

23rd Annual Americade

Lake George, NY

by Steve Larsen, photos by Perry Hebard

HOT, HUMID DAYS followed by late afternoon showers complicated riding choices for attendees at the 23rd annual Americade in Lake George, NY. This rally, which many consider the best-run motorcycle rally in the country, has grown from 2,000 attendees 20 years ago to a reported 60,000 bikers in 2005.

Americade can easily overwhelm a newbie with its scattered venues and overlapping activities. Boat rides, poker runs, seminars, demo rides, club and group meetings compete with time to browse two massive vendor exhibition areas or observe the vast diversity of bikes and people along Canada Street. Over 220 volunteers, several dozen paid staffers and event organizer Bill Dutcher's full-time crew of 11 keep things running



The motor/transmission combination on these bikes is the best of any H-D in recent memory although the chassis has a ways to go. Given how very different it feels from your typical Harley ride, we're not sure the faithful will give it a chance. Too bad, the bike has great promise.

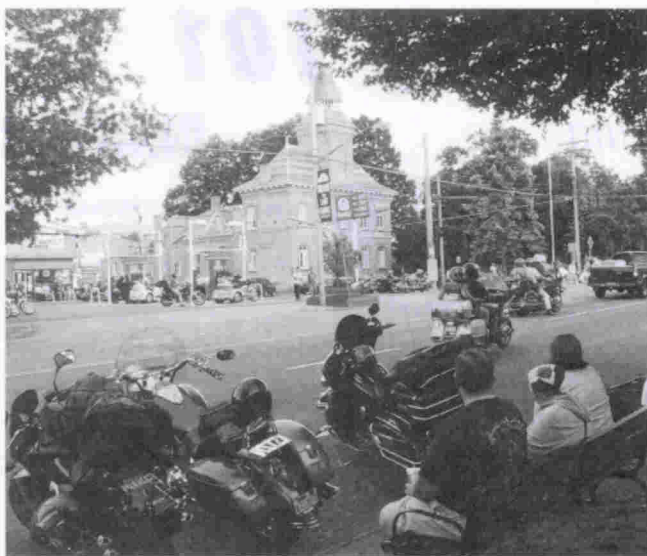
Normally, a quick walk through a vendor area is enough for us, but Americade's TourExpo and air-conditioned Forum were different. We found just about anything we could ever want for our bikes or bodies: On site pinstriping, chrome, tires, helmets, rain gear, jackets, decorative lights, trailers, sidecars, bags and cases, boots, gloves, socks, every accessory you can imagine and touring companies with offerings from all over the globe. We found we actually enjoyed spending time (and dollars) here and the vendors seemed to be pleased as well. Exhibitor Doug Marlow, president of Autumn Riders, said, "From a sales standpoint, this is the best rally we attend. Americade attendees don't just look, they buy."

smoothly. "While the best specimens of unpretentious humanity ride motorcycles, and I'm fortunate that many of them come to Americade" Dutcher said, "unfortunately, others show up, too, and they sometimes cause problems." Unlike Sturgis, Daytona or Laconia, most Americade attendees appear to be the mature/friendly types versus the angry/intimidating variety.

Eleven manufacturers offered demo rides: BMW, H-D, Honda, Kawasaki, Moto Guzzi, Suzuki, Triumph, Vespa, Victory, Yamaha, and even Hummer. The most popular manufacturers were maxed-out with waiting lists and long lines. Photographer Perry Hebard arrived at the BMW demo area at 6:45 a.m. one morning to be sure to get a chance to ride the new 1200RT and found more than 200 people already in line!

We took the opportunity to ride Harley's two V-rod models back-to-back, the regular VRSCA and the new Street Rod with more clearance, higher seat, forward sitting position and center (versus forward) pegs.

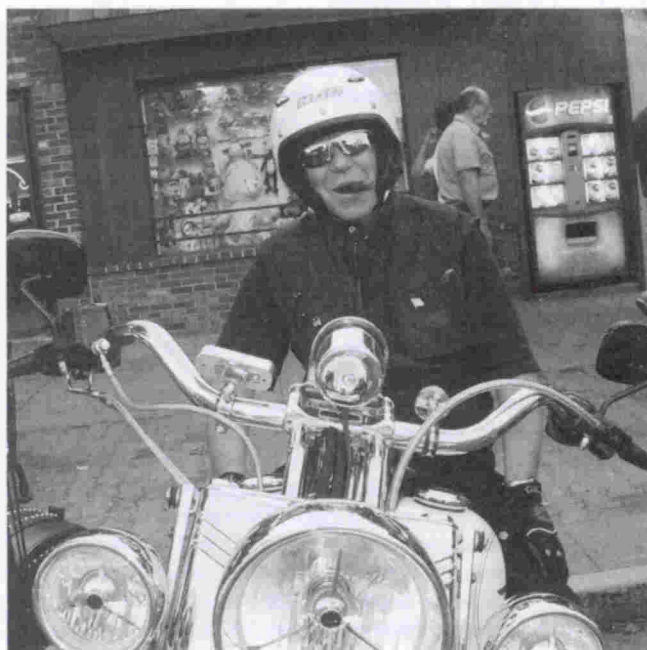




We were intrigued with Marlow's booth offering hundreds of different motorcycle models for highly detailed embroidery on a wide range of shirts. They even had the MCN logo. Their website offers the ability to build a custom shirt—www.yourbikeyourshirt.com.

Americade attracts so many riders it is easy to find others who share your bike, style of riding or special interest. The number and proximity of factory reps provide opportunities to hear the latest news, first hand, about your favorite motorcycle manufacturer. It is fun to talk to the manufacturers' employees. As non-PR folks, Americade is almost a paid vacation. Without public relations staff filtering their speech, more interesting stories and perspectives emerge.

People-watchers enjoy the evening crowds on Canada Street where things can get rowdy. Just after 9:30 p.m. on Saturday, we watched a sportbike rider begin a burnout at a red-light. He'd hardly begun when two plain clothes officers converged from opposite sides of the street and motioned him to the side. Before you knew it four police cars were on the scene. Five minutes later the offending biker was handcuffed and led away and his bike loaded onto a flatbed truck. The speed at which the incident was under control and over was remarkable. An officer remarked to us afterward, "These guys



come up here for the first time and think they're going to try something new. We've been doing this event for over twenty years; we pretty much know what shenanigans they'll try to pull and where. Occasionally we get surprised, but not often."

This year two motorcyclists (one attendee and one non-attendee) lost their lives, both apparently due to misjudgments on the part of automobile drivers. Bill Dutcher said, "Thankfully, deaths are unusual here. We've had less than eight over the past 23 years and the last one was in 1998. Considering that Americade is a riding-oriented convention with the total miles ridden so large, I guess the odds eventually catch up to you."

We asked Dutcher about an "Americade West," and he said it and other possibilities were under consideration. "We're working hard to develop an alternative venue to Lake George. We don't want to leave Lake George, but if we're forced into an untenable position by the state, we have to have another venue ready. Fortunately, there are a number of areas very supportive of us coming their way. ☛

GOING TO AMERICADE

Americade & TourExpo June 5-10, 2006 Lake George NY

E mail: info@tourexpo.com www.tourexpo.com

Why go? There's something for everyone with organized rides on pleasant, undemanding roads, seminars from leading motorcycle journalists and other pros, drill-team competitions, trials bike exhibitions, demo rides from a host of different motorcycle manufacturers, showing off your bike, trailer, sidecar, trike, special lighting, pinstriping or customizing at judged competitions. You can buy anything related to motorcycles and riding that you can imagine (and probably some you wouldn't imagine). Dining is more than adequate. There are dinner cruises on Lake George, and chances to win many door prizes, including at least one new Honda and a Harley. And of course, there are fireworks and a parade.

Tips:

Parking—It's a pain so get a hotel in town. Americade venues range from several blocks to several miles apart. Make your reservations along Canada Street, which runs through where most riders cruise and park and puts you within walking distance of most of the fun.

Weather—Impossible to predict so be safe; prepare for rain, heat, humidity and cold riding. It easily can be all of these in the same week.

Seminars—Worth it. Half the value is the speakers and the other half is meeting the people who attend the same seminar as you.

Guided Tours—Great if you are new and want to meet people. The area around Lake George is beautiful. Guided tours average 200 miles, start about 8:00 a.m. and cover scenic routes, often into Vermont. They are led by expert local tour guides and include lunch. Self-guided tours and routes are also available.

Demo Rides—Major fun, but get in line and signup early for a slot. By 9:00 a.m. most vendors have booked the day's riding slots. This is a great way to try a Moto Guzzi, Triumph Rocket III or even a Vespa if you've never been on one.

Vendor Booths—Everything you can possibly imagine for riding or wearing is here with a minimum of duplication. You'll see the newest gadgets, sometimes even before they're reviewed in MCN.

Canada Street—It's fun to hang out, ogle the variety of bikes and talk to those with unique bikes or quiz people on how well they like what they ride. Traffic and noise build on Canada Street through the week, reaching a peak on Saturday night.