

4
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YAMAHA YZ125E: 11 GRAND GASSER

DIRT BIKE

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**RED ROOSTER
HONDA CR250R**

TESTS:

- **HERCULES 250 ISDT**
- **SUZUKI RM80C**
- **YAMAHA SR500**

**CHUCK SUN
ON THE
RISE**



TOMMY CROFT



TRAINING WITH BRAD LACKEY
FIX FLATS WITH LESS FUSS
KYB PRO-LINE SUSPENSION

DIRT BIKE

VOLUME EIGHT NUMBER FOUR
APRIL 1978

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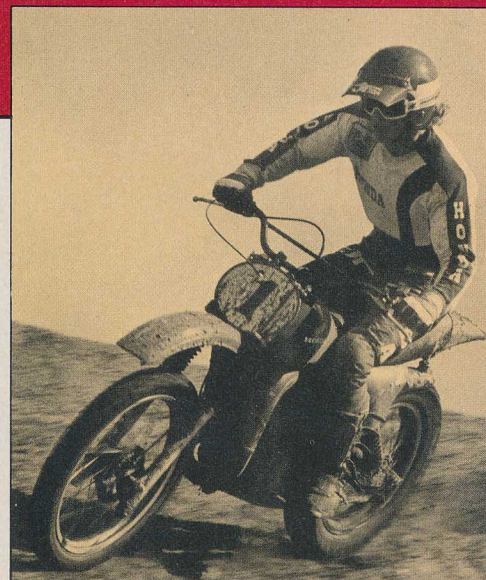
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ON THE COVER:
Tommy Croft and the Big Red Machine
that Cincinnati didn't build.
Photo by Len Weed.

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE APRIL 20



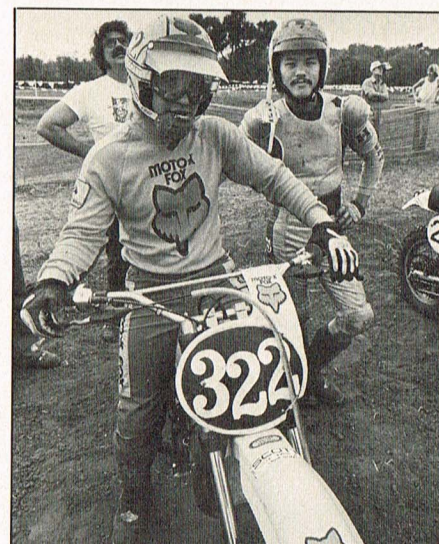
Chuck learned to adopt a smoother, more conservative style to be sure of finishing races.



At Mid-Ohio this past fall, Chuck narrowly edged out Honda factory rider Warren Reid to win the opening race of the Trans-AMA 250cc National class.



Chuck added two more overalls after the Mid-Ohio opener.



One of Chuck's toughest rivals in the 1977 Trans-AMA Support class was Moto-X Fox's Mark Barnett.



Chuck with tuner Eric Crippa.

CHUCK SUN

No more wrenching for the Trans-AMA National class winner

Report and photography by Jim Gianatsis

□ There are two ways to make it to the top in the high-powered, bucks-up world of American professional motocross. Neither is easy, but one is a lot harder. One way, and the easiest, is to impress the Southern California-based motorcycle companies with consistent wins at nearby tracks like Carlsbad and Saddleback. The second way is roughing it on the road.

For Chuck Lai Sun the second way was the only way to go. Not too many factory team managers take notice of who dominates at the local races up around Sherwood, Oregon. So Chuck hit the AMA National circuit, a little over two years ago. He stuffed his shop-sponsored 360 Husky into a home-built enclosed trailer, convinced his best friend of the glories of being a race mechanic, and talked his girlfriend into joining them. Together the trio piled into a 12-year-old Chevy pickup truck to follow the 1975 Trans-AMA series across the United States.

As the story goes . . . Chuck had just enough money, about 150 bucks, to get to the first race in Ohio. The 250cc Support class was already full, so he had to compete in the 500cc International class against all the top factory riders. During the ten weeks of traveling across the country he showed flashes of potential. At Cycle World, Missouri, he nailed the holeshot, only to throw his bike away two corners later when the realization that he was leading a Trans-AMA race finally got to him.

Most of Chuck's first year on the circuit consisted of trying to keep his bike and truck running, while still doing well enough in each week's race to earn the money for gasoline and food to see them through to the following week's race. Things like motel rooms were a luxury Chuck could never afford. Once in a while they'd bum a shower or a warm floor when it was really cold out, but most of the time Chuck and girlfriend Lisa camped out in the back of

the pickup truck while mechanic Rocky made the front seat his home. Much of the time meals consisted of nothing more substantial than cold cereal or peanut butter sandwiches.

Lisa and Rocky called it quits midway through the 1976 racing season, leaving Chuck on his own. Besides racing, training and driving, he now had to be his own mechanic as well. One could live cheaper than three, though, and once in a while Chuck could afford the luxury of restaurant food and sharing a motel room on race weekends with other riders. 1976 was also the year that Chuck didn't get much faster, but he learned the tricks for riding consistently and keeping his bike together. Consistency and a reliable bike are both necessities if a privateer is to survive.

Much of the 1976 season was spent racing Support at the National races. When the Trans-AMA series rolled around again he had made sure he was entered in the 250cc Support class. The series evolved into a battle between Chuck, Danny LaPorte, John Savitski, Rich Eierstedt and Jimmy Ellis, with Eierstedt pulling off the title win at the final event in Phoenix. Chuck finished the series in third place as top privateer behind Honda's Eierstedt and Suzuki's LaPorte.

Normally such a performance would have netted him a factory ride for 1977, but it didn't. Chuck wasn't the type to go around asking the other factory teams to sponsor him. Most of the other teams figured Chuck was loyal to Husky and that Husky would provide him with additional help. Husqvarna didn't have a large motocross budget for 1977, and what they did have all went to Kent Howerton, the new 500cc National Champion. Take it or leave it, the best offer Husky could make Chuck was to provide him with a bike, parts, and a used Husky van to replace his weary pickup truck. Chuck took it. He'd still have to pay his own expenses, but there

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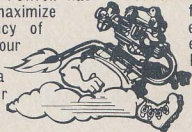
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CHUCK SUN

would at least be a couple of bucks of contingency money from Husky if he did well.

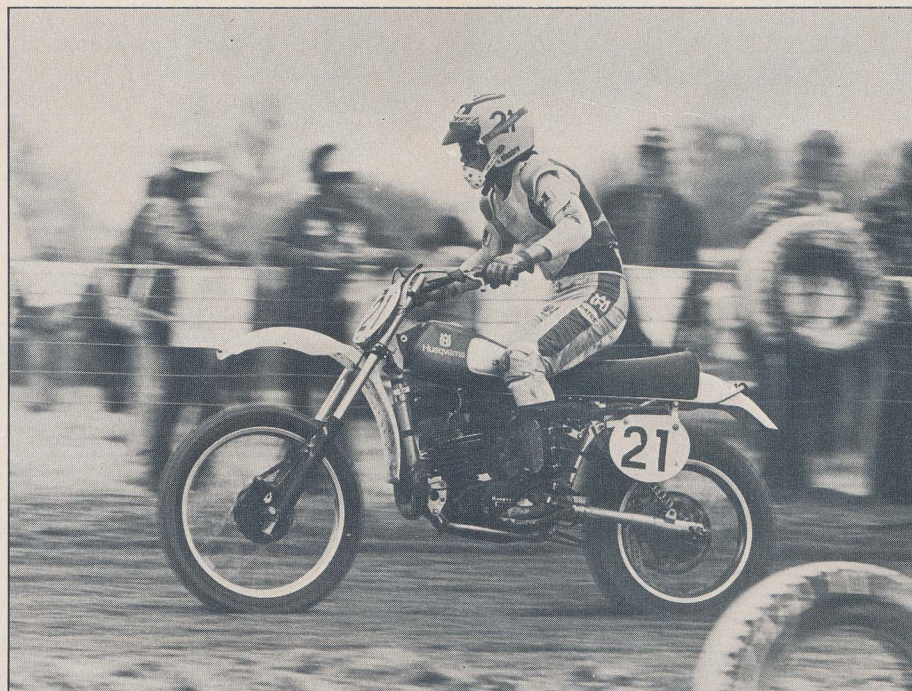
1977 was the year of the rising Sun. His speed picked up considerably. He rode the National classes instead of Support, and while Husky team leader Kent Howerton went into a slump, Chuck began finishing consistently in the top ten each week. When the National Championships concluded at the end of August, Chuck Sun was the seventh-ranked rider overall in the National standings, ahead of a lot of better-known factory riders.

Chuck attacked the Support class of the 1977 Trans-AMA series with a vengeance. Yamaha was out to snare the Support class with its two factory riders, Mike Bell and new 125cc National Champ Broc Glover. Honda counted on Warren Reid. But Chuck showed from the opening race at Mid-Ohio that he had the skill to do well on each of the different tracks of the series. Some of the California factory riders had difficulty in the mud at the eastern races, while Chuck roosted away with the series right from the start, winning three of the first four rounds. Moto-X Fox's young Mark Barnett gave Chuck a fight early on.

The Trans-AMA series is also the riders' showcase for new sponsors, and the factories shop around for riders. Chuck was finally in a position to ask any of the big Japanese companies for a factory ride, but he liked Huskys and wanted to stay on them. His big break came midway through the Trans-AMA

when Kent Howerton announced he would no longer ride for Husky amidst speculation that he had secretly signed with Suzuki. The door was finally open at Husqvarna for Chuck, and within four days of Kent's leaving Chuck had signed a full factory contract to be the top rider on Husky's team for the 1978 season.

Chuck was elated. Along with his factory sponsorship Chuck got Eric Crippa, Kent Howerton's mechanic, who is one of the best in the business. The two should prove to be a potent team as they attack the Supercross series and the 250cc Nationals during the 1978 season. Those two years of cold cereal had finally paid off. ■



Chuck did well enough in local races to pick up a shop-supported bike before going off to follow the Trans-AMA series with \$150.