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## Business Day

### *Hair Club Hitches Its Sidecar to a Biker Theme*

By ANDREW ADAM NEWMAN

IT is among the most memorable — and parodied — lines from a television commercial: Sy Sperling, who in 1976 founded Hair Club for Men, would end his pitches in the 1980s and 1990s by saying, “I’m not only the Hair Club president, but I’m also a client.” As he delivered the line, Mr. Sperling, who appeared to have a full head of hair, held up a photograph in which he was nearly completely bald.

While unforgettable, those commercials are musty, and the company is beginning an effort that aims to cast the brand in a contemporary light by marketing to a narrow segment of those with male-pattern baldness: motorcyclists.

The company, now known as simply Hair Club, is over the next six months traveling to major bike rallies, having made its first appearance at Daytona Bike Week in Florida early this month, and concluding the tour of seven destinations at Roar to the Shore in Wildwood, N.J., in September.

“We wanted to take a brand that people look at as dated and to convey to people that this is not your father’s Hair Club,” said Lee Zoppa, vice president for marketing and advertising at Hair Club.

The tour comes on the heels of a partnership with “American Chopper,” the reality show on the Discovery Channel, where the brand commissioned the motorcycle shop featured on the show, Orange County Choppers, to build a motorcycle in honor of the 35th anniversary of Hair Club.

The design and assembly of the chopper was the subject of two episodes, and the finished bike, unveiled during a January episode, featured the Hair Club logo and follicular flourishes like skulls sprouting hair in a flame pattern, forks that resembled razors, and custom rims meant to evoke the blades of scissors.

The chopper will be displayed at the rallies, along with a similar chopper built by the shop. Hair Club is giving away that second motorcycle, valued at about \$36,000, through a sweepstakes contest being highlighted at the rallies and at [hairclub.com/sweepstakes](http://hairclub.com/sweepstakes).

In “Hair!: Mankind’s Historic Quest to End Baldness,” the author Gersh Kuntzman credits Mr. Sperling, the Hair Club founder, with “marketing the hairpiece as a cultural icon worthy of a place in mainstream society rather than a rug that men purchase with a whisper and a glance over their shoulders and stuff in a brown paper bag.”

Still, in spite of those efforts, “the hairpiece more than any other baldness remedy is the one most reviled in the common culture,” Mr. Kuntzman said in an interview. “Rogaine and Propecia users are not reviled or mocked in the popular culture to the same degree that hairpiece users are,” he added.

For Mr. Sperling, who sold the company to the Regis Corporation in 2005, the word “toupee” was forbidden, although that is precise-

ly what the company sold, a hairpiece woven into what hair remained.

They still “don’t use the ‘T’ word,” Ms. Zoppa said. “We call them ‘nonsurgical hair systems.’”

Whatever they are called, hair pieces were all the company sold up until 2000, but now account for only about 50 percent of revenue, with 30 percent now coming from hair loss prevention treatments like minoxidil (the active ingredient in Rogaine) and a laser comb, and 20 percent from surgical hair transplantation. With more than 95 locations in the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico, revenues were over \$144 million in 2010, according to the brand.

Today women account for about 20 percent of customers, and their growing ranks are why, in the last decade, the company first changed its name to Hair Club for Men and Women before dropping any reference to sex.

New commercials aimed at men drive home the same selling points that the company has for decades: that no matter what approach men pursue, it will not be conspicuous; and that if they do buy a hairpiece, it will not, as it did for so many hapless sitcom characters in the 1970s, fall off.

One new spot, for example, shows several men with a full head of hair engaging in sports like basketball, football and karate, with each turning out to be a Hair Club client and saying to the camera, “Can you tell?” Another shows a man skydiving, the air rip-

pling his forehead but his abundant hair looking natural, who proclaims when he reaches the ground, “Hair Club baby!”

For the motorcycle-related campaign, the company spent about \$500,000, including the fee for building the motorcycles, the brand-integration deal with the Discovery Channel, placing Hair Club commercials that ran during the initial broadcasts of the two episodes that featured the brand, and the current tour of the biker rallies.

While that is serious money, Ms. Zoppa said it was actually a bargain: Considering that episodes were shown several times, and broadcast in Canada and in Puerto Rico, the total airtime the brand received would cost, if bought at current advertising rates, more than \$5 million, according to her calculation.

Hair Club is associating with motorcycles not just to appeal to motorcyclists, but because of what motorcycles more broadly represent.

“When people lose their hair, they lose their self-esteem, and what Hair Club represents is getting back that power, that self-esteem, that self-assurance and that freedom,” Ms. Zoppa said. “And what motorcycles truly represent is that power and freedom, that feeling of the wind blowing in your face and wind blowing through your hair.”

And, said the executive producer of “American Choppers,” Christo Doyle, “You have to go to Hair Club to get hair — and then you can have the wind in your hair.”



A motorcycle commissioned by Hair Club was built on “American Choppers,” and the company is planning to visit biker rallies nationwide.