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Sportster History - Sub-01C

AMF Acquisition of the Harley Davidson Company

There was quite a bit of uproar over the AMF acquisition of the Harley Davidson Company by enthusiasts. Some have written that this was the beginning of the Dark Ages (reference to the Era of AMF (American Machine and Foundry) ownership of Harley Davidson from 1969-1981) where sales dropped as well as did the reputation of bikes with some claiming they weren't real Harley's anymore. However, the "Dark Ages" is a matter of opinion, not a fact.¹⁾

- Sales did NOT drop during the AMF era. Sportster sales actually soared during the AMF era. Sales fell to dismal lows in the decade before the AMF merger. AMF picked them up again, by a factor of about 10 in the end.²⁾
- AMF's reputation can't have been too bad if they were selling that many new bikes compared to the previous decade when HD's reputation was supposedly still unviolated.³⁾
- One interpretation of the facts indicates that AMF quite probably saved HD from extinction. They spent millions on machinery, plant and tooling that HD had never invested, and never would have. In fact, they brought HD manufacturing and marketing methods OUT of the "Dark Ages" that dated back to the 1920s and '30s and into the modern world. That included the special gear-cutting machines that made the first 5-speed transmission possible and most of the R&D that led to the Evo models.⁴⁾
- Yes there were quality control problems, mostly early in the AMF era, due in part to the rapid expansion in production numbers and also to labor relations problems related to the adopting of new more efficient work methods etc. (EG, 100 day strike in about 1972). But by the mid to late '70s most of these problems had been addressed and quality was comparatively good for the era, as the continuing rising sales figures testified.⁵⁾
- One good source for this particular stuff is "Harley Davidson: An Official History", published circa 1984 by the MoCo, author David Wright.⁶⁾

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Last update: **2018/04/17 23:05**

