

Name: Len Dillon aka Lightning Len

Date of Profile: July 22, 2016

Born: July 24, 1947

Voted in to the WCMC 1977

First Bike : 1965 65 cc Honda

Current Bike: 2008 1300cc Yamaha Royal Star and for backup a 1980 750 Honda.

Bikes owned: 1965 65 cc Honda, 1970 175cc Honda twin, 250 cc Suzuki Savage, 1974 125 Honda Elsinore Flat Tracker, 250 Honda Elsinore (which I used for the Massassauga Enduro, changed tires and flat tracked it, changed tires and went motocrossing), 1974 250 Honda Elsinore (strictly for Flat tracking), 1975 185 Suzuki enduro, 1976 175 Yamaha IT, 1977 250 Yamaha IT, 1974 80 Yamaha XT (Kim & Shawn raced it at Lapp's Cycle), 1976 360 Husquarvarna automatic (Got stolen- still looking for it), 1977 250 Husquavarna, 250 Can am enduro (Noreen's), 1976 360 bultaco astro flat tracker, 1972 750 triumph flat tracker, 3-2 valve Jawas, 24 valve jawas, 2 Godden uprights, 1 GM laydown, 650 Yamaha Special, 1980 Honda CB 750 – 4, 1969 50 cc Honda Mini trail, 1972 Z-50cc Honda, 1969 50 Honda step thru, 1974 80 TY Yamaha trial, 1970 125 bultaco Lobito, 1986 185cc Honda xl enduro (Noreen's), 4 1974 250 TY Yamaha trials, 1978 350cc Honda XL, 1975 500 xt Yamaha (Used for Heavy weight Vintage Trials and trail riding), 1985 250 Honda WR (wicked trail bike) ,Honda trail 70 cc and 1 in parts and I now ride a 2008 1300 Yamaha Royal Star.



1965 65 cc Honda

I became interested in motorcycles in 1973, while working at Niagara Steel with Gary Eissler. He and his neighbour Ken Thornton asked me to get a bike and come riding with them. After a very short time, the 65cc Honda didn't provide enough adrenalin or speed. I moved up to a 175cc Honda twin street bike, on which I rode my 1st competition, the Frost Bite Enduro. I removed the chrome pipes so they wouldn't get damaged or hang me up, but organizers wouldn't allow it as it had to be street legal. Consequently, lots of pushing through the snowbanks, but I finished. I was hooked. And the story begins....

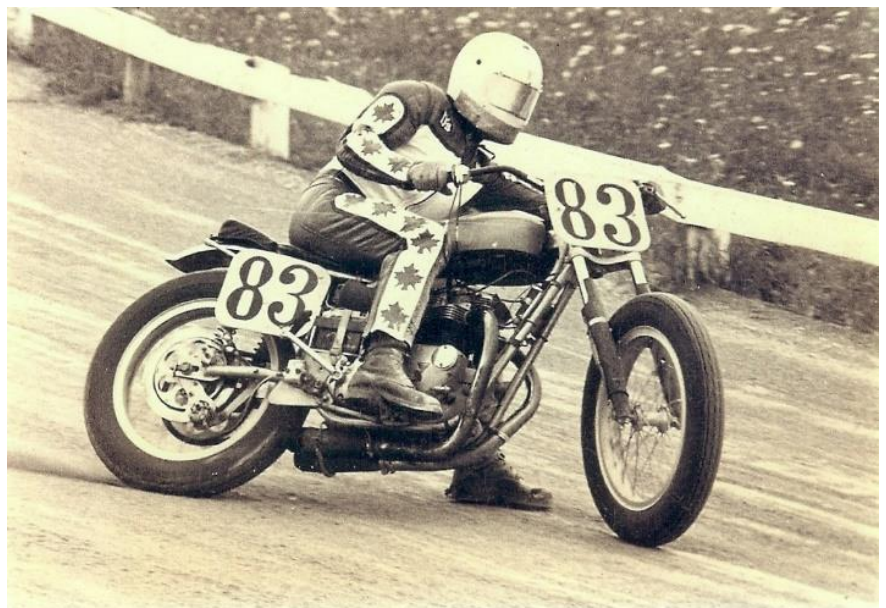
The reason I joined the club:

After riding enduros (including the Legendary Massassauga), Flat Tracking for a couple of years and spending a lot of time with a great bunch of guys from Welland County, I decided to join them.



Massassauga Enduro

1980 750 Triumph
Flat Tracker



My Number 1 project was many hours of Track Prep for 19 years, 15 years while I was racing. I then took a sabbatical and came back for the last 4 years with Jim Scott and Joe Montovanni. My fitness program, in the early years, included the manually operated pull behind grader. The tow vehicle was a junker, oil burning car or truck. Amazing I'm still alive.

In my spare time, while racing and doing track prep, I built a mini track on the infield on the front straight away to be used for Junior Speedway.



Team Race Speedway

1 Plate in Speedway



My wife Noreen and daughter Kim did registration, program setup, lap scoring and payout rather than being my pit crew. Our son-in-law Kevin and Grandson, also came on board as referees for many years (rather than being part of the pit crew.) I think I was a little hard on Family pit crews!!! That left our son Shawn to help with the track and antagonize just to keep the adrenalin flowing. And he did!!!!



Lighting Len with one of his many Speedway Bikes

We were also part of the track promotion, as in the off season, we participated in mall shows, Toronto bike shows, ethnic parades and Santa Claus parades. We built an amazing float which we hauled to Welland, Port Colborne, Fort Erie, Niagara-on-the Lake and of course St Catharines.



Bike shows in connection with CSRA



Floats in many parades like Rose Festival, Folk Arts.

Grape and Wine and Santa Claus parades around peninsula



Vintage Trials with my son Shawn and Grandsons Jeff, Cole and Riley.



Vintage Trials Riding

Trailer designed by
Dennis Wrabuitza



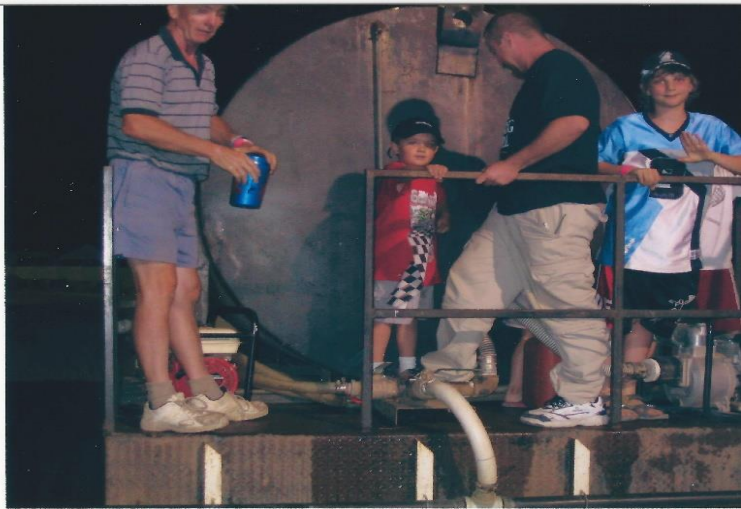
Many long hours spent on the old manual grader.
I've kept it for a souvenir.



Grading the easy and cool way



Need sun protection for my sensitive skin.



And long hours spent on this baby too.

Now we just enjoy cruising with fellow Club Members on some of the clubs excellent rides.



Awards

Canadian JR and Sr Enduro Champion 1974-77

1977 Canadian 750 SR Flat track Champion and Ontario High Points

1980 began Speedway racing

12 time Canadian National Champion and #1 Plate holder for Speedway and Long Track 1983-1994.

11 time Ontario and Welland Highpoints for Speedway 1980-1993

9 time Canadian Speedway Racing Association Highpoints 1980-1993

Represented Canada in U.S. qualifiers to World Final in 1982 and 1988 in California.

9 time Max Award winner (Motorcycle Award of Excellence)

C.M.A. Billy Matthews Award for Sportsmanship in 1990.

C.M.A. White Memorial Trophy (presented to the best all round Canadian Rider in all motorcycle sports) in 1991.

First Recipient of Bob Harpwood Award for most successful WCMC rider.

Numerous Welland County Appreciation Awards over the years.

My last big Hurrah as a Motorcycle Racer was in 2011 when I was inducted into the Canadian Motorcycle Hall of Fame.



Canadian Motorcycle Hall of Fame Award 2011



Our Family. Everybody has been on a bike.

■ MOTORCYCLE RACING

Wild ride capped with Hall of Fame induction

JIM WALLACE
Standard Staff

From the first time he hopped onto a motorcycle in a race, Len Dillon knew he was hooked.

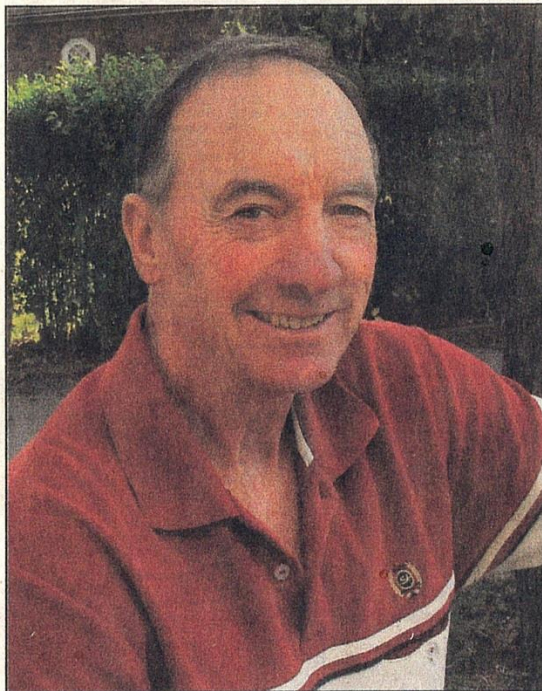
Of course, it helped quite a bit that he won that first race in Niagara Falls, N.Y. But the St. Catharines resident went on to win a lot more races, across Ontario, Canada and the United States.

Winning those races made him a 12-time Canadian national and No. 1 Plate holder for speedway and long track racing, 11 Ontario high points champion in the speedway division and nine Canadian Speedway Racing Association high points championships. He also represented Canada in U.S. qualifying for the world final in 1982 and 1988, along with a number of other notable accomplishments.

Little wonder the 64-year-old, who was born in Enterprise, Ont., but moved to St. Catharines at age 13, is being inducted into the Canadian Motorcycle Hall of Fame this weekend in Mississauga.

Basically, if it had two wheels and a motor, he'd give it a try — and try hard to make it go as fast as possible.

Asked by a friend if he wanted to go out for a ride in the early 1970s, he was immediately hooked and bought a 65cc Honda. From there, he rode flat racing tracks — using Welland



JIM WALLACE Standard Staff

Len Dillon who will be inducted into the Canadian Motorcycle Hall of Fame.

County Speedway as his home — for five years before graduating to the more powerful speedway bikes.

But it really didn't matter —

whatever he drove, he won.

"Where I got my name was my quick starts," he said in the trophy-filled basement of his central St. Catharines home. "I

LIGHTNING LEN DILLON

Personal: Born in Enterprise, Ont.; moved to St. Catharines at age 13; married to Noreen for 45 years; has two children, Kim and Shawn, and seven grandchildren; retired from General Motors in 1996.

Types of racing: Enduro, motocross, dirt track, speedway and vintage trials.

Accomplishments: Junior Canadian enduro championship 1974; Senior Canadian enduro championship 1975; senior flat track championship 1977; 12-time Canadian national and No. 1 plate holder for speedway and long track racing 1983-1994; short track championships 1983, 1984, 1987, 1989, 1990-94; long track championships 1990-1993; 11-time Ontario high points speedway winner 1980-1993; nine-time Canadian Speedway Racing Association high points, nine-time Max Award winner (Motorcycle Award of Excellence) 1984, 1985, 1988-94; Canadian Motorcycle Association award for sportsmanship 1989; Canadian Motorcycle Association trophy for best all-round Canadian rider in all motorcycle sports in 1990.

"If you're the first to get into the turn, it's a lot easier to win a race from the front than the back."

He also had an unusual technique — two fingers on the handlebar and two fingers on the clutch.

"Most people put all four fingers on the clutch ... and just snapped them off, rather than let them out."

And there would be plenty of races a year — three times a week from mid-May to mid-September, in a number of size classes on all sorts of tracks, one-eighth, one-quarter, half and five-eighths of a mile, from Tillsonburg to Woodstock to London to Belleville to Trois-Rivieres, Que.

His favourite?

"They're all so different. Trois-Rivieres, Peterborough and Sarnia are all 3/8-mile — the biggest tracks in Canada — so it was warp speed, but so smooth you'd never let the throttle off, just ride them. And I enjoyed the smaller tracks because there was more bumping and grinding, really close competition."

All in all, though, as long as he was racing, it didn't matter where.

And although the paydays weren't fantastic, he more than held his own.

"I always said if you're winning, you're paying for the sport."

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started flat-tracking on 125, 250 and 750cc and even on those bikes ... 90% of the time, I was the first one off the line.

■ RACING

Serious crash didn't dampen spirit

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"If you were second, you were likely breaking even or making a little bit and if you're third, it's all coming out of your pocket," he said. "Even later in Welland, to win the Canadian championship, you'd win \$500."



Dillon

Dillon did retire briefly in 1996, coinciding with leaving General Motors, but still raced when he wanted until the decision was made for him in 1999. In 25 years of racing, he had suffered a separated shoulder,

"cracked a couple of ribs" and chipped an ankle, but a major accident in Trois-Rivieres left him hospitalized for sixth months and undergoing major rehab.

"It was close to 100 m.p.h.," he recalled, his voice softening. "(The other driver) rode really tight to the inside and just as he went into the third, he went down and I was a second and a half behind him. I came off him like a ramp, went the whole width of the turn and hit the wall head-first. My helmet exploded."

"I came back out onto the track feet first 15 feet into the air and landed here," he added, pointing to the right side of his head.

The result was a broken neck, 10 breaks in one hand and 12 in

the other. He said he has three bars holding his head in place with "wires and plates" all in place.

"I can't even shake my head these days," he said. "The slightest bump sets me off."

It still, however, hasn't dampened his riding spirit. When he and Noreen, his wife of 45 years, head out camping, his 750cc Honda is on the back of his camper, and he now competes in the vintage trials.

"I go slow over rocks and logs with my son and three grandsons."

"Now, I'm idling in first gear," he added with a laugh.

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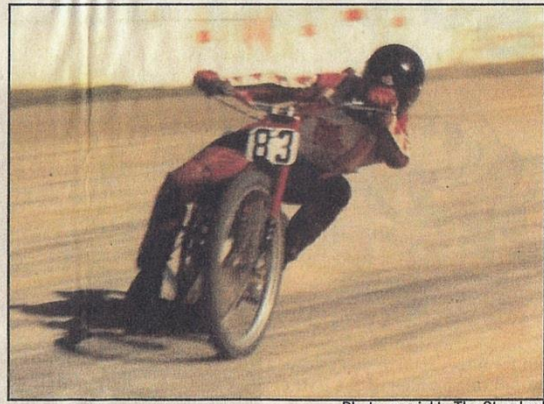


Photo special to The Standard
Len Dillon is being inducted into the Canadian Motorcycle Hall of Fame this weekend in Mississauga



Lighting Len with the Checkered Flag