

A Fork In The "Road To Glory"

Editor's Note: With the recent trade show attention on the V-twin market, not to mention the on-again, off-again last rites for Excelsior-Henderson, it was an odd coincidence that we received the following "Dear John" letter. (Actually it was addressed to former publisher John Murphy.)

Thank you for your support of the former Excelsior-Henderson Motorcycle Manufacturing Company and the founders as we endeavored to create a proprietary American motorcycle company. Although we were hopeful of even more industry support, maybe our expectations were too strong. We were on a rather intense and focused mission.

It is exceedingly strenuous to start a proprietary, independent motorcycle manufacturing and distribution company. Most don't have the courage. What a tough business plan. Suffice it to say, there are significant barriers to entry, which is why in the past 75 years no independent start-up project in America even progressed as far as we did. And may never again. In 1998 we had the "Road To Glory" theme as we struggled to reach initial production. We made it, and built approximately 1,950 motorcycles. Since 1993 the critics had said it was impossible. Well, we did it. If it weren't for the tremendous excitement of the achievements, the tasks would have been insurmountable. Only those that were there will ever understand fully the individual and family sacrifices, and the moments of glory.

The year 1999 was a transition year for the company as we were moving from a development stage company into an operating company. We anticipated that we would be able to fund through this transition, as the plan required, but the public equity and debt markets were not supportive at that time. In retrospect, maybe it would have been a good investment.

The sign outside the factory states that E-H was founded as a "proud American motorcycle company." At our inaugural flag raising ceremony on Veterans Day 1997,



Hanlons in happier times — Dave, Jennie and Dan at the E-H launch in Sturgis.

we raised the American flag, the Prisoner Of War flag, and the flags of the state of Minnesota, the city of Belle Plaine, and Excelsior-Henderson. A direct quote from our ceremony that day: "These flags symbolize the soul of Excelsior-Henderson, from the veterans who have courageously served to ensure our freedom, to the pioneers who have persevered before us." Abraham Lincoln once said to the remaining soldiers as he surveyed a Civil War battlefield: "The world will little know nor long remember the battle that we fought here today, but for those of us who did, we will never forget." Maybe this says it all.

I hope you are as proud as I am of the accomplishments of Excelsior-Henderson. We were fighting the battle of our motorcycle lives, and through our own blood, sweat and tears, we thrust the company forward further than anyone else had ever done before — or has done since. We forever left our mark in the industry, and no one can ever take away our achievements. I hope you can reflect on the accomplishments and recognize that we all did as best as we could.

Until we meet again.

Sincerely,

Dan Hanlon
Co-Founder

Excelsior-Henderson Motorcycles