

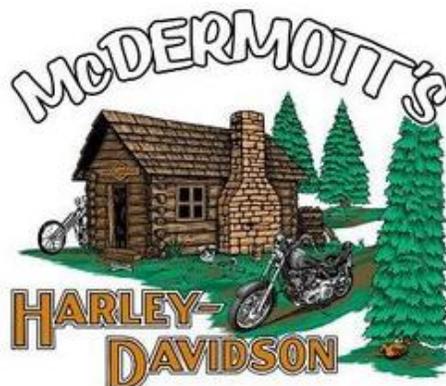


Thomas L. McDermott Sr.



Thomas Leo McDermott, Sr. peacefully passed away Saturday, July 14, 2018, at the home of his daughter Mary. Born April 8, 1931, in Glens Falls, NY, he was the son of the late Martin and Elva (Stevenson) McDermott. Tom served in the United States Air Force from 1951 to 1954. He was awarded the following medals: Korean Service Medal, United Nations Medal, National Defense Service Medal and Good Conduct Medal. Tom loved motorcycle racing and he was good at it. In 1949, he was the first American to win a gold medal in the ISDT in Wales. He

was inducted into the Motorcycle Hall of Fame in 2000. He was a member of the American Motorcycle Association, the Bear Pen Hunting Club, and honorary member of The Jury Motorcycle Club and a proud member of the Over-the-hill gang in Ohio. Tom was CEO of McDermott's Harley-Davidson in Fort Ann, NY. He liked to tell people he was the janitor. Besides his parents, he was also predeceased by a sister Catherine McDermott, a brother Paul McDermott, his wife of 51 years Alma (Lanfear) McDermott, a son Martin McDermott and a grandson Richard Thomas McDermott. Survivors include his children Mary Hoertkorn, Toni (Ed) McQuate, Kathleen McDermott, Thomas (Amy) McDermott, Jr., Paul (Julie) McDermott, all of Queensbury, Patrick (Alise) McDermott of Fort Ann, Paula (Tom) Harrold of Rexford; daughter-in-law Janet McDermott of Chipley, FL; 20 grandchildren, 8 great grandchildren, brother Robert (Ginger) McDermott of Queensbury, sisters-in-law Helen McDermott, Margaret Batease, and Patricia Shippee and several nieces, nephews and cousins.



Tom McDermott was the first American rider to earn a gold medal in the prestigious International Six Days Trial, the ISDT, which later became called the International Six Days Enduro (ISDE). McDermott's performance in the prestigious international off-road event in 1949 went largely unnoticed in his home country until the United States began participating in the ISDE on a regular basis in the 1970s and the American motorcycling press became interested in the history of the venerable Olympic-like event. Even then it took a number of years for McDermott to earn proper recognition since he was entered in the ISDT riding under the British ACU banner, as a guest of the BSA factory, and wasn't listed as an American rider in the record books. In addition to his fabled ISDT accomplishment, the versatile McDermott also had a respectable career competing in AMA Nationals during the 1950s. He scored four top-five finishes in the Daytona 200, including podium results in 1950 and 1954 riding factory BSAs. McDermott was born in Glens Falls, New York, on April 8, 1931. TT racing was the rage in New England motorcycling in the late 1930s, and one of the tracks happened to be about a mile from McDermott's home. "I tore up a lot of my Sunday clothes going through the brush and sneaking into the track through the back way," McDermott remembers. "By the time I was eight or nine years old, I was hooked on racing." When he was 11, McDermott began riding a borrowed Triumph Tiger in the cow pasture behind his home. During World War II, racing came to a standstill in America, but McDermott's older brother, Paul, and a fellow local racer occasional traveled to Canada to race flat track. Young Tom tagged along as his brother's "mechanic." When McDermott was 16, he began racing local New England flat track races on a BSA borrowed from local Glens Falls racing hero Carl Crannel. In the late 1940s, McDermott easily made his way through the novice and amateur ranks. Along the way, he traveled to



Michigan to race in the famous Jack Pine Enduro. In his first enduro event, McDermott took third on a 500cc, single-cylinder BSA Gold Star. McDermott earned his AMA expert license in 1949. His first race as an expert was the Daytona 200. Riding on a BSA sponsored by a local dealership, McDermott came out of nowhere to finish a very solid sixth place in the most prestigious race in America. BSA officials visiting from England were very impressed by the 17-year-old McDermott and offered him a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to come to England to race. In April of 1949, McDermott, who'd just turned 18, went to Montreal and

boarded an overseas freighter for England. He spent the entire summer competing in British motorcycle racing events. Post-war restrictions prohibited foreigners coming to England to work, but BSA devised a novel plan to work around the restriction by hosting McDermott as a student on stipend. When he finished second to leading British scrambles and trials rider Bill Nicholson in the prestigious Cotswold Scramble, McDermott became a sensation among the British motorcycling press. They dubbed him a natural. McDermott didn't limit himself to trials and scrambles racing, either. He also qualified for the popular British Speedway League. McDermott's dream summer culminated with the ISDT, held in Wales in September. Riding for the BSA team, McDermott raced the entire week without arriving late at a single checkpoint, earning him the coveted gold medal. "Dick Mann and I were talking about this once," McDermott said. "It seems like it's always the easy rides where you win or earn gold. The heroes are the guys who had all kinds of problems and still manage to get a silver or bronze. It was the former for me at the Six Days. It seemed like everything went smoothly except for one day when I crashed going through a ditch and my bike ended up against one of the beautiful Welch stone walls with some broken spokes. The rear wheel was so bent that the tire rubbed the frame and the canvas was showing through. Fortunately, a friend put some straight spokes in for me, highly illegal I might add, and I was lucky enough to get through and earn a gold. It didn't mean much to me at that age, but it became something to treasure over the years." Since McDermott raced under the Auto Cycle Union (ACU) banner, the British equivalent of the AMA, his accomplishment at home went unnoticed for decades. For years, Bud Ekins was considered the first American to compete in the ISDT since the inaugural 1913 event. The modest McDermott said he was too busy with the routine of everyday life to speak up for himself. Finally, in the late 1990s, legendary racer Dick Mann and John Taylor, a Bultaco and Ossa distributor, spoke up for McDermott and his accomplishment in 1949 was at long last recognized in his home country. McDermott served in the Air Force during the Korean War. After leaving the service, McDermott went on to earn a reputation as a solid competitor in AMA nationals. He scored third in the 1950 Daytona 200 on a factory BSA Gold Star he largely built himself while in England the summer before. In 1954, McDermott finished third again and was part of BSA's famous top-five sweep at Daytona. McDermott was the only rider on a single-cylinder machine. The other BSA riders were on special twins shipped over from the factory specially for Daytona. It was the first



time one company had swept all top five positions at Daytona. In addition to his Daytona success, McDermott was also a top runner at many of the other AMA nationals of the day such as the infamous mile in Langhorne, Pennsylvania, and the popular Laconia National in New Hampshire. He scored a podium result at Laconia in 1956 and went on to finish the season ranked ninth in the AMA Grand National Series, despite running a limited schedule. On the regional flat track level, McDermott was a two-time New York State Champion and also twice won the New England States title. By the late 1950s, McDermott, who with his wife, Alma, was raising eight children, began to scale back his racing endeavors. For the better part of 20 years, McDermott worked as a service manager for Volkswagen, while maintaining a small part-time motorcycle dealership and repair shop. In 1978, he became a Harley-Davidson dealer in his hometown of Glens Falls. A family business, the dealership grew tremendously and is now located in large facility in Fort Ann, New York, in the foothills of the Adirondack Mountains. While McDermott's racing career was rich with accomplishments, he will always be best remembered for his pioneering achievement of being the first American to earn gold in the International Six Days.