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Remember 'You Meet the Nicest People on a Honda?'

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The big news from this year's Long Beach motorcycle show is not what happened, but what might happen. First though, remember the Honda motorcycle ad, "You Meet the Nicest People on a Honda?" Believe it or not,

2013 marks fifty years since that ad helped mainstream America notice — and buy — motorcycles in the 1960s.

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Back to the Long Beach show ... At last year's show, Honda released the CBR250, a sub-\$4,000 model aimed at driving new buyers into dealerships. At this year's show, Honda introduced a lineup of three 500cc motorcycles, starting under \$6,000. Like the CBR250, these new 500s will appeal to new riders, but the solid designs look much better than we might expect of "beginner bikes." It is not just Honda either. Kawasaki's new Ninja 300 is a similarly attractive product with a price that will not scare away new riders.

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Think about these products ... Five or six years ago — during the time of \$10,000 600cc sport bikes — manufacturers and dealers would have paid little attention to a \$6,000 500cc motorcycle. After all, the profit margin to the manufacturer for these "beginner bikes" pales in comparison to that of a \$10,000 motorcycle, and the same is true for dealers. Last week while visiting a Honda dealership, I heard complaints about the low gross available on the new CRF250L. "Hardly worth the effort to sell it."

But let's think back to 1963, and what might happen today. We can complain about selling less expensive motorcycles, or we can turn 2013 into 1963 all over again. The gross from today's CB500

or Ninja 300 sales may be lower than we like, but those customers are likely the key to the industry's success. They may not remember that 1960s Honda ad, but these new customers will go on to buy multiple bikes and accessories over the years and will also attract their friends—a whole new generation of riders—into your showroom.

Fran O'Hagan is president & CEO of Pied Piper Management Company LLC, a Monterey, Calif., company that works with motor vehicle manufacturers and dealers to maximize performance of dealer networks. One of Pied Piper's most popular services for the powersports industry is Pied Piper Prospect Satisfaction Index (PSI) sales mystery shopping to help turn more motorcycle shoppers into motorcycle buyers.

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