



There can't be another dealer in Europe who could draw as big a crowd as Warr's did on a Sunday morning in June, but then there are no other European dealers who are in a position to celebrate 90 years of trading.

WARR'S HARLEY-DAVIDSON

90TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Words and Photography: Andy Hornsby

More than that, it's 90 years in the same family and the enthusiasm of the current group Managing Director, John Warr – a lifelong motorcyclist and former motorcycle racer – is as assured as that of his grandfather, Captain Frederick James Warr, who first became a Harley-Davidson dealer in 1924, based at the bicycle repair shop that he'd founded on the King's Road, London earlier that year.

Frederick Howard Warr – Fred Warr Jnr – joined the company in 1949 on leaving the RAF, at a time when the import of US motorcycles into the UK was prohibited in an attempt to protect the domestic industry, but there was enough war surplus to meet demand for civilianised Harley 45s, and it wasn't as though there weren't the only shop doing so, but it was



Fred Warr Jnr who went to America to meet with William Davidson – Willie G's father – and his export manager, which resulted in Warr's becoming the Harley-Davidson's UK distributor by the 1960s.

Warr's commitment to The Motor Company remains strong and the flagship store, built in 1999 on the site of the original shop, within ten years of John Warr taking over, was the UK's first 'destination dealer' – pulling in visitors, customers and the famous from around the world – and still has a reputation of holding the most comprehensive range of spares in the UK, across the widest range of models – ancient and modern.

It is typical of the Warr family's forward planning that the new building was conceived as a multi-phase development, and it is currently in the 'showroom' phase. Plans are in place for a vertical expansion, which among other things will provide a permanent home for the Warr's Museum – a few of the exhibits you will have seen on the Harley-Davidson stand at the Motorcycle Live and Excel – which includes an as-shipped, unopened WLA45 engine still in its case. It will also provide an

improved profile for Warr's in-house performance and custom shop. Driven by Charlie Stockwell, who has been with the company since 1996, King's Road Customs has capitalised on Warr's reputation and heritage, and Charlie's vision, communication skills and attention to detail, attracting a lot of high profile customers and commissions.

But the day was as much about celebrating 90 years as looking to the future, and the number of people who turned up exceeded all expectations, jamming the small streets off the King's Road – and the King's Road at times – and creating a mini-Sturgis with bikes parked forming traffic islands in the middle of the street.

With four bands playing an outdoor stage, there was a busy schedule throughout the day, including giving many people their first opportunity to hear a 1914 Silent Grey Fellow running. Celebrating their racing heritage, they set aside a corner of the car park for a selection of race bikes – KR and XR road racers and the immortal XR750 – and John Warr gave us a potted history of the achievements of a company that we →



don't associate with road racing ... unless speaking in hushed tones of Cal Rayborn and the 1972 Transatlantic Series.

The aggressive roar of a 1972 XR750TT, one of only ten produced by the Harley-Davidson race department that year, made its voice heard as Martin Szigowski, who headed Warr's XR1200 Cup team, gunned the warming engine.

John Warr then handed the mic to Jeremy McWilliams, the winning rider of that first series, and between them they made it clear that coming second had never been an option. As a racer himself, John knew what level of commitment was required and they went for it.

And all the time – all day – there were people milling around everywhere. They were in the workshop talking to Charlie and looking at what was on the bench. Some were looking at bikes as though it were any other Sunday, or

picking up some of the limited edition 90th Anniversary merchandise – and certainly making sure that they'd got the free souvenir pin – or chatting with the guys from MAG Europe, who were there in a supporting role. Still more were checking out the exhibits from the museum, or the bikes that folk had arrived on, or just standing around on the pavement out front, socialising: possibly about going to one of the local pubs that were doing deals on food.

If they hadn't planned for this many people, some of Harley's trademark over-engineering must have rubbed off over those 90 years because it went like clockwork.

It was a bloody long way to go for a daytrip – and I know we weren't the furthest travelled – which only served to underline what makes Harley-Davidson special, and the part that F J Warr & Son played in their success in the UK. ★

