

## METTCO PENTON

Penton motorcycles are often primarily associated with Eastern woods riding. After all, John Penton and his family call the state of Ohio home, and the image of a Penton motorcycle racing down a wooded trail is one most familiar with many enthusiasts of the brand.

However, it did not take long following introduction of the first Penton motorcycles, for riders from all over the country, as well as eventually the world, to discover just how well these machines performed, and in all kinds of competition.

Take California, for example. By the early 1970's, motocross racing was really catching on throughout the state, with tracks opening up all over. Scores of riders were becoming involved, and there was a tremendous need for race-ready motocross machines.

Unfortunately, many of the bikes available at the time required considerable modification in order to perform well in motocross competition. Inadequate frames, poor suspension components, unreliable powerplants, and excessive weight, hampered many of the motorcycles of the era. Ah, but then Pentons were introduced to the motorcycling world.

Savvy riders and race shops recognized the tremendous advantages the bikes had to offer and pounced upon each and every one that was made available. One such shop, located in Compton, California, was called Mettco Racing.

Fred Hayes opened Mettco, which stands for "Motocross, Enduro, Trail, and Trials, Competition Oriented", in the early 1970's, with the intention of catering to the ever-growing Southern California racing scene. Recognizing the potential of Penton motorcycles, Mr. Hayes set about building his business around them, but sold the Monark, Maico, and Saracens brands as well.



In addition to the retail motorcycle business, Fred also owned and operated Hayes Manufacturing, located right next to his race shop, which produced among other things, a variety of motorcycle parts and accessories. Included in those products were plastic number plates, mud flaps, and fork protectors.

However, Mr. Hayes' passion, and what really brought attention to Mettco Penton, were the shop's performance upgrades, offered both as bolt on parts, as well as complete high-performance systems. Using powerful and reliable Penton motorcycles as a basis, Mr. Hayes offered various stages of what were referred to as Chuck Bower Specials.

Chuck, a local pro motocrosser and sponsored Mettco Penton rider, was making quite a name for himself at the time, wreaking havoc in Southern California 125-class racing. As a result, business was good at Mettco for such race-proven offerings as porting, head work, aluminum rims, stainless steel spokes, high-performance pipes, carbs, ignitions, straight cut gears, different shifting systems, and more.



Chuck Bower, at one of the old Southern California night Motocross races.

Fred Hayes worked hard on these systems, continually testing and evaluating their performance capabilities both on the track, as well as in the shop. In addition to Chuck Bower, Mettco riders Bruce McDougal, and Danny LaPorte, all provided valuable feedback from their racing efforts, while Mr. Hayes

invested hundreds of hours running innumerable combinations of carbs, pipes, porting, and compression ratios, on his own dynamometer

Mr. Hayes relates that Mettco's "secret" to success, is what *wasn't* done to the bikes. That is, he chose not to make any radical changes, as did most of the other performance shops of the day. Instead, most of his engine modifications were based on the proven Sachs GS-series of engines.

A great admirer of John Penton, Mr. Hayes had the honor of accompanying John in 1973, on a trip to Europe. There he met with Freddie Stolberger, then the engine designer for KTM. The two men shared design philosophies, and from this Mr. Hayes determined that by comparison, KTM's factory racing engines produced more horsepower, but Mettco's had a wider power band.

Back in the states, one of the most effective performance components developed by Mr. Hayes, were exhaust pipes. At first, Mettco Pentons used modified stock pipes with the ends removed, and a small silencer welded on. Later, pipes developed and produced by Darryl Bassani were used, which provided the Pentons with wider powerbands, and more top end speed.

However, as power and speed increased, there were some setbacks, such as failures of the stock connecting rods. Mr. Hayes overcame this problem by installing rods from 175cc engines. And, as a result of all these efforts, Mettco Pentons became faster, and their riders more and more successful.

Starting grids began to fill up with Pentons, some stock in appearance, some with the signature Mettco colors of white frames, black engines and hubs, and red tanks. Such was their success, that there was a time when two-thirds of many 125-class southern California motocross fields were made up of Pentons.



Very nicely done Mettco replica, put together by Marc Biro.



Fred Hayes' influence, and contributions to the racing successes of Mettco, were not limited to machine preparation, either. He was also one of the early advocates of a training regimen for his riders. In fact, there were no details he would overlook in his efforts to support his team and to help his riders win. The result was that his "wrecking crew" of Bower, McDougal, and LaPorte were among the most successful riders in the highly competitive arena that was Southern California motocross racing in the early 1970's.

In addition to Mettco's very successful motocross program, and as the company name implied, Mr. Hayes supported other forms of racing as well. Being an enduro rider and ISDT enthusiast himself, Fred sponsored a number of enduro riders, including Mike Adams, Carl Price, and Rick Munyon.

And so, it was that Fred Hayes and his small but extremely ambitious race shop set the standard for others follow. The combination of Penton motorcycles' capabilities and durability, along with Mr. Hayes' insight, as well as his engineering and developmental efforts, his organizational and motivational abilities, and finally his foresight in hiring some very fast riders, resulted in racing and sales successes for the Penton brand, far from the wooded trails of Ohio.

These days, Fred and Kay Hayes are as busy as ever, and continue to play a strong part in the motorcycle industry. However, unlike their Mettco racing efforts during the 1970's, the Hayes have, in recent years been working to engineer, develop, and produce, a diesel-powered motorcycle, for use by the military.

While their present company, HDTUSA, has been supplying motorcycles to the U.S. military since 1982, this more recent project resulted in the world's first purpose-built diesel motorcycle engine, for which Mr. Hayes finally secured a government contract, in the summer of 2005.

And so, as back in the early 70's when he was creating race-winning Pentons, Fred Hayes continues to improve and expand the capabilities of motorcycles with his special skills in engineering and development. For more information on Mr. Hayes' current company, featuring the diesel motorcycle engine he has created, as well as Mettco Racing, check out [www.dieselmotorcycles.com](http://www.dieselmotorcycles.com).



Postscript. Since this story was originally written, we have sadly lost Fred Hayes. He passed in 2018, and is greatly missed by all who have known him.

## METTCO PENTON - A Rider's View

By Bruce McDougal

I first became aware of Fred & Kay Hayes' Mettco Pentons in 1972. I was 17 years old at the time, had just graduated high school, and was at a night motocross at El Toro Speedway, in El Toro, California.

Actually, to refer to El Toro's course as a motocross track is stretching a bit, as it consisted of a short track/TT oval, but with plywood ramps up the sides of the concrete outer walls, leading to some trails surrounding the place - and all with pretty poor lighting.



Back when I was just a kid, I competed on a Hodaka.

I was competing in the 125 class on a Yamaha AT1 and, with support from Yamaha International, also had National Champion Gary Jones' 250 Yamaha from the previous season, for the 250 class. I was also doing some 500-class racing on a 250 Greeves Griffin, which was owned by Don Draco, of Draco Kawasaki, in Santa Ana, California. However, then my friend Chuck Bower showed up with this 125 Penton, sponsored by Mettco Racing.

There were a lot of fast and talented riders competing at El Toro back then. Local pro's such as Morris Malone, Bruce Baron, Davy Carlson, Gary Wells, Werner Schultz, and Dave Boydston, to name a few, made all the classes extremely competitive.

But on this night the clutch on my 250 Yamaha broke during practice. I had resigned myself to riding just the 125 class on my AT1, but then Chuck offered to let me ride his 125 Mettco Penton in the 250 class.

Before Chuck brought that Mettco Penton to El Toro, the only other times I had ever even seen a Penton were at Saddleback Park and Carlsbad, being ridden by guys like Gary Bailey, Lars Larson, Bill Silverthorn, and Ruben Benitez. Needless to say, I jumped at the chance to ride Chuck's Penton.



Here's a great shot of Chuck, taken at the original Elsinore Grand Prix!

Considering that I would be riding it in the 250 class, I was hoping just to keep the fast guys in sight. Well, much to my surprise, I ended up winning that race! After riding my 125 Yamaha AT1, the Penton was like riding a works bike.

Right after the event, I asked Chuck where Mettco Racing was located, and how much a Penton cost. I was ready to go right down there and sign on the dotted line. However, the next day, and before I even got the chance to go to the Mettco shop, Chuck called me and said that Fred Hayes was looking for another 125-class rider. I immediately went over to see Mr. Hayes before he could change his mind!

Once at Mettco, I met Fred and Kay Hayes, along with Fred's parents. They were all very nice and made me feel right at home. And, before the day was over, I had become an employee of Mettco Racing, and a sponsored Mettco rider.

The very first race in which I competed on my own Mettco Penton was at Lions Dragway, near Ascot Park, in Long Beach, California. We would race there on Wednesday nights, then at Orange County Raceway on Thursday nights, Friday nights at Corona Raceway, Corona again on Saturday, or at Saddleback Park, then Carlsbad on Sunday.

This all was during the early days of motocross. The night races were poorly lit and often dusty. Most of the tracks didn't have starting gates early on, either. Instead, we would start with the one-hand-on-the-helmet method, or with a rubber band. The rubber bands were just that. A giant rubber band was stretched across in front of the entire starting field, then it was let loose, snapping away from in front of the riders, and away we would go!





That's Chuck Bower on the left, me in the middle, and Danny LaPorte over on the right.

My Mettco Penton was extremely fast from day one, and with Fred's ongoing R & D, just kept getting faster and faster. The bikes also handled great and were definitely ahead of their time in 1972. Among the modifications we used were porting, head work, shifting systems, relaced wheels with DID rims & stainless steel spokes, and Bassani pipes. Plus, we pop-riveted the stock fuel tank's seams, and ran a variety of different rear shocks, such as Curnutt, Koni, and Works Performance, and early on, experimented with Yamaha front hubs and brakes.

Fred and Kay Hayes, and Fred's mother and father, were the hardest working, nicest, and most dedicated people I have ever worked for. They couldn't do enough to help us in our efforts to win races. If there was anything we needed to further our chances to win, all we had to do was ask. They were there for us in every way possible

Chuck and I, and later Danny LaPorte, competed all over Southern California, often choosing where to go by virtue of what track had the largest purse. We just kept winning on our Mettco Pentons, especially at the night races, which we tended to frequent. This was all before there was a 125 National Championship class, but while I was with Mettco, we did travel to St. Louis, Missouri to compete in a 125 GP, and rode a pre-championship 125 national, in Southern California.



That's me, trying to get up the inside of Bob Grossi, with Danny Turner behind us.

Chuck and I both rode 125's most of the time, but also raced Penton 250's after they came out in 1973. However, before the 250's were introduced, Chuck would compete on a 175 in the 250 class at night races. My brother, Bob, also did some racing for Mettco, riding a 100 Penton. Fred said that Bob's 100cc Mettco Penton was by comparison the fastest bike in its class.

Soon, lots of Pentons began to show up at the races, especially Mettco Pentons. You could look down the starting line at 125-class races and see nothing but green Penton tanks, often making up some two-thirds of the fields. At most big 125 races and night races, it was rare not to see a Mettco jersey in the top five.



In this shot you can clearly see the rivets we used to strengthen the seams of the stock, Penton fiberglass fuel tanks.

I continued to ride Mettco Pentons for Fred and Kay Hayes until the 1974 season, when I was offered a factory Honda ride, with which to compete in the

Nationals – the first year for a 125 class. However, in my opinion, the last 125 Mettco Penton I competed on was faster than my works Honda.

Of course, that was all a long time ago. I've done a lot of racing since then, including several seasons of campaigning the nationals, and for different factory teams. Today however, more than thirty years later, I am back to competing on a 125 Mettco Penton.

My current bike is not an all-original Mettco bike, but it is fast, reliable, and extremely competitive in vintage 125-class racing. I also ride a modern bike – a big bore KTM four-stroke, but I really love my 125 Penton.



How about that classic Mettco jersey, along with open-face helmet, duckbill, and Jofa?

I have ridden and raced quite a few different brands of motorcycles over the last 40 years, but the Mettco Penton will always be my favorite. Racing it is still terrific fun, but I even enjoy just sitting and looking at it, remembering all the great times I have had (and continue to have!) racing Mettco Pentons.



I can sure understand why someone would want to restore a Mettco Penton and/or have one in their collection, but I myself couldn't restore one and just let it sit there - I would have to ride it!

Editor's note: Long after this story was originally written, and while performing research to locate additional images of Bruce, and of Mettco Pentons, the following picture was discovered.

What a great shot of Bruce meeting up with the man responsible for Penton motorcycles - Mr. John Penton himself.



