

Simple or complex, putting on a motorcycle event is all about planning, organizing and staying on top of the details as the event unfolds. It is challenging, but can also be a most rewarding experience.



# YOU, THE Event Organizer

Successful planning, coordination and hard work can help ensure that attendees have the time of their life.

> By **Alisa Clickenger**

**W**hat makes an awesome motorcycle event? Answers vary as much as our bikes, riding techniques, goals and experiences do. For some, a great event is all

about campfires and camaraderie. For others, it may be a series of challenging rides, motorcycle travel presentations, live music or all the above. For me, it's all about connection and community.

Motorcycle events can bring out the best of us as riders. Events allow us to meet and bond with like-minded souls, go on exhilarating rides together and discover new ways to experience motorcycling. For beginners and veteran riders alike, motorcycle events can be a cherished escape into a two-wheeled world where anyone can feel "at home."

Some events are stationary, and some move about the country. Some are based upon modern themes, while others are inspired by history. The 2016 Sisters' Centennial ride commemorated the 100th anniversary of Adeline and Augusta Van Buren's historic cross-country ride. We led nearly 100 women on motorcycles across the U.S. The event was a success, so we're going to do it all again in 2020. Here is how you can start your own motorcycle event, too.

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## DO YOUR RESEARCH

Before you start sending invitations, do a little research. You may have a unique motorcycle event idea, but double-check, nonetheless. What events are available in your area? What need are they filling? How is your event different? These are essential questions to answer before you begin.

If there are already similar events, perhaps you can add to them. Reach out to the organizers and offer a new angle. For example, to bring street riders to a local dirt bike rally, you might volunteer to lead road rides during the event. If an event offers camping, riding and entertainment, but no travel presentations, you can organize the missing piece.

Volunteering at other events is a great way to gain experience. Jen Kulick, organizer of the Oxford Ranch Rendezvous, says it's crucial to figure out why events work or fail before going all in on your idea.

"Research other events," she said. "Walk the walk. Go behind the scenes and experience the events that inspire you from different angles, as a guest, a vendor and an employee. You don't have to be a VIP or part of the inner circle to see the structure behind what makes an event a success or failure."

## JUST DO IT!

After researching your idea, start putting a plan together. It may seem overwhelming, but don't give up. Break everything down into smaller steps. When I was organizing the 2016 Centennial ride, I hadn't set out to do anything huge. I simply wanted to lead a group of women on a cross-country ride. As each additional idea and opportunity presented itself, I said, 'yes.' Everything grew one idea at a time.

A motorcycle journey from Prudhoe Bay, Alaska, to Ushuaia, Argentina, may look daunting at first glance, but if you plan it day-by-day, it suddenly seems doable. On Day One, ride 400 miles, sleep, then do it again, and again. Before you know it, you've accomplished something truly extraordinary, which at one time seemed too big to grasp.

Event organizing is similar. Porsche

Taylor, organizer of the Beautiful Bikers Conference, now in its eighth year, said it best: "Don't overthink it. Create a plan. Put it on paper, and take it one step at a time."

## MENTORS MAKE THINGS EASIER

Whether you have event planning experience or not, calling on friends, fans, and mentors for help is always a great idea. Friends and fans will help and support you, and encourage you when you're overwhelmed. Mentors will guide you and help crystallize your message, and will also be the voice of reason when the world seems to descend into chaos.

"I ask mentors, research online, and seek friendly advice from industry insiders," Taylor said.

Kulick says most of her help has come from friendly advice.

"I prefer to call these the Messengers for Success who are guiding me on the right path," Kulick said. "They are usually part friend, part mentor."

## MAKE THE MONEY WORK

Budgeting might be the hardest part of creating an event from scratch. Finding sponsors for a brand-new event can be a headache, but that doesn't mean it's impossible. A clear message and a short, but intriguing, idea of why your event matters, how is it unique, and what crowd it will attract, will assist in finding sponsors who have similar values. Tailor your sponsor pitches to add value for those who will support you financially. Reach out to companies whose values and products are aligned with your own.

"The fear of losing money is a legitimate concern," Women's Sportbike Rally director Brittany Morrow said. "We work really hard to create and maintain a budget every year, and I highly recommend seeking outside help with budgeting, if you don't have experience with that area already. The experience will happen regardless of tangible goods, so we are always experimenting with the right balance of how much to charge the attendees and what they get in return.

"We've been at it for 13 years now, so don't expect it to happen overnight. Sponsorships can greatly increase your

ability to stay on budget. One of my favorite parts is finding creative ways to gain support from businesses and create valuable ROI for those who contribute."

Sponsorship also helps diversify event income. Plan out several different revenue streams for your event, including sponsorships, vendors, ticket sales and event merchandise. If a sponsor backs out, the event still shouldn't lose money. Spend the money on tangibles, and find more creative ways to attract riders.

"Make sure marketing doesn't eat up your funds," Kulick said. "There are many free ways to spread the word. Having a good media plan helps with this."

## MANAGE EXPECTATIONS

A motorcycle event is all about fun, but organizers must ensure that everyone has a great experience, including participants and sponsors. In 2016, I mistakenly thought I could organize everything ahead of time, then simply have a great, fun ride with all the women I had gathered. The reality was dealing with a million things along the way, from hotel reservation mishaps to coordinating meetups. This was a hard lesson, and once I accepted that my role was to make sure everyone was having a blast, everything went smoothly.

It's not always fun to be the organizer, so consider that before stepping into the role. It sounds tempting to simply relax and enjoy the fruits of long preparation, but the event has your name on it, and you are ultimately responsible. It's on you to deal with anything and everything that comes up. That's your job as an event manager or coordinator.

Creating your own motorcycle event is both an incredibly challenging and rewarding experience. Clarify your idea, plan it, and start working to make it a reality. There will be doubt, hesitation and hardship along the way, but it's part of the experience. Every misstep is an amazing learning experience for the next event. Lean on friends, mentors and volunteers to help you out.

After the event, seek feedback about how your event made a real difference to attendees. You'll probably find that you cannot wait to do it again next year. **MCN**