

A TRIBUTE TO WAYNE KELLY

Wayne Kelly Remembered

Note: The following was written in memory of Wayne Kelly for the Newsletter. I altered the format a bit so it could be posted on the Internet BMW Riders list. 1,400 IBMWR subscribers saw the following. I've gotten a lot of notes back from that group acknowledging how much they enjoyed hearing about Wayne from this narrative. jd

A note about a local motorcycling figure from western Pennsylvania. Wayne Kelly, the person who brought BMW motorcycling to our area, passed away Wednesday morning, February 26. Wayne, in his early 80s, had suffered a severe stroke a good many months ago and had been incapacitated since. Services are being held today and tomorrow here in Pittsburgh. *(Originally written in February)*

Wayne was a colorful figure and a remarkable study in contrasts. A rider for decades, he did a stint as a factory test rider for Harley and is reputed to have done over a million miles on the Milwaukee bikes. Somewhere along the way in the '60s he became involved with BMWs becoming the first dealer in the area. He and a friend organized the Four Winds BMW Riders, our local club, 31 years ago. While the story may be simply local legend, rumor has it that the idea for a national organization of local BMW clubs grew from a discussion around an early Four Winds rally camp fire. The reason, so our version of the story goes, that Four Winds is MOA Charter Club #6 is that folks back then wanted to wait to see if the organization would amount to

WAYNE KELLY TRIBUTE

(Continued from page 1)

anything serious before joining up. True or not, it's part of our local folk lore.

Wayne left the BMW selling business in the early '70s but continued running a motorcycle service garage up till the day of his stroke. The first time I met Wayne was two years ago. Rick Povich, an IBMWR President from Johnstown, 90 miles east of here, had contacted Gary Smith, founder of the Shack Pack, about getting some help with a charging problem on his R90. Rick managed to ride his bike with a fully charged battery and disconnected headlight to our Wednesday meeting and we tore into the bike. A failed alternator rotor was the problem. By then it was 8:00 PM and we had no place to secure a replacement. Gary then suggested we call Wayne. "Who?" I asked.....and was told to just come along and enjoy.

Wayne was still at his shop some 12 miles away and

(Continued on page 3)

A TRIBUTE

(Continued from page 2)

when we got there I was stunned to see a rather disorganized collection of old Harley and BMW parts scattered in three dimensions over a large shop floor and up three of the walls. Wayne had the frame of a large man who'd not aged as gracefully as he might have hoped, walked with two canes, but was as animated as could be. We were barely in the door when he saw the rotor in Gary's hand and started scrounging through bin after bin of old stuff. None were to be found. Off we went to a warehouse down the road where he had some stored bikes. I'll never forget the sight of Wayne pushing us aside as he braced himself with his crutches till he'd lowered himself to the floor. He took the front cover off an R bike in the middle of a pile of old bikes and parts. Four grown men stood watching as he laid on the cold concrete at 9:30 at night pulling yet another bike apart. He finally got up and let one of us remove the alternator rotor after he'd removed the cover and seen for himself the condition of the alternator.

Off we went back to Rick's bike, installed the rotor, and the repair was complete. I still had a ton of questions about the man I'd just met for the first time. Turns out that only a few years previously Wayne had been riding a bike out west and had been in a wreck and suffered some injuries. Then, more recently, he'd been working on a bike along a sidewalk and someone had run over his legs. Crippled, in poor health generally, he kept doing the only thing he wanted to do. Fix motorcycles.

I later spent a day in his shop installing a front fork brace and a "rented" rear drive on my R90. I'd mail ordered a set of tires and the front one was too wide for the stock internal fender brace. Wayne had an

old external one and said to come on over and install it myself. I had also recently found a bad rear drive; splines worn and a seal destroyed. Wayne didn't have a used one for an R90 but did have a different ratio one from an R75 rear end which would fit. While working on my fork brace I asked if I could "rent" that drive from him till I found an in-kind replacement. "No problem" he replied. So a few hours and \$50 later I had a new fork brace and a working rear drive, and had used space in his shop for most of a Saturday. A few weeks later I found the correct rear drive unit and returned my "rented" one to Wayne.

Most of Wayne's time was spent in recent years straightening bent wheels for motorcycles, cars and trucks. He had rigged up some home made turn-tables and hydraulic presses and would straighten or repair most any cast rim that someone brought him. He had wheels shipped to him from all over the country based solely on word of mouth advertising about the work he did. The day I was in his shop he was hand assembling a spoked wheel for an old Sears motorcycle that a collector was restoring.

Wayne was different, gruff, and talked like a sailor on shore leave, but more than anything loved to tell stories. Those of us who would go to his shop to work on our bikes were always amazed at how little he charged for what he'd do, but then realized that he probably wanted someone around to talk to, a

(Continued on page 4)

WAYNE KELLY TRIBUTE

(Continued from page 3)

captive audience for his hundreds of tales from the "old days." My favorite was one about testing how Harleys would handle with a blown tire. The task was to get the bike going as fast as possible and then blow out the rear tire with some mechanical gizmo that had been rigged to the bike and try to get the bike stopped safely. Hard tail bike, no helmet, 1950s time frame, and the test was repeated several times daily for a while till all the data was collected. How accurate the stories were didn't matter. How he survived that and the many other adventures he'd lived, I'll never know. Some folks said he'd accumulated over a million miles, some folks claimed two million. What ever the number, clearly he'd ridden more and done more than a dozen "normal" riders. And, right up till his stroke, at an age when most of us would have been retired for a dozen years, he spent every day in his shop doing the only thing he ever wanted to do. Work on motorcycles.

"HE KEPT DOING THE ONLY THING HE WANTED TO DO. FIX MOTORCYCLES."

He did help found Four Winds 31 years ago, one of the oldest BMW clubs in the US. Whether the MOA was actually conceived around a Four Winds camp fire as some claim, merely talked about, or something else, I can't say for sure. But the hundreds of us Harley and BMW folks who bought bikes from or had bikes repaired by Wayne over many decades had a big swatch of color added to our lives for having known him.

Jeff Dunkle