

## Thank You GABMA

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank each of the members at the January 2005 meeting for their kindness in voting me permanent membership. I'm not sure what I did to deserve that, but it seemed to be my evening. Seconds before the nomination, Bob Cassidy had handed me \$20 and told me if I'd join, he pay for it. So it was a delight upon delight when the vote was taken minutes later to make me a lifetime GABMA member. With any common sense, I should have gone right away and bought a lottery ticket!

Maybe a little about my self and the early Club is due in the way of introduction. I'm an Atlanta native, raised in what is now called Virginia-Highlands. My brother got me interested in motorcycles about age 16. He'd take me to Honda Village. While he wasted his time looking at "the nicest people", I'd walk down a couple of doors to the Northside BSA-Suzuki shop. Although the manager assured me "You get more nookie on a Suzuki", that was not the attraction.

What captured my heart was way in the back. It was (and still is) the most beautiful motorcycle I had ever seen, a 1966 BSA 441 Victor with bright yellow aluminum tank. I would sit on that motorcycle and ask silly questions until the manager would finally chase me out. Then I'd grab handfuls of the free BSA literature to devour at home. I remember showing a Victor road test to my dad, an engineer. It showed the massive roller crank and even he was impressed. Every photo showed the rider's face in wide-eyed shock and the Victor's front wheel about 3 feet off the ground. It had power to spare. None of the Honda literature even showed the wheels moving. I knew anything British had to be the real stuff!

Then in June 1967 a friend got me a summer job at Atlanta M/C Sales in downtown Atlanta. My very first job was to replace a scratched rear fender on a 1964 TR6. I soon progressed to oil changes, flat tire repair (oh God, those rim locks), and finally by August was doing 500 mile inspections. In 3 successive summers at AMS I was hooked. I bought my first bike there, a dusty, rusty, 1957 6T Thunderbird for a whopping \$250.

About 1971 I joined the Triumph Owners Motor Cycle Club (TOMCC) of England, mainly to help find restoration parts for the Thunderbird. In the early days the Club was mostly a Friday night drinking society for motorcycle mechanic friends, but as other hard-core Brit bike owners joined, the group slowly grew. Some of these early (sober) members were Tony Clark, Shelia Ramsey, Randy Hazan, Howard Johnston, James Hiter, Steve Dillon and Bob Cassidy. About 1974, we realized we had enough membership to form a TOMCC regional chapter and we adopted the name "Hillbilly Section" in complete jest. As British bike values dropped, we also realized our own basements were starting to swell with other famous British marquees like Vincent, Velloccette, and Norton. That's when we made our first mistake and started allowing BSA riders like Beno Rodi to hang around!

As our numbers grew we started to work with other bike clubs and groups around Atlanta. Notable among these was Alex Nofsger and the Vincent Owners Club. The height of our collaboration being the "Hillbilly Hoedown" aka the 1976 Vincent National Rally held at Lake Lanier, a little north of Atlanta.

Not long after that, kids came along and one-by-one motorcycles were sold. The TOMCC “Hillbilly Section” dissolved and most of the members drifted over to join a new all-British club started by Fred Loggerquist, called GABMA. My last “official” act was at the first *British in the Blue Ridge* rally at TWO in Suches, GA. I was asked by Fred to judge the entrants. I don’t remember the bikes, but there was one bra-less cutie that had ridden her Triumph from Tennessee. I remember awarding her the “Best Stuffed T-shirt” trophy!

Since then my wife and I have lived in Suwanee, and raised 2 wonderful sons. I presently own a box of 850 Norton parts, but to this day have never owned a 1966 Victor!

RF Whatley