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**WIDOW-
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THE BIG
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**RM250N:
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**SPARK
WARS
HOW
TO**

**WEIRD
WHEELS:
HONDA ATC
& ODYSSEY**



BATTLE OF THE BULLETS!



ISSN 0364-1546

WIDOW

Over 500 riders from 20-plus states and Canada came to Salt Lake City, Utah, to try to conquer the 1500-foot "Widowmaker" mountain. Over 19,000 people (largest paid attendance in 16 years) turned out on April 21 to see if one of the climbers could ride to the top of the mountain.

Riders in every class had extended their bikes more than ever before. The bikes included everything from stock 125s, to 69-inch 500 Yamahas, to 80-inch Triumphs. It didn't take long to realize that this was keeping front ends on the ground better than last year. Some of the riders, such as Mike Polley from Texas, had to add a third shock to get enough damping for the added leverage.

Polley's 370 Bultaco was extended eight inches over stock and had at least 16 inches of travel at the rear wheel. One trials rider seeing it said, "You need oxygen just to walk around it." Polley went out of bounds at 525 feet on his first run, but said that the bike was tracking well up the mountain.

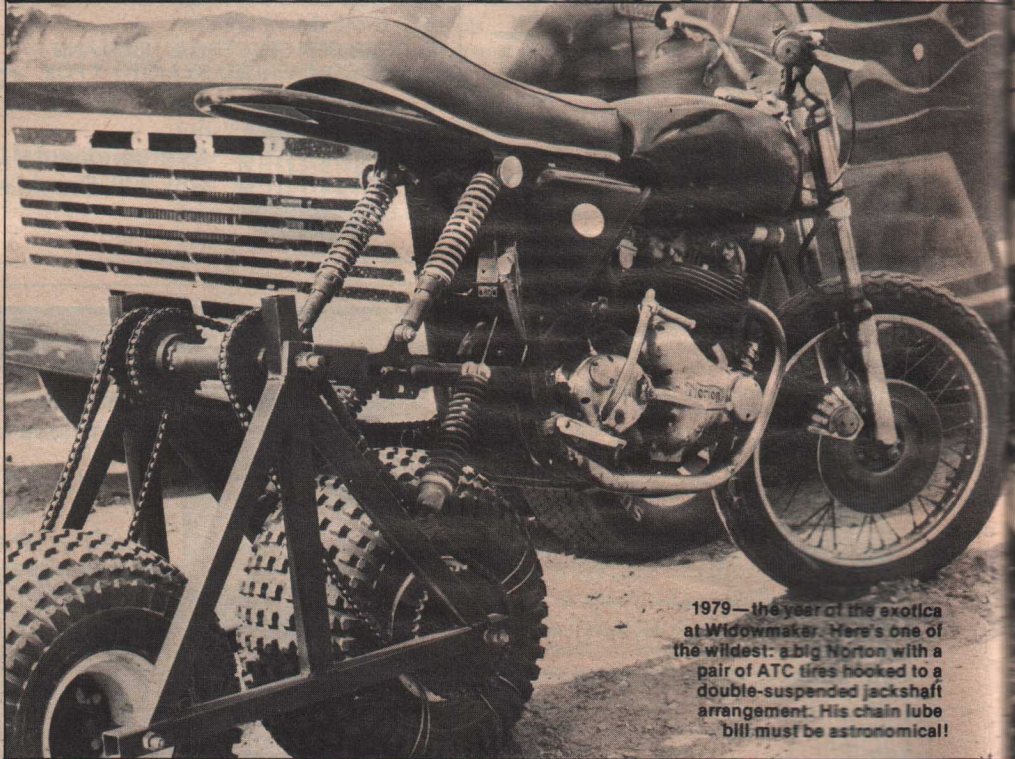
On his second try, he stayed on the path all the way to 613 feet, where one of the puckerbushes stopped him. This put him 12 feet higher than the second-place rider, Will Alford, and gave him first in the 370 class.

Willard Kinzer (Kentucky), riding his 1100cc Honda Four in the Open class, showed everyone that a first-place run could be made on the first try. He maneuvered his parallelogram-suspended bike to 655 feet and then sat back waiting to see if anyone could go higher.

A hillclimber who is in first place after the first run, can wait until everyone else in the class has tried twice—before trying again. This tends to put pressure on the other riders, and if the ride stands, he may decide not to take his last ride. Kinzer did not.

The really outlandish ideas are saved for the Exhibition class. These riders go all-out for a share of the \$3000 purse and a new Yamaha 80. The Yamaha was donated by the Yamaha Motor Corporation (U.S.A.), as was the \$1000 that was to go to the first man over the top in this class. Even though the other classes ride on an old lane,

King Of The Hills



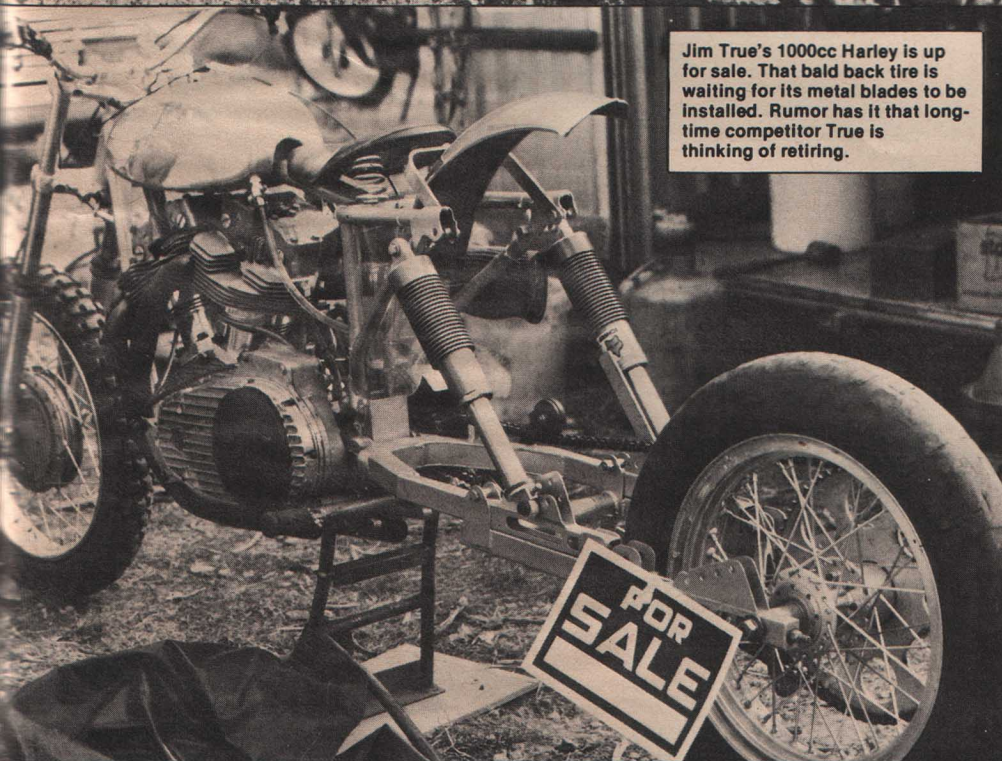
1979—the year of the exotica at Widowmaker. Here's one of the wildest: a big Norton with a pair of ATC tires hooked to a double-suspended jackshaft arrangement. His chain lube bill must be astronomical!

IMAKER!

Story & photos by Diane Polley



Extended rear sections were the big rage this year. Henry Polley's 750 Triumph rigid frame sported an 80-inch wheelbase. Yes, that's what you're seeing: two swingarm sections welded together!



Jim True's 1000cc Harley is up for sale. That bald back tire is waiting for its metal blades to be installed. Rumor has it that long-time competitor True is thinking of retiring.

the Open and Exhibition classes always get to open up a new one. The Bees have to use three lanes up the mountain just to give everyone entered two tries before dark.

The Exhibition and 500 classes both had over 100 riders (some climbs don't have this many *total*), and were running side by side at the same time. A large number of the Exhibition bikes use a mixture of 90-percent nitro and 10-percent alcohol. Conley Newsome (Ohio) said that nitro costs \$18 a gallon and would last for about two minutes of riding. Vince Bertolucci estimated that it took one gallon of this mixture per run. A few of the riders who used the top member of the frame for a tank (or a small quart-size tank) ran the risk of running out of fuel part way up the mountain. Some did between 700 and 800 feet.

It is very dangerous for a fueler to be kickstarted. If the engine is flooded when it's kicked, there is a distinct possibility that the rod will be bent, or the piston blown out the bottom of the engine onto the ground. Some riders start their bikes on alcohol and get them warm, then switch to fuel. Others, such as Bill Harrison, use a small electric motor to turn the motor over. The electric motor usually attaches to a fitting on the end of the crankshaft and turns the engine over from there.

Last year, Vince Bertolucci had designed a metal blade arrangement for his rear tire, similar to a rubber paddle tire, but it gets more bite, because it doesn't give when it hits the ground. He was the only one with anything like it then, but this year, about 25 riders had rigged up something similar. Some had bolted angle iron to the tire, or some other type of metal blade, and others had followed Bertolucci's idea and attached theirs to a pair of chains in the manner of ice chains for cars.

A regular tire chain with motorcycle chain for the cross-piece was the most popular arrangement. Some of the riders installed a few loose pieces of chain over the stationary pieces, called pilers.

Riding order is determined by draw in the Exhibition class and the later

you ride, the better your chance of being in the winners' circle. Bill Harrison and his 1526cc Harley had the best chance of taking home all the loot. His name was the first one drawn, so he was the last to ride.

The first 25 or so riders felt that they did not have much chance, but Earl Whetsell decided not to let that bother him. He came to the line confident that he could match Kinzer's feat and get the win on his first run. His 1080cc Honda showed how it got its name of "Ditch Witch." Whetsell aimed it up the mountain and let it do its stuff. It plowed through the puckerbushes and over the steps in the hill, with its metal-bladed tire churning.

About 1000 feet up, the bikes go out of sight if you're spectating near, or on, the hill. Whetsell went out of sight, but the bike could still be heard. It seemed like hours before the spectators at the bottom let it be known that he was on top. But, he had gone out of bounds at 1200 feet and was not given credit for a legal over-the-top ride. Another rider had also ridden the bike in the same class, which is not supposed to happen. A protest was filed and he was disqualified.

Back in the 500 class (on the next lane, which was smoother), the riders began passing the 750-foot mark regularly on the second run. Wes Evans rode his Yamaha to 960 feet before the mountain took its toll. Five riders later, Kerry Peterson brought his 400 Maico to the line. He barely made it past Evans, but 963 feet put him in first and there were only 11 riders left.

Bill Landsborough had decided that the way to go all the way, was to follow the path as far as possible and stay in bounds. He came out of the hole looking good on his new 400 Yamaha and followed the path perfectly. Finally, he realized that he was blazing his own trail and began concentrating on staying away from the white lines. He did not want to "screw up" now. Landsborough said that he had to ride differently on the top part of the mountain, because the traction changed. He had to use more body English to keep the bike on the ground and headed up.

When he reached the top, he said he was in shock, and really did not realize he had conquered the Widowmaker until a TV camera and microphone were stuck in his face. Bill Landsborough had not gone out of bounds or screwed up and he had become the second man to ride the 1500 feet to the top of Widowmaker.

Landsborough hoped that experience would help, but Jim True, the man who went over in 1976, could have told him that it did not. Landsborough was riding a 750 Norton in the Exhibition class and had an 853-foot ride on his first try, but a thrown chain ended his day. Landsborough had gone over

on a *moderately extended, stock Yamaha using a regular KNOBBY tire.*

Meanwhile, the Exhibition class was still trying. Jim True threw a chain (it seemed a common occurrence in this class) on his first ride on his 1000cc Harley. He made it to 864 feet on his second try, but the top still eluded him. More and more riders were getting to 800 feet-plus, and hopes were rising that one of these specially prepared bikes would get the \$1000 bonus.

Chains were checked to make sure they were adjusted just right. Fuel mixtures were checked one more time to make sure they were mixed for the temperature. The riders were trying to make sure everything was as perfect as possible when their turn came to try to conquer the mountain.

Marc Smith was the first one to break the 900-foot mark. He made it to 930 feet with a 750 Triumph. Vince Bertolucci wanted to become the first man with back-to-back wins, and if he could do it by riding his 750 fuel-burning Triumph to the top, that would be even better. But, it was not to be. He just could not find that smooth, open line that would take him to the top, and had to settle for a 932-foot ride.

Things kind of calmed down after his ride and it began to look as if Bertolucci would repeat. Big Bill Harrison and his Harley had other ideas. On the last ride of the day at the Widowmaker, Harrison knew he had a good chance of taking the win. He left the hole, pouring the fuel to the Harley and throwing rocks with the metal paddles on his tire. He says that his size helps keep the bike on the ground, and it seemed to be working. Harrison passed 900 feet with good momentum, then the 1000-

foot marker. Fifty-six feet later, just a fraction of a second, the mountain reared her head again and Harrison's ride came to an end. He was in first place and had done it on one of the biggest, most exotic bikes at the event. He ended the event on a humorous note. The 80 Yamaha almost disappeared when 300-plus-pound Harrison sat on it, and the only time it would move him was if they were aimed downhill. That was OK. Big Bill Harrison was King of the Widowmaker.

The riders left telling the mountain that they would be back next year with something new to throw at her. One more rider, Bill Landsborough, had gone over, but the Widowmaker was not conquered. The question is still not answered. Do the exotics work? □



WIDOWMAKER RESULTS

200

Erick Goehers (Suz, WS) 591 feet
Jon Foerster (Hon, ND) 575 feet
Tim Kain (Suz, MN) 502 feet
John Blanton (Bul, TX) 415 feet

250

Clyde Peterson (Yam, CA) 680 feet
Gary Peterson (Yam, CA) 670 feet
Dean Gerdes (Suz, WS) 660 feet
Scott Juhlin (Hon, MN) 660 feet

370

Mike Polley (Bul, TX) 613 feet
Will Alford (Bul, TX) 601 feet
Marty Moreali (Yam, CA) 601 feet
Wes Evans (Yam, CA) 595 feet

500

Bill Landsborough (Yam, CA)

1500 feet over the top
Kerry Peterson (Mai, CA) 963 feet
Wes Evans (Yam, CA) 960 feet
Bob Baker (Yam, CA) 957 feet

Open

Willard Kinzer (Hon, KY) 655 feet
Tom Elmore (Kaw, IL) 578 feet
Bruce Waddell (Tri, NB) 547 feet

Exhibition

Bill Harrison (Har, CA) 1056 feet
Vince Bertolucci (Tri, CA) 932 feet
Marc Smith (Tri, CA) 930 feet
Wes Evans (Yam, CA) 885 feet
Jim True (Har, CA) 871 feet
Rex Houey (Yam, CA) 864 feet
Bill Landsborough (Nor, CA) 853 feet
Gary Waddell (Tri, NB) 844 feet

Levi's were the day's main dress code, sported here by Vince Bertolucci.



Puttin' It to the hill, 1979 Widowmaker winner Bill Harrison and his 1526cc Harley.