

# Powersports Industry People

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I like to ride our products  
and make them better."*

**"B**ack in the mid 60's my father was a movie producer and made all the commercials and films for Yamaha Motor Company," recalled Frank White. He said his father took Yamaha models in trade each year as a partial payment for his work. "My family rode these in the So. Cal. desert for years," he explained.

In 1983 Horst Leitner founded ATK Motorcycles and in 1987 he went into partnership with Ken Wilkes, who in 1989 bought the company from Leitner. In 1991, Frank's family reportedly purchased ATK, which has become the only US manufacturer of offroad motorcycles. According to their Web site, ATK has a reputation for building groundbreaking products, such as its namesake – the anti-tension kutentraub side-mounted shocks, linkless suspension, the first fuel-injected offroad motorcycle and the first production motard. The company was said to have purchased Cannondale Motorsports in 2003 and this added ATVs to its product line. Today, White is the owner, president and current CEO of the company, he tells us.

"I like the people," Frank said when asked which part of the industry he likes most. "I like to ride our products and make them better," he continued. Frank also likes to race his company's bikes in national racing events. White has reportedly made a practice of racing the bikes anonymously, which means he does not tell anyone that he owns the company that makes the bike he is riding, that way he's able to get honest opinions about what others think about the bike.

"The last few years, when people see me at the races (away from Utah), and I'm racing, they see me in an ATK van and they ask if I work for ATK and I answer yes," he tells us, adding, "I don't tell them what I do at ATK unless they ask. I drive to the races by myself, work on the bike myself and act just like they do. I enjoy the total experience and

## MANUFACTURER: FRANK WHITE, ATK MOTORCYCLES

think it's very important to go through it. Sometimes they find out I'm the man behind ATK and I like to befriend them," described Frank. He said a key to working in this business is to listen to what riders want, both right now and in the future, then figure out the best way to make it happen.

His favorite moment throughout his years in the powersports industry came at the 1994 Indianapolis dealer show. "We had our new platform of products on display for the first time at the show," he explained, adding, "I was on the cover of *Cycle News* for the copy that was distributed free at the show for the dealers." ATK's products were also featured in two large national retail magazines that were also handed out free to the dealers during the show, Frank continued, "That was a good week for us."

The biggest threat to the industry, White said, depends on which part of the industry you're interested in. For the offroad enthusiasts it would be land closure issues, while for the street bikes, "it's too many billboard lawyers looking to make a quick buck," explained White.

"The mid-size cool looking street motorcycles for the gen X-Y consumer has the greatest growth potential," stated Frank. He added, "Because of gas prices [they are] thinking motorcycles may be a good option."

His advice to others within the powersports industry is this: "Stay focused on your niche and understand why people buy your product and determine who your future customer is and what they will want in the future."



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