

Freedom feels like this

By Francie Healy



They sit at Bob's Diner in Delta, Ont., just a couple of Old Bastards sipping on coffee and shooting the breeze.

They're Ernie Olivo and Malcolm (Mac) Reath, and they practically live and breathe old motorcycles. Ernie started a club for them in the Delta area. He's an Old Bastard, and so is Mac, and so are all the members of the Old Bastards Vintage Motorcycle Club.

It was a name just waiting to happen. Most of the members are themselves what you might call "vintage", and the club is in historic Bastard Township (now part of the Township of Rideau Lakes).

Vintage, with this group, might mean you're anywhere from 40 to 80 or beyond.

Mac Reath is 77 (but you'd never believe it in a million years). He sports two artificial knees, a steel shoulder, and a bad ankle – partly due to motorcycle injuries over the years.

But he rides. Oh, yes. He rides.

So does Ernie, who used to race vintage motorcycles at Mosport and teach the skill of motorcycle riding. He was involved for years with the Canadian Vintage Motorcycle Group (CVMG) based in Toronto.

These are energetic, smart men with lots of humour, stories, and a passion for the grand old machines.

When Ernie retired from a career in education in Toronto, he moved to Delta. He knew there were a lot of people in the area who collected and restored vintage motorcycles. From his years with CVMG, he knew most of them.

Just for fun, he put an ad in the Brockville *Recorder and Times* to see if anyone would be interested in forming a local chapter of CVMG.

Mike Hart, a *Recorder and Times* writer, saw the ad and wrote about it.

"There were phone calls like mad," recalls Ernie.

People were interested, all right. They were ready to dive right in. They would call themselves the Old Bastards. It was a perfect fit.

So Ernie went to the CVMG National Executive. He told them he wanted to open a new chapter. He was asked what the new chapter would be called.

“Old Bastards,” said Ernie. He explained the history behind the name.

The National Executive wasn't impressed. They wouldn't allow the name. They thought it would give a “negative image” of motorcyclists.

Thank you very much, said Ernie. And he brought the comment back to the group.

Almost in the blink of an eye, those Old Bastards became an independent club. “Their loss was our gain,” says Ernie with a typical big smile.

Now “a coupla hundred” members belong to the club. They come from the wider area. Connected to them are the “Northern Old Bastards”, or NOBS (they clearly know how to laugh at themselves, these people), from the Gatineau-Campbell's Bay-Arnprior-Cobden areas.

Meetings happen at Bob's Diner, which seems ideally suited to vintage people with vintage machines. Bob's, owned by Bob Kelly, is a popular eating place in Delta. It's nostalgia to the extreme. It's bright, colourful, loaded with antiques and collectibles. When you walk in Bob's door, you step back in time...and forget it ever went forward. It's what the Old Bastards consider their clubhouse.

The Old Bastards have fun but they do serious business, too. Every cent of profit from their community events goes to local charities. They have provided funds for a children's breakfast program in Elgin, Ont. They have given to the historic Delta Mill. They helped provide a playground at Sweets Corners School in Lyndhurst, Ont. They support the Ride for Dad. Their expenses are almost non-existent, because they all volunteer their time and skills.

Motorcycle clubs around the country have heard about the Old Bastards. They've asked if they can be part of it. But the Old Bastards want to keep things simple.

“We don't want to build an empire,” says Ernie. Mind you, anyone can buy an Old Bastard t-shirt, go to the big rally September 11 and 12 at Delta's Lower Beverley Lake Park, or join the club.

Why do they do it, these Old Bastards with their old bikes? Why do they ride motorcycles? What's the thrill?

Ernie likes the vintage machines “because I understand how they work, and I can fix them.”

“It's the freedom,” says Mac. “It's like you're flying. You're like a bird.”

If these Old Bastards are any indication, apparently they keep you young and energized, too.

Visit the *Old Bastards Vintage Motorcycle club* here: <http://www.oldbastards.ca/>