

Commentary: Riding Into History, The Rise and Decline

MotoEuro Garage has been an avid supporter of Riding Into History since its inception, providing services, donations, and volunteers. Unfortunately, there have been some dismaying changes. After a few months to reflect, we have decided we must address why we no longer support the event.

RIH was begun some twenty years ago by a small group of vintage motorcycle enthusiasts. The mission statement was to create a world class motorcycle concours d'elegance while also raising funds for worthy charities.

The event began small but within five years it had grown in size, quality and stature. It became a full weekend event with a vintage bike tour, a dinner, and topping the event, the show, as always at St. Augustine's beautiful World Golf Village. RIH became known for presenting many very nice custom awards, and for attracting well known Grand Marshals. From motorcycle media folks like Dave Despain and Dennis Gage to Hall of Famers such as Craig Vetter, and racers, including Yvon and Miguel Duhamel and Scott Parker.

Initially supporting the local Buddy Check 12 cancer awareness charity, RIH later transitioned to the Wounded Warrior Project, before beginning a lasting relationship with K9's For Warriors. Over the years RIH raised over a half million dollars for these worthy causes.

After the 2018 event, two disaffected members of the organizing committee paired with the corporate president (a largely ceremonial position) to alter the bylaws, and, in effect, execute a coup, resulting in the removal of the majority of the people who had worked the event for over a decade. Their stated reason was to place greater emphasis on charity and less on the event itself.

To accomplish their new goal, the show needed to be "dumbed down"; less classes, fewer and cheaper awards, and less invited guests. Unintended consequences were caused by the new group's lack of knowledge of vintage motorcycles, and not understanding the intricacies of running a major event. The result was, to be charitable (no pun intended), disappointing. Entries were down dramatically, motorcycles were misclassified and poorly positioned on the show field, the judging was spotty at best, and more than a few veteran entrants were seriously upset.

To be fair, the event was able to generate fifty thousand dollars for the K9's, several thousand more than the past years' average. Unfortunately, to our eyes at least, the cost was far greater. The 2019 event did serious harm to Riding Into History's well-earned reputation.

For 2020, the presenters vowed to correct their organizational issues. From all appearances that did not happen, as they continued to be hampered by "not knowing what they don't know" and the constraints of their financial planning.

For the next few years, RIH plodded along. Reduced interest and sponsorships limited the quality of the event and the cash available for charity donations. In 2023 World Golf Village declared bankruptcy. This provided an ideal reason to end the show. Instead, they further diminished the event's prestige by turning it into a parking lot show with room for only half the entries.

Clearly, Riding Into History will never again be a top tier event.

It is time for a mercy killing.

Epilogue: Finally, the 2024 parking lot debacle was bad enough that even the dimmest of bulbs realized they had killed the golden goose. It was a sad, sad end to what at one time was the finest event of its kind on the east coast, perhaps in the US.