

# LIFE IN THE FAST LANE



**Bill Bowman**, a Mayfair resident and 1965 graduate of Father Judge High School, currently drives a Harley-based V twin motorcycle, which he has flown through a quarter-mile track in 8.8 seconds at 146 miles per hour.

Bill Bowman is pretty much your average guy. He's lived in Mayfair his entire life. He's worked as an maintenance engineer for the past two decades. He treasures quality time with his lovely wife, Candy, and his five children and six grandchildren. And on the weekends, the 61-year-old Bowman rides one of the fastest pro-modified Harley Davidson motorcycles in the nation.

So maybe he isn't your typical grandpa.

Bowman has been involved with motorcycle racing for 45 years. He purchased his first motorcycle at 16 — a Tiger Triumph Cub — and has been hooked ever since. These days, Bowman's need for speed is stronger than ever. He recently placed in the top 10 of the pro-modified All Harley Drag Racing Association (AHDRA) for the second consecutive year.

"I've raced on a motorcycle every which way there is to race. I've done it all," said Bowman, who ranked seventh in the country this year, fifth on the East Coast. "I've raced every way you can." Bowman, a 1965 graduate of Father Judge High School, competes within AHDRA, which originated in the late 1970s and has grown to become one of the top nationally recognized organizations in motor sports today. It is composed of 16 classes, separated by skill level and speed, with more than 400 racer participants. "Drag race is what I like doing the most," said Bowman. "That's a quarter mile, straight ahead. I'm a little too old for the oval tracks. But I can still go straight ahead . . . and exceptionally fast."

Bowman now drives a Harley-based V twin motorcycle, which he has flown through a quarter-mile track in 8.8 seconds at 146 miles per hour. Needless to say, you won't find him cruising the streets of Mayfair on this bad boy.

"It's not street legal. It cannot be used for anything else except racing," said Bowman's wife, Candy. "You couldn't go driving five miles. It just wouldn't go. It's specifically made to go a quarter mile at a time."

## SAFETY COMES FIRST



Bill Bowman and his wife Candy — who also is his crew chief — regularly travel the nation to compete in tournaments through the All Harley Drag Racing Association.

Because of the swift speeds and immense danger involved with drag racing, safety is always an issue. Before the various bikes are even fired up, a complete tech inspection must be completed, as well as a review of all safety equipment, such as boots, gloves, helmets and body protectors.

"It's all inspected before we're even allowed to walk onto the track," said Bowman. "But when you figure you're going down a quarter-mile stretch of asphalt in less than eight seconds at 150 miles per hour, you're going to be a little apprehensive." There also is a complete physical required for all riders before they are awarded an AHDRA license, enabling them to race on various AHDRA tracks. "There's a million things to do before you get there, and there's a million more at the starting line," he said. When competing on a professional level, as Bowman has for four decades, all bikes are custom-made specifically for a particular race. "They're not motorcycles that you just buy. It's one of a kind," he said. "These are self-made. We build it — wheels, motors — everything on it is special-made. It's not something you can just go buy and race. I'm a privateer, which basically means it's done on my own." Bowman has some helping hands at home — specifically his wife of 20 years, who also happens to be his crew chief. "It's fun. It's intense. It's a lot of work and preparation and then it's over. It all goes real quick," explained Candy. "I have to be honest with you. I do some of the stuff, but he does a lot of it himself. I'm not a mechanic." When Candy's not supporting her husband's life in the fast lane, she works as a manager for Brian's Harley Davidson shop in Bucks County.

"I was never on a motorcycle until I met him," said Candy, an Abraham Lincoln High School graduate who worked in dentistry for 24 years before veering to a career in motor sports. "When we first started dating, my mother chased him away because he had a motorcycle. Now, I love it. You'd have to get on a bike and ride around to understand. The wind blowing in your face and . . . it's just different."

### **IT'S NOT A CHEAP HOBBY**

The adrenaline-rush career of a professional motorcycle drag racer does come at a hefty price. All bikes in the various races are custom-made, which can rack up tens — and even hundreds — of thousands of dollars. "Every time you raise yourself a class, you have to build a new bike or greatly modify the bike you have," explained Bowman, referring to the various levels of expertise within AHDRA. "It would cost you \$100,000 to build a top fuel bike and probably \$100,000 to \$150,000 a year just to race it." His wallet has been hit even harder once you factor in traveling and living costs for the various tournaments throughout the years. This year, Bowman has ventured to Florida, Arizona, Texas,

Maryland, Virginia, Tennessee and Indianapolis, among many other destinations to compete against some of the toughest riders in the nation. "I love traveling. We spend a lot of time on the road," said Bowman. "I save all my vacation time and use my personal days from work and try to turn them into long weekends, so I can travel and compete. "This is what I love to do," he continued. In addition to his speedy success on the tracks, Bowman has worked as a maintenance engineer for Brandywine Realty Trust for 20 years. His job responsibilities include taking care of the structure of several piers owned by the realty firm along the downtown Philadelphia waterfront. For Bill, it's just a day job. His true passion is on the road. "I think it's the motorcycle motif," he said with a smile. "I love the freedom of it. It's an entirely different lifestyle." •• Sports editor Melissa Yerkov can be reached at 215-354-3035 or myerkov@phillynews.com