

54-YEAR OLD RENEWS HIS LOVE OF DRAG RACING

TEAM RAW

FROM SPORTSTER TO DRAGSTER

by Roxs Laurendeau

Ever wonder how a rider becomes a racer, a bike becomes a dragster, and a group of mechanical helpers becomes a team? Well, Bill Bowman, a.k.a. "Billy Joe," can tell you how, since he just renewed his old passion for racing. You see, Bowman raced dragsters in the '60's and wanted to race a Harley again. When the 54-year-old had an opportunity recently to purchase a '93 Harley-Davidson Sportster, his dream to turn it into a drag bike began to become a reality.

Bowman is the chief maintenance engineer at the Philadelphia Marine Center in Philadelphia, PA. His wife Candy is the manager of MotorClothes at the Montgomery County Harley-Davidson Valley Forge dealership. An AMA Chartered Life Member for the past 37 years, Bowman's devotion to motorcycling has become a family affair over the years. The family garage was always a place where his sons and their neighborhood friends could hang out and get bikes repaired. Bowman's sons Billy, 32, and Joey, 26, and nephew Sean, 21, with childhood friends Minotti Russo and Mike Weizzer, still hang out in the garage and are now part of Team RAW.

Team RAW, which stands for "racing and winning," was organized by a group of friends and family with one thing in common:

their enjoyment of motorcycles and motor racing. Initially, the purpose of the team was to provide the members with an opportunity to increase their expertise, the informal atmosphere fostered an appreciation for drag racing and turned Team RAW into racers to be reckoned with.

Bowman has long admired fellow racers like George Roeder, who set a 1965 World Speed Record on his Harley-Davidson, and Joe Smith who was the fastest rider over a quarter mile in 1977 at 182 mph. E.J. Potter had the first Chevy V-8 powered bike in the early '70's and accomplished 180 mph in 8.8 seconds.

Bowman has had his share of racing over the years in scrambles, flat track, ice racing and drag racing. So much so, he's had to undergo a couple of knee operations through the years. He is also a street rider, riding a turbo-charged '98 Harley-Davidson Springer.

He and his wife Candy have traveled to Daytona and Sturgis every year for the past 15 years and are members of the Valley Forge H.O.G. chapter. He also often rides with his son Joe, who rides a '96 Custom Softail, and his son Billy, who has a 2000.

high on his list. This dream came closer to reality each day as Bill and his team built his Sportster dragster. The engine is 97 cubic inches, has S&S rods, Andrews cams and a Dyna Super Pro ignition. The '93 XL frame has been modified by Simons Performance Center in Penndel, Pennsylvania. Owner Andy Simon is an accomplished racer, having won the 1994 ECRA World Championship among a long list of awards and titles. Andy has put an extended swing arm, front-end drag forks and Pingel wheelie bars on the bike. Pig Skins Custom in Philadelphia has done the paint. Bowman is ready to race again.

Bowman's first race will take place March 1-2 at the AHDRA races in Bradenton, Florida. He will race in the 9.90 ET Super Gas class, shooting to run a quarter mile in 9.90 seconds or slower. He will also participate in bracket racing at his local track, hoping to be the fastest competitor to race a quarter mile.

As Bowman proves, racers really never stop racing. And with the help of his supportive family and friends, Bowman will be beating up the track once again...before the memories become faded pictures in a dusty covered album.