

LOCAL FOLKS



Bill Reed on his 1967 BMW R60/2.



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BY MARY WANSEER
RESIDENT COMMUNITY NEWS

Bil Reed is a semi-retired construction worker and logistics expert. He's been living on the edge of Ortega since 2005. He's been living on the edge of adventure for a whole lot longer. He's ridden a motorcycle to every state except Hawaii.

Reed's been riding for nearly six decades. He started in his early teens on dirt bikes and street bikes in the suburbs of Chicago before he "graduated to bigger motorcycles." And he raced them.

"At some point, like everybody, I kinda had to give that up when I got into my real life," Reed said, when family and kids had to take precedence.

"I went without for quite a few years, and then I got back into it again in a big way when I was about 50 years old," he said. That's when he bought his first BMW bike. Since then, he's owned many of them. Right now, he owns four, plus three Hondas. He said that he has "thinned down" his collection over time because "it was getting a little out of control." His hobby had become an obsession.

"I have accumulated close to 400,000 miles on BMWs," he said.

Reed used to travel by bike for work. Being in construction, his busy months were March through November, and he'd be off through the winter. Many winters, he'd ride a bike to Florida from Illinois to visit his sister, until one year, 2005.

"I came down and stayed," he said. He has resided in the same house in the Ortega area ever since.

Two years after his Florida move, Reed rode to Alaska. "It was quite an epic trip,"

he said. For a long time, he had thought about doing it and told himself, "If I don't do this now, I'm never going to do it," because he was closer to 60 than 50 at that point.

In late fall 2013, Reed came home from a work trip and told his wife, Teresa, that he was going to take a ride up to Blairsville, Georgia, and do some camping. That's where he found his most prized possession, a 1967 BMW R60/2 with a 1957 Pop Dreyer sidecar — a one-of-a-kind rig.

Reed had spotted it at a local motorcycle show there. He made a deal to buy it on a handshake with the owner, Al, promising not to restore and flip it. They hadn't even discussed a price first. It was a full year, and another cycle of construction-work travel, before Reed returned to Georgia with his van and trailer. He spent a few days with Al and his family, learning how to ride the rig — which handles differently than a motorcycle — before bringing it home to Jacksonville. The two men have been good friends ever since.

"I know the history of this bike since day one, which is another cool part of the story," Reed said. The bike was bought new at Dreyer BMW in Indianapolis, Indiana, by Al's cousin. Al's brother had been the second owner. Al, the third. And Reed is now only the fourth owner, the first outside of Al's family.

"It's certainly got some patina to it, but it's still really nice," Reed said, and he still has no intentions of restoring it. He likes it all original. When it comes his time to sell it, he'll make sure to pass it

on to only the right person, just as he promised Al a decade ago that he would.

Most of the motorcycles built by BMW back in the '60s were basic black. Reed's is Dover White, a factory color. The sidecar is the same color and was built by Floyd Dreyer himself. "That's really rare," Reed said. It's undetermined how many of them were ever made, but it's fewer than 600.

Occasionally, Teresa can be spotted riding in that sidecar, which turns a lot of heads as they cruise through 5 Points or along Ortega Boulevard. "The grandkids think it's the coolest thing in the world, which it is," Reed said, agreeing with all four of them, who live nearby.

For a couple of years, Teresa enjoyed riding her own bike. She and Bil have ridden side-by-side up to the mountains and into the panhandle a few times, but she has since sold her bike. Reed still rides out-of-state occasionally but not nearly as often as he used to.

"I'd like to think I could still do all that stuff, but I've scaled way back," he said. "I'm getting older. I'm 72."

Reed is affiliated with the local BMWNEF, a social club of Northeast Florida motorcycle owners. Sometimes, he rides for local charities, like The Distinguished Gentleman's Ride that raises funds and awareness for prostate cancer and men's health.

Although Reed has no intentions of giving up his motorcycling anytime soon, he and his wife have a new hobby, RVing. It's something they're looking forward to doing together.

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