

MEGAPHONE NEIL KNEW THE WAY

BY DUKE LAMBERT

Neil Fergus passed away on July 31. He was 95 years old and died at home with family and friends around him.

Neil, profiled in the June 2023 issue, lived a full life, and passed away with a smile. He always said, "If it's not fun, don't do it!" And he said life was fun right to the end.

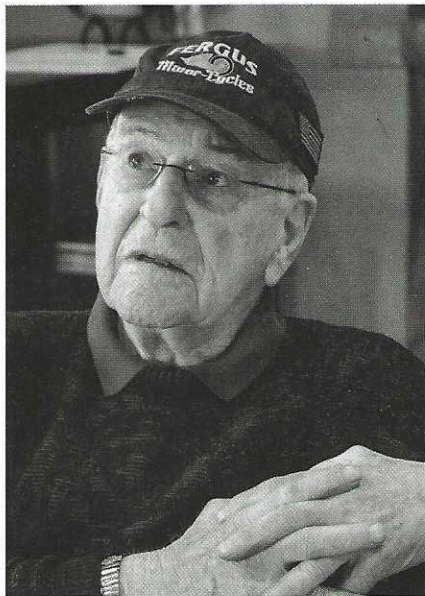
Like a lot of us, Neil started off riding for the pure joy of it...the freedom and thrill of piloting a machine where injury is possible and skill is required. He transitioned to racing, testing that skill and bravery against others, and was good at it. He won a desert-racing No. 1 plate in 1964 and was proud of that to the end of his life.

He then transitioned to riding for work, first as military police and later as a Pasadena, Calif., motor cop. But that wasn't enough for Neil; he became a motorcycle engineer, helping Yamaha make the DT1 into a machine that could do it all.

Along the way he married his first wife, Ellen, had kids, raised a family, and eventually got remarried to his second wife, and the love of his life, Jane. He and Jane rode together for 42 years. She passed six years ago, and he missed her dearly right up until he died.

Think about this chronicle of events for a moment — it aligns with a lot of us, and our relationship to life and motorcycles: You start off with pure joy, migrate to some form of competition, then either find work around them, or perhaps put them aside while you toil in other fields.

Then, later in life, your motorcycle becomes a way to be with friends... your favorite social circle, the one you cherish. Nothing beats riding with your buddies.



California motorcycle legend Neil Fergus: 1929 - 2025

Neil was special, riding until he was 95. He rode to our café just a week before he died, and we teased him because he was using a cane to limp around, as his back was bothering him, but he had figured out a way to fold the cane up and tuck it into the DR650's rear rack. He also parked next to a curb so he could more easily throw (well, more like arduously *lift*) his leg over the seat.

But once the cane was stowed and he was seated, he told us it was the most comfortable place he could be. He said a lot of his old body hurt most of the time, but nothing hurt when he was riding.

And ride he did, using his bike to create a circle of new friends. When you're 95, most of your old buddies have passed, and it can get lonely. But Neil stayed out there. He'd get up and ride, covering 40-60 miles before breakfast. At every breakfast place I ever joined him at, the staff would come and hug him as soon as he

walked in the door.

His smile, sense of humor and warmth were so appreciated by those around him. He really did adhere to that old adage, "You don't quit riding when you get old, you get old when you quit riding."

There's a great old story about a man who headed to the store to buy just one envelope, even after his wife asked why he didn't buy a hundred and put them in the drawer. He said, "I pretend not to hear her, and go out to get an envelope — because I'm going to have a hell of a good time buying it. I meet people. And see some great-looking ladies. A fire engine goes by, and I give them the thumbs up. The moral of the story? We're here on Earth to fart around. The computers want to stop all that, but what the computer people don't realize — or don't care about — is that we're dancing animals. We love to move around."

That's how Neil lived. He talked to everyone. He smiled. He made jokes. He hugged people. And he rode his motorcycle every day. Those rides filled him with joy, and he used that joy to make the world a bit brighter.

So, don't ever stop riding. You're not too old. It's not too risky. The bike's not too heavy. Get a small bike you're comfortable on. Ride it to your local coffee shop. Walk in and strike up a conversation with someone. Ask about their dog or kid or their car. Tell them where you rode to get there. It will fill your life with joy and love. And Neil will be smiling from above.

Duke Lambert is an
AMA Charter Life
Member.

