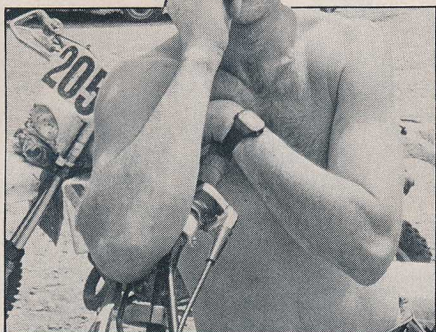


GEOFF BALLARD

An Australian on the American ISDE team?



"Timekeeping is really foreign to me," says Ballard. Still, he's riding the Nationals with fair success and claiming that winning a National enduro would "... be the ultimate for me!"



Ballard was THE Australian Six-Days star for the past four years running. He was top Aussie in Wales last year and a constant threat on the special tests.



"I'm normally a 500 rider, but when I rode the big Can-Am, it was way too fast for me!" He seems to be adapting well, winning the 250 class in Oregon and the overall in Michigan.

A new name appeared on the list of American ISDE riders this year, and that name promises to cause a stir in our international competition before the year is out. Australian Geoff Ballard, born in Sydney, 25 years old, is a five-time veteran of the Aussie ISDE effort, and now a member of the American Vase team in Holland. Since the beginning of the year, he's been racing enduros in the States for Can-Am, and although a National Enduro win has eluded his grasp, an overall win at the Michigan Three-Day Qualifier is a definite challenge to Husky's domination. How did he manage to wind up here, and on the American team?

"I've been to Europe for a couple of seasons, and I could have gone back there, but I didn't know how long I'd be able to afford to travel around to all the racing over there. After riding against the American team in the Six Days and reading so much about the American enduro series, I did

want to see America and race over here, just to try it out.

"In Australia nobody understands the American way of running enduros—all the timekeeping, and you can't be early at the checks and such. They think it's crazy. But this friend of mine from New Zealand kept saying, 'Boy, I'd really love to go to the States and ride that series!' He thought it was fantastic, and I couldn't understand it. I thought, *What would you want to do that for?* But the more I thought about it, the better it seemed. So I finally decided that if someone was going to go to America from this side of the world, I was going to do it first!"

Deciding to do it and then actually riding in the States turned out to be two different things. We asked him how he was adapting.

"I remember when I knew I was coming over here, I read an article in *Dirt Bike* about how to keep time, and I must have read it a dozen times. But I still didn't know

what to expect. Somebody said, 'Yeah, but John Martin's one of the best. You won't have any trouble!' I don't know about that. When you want to know where to find something in a strange place, you don't ask one of the locals, because he just presumes that you know where everything is. Learning timekeeping from John was like that—at first he skipped over a lot of things that turned out to be real important.

"The timekeeping is really foreign. I get frustrated when I make a mistake and don't have enough experience to figure out what I'm doing wrong. But keeping such exact time seems to make the event more challenging. Winning an American enduro would just about be the ultimate for me."

What about the level of competition over here? How does America compare to the rest of the world?

"As far as all-around riding goes, America has been a great experience, especially the woods riding. In a European-style qualifier, if there's a tight woods section, you're allowed plenty of time to go through it, but over here, when it's super tight it means you have to go fast! I think American riders go through any sort of tight stuff faster and better than anyone else in the world. I don't think any of the Europeans can touch the Americans in tight riding."

If it sounds like Geoff is enjoying himself, you're right. But what about the rest of the American team; what do they think of riding with a foreigner?

"I think most of the riders will accept me as a member of the Vase team. They knew I was intending to qualify when the series started, and I've gotten nothing but positive response since then. Maybe some of the guys who just missed out on qualifying might not be too happy about being bumped out by an import, but I think I'm going to be an asset to the team.

"Some of the Aussies might not be too happy about me riding for the United States. Hey, I'm a patriotic guy. I'd like to ride for Australia this year, but the ACU (the race-governing organization in Australia) won't let me. They won't issue me a license because I've been racing in another country. I just wanted to ride over here for the experience and then ride the Six Days with the Aussies, but when I found out that the ACU wouldn't let me, I decided I wanted to be on the best team I could."

And in our opinion, that's exactly where he wound up. Look for Geoff to prove himself in the ISDE this year—and don't be surprised if the top American turns out to be an Aussie! □