



U.S. WRAPS IT UP WITH A PAIR OF KINGS

LaPORTE:

THE "OTHER" WORLD CHAMPION

World 250 title backs up Lackey's 500 crown

By Tom Webb

Everything came down to the wire. After a season of fierce battling, full-blown, gut-wrenching survival racing, the whole ball game boiled down to the final moto. For some, it was anticlimactic. Others considered it a fluke; but for Danny LaPorte all that mattered was the World Championship.

Moto one in Sweden intensified the warped vibes that passed through the bipartisan crowd and the journalists on hand. Could Danny pull it off? Only a rookie on the GP scene, the young American impressed the European crowd first with the dynamic finishes in the Trophee and Motocross des Nations in 1981, then with his drive to become the first American 250 World Champ.

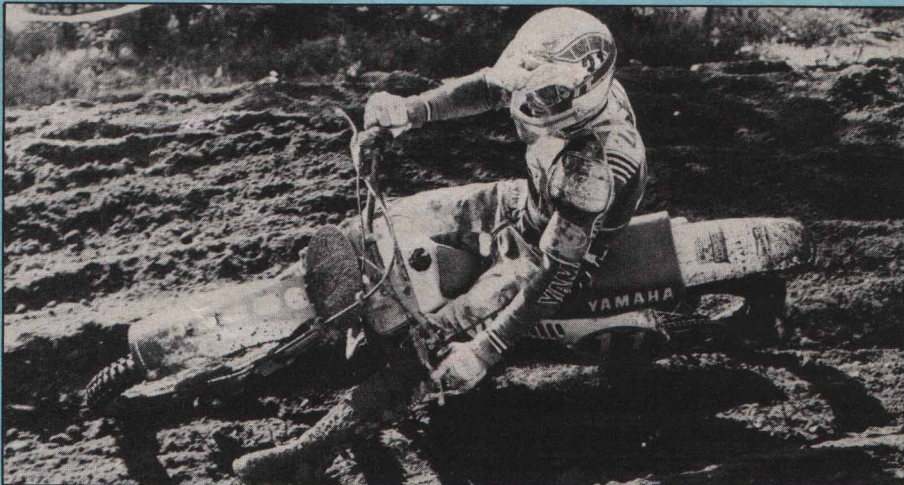
Danny made a decision to flee the U.S. scene and go for the World title shortly after the Trophee and Motocross races in '81. He needed a goal, a revived interest in racing, and Europe dealt him the hand he needed. The States offered very little in the way of personal drive, there were too many distractions. Danny had already won the 125 and the Open Class titles, along with numerous other races. With all of his friends and family so close, pushing himself to the extremes necessary to win became a chore. The fun was gone.

Europe provided the key. Danny still loved to compete, he just needed a purpose. An ultimate goal that would require everything from him—all of his love for the sport, all of the personal incentive he could muster. A funnel that directed every bit of energy towards his ultimate dream. That of being a World Champion.

Heading into the final round, Danny had a 15-point lead on Georges Jobe, the Suzuki rider who was his main nemesis all year. Danny had to ride smart, take few chances and finish well up in both motos. That and the fact that the track was



Former 250 and 500 World Champion Heikki Mikkola was the first to congratulate Danny after the Californian crossed the finish line of the final moto that gave LaPorte the World 250 crown.



Photos by Jack Burnicle

Danny LaPorte was one of the many Americans who wreaked havoc in Europe this year. The U.S. dominated all World Championships by taking home the 250, 500, MX and Trophee des Nations, and World Speedway titles.

narrow made good starts mandatory; gating poorly would provide an increased pressure to pass when you shouldn't. Danny was 15th at the end of lap one. By the halfway point he was in fourth, Jobe in second.

Moto two was a nerve-racker for the young American. Jobe had cut his lead to 11 points. The pressure was on the Belgian, but Danny felt like he'd explode at any moment. All he had to do was finish this moto in the top ten and the title was his, no matter what Jobe did. This was a high-stress situation, the tension thick; Danny felt twisted. He was gnawed on by the fact that something could go wrong. A DNF would kill him.

Danny gated in the top five and on that fateful first lap Jobe fell. He was dead-

last. LaPorte loosened his bionic grip and started to ride. All wild acts were cut from the routine; air time was minimal off the big jumps. The cautious side of Danny took over and he rode conservatively, a state of shock was starting to set in. His whole body was in a rush, a high; yet he had to maintain and just get to the finish line.

For a rookie to win a World title, a rookie with almost no European experience, is no fluke. It was fate. Danny LaPorte, determined and driven, had fulfilled his dream in one short year.

He is a true champion and the second American this year to garner an MX World title. The '80s look like the decade of U.S. domination in Europe and Danny has made his mark. □