

In this Wednesday Wrench, meet the man responsible for bringing American Honda back to the Grand National Cross Country Series. Ray Conway has been with American Honda for over 25 years, and started out on a Honda before they even began manufacturing racing motorcycles! Read up to learn more about Ray and see what American Honda has in store!

Hi Ray! How was your experience at the Penton GNCC a few weekends ago? Did you have a good time?

I had a great time! I have attended races all over the world but this was my first GNCC. These riders are among the toughest to go three hours in this very challenging terrain and in the high heat we are having this summer.

Were you able to get out into the woods and watch the team ride? I know it was a rough weekend for the team- but hopefully you got to see some good racing action.

Yes, I hiked out to the trees and the mud holes.

Your sponsorship of JG Off Road brought American Honda back into the off-road spotlight. How does it feel to be back off-roading again?

Honda has had a good program out west with Johnny Campbell in the SCORE series and AMA National Hare & Hounds. I had always wanted to get Honda racing off-road back east again.

When did American Honda start to think about getting involved with JG Off Road?

Our first talks were at the end of 2009 and we just stayed in touch during the 2010 season and Honda was able to be involved with JG Off Road for the 2011 season.

Were there other reasons American Honda wanted to get involved with the GNCC and OMA series?

Honda really wanted to get back involved in the GNCC's. We had a lot of customers and fans from when Scott Summers raced the series and our new CRF450R, CRF250R and CRF150R offer a great racing platform for this type of competition.

Can you tell us why American Honda decided to sponsor JG Off Road?
JT and Gretchen offer a very professional team, and Honda and GEICO have also worked together with other race teams.

What kind of support system does American Honda provide for the team?

Currently, Honda provides the team with motorcycles, parts and technical information.

Can you tell us a little bit about the bikes the team are on this year? How do they stack up in the field?

The GEICO/ Honda JG Off Road team is using 2011 CRF450Rs and CRF250Rs. These bikes offer the team a great starting base to build an eastern off-road racer, and with just a few simple modifications they are competing at the top of the pro ranks.

You've been with American Honda for 25 years. How did you get the gig at Honda? Why have you stayed?

I started riding Hondas in 1969 when my parents bought me a Mini Trail 50. I caught the motorcycling bug pretty bad after that and went to work at a Honda dealer after school and then full-time after graduation. My Honda District Service Manager got a promotion to head up all of the US motorcycle customer relations departments and a few months after he left for that position, he contacted me and asked if I would come to work at

American Honda. I began working at Honda in 1986. They treat their customers and associates with great respect so that is why Honda customers stay with the brand and why the associates stay with the company.

You've also raced. Can you tell us a little bit about your racing career? Do you still race/ride?

My story is atypical. I was a better mechanic than a racer so I raced just for fun. However, I have had a few successes. I was a top ten 250 expert desert racer for a number of years. I raced in Baja a few times and helped my team become class champions. I still race a few times each year, and last year I raced in the Catalina Island Grand Prix. That was big fun!

How have you seen the technology of the bikes change over the past years, or at least since you've been with American Honda? Well, I started racing Hondas before we even made a racing motorcycle. I started racing a Honda SL100. That was two years before the Honda Elsinores came out. So for me, I started on a 11 hp air cooled four stroke and now here we are 40 years later with water cooled, fuel injected 45 + hp four stroke.

Besides sponsoring JG Off Road, what else is new for American Honda? The other new project for Honda racing this year is being the motorcycle sponsor for Chad Reed's Two Two Motorsports SX / MX team. So far this is working out really well this year with Chad challenging for the championships in both SX and MX racing.

Do you have any new product announcements?

For the 2012 model year we have announced a full line of off road motorcycles, the CRF450R, CRF250R and the CRF150R. Both the CRF450X and CRF250X are returning for 2012 and the full line of "F" models are back

form three CRF50F all the way up to the CRF150F and CRF230F that feature electric starting.

Will we see you again sometimes soon at the races?

I will be at the Summer X games to watch the GEICO/Honda team compete in Endurocross.

Don't forget to watch for the guys on TV at the X Games, schedule below.

Sunday, July 31		
TIME (ET)	EVENT	NETWORK
2:30-3:30 AM	X Center (Day 3 Highlights)	ESPN2
4:30-5:30 PM	Skateboard Hometown Heroes	ESPN3.com
5:00-7:00 PM	🔥 RallyCross	ESPN ESPN3.com
7:00-8:15 PM	🔥 BMX Freestyle Street	ESPN2 ESPN 3D ESPN3.com
9:15-11:00 PM	🔥 Moto X Enduro X Women's	ESPN2 ESPN 3D ESPN3.com
9:15-11:00 PM	🔥 Moto X Enduro X Men's	ESPN2 ESPN 3D ESPN3.com
8:30-9:15 PM	🔥 Skateboard Game of SK8	ESPN2 ESPN 3D ESPN3.com