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Bike's history proof of reliability

By Greg Williams
Canwest News Service

travelling to B.C. including Vancouver Island and into the United States.

In 1969, BMW updated its entire line of motorcycles, and for 1970 introduced a new range — the R50/5 (500 cc), R60/5 (600 cc), and, of course, the R75/5 (750 cc). Regardless of the capacity, the engine was of the "boxer" opposed twin-style, with the cylinders and cylinder heads sticking out from either side of the engine case.

The "Slash-5" series, as the bikes became known, were much more modern than the motorcycles they replaced.

For example, six-volt electrics and kick-starters had given way to 12-volts and electric starters — although the machines retained the kicker pedal, "just in case."

Front forks were now telescopic units and better brakes were more capable of hauling the motorcycle to a halt.

The first Slash-5 motorcycles were equipped with large, 24-litre fuel tanks. That changed in 1972 on most of the BMW motorcycles destined for North America. A smaller, 17-litre tank was put in place, and it was trimmed with a set of chrome side panels.

These distinctive panels gave the gas tank the look of a chrome kitchen toaster and the bikes were affectionately dubbed "toaster-tank" models.

In 1973 when BMW stopped production of the Slash-5 series, some 38,370 R75s had been built.

It was a toaster-tank BMW that Jones had bought, and even though his nephew Paul Leochko was only four years old at the time, the machine left an indelible impression on the youngster.

"I was a little scared of bikes, but I remember my aunt and uncle coming around on it," Calgary resident Leochko, 42, says. "He'd

After 38 years on the road, this BMW motorcycle has only ever had two pilots.

The first would be the original owner, George Jones. The second is his nephew and current owner, Paul Leochko.

High River, Alta., resident Jones is in his early 80s, and he's been an avid motorcyclist most of his life. He started at 16 aboard an army surplus Harley-Davidson WLC model.

Bitten by the bug, he sold the Harley and bought from Walt Healy Motorcycles in Calgary a brand new 650cc Triumph T110. Jones toured aboard the Triumph, going through the States as far as Buffalo, N.Y., and back.

"The Triumph was a great running bike," Jones recalls, "but you leave it sit, and you've got an oil patch under it wherever you park it."

Jones and his wife of 50 years, Muriel, also toured aboard a 1970 Yamaha XS650 twin motorcycle.

While the Yamaha didn't leak oil, Jones says it vibrated so badly his hands would go numb — he'd have to shake them to bring feeling back — and Muriel was uncomfortable on the pillion.

"I'd heard that BMWs were smooth-running bikes," Jones says. With that information in hand, and the fact that he liked the look of the German-made motorcycles, on March 4, 1972, he went to T&T BMW in Calgary and bought a brand new 1972 R75/5 in Monza Blue Metallic for \$1,200.

"That was kind of expensive, it was a bit more than what other bikes cost back then," Jones admits. But the couple was comfortable on the BMW and they used it extensively,





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work on the bike in the garage, and I'd sit on the porch and watch. He'd take me for a ride, I'd be on the gas tank and my aunt was on the back."

As he got older, Leochko took an ever-increasing interest in motorcycling. His dad bought a 1974 Yamaha 500 and Leochko started to ride that machine on the street.

As he had only his learner's permit at the time, his uncle would ride along on the BMW as the pair toured to destinations such as Banff, Okotoks and High River.

When Leochko was 15, his uncle offered him the chance to buy the R75/5 BMW for \$500. Jones was upgrading to a Suzuki

GS1100.

"I had money saved up from working, and I said yes right away," Leochko says. He soon got his motorcycle permit, when he turned 16, and for a number of years he and the BMW were inseparable.

He used it less throughout the 1990s, but he'd always make an effort to start it once or twice a year and make sure it was in running condition. In 2005 he had the bike completely tuned up and fitted with new tires.

Leochko now rides the BMW to special events, such as Thursday Night Bike Night at a local A&W restaurant and on *Ride For Sight*.

A 2005 Harley-Davidson Sportster takes him on longer tours, but the BMW — with its 117,000 kilometres on the clock — holds a special place in his heart.

"Everything is 100 per cent original, with the exception of the tires, battery, gas lines and spark plugs (or consumables, as they are known)," Leochko says. "The paint has some scrapes and scuffs, but the only people who have ridden this bike are my uncle and I, and we put them there. I'd not consider restoring it."