

Motörhead's overwhelmingly loud and fast style of heavy metal was one of the most groundbreaking styles the genre had to offer in the late '70s. Though the group's leader, Lemmy Kilmister, had his roots in the hard-rocking space rock band Hawkwind, Motörhead didn't bother with his old group's progressive tendencies, choosing to amplify the heavy biker rock elements of Hawkwind with the speed of punk rock. Motörhead wasn't punk rock -- they formed before the Sex Pistols and they loved the hell-for-leather imagery of bikers too much to conform with the safety-pinned, ripped T-shirts of punk -- but they were the first metal band to harness that energy and, in the process, they created speed metal and thrash metal. Unlike many of their contemporaries, Motörhead continued performing into the next century. Although they changed their lineup many, many times -- Lemmy was their only consistent member -- they never changed their raging sound.

The son of a vicar, Lemmy Kilmister (born Ian Fraiser Kilmister, December 24, 1945) first began playing rock & roll in 1964, when he joined two local Blackpool, England R&B bands, the Rainmakers and the Motown Sect. Over the course of the '60s, he played with a number of bands -- including the Rockin' Vickers, Gopal's Dream, and Opal Butterfly -- as well as briefly working as a roadie for Jimi Hendrix. In 1971, he joined the heavy prog rock band Hawkwind as bassist. Lemmy was originally slated to stay with the band only six months, but he stayed with the group for four years. During that time, he wrote and sang several songs with the band, including their signature track, the number three U.K. hit "Silver Machine" (1972).

Lemmy was kicked out of Hawkwind in the spring of 1975 after he spent five days in a Canadian prison for drug possession. Once he returned to England, Kilmister set about forming a new band. Originally, it was to have been called Bastard, but he soon decided to call the band Motörhead, named after the last song he wrote for Hawkwind. Lemmy drafted in Pink Fairies guitarist Larry Wallis and drummer Lucas Fox to round out the lineup. Motörhead made their debut supporting Greenslade in July. Two months later, the group headed into the studio to make their debut album for United Artists with producer Dave Edmunds. Motörhead and Edmunds clashed over the direction of the recording, resulting in the group firing the producer and replacing him with Fritz Fryer. At the end of the year, Fox left the band and Lemmy replaced him with his friend Philthy Animal (born Philip Taylor), an amateur musician.

Motörhead delivered its debut album to UA early in 1976, but the label rejected it. Shortly afterward, former Blue Goose and Continuous Performance guitarist "Fast" Eddie Clarke joined the band. Following one rehearsal as a four-piece, Wallis left the band, leaving Motörhead a trio; this is the lineup that would later be recalled as the group's classic period. The band spent most of 1976 struggling, however, performing without a contract or manager and generating little money. At the end of the year, they cut a single, "White Line Fever"/"Leavin' Here," for Stiff Records that wasn't released until two years later. By the summer of 1977, they had signed a one-record contract with Chiswick Records, releasing their eponymous debut in June; it peaked at number 43 on the U.K. charts. A year later, the band signed with Bronze Records.

Overkill

Overkill, Motörhead's first album for Bronze, was released in the spring of 1979. The album peaked at number 24, while its title track became the band's first Top 40 hit. Motörhead continued to gain momentum, as their concerts were selling well and *Bomber*, the follow-up to *Overkill*, reached number 12 upon its fall release. The band was doing so well that UA released the rejected album at

the end of the year as *On Parole*. *Ace of Spades*, released in the fall of 1980, became a number four hit, while the single of the same name reached number 15.

No Sleep 'Til Hammersmith

Ace of Spades became Motörhead's first American album, but they were making little headway in the U.S., where they only registered as a cult act. Back in England, the situation could hardly have been more different. Motörhead were at the peak of their popularity in 1981, releasing a hit collaboration with the all-female group Girlschool entitled *Headgirl* and entering the charts at number one with their live album *No Sleep 'Til Hammersmith*. Though the group was rising commercially, there was tension within the band, particularly between Clarke and Lemmy. Clarke left the band during the supporting tour for 1982's *Iron Fist*, reportedly angered by Kilmister's planned collaboration with Wendy O. Williams. Former Thin Lizzy guitarist Brian Robertson replaced Clarke.

Another Perfect Day

The new lineup released *Another Perfect Day* in the summer of 1983, which was a disappointment, only reaching number 20 in the U.K. Robertson left two months later, replaced by two guitarists: former Persian Risk member Phillip Campbell and Wurzel (born Michael Burston). Shortly afterward, Taylor left to join Robertson's band *Operator*, and was replaced by former Saxon drummer Pete Gill. This lineup released a single, "Killed by Death," in September of 1984, but shortly afterward the group left Bronze and the label filed an injunction against the band. As a result, Motörhead were prevented from releasing any recordings -- including a bizarre collaboration between Lemmy and page-three girl Samantha Fox -- for two years.

Hear 'n Aid

Motörhead finally returned to action in 1986, first with a track on the charity compilation *Hear 'n Aid* and later with the Bill Laswell-produced *Orgasmatron*, which was released on their new label, GWR. *Orgasmatron* was successful with the band's still-dedicated cult audience in England and America, and received some of the group's best reviews to date. The following year, they released *Rock 'N' Roll*, which was equally successful. In 1988, the live *No Sleep at All* appeared, and Lemmy made his acting debut in the comedy *Eat the Rich*. Two years later, the band signed to WTG and released *The Birthday Party*. Taylor briefly rejoined the band in 1991, appearing on that year's *1916*, before Mikkey Dee, formerly of King Diamond, took over on drums. Dee's first album with the band was 1992's *March or Die*, which didn't chart in the U.S. but played to their U.K. cult following. WTG dropped the band after the album's release and they started their own label, appropriately called Motörhead, which was distributed through ZYX. Their first album for the label was 1994's *Bastards*.

Stone Dead Forever

For the remainder of the '90s, Motörhead concentrated on touring more than recording. Outside of the band, Lemmy appeared in insurance commercials in Britain. He also acted in Hellraiser 3 and had a cameo in the porn movie John Wayne Bobbit Uncut. In 1997, the group moved to the metal-oriented indie label Receiver and released Stone Dead Forever; the live Everything Louder Than Everyone Else followed in 1999, and a year later they returned with We Are Motörhead. Hammered appeared in 2002 and was followed by 2004's Inferno. In 2005, the Sanctuary label reissued some of the band's classic albums (Overkill, Ace of Spades, and Iron Fist) in two-CD deluxe editions. A collection of all-new material, Kiss of Death, arrived in 2006, followed by Motorizer in 2008. In 2010, Motörhead embarked on a 35th anniversary tour in support of their 20th studio album, The Wörld Is Yours, which was released under a new deal with German label UDR. After taking an enforced break in 2012 to allow Lemmy to recover from laryngitis, the band started writing for its next album. Decamping to NRG Studios in North Hollywood to work with producer Cameron Webb, they recorded Aftershock, one of their most aggressive albums in years, which was released in October 2013.

Bad Magic

However, while Motörhead's fan base was as strong as ever, Lemmy was not -- years of drinking and smoking began to catch up with the group's leader (by this time well into his mid-sixties). He struggled with heart problems and diabetes, and in 2013, the rocker was fitted with an internal defibrillator to regulate his heartbeat. A pair of European festival dates had to be canceled when Lemmy was diagnosed with a hematoma, and Motörhead were forced to cut their set short at the 2013 Wacken Open Air Festival when Lemmy lacked the strength to continue. The seemingly indestructible Lemmy finally made concessions to his health, giving up cigarettes and replacing bourbon and cola with wine and the occasional vodka; by the end of 2014, Motörhead were back in business. They resumed their busy touring schedule, and in early 2015 entered the studio to begin work on a new album. The finished product, titled XXX: Bad Magic, was released in late August 2015. Sadly, Lemmy's health continued to decline, and the day after Christmas, he was diagnosed with cancer. He died two days later on December 28, 2015. The band's last record turned out to be a recording of two typically blistering sold-out shows at Munich's Zenith concert hall only a month prior to his death. The resulting live album, Clean Your Clock, was released in spring 2016 and was the 40-year-old band's final offering, following their understandable decision not to continue without their much-loved frontman.