

9th ANNUAL  
ENDURO du TOUQUET

# THE WILDEST RACE IN THE WORLD!

300,000 spectators &  
1,150 races hit the beach

Story & photos  
by Jack Burnicle



Hakan Carlqvist storms by riders on his factory Yamaha.

Nine years ago a young Frenchman called Thierry Sabine saw a picture in an American magazine showing 300 riders on the start line of a Californian desert race.

A keen enduro rider himself, Sabine had spent many hours playing around on the sand dunes and wide beaches of his native Le Touquet, an exclusive Northern seaside town.

The photograph sparked off an idea in Sabine's mind. Why not run a similar off-road free-for-all right there at Le Touquet? In 1974, the first unlikely effort took place. Two hundred and fifty riders turned out

for an inaugural Sunday morning thrash. They were watched by 5000 spectators.

February of this year witnessed the ninth annual staging of this gladiatorial contest. Competing were 1150 riders. They were watched by 300,000 spectators! The extensive Thierry Sabine Organization also runs the controversial Paris-Dakar Rally. Things have come a long way in nine years...

## PACKED HOUSE

The whole seaside town was swamped with visitors and motorcycles for the weekend. Scrutiny of the local sports hall on Saturday revealed an odd assortment of bikes (and riders) in various stages of

preparation (and decomposition!). They were consigned to a parc ferme in the forecourt of the Palais de L'Europe to gather frost overnight, while gangs of noisy leather-clad kids roamed the streets. With nowhere to actually bed down, there seemed little point in going to sleep.

Those in the Westminster Hotel, the race headquarters, were more fortunate, even if they were on the floor in sleeping bags.

Raceday dawned bright and crisp. At 10:30, the main body of eager participants was unleashed into the parc ferme to start their machines. The resultant clouds of carbon monoxide were enough to near poison



Bottlenecks formed in the deep sand during the early laps. After a goodly portion of the bikes seized, traffic thinned out considerably.









*Finding the hot line through the bottlenecks was tricky. Van der Ven, the KTM star, simply bulldozed his way over, around and through whatever was in the way.*

## du TOUQUET

those in the middle. A protracted hour later, the huge column was escorted slowly through the streets of the packed town towards the beach, screaming the last half mile in a frenzied surge for starting places.

### MASS STARTS AND MASS CONFUSION

Ten minutes before the appointed hour of midday, the massed ranks broke. The starting cannon barked belatedly 20 seconds later as the shrieking horde swarmed off into infinity, leaving behind the odd dead bike and furiously kicking pilot.

The 1982 race was won by KTM's 250 World motocross challenger and Dutch National Champion, Kees Van der Ven, on a tragic day which saw his teammate, Gerard Rond, severely injured and a woman spectator killed in a horrific high-speed collision on the beach.

This year, the course had been shortened from around 15 miles to 12, and a full-bore four-mile stretch of beach was interrupted by a series of awkward, narrow, manmade hummocks (which were missed out on the first lap). Many riders felt that some sections of the dunes were too cramped. Long lines and delays spoiled some of the steeper climbs.

Kees Van der Ven was back again seeking his second success, and KTM's massive effort included other motocross Grand Prix regulars. Belgium's Jack Van Velthoven,



*Many riders floundered in the deep sand all the way to the end.*

Stephan Desmare and triple French Champion Patrick Boniface were joined by the burly blond East Coast American, John Finkeldey.

The principal factory opposition was spearheaded by Yamaha and Honda. The former's fabled "Super Swede," Hakan Carlqvist, a seasoned contestant at Le Touquet, faced Honda's surprise package, Andre Malherbe—one motocross World Champion versus another! The supporting cast included Belgian Paris-Dakar headcase Jean-Paul Mingels and grizzled French veteran Serges Bacou on Yamahas, and

sand-loving Dutchmen Bennie Wilken and Martin Schalkwyck aboard Hondas.

But nothing could thwart KTM's huge invasion. Although "Carla" led the first lap, Van der Ven hit the front second time round with Malherbe in tow as the Swede got swamped in heavy congestion.

Outstanding local youngster Gilles Lalay, riding a 250 KTM, took over as Van der Ven snarled up in traffic on his third lap. By this time Wilken, Schalkwyck and Boniface had all succumbed to engine seizures, a common complaint as the bikes howled, whiplashing along the vast beach.





Former World Champ Andre Malherbe was cooking on his works Honda until mechanicals stopped him.



Race organizer Thierry Sabine (on the left), winner Kees Van der Ven (center), and American John Finkeldey (on the right). KTM dominated the action completely.

### SWAPPED LEADS

For an hour and a half the spirited young Frenchman hung on, but Van der Ven, with Carlqvist in savage pursuit, eventually recaptured the lead. Twenty-one-year-old American Finkeldey had meanwhile forced his muscular way through to fourth place, past Malherbe, after being 15 minutes adrift of the leader on his second lap! The Belgian's thinly disguised 1982 Honda factory motocrosser then broke its gearbox on the penultimate lap and the race lay between Van der Ven and Carlqvist.

Heavy traffic once more snagged the big Swede's late charge, however, and in a dramatic finale, his Yamaha seized 500 metres from the finish. "It stopped right opposite the Novotel, where I was staying," grinned Carla later, "so I just walked straight in and took a shower!" Van der Ven had won the day, completing ten laps in three hours.

This surprise conclusion hoisted his teammates Lalay, Finkeldey and Gilles Francru up the leaderboard, despite the latter having been assaulted by British heavyweight Jack Mathews when he tried to jump one of the queues, claiming factory immunity to the delay!

Mathews himself had visited the hospital during the race after passenger Robin Walters had caught a finger in the rear sprocket. They duly returned to the fray an hour later to rejoin a sidecar class. This was won by fellow Britons George Greenland

and Nick Moores, who heaved and shoved their 1000 Wasp outfit round four punishing laps.

Carlqvist was classified fifth on nine laps, in front of steady 36-year-old teammate Bacou, with Malherbe credited 43rd, two laps down.

On the victory rostrum, Van der Ven looked as if he'd spent the afternoon watching telly. "The race is good, but the track is too narrow. Marshals would try and stop me and I had to attack them to get past! The straight lines are no problem, but the other bits are difficult. Five or six times I crashed where there was ice in the bottom of the corners.

"The only real race I had was four laps back with Carla. I passed him over the jumps, but you need a lot of luck to win a race like this!"

You need a lot of skill and courage, too. The pale, modest 24-year-old Dutchman will take a lot of stopping as he goes for the hat-trick, Carla or no Carla! □

#### RESULTATS ENDURO du TOUQUET

1. Van der Ven (Holland).....KTM
2. Lalay (France).....KTM
3. Finkeldey (USA).....KTM
4. Francru (France).....KTM
5. Carlqvist (Sweden).....Yam
6. Bacou (France).....Yam
7. Branle (France).....Yam
8. Van Velthoven (Belgium).....KTM
9. Hamard (France).....Hus
10. Hoestland (France).....KTM
11. Groux (France).....KTM
12. Mingels (Belgium).....Yam

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