

# 50 Years of the “Four Winds Rally”

For fifty years, BMW motorcyclists throughout the Midwest and eastern United States have kept the third weekend of August open for the Four Winds BMW motorcycle rally. Organized by a group of BMW enthusiasts from the western Pennsylvania region, formally known as the BMW Owners' Association of Pittsburgh and the Tri-State Region, the rally became an early destination for individuals and BMW clubs to find, meet, and renew acquaintances around a common interest; the BMW motorcycle. Onsite camping was encouraged to enhance the group experience and keep individual expenses low. The outdoor event encouraged the sharing of BMW stories and experiences as well as suggestions and modifications to make the riding experience more enjoyable.



In the late 1960s, BMW dealerships were scarce, finding other BMW owners was difficult and rallies as we know them today were quite rare. The only other comparable and nationally known rally was the White Mountain Tour put on by the Northeast BMW club. Remember, this was before the publication of BMW and touring oriented magazines. The Four Winds Rally proved to be a key opportunity to find and share such information. Attending the 1973 Rally with his wife, Frank Diederich, the MOA editor, described the Rally as a “Happening.”

The rally has remained a three day event from its earliest days, always starting on a Friday afternoon. Registration would begin in the late afternoon and be followed by a campfire and a general get together. Saturday mornings started with an assembly for picture taking where clubs were encouraged to bring club flags and pennants. Around 11:00AM various field and riding events would commence. Some years a tour or parade of up to 170 BMWs through the local countryside or small community would be arranged with local police helping. To enhance the enjoyment and pleasure of all in attendance, visiting clubs were invited to sponsor and organize additional field activities of their own making. Some of these events were truly uproarious fun for all but the most reticent attendees. Saturday evenings saw projectors and a large screen appear for all to share recent slides or home movies of their BMWs in use. By Sunday, weary participants were soon thinking about the ride home, so an



additional photo session and a few more events were scheduled to be completed by noon. During a final lunch, trophies were awarded for individual and group accomplishments. By 12:30 it was time to say goodbye until next year.

The earliest Rallies were held at Hidden Hollow Camp Grounds in Carrollton, Ohio. Each year, the organizers tried to improve on the participants' enjoyment and the attendees responded with increasing attendance. By the fourth year over 200 people were in attendance with 125 motorcycles on the field. In 1971, for the 5<sup>th</sup> annual get together, the organizers christened the event "The Four Winds Rally" to remind all BMW enthusiasts, "both near and far, that the invitation requesting the pleasure of their company for a weekend of sharing BMW stories and experiences" was "going out in all directions." Over the next several



communities. Frequently local news reporters would be invited and glowing reports were often published. Local merchants were frequently cited as seeing an uptick in business due to the rally, while saying, "These bikers are some of the nicest people who have ever stayed in (the area)." Local newspapers even ran large quarter-page advertisements from local merchants associations welcoming the BMW clubs to the area. Attendees were often described as age 30 years and up, "married, many with children who ... ride in sidecars...." The riders were reportedly coming from all walks of life. "Some are professionals . . . doctors, lawyers, journalists." One attendee's wife told a reporter, "We are as opposite of Hell's Angels as possible." Law enforcement agencies agreed saying they "...had absolutely no problems with the staunchly organized club."



years, attendance would continue to grow reaching over 360 motorcycles and nearly 600 people in 1975. Riders were coming from as far away as California, Nebraska, Wisconsin, Texas and Canada, with clubs from Detroit, Philadelphia, Akron, Toledo, Buffalo and the Finger Lakes regions of New York arriving in groups as large as 37 bikes. The venue would change over time to various sites in western Pennsylvania as the organizers tried to keep improving the rally experience.

The organizers learned early to develop good working relations with the local



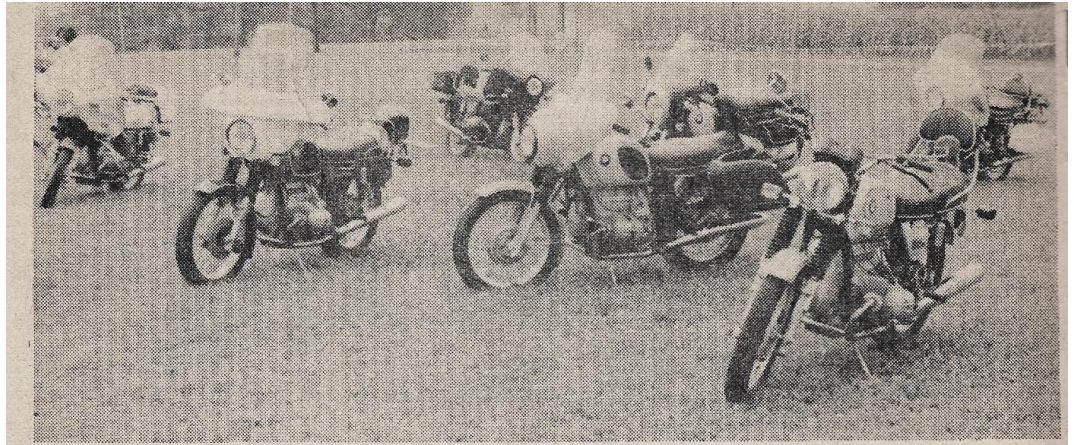


The organizers helped the local reporters find their "human interest" stories by pointing out several of our own celebrities. During the early 1970s, 75 year old Floyd "Pop" Dreyer from Indianapolis would attend the rally. Riding his 900cc BMW with a custom faring of his own design and manufacture, "Pop" would frequently get his picture and life

story in the local newspaper. If a rider would arrive with the family dog in a side car or on the gas tank, you could be sure a photo would appear in the next edition. At the 1972 Rally, an enterprising "shade tree engineer" riding

his custom built motorcycle got a reporter's attention. Powered by an engine that merged two BMW R69S, Bob Frantz claimed his motorcycle developed nearly 85 horsepower with its 1200cc spread over four cylinders.

The field events were often described in detail to the general public. There frequently was a particular fascination with the slow race. They seemed to love the idea of a race to finish last. One photographer couldn't pass up a pretty girl on the back of a BMW spearing a potato with a stick in another contest. Often the journalist's report would conclude with the reminder that the rally's objective was to promote goodwill between the motorcyclists and the public.



### ***Fonzie's Delight***

No, this isn't a scene from a "Happy Days" episode. This photo was shot Saturday afternoon at the Colwell Campgrounds in Knox, site of the 10th Annual Four

Winds Rally sponsored by the BMW Owner Associations of Pittsburgh. The objective of the rally is to promote goodwill between the motorcyclists and the public.





The rally also contributed, in its own small way, to the formation and development of today's BMW owners' organizations. Attendees of the earliest Four Winds Rallies often included several regional club presidents such as Chuck Smith and Vern Hansen. In the glow of evening campfires, they and others would frequently discuss the need for a national organization of BMW owners. These early discussions would contribute many of the seeds that grew into the idea of a MOA. In addition, Tom Sheridan, an active member of the BMW Owners Association of Pittsburgh and Tri-States Area was an early participant in the 1971 correspondence with MOA founder Bill Harmer and was named to the earliest "Board" of planners. Another Four Winds Rally organizer, Jean Rihl, was often called the spirit of the

Rally because of her efforts the make everyone feel so welcome. Initially the Pittsburgh club Secretary, Jean would later become the first Secretary of the new BMW Owners of America and editor of years 3 through 8 of the Anonymous Book. Jean was recognized for her contributions to the MOA in 1981 when she was presented the Distinguished Service Award. After the 1972 election of Vern Hansen as President of the national organization, he chose to use the Four Winds Rally as the site of his first Board of Director's meeting.

Over five decades, the Four Winds Rally has continued to offer the essence of rider comradery for BMW enthusiasts. Its significance and wide recognition to BMW riders around the country led the Pittsburgh Club to change its name to the Four Winds BMW Riders in 1992. The Rally has used more than 10 venues over its life. This year the Rally is celebrating its 15<sup>th</sup> year at the Redbank Valley Municipal Park. As said many times before, we welcome your company as Four Winds celebrates a milestone weekend in its legacy of sharing friends, food, fun and BMW oriented pleasures.



BMWMOA Officers and directors at Four Winds Rally, Carrollton, Ohio, Aug. 20, 1972. (l. to r.) John Moore, Treas., N. Cal.; Don Smith, Dir., Toledo; Jean Rihl, Sec., BMW Owners Assoc. (Pitts.); Frank Diederich, V.P., Chicago; Vern Hansen, Pres., Detroit; Chuck Smith, Dir., Western N. Y.



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