

HANG TEN GP: PLAY IT AGAIN, GERRIT

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SEPTEMBER 1976 \$1.00

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cycle guide

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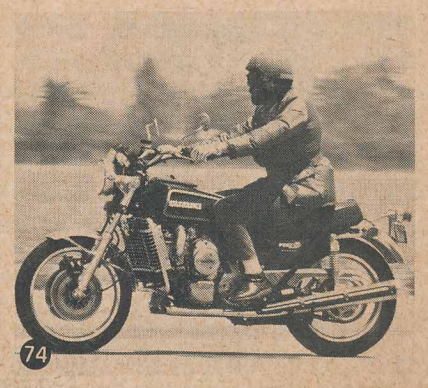
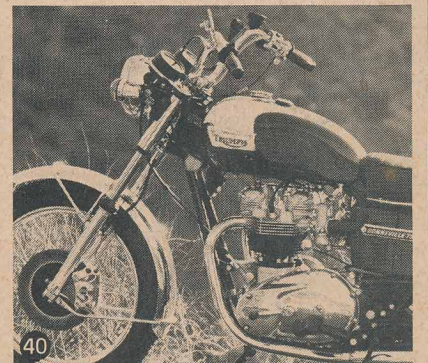
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HANG TEN U.S. GRAND PRIX:

PHOTOGRAPHY: STEVE FRENCH, PAUL WEBB AND ART FRIEDMAN

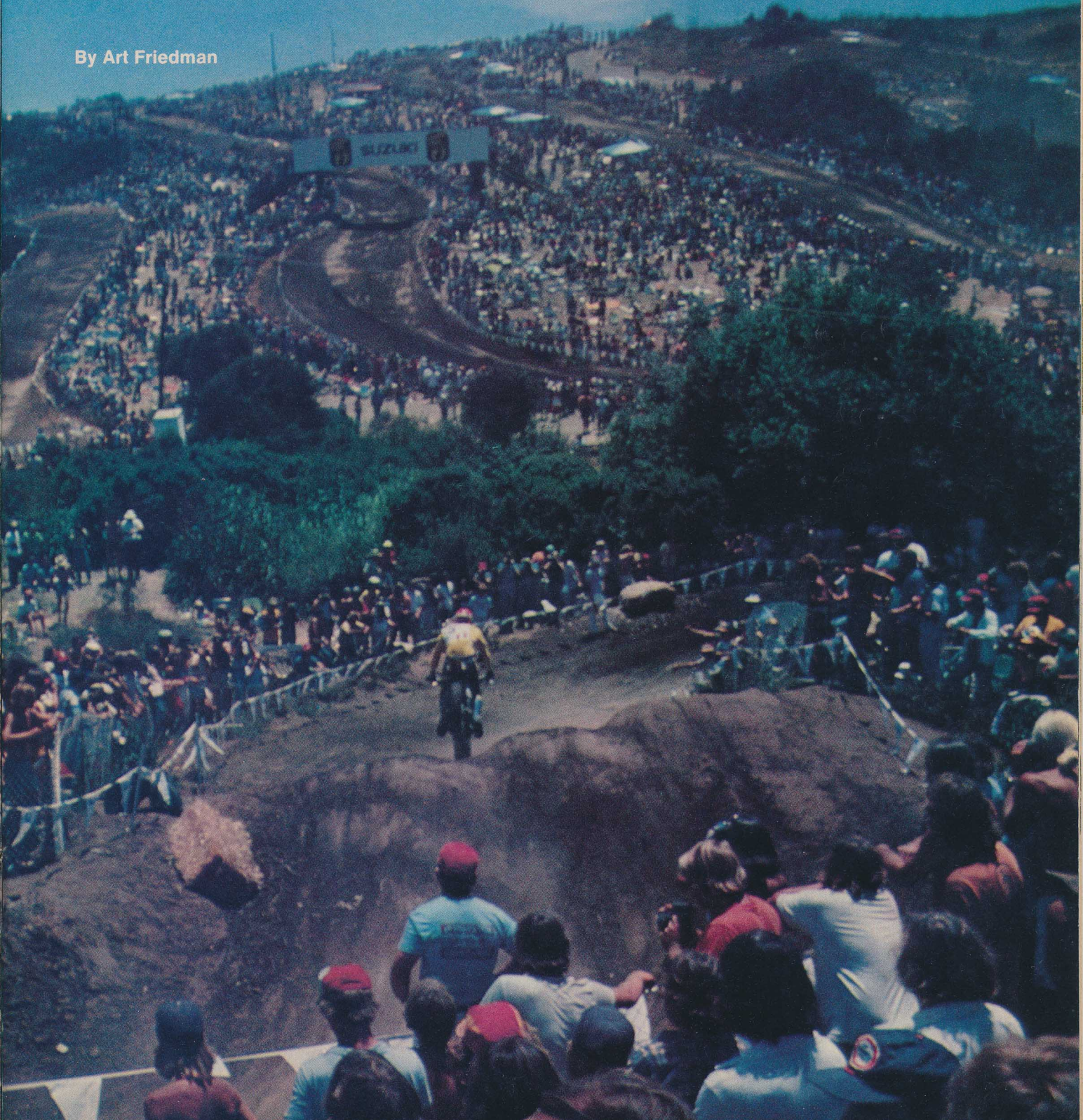


PAUL WEBB



Or, The Third Annual Gerrit Wolsink Benefit Motocross

By Art Friedman



"It was just one of those days . . ." shrugged Gerrit Wolsink. He'd just won his third consecutive Hang Ten United States 500cc Grand Prix and was facing a group of reporters who wanted to know if the Dutchman had some special physical or mental affinity for the Carlsbad, California motocross course. Wolsink is considered one of the better riders on the 500cc world championship circuit, but not *the* very best. That distinction is reserved for his Suzuki teammate, Roger DeCoster. But better or not, Wolsink consistently manages to wax DeCoster and everyone else when the 500cc championship trail comes to America.

Wolsink was considered a possible winner before the race, but not too many people were picking him for a third straight victory. After he won it, however, observers began to talk about some special something that Wolsink might feel for Carlsbad's world championship course. But Wolsink disagreed with that idea, saying his string of wins has been the result of nothing more than consistency, lots of effort, and good luck.

Certainly his competition wasn't unusual. Wolsink's biggest concerns were the European riders he faces every week on

the Grand Prix circuit—he probably wasn't too worried about the Americans arrayed against him. Only one American—Brad Lackey—seemed to have a good chance at a victory, and only because he's learned to play this European game of motocross the way the Europeans play it. Since Heikki Mikkola moved to the 250 class, Husqvarna's entire 500cc world championship effort is now centered on the northern Californian.

There didn't seem to be too many strong challengers among the purely-domestic Americans. Suzuki's Tony DiStefano, fresh from his second 250 national championship, and his teammate, Steve Stackable, were long-shot possibilities, but like the other Americans, were only expected to be field-fillers, battling for a good spot in the top ten. Others in this category included Gary Semics on a Team Kawasaki, Bultaco's Marty Tripes, Maico-mounted Gaylon Mosier, Team Honda's Tommy Croft, Harley's Rex Staten, and three-time National Champ Gary Jones.

The latter two were riding some unusual, more-or-less American-made machinery. Jones was aboard an Ammex, which is what you get when you cross a motorcycle made by the Mexican Islo factory with the motocross tradition of the Jones family. The bike has been under

development by Gary and his father for more than a year, but progress has been slow and the bike still isn't sorted out.

Staten's ride—a 341cc Harley-Davidson—was more promising, even though the machine was brand new. The bike was three weeks old when it got to Carlsbad, and its keepers, headed by John Ingham, hadn't even had a chance to get it on a dyno. The 341 wasn't super-fast at Carlsbad, but it proved to be fairly reliable. The bike is not a bored-out version of H-D's 250, either. The engine is very different, and the dry weight of the bike is about 230 pounds.

Another new and promising machine was the Honda RC500 Type II. Little information was divulged about the bike, but it was unquestionably the most powerful motocrosser at Carlsbad. With the RC500 Type II, Honda has extended its use of the color red—even the engine is painted that color.

The RC500 had Pierre Karsmakers, the "Belgian Dutchman" turned American, looking like he meant to win. His co-star on the Honda team, Marty Smith, wasn't on hand, since Honda preferred that Smith contest the 125cc national in Michigan. The second Honda RC500 was ridden by Tommy Croft.

Smith wasn't the only American miss-

Overleaf: A dead magneto kept Pierre Karsmakers out of the first moto, but he was a solid second in the final moto despite tiring shocks.

While Karsmakers (6) and Wolsink (3) were making a quick getaway in the second moto, Tony DiStefano, Steve Stackable, and Willi Bauer were out back playing bump-me-crash-you.





Faster and tougher than ever before, Gerrit Wolsink was just plain unbeatable.

When Wolsink got back to the pits, DeCoster sat down next to him and said, "You look tired." But DeCoster wasn't feeling that swell himself after his get-off.

Over in the Maico pits there was an air of restrained optimism: If Wolsink's luck failed him, the Maicos of Noyce and Mosier were holding the second-best spots for the overall victory going into the second moto.

In the meantime, the 250 Support class launched into its second moto. The first 250 moto had been led initially by Ken Zahrt on a mostly-stock OSSA GP II. But Kent Howerton had been closing in and his Husky took over when Zahrt's big drive wound down. Howerton won the first moto and took the lead immediately in the second moto, which he won despite losing the lead when he hit a fallen bike and bailed off. Like Wolsink, Howerton carried the number three on his number plate, and one observer suggested that the only requirement to win was just having the right number. Robert Elliot ended up

ing. Bob Hannah was also in Michigan—winning—and the rest of the Yamaha team was with him. Kawasaki had lost the services of Jim Weinert when his kneecap was smashed by a flying rock in a practice session several weeks before. Weinert was hobbling around playing Expert Commentator for ABC-TV's Wide World of Sports. Jim Ellis was also at the 125 national, and Jim Pomeroy was in Europe, pursuing the 250 world championship for Bultaco.

After the gate fell, Wolsink reached Turn One first. By the end of the first lap, he had more than five seconds in hand, and his lead just kept getting bigger as, one after another, his pursuers plunged into their own disasters.

Brad Lackey had gotten a good start, but tipped over right away and lost his advantage. For a moment it looked as though Roger DeCoster might gain on the rapidly-disappearing Wolsink. But on the second lap, while running second, DeCoster felt his footpeg begin to bend and in the next turn he left the race—end over end. He wasn't badly hurt, but called it quits for the moto and rode slowly back to the Suzuki pits. There he could contemplate why—on Father's Day of all days—he should be sitting, bruised, in the back of a truck while his wife was ten days overdue with their first child.

DeCoster wasn't the only one to retire. The magneto on Karsmakers' Honda stopped making sparks, and his chance of a GP win at Carlsbad '76 ended. Adolf Weil also ran into trouble when he had to stop to change a fouled plug.

Out on the track, Wolsink had opened a bigger lead than ever and began to check

his pace slightly to allow for the terrific heat and increasing dust. Holding down an ever-more-distant second was Britisher Graham Noyce, Maico's surprising new 19-year-old star. Within striking distance of him was Gaylon Mosier on another Maico, so the Maico camp was hoping for a problem to pop up in Wolsink's Suzuki. But the Suzuki never did anything except get farther and farther away.

About halfway through the moto, Steve Stackable passed Herbert Schmitz and his Puch to take fourth. Behind them for most of the moto was Englishman Vic Allan on a four-stroke CCM, feeling pressure from Belgian Jaak Van Velthoven. Van Velthoven was a factory Yamaha rider last year, but got his walking papers when Yamaha lost interest in European motocross. He now works for KTM.

Brad Lackey righted himself after his crash and worked back up through the pack until he was behind Tommy Croft in the closing laps. Lackey applied pressure until he found an opening, then went off after Allan and Van Velthoven, who had switched places. Lackey caught Allan but ran out of moto before he got to Van V.

Did Wolsink have trouble pacing himself way out front like that? "Oh, no," smiled Gerrit. "When you have a 20-second lead, it's very easy to find a comfortable pace."

For Roger DeCoster the USGP was best forgotten. However, he did remain first in the world championship standings.



ART FRIEDMAN

STEVE FRENCH

second in both motos on his RM250 Suzuki.

Pierre Karsmakers' early retirement in the first 500 moto gave him plenty of time to psych himself up for the second. He combined that mental energy with the Honda's power advantage to get the holeshoot. But Wolsink wasn't far behind, and in a few laps the Suzuki was back in front and stretching it out again. Now Wolsink had only one thing to worry about: His kickstarter lever had snapped off when he came out for the second moto, so if he stalled the engine, he might not get it restarted.

But the two Maico riders who'd placed second and third in the first moto weren't there to capitalize on any disasters that might have befallen Wolsink. Both Noyce and Mosier were delayed by crashes and were no longer holding down strong positions in the race. There was no joy in Maico-ville.

Nor was DeCoster finding a fresh sup-

ply of luck. His front brake cable had kinked and was doing one of those things where the brake locks up every time the fork compresses. DeCoster tried for a few laps, then retired. He'd have liked to win the second moto because the world championship is decided by the number of *moto* wins, not by overall finishes. But DeCoster wouldn't have had an easy time of it even without his brake problems. Wolsink was *on* that day, and even Roger DeCoster would have had a hard time running him down.

In the wakes of Wolsink and second-place Karsmakers, Tommy Croft had come to life. For the most part, Croft has been considered a 125—and occasionally a 250—rider, and as such has always lived in the shadow of teammate Marty Smith. Some people were surprised to find his name on the entry list, but in the second moto, Croft showed the reason it was there.

Croft got a good start and went right out

and passed Ake Jonsson. (That's Ake Jonsson the former Yamaha factory rider who is back on a factory Maico; Jonsson has always been close to the 500 world championship, and he dominated the 1972 TransAMA series.) Then Croft passed Adolf Weil (who came to Carlsbad second in the world championship standings) and made both passes stick—at least for a while.

Rex Staten and Vic Allan were debating ninth place when they collided. Allan's bike was bent past quick repair, but Rocket Rex got up and going again. About half a lap later, Staten realized that a footpeg had punched a big gouge in his hip, so he stopped at the pits and was flown to the hospital.

Brad Lackey got a reasonable start, and worked his way up place by place until he passed the Maicos of Jonsson and Weil and once again came up behind Croft. He might have had problems getting past the Honda rider in this moto, but Croft came

Brad Lackey is getting faster all the time. Despite a first moto fall, he ended up second overall.





German Puch rider Herbert Schmitz was relatively unknown in this country before the race, but he changed that by finishing third overall.

down with a bad case of the wobbles when six spokes in his front wheel snapped. Lackey went by Croft just before the end, which didn't hurt Croft too much because he didn't lose any overall positions. But as he continued to slow to nurse his front wheel, Ake Jonsson caught him and passed just before the flag, dropping Croft to fifth in the moto and fifth overall. Behind them, Tony DiStefano, who had come from dead last after a first-turn spill, almost, but not quite, caught crafty old Adolf Weil at the flag. Herbert Schmitz finished behind them for eighth in the moto and third overall.

Up front, Wolsink won without challenge. Karsmakers' Honda was loading up a little at low rpm and he had faded his suspension ruthlessly but still kept a firm grip on second in the moto. Lackey's third in the second moto and his seventh in the first combined for second overall. Herbert Schmitz turned a fifth and an eighth into third overall for Puch. Tenth and fourth made Ake Jonsson and his Maico fourth overall. With the glaring exception of Wolsink, it was not a day for consistency.

While some onlookers were talking about Wolsink as a permanent fixture on Carlsbad's victory podium, others were asking, "What if DeCoster hadn't had problems?" The answer is that it's likely that DeCoster would have been second. Even if he hadn't been stopped by mechanical gremlins, DeCoster would have had problems catching Wolsink, who was faster than ever before and rode a flawless race. "I'm being more aggressive this year," said Wolsink. "And I'm in better shape." To those who asked about what would have happened if DeCoster had not broken, Wolsink said: "In motocross, there are no 'ifs.'" 📱

FIRST MOTO RESULTS:

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------|
| 1. Gerrit Wolsink | Suzuki |
| 2. Graham Noyce | Maico |
| 3. Gaylon Mosier | Maico |
| 4. Steve Stackable | Suzuki |
| 5. Herbert Schmitz | Puch |
| 6. Jaak Van Velthoven | KTM |
| 7. Brad Lackey | Husqvarna |
| 8. Vic Allan | CCM |
| 9. Tommy Croft | Honda |
| 10. Ake Jonsson | Maico |

SECOND MOTO RESULTS:

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------|
| 1. Gerrit Wolsink | Suzuki |
| 2. Pierre Karsmakers | Honda |
| 3. Brad Lackey | Husqvarna |
| 4. Ake Jonsson | Maico |
| 5. Tommy Croft | Honda |
| 6. Adolf Weil | Maico |
| 7. Tony DiStefano | Suzuki |
| 8. Herbert Schmitz | Puch |
| 9. Jaak Van Velthoven | KTM |
| 10. Steve Stackable | Suzuki |

OVERALL RESULTS:

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------|
| 1. Gerrit Wolsink | Suzuki |
| 2. Brad Lackey | Husqvarna |
| 3. Herbert Schmitz | Puch |
| 4. Ake Jonsson | Maico |
| 5. Tommy Croft | Honda |
| 6. Steve Stackable | Suzuki |
| 7. Jaak Van Velthoven | KTM |
| 8. Gaylon Mosier | Maico |
| 9. Adolf Weil | Maico |
| 10. Terry Clark | Kawasaki |

Winner Kent Howerton closes in on Ken Zahrt in the first 250 moto.

Howerton wanted to ride in the 500 class, but Husky put him on a 250. STEVE FRENCH

