



By ROBERT PIERCE

The first internal combustion petroleum fueled motorcycle was the Daimler Reitwagen, designed and built by German investors in 1885.

Until World War I, the largest manufacturer of motorcycles produced more than 20,000 units per year. By 1920, Harley-Davidson became the leading maker, with bikes being sold to dealers in 67 countries.

Later years saw an increase in the popularity, and motorcycles have historically been associated with subcultures and loose knit social groups such as cafe racers of 1950s Britain and the Mods and Rockers of the 1960s.

More recently, even amidst downturns in the economy such as one in 2008, when the motorcycle sales grew by 6.5 percent, the market continued to grow. Between 2000 and 2005, sales in the U.S. alone jumped 51 percent.



A Liberal family has been supplying motorcycles to the area since 1960. Cecil "Bill" Milhon began the business that is now Milhon's Honda-Yamaha-Kawasaki in 1960 with Triumphs, BSA and Norton motorcycles, and he would later add the brands which his business's name now has.

"It's basically been a family-owned business from day one," said Bill's son, Cecil, who is the current owner. "I'm the second generation that's running it."

The store has had three locations in the 50 years it has been in business and has been at its current location at 811 S. Kansas since the late 1960s and early 1970s.

"The grandsons have worked in the business," Cecil said. "My sister's worked in it. My niece has worked in it and of course, Mom."

In the early 1970s, Bill bought the Hirn Ranch north of Liberal.

“He went to running cows, some farming, and I took over the business and ran it ever since then,” Cecil said. “The big plan was to make 50 years, which we did in August.”

Bill passed away in August of 2008, and Cecil said he and his father worked together at the store as well as the ranch. Now, the younger Milhon wants to concentrate on the ranch.

“It’s nice and peaceful and quiet out there to take care of my cows,” he said. “I’m trying to retire. I’ve thought about closing, but we’re not. We’re just going to keep going, and hopefully, find a buyer and sell the business. The business is for sale.”

While Cecil said recent rumors of the Milhon store closing are not true, he would like to sell the business.

“I’ve done it long enough,” he said. “It’s all I’ve ever done my entire life. I never thought I would like taking care of cows. Dad would have a smile on his face from ear to ear if he knew that’s what I wanted to do and that’s where I was headed.”

Cecil said Bill’s love of motorcycles came from being a truck driver.

“Of course, being a truck driver, you’re gone all the time,” he said. “He never did get to see his kids – me and my sister – so he decided one day that was enough of that. He wanted to spend time with his kids, so he said, ‘OK, let’s move to Liberal and open up a motorcycle shop.’ So they came down here in 1960.”

Milhon’s first location was in two buildings near the current location of Rick’s Muffler and Rick’s Auto Sales at the intersection of Pancake Blvd. and Kansas Avenue.

“We lived in the back of it when we started our business,” he said. “Dad ran the motorcycle shop, and Mom worked at the hospital in the early years.”

After Bill started the business, his wife, Mary, quit her job at the hospital and came to work at the store.

“Over the years, we’ve been a Beaver Express agent,” Cecil said. “We’ve been in the appliance business. We’ve been in the bicycle business. This all took place in the ’60s.”

The older and younger Milhons share a love of motorcycles.

“It’s one of the few businesses where we were doing our hobby and making a living at it,” Cecil said. “With most people, motorcycles and four-wheelers are their hobby. We were lucky enough to do our hobby and make a living at it.”

Just as everything has, Cecil said the motorcycle business has changed tremendously over the years.

“The computer age has come along,” he said. “Newer electronics, fuel injections. Today’s workings of the business as well as the mechanic side of the business is totally different than it was 20 years ago.”

Cecil said with the computer age, he has had to adapt to the changes in technology, but he said overall, business has been good to the family.

“We cannot complain,” he said. “It’s treated us right, and we’ve had a lot of fun at it.”

When the time arrives, Cecil said he is ready to leave the business.

“My goal was to retire at 52,” he said. “I’m 52, so I’m ready for my mid-life crisis. I want to go take care of my cows. I enjoy taking care of my cows and watching the baby cows run around. That’s my retirement.”

Cecil recalled a visit his dad made to a banker not long after Milhon’s was started.

“The banker said, ‘Well, you’ve sold everybody a motorcycle that wants one. Now, what are you going to do?’” he said. “We’re still selling them 50 years later. There’s a lot of good memories of going trail bike riding, going to the mountains, going to the races.”

In addition to selling motorcycles, Cecil enjoys riding them, and he did much of that in Lake City, Colo. The Milhon’s owner said there is one moment from riding he will never forget.

“Me and my sister were riding Trail 70s, and she fell down,” she said. “She crawled underneath the motorcycle to keep from scratching up the motorcycle. She thought Dad would be madder than hell if she scratched the bike up.”

Cecil said rather than scratching the motorcycle, his sister was skinned from head to toe following the incident.

“That was funny hours later once she got over crying,” he said. “We did a lot of trail riding in the mountains when we were small.”

Another moment Cecil remembered was at Lake City riding a trail made of what seemed to be a solid rock formation.

“It looked like if you moved one rock, the whole mountain was going to come down,” he said. “The Trail 90 ran out of power, and I had to get off. I didn’t want to get off because I thought the mountain was going to come down if you move the rocks.”

Cecil said he has ridden bikes throughout Colorado and New Mexico, and he still does now.

“When my kids were small, I’d haul them around on my Trail 70 and my Trail 90,” he said. “I met my wife. We got married, and I took her trail bike riding.”

This was in Red River, N.M., according to Cecil.

“I put her on a Trail 70 and took her up the roughest, toughest trail there was out there,” he said. “She said if she could have divorced me, she would. She learned how to ride a motorcycle in about two hours.”

In addition to motorcycles, Cecil said his wife, Linda, also enjoys riding four wheelers and side by sides.

“We’ve done a lot of that as a family,” he said. “We did a lot of jet skiing as a family. We did a lot of camping together.”

Cecil spoke of some of the very first customers the store had who were from Hugoton.

“They’re still buying stuff from us today,” he said. “It’s kind of neat. When Dad was running the place, he sold stuff to Larry Taylor for his boys, and now, I’m selling stuff to Larry’s boys for their boys. They all come in together.”

Cecil said Milhon’s has sold units all over the country.

“We’ve made a lot of good friends over the years,” he said. “It’s been very good to us.”

Cecil said the motorcycle business continues to grow.

“Every year, it grows a little bit,” he said. “It’s kind of like the oilfield business. It’s up and down depending on what the weather’s doing, the economy. In most cases, it’s always kind of in the up mode. In the early years, whenever there was just motorcycles, in the winter time, it was kind of slow. In the later years, ATVs came along, and the four-wheelers took up the slack in the winter time and opened up a whole new group of customers to the farmers for ATV utility use.”

Cecil said his plan now is to sell the business.

“I’m wanting to retire from the motorcycle business,” he said. “We’re working on the farm house, redoing it. We’re going to sell our house in town and move to the country. Take care of my cows and just kind of kick back and go motorcycle riding and four-wheeler riding and enjoy life. That is the game plan.”