

## Superbike's Gentleman Racer

**R**eg Pridmore, the first AMA Superbike Champion, was a rider from a previous era. Pridmore's style was grounded in the 1960s — a GP style that featured precision braking marks and racing lines. It was fitting that Pridmore raced a gentleman's touring machine in the BMW R90S. While Pridmore had contemporaries in the early years of AMA Superbike racing, it was the young guns like Wes Cooley, Eddie Lawson and Freddie Spencer who later changed the face of Superbike racing, riding the fire-breathing, ill-handling 1000cc Japanese fours and using every ounce of body English, and every inch of track they could.

But it was the sure, steady, almost staid Pridmore who delivered the goods in AMA Superbike, winning the title in its first three years of its existence — 1976, 1977 and 1978. While Pridmore won only three AMA Superbike Nationals during his four seasons on the circuit, it was his uncanny consistency that earned him his three titles. He rarely finished outside of the top five, and, more often than not, he earned a spot on the podium.

Pridmore is best remembered for winning the inaugural AMA Superbike Series in 1976 on a Butler & Smith BMW R90S. Less remembered are the two following years when he won Superbike titles on Racecrafters and Vetter-sponsored Kawasaki KZ1000s. Pridmore was the first rider to win an AMA Superbike National on a Japanese-made motorcycle, when he took victory at Pocono, Pennsylvania, on August 21, 1977, aboard a Racecrafters Kawasaki KZ1000.

Pridmore was born in London on July 15, 1939, and he began racing in England in the early 1960s, win-

ning his first race at Silverstone in 1961 riding a Triumph 500 Tiger. Growing weary of the British weather and political climate, Pridmore decided to move to what he had always heard was the land of opportunity, the United States. The 25-year-old sold all of his possessions in England, shipped his car over, and took a ship to America.

"I had a clean change of underwear, \$250 and a dream to live in the sunshine," Pridmore remembered.

He landed on the East Coast, but was very specific about where he wanted to live: Southern California was the place that Pridmore had always dreamed of, so he drove cross-country, virtually broke, and settled in Santa Barbara.

Pridmore found that America lived up to its claim of rewarding hard work. He was soon back to motorcycle racing on the tracks of Southern California. He favored the four-strokes and gravitated toward production-based racing.

Pridmore did well enough in club racing to attract the attention of Norton. He rode Nortons in 1971 and began competing in a few AMA Nationals. In 1972, Pridmore switched to BMW, and, by the time Superbike became a recognized AMA National Championship event in 1976, Pridmore had the jump on his competitors with a wealth of experience in racing production motorcycles.

"Superbike became a recognized National class by the AMA in 1976," Pridmore said. "By then, I already had five or six years of experience racing that type of motorcycle in the very competitive club races of California."

The very first official AMA Superbike Series race at Daytona on March 5, 1976, was perhaps the closest finish in the history of the series. Steve McLaughlin nipped Pridmore (both on Butler & Smith BMWs) at the line by less than half a wheel. It was a truly exciting start to what would become the premier motorcycle road-racing series in the country.

Pridmore said that second-place finish at Daytona in 1976 was his most memorable race. McLaughlin won the battle at Daytona, but it was Pridmore who won the war. On August 1, 1976, at Laguna Seca Raceway, Pridmore won his first AMA Superbike National. Two months later, Pridmore won the final round of the year at Riverside and claimed the Superbike title.

Pridmore and the 1976 Butler & Smith BMW R90S that stunned the motorcycling world with championship performance from what the Germans had dubbed "the Teutonic Tourer."

"I look back on what we achieved by our success on that bike," reflects Pridmore. "I beat a lot of the bad boys and the Japanese and Italian factories. It made a lot of people sit up and say, 'On a BMW?'"



Pridmore gained a reputation as a hard-nosed rider. Gary Nixon once admitted that he did close the door on Pridmore, but Reg ran it up underneath him over the tiger teeth in turn two at Sears Point anyway. In the 1977 AMA National, Reg actually ran over Yvon Duhamel's foot on the inside of the old turn nine at Laguna Seca.

"He left space on the inside! And what was he doing with his foot off the peg anyway?" laughs Reg.

After starting the season on a BMW at Daytona, Pridmore was hired to race for Racecrafters Kawasaki in 1977 and Vetter Kawasaki in 1978. Even though he won only one more Superbike race — Pocono in August of 1977, the first AMA Superbike win for a Japanese brand — Pridmore's consistent podium finishes earned him two more titles in the class. He won his final AMA Superbike Championship in 1978 at age 39, making him the oldest AMA Superbike Champion. He retired from professional racing after the 1979 season.

Pridmore raced in the very earliest stages of Superbike racing, when the Japanese multi-cylinder race bikes seemed to have way too much horsepower for the frames and tire technology of the time.

"Those 'flexi-flyers' had tons of horsepower back then," Pridmore says, estimating about 140 horsepower, "and were easy to get crossed up."

Besides riding wild bikes, Pridmore remembers the competitors he raced against as some of the toughest riders of the era.

"Riders like Yvon DuHamel, Steve McLaughlin... like Cook Nielson, Gary Fisher and the Wes Cooleys and the Mike Baldwins. There were a lot of them out there. Sometimes I think my son relates to the bad guys in the '90s, but they were there... especially the Duhamels. They were a tough group. They still are."

Today Pridmore runs CLASS, one of the top motorcycle riding schools in the country. He lives in Santa Paula, California, and loves to pilot his aerobatics airplane and go on fishing trips when time allows. Pridmore is not totally done with racing. He has participated in select legends races throughout the years. His son, Jason, became an AMA and FIM Endurance road racing champion of the 1990s and early 2000s. **CN**

