

EASY RIDER

Ed Bargy inspires motorcycle mania in a new generation



BY RANDY SOUTHERLAND



Ed Bargy turned a lifelong love of motorcycles into the nation's pre-eminent school for teaching the finer points of riding and racing.

Ed Bargy met his destiny on a street in England. It was the latter half of the swinging '60s, but for this American with the U.S. Air Force in Europe, the real action was on the roadways. His true love was motorcycles and his passion was for speed and competition.

Britain was big into fashion and rock 'n' roll, but it was also the place for young men to learn how to ride the big cycles. Many GIs caught the fever, but none more so than Ed.

"Competition was in my blood," he says today from his home in Southern Cherokee County, where he operates the Ed Bargy Racing School—the oldest, largest and, by most estimates, the best of its kind in America. The schools are held at racing venues around the country and offer both the novice and more experienced riders the opportunity to refine skills they can put into practice on some of the best tracks in the country.

Students in the school get a glimpse of his passion for riding and can tap into his vast reservoir of knowledge of the best and safest ways to ride motorcycles on the street and track. Many topnotch amateur racers—such as Conyers resident Mike Smith and Durham,



N.C., rider Audrey Ghia—first learned or improved their skills under his tutelage.

Ed was drawn to motorcycles and racing naturally. He always liked speed and competition, whether it was water skiing or racing boats, go-carts, bicycles or even metal slot cars. In England, motorcycle racing had a long and distinguished history; in fact, men had been racing through the streets since before World War II.

He joined a cycle club and soon found that he had another talent as well: Ed was very good at instructing others on what he had learned about the sport. In Europe, he took the mandatory riding course and soon found himself teaching other airmen how to ride. It was a critical turning point in his life.

In the early '70s, out of the military and back in the States, Bargy continued to pursue his passion for motorcycles. He joined a motorcycle gang—he won't say



Students at the Ed Bargy Racing School in Cherokee County receive expert and hands-on instruction in the right way to ride.

which one—but that didn't last long.

"I was riding the special sport bike with clip-ons [convention handlebars] and everything and they were all on choppers [custom bikes with extended handlebars a la the movie "Easy Rider"]," he remembers. "They said, 'You don't fit, dude.' 'OK, I'm out of here.'"

When he returned to his hometown of Rochester, N.Y., in the early '70s, one of the first things he did was

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organize a bike club—the Rochester Road Racers.

“When I came back from Europe, I was watching how the American [street cyclists] ride and it was atrocious,” he says. “They didn’t have a clue as to what they were doing.”

He made sure his club members knew the right riding techniques. As a result of his training, the club quickly began winning every event they entered on the amateur circuit.

An engineer by trade, Ed had always wanted to experiment and see how things worked so he could share that knowledge with others. In 1972, he organized a school dedicated to showing proper riding techniques to young riders, and developed the first standards for competitive motorcycle racing, which were eventually adopted by the sport’s governing associations

such as the Western Eastern Roadracing Association and Championship Cup Series. Today, riders who want to get a license to race on the circuit have to graduate from a school that qualifies them to compete on high-speed tracks.

Many of them come to Ed for their training largely because—through word-of-mouth—he is acclaimed as the guy who knows how it’s done and will teach it to you, plain and simple.

“I teach race-level techniques that actually work,” he says. “I bring it down to common-sense values. A lot of people try to explain it in the rocket-science realm and make this ‘mysticism’ out of it. It’s really pretty simple stuff.”

Simple, perhaps, but very few people know how to do it right. Ed says that one of the reasons he was drawn to teaching is to dispel the many myths associated with motor-



Instruction begins with a clear understanding of the principles and science behind safe riding.



The Bargy Racing School qualifies students for a racing license and the thrill of on-track competition.

cycles. His greatest goal is to develop students who ride safely.

"On the street your techniques can be extremely sloppy, and at street speeds you can survive for years," Ed observes. "The faster you go and the harder you push that bike, the more critical your techniques become."

In other words, a mistake can put you and your bike into a deadly face plant on concrete or against the fender of an auto.

Bargy takes his racing school to tracks across the Southeast and into Ohio and New York. These events, often held in conjunction with races, combines classroom lectures with on-the-track practice. One technique and concept builds on another, from throttle control to braking to bike aerodynamics, until the whole picture comes together. At the end, all the riders participate in a mock race to show off what they have learned.

The best will pass the course, qualified for either "Non-racing Event Track" or "Full Competition" status. The latter group can apply for a racing license from any of the regional or national organizations that sanction the sport.

Most of Ed's students—about 60 percent—aren't interested in racing. They just want to learn how to enhance their skills so they can better enjoy riding their bikes.

The rest are like Audrey Ghia, who became part of the Sirens' women's amateur motorcycle racing team after attending one of Bargy's schools.

"I was a typical street rider," she recalls.

Audrey's introduction to the course was on a cold, wet day that found even the best riders having a hard time keeping their bikes up. Nevertheless, she won Full Competition honors. A few months later, she was racing with the veterans. She was thrilled and totally hooked, even after finishing last. Now it's her main passion as she and her teammates travel from venue to venue.

"It becomes a part of your life," she admits.

Audrey, like many others, credits Bargy with instilling a love of the sport. More important, perhaps, he inspires them to ride safely on the streets and on the fast track of competition. 🍌

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