

# TEAM DIRT BIKE SETS WORLD RECORD

How do you set the 24-hour  
off-road world speed record?

By Ron Lawson

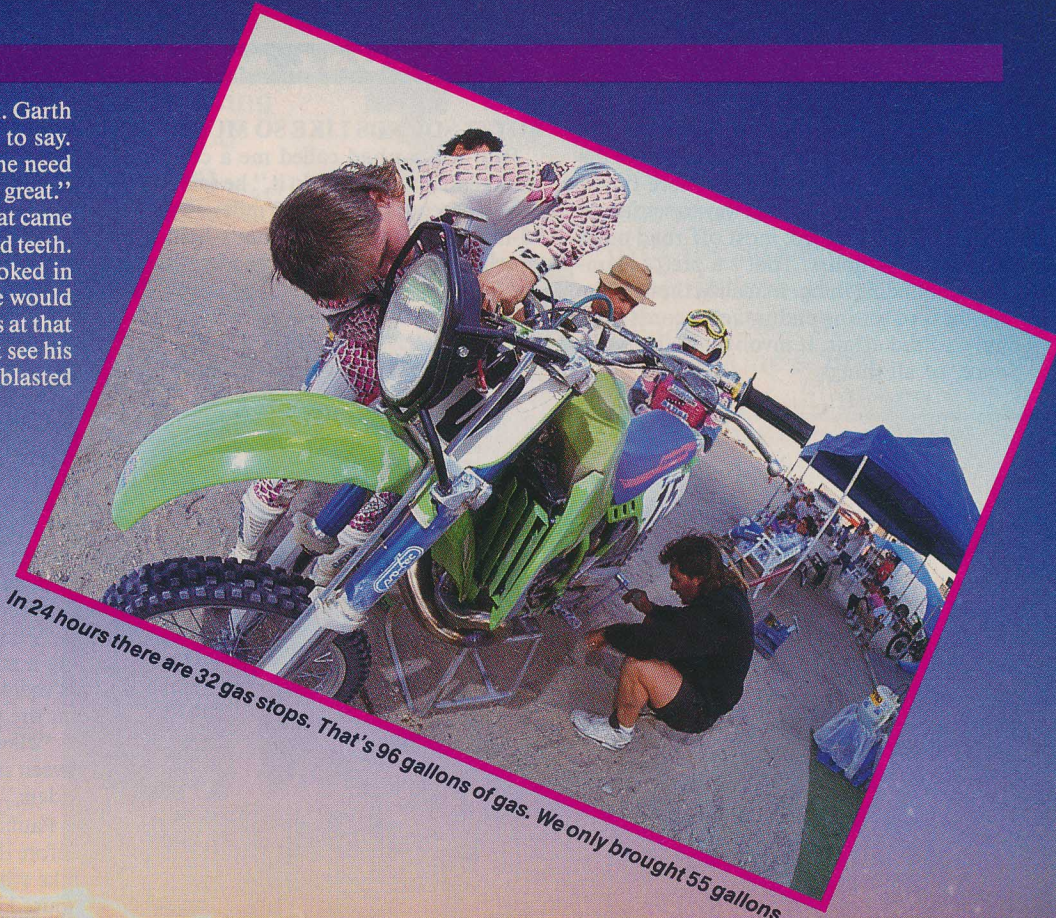
Garth Sweetland was tired. I don't think that has ever happened before. His body was melted into a lawn chair. His hair looked like a dirty air filter. A bug crawled across his forehead and grime was starting to cake around his mouth and nostrils. He didn't care. The worst part of all was that he looked better than I felt.

"Zitterkopf is a dead man," I said. I had already made that same statement four or five times in the last two hours. Those were



the only words my mouth could form. Garth grunted. He rarely had much more to say. "Garth," I said, suddenly feeling the need for a deeper conversation. "You look great." He tried to manage a smile, but all that came out was a glimpse of his mung-covered teeth.

"When was the last time *you* looked in a mirror?" he retorted. Paul Krause would have looked just as bad as either of us at that particular moment, but we couldn't see his face. He was on the KX500, and he blasted



In 24 hours there are 32 gas stops. That's 96 gallons of gas. We only brought 55 gallons . . .



Setting an endurance record means riding a bike long past the point where it stops being fun. Joey Lane, 250cc World Endurance Champ, demonstrates.

by the pits going very fast. He had done that 25 times in the last 12 hours, and before the day ended he would do it 25 more times. Paul, Garth and I were halfway to setting an absolute world record: most off-road miles covered in 24 hours. That's a pretty glamorous-sounding thing. In reality, though, the business of setting endurance records is an ugly, sordid affair. It involves, well, *endurance*, of all things.

### BUT IT SOUNDS LIKE SO MUCH FUN

Paul Krause had called me a couple of weeks earlier. "We can do it," he said. "The existing record is only 1080 miles—that's a 45-mph average . . . and that's held by a couch."

"What will the course be like? Forty-five can be awfully fast around a supercross course."

"Like I said, a *couch* has the record now

—an ATV. That was set in the same place two years ago. Fud Racing is organizing a 24-hour desert race at Plaster City, near San Diego, just like last time, and it will be the same course."

You need to understand this about Paul: He's a salesman. He sells ventilation systems for industrial buildings for a living, but he can sell just about anything to anybody. If a Girl Scout is unfortunate enough to pick on his house, she might not sell any cookies, but chances are she'll walk away with a really great deal on an industrial filtration device.

Paul sold me. "There will be four of us—you, Garth Sweetland, Greg Zitterkopf and me. We'll get Eric Poston from Team Green out there to help with the pit stops, so each of us can just kick back and relax for hours between riding stints."

"Four people isn't very many," I said, being a coward. "Can't we have five or six? Is there any reason we can't have 24 riders on the team?"

"Naw," said Paul, "we'll just get cold between rides. Four is the perfect number of riders."

Paul and I spent a couple of late nights before the race in his garage, working on the bike (the same KX500 that was used and abused in the February *Dirt Bike* shootout)



### WHAT ABOUT THE BIKE?

#### ONE DAY IN THE LIFE OF A KX500

• Hillary wasn't happy. Paul Krause and I had a KX500 scattered all over the garage. Her garage. We spent several evenings getting the bike ready, and Hillary wanted her husband back. "I hope you're enjoying the quality time you're spending with my husband," she said. "Some day you should introduce me to him."

"Hilly," Paul said, "it takes a lot of work to make a bike run for 24 hours." That was a lie. The truth is that almost any modern motocross bike can survive 24 hours of brutal punishment without a single modification. Paul and I were simply trying to undo the abuse that the KX500 went through in the hands of the *Dirt Bike* test squad. The bike had about ten races on it and an awful lot of jumping and thrashing for photo shoots and such.

Here's what we didn't do:

- We didn't start the 24 hours with a fresh top end. It was a little tired, but what the heck. A 500 can take a lot of wear.

- We didn't modify the cylinder, the compression ratio or even replace the worn-out reed valve.

- We didn't brace the frame or repack any bearings.

Here's what we did do:

- We installed a Scott's ([818] 248-6747) steering damper. This was the smartest thing we did. As we got more and more tired, we turned the damper up higher and higher.

- We sent the suspension to Pro Tec ([714] 738-0631). Krause was used to having his suspension set up by Big Bill down there, so we duplicated his setup on our endurance bike. It worked.

- We started the race with a fresh O-ring chain (Tsubaki) and sprockets. The gearing was 15/40.

- Put on an FMF pipe for more over-rev.
- Put thread-locking compound on the engine mount bolts, the shock linkage bolts

◀ **What's it take to make a bike last 24 hours? Twenty-four hours of riding, and not much else.**

and random other fasteners.

- Ran Trick race gas. This was more for reliability than performance, because race gas burns cooler.

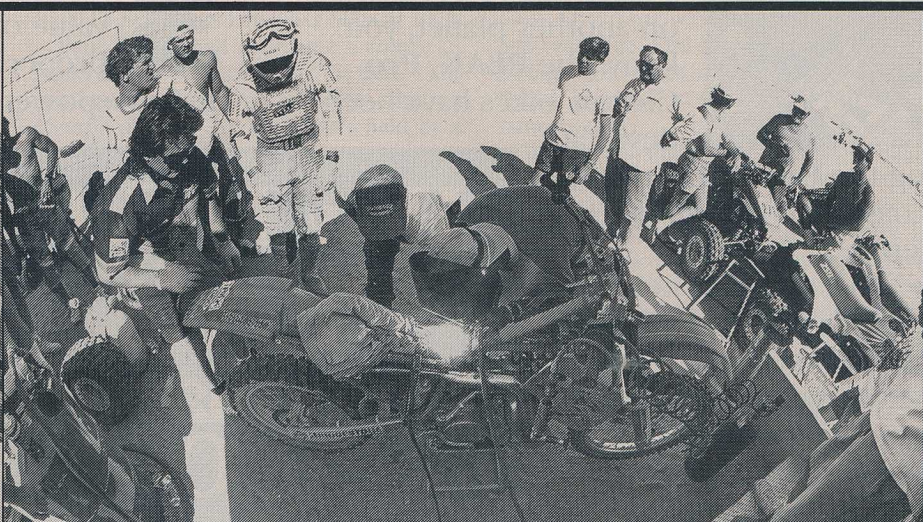
So how did the bike hold up? Early in the day we broke a spoke. A much more costly problem happened about halfway through the event. The frame broke right where the subframe mounts. Garth had to ride five miles holding the subframe between his knees. Worse, the carb intake was sucking in raw dust during that time.

We welded everything back together and got back on the track within 15 minutes. The dirt in the top end didn't seem to hurt, but the stress from the incident caused the pipe to crack later. Still later, the subframe broke and had to be replaced.

We changed the filter a few times—I'm not sure how often—and we went through three Bridgestone M58 rear tires. The same Bridgestone ED-11 front tire went the entire distance. The only other maintenance the bike got was a replaced chain and front sprocket in the early hours of the morning. Pretty impressive. The KX will live to motocross again.

As for Hillary, she came out of it pretty good, too. I'm not sure, but I think she was pulling my leg most of the time that she was complaining.

Then again, maybe not. •



*"It'll be easy," said Paul. "We'll just get on the bike and ride for 24 hours." He forgot to mention the part where we get off the bike and weld it back into one piece after nine hours.*

◀ *With Paul Krause (pictured) and Garth Sweetland, Team DIRT BIKE had the two fastest men at the event.*

*The heroes of the event were the guys who rode this BMW R80 around the course. They completed over 70 laps, but it probably felt like 700. ▶*



and fending off attacks from Hillary, Paul's wife. The plan seemed all too reasonable.

**WHERE IS THE ZIT?**

Paul flopped into the chair that Garth had just vacated. "Zitterkopf is a dead man," he said. I grunted. Krause didn't look too much like a salesman at that particular moment. With dirt embedded into his lips and big, bloodshot eyes, he would scare any Girl Scout into a coma as soon as he opened the front door.

In the meantime, Poston was in the van with his calculator. We all reacted to the sleepless hours of monotony in different ways. Poston would start spewing figures. "We're up to a 57-mph average now. Allowing for a ten percent increase in lap times as it gets dark, and then figuring on a five percent fatigue factor, we are right on schedule," he announced without stopping to inhale. "By the way, with the additional ten gallons of pump gas in the 55-gallon drum of race gas, that brings our ratio of pump gas to race gas to the 40 percent range. Using Osgood's revolving octane reduction law, that means we're somewhere in the 99-octane bracket now."

"You need some sleep, Eric," I said.

"Man, do I."

Garth blasted by the pits. I leaned over to Paul and confessed: "Unless Zitterkopf shows up in the next ten minutes, I'm going to drop dead. I don't think I'll make it through another 40 minutes on that bike." I was being honest. Last-minute plan changes

called for Zitterkopf to arrive at about 4:00 pm—the first nine hours of the race would be a three-man effort, then we would get fresh meat for the night stints. We thought.

It was now 8:00 pm. Aside from a short period near the beginning of the race (when I was on the bike going horrifyingly slow), we had been in front the whole time. Paul and Garth were riding as hard as they could every minute they were on the bike. For that matter, so was I—it's just that my best was about a minute a lap slower than their's. "I don't think Zit is going to show," Paul reported. That thought horrified me. The course was much more brutal than expected. We would have been better off on a supercross track. It started off with a three-mile sandwash. That was the only part where the big KX could be tapped out, but every muscle in your body had to be clinched in order to stay on the bike. Then the course made a sharp 90-degree turn (in whoops) and traversed a cross-grain section of monster whoops where we were lucky to squeak out 30 mph. After that, the course turned and went across a featureless plain. The only problem here was that it was dotted with what might have been bomb craters. I saw an ATV hit one of those and endo itself into pieces. It looked like two quads had collided at 100 mph, as the bodywork separated from the bike and both tumbled through the dust.

Next, the course dropped into a sandwash and went under a train trestle. Only a slight

problem here: The trestle was five feet off the ground. If you forgot to duck, you'd never forget anything again. Then there was a high-speed plain with criss-crossing trails and a few wrecking-ball-sized rocks lying around. Finally, just before the pits there was a section of whoops with a big natural terrain tabletop, made expressly for Garth to show off on. Just one lap on the course had my arms pumped up to uselessness. We had to go for five laps at a time; then we would gas up and switch riders.

**SOUNDS EASY**

Paul was right. Zitterkopf never showed up. It wasn't just that I was tired, but I was blind, too. My night vision is only a little better than Mr. Magoo's. Every time I've raced Baja, I've managed to talk someone else into doing the night segment. The night part of the race was a perverted comedy of me wobbling around in circles and floundering off the course. The ugliest part of all was that there was another team just two laps behind us. If I was too bad at night, they would catch our team in a matter of hours. Everyone slowed somewhat in the dark, although not quite as much as I did. Still, the strain of stumbling around in the darkness took even more of a toll on me. Something had to give.

We tried putting Garth on the bike for double stints at night. That didn't work. He would ride like a hero for about ten minutes, then start to come unglued. Our lead, which had been four laps at one point, gradually

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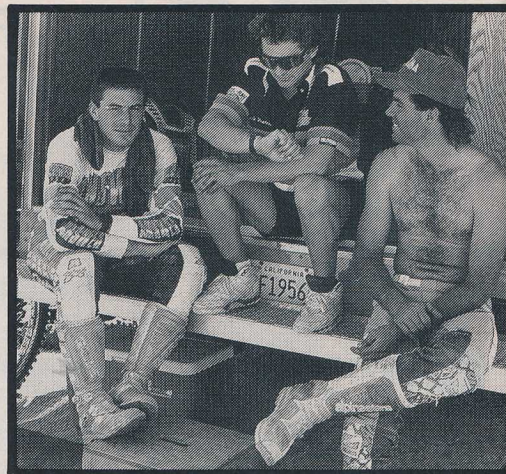
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**SURVIVAL**



Paul Krause, Eric Poston and Garth Sweetland enjoy NOT going around the course. Lawson was doing that at the time.

diminished. Eventually, one KX250-mounted team put itself on the same lap as us.

**THE CAVALRY ARRIVES**

That 250 team had been plugging away the entire time. It was a five-man group consisting of Craig Smith, Joey Lane, Roger Hurd, Bruce Lerud and Robert Prayther. We were sharing the same pit area and fighting over the same lawn chairs. Paul, Garth and I must have been such a pathetic sight that even they took pity on us. They would come up and say things like, "Boy, I sure can't wait to get on the bike again. You sure get cold when you have a few hours to rest, huh?" Then they would look at my sagging face and say, "Oh, sorry. I forgot."

Roger Hurd took the most pity on us. "If you guys need a break, I'll be glad to ride a few night terms for your team, too," he offered. We accepted.

After my first two night sessions, no one really wanted me to ride any more, least of all me. My lap times were terrible, my body was used up and my vision got worse and worse. Hurd took my place during the next two turns. That didn't really offer any rest to Garth or Paul, but it did help the team. In fact, thanks to Hurd's effort, we were able to hold our own against the 250 team—his team. Hurd's work kept us from wearing down to the point where we would have lost the lead.

**THE BOTTOM LINE**

In the end, the record book will read that the four-man team of Sweetland, Krause, Lawson and Hurd won the race by two laps and set an official world speed record of 51-some-odd miles per hour. It won't mention anything about Zitterkopf's no-show, Hurd's sacrifice, Sweetland's double duty or Krause's salesmanship. It won't say a word about Poston's calculations or my night blindness or the bug crawling across Garth's face. It will just say we went 51.35 mph and 1232.5 miles one day.

You know what? That's enough. Nobody has ever done it before. We think it will be a long time before someone does it again. □

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