

Guildford Harley-Davidson

- the first 10 years

By Steve Cork Road Captain and Chapter Historian

In the beginning

The story begins, as they say, way back in 2006 when the Lind Group, a major car dealership for a range of prestige brands from Audi and BMW through to Porsche and Land Rover, was sold to the giant Inchcape Group. The Lind Group, owned and managed by Graham Dacre, had operated in Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Kent. As part of the deal, Graham retained ownership of the Porsche Centre in Tonbridge, Kent to hand on to his son, Russ Dacre.

In 2007 Russ formally took over control of the Lind family business from his father, managing the Porche dealership in Tonbridge and started to rebuild the Lind Group. Luckily for us, as well as his passion for Porches, Russ has a real enthusiasm for motorcycles, particularly Harleys, and negotiated to get an agreement with Harley Davidson to open a new Dealership in the Guildford area.

The new dealership arrives

On 19th June 2007 planning permission was granted for the conversion of Weyvern House, Peasmarsh into a “Flagship H-D Dealership” and work started on the creation of “Guildford H-D”.



This was six months under reconstruction and development, with the Dealership unofficially opening its doors to the Chapter on 13th September 2008.



As a brand-new Dealership, there were naturally a number of “firsts”.

- The first bike on the ramp in the new workshops was my old black Dyna - to replace yet another broken drive belt!



- The first Chapter ride-out to meet and leave from the dealership was on 17th August 2008, the “Persuasion Ride” led by Catherine Cork
- The first new bike to be sold by the Dealership was Delia Cordell’s original 1200 Sportster – the one before “Tennessee’s finest” - and sold to her by Michael Noble, the current Sales Manager

With the new Dealership now open for business, talks were held between Surrey Chapter (the local Official H-D Chapter, but without a sponsoring dealership), Harley Davidson UK and the Dealership to discuss ways that the new Dealership could offer a home to the Chapter. It was soon agreed that this was the way forward and discussions were held on a possible new name for the Chapter.



At a very special VIP night on Friday 6th March 2009, the Chapter was officially renamed “Hogsback Chapter” and adopted by the Dealership.

The following day Guildford H-D held their official “Grand Public Opening” as the first bike dealership of Russ’s new “Empire”.

The social side of the Dealership



The social activities held at the Dealership with the Hogsback Chapter took off rapidly in 2009!

Following the “Grand Public Opening” on Saturday 7th March, the first (and only!) Bikini Bike Wash was arranged at the Dealership on 20th June.

The 4th July was celebrated with an “Independence Day” BBQ and band and the Hogsback Ladies of Harley organised a fashion show at the Dealership on 19 November.

The pattern has been repeated with regular events hosted by the Dealership each year including Christmas Club Night specials, new model bike launches, summer BBQs, LoH fashion shows and Dealership birthday parties.

Photos of all these events can be found on the Hogsback Chapter website.



In addition, the Dealership has been a focal point for Chapter meets, ride-outs and socialising over the coffee machine upstairs!

Management and Organisation - The staff

At today's Dealership you will be greeted by a whole range of staff who are essential for the maintenance and smooth running of your Harley. There are people there who will persuade you to buy a new (or even "previously cherished") Harley. These are known as salesmen or "sales executives".

There are other people who will sell you special shiny bits to make your bike louder, faster or more special than any other bike. These are known as "the guys in parts". They work closely with other people in the Dealership who can forecast the future and know when there is a space in the workshop when your bike can be serviced and when the new shiny parts you ordered with "the guys in parts" will arrive and can be fitted to your bike. These are known as "Service Advisors".

Upstairs you will find people selling Harley clothing (i.e. crash helmets, gloves, leather jackets, armoured jeans, padded shirts and lacy "T-shirts" (usually for the ladies). These are known as "salespeople" as well. They know a great deal about the difference between 2XX and 4XX and but only a minimal amount about bikes compared with the "salesmen" downstairs. Importantly they also know how to refill the coffee machine. I have also seen people upstairs in offices with computers and spreadsheets and things but I have no idea what goes on there other than at LOH Fashion Show time the offices turn seamlessly into luxury dressing rooms for the exotic models (male and female) who will be displaying next years "must have" biker apparel.

Then finally there are the people who actually service and repair your bike and who you rarely see because they are shut up in the workshop and only allowed out on special occasions, such as showing you how to fix the new shiny part you have just bought from "the guy in parts". These people are known as "technicians" which means they know what they are doing.

The Dealer Principal (DP)

Controlling all this Empire is the Dealer Principal or DP. His primary role is to make sure the Dealership makes enough money to be able to give the Chapter a significant annual financial contribution so we can spend it wisely on partying during the year. Since this is entirely within his prerogative please ALWAYS be nice to the DP.

There have been four Dealer Principals at Guildford H-D since the opening of the Dealership in 2008.

John Tenner – who, with the owner, Russ Dacre, officially launched the Dealership and the adoption of the Hogsback Chapter at the special VIP night on Friday 6th March 2009 and was responsible for the early set up and running of the new dealership

Russ Dacre – who formally took over the role of DP and the day to day management of Guildford H-D from John in late 2009 after he had finished sorting out the Porsche dealership

Toby Sleeman – who was appointed as DP by Russ in mid-2012 and remained until 2018, when he went on to assist Russ with the expansion of the Lind Group and development of other Harley and Triumph dealerships

Aaron Presley – is the current DP at Guildford H-D and took over in 2018

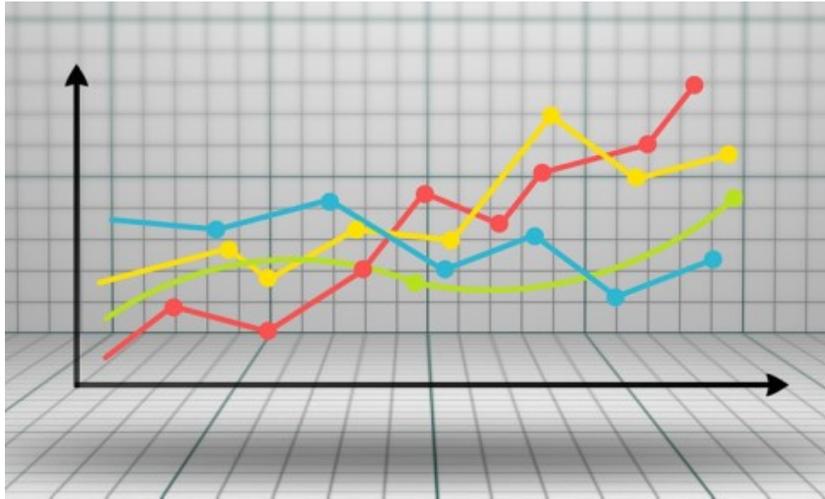


Guildford H-D Dealer Principal - Aaron Presley – wishing he was in the Rockies with the bikes in the picture behind him!

What do Guildford H-D sell?

Clearly, they sell Harley Davidson motorcycles (and trikes!), shiny parts and clothing – what else do you need!

I had plans to insert detailed charts and graphs at this stage covering bike sales at Guildford H-D over the years since they opened. These would have shown really interesting things like the numbers of new/used bikes sold each year and the split between models sold - Touring/Dyna/Softail/Sportsters/Trikes/Street/V-Rod/CVO etc. to show growth trends and fashions, the impact of external economic factors, effects of Brexit, trade wars with USA etc.



Fantasy graph showing unattainable statistics of the ups and downs of selling Harleys!

Unfortunately it is impossible to get any hard facts and figures on numbers of bikes sold, turnover etc. since this information is considered commercially confidential, but if you pester enough people for long enough you can get some idea that the average Dealership in UK typically sells around 300 – 400 new and used (sorry – previously cherished!) bikes each year, and we all know Guildford H-D is above average! It sells a lot of high-end touring bikes and designer Softails, no new Dynas because they don't make them anymore (shame!) plenty of sportsters, an increasing number of trikes and next year maybe even some electric bikes!

The future

Since Russ set up Guildford H-D in 2008, he has been busy. As well as maintaining the original Porsche dealership in Kent he has developed three more Harley-Davidson stores in Newmarket, Norwich and Reading, BMW Motorcycles Dealerships in Norwich and Welwyn Garden City, two Triumph Dealerships in Ashford (Middlesex) and Romford, with the addition of two new Triumph businesses in Central and North London this year. The Guildford Dealership is likely to continue to thrive and serve us well into the future. Let's enjoy the next ten years as much as we have enjoyed the last!

Steve Cork

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