

WHO WAS KAREN HORNBECKER AND WHY THE INJURED RIDER'S FUND NAMED FOR HER!!

Most of you never met Karen Hornbecker so the following is a little story of who she was, and after reading it you will understand why the injured rider's fund could only be named in her honor. Tom Fournier (#55) donated the first money (his winnings after a very successful season) years ago; donations, fund raising and monies collected from fines imposed at NHMS is the only way money is added to the 'KAREN HORNBECKER INJURED RIDER'S FUND'.

Karen Hornbecker was the Medical Director of the Loudon Road Race Series at New Hampshire International Speedway and GP/Pro at Bridgehampton Race Circuit in New York. She died on April 21, 1995 from a short illness at her home in Flagler Beach, Florida.

Karen's involvement in motorcycle road racing began when she attended her first race in 1977. As is usually the case, her friend Alan Hathaway (presently assistant Race Director at LRRS) persuaded her to "take it to the track" after Karen insisted on sampling the roads of Connecticut sans motorcycle. Unfortunately, despite Al's good intentions of trying to increase Karen's safety by encouraging her to ride on the track, she crashed in her very first practice and was promptly run over by another novice rider who, of course, became another good friend of Karen's. This introduction to our sport was not a deterrent to Karen and she was back the following year after her healing was complete.

Karen continued to race her 450 Honda Hawk and became an Expert over the next several years. She rode for Thomaston Honda and was a member of Team Litchfield. In 1986, Karen decided to bow out of racing after experiencing a lap that was, unfortunately, similar to her very first lap ever, except much more spectacular. On a borrowed bike no less, Karen had a most acrobatic get-off at Turn 3, which at the old Bryar Motorsports Park, was a very fast turn. Karen escaped unharmed but the motorcycle never healed. She had worked at Waterbury Hospital in Waterbury, Connecticut as a surgical RN and retired in September 1994 after over twenty years.

She had also worked as a Supervisor of Critical Care Pediatrics at Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York City and as a volunteer for the Woodbury, Connecticut Ambulance Association. She was well known for her expertise in the field of surgical nursing and was highly respected by her colleagues. We were fortunate here in the Northeast Region to have had the benefit of Karen's services and enthusiasm.

It was inevitable that eventually Karen's interest in racing would overlap her interest in nursing and she began to donate her time and knowledge to corner marshalling and on-track medical emergencies. Over the next decade, and indeed, until her death, she was known affectionately as "The Nurse". What made Karen so much of a presence was not necessarily her skill and professionalism with medical emergencies (although both were substantial), but her genuine love and caring for the racers themselves. There was almost no rider who raced more than a few seasons who had not known of Karen's exceptional care, good humor, and supremely wonderful bedside manner.

The true test of a consummate professional is an unwillingness to let one's skills become stagnant. Karen was constantly devising new ways to improve racetrack and rider safety. She authored books, pamphlets and articles covering racetrack safety and the treatment of accident trauma. She was one of the first to make racers aware of the importance of constantly drinking fluids to avoid dehydration during hot summer weekends. She also pioneered and taught helmet removal techniques for use on injured racers and riders with possible spinal and neck injuries. The technique is still taught today. She taught ambulance crews at Loudon and Bridgehampton how standard procedures need to be modified for the special conditions and types of injuries encountered on the racetrack.

Last but not by far the least, Karen had a zany sense of humor that never quit, even in the most serious situations. Sometimes a sense of humor is the only thing that "works" for an injured rider. She understood the psychology of injury and especially traumatic injury and worked tirelessly to heal those racers who had the misfortune to require medical services at one point or another. Road racing has lost a valued and loved member of its family. Karen's contributions will live on in obvious ways, such as in improved helmet removal techniques, ambulance procedures on track, dehydration emphasis on hot race days, live television network race coverage and exceptional professionalism and skill in medical trauma situations. Her contributions will also live on in not so obvious but no less important ways to all those who knew and loved her. Thank you Karen, for all you've done for us.

For more information on this fund and how it can help you or to make a donation contact - Jim Rich, Scott Greenwood, Dick Jalbert, Jim Smith or Kit Kraysha. If you can't find them just leave a message in the Media Center any race weekend and they will contact you.