

# The Harley Mystique



Above, Harley Davidson produces 19 different models of motorcycle ranging in price from about \$20,000 to \$80,000. Most of their customers travel to Waugh Enterprises from the DC Metro area. At left, one of 12 fulltime technicians, Ricky Nichols makes an adjustment on a motorcycle in the Waugh Enterprises repair shop.

Photos by Phil Audibert

was started. Today HOG stands for something entirely different...Harley Owners Group. Waugh Enterprises hosts a chapter in the old building where the first Harleys were sold in Orange. Much more than just a riding club, HOG and Waugh Enterprises have done much to alter the biker image locally by sponsoring a host of charity events, benefiting Toys for Tots, the Muscular Dystrophy Association, the Make a Wish Foundation, diabetes research, pediatric cancer and others. "Motorcyclists in general realize how fortunate they

Palmer ticks off the list of "goals" he's heard a hundred times... a thousand times. "When that goal arrives, it doesn't matter. They waited, lots of times, a lifetime for it, and they buy it."

Or their wives do. This past Christmas, women bought eight new motorcycles as presents for their husbands... a record. And four men bought their wives bikes.

For years, women customers hovered at 5 percent, says Palmer "Now it's up close to 20 percent. Today's woman is just not content to ride on the back." However, he strongly recommends that before investing \$20,000 in a bike, women, in fact all firsttime riders, should attend the weekend-long Motorcycle Safety Foundation's classes in motorcycle riding held at Germanna Community College. It's a popular program; classes are booked solid through June.

Harleys don't come cheap. Out the door, they start at \$20,000. Nineteen models are offered now, ranging in cylinder size from 883 to 1690 ccs. You can spend as much as \$80,000 if you really trick it out or get a sidecar. Just recently a customer from Mt. Airy, NC, spent \$50,000 just for the sidecar. Sidecars are a Waugh Enterprises specialty.

The high-revving Japanese "crotch rockets" that you hear whining and winding through the gears are no threat to the Harley mystique. They generally attract a younger different clientele.

You can buy Japanese cruising motorcycles for less money, but with the noted exception of the Gold Wing, they won't hold their value as well as a Harley, says Palmer. "One of two things happens when you try to make a copy," he points out. "You either make the copy so good and so accepted it will replace the original, or it will never quite be as good and it just reinforces the value of the original." He pauses for effect. "And that's what we've had happen with Harley-Davidson."

are to have their health and enjoy this and they want to give something back," explains Palmer.

Just about then, Mr. Typical Harley Customer walks into the store. The Waughs can spot him a mile away. He is approaching middle age, and it's time. He used to own a bike way back when, but a wife and children and career told him to be more cautious. "So then all of a sudden, the house is paid for, kids are grown, career has done well, they've got the time and the disposable income to buy a motorcycle," Palmer pauses a beat and adds with a sly smile, "and this is where they come to."

They come through the door muttering "When I turn 40... when I turn 50... when I retire...when my last child is out of college...when my last child starts college...when our 25th anniversary rolls around,"

There's just something about a Harley. With that big low-revving rumble and all that black leather and chrome, it is, without doubt, "an American icon."

What is it about these motorcycles anyway? "It's that basic freedom," answers Palmer Waugh. "It's a chance to be an individual. It's the last thing that you can own that you can personalize." He points to a T-shirt that says "If I have to explain it, you wouldn't understand."

We'll try. Harley-Davidson represents that most rugged of modern day American individuals, the biker. In the early days, there was a phenomenon called "the 1 percent patch."

Worn on the sleeveless vests and black leather jackets of the hard core, it said "I am the 1 percent of the biker population who is an outlaw."

"Harley-Davidson back in the late

80s made a conscious decision to do away with that image" says Palmer. And the way they did it was to move the dealers out of the back alleys and bad parts of town, to upgrade the dealerships, and increase prices. In the mid 90s, a shortage of motorcycles sent prices through the roof, attracting celebrities and excluding the average Joe. Today, that too has changed. "It's the every day person who is riding this motorcycle now," says Palmer patting a behemoth bike. "You can still be sort of a bad boy with it, but the outlaws just aren't in it anymore. The criminal element is not even 1 percent anymore. It's probably a quarter of 1 percent or less."

Long ago, two motorcycle racing brothers would take their pet pig with them on road trips. The pig rode on victory laps whenever they won a race. That's how the "HOG" moniker

# ORANGE'S BEST KEPT SECRET



Waugh Enterprises is truly a family-owned and operated business, employing 50 people, selling 600 new Harley-Davidson motorcycles last year and grossing \$17 million. From left to right: Don and Marcelline Waugh and their children, Donna Waugh-Robinson and Palmer.

Photo by Phil Audibert

The year was 1989. Palmer Waugh was stuck in Wisconsin for nine months awaiting and undergoing a pancreas transplant operation. His Dad's business, Waugh Enterprises sold 36 Harley-Davidson motorcycles that year, along with heaven knows how many kerosene heaters, chain saws, used cars, boats, generators, and Mitsubishi tractors. Palmer was a long way from home. He was bored. "I had nine months of just looking at financial statements," he groans. "When I came home, I told Dad, 'look, here's where we're making money; here's where we're just running money through. We need to either get big in Harley-Davidson or we need to get out and do something else entirely.'"

Don "Hoss" Waugh and his family made the right choice. In one year, they almost tripled that sales number to 90 motorcycles. A year later they sold 125. And in the 10-year stretch that followed, they earned Harley's prestigious dealer award, the Gold Bar and Badge Circle of Excellence...every year. That means Waugh

Enterprises, right here in little ol' Orange, was one of the top 25 Harley-Davidson dealerships nationwide for 10 years in a row. Don's got a ring the size of golf ball to prove it.

As the late Dick Sharpe termed it, Waugh Enterprises is Orange's "best kept secret."

For instance, you probably did not know that Waugh Enterprises employs as many people as a small manufacturing plant...50 souls. Last year, they sold--count 'em--600 brand new Harley-Davidson motorcycles, "plus a couple of hundred used ones." In 2005, this "mom and pop" business grossed--hold onto your hat--\$17,000,000. That's right... six zeros with a 17 in front. "In '89, when I had the transplant, we did about \$900,000 gross revenue," says Palmer soberly. "That's a bad month now."

He's not bragging... just telling facts.

Still battling the side effects of immuno-suppressors ("I'm one of the long ones") Palmer conducts a tour of this phenomenal family-owned and operated success story. Out on the showroom floor, rows and rows and rows of brand spanking new Harleys glitter like a Roman Legion in the afternoon sun. We walk past the offices where a buyer can apply for financing, even get his insurance... past the

full-time web master who runs the on-line shopping mall that is www.waughhd.com, past the advertising director, past his Mom's office, past human resources with his sister, Donna, at the helm, past the man himself, Don "Hoss" Waugh, who at a hale and hearty 72 still smokes his trademark pipe and issues witticisms from an old rocking chair. More on him later.

We go past the customer lounge with the black leather sofas and matching pool table, down the stairs and out into what Don calls, "Bloomingdales." It's a department store for Harley-Davidson stuff: "from mirrors, to seats, to handle bars, all kinds of chrome doodads." And then there are the accessories! "Use a basket for easy shopping," reads a sign. Videos of country rock groups play in various corners. Here's where you can find that perfect Harley-Davidson leash, toy, or bandanna for your dog. And that's just the beginning. The product line includes Harley-Davidson rocking chairs, pillows, blankets, jewelry, sunglasses, bar ware, helmets, gloves, videos, leather, denim (yes, Harley has its own line of jeans), boots, wallets, belt buckles, hats, and "of course, the black T-shirt is standard wear." There's even a children's section, and now a separate women's department with its own line of jeans, leathers, T-shirts, vest. Any of you girls want a Harley-Davidson thong? What color? Black? Red?

We go backstage, where the inventory in parts alone tops a cool million. That's not counting another \$300,000 in what's called "motor clothes." We step out onto the loading dock and look at a picnic shelter and almost five acres of landscaping known as Legend Park, host to numerous community fundraisers. Duck in another door and you're in the repair shop with 12 full-time technicians busily tuning and tweaking these modern-day chariots. Palmer points to a stripped down beauty. "This bike is getting about \$25,000 worth of custom work done to it." Outside, among the dozens of motorcycles awaiting service, two full-time employees wash bikes all day.

It took a long time to get Waugh Enterprises to this point. Palmer refers and defers reverently to his grandfather, his namesake, who "went bankrupt and lost everything during the Depression." In fact, hanging on the wall of the customer lounge is a somber reminder of those tough times, a framed letter dated 1932 from his grandfather's brother in West Virginia to their father back in Orange. It reads poignantly, "I cannot tell what the country's coming to. One cannot sell anything at any price or get a job. I have been doing everything considered possible to



**Top photo, General Manager, Palmer Waugh says the full out-the-door price, including freight, dealer prep, tags, tax, and title is always prominently displayed on every motorcycle they sell. Although bikes always fetch Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price, the Waughs have never tacked on premiums. Don and Marcelline Waugh have traveled hundreds of thousands of miles around the country on a motorcycle with a sidecar. This past summer they toured New England on back roads. They celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary next October.**

Photos by Phil Audibert

sell something and get a contract and everything goes dead cold on me."

Well it's hot now. Palmer Senior started out in 1939 selling tractors. During World War II, he sold used cars, became a dealer for Dodge, AMC, Jeep. After his son Don took over, they started dealing Datsuns (later Nissan). As Palmer grew up, they moved the business from its current location to where the Orange County Review is now, and back again. They sold everything from kerosene heaters to chainsaws, cars to motorcycles. They dealt Honda, Triumph, BMW bikes, and in 1976, Harleys. "I went into it at the worst possible time," remembers Don. "AMF had us and the quality, it was just terrible

back then."

But Don Waugh knew that Harley-Davidson would play out as a winner. "I weathered all the bad storms," he says contentedly. Palmer quotes the postcard Don wrote to Harley's District Manager. "Today, I got rid of the damn Hondas, now set me up with the Harley-Davidsons." Don flew out to Milwaukee and came back the next day with a contract. The "damn Hondas," by the way, are doing quite well over at Schafer Motor Company.

"This is a wonderful place to come and buy a motorcycle and all the stuff that goes with it," says a trim fellow in jeans and Harley T-shirt, named Richard Woodworth. "I came down here from 65 miles away in Centreville to buy my bike here."

Aha. In those simple words lies the essence of this success story.

"We concentrate a lot on customer service," emphasizes Palmer. "You have to when you're 90 minutes away from your main customer. You have to give him a reason, or her, to come here."

Here's an example. These bikes cost anywhere between \$20,000 and \$80,000. They always fetch MSRP (Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price). Many dealers, during the shortage and waiting list years, tacked on premiums. "We've never done that," says Palmer, shocked at the very idea.

He points to the price tag hanging from the handlebars of a sleek black machine. It is "the true out-the-door price, including freight, dealer prep, tags, tax and title. Many dealers don't even put the price tag on their bikes," he snorts. "We just price it all up front where you can see it. It's the way we've always done business."

Waugh's market is the Washington, DC metro area, Spotsylvania County in particular. Only 3 percent of their business comes from Orange. The average customer comes a long way and spends a lot of time and money at

Waugh's. Why do they travel so far, one might wonder? Think about it. "You live in the DC metro area and all that hustle and bustle and rat race that comes with it. You want to get out of it." Palmer smiles faintly. "We're a destination store. It's a beautiful place to come to."

And so, going to Waugh's is part of the whole motorcycle experience. It involves getting out of that insane asylum known as Northern Virginia and taking a road trip that becomes more peaceful with every mile...through the rolling two-lane countryside to this biker's Shangri-La dream candy store right here in little ol' Orange...the best kept secret.

# That's just Hoss Waugh

Don Waugh's nickname is "Hoss," presumably because he bore a resemblance in size and looks to the old TV Western character in Bonanza named Hoss. Today, Don Waugh looks nothing like Bonanza's Hoss. He's lost 80 pounds, "and I never felt better in my life." A trim 72 years old, he eats breakfast every morning at Jean's Café, carries a cane that he uses more as an exclamation point, and clenches in his teeth an ever-present pipe. Don't be fooled. This man can still sell a refrigerator to an Eskimo.

His daughter, Donna, whose official title is Director of Business Affairs says, "When he dies, he's going to be buried in his blue jeans and his shirt and his pipe. We tease him that we're going to have him stuffed and mounted out front, with a little string coming out of his pipe and his cane up in the air," she laughs. Son Palmer, who is General Manager, adds, "He'll be here till the day he dies. There's no question about that."

Born to the massive Waugh clan of Brushy Mountain, Don points to a sign at the entrance to Waugh Enterprises: "Welcome to the House of Waugh, circa 1651." Actually, Don's wife Marcelline can trace her roots back even further to the Germanna settlement! But who's counting?

Don remembers going to school until 1 p.m. and then getting off early on a academic work release program to drive his father's tractors to dig footings and haul dirt on Marshall Heights, barely 300 yards from where Waugh Enterprises stands today. One year, his dad packed him off to Fork Union Military Academy because, "I got to goofing off and playing hooky," he grins. He enlisted in the Army and actually served in the Army Security Agency. And if we tell you anymore about that, we'll have to kill you. Just kidding.

Back from the Army, Don Waugh went to work for his father, and married his high school sweetheart, Marcelline Edwards. They did everything together...still do. Once in 1959, they hit an oil patch and crashed. That is the only time that Don Waugh has been in a



**Top left, Palmer Waugh was probably 16 years old when this photo was taken by an Orange County Review photographer when Waugh Enterprise was located where the Review is located today. Above right, Don Waugh, at age 10 or 11, would get out of school early to help his father grade and dig foundations on Marshall Heights. Here he drives a tractor in the shadow of what is today R and J Slots. Center, Don and Marcelline Waugh in 1956 with his Corvette at the drag races in Manassas.**

motorcycle accident, and he has literally hundreds of thousands of miles "in the saddle."

He also used to race motorcycles, often on the dirt track at Richmond, where "you had a steel shoe on your left foot. That was your brake. You didn't have no brakes on the bike." But then echoing a story he's heard from customers time and again, he says, "I had a wife and children on the way, and I had to give it up." He pauses, a faraway look in his eyes, and says mistily, "I loved it. I loved every damned minute of it."

An avid collector of many interesting things, he says "I never threw anything away." A trip down his "Memory Lane" mini museum shows all manner of stuff: NASCAR beer steins, harmonicas, model cars, Barbie dolls as Harley bikers, model airplanes, clay pipes, old fashioned barber strops and razors, playing cards, poker chips, model motorcycles, belts, pins. It has taken him 50 years to put together a priceless knife collection.

Every year, Don and Marcelline buy a new motor

cycle and put a sidecar on it, and go on a long trip, with some riding friends of theirs. They've been everywhere. "I've been to every state in the Union," he claims proudly, "Nova Scotia five or six times." And Marcelline rides in the sidecar every inch of the way. "Sometimes she's asleep," asides Palmer, who adds the two have scaled back from 15,000 riding miles per year to 8,000.

One time Don was at the Grand Canyon when a triple-digit heat wave settled in. He decided to go home. They rode 850 miles per day for two and a half days and pulled up to the store in Orange. "She's a trooper," he says of his partner of 50 years next October. Marcelline just smiles demurely.

The Waughs have done a tremendous amount of charity work both with and without Harley-Davidson. But perhaps the nicest thing they ever did benefited just one person. A woman in Culpeper was dying of cancer. The Waughs learned through Hospice that her dying wish was to ride on a motorcycle. Don rode up to Culpeper, put her in the sidecar and off they went. "She died three weeks later," he says flatly.

She was probably still grinning from the ride. A customer walks out the door. Don hollers after him, "Y'all come back to see us. Have a good day today and a better day tomorrow. Every day is a good day. If you don't think so, try and skip one." That's just Hoss Waugh.