

100th Anniversary Motorcycle Day in Livermore, CA

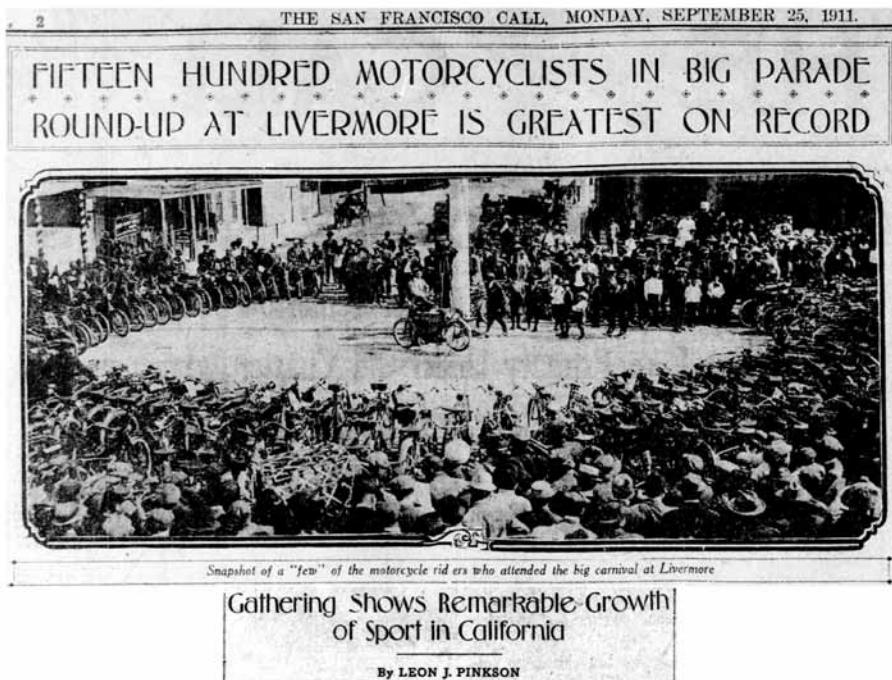
By Richard Klain #22237

ON SEPTEMBER 24, 1911, A LITTLE OVER 100 years ago, 1,500 riders and 1,000 motorcycles from five Central California counties' motorcycle clubs (San Francisco Bay Area, Stockton, and Sacramento) met in Oakland, CA and "raced" to Livermore, CA to celebrate Motorcycle Day. One hundred years later, on September 24, 2011 more than 300 riders celebrated the 100th Anniversary of Motorcycle Day in Livermore. How did this happen?

You might say it started when a panoramic photograph of the 1911 event somehow ended up on the wall of an automotive dealership. Just when and how that happened is lost to history. What is known is that about 10 years ago, Michael Meissner, who was leaving the automotive industry to join a BMW Motorcycle Dealer, California BMW in Mountain View, CA, was given this photo as a souvenir for his time in the auto industry, and as a "good luck" charm on his new venture.



In 1911 the photographer sets up his Kodak Cirkut camera and ponders how to shoot a panoramic photo with a flagpole just behind him. (Photo from the collection of The Livermore Heritage Guild)



1911 News article that appeared the next day in The San Francisco Call on page 2.

Next, the photo graced the walls of CALmoto, which a few years later started planning their expansion to a second dealership. Livermore, CA initially wasn't high on the list for their second location, but that's what finally happened. The photo then found its way to a wall at Tri-Valley Moto in Livermore, CA.

Bill Mentz, Tri-Valley Moto's Sales Manager, noted that the 100th anniversary of that 1911 event would occur in just a few months, less than five miles from Tri-Valley, falling on a Saturday. Bill cleared the idea with his GM, Mike Meissner. Then came the hard part of selling the idea, convincing the City of Livermore and various



Livermore, CA Motorcycle Day group photo taken on September 24, 1911. (Photo courtesy of Tri-Valley Moto in Livermore, CA)



Setting up to take group photo on September 24, 1911. (Photo from the collection of the Livermore Heritage Guild)

city departments, arranging, scheduling, finding volunteers, and spreading the word. Only then could the 100-year anniversary become a reality.

Once the word was out, customers, clubs, and even I noticed the announcement, and it dawned on me that this would make for an interesting story and video. Then started researching to learn about the story behind the story. Learned that Harley-Davidson and Triumph were the only two brands that survived until the present day. BMW didn't start building motorcycles until 1923. Visited the History Center at the Livermore Heritage Guild. They had additional photos of the event and suggested I check out

online newspaper archives.

Spoke with Jeff Kaskey, who is President of the Livermore Heritage Guild. He was a fountain of information. He told me that the 1911 photo was shot at the intersection of First and Lizzie Street, now it's Livermore Ave and First St, and the streets have been moved slightly. The original flagpole, erected in 1905, was removed and replaced in 2004-2005, but it's still within 20 feet of its original location. Across the street from the new flagpole is Lizzie Fountain Park. What now is paved, with signals, lights, signs, etc., was a wide dirt intersection in a small city agricultural center.

100 years ago the roads were mostly dirt,



badly rutted and rocky. That ride from Oakland to Livermore would today be classified as “Adventure Touring”. Average speeds for that ride was probably in the 10-15 mph range. And a very rough ride, considering the primitive suspensions and mostly solid rubber tires! They did it wearing their Sunday best. You probably don’t remember, but September 24, 1911 fell on a Sunday.

There’s also a women’s interest story here. Yep, there were women riders back then. Most of the motorcycles 100 years ago didn’t have dual seats, but if you look closely at the video about this event, you’ll notice some women wearing riding gear of the day. Women’s voting rights in California were about to be decided in 1911. Women’s suffrage and prohibition (against alcoholic beverages) were somehow considered together, even though prohibition didn’t start until 1920 and end in 1933. When the vote came, Alameda County (which includes Livermore) voted against the ladies. But, less than a month after that first Livermore Motorcycle Day women won the right to vote, everywhere in California.

The best newspaper article, which included a photo, seemed to be the one



Setting up to take group photo on September 24, 2011. (Photo by author)

published in The San Francisco Call on September 25, 1911 on page 2. See for yourself online by going to -- <http://chronicling-america.loc.gov/> -- then do a search on “Livermore Motorcycle Day,” select “California” for the state, and from 1911 to 1911 for the date range.

I was also curious about the camera used. Turns out it was a Kodak Cirkut, made by the Folmer and Schwing Division of the Eastman Kodak Company from 1904 until the early 1940’s. Film was available from Kodak on special order up until the late 1990’s or so. The camera used a spring and gear driven mechanism to transport a long

roll of film past a slit to expose the film photograph in a 360 degree arc. To get the proper perspective, everyone had to be arranged in a circle around the camera.

In 2011, 100 years later, everyone was arranged in a straight line nearly 100 yards long. This time the photographer was perched on top of a tall ladder snapping away with a digital camera. Then these photos were assembled into a single panoramic photo using a computer and special software. If you want to see the 1911 and 2011 panoramic photos in greater detail, check out the MOA video section -- <http://www.bmwmoa.org/news/video/>. ☺



Livermore, CA Motorcycle Day group photo taken on September 24, 2011. (Photo by Eric Gulbransen)



A 1914 Harley-Davidson is one of the last to leave after the “group” photo was taken. (Photo by author)

