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AHRMA
Silver
Jubilee:

Battle of the Legends





Celebrating 25 Years

SILVER JUBILEE



Looking Back... BMW Battle of the Legends

By Don Emde

In 1991 I had just started my own publishing company and was dedicating most of my time to the many details of getting a new business off the ground. And my motorcycle riding was limited mostly to trailbike riding in the California desert and an annual trip to Colorado.

But then I got a call one day from then-AHRMA Executive Director Jeff Smith which changed my life pretty noticeably. As a former BSA factory rider, I had that connection to his legendary racing career and we would also see each other from time to time when he worked for Can-Am. I remember to this day Jeff's first words of the phone call. It was: "Hi Don, I've got

an offer you can't refuse." Okay, he had my attention. He then went on to explain how he got BMW North America to agree to sponsor a series for former riders of my era and we would race at the AHRMA event at Daytona in March on stock BMW Boxers.

We then went back and forth on points like I hadn't ridden anything over about 80 miles per hour in 20 years, and he responded that it would really be more of an exhibition than a race. Then, he started telling me who else he was trying to get to ride – Gary Nixon, Dick Mann, David Aldana, Yvon Duhamel, Roger Reiman, Eddie Mulder and a few more. Wow, he really had me hooked. What a thought to be back on the racetrack with my old friends and former competitors.

Then it hit me that I wasn't sure the cost

of a trip to Bike Week was even in my budget? So I told him that and he said, "It's all taken care of....airline, hotel and other expenses. You'll even have a new set of leathers to wear." Well, as Jeff was good at doing, he had me sold and I agreed to ride.

Soon, people from BMW were in contact. The BMW Battle of the Legends series would be headed up by Richard Dampf from the New Jersey headquarters. He and his crew were getting a dozen or so 1992 BMW R100R Boxer twins ready for the series and they were going to come to California for a shakedown test at Willow Springs. So I was invited, along with Don Vesco, Aldana and a few others who would be in the new series, and we rode the bikes all day to break-in the motors. This was also a great opportunity for me to get my

head back into road racing and a feel for modern tires, corner speed and more.

So just as Jeff had explained it, there I was at Daytona in March where I had won the 200 in 1972. This time, though, I was on a BMW Boxer instead of my 350cc Yamaha "Giant Killer." To keep the speeds down, that first year we ran a short course that used only the east banking. Today's Superbike course actually uses a similar route that exits the infield on the backstraight.

I remember thinking as I prepared for that first race what my expectations should be? Sure, everyone wants to win, but was that realistic? Or even necessary? I had a family and that new business to run. So my "goal" was simple. I figured I'd be happy if I could just beat more riders than beat me. I got close, but didn't quite achieve that. I ended up sixth out of 10 in the two races that we ran. Ahead of me were Duhamel, Jay Springsteen, Nixon, Reiman and Reg Pridmore.

I don't recall the

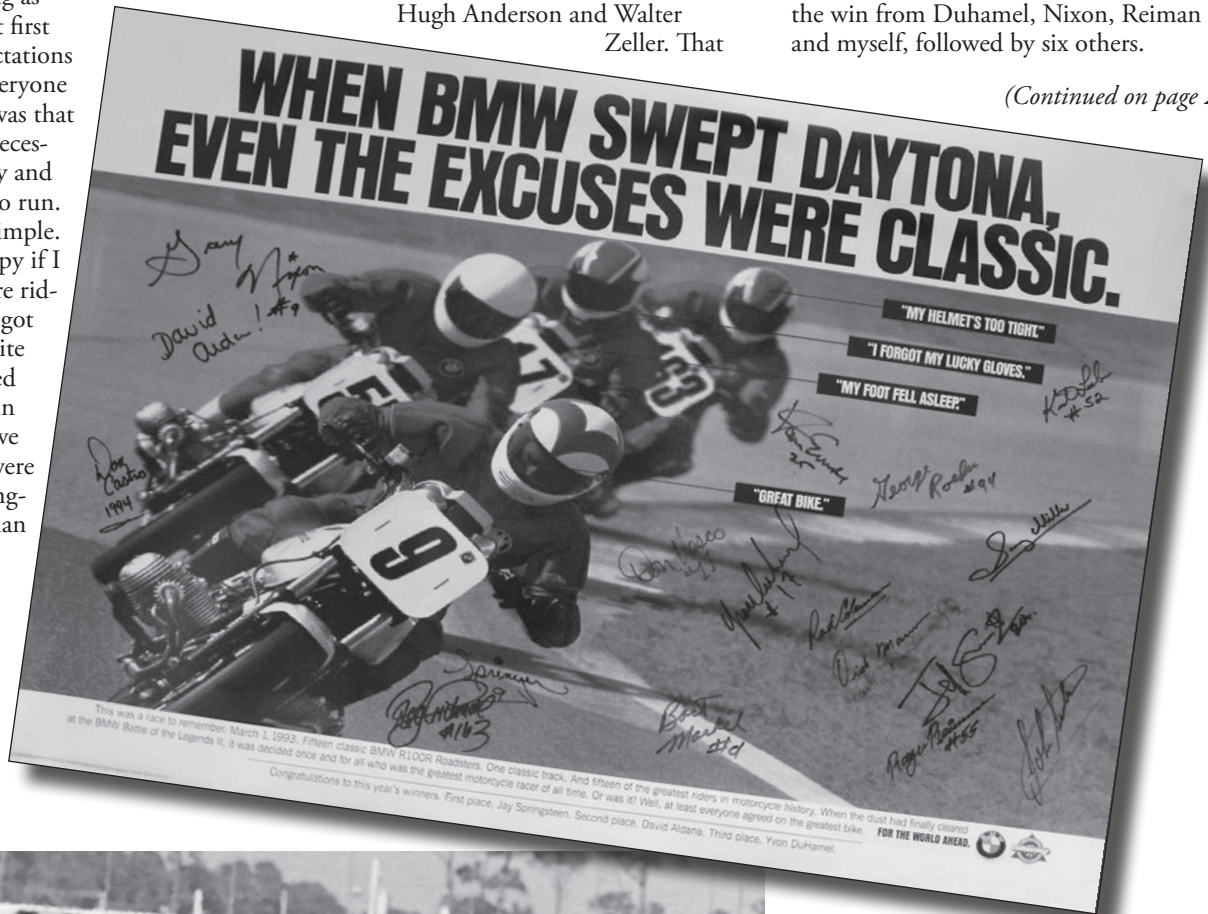
crowds being real huge that first year. I think the AHRMA vintage races were just starting to catch on for the beginning of Daytona Bike Week. But the first year's result gave AHRMA and BMW something they could promote for the coming year.

Before long, the plans were in place for 1993 at Daytona. We would now ride the R100Rs on the full regulation track, and the field was expanded from 10 riders to 15, including some notable riders of Grand Prix fame: Phil Read, Walter Villa, Hugh Anderson and Walter Zeller. That

year my goal was achieved, as I was able to finish seventh overall of the 15 riders in the two races. And, Springsteen turned the tables on Duhamel for the overall victory. For sure the interest in the series was now catching on. The AHRMA vintage races were expanded to two days, and the crowds were growing.

A second race was also announced for a mid-year event at Loudon, NH. Ultimately, it would be a one-time race there for the Legends series, with Aldana taking the win from Duhamel, Nixon, Reiman and myself, followed by six others.

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(Opposite page) 1995 Legends riders Don Vesco, Walt Fulton, Gary Nixon, Eddie Mulder, Roger Reiman, Yvon Duhamel, Jody Nicholas, Don Emde, Jay Springsteen, Don Castro and Dave Aldana, (Photo by Mark Mitchell)

(Above) 1993 BMW poster signed by the participating racers. The winner that year was Jay Springsteen.

(Left) Legends in the Daytona infield, 1994; the BMW-backed series at AHRMA's largest races was very popular with the spectators, and put some of the sport's biggest names back on the track. (Photo by etechphoto@usa.net)



Looking Back...

(Continued from page 7)

Springsteen had other commitments and did not ride.

One great thing about the BMW Battle of the Legends series was that it wasn't a stand-alone race, it was an integral part of the AHRMA vintage races. Smith and others from AHRMA had us involved in many ways other than just racing. For example, when they would have the sign-in and tech inspection for the AHRMA racers, a special Legends poster signing session would end the day. That helped draw fans who also got a chance to check out the large number of vintage and classic bikes. It was really fun, and frankly flattering, to see the huge lines of people who came to get our autographs. AHRMA also included us at all of their awards banquets, which really made us feel like a part of the AHRMA family.

By 1994, AHRMA vintage races and the BMW Battle of the Legends was on everyone's calendar, it seemed, for Daytona Bike Week. The crowds were really getting huge, and BMW was responding with great support.



They also had a new model motorcycle for us to ride that year, the new R1100RS sportbike. By now the rust had pretty much dusted off most of us who were regulars in the series, and the racing was beginning to get pretty competitive. The new bikes were capable of about 135mph, compared to about 115 on the Boxers.

At that time, Aldana, Duhamel and Springsteen were running the best of the Legends group. As they had been doing almost since the start of the series, the three traded the top positions, with Aldana taking his second-straight Legends win. That summer we went west for the first time and ran at Sears Point, near San Francisco. Aldana and former BMW-riding Superbike champ Pridmore swapped wins in the two races there, with Aldana extending his overall event-winning streak to three.

For 1995, another sign of the growing popularity of the Legends series was the

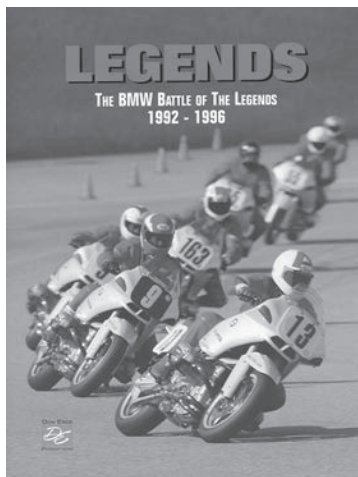


(Above) Nixon, Pridmore and Duhamel in 1996 (Photo by etechphoto@usa.net). (Below) The autograph sessions were a highlight; Mann, Aldana and Nixon in the foreground. (Photo by Mark Mitchell) (At right) BMW commissioned this limited-edition Legends-series book in 1997, by Don Emde.

expansion to three races during Daytona Bike Week. Former AMA Grand National Champion and 1967 Daytona 200 winner Nixon decided it was time to break up the dominance of our series by the Aldana/Duhamel/Springsteen trio. Nixon stepped up the pace and won two of the three races to score his first overall win, with Jay and Yvon following him. Our "summer stop" that year was at Mid-Ohio, when the AHRMA races were part of the AMA Vintage Motorcycle Days. I had my best result to date there, finally scoring a race win and a third-place overall finish behind Duhamel and Reiman.



The 1996 races at Daytona saw some of the closest racing yet in the BMW Battle of the Legends series. Everyone had now figured out how the motors responded, and



practice session for the 1997 events, it was all business as usual. With our identical BMW 1100s, the racing was always close and an unfortunate set of circumstances caused three of us to collide as we approached the infield dog-leg turn. Reiman was in the middle of it all and did not survive after being hit by one of the tumbling bikes.

We did ride on Monday that year in a ceremonial tribute lap to Roger. Then, in the old spirit that the show must go on, racing resumed on Tuesday. Despite my leg broken just above the ankle, I was able to participate in the races, but not in

a fast or spirited pace. That night, we attended the AHRMA banquet and it was an emotional ending to what had been such a fun and exciting series to be a part of.

I'll obviously always carry with me the sadness of losing my old friend Roger Reiman like we did, but I also have some great memories of my two race wins in the series, and even just a couple of good passes I made here and there that reminded me of my days of old. Jeff Smith used to say often that vintage racing makes you feel young by making you remember when you were just a teenager. And he was right. It did. And I'm glad I got that chance. ▲

NASCAR-style drafting became the norm around the banking at Daytona. The result was virtually the entire field stuck together and all three races had incredibly close finishes. Springsteen, Duhamel and 1972 Grand National Champion Mark Brelsford shared the three race wins, with Springer having the best average to take overall honors. Then it was back to Mid-Ohio in July where Aldana and I took the two race wins, but David's 2-1 finishes beat my 1-5 for the overall victory.

Despite my runner-up spot to my former BSA factory teammate, I was thoroughly enjoying myself with the two annual Legends weekends, trying to test myself to improve my speeds, while keeping things at a reasonably safe pace. I had spun out once in previous years when I hit some oil at Daytona, but otherwise was incident-free after five years of racing.

As many AHRMA members probably recall, the Legends series ended badly in 1997 with a practice crash that took the life of Roger Reiman. Fellow Legends Duhamel, Brelsford and I were also involved in the crash and I ended up with a broken leg. What many may not know or remember is that Reiman's death was not the reason the series ended.

Before we got to Daytona, AHRMA had announced that BMW decided it had achieved its promotional goals with the series and was moving on to other opportunities. Since I was in the publishing business, BMW contracted me to produce a book for Daytona Bike Week 1997, titled *Legends. The BMW Battle of the Legends 1992-1996*. The book was printed and distributed at the 1997 Bike Week, with all the stories and stats of the previous five years. They also brought to Daytona some specially-made trophies for all of the riders to officially close out the series after one last set of races.

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