

1990 ACERBIS INCAS RALLY

*One of the longest,
hardest battles in
South America*

By Bill Berroth

Among the world's great Rallies, the Incas rally is the most accessible and interesting to the average dirt biker. At a cost of \$6000 to \$8000 for transport for yourself, your bike and spares, lodging and entry, participation is about one-third the price of rallies like Paris-to-Dakar. As a bonus, South America offers some of the most breathtaking scenery on earth. Although some of the world's best riders are drawn to the Incas Rally, there are no mega-dollar factory teams or automobile and truck teams so the common man can still have hope of finishing j'irily well if he rides smart and keeps his bike together. Finishing is a victory in itself, because the Incas Rally takes riders 4300 miles on a meandering route that goes from coast to coast and crosses the Andes mountains at elevations above 14,000 feet. The rally is divided into transport sections which riders must complete within a given time frame and special tests, which are all-out timed races, some of which are more than 200 miles long. Imagine racing Barstow-to-Vegas twice a day, three times a week!

Bill Berroth, president of Acerbis Plastica USA, rode the Incas Rally this year and recorded his experiences from the 14-day, 4500-mile race in a journal, hoping to preserve some of his memories in writing for his children. Bill stopped by shortly after the rally and left the journal in the *DIRT BIKE*

offices by mistake. Since we discussed the journal, we knew what it was about and, respecting Bill's privacy, we didn't read it—until about ten minutes after we found it. A few pages into the journal, we knew we had to print it so our readers could ride the Incas Rally along with Bill, through his journal, as we did. Here are some of the highlights.

STARTING WITH A SQUEAK

It's late when I reach Lima, so it's straight to the hotel and to sleep. Kevin Hines, Toshi

(a Japanese rider) and I decide to break in our yet-unstarted machines on a trip to Ica, an easy ride of about 300 miles on mostly paved roads. Surprise! Kevin's and Toshi's bikes were shipped without transmission oil and both their gearboxes lock up! My bike is fine, due to my clearly superior bike prep job, but I ran into trouble of my own. I get stopped by military police but manage to buy my freedom with a few stickers. We looked the bikes over in Ica and went for a desert ride to the Pacific Ocean.

The first special test of the rally is a fast, 120-mile race across the dunes, no trees, rocks, roads—nothing! I took my time and followed my route book, trying not to get lost, crash or seize the bike. Libor Podmol, a Czech rider, crashed hard. Italian Fabio Fasola seized—his first of five before his piston supply ran out, putting him out of the rally. The first special test was used as an event of the Peruvian national enduro championship. Heinz Kinigadner of Austria, former 500 world motocross champion, won the day's race.

LEARNING TO TRIM

With the first day behind us, most riders seemed to be settling down to the pace of the event. I knew I had to rejet before the second day's special test which took us

Peru's coastline desert. Hours in the saddle to gather your thoughts. ►





Motocross special test, Jacarepagua F-1 circuit outside Rio. Final day!

Kevin Hines, top American, earned an impressive second overall. ▶

Photos by Luc Verbeke



INCAS RALLY

above 7000 feet, so on the side of the dirt road about 20 miles from the start, I stopped with Kevin Hines and threw in some jetting I hoped would work. I couldn't resist ribbing Kevin while we worked on the bikes so I asked him if he'd like me to check his tranny oil for him, then I wondered if I should follow his jetting suggestions. The special test was faster terrain than I expected, twisty, rocky mountain roads would be, but bikes with high top speeds still had an advantage. I slowed a bit after nearly slamming into a group of llamas and then tried making up time "trimming" the mountain course by riding off the edge of the mountain road to where it turned below us further down. It was hairy but I saw Kevin do it, so I tried it and didn't die so I kept on doing it. Shortcuts are allowed, but riders take them at their own risk and there's plenty of risk of crash-

ing or getting lost. Even so, the winner is the rider who finishes first, and "trimming" never hurts.

We finished in Puquio, a small village in the heart of the Andes. As we arrived a local girl gave us each a bundle of yellow flowers. I ended up 14th for the day. The piston-scorching Italian, Fasola, won today's race. The town was very remote and the riders were guided to the only large structure there, a town meeting hall. As we chose our beds, the girls who made them all watched us. When a rider picked a bed, the girl who made it would clap and cheer—bizarre!

After we got situated in our "dorm" we ate and worked on the bikes. I decided a new rear tire was in order for the next day's special test, so I took mine off and gave it to a local Peruvian rider. Not long after that

I heard the special test was canceled and day three of the race would be a transfer section only. I found the Peruvian, hoping to retrieve my tire, but he'd already put it on his bike. Our parts truck was late so I had to put his old bald ripper on my bike!

WORK, WORK, WORK

I pulled my bike apart the evening of the fourth day, 800 miles into the rally, to find the source of an odd noise that had developed, along with a big drop in top-end performance. I knew I found it when I pulled the ignition cover off and a mound of epoxy dust fell to the ground. Oh no! I considered stealing the ignition from a press bike but, by some miracle, the KTM parts guy had a spare ignition. I managed to put it on wrong and the bike pinged horribly, but the service van was gone, along with the tools I needed to reinstall it.

JUNGLE BOOBYTRAPS

A special test was planned for day seven but it was canceled when pre-running course checkers discovered the route called for the use of several crudely designed jungle bridges. Hitting them at speed would have been sure disaster. Plenty of technical jungle riding through water and dense vegetation on days seven, eight and nine. It's slow going in spots but they were high-mileage days, over 300 miles each.

I met Kinigadner at a gas stop. Finding gas is always a challenge because the route book only shows a gas pump at a certain mileage with the town name where the local gas vendor is. Usually, it's a man with a drum of straight 79-octane gasoline raised on a stand with a hose running from it, clamped shut with vise grips. You pour some two-stroke oil in your tank, unclamp the hose and fill up. Then you give the "service" station attendant some money and see if he thanks you or says "more."

We went on into the jungle and Kinigadner pulled away. Later I happened on one of the bridges that caused Franco to cancel the special test for the day. This one was just a couple of logs laid across a small ravine with nothing between them. No flat side cut on the logs, no boards joining them together—just logs. Anyone approaching the bridge at speed would have fallen through for sure.

At one point I came to a river crossing where the bike had to be rafted across. Locals wading in the river guided the raft. It was like a scene out of a movie! A raft and some river waders would have been handy on the next river I hit. It was two feet deep and 120 feet across. The bike burbled but made it.

Once across the second river, I realized I was in Brazil. The terrain changed. It was less severe but the insects were the size of chili peppers, but with more juice! Riding alone felt like riding behind a 500 on a rocky road.

I met some other riders in a small Brazilian town that supposedly had gas, so we asked a cop where we could find fuel. He told us "go to Bolivia." *Bolivia!* The cop explained we were less than a mile from the

border and the guard hut had been burned by guerrillas. He suggested we just go into Bolivia, get gas and get out.

TOP-TEN POSSIBILITIES

Day 11 decided the rally for me and a few others. Angelo Signorelli, one of the front-runners, went over the bars after bottoming out on a bridge at the bottom of a hill during the extremely fast 80-mile special test. I passed him and saw his bike, helmet and leathers were completely wasted. We were all surprised he finished the day. Later I saw Gancewski from Poland pushing his bike and Fasola's bike in a truck which was towing Kinigadner! Three top runners forfeited the day—hot dog! I was soaking in my good fortune when Gancewski asked me for gas. I was low so I offered to push him. He said I pushed too slow so he pushed me—at 50 mph! Just when I thought I would live through this my bike quit, out of gas. Who happens by but my Italian buddy, Fabio Gervasio, the shortcut specialist. He gave us each a gallon. Thanks! As we pulled into town the local riders joined us and tried to impress us with their riding skill. We hung back to avoid being taken out by these bozos.

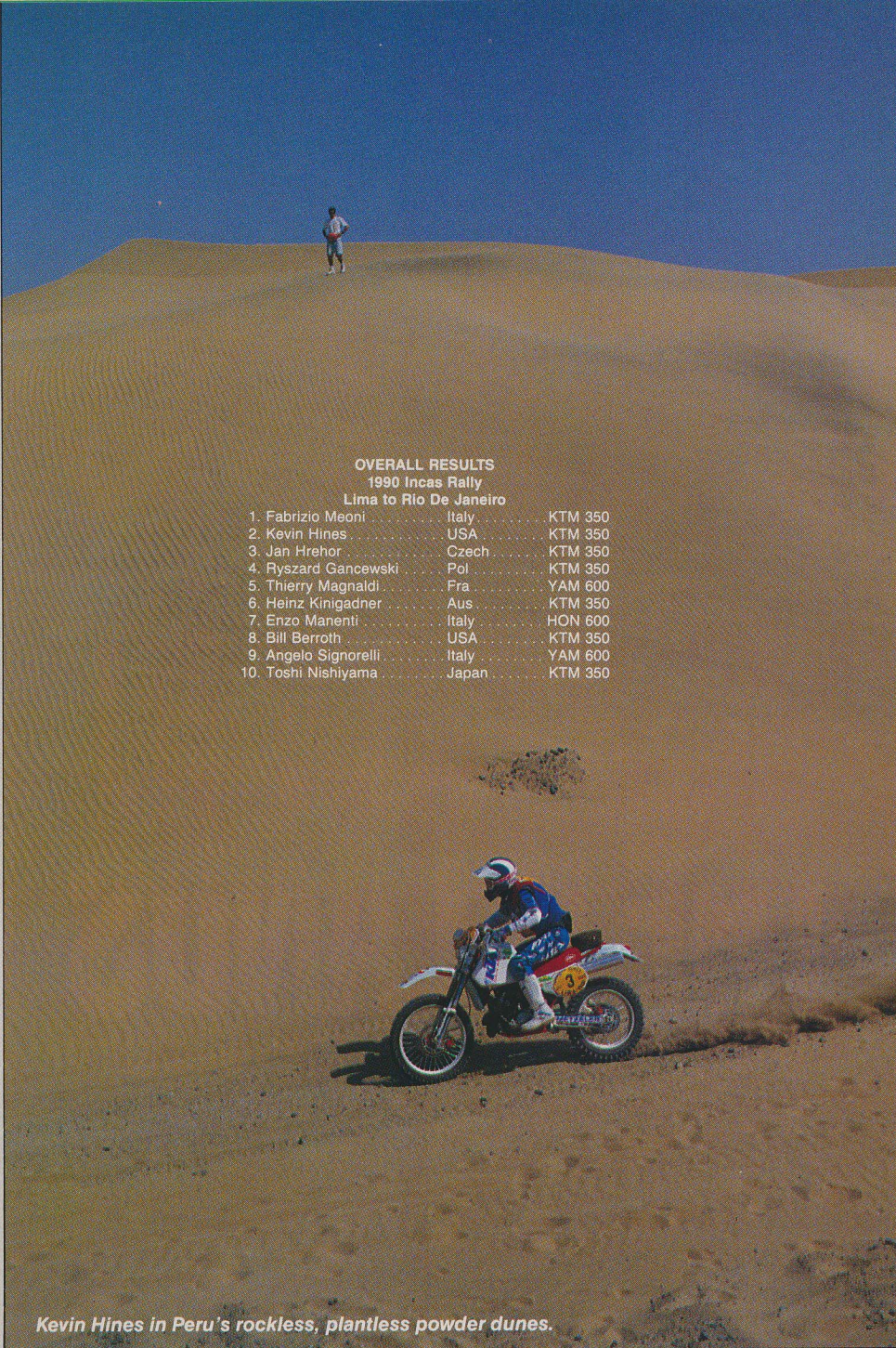
Day 12 was a grueling 620-mile transfer in horrible weather. What was even more horrible was I'd sent my enduro jacket on with my bags by mistake the previous night! A borrowed sweatshirt and cardboard offered some relief against the cold but once it started raining I dissolved into a pulpy mess. After it got dark I became a pulpy frozen mess. Rest day tomorrow. Good idea.

I'd just finished working on my bike and I was asked to join some of the riders to appear on TV, on a Brazilian version of the Johnny Carson show. They wanted us to ride our bikes on stage!

OCEAN VIEW

Day 13 gave us 465 miles and two special tests. When we got to the start of the first special test the rain was steady and things were muddy. Somewhere into the test my rear brakes went. I thought I'd overheated them but I'd worn them out. There were no pads to be found so I pushed on toward the second test. I happened on Kevin, stopped beside the road changing his rear brakes. I thought I'll take his old ones or he's probably got another new set. I'm saved! Then Kevin showed me his bike's brakes were different than mine. He tested the feel of his brake pedal, smiling, and said, "Feels pretty good, Bill, and hey, don't worry, transmission oil's fine, too." Kevin's humor didn't raise my spirits too much but seeing the Atlantic Ocean did! Two weeks and 3500 miles later, proof that we were going somewhere. We'd crossed the continent!

The second special test was memorable, but not because it was one of my best rides. The lack of rear brakes slowed my progress in the rainy, muddy test and I nearly slid off the edge of a 120-foot-long bridge over a raging river. I had plenty of time to calm myself during the final 185-mile transfer. The skies cleared as we neared the finish and we saw some spectacular scenery. On our right



Kevin Hines in Peru's rockless, plantless powder dunes.

OVERALL RESULTS

1990 Incas Rally

Lima to Rio De Janeiro

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|----------------------|-------|---------|
| 1. Fabrizio Meoni | Italy | KTM 350 |
| 2. Kevin Hines | USA | KTM 350 |
| 3. Jan Hrehor | Czech | KTM 350 |
| 4. Ryszard Gancewski | Pol | KTM 350 |
| 5. Thierry Magnaldi | Fra | YAM 600 |
| 6. Heinz Kinigadner | Aus | KTM 350 |
| 7. Enzo Manenti | Italy | HON 600 |
| 8. Bill Berroth | USA | KTM 350 |
| 9. Angelo Signorelli | Italy | YAM 600 |
| 10. Toshi Nishiyama | Japan | KTM 350 |

was the ocean, one secluded cove after another, each with a few large sailboats in calm blue water. On the left was a high mountain range, thick with jungle vegetation, rising into the clouds.

EIGHTH PLACE!

Day 14, the last day! A short transfer took us out of Rio to the Formula One road racing circuit. A motocross special test was held in the track's infield. Rain fell as we approached the track and the infield grass was soaked and there was a lot of standing water. I switched to a mud tire for this final test and removed my tool bag so I could move around on the bike better, being careful not to remove the picture of Billy [Berroth's son] which had stayed on the bike since the start in Lima! The race was brutal, in two-foot-

deep ruts formed in just a few laps, and there were bike-swallowing mud puddles like a Pennsylvania hare scrambles! I was struggling toward the end of the 30-minute moto when my mud-covered chain sucked the remains of someone else's chain rubbing block into my countershaft! The bike slithered to a stop but the cases were undamaged. My finish secured an eighth in the overall standings for me. All right!

We returned to Rio for the official finish, wheelying and brake-checking each other the whole way. What we'd accomplished started to hit me and I felt great. I'd made some good friends along the way, too. Getting on the plane and returning to real life didn't seem too exciting, but I'd never forget this coast-to-coast ride. □