

## **International Classic Leader Launches '50 Years of Suzuki in NZ'**

March 5-7<sup>th</sup> will see Suzuki enthusiasts gather from around New Zealand and offshore in Wanganui to commemorate '50 Years of Suzuki' motorcycles in New Zealand. The celebration over the weekend includes an informal social on the Friday Evening, the North Island Classic & Twinshock Trials Championships at Westmere on the Saturday with rally entrants having a choice of the catered BBQ at the camp HQ or attendance at the '50 Year Dinner' at the Kingsgate Hotel. Dinner tickets are expected to be at a premium as current Suzuki motorcycle dealers, former dealers of the 1970s and over forty former Suzuki motocross riders of the 70's have been sent invitation packs, plus a mail list of over three hundred classic dirt enthusiasts and veterans around New Zealand. Tickets will be available online on the event website [www.legendsofdirt.co.nz](http://www.legendsofdirt.co.nz), plus at [Wanganui.com](http://Wanganui.com).

Throughout the weekend a new event on the New Zealand classic calendar, the Wanganui Classic Motorcycle Rally will be running for pre-1986 British, Japanese, American & European machines. Speakers at the dinner include John Bullock – Cheney GB and Rod Coleman of Percy Coleman & Sons – the Suzuki importer for the first 25 years. At the Saturday dinner venue there will be a private display of 25 plus iconic Suzuki models. On Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> the old 'Coleman's Track' at Westmere has been secured for a one off event for the 50<sup>th</sup>, the North Island Classic and Twinshock scramble, covering machines from the 1950s to early 1980s. In addition to the large number of Suzuki machines in action and on display there will be a special Cheney & British Bike Dirt Day display.

Organizer of the weekend Robert Cochrane has had a long association with the classic motorcycle scene in New Zealand for more than thirty years. More known for his interest in British motorcycles and his key role in founding the NZBSA Owners Club in 1978 and, running both National and International events for the club, and also classic dirt-bike events in the past four years. As Robert says, 'The history of New Zealand motorcycling is not about countries of origin, it's about the local people and their experiences, different designers across the world, and the local entrepreneurship of business to market these products and of Kiwi adeptness at tailoring them to local conditions whether for commuting, weekend fun or competition. Achieving 50 Years is an important milestone in NZ's motorcycle history and will receive both local and International Motorcycle press coverage.

Rod Coleman secured the Suzuki agency for New Zealand from Mr Iwai of Hoyo Shoji Kaisha Ltd an import/export agent in Tokyo in September 1959 but due to the tight import license restrictions at the time, only small volumes of bikes came to our country during the early 1960s. The first machines were the MA 50 moped followed by the SGB 150cc twin motorcycle. But from those humble beginnings that all changed with market de-regulation for motorcycle imports in 1972. From 1926 to 2006 over 520,000 motorcycles have been registered for the road in New Zealand with the 1970s the boom decade. In 1973 nearly 35,000 machines were sold new and 1979 was the peak year with over 38,000 new bikes registered. In 1973 Coleman's imported and sold over 15,000 Suzuki models, and in 1982 sold 10,580 new machines. In 2006-2007 sales figures for total new motorcycles registered in New Zealand had just climbed back up to the 10,000 new units mark.

Earlier this year Robert offered his event management professional services through his Legends Events & Media Company to other clubs around the country. He has successfully

completed the '100 Years of Motorcycling' event for the South Canterbury Motorcycle Club that involved sponsorship, public relations, marketing, website, design, writing and printing of event programme and arranging and overseeing on-site filming of a 1 hour TV show of the event for SKY Sport 1 (screening December 22<sup>nd</sup> @ 18.00 and 23<sup>rd</sup> @ 07.00). Undertaking projects of this type has only been possible with a great team locally: Jeff Croot of Inferno Design, Nigel at Kiwi Webs and Ed & Hinemoa Boyd of H & A Print all had key roles. Another successful project put together by the team at short notice, was the NZ 3 Day Moto Trials Championship in Kapiti for the Labour weekend. Sponsorship, radio and print advertising, press releases and the event programme were all designed, printed and directed from Wanganui. The competitors and vets rated it the best NZ event ever. The event used to have 40-50 spectators but this time 1800-2000 turned up in beautiful weather.

The Wanganui '50 Year' event on March 5-7<sup>th</sup> is aimed at participation for locals and gives them a chance to brush the dust off their older road bikes and enjoy a great social weekend. The event has already attracted its first International guest -- Stan Millard from Wisconsin, USA, a world-renowned classic race-bike builder and a former Suzuki and BSA Dealer.

All entry Forms and online payment available December 15th – ENTRIES CLOSE Feb 15th  
*Further detail [www.legendsofdirt.co.nz](http://www.legendsofdirt.co.nz) – [www.britishdirt.co.nz](http://www.britishdirt.co.nz) [robertc@amcom.co.nz](mailto:robertc@amcom.co.nz)*