

The Disneyworld For Classic Motorcycle Racing The Annual Barber Vintage Festival

A Can't Miss Weekend For BMW Enthusiasts

By Kirsten Haas

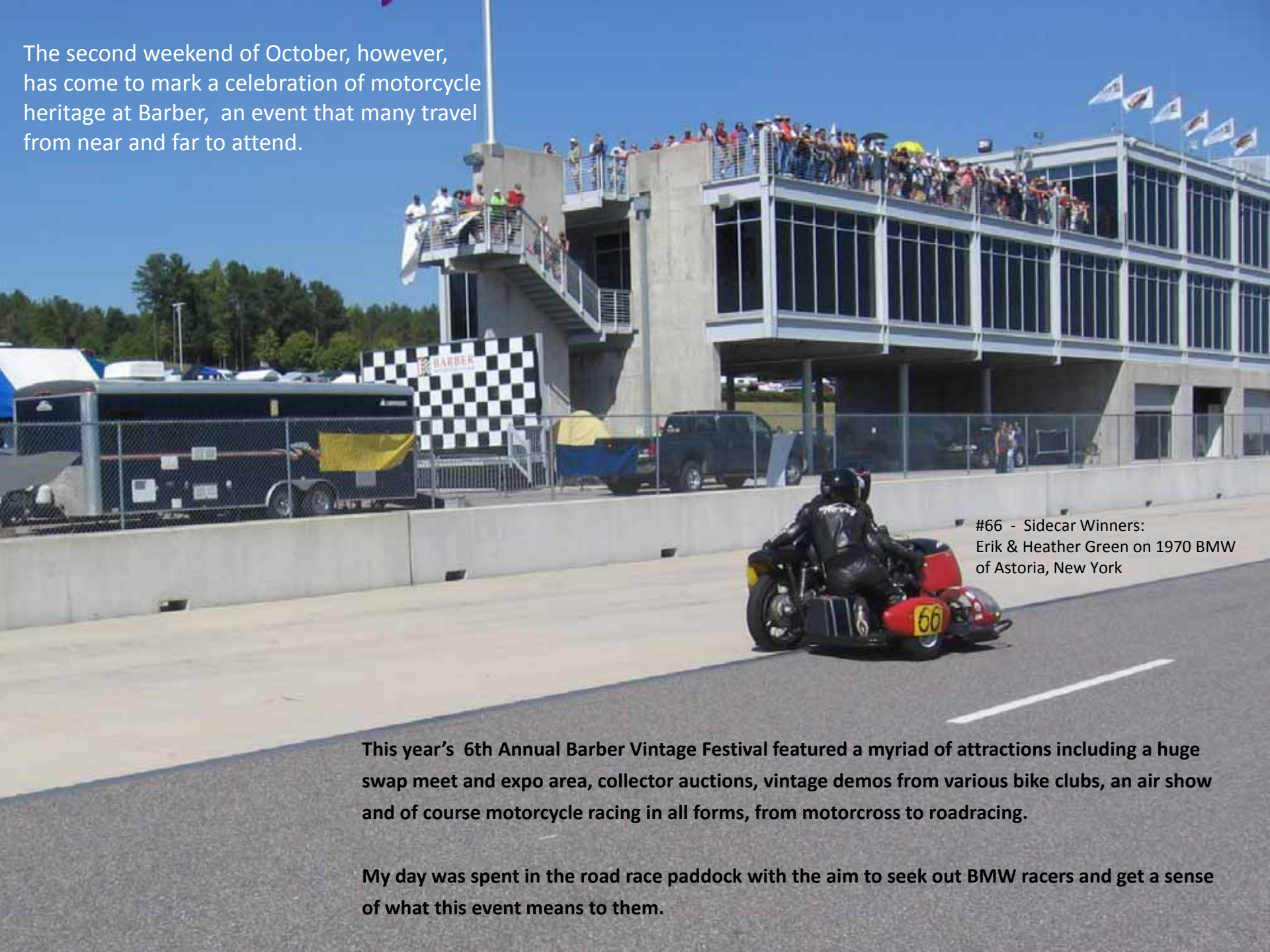


A trip to Barber Motorsports Park is always a special treat. Nestled between the Talladega National Forest and Birmingham, Alabama, one can't help but be stricken by the beautiful rolling landscape offering sun-drenched grassy slopes and tree-lined hillsides. The footpath connecting the famed Barber Vintage Motorsports Museum and shaded spectator areas for the back side of the zig-zagging 2.38 mile roadrace course is speckled with surprises that give one pause to realize they are in an exceptional place. Botanical imprinted walking stones and views of giant steel insects marching on the infield convey a Disney-like magical ambiance and engage the hearts of those who fall outside the spectrum of motorsports enthusiast.



John Landstrom In Action – BMW Sidecar Race 1

The second weekend of October, however, has come to mark a celebration of motorcycle heritage at Barber, an event that many travel from near and far to attend.



#66 - Sidecar Winners:
Erik & Heather Green on 1970 BMW
of Astoria, New York

This year's 6th Annual Barber Vintage Festival featured a myriad of attractions including a huge swap meet and expo area, collector auctions, vintage demos from various bike clubs, an air show and of course motorcycle racing in all forms, from motorcross to road racing.

My day was spent in the road race paddock with the aim to seek out BMW racers and get a sense of what this event means to them.

Rolf Janssen #757 – The Rookie

1972 R75/5

Hometown: Originally from Cologne, Germany, he resides in Atlanta, Georgia.





Rolf Janssen #757 – The Rookie

Race Background & Goal:

This was his second race ever. His first race was last year's AHRMA (American Historic Racing Motorcycle Association) season closer at the Barber Vintage Festival. He finished third in the Production Heavyweight class. This year he raced the Production Class and the Airhead Class. He hoped to place third or better this go around.

The Bike:

Janssen bought the bike from a Norton guy (David Brock) who rescued it from a chicken barn and simply didn't have the time to give it the love it needed. Janssen applied the necessary elbow grease to remove the years of neglect in the coop and restored it to be a means of transportation. He rode it the 150-mile stretch between home and Barber to attend previous vintage festivals, noting that it was probably one of the only bikes that have been used to get to the event and then be a race bike in subsequent years.

The Race Experience:

When Janssen made his 2009 race debut, he was amazed by the camaraderie in the race paddock. Many stepped to his side and helped him with parts and set-up and asked for nothing in return. In fact, they invited him to pit with them for this event; a testament to the strong community that comprises the AHRMA race paddock. When I came upon Janssen's pit, he was dishing out spaghetti to his crew as they joked about his cooking talents equaling his skills on the track.

Race Preparation:

Janssen took a 1-on-1 road racing course from Ed Bargy Racing to brush up on his riding skills and worked a lot with Todd Haney Racing to prepare his R75/5 ready for the track.

Results:

Production Class: Sat- 3rd Sun – 1st

Airhead Class: Sat- 4th (750cc) Sun -3rd (750cc)
6th in field 5th in field

Norbert Nickel #51 – The Veteran

1939 R51

Hometown: Originally from Germany,
he resides in Kansas City, Missouri.



Norbert Nickel #51 – The Veteran

Race Background & Goal:

Nickel started racing in Germany in 1948, and was a factory-supported flat track racer in the late 50s and 60s. He came to the US in 1956 to work as a mechanic for Volkswagen dealerships and stuck around because of ample opportunities to race. He went head to head against established pros like Dick Mann, Joe Leonard, Everett Brashear, Sammy Tanner and Gary Nixon. In fact he finished 7th against them on his 500cc BSA while they were on 750cc Harleys. In the early 90s, he started road racing AHRMA. He's been racing this particular BMW since 1999 and has won 11 championships in two classes. For this event, he was registered for three classes; Class C, Pre 1940 and the Airhead Class. His goal was to podium all three classes. A formidable competitor at the age of 77, Nickel is the oldest racer on the AHRMA circuit and has recently been profiled in Classic Motorcycle (September 2010 issue) www.ahrma.org/Z-2010/Forms/10_Nickel_Sept_CB.pdf

The Bike:

Nickel purchased the 1950 bike in Missouri and downgraded it to a 1939 with modifications to engine cylinders and cylinder heads, the only differentiators between the 1939 and 1950 models.

The Race Experience:

On a fun-scale rating of 1-10 (ten being ultimate fun and 1 being no fun) Nickel ranks the Barber Vintage weekend as a solid 10. He summarizes the event as the Disney of Vintage Racing. It is the event he anticipates the most because of the fantastic facilities and the amazing enthusiasts the event draws. His biggest rival is beating the Norton in Class C.

Race Preparation:

He performs all the work on his BMW to prepare it for races and keep it running. He occasionally takes the bike to Kansas City's Café Racer shop for dyno runs.

Results:

Class C: Sat- 2nd Went into Barber Round as Championship Title runner up

Pre 1940: Sat- 3rd

Airhead: 2010 CHAMPION; Sat- 1st for 500cc; Sun -1st for 500cc





Paul Bates #666 – For The Hell of It 1982 R65 LS

Hometown: Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Race Background & Goal:

Bates has been racing for 6 years. He started on a Yamaha and moved on to the R65 four years ago. He races select events on the East Coast with his buddy, Bob. In a competitive field of 12, his goal was to whoop up on buddy Bob and finish in the top half of the field. His race number was assigned to him. His only request was that it have a 6 in it. He doesn't mind the number and likes how it is an attention getter.

The Bike:

His R65 was a junkyard special pieced together with salvage parts with the help of Bob Bancroft out of Kinsman, Ohio. It is unique because it is the only bike of its kind running in the lightweight class.

The Race Experience:

What Bates enjoys most about the Barber Vintage Festival is the people and the camaraderie among the AHRMA race community. He ranks the event as a 9 on the fun scale. He sees vintage racing as a test of who can achieve the best results with the least output of cash.

Race Preparation:

Running two classes, Bates spent \$600 for entry and travel costs.

Results:

Lightweight Class:	Sat- DNF Mechanical
VSBK Mid Class:	Mechanical
Airhead Class:	Did not finish, crash

Ivan Messina #52 – Air Head Meister

1971 R75/5

Hometown: Asheville, North Carolina.





In the Pits of Ivan Messina #52

Race Background & Goal:

Messina has been racing since 1996 when he built his R75/5 race bike. He was crowned AFM Vintage Champion in 2000 and has raced in AHRMA and WERA with great success. He teamed with Frank Shockley and Brad Phillips on the R1200S in Moto-ST (2006). This year, he had two wins at VIR in the Sportsman 750 class. For this event, he was striving for another victory and a podium in the Airhead class. He coordinated and sponsored the Airhead class for this event, a class that has been running on and off since 2003 and had a field of 8 riders for the weekend's grid.

The Bike:

Ivan runs a BMW parts and repair shop, Motorrad Unlimited in Asheville. He keeps the bike, which he built out of salvage parts. He keeps the bike tuned with the help of Cogent Dynamics, also in Asheville, and Brad Phillips. The bike has a factory-close ratio transmission and a mostly stock motor, chassis work and frame bracing.

The Race Experience:

Messina ranks the event a 10 on the fun scale. He notes how more and more spectators come out to the event and how the event is drawing more competitors – this year 487 pre-entries. During our conversation, track announcers commended the crowd over Barber's PA system and informed listeners of their part in making this year the best attended festival in the event's 6-year history. Messina echoed the description of the Barber Vintage Weekend as the Disney of Vintage racing. He has no big rivalries and is passionate about the sport.

Race Preparation:

Messina spends around \$1,000 per race for entry fees, travel, parts and supplies.

Results:

Sportsman 750: Sat- 1rst ; Sun - 1rst
Air Head: Sat- 3rd 750cc; Sun – 2nd 750cc
4th in field 2nd in field

Bob Demetrius & Christina Divigard #600

1972 R75/5 Hand-built Sidecar

Hometown: North Hampton, Massachusetts (Demetrius)

Long Island City, New York (Divigard).



Christina Divigard (above) in the lounge chair and Bob Demetrius, seated by the trailer door, enjoy the comradely of the AHRMA race paddock.

Bob Demetrius & Christina Divigard #600

Race Background & Goal:

Demetrius has been racing this bike for more than a decade in both pilot and monkey roles. Divigard stepped in as the monkey 4 years ago and they have been racing most of the circuit since. They race 10-12 races a year comprising mostly AHRMA events as well as VRRR races in Canada and USRA Northeast Vintage races. Their aspirations for the Barber round included two podium finishes. Unfortunately, a Friday practice crash sent Divigard to the hospital with a concussion. They sat out Saturday's race to rest up for Sunday's race.

The Bike:

The bike was first owned by Fitz Sargent who raced it with Demetrius' father. A DCM chassis was added in the '80s. The bike was passed down to Demetrius' father and father piloted the bike with son serving as his monkey. When Dad called it quits, Demetrius took over racing the 750/5.

The Race Experience:

The pair unanimously rated the event as 11 out of 10. In their words, "Nothing matches the caliber of facilities offered by Barber Motorsports Park." They described the track as amazing. Rarely does one find a place that taxes horse power to the equal magnitude of corner speed. It tests your skills like no other.

What really makes the weekend exceptional is the camaraderie among the sidecar teams. This event draws the largest field and it is like a family reunion. Everyone hangs out and enjoys one another until it comes time to race. Once on the green flag flies, it is on. After the checkered flag, they all get together over a beverage and laugh over all the crazy things that happened during the race. With vintage racing, craziness is the norm because keeping the bike running for the duration of a race is a large part of the challenge and appeal of the sport.

Race Preparation:

Demetrius & Divigard are a self-financed team. Over the last five years, Mohawk Garage's Pete Tallabach (Becket, Massachusetts) has helped keep the bike competitive by handling geometry, suspension and exhaust modifications.

Results:

Did not race

John Landstrom & Andy Adler # x3

1953 BMW

Hometown: Norcross, Georgia (Landstrom)

Chicago, Illinois (Adler).

Race Background & Goal:

Landstrom, owner of Blue Moon Cycle BMW, is a passionate collector of rare classic motorcycles and is a great source of parts for vintage European bikes. He holds a particular affinity to sidecars and races them for fun a few times a year at vintage motorsport events.

The Bike:

The oldest and smallest bike racing AHRMA sidecars, the 1953 500cc "sitter" has proven to be very reliable but lacks the power of the 750cc competition. Last year, it rained during the first race and the pair actually hung with the pack for a few laps when max horsepower wasn't a factor. In Landstrom's words "I like flogging the old girl for all she has and Andy and I feel very comfortable on this rig".

Landstrom's race fleet included a 1959 BMW 500cc "kneeler". This rig was built in Germany around the time when sidecars were evolving from Sitters to Kneelers. It features custom made frame with motor offset 3 inches to the right, the wheels are 12 inchers and the fuel tank is mounted under the chair. Brakes are hydraulic drum type on all three wheels. The small wheels are great for traction but the gearing is too low for the long Barber straight-always. While not ideal for races, they ran this machine in practice because she sticks to the turns like glue.

The Race Experience:

The Barber Vintage weekend is always a great time to reconnect with friends that share his passion for vintage bikes. The event draws a strong field of 10+ sidecars and it is always fun to be part of a larger grid.

Race Preparation:

Blue Moon Cycle service techs help keep the bikes running and looking great.

Results:

Sat - 9th





Larry Campbell # 95

Sidecar: 750 BMW Engine
with custom frame

1970 BMW 75/5

Hometown: Vacaville, California

Bike Preparation:

Ozzie's BMW Vintage Racing (Chico, California)/DP Motorsport (Phoenix, Arizona)

Results:

Sidecar: Sat Race – Starting from pole, led early lead but ran wide for an off-track excursion in the first lap of the race. They managed to get back on the course and finished 7th.

Sunday Race – 7th

Airhead: Sat – 5th in 750cc; Sun – 5th in 750cc
7th in field 7th in field



Other BMW Results:

Airhead Overall Championship Standings

1. Norbert Nickel (198 points)
2. Will Harding (181 points)
3. Brad Phillips (177 points)
4. Ivan Messina (167 points)
5. Larry Campbell (159 points)

Airhead 1000cc SAT – Will Harding 1st; Pete Homan 2nd
750cc – Tim Joyce 1st, Brad Phillips 2nd
500cc – Norbert Nickel 1st

Airhead 1000cc SUN – Will Harding 1st; Pete Homan 2nd
750cc – Brad Phillips 1st, Stan Miller 4th
500cc – Norbert Nickel 1st

Bears SAT – Tim Joyce, BMW 1st; Glenn Campbell 70 BMW 3rd; Stan Miller, 73 BMW-7th
SUN – Glen Campbell, 70 BMW 2nd; Stan Miller, 73 BMW-5th

Vintage SBK Middle SAT – Pete Homan on 78 BMW 3rd –Sat; 3rd on SUN
SUN – Pete Homan on 78 BMW 3rd

Vintage SBK Heavyweight SAT – Will Harding, 74 BMW 5th –
SUN - Will Harding, 74 BMW 5th

Production Heavyweight SAT – Craig Chawla 1973 BMW 4th; Larry Plag, BMW 8th
SUN- Steve Little, 72 BMW R75/5 7th; Craig Chawla, 73 BMW 8th

Formula 750 SUN – Glenn Campbell, 70BMW 5th

Sidecars SAT – Erik Green 1971 BMW 1st; Andrew Fairbank, 1970 BMW 2nd; Robert Balla, 1971 BMW-4th, Brian Carroll, 1971 BMW-5th

SUN – Erik Green 1971 BMW 1st; Andrew Fairbank, 1970 BMW 2nd; Robert Balla, 1971 BMW-4th, Brian Carroll, 1971 BMW-6th

Vintage Racing Trial and Error

With vintage racing, craziness is the norm because keeping the bike running for the duration of a race is a large part of the challenge and appeal of the sport.

Waiting for the green flag for the race warm-up laps, pilots take advantage of the final opportunity to make adjustments.



For vintage racing, it is not uncommon for riders to abandon stalled bikes on the starting line.





Saturday sidecar race: Riders take off for warm-up lap. Sidecar #95 Monkey taunts the competition from the pole position as engines rev up for the green flag. 6 turns later, the #95 car had to play catch-up. 6 out of the field of 10 cars ran BMW engines.



#320 BMW 75/5
Stan Miller

#710 1973 BMW
Craig Chawla of Chicago

Strolling through the paddock, one couldn't help noticing BMW's strong presence.

In addition to race bikes, it was apparent that many BMW riders rode to enjoy the Festival.



Aside from BMW, here a few things that would catch the eye:

The electric Markel bike

World Superbike Champion, Doug Polen,
performing adjustments to go faster

Stylish leathers for her
and
Doug Young's skeleton leathers, with
heart, signed by motorcycle race legend,
Dave Aldana.





Saturday noon was marked by an impressive airshow of the Aeroshell Aerobatic Team . Four North American T-6 Texans bored through the skies over the Motorsports park infield including a demonstration of their fighting skill taking aim at Charlotte (the 34' steel spider sculpture on the infield).

Charlotte survived as evidenced in the top left corner of the snapshot of sidecar race grid taken an hour later.

