

MURRAY NEIBEL

Pioneer - Motorcycling - Inducted 2009



By Pete Kellond, Ted Havens, Aaron Stedmann, Mark McKnight, Dan Smith and Patty Neibel — 2009 Edited by Tom Johnston

1962 saw the arrival of Murray to the Westwood racetrack. Still a teenager, he had built his own motorcycle—because his dad had said, “You cannot buy a motorcycle.” Murray built a 4-cylinder water-cooled racer using a salvaged Mercury outboard engine, hung at a 45-degree angle in a Norton featherbed frame and running gear. Years ahead of the Honda 750 fours and while faced with many teething problems; it ran and went like you wouldn’t believe.

Murray then built, from bits and pieces, a 350 Manx Norton that he successfully campaigned from 1964 through 1967 and then later in the Vintage classes throughout the Pacific Northwest. His accomplishments racing his 350 Manx were many and he was frequently first overall.

Early in 1966, Murray met with Ray Deeley of Radco Sales, Distributor of Suzuki Motorcycles and became the first Canadian to be sponsored, successfully racing the Suzuki 250cc T20. Later that year, he was elected president of the



Westwood Motorcycle Racing Club (WMRC) and then re-elected in 1967. The only time, it is reported, that the club operated with a financial surplus.

In ‘67, Murray crashed, went to hospital and was put into a full body cast. It is rumored that some short time later he was smuggled out of the hospital to a party and then taken back and caught by the charge nurse, he is still in pain from her reprimand. It is also suggested that 6 weeks later, “Dr. Murray” removed the full body cast because he thought he was now healthy. His reason, “50% of all practicing doctors graduated at the bottom half of their class.”

In 1966, Murray purchased a building, on Commercial Drive and began Modern Motorcycling selling Suzuki and Norton motorcycles. Modern Motorcycling is the oldest continuously managed Suzuki dealer in Canada and the USA. Murray’s unique method of selling, working, repairing and servicing customers is “It’s my way or the highway.” There was nothing that Murray couldn’t or wouldn’t do to generate business. Manufacturing ape-hangers, extended forks, custom handlebars and custom frames for both tall and short vertically challenged were just a few of his projects. Never at a loss for words, smoking was not allowed and when one customer, surrounded by blue smoke, wanted a bike and, patting his pocket, stated he had \$500 cash. Murray respectfully suggested “It’s No Smoking” or “don’t let the doorknob hit you on the way out!”

In one instance they found that the Suzuki PT250 trail bike had virtually no torque, Murray’s idea came from his stint at Richards Engineering, he machined a heavier accessory flywheel and the bike performed beautifully. With the advent of the “Crotch Rockets” and the “I know everything rider” an unofficial record was started to see the shortest distance traveled from the shop to where it was dropped, the record stood at one block until one day a very inexperienced rider got only three feet. Still a record!

Murray’s life revolved around the store; he built an apartment up above the shop, only accessed from the small stairs in the back. . . Then, this lovely Italian girl showed up, Patty turned everything upside down, they were married March 1970, a great Italian wedding with ample food and wine and a honeymoon in Hawaii, then she moved into the apartment. The parties held were many and famous with a roof-top-patio, Hawaiian Tiki torches and on one occasion the Vancouver Fire Department arrived with sirens, apparently thinking that the roof was on fire. Next came the birth of Aaron in September ‘77 and Breanne in 1982

and Dad’s involvement in making scrapbooks, photo albums, horses and equestrian events, mini-motorcycles and everything else.

Frequent business travelling took Murray to many countries in the world, Japan, England, Australia, New Zealand, Europe and his road trips to the US with Ted and Mark were most memorable.

Restoration brings to mind some significant projects accomplished by Murray, remember this?

Old Vancouver Sun advertisement.

“Single white male looking for a relationship with an Old British bike — object; RESTORATION.”

This garnered many replies and the drinking of much tea with the little old ladies who had these old bikes in their basements. These are now restored and in Murray’s basement, especially the restorations of the AJS 7R, the ‘49 Vincent Rapide amongst others. He still loves his tea, now an acquired taste. Murray’s help with Dan Smith’s A series Vincent HRD, his help with the Vincent Land Speed record attempt, his support for racing has made Modern Motorcycling and Murray Neibel recognized throughout British Columbia and Canada. His classic machines have been displayed at Orlando, Atlanta and the Guggenheim in the US, Canada’s Calgary, Vancouver and has received many national and international awards. The people, who have worked for him over the past 40 plus years have been helped and trained to a level far beyond the norm, learning everything that Murray knew.

Thank you Murray!



At Westwood on the Norton (Langton-Adams)