

I had ridden by the lonely motorcycle underneath the covered porch many times. Holopaw and 441 South is a very popular road for motorcycle riders, either separately or in a group. One day on a ride between here and there, I stopped in Holopaw at Holopaw Corvette and Ural Motorcycles to find out the real story. Please join me for the rest of the story (credit goes to Paul Harvey) about the proprietor, Gene Langford.

Born in 1939 in Portsmouth, Ohio, Gene moved at the age of 12 to Miami, Florida. He assures me that this is absolutely true: he went from *Ulysses S Grant Junior High* to *Robert E Lee Junior High*. This was a serious culture shock for a 12 year old boy but all part of growing up. After graduating from high school Gene joined the US Navy as a Machinery Repairman. This is really a machinist and is a very technical and skilled job. Gene turned this skill into a career with Eastern Airlines as a machinist and later an airframe and power mechanic. He transferred to Orlando Florida from Miami and worked in Orlando for another seven years.

When Gene transferred to Orlando, he drove through Holopaw and thought how wonderful it would be to live in this very rural environment. He convinced his wife, Rebecca Langford that living in the woods and country far from any store or mall would be a good thing. Here is the early salesman at work. Holopaw is one of those places when you need to go to town; you make sure you have a grocery list. He is either very successful or still extolling the virtues of Holopaw as they have lived there for 25 years and have six children.

The Eastern Airlines mechanics strike forced Gene to seek alternative income to make ends meet. He turned a hobby into a vocation and began restoring and customizing Corvettes, hence the Holopaw Corvette. There are two Corvettes on the yard, both non-running and relegated to the "someday" category. Soon technology overcame even the Corvette restoration trade and Gene began building custom hunting buggies.

In 1998 Gene went to Bike Week in Daytona and saw and fell in love with the Ural motorcycle and sidecar. Gene describes this generation of Ural as "100 % Russian and 50 % junk". I remember meeting a man who owned one of the early 650 cc models and he described it as being too slow to outrun its poor brakes. But Gene was not deterred. He became a Ural dealer and has never looked back. He is now the oldest and longest-lasting Ural dealer in Florida. Urals now feature disk brakes, electronic ignition, Keihin carburetors and many other modern features. The "50% junk" feature has been removed.

Gene also sponsors a Florida Ural Rally. At least, he provides a place for them to meet. In November, Ural riders will migrate to Holopaw to renew acquaintances with each other and Gene at the Holopaw Ural Gathering (HUG). Last year there were over 50 Urals and over 200 people attending. Gene likens Ural riders to Ural motorcycles. "There are no two alike". If Gene is indicative of a Ural rider, that should make a clear statement about individuality at an Ural rally.

Gene has seen many attempts at other locations to become a Ural dealer. Gene says they do it for all the wrong reasons. He does it for love and the failed dealers were doing it for

money. Gene loves what he does. He has a full-time mechanic, Ken Lawrence, who does his wrenching and Gene makes the dealership a great place to visit. Everyone remembers an old-time dealer who always had time for a customer, or even a visitor. Gene has a wealth of great stories and memories. Pictures and hats hang on his wall. Gene has been to the Ural factory in Russia. The Russia visit began in Beijing China and took four days by rail to Russia. Once there, Gene spent eight days riding Urals and being treated like Russian royalty.

Hanging around Gene's shop and office are evidence of his other collections. Hats are everywhere, from his original sailor hat from 1956 to hats from Russia and China. Sidecar models are in cases and include models from England and a model by Lego.

Gene says he is the richest man in the world. He walks to work, loves his job and meets interesting people every day

-Laurence Toews