

AIMExpo Wrap-Up

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TWO YEARS AGO, THE MOTORCYCLE Industry Council's trade show, called the American International Motorcycle Exposition (AIMExpo) was in Orlando, Florida. Last year it moved to Columbus, Ohio. The rationale was that more powersports and motorcycle dealers were within 500 miles of central Ohio than within the same distance from central Florida. The move to Las Vegas, Nevada, for 2018 was meant to draw more west coast dealers, who have said since the

show's inception in 2013 it was too far to travel and had too low a return on investment to make it worth their while to attend.

The jury is still out on whether the Las Vegas show attracted the number of west coast dealers the MIC hoped for, but overall it was another successful, well-organized trade show attended by manufacturers, service providers, dealers and consumers from all over the world.

The show floor in Mandalay Bay's Convention Center South is massive, hundreds of thousands of square feet, and the aisles were nice and wide to accommodate the 20,000-plus people expected by expo organizers. Though it was obvious there were

thousands of people on the show floor, it never felt too crowded and moving from booth to booth was easy. The facilities in Vegas were top notch, and both Mandalay Bay and AIMExpo employees made getting to, through and out of the show a smooth process. The logistics required to put on such a large event are immense, but you wouldn't know it from how easy they made everything look.

Most of the major motorcycle manufacturers were there, but several had noticeably small presences or decided to skip the show entirely. BMW Motorrad was the biggest obvious absence from my perspective; not only did BMW not have a booth or any



Indian's new FTR 1200 S (below) was the talk of the show this year. It features a state-of-the-art touchscreen dash (inset, left) and Bluetooth connectivity to the rider's smartphone.





The Vozz motorcycle helmet, only recently being imported into the USA by Pacific Powersports, represents an ambitious attempt to redefine the concept of how a helmet stays in place.

organized presence on the show floor, they didn't bring the fabled demo truck, either. Indian, Harley-Davidson, Kawasaki and Honda dominated the outdoor pavilion, with notable demo rides from SSR, a Chinese manufacturer, and autocyte maker Vanderhall.

Indoors, Triumph had a small, sparsely populated booth dominated by some monster version of a truck. The Big Four—Honda, Kawasaki, Suzuki and Yamaha—all had giant booths, with Honda's being the largest on the show floor. All were well stocked with motorcycles and employees, allowing anybody who wanted to know more to look, sit, touch, twist, talk and learn about everything new. Indian and Harley-Davidson had more modest booths, but still had a good spread of motorcycles on display.

When it came to new motorcycles for 2019, there weren't any surprises. Most manufacturers had debuted new models at Intermot, in Cologne, Germany, in the two weeks preceding AIMExpo. Still, many attendees flocked to Kawasaki to see the new ZX-6R Ninja, a technology-packed sport bike with a new 636cc engine that is sure to pump adrenaline through the veins of all who throw a leg over it. Many of the mainstream manufacturers, including Kawasaki, are catching up to BMW with

their motorcycle technology, adding things like quick shifters, TFT dash displays and lean-capable ABS to their motorcycles. In many cases, they are doing so at price points well below high-end BMWs, but only time will tell if the performance of these modules measures up to the quality expected by BMW riders.

Over in Yamaha's booth, the buzz was all about the 2019 YZF-R3, an entry-level sport bike that looks every bit like something you'd see on a race track on a Sunday afternoon. Yamaha has introduced a number of technological updates to this 321cc platform, taking not just tech but also styling cues from their popular R1 superbike and filtering them down effectively to a bike anyone can buy for about \$5,000.

The excitement over these two sleek sport bikes and Honda's Super Cub returning to the market aside, most people who got excited about a new motorcycle—myself included—were excited to see Indian's newest offering, the FTR 1200. This is an all-new liquid-cooled 1200cc V-twin motorcycle with design inspired by the company's FTR 750 flat-track race bike. Indian cannily released info and videos about this bike about 10 days before AIMExpo, so by the time everybody got to the show, the hype was everywhere. I got shooed away from the first one out of the

crate on setup day, but not before I got some photos. It's no secret that I am totally enamored by this motorcycle, to the point where I have even put down a deposit on one at my favorite Indian dealer (who also happens to be a BMW dealer).

Beyond these new motorcycles and a few select others, it was largely like any other trade show. Exhibitors showed off new and improved products, such as Helite's Turtle 2 airbag vest, a video of which can be found on the MOA's YouTube channel. The most exciting new product I came across was the helmet made by Vozz in Australia, currently being imported into the U.S. by Pacific Powersports. If you haven't seen one of these, you owe it to yourself to check them out. Helmet technology doesn't advance far or quickly from year to year, but the folks at Vozz have hit upon an innovation that is sure to garner a ton of attention.

There was a lot of fun to be had at the MotoCulture exhibit, where Roland Sands Design, the Gooniez Grom Squad, Vespa Club of America, American Flat Track, Bell Helmets and BMW MOA joined a coffee bar, regular bar, local tattoo artists and more in showing off multiple aspects of motorcycling culture. Enough people strolled through this area that I hope AIMExpo continues dedicating space to this concept in the future.

*AIMExpo returns to the Greater Columbus Convention Center in Ohio for 2019. Show dates are Thursday through Sunday, September 26-29, 2019. As usual, Thursday and Friday are for media, dealers and other industry professionals only. Saturday and Sunday are open to the public; arrive early if you want to get a demo ride from any of the available manufacturers, as those lists fill up quickly. Discount tickets for consumer days will be available through a number of outlets, so stay tuned to the MOA website (bmwmoa.org) next summer for more info. You can learn more about the AIMExpo at their website, aimexpousa.com. You can listen to a discussion with Larry Little, one of the key organizers of AIMExpo, on Episode 34 of *Chasing the Horizon*, a podcast by, for and about motorcyclists. You can find that episode on the web at horizon.bmwmoa.org, along with Episode 36, a thorough discussion of this year's AIMExpo featuring MOA members Scott Correy and Liz Howe. 🍷*