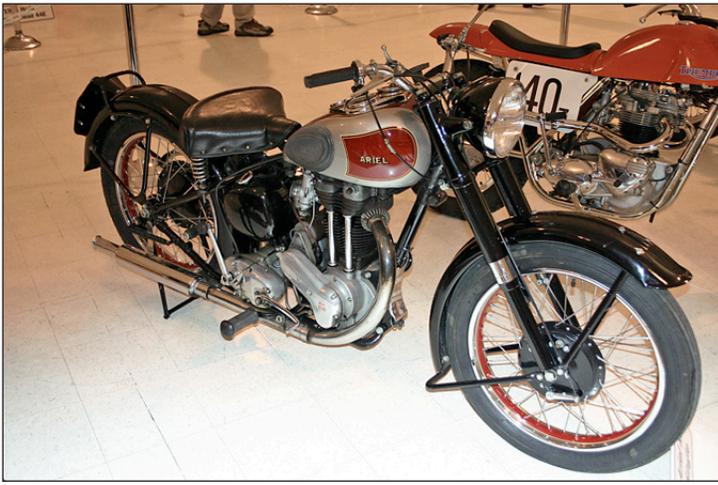
Helping out by staffing the Fort Sutter booth were: Ed Bailey, Bill Cruz, Tom Green, Rich and Barbara Hardmeyer, Rich Kinney, Tracey Kleber, Gary Kubodera, Jim and Marie Moore, Rich Ostrander, Tom Pettibone, Bob and Shari Pratt, Karie Schenken, Mark Wiebens, and Greg Wood.



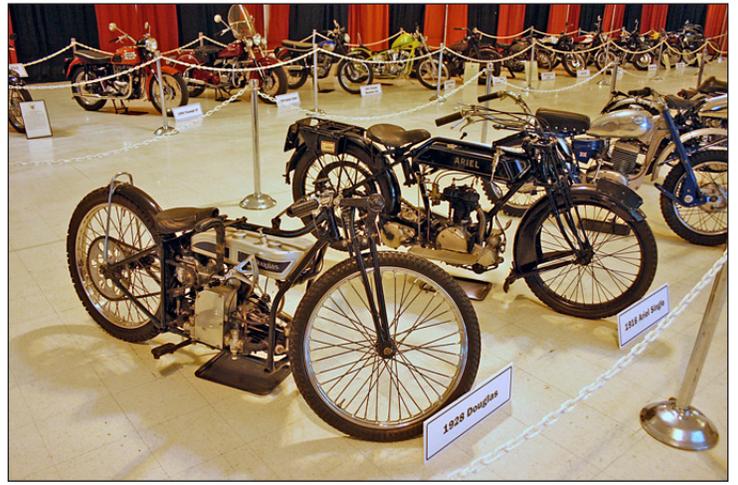
Jim Schenken's 1946 and Ed Schenken's '47 Knuckleheads along with Galen McGhee's 1948 Flathead drew a lot of interest from the younger viewers.



Wes Allen's 1910 Yale and his 1910 Marvel two speed were the oldest bikes in the exhibit.



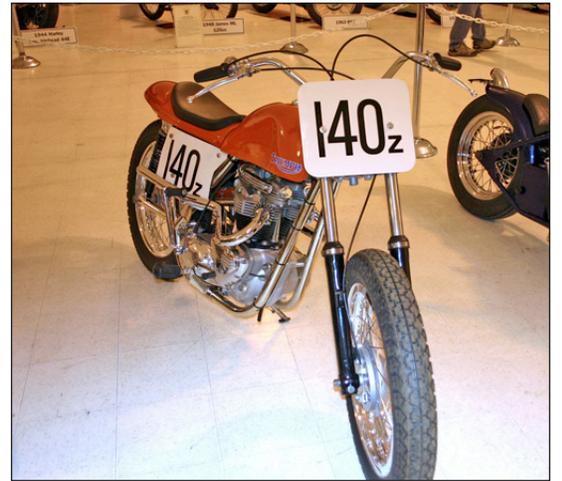
Martin Lund's 1948 Ariel Red Hunter.



Rich Hardmeyer's 1928 Douglas Speedway Racer and 1916 Ariel.



Some of the story boards showing the history of the club with Mark Wieven's Cannonball JD in the background.



Tom Pettibone's 1966 Rickman Triumph.



Mark Wieben's '27 JD and Mark Loewen's '25 JD Cannonball Bikes.



Bill Cruz, Karie Schenken, and Rich Hardmeyer caught the early shift on Friday morning.



*Wishing you and your family a very happy and enjoyable Thanksgiving and may that same happiness extend through the entire holiday season!*



This year's Cannonball ride is over and in the books. The Iron Dinosaur team from NorCal had six participant's. For Dave Kafton, their chief mechanic and FSMC Vice President, it was his third go round. In 2010 he rode his single cylinder belt drive H-D as the cut-off was pre-16 models. For 2012 he rode "Ellie Mae" his 1927 JD with FSMC board member Mark Wieben's 1927 JD and Dave Cava 1929 JD. The cut-off that year was pre-30 machines.

This year's ride cut-off was pre-37 models and the three above listed riders rode their same machines but were joined by another FSMC board member, Mark Loewen on his first really old motorcycle, a 1925 JD and Mike Inglis on a Kafton restored 1927 JD. Also traveling with the JD team was Victor Boocock aboard his 1914 H-D twin on his second Cannonball which was his third time across on a machine he's owned for some fifty years. He celebrated his seventy-second birthday along the way. All the bikes started, all bikes finished with just a few minor hiccups. A job well done by all. Dave should be happy as he was responsible for most all the work on all six motors making it 3,938 miles from Daytona, Florida to Tacoma, Washington in sixteen days. Not just bar to bar or around the block bikes folks!

*Rich Ostrander*



Dave aboard "Ellie Mae" 130 miles from Tacoma.



Mark Wiebens and his trusty '27 JD glad it's the next to the last stop.



Mark Loewen with his "new" 1925 JD.



Victor Boocock's 1914 HD twin enjoying their third time across America.

# The Passing of Harold Ball

November 25, 1927 – August 15, 2014

## The End of an Era

*What follows is actually a continuation of what I began in the last newsletter but had no time to finish. It is the story of Harold Ball who, to many of us cutting our motorcycling teeth during the early fifties and into the seventies, was one of Sacramento's racing icons as well as a respected shop owner. To tell Harold's story also requires telling of a time when you didn't have to go any farther than Lodi or Sacramento's Hughes Stadium to see "Lammy" Lamereaux, Jack Milne, or Phil Cancilla in action. A time many considered to be the golden age of dirt track racing. ¶ After Harold's services, held August 27, a group of men, most in their sixties and seventies, was gathered outside the funeral chapel when one of them said, "With Harold gone it looks like that's the end of an era." A group of graying heads all nodded in agreement. The era they were speaking of was the approximately two decades following World War II.*

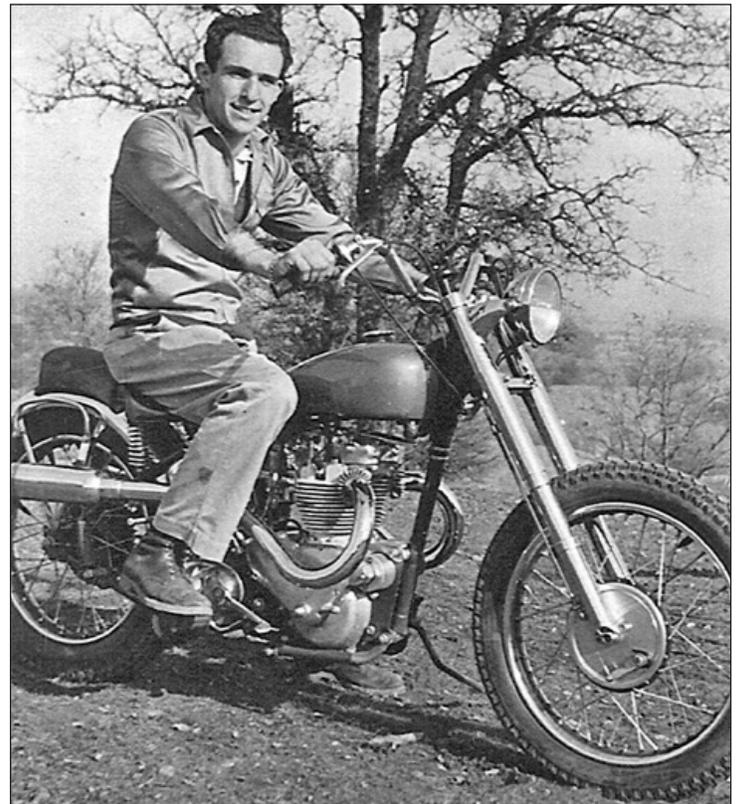
Harold was born and raised in Sacramento and attended San Juan High School. Following graduation in 1945 he was immediately drafted. As the war had just about ended by the time he finished basic training he became part of what was referred to as "the occupation army." He jokingly said, "I spent all my time occupying an army base in San Antonio, Texas. For a little excitement, and to amuse himself during off hours, he bought a 1946 Triumph Speed Twin and began tuning and modifying it. Then, just to see how well his engine modifications were working, he began drag racing on the base runway.

Following his army discharge, he rode the Speed Twin back home to Sacramento and began looking for a job. For somebody looking for employment in the motorcycle business, Sacramento in 1948 didn't offer many choices. There was Frank Murray, the Harley-Davidson dealer; Al Lauer, selling Indians; Jack's Cycles, a small shop at 1606 D Street that sold BSA and Sunbeam and Joe Sarkee's Motorcycle Service Shop which had just opened in 1947 carrying the Triumph and Ariel line. As Harold was riding a Triumph, Sarkee's seemed like the obvious place to start his job hunt. Joe wasn't too sure he really needed another mechanic but Harold's Speed Twin scored a few bonus points with Joe so he was put to work—at least on a trial basis.

It wasn't long before Harold decided to take his Speed Twin to the Reno Speed Trials where he turned

111mph, about 25mph faster than a stock Speed Twin was supposed to go. Joe was duly impressed and Harold had a steady job.

It was shortly after the Reno Speed Trials that Harold was given a nick name. As part of the Speed



**Back from the Army. Harold on his Speed Twin in 1948.**

Twin's modification, Harold had replaced the stock tank with a smaller one from a Francis Barnett. That, of course, meant some painting was required. For some reason Harold decided to paint the tank a sort of muted yellow. Shorty Tompkins took one look at the paint job and started calling Harold "Bananas."

A nick name that would stick with him the rest of his life.

Still riding his Speed Twin, Harold began flat track racing on the many tracks then flourishing in Northern California—a dozen of which were within 100 miles of Sacramento.



Harold still on his—now yellow—Speed Twin.

He quickly passed through the novice ranks, trading in his red and white novice number plate for the yellow and black plate of an amateur bearing his new number—54y

After about eighteen months, learning even more about engine tuning from Joe and getting pointers on short track racing from Shorty, Harold decided what he really needed to advance his racing career was more power and what had more power than a 750cc Harley? And weren't most of the big names in racing on Harleys? So, late in 1950, Harold went to see Armando Magri.

Armando had just purchased the Harley dealership from Frank Murray but by this time Armando, with a business to run, was pretty much confining his competition riding to hill climbs but he did have a Class C Harley flat tracker he said Harold could borrow. Harold loved the bike: *You just gave it some throttle and the rear wheel slid out, the balance*

*was perfect. The first time I raced it I won my heat, the semi, and the main—even the trophy dash. Only time I ever did that.*

Harold, now working for Armando, continued to race on the Harley and was doing quite well but what he really needed was a sponsor. Armando, as Red Cadwell would find out a few years later, wanted no part of being a sponsor. He'd let Harold borrow the Harley but that's as far as he'd go. . . Enter: Elmer Graves.



After leaving Joe Sarkees, Harold went to work for Armando Magri. He liked riding the Harley but greener pastures lay ahead.

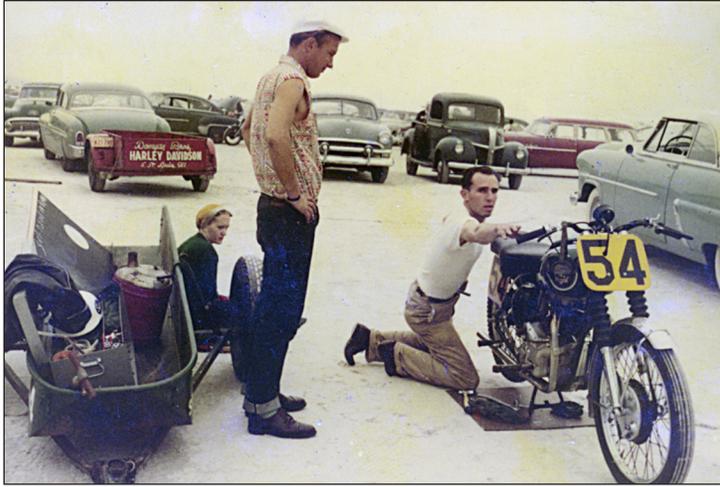
Harold had met Elmer a number of times while they were both competing in short track at places such as Galt, Dixon, Stockton, Belmont, and Hughes Stadium. Elmer, almost six years older than Harold, had started racing Class A (speedway) before the war and was now making a name for himself in Class C on an Indian Scout. He worked for Al Lauer and even had a sponsor, Casa Nello's, a Mexican bar and restaurant just blocks from Hughes Stadium. Elmer suggested that Harold talk to Lauer about getting a job and there might be another possibility as well. Al, who had just become the local BSA dealer, might be willing to sponsor Harold on a Beezer.

The timing was perfect. Al needed to put someone on a BSA who would give him some publicity and Harold, with his reputation preceding him, was just the person to provide it. So, in 1951 Harold went to work for Al and, for the first time, started riding BSAs. The association with BSA would continue for the rest of his life. The association with Al Lauer would last less than two years.

In 1952, Harold decided to go to Dodge City for the annual fifty mile national. As he still carried the yellow and black plate the plan was to ride the shorter race—the twenty-five mile event for amateurs.

For some reason the AMA and the race promoters decided that this year they would eliminate the twenty-five miler and let the amateurs run with the experts in the fifty mile, main event. Harold won the whole thing beating some of the biggest names in racing,

In the Spring of 1953 Harold was off to Daytona to ride a BSA in the 100 mile Amateur race held on the old beach course [experts rode the 200 mile feature]. He had been there twice before on both a Triumph and a Harley. His best finish was eighth while riding the Triumph.



The pit crew: Harold's wife, Geneva and friend George Visman watching as Harold gets ready for the 1953 Daytona 100. Thanks to George for the photo

"Team Harold" was a low budget affair at best, (the Al Lauer sponsorship did have its limits) consisting of Harold's wife, Geneva and his good friend, George Visman who tells the rest of the story:

*Harold and I knew there was no way he'd be able to carry enough gas to go the whole 100 miles. We'd sent back to New Jersey to order a larger tank from the east coast BSA distributor but it didn't arrive in time.*

*When we got to Daytona we went into town and bought a small plastic bottle, filled it with gas and taped it to the frame.*

*With only a few laps to go, Harold was leading the race but a lap or two later here he comes down the straightaway, the engine spitting and sputtering, fighting to keep control of the bike while trying to get the top off that bottle and pour gas into the tank. That slowed him down just a little too much and he finished in second place.*

While Harold was away at Daytona, other things had been going on in Sacramento. There were now five dealerships competing for business. Jack's Cycles had disappeared in 1951 leaving Hall-Burdette, the Norton dealer which opened in 1950; Joe Sarkees, Triumph, Ariel, and JAWA; Armando Magri, Harley-Davidson; Al Lauer, BSA, Indian, Velocette, and

Cushman; plus a new player in the game, Jim Reed who had just opened a shop selling Indian, Vincent, AJS and Matchless at 16th and R Streets. Of course, the Indians were the British made Royal Enfields, which weren't selling, and Vincent would be out of business by 1955 so, in reality he was (or would soon become) just an AJS and Matchless dealer.

As 1952 came to a close and 1953 began, trouble was brewing at Lauer's. We'll never know exactly what happened but by early '53 both Harold Ball and Elmer Graves were on Jim Reed's payroll.

When asked what had caused them to leave Lauer's there was a long pause and Harold, always the gentleman, simply said, "My mother always said, 'If you can't say something good, don't say anything.'" What ever the case, Jim Reed was enjoying the benefits of having, not one but two, well known racers and accomplished mechanics working in his shop.

Keep in mind that during the 50s, unlike today, most of the shops were selling motorcycles to young men interested in some form of competition. Mostly sportsman events, anything from field meets to enduros, scrambles to short track. And on any weekend there were plenty of events for a would-be racer to choose from. One very popular local event were the weekend races at Selby Stables, promoted by the Fort Sutter Motorcycle Club.

On the street there were no, leather encased, posers on baggers, and the Angles had yet to become a brand name. It was almost to the point where if you saw other motorcycles on the road you figured (after waving of course) they weren't going anywhere in particular, they were just looking for some dirt to play in. And no matter where you lived that dirt was probably no more than ten of fifteen minutes from home so it was important for a shop owner to have somebody around who could promote a motorcycle's sporting and racing potential with credibility.

While Reed may have been profiting from the deal, Harold and Elmer soon realized they weren't so they decided to open a shop of their own. Pooling what resources they had they bought an old gas station at the corner of 16th and W Streets and *The Motorcycle Sport Center* was born. Their original idea was to be strictly a repair shop. *Let Hall-Burdette, Magri, Sarkees, Lauer and Reed sell 'em and we'll fix 'em.*

Well, that idea didn't last long. They had only been open a few months before there were new BSAs on the showroom floor and an AUTHORIZED BSA DEALER sign on the wall.

How that happened, how they managed to take the BSA franchise away from Lauer remains a mystery.

All Harold would say, following his mother's advice about not saying anything bad was, "We couldn't have done it with Hap Alzina. We never could have done it alone."

Considering that Alzina had just signed Kenny Eggers to help promote the BSA name, it may have been he was looking for some additional racing names to help sell the brand in Northern California. What ever it was, this time Al Lauer, known for his wheeling and dealing, was beginning to see the wheels fall off his deals, leaving him in 1954, as a BMW, NSU, Vellolette, DOT, and Cushman dealer.



**Shorty Tompkins gave Harold a few tips on the fastest way to get around Belmont but this wasn't one of them.**

Even though he was now a shop owner Harold managed to keep racing. Besides Belmont and other local tracks he rode as many national events as his schedule would allow. At Bay Meadows, his favorite track because of its cushion surface, he finished 5th in 1954 and 6th in 1955. He was doing even better on road courses. In 1958 he finished second to Brad Andres at Riverside. At Willow Springs he was the fastest qualifier but finished second to Joe Leonard. He finally earned enough points to qualify as an expert and received his black and white plate but his racing days were winding down. Running a business was taking up a lot of his time as were family obligations—he found out about the birth of his second son while sitting on the starting line at the Santa Rosa Mile.

Harold thought of himself as more of an engine builder than a rider. Sometimes, you got the feeling that the only reason he raced was just to find out how his latest engine modification would work out. His son, Cliff said: *Dad used to tell me most mechanics just take things apart and put them back together again. Sometimes making the same mistakes over and over because they don't understand what each part really does and how they work together.*

*When he bragged at all it was about the year his Triumph out ran the factory Triumphs at Daytona or the time his 500 was faster than all the 40 inchers at Reno or being the fastest qualifier at Willow Springs.*

As shop owners, Harold and Elmer were doing quite well and they made the perfect team. As Harold was quite willing to admit, Elmer was the business man who watched the inventory and kept the books. Harold, on the other hand, with his outgoing, friendly personality, made the perfect salesman. Their shop became a gathering place for many sportsman riders. It didn't matter if they rode a BSA or not, Harold made them feel welcome. Elmer, on the other hand, made it pretty clear you'd be even more welcome if you bought something.

By the mid 60s they had moved the shop to a larger building at 16th and S Streets. The British motorcycle industry was starting to write its final chapter and it was obvious they had to find something to replace the impending loss of the BSA line.

They decided to become Yamaha dealers. While it was a business necessity it didn't sit well with Harold. "I never did like two strokes," he would say. And it might have been two strokes that made Harold decide it was finally time to retire.

By the early 70s the industry was awash in a sea of two strokes. Now his friends and former BSA racers and riders were on Bultacos and Husqvarnas, Kawasakis and Suzukis. By the mid 70s Harold had made his decision and sold his half of the business to Elmer. Elmer continued to run it with the help of his son, Scott but then, in 1978, sold it to what would become PCP Yamaha.

Harold's retirement didn't last very long. He bought a neighborhood-style bar, the Delta Club on J Street, which he ran with the help of his wife, Geneva and an African lion they called Boss. How he acquired a lion and how he brought the lion to bar each day is, well. . . another whole story.

If you've made it this far you may be wondering why four full pages have been devoted to someone most of our club members never knew.

It's quite simple: You may not have known Harold Ball, Orin Hall, John Burdette, Joe Sarkees, or Armando Magri, Al Lauer, or Jim Reed, but you have, in one way or another, experienced their legacy and what they left behind. They were the ones who helped many of us get our start. They supported the original Fort Sutter club. They were the ones who helped fellow club members and racers, Red Cadwell, and Rich Hardmeyer and others, no longer with us, go on to the professional ranks.

With the passing of Harold Ball they are all gone but they won't soon be forgotten. As long as there are old Triumphs, BSAs, Harleys and Indians, Nortons and Matchless' to work on and ride, they will be remembered. To all of them we say, *Thank You*. Thank you for the helping hand while creating wonderful memories of wonderful time.



Fort Sutter Chapter  
Antique Motorcycle Club of America  
C/O 4520 Francis Court  
Sacramento, CA 95822

## **The December 6th Meeting Will be an Important One!**

**Besides the election, with a record six candidates  
running for three open seats,  
we will be continuing the discussion revolving  
around the future of our national meet at Dixon.**

**PLEASE TRY TO ATTEND  
We Need Your Input!**

*Rich and Barbara Hardmeyer*  
Invite you to their biennial

*Christmas Open House*  
*and*  
*Potluck*

*Sunday, December 7, 2014*

–Rain or Shine–



**Festivities Begin at Noon**  
**Lunch Served at 2:00 p.m.**

*Bring Your Favorite*  
*Dish or Libation*

**Please R.S.V.P. (209) 748-5126**

11701 Clay Station Road, Herald, CA 95638

From Sacramento: South on 99 to Twin Cities Road.  
Then East on Twin Cities for 9.2 miles,  
Right (South) on Clay Station to the house on the hill.

