

The Classic Motorcycle He Sneaked Past His Mother

As a 14-year-old, this CEO bought a Honda CL90 on the sly; it's still his pride and joy almost five decades later

Gordon McCall of Carmel Valley, Calif., on the 1969 Honda CL90 that he bought at age 14 without telling his parents. 'That bike spawned everything for me,' he says 47 years later. ANGELA DECENZO FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By *A.J. Baime*

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23 RESPONSES 

Gordon McCall, the Carmel Valley, Calif.-based 61-year-old CEO of McCall Events, which produces the annual McCall's Motorworks Revival at the Monterey Car Week, on his 1969 Honda CL90 motorcycle, as told to A.J. Baime.

When I was 14, two years before I was old enough to get a driver's license, I saw an ad for a 1969 Honda. My mother was strict, and I knew if I asked, she would say no. I just had to do it. I sold my 10-speed bike, added that to the money I had made doing yard work, and bought the Honda for \$100 from a mechanic in Seaside, Calif., near where I grew up.

This is where the life lessons kicked in. I kept the bike hidden from my parents. If I got caught doing something wrong, I would be exposed. If I crashed, same thing. If the bike broke, I had to figure out how to fix it on my own. That 90-cc Honda engine was as simple as an engine could be, and I learned what goes on inside it.

I was always tall for my age, so even at 14, the bike was small for me. I was like a trained circus bear on it. But I had a helmet with a dark face shield, so people could not see my baby face. The bike only went 38 miles per hour, but I figured out that, if I changed the front sprocket, I could get it to 46. I would throw my leg over that thing and just ride, and in the process, I learned how the world spins. That bike spawned everything for me.

The bike is significant for another reason. Long before Honda cars existed in the U.S., Honda bikes were everywhere. These motorcycles launched the Honda brand in America. I have talked to so many people who say the Honda 90 was the first bike they owned.

Years later, I have a collection of vintage bikes and cars, and a career I love that is steeped in the vintage vehicle world. A little motorcycle was the impetus behind all of that. I have vintage race bikes, old [BMW](#) motorcycles—and that first Honda I bought when I was 14.

Just like when I was young, at least once a week, I take out a motorcycle and just ride. There is something about that analog way of engaging with a vintage machine that is priceless. You are totally engaged and in the moment.

When I was young riding, I remember thinking: Life is so great! Just don't get a ticket. Don't get in trouble. And you can do this forever. I was right.

