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DIRT BIKE

JANUARY 1978

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DIRT BIKE

JANUARY 1978 VOLUME EIGHT NUMBER ONE

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DIRT BIKE (Jan. 1978) is published monthly (semi-monthly in Feb., Aug., Nov.) by Hi-Torque Publications, Inc., with editorial offices at 16200 Ventura Blvd., Encino, California 91436. Subscriptions \$9.00 for 12 issues (one year). Foreign subscriptions add \$2 per year and Canada \$1 per year for additional postage. Copyright © 1977 by Hi-Torque Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Nothing in this magazine may be reprinted in whole or in part without the express permission of the publisher. CONTRIBUTORS: Photographic submissions must be 5x7 or 8x10 glossy black and white, or 35mm and larger color slides. Please mark each photo with owner's name and address. Manuscripts should be typewritten. Unsolicited contributions must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Unless special arrangements are made in advance, all published material becomes the sole property of Hi-Torque Publications, Inc. The publisher does not assume responsibility for unsolicited material. Second class postage paid at Van Nuys, California 91408, and at additional mailing offices. DIRT BIKE, P.O. Box 317, Encino, California 91316.

ON THE COVER:
From American Eagle to American hope,
Brad Lackey keeps getting closer.
Photo by Jim Gianatsis.

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ANOTHER WHILE
AT THE MILE

SAN JOSE IN THE FALL

by Rik Paul

Photos by Mark Kiel and Rik Paul

*It's that old "Do you know
the way" time again*



PROLOGUE, including The Trek
A "happening," according to my dog-eared Merriam-Webster paperback dictionary, is "an event . . . designed to evoke a spontaneous reaction to sensory, emotional, or spiritual stimuli." Hmm.

There are several events in the world of motorcycling which are commonly thought of as *Happenings*.

And of the few that attain this status, far fewer can retain it on a semiannual basis. One that does do it, and with no compromise in quality, is the San Jose Mile. That's why it's commonly referred to simply as "The Mile." San Jose is always one helluva race.

September was growing gray, and time it was for the fall chapter of The Mile. Opting for the touring route, we borrowed a couple of

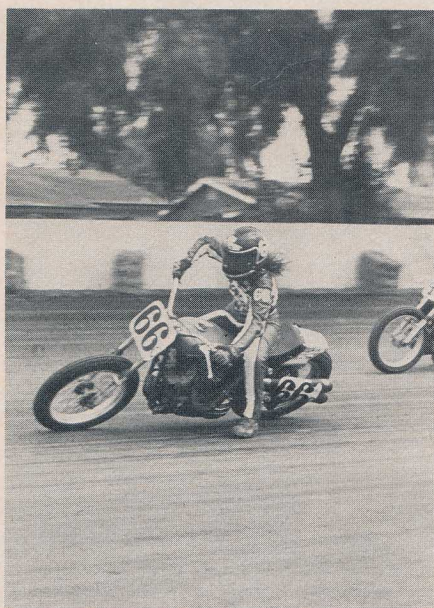
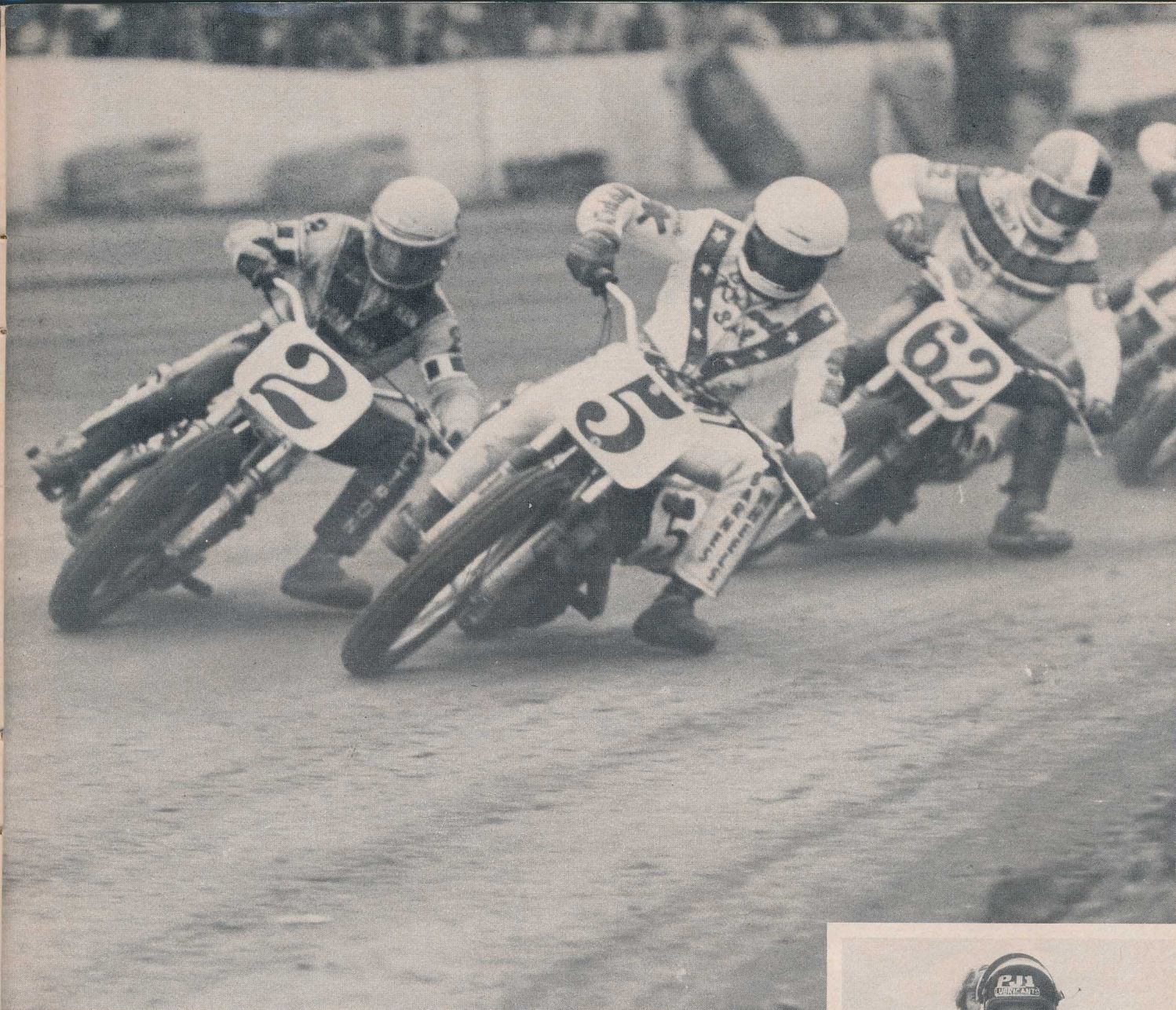
bikes from sister *Big Bike*, and set ourselves neatly on the freeways with the sun rising in our rear-view mirrors. A fitting prelude to the magic of San Jose.

It wasn't long before a yellow VW Beetle pulled up alongside matching our speed. We looked over and one of the three groggy-eyed guys inside held a Camel Pro sticker up to the window and pointed questioningly north. We nodded, and tucked ourselves down on the seat, left hand on the fork, in imitation of the mile racers. They laughed, gave the "OK" sign, and pulled away.

Further on we passed a couple of Hare Krishna types along the shoulder of the highway, performing a morning ritual. They would walk a few paces, kneel in a praying position for a couple of



Strategy conference in the Lawwill/Kidd pits.



Princess Diane Cox was hindered by brake problems.

seconds, then slowly rise and walk another few steps. It's nice that they pay their respects, we thought, but they'll never make the race at that rate.

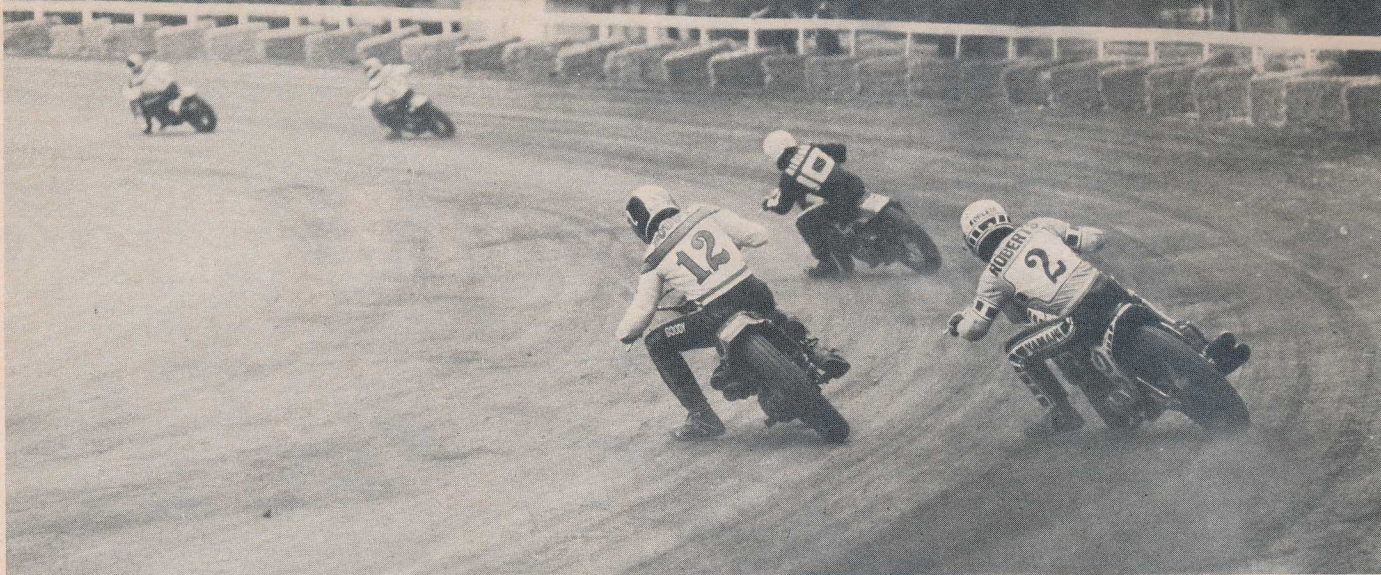
Finally, as San Jose signs began popping up, the lulling of too many hours in the saddle began to give way again to anticipation and the eagerness of "mile fever." And, after a discouraging tour through San Jose's downtown "special hourly rate" motels, we settled into a little place quaintly wedged in between a truck stop and a used car lot.

RACE DAY

After checking in at the track and compiling our initial rations of hot dogs and Coors, we wandered into the pits. Time trials were under way and the infield was its usual bustle of pre-race activity.



From the look in his eyes, Skip Aksland knew he had it wrapped up long before anyone else.



We were stationed at the Bel-Ray van, washing down our Coors with some Budweiser, when we spotted Mert Lawwill pushing his bike in. Quickly gulping down the remains of our foam, we headed over to the Lawwill/Mike Kidd camp to nose in on what was happening, and offer any necessary sympathy and/or encouragement.

Here it might be necessary to make note that, realizing that the concept of "objective journalism" is a presumptuous one at best, even a potentially dangerous one, we make no bones about the fact that we have favorites, just like anyone else who's at least semi-human.

Mert had just logged in one of the

slowest qualifying times of the 48 starters, a complete reversal from his Spring time trial where he set a still-standing track record. Mag trouble was the reason. Then he mentioned a cheer he drew from the crowd for getting hung out in a turn. "I was only going 20 mph," he laughed.

Mike, meanwhile, was busying himself on his own bike. On his left wrist, he still wore a cast from when he broke it in an accident at the Terre Haute Half Mile, made famous via national TV. He recounted how the doctors released him prematurely from the hospital and told of the dizzy spells he experienced while driving home, forcing him to pull off the road. "I was dizzy for a couple of days after that."

Now, though, was a time for other thoughts, for he was scheduled for the first qualifying heat. "The first heat is the worst," he nodded, but then a sly gleam came into his eyes, "but I'm in there with Springer."

We moseyed over to the Roberts/Yamaha camp where his mechanics were feverishly replacing his engine with the spare from his back-up bike. The original engine had blown a head gasket. His Yamaha was also sporting a prototype Works Performance monoshock for testing.

Diane Cox, our eternally optimistic hope for a main qualification, had also set a slow qualifying time, one notch up from Mert's. Her brakes weren't working up to snuff. "Just have to go faster and pitch it sideways," we naively kidded her. "Can't pitch it sideways anymore," she informed us, "the

tires grab too much traction now." Oh.

Mike Kidd's sly gleam proved to be one to reckon with as he took the first qualifying heat home ahead of Springsteen. Garth Brow took third, edging Roberts into a semi, along with Dave Aldana and Ted Boody. Diane, despite our shouts from turn three, ended up last. Guess you really do need brakes.

Skip Aksland, working with a very fast bike, and pumped from his recent pavement win at Laguna Seca, took the second heat. Mert managed only ninth.

Hank Scott and Steve Eklund captured the third heat, and

Continued on page 69



Running with his spare engine, Roberts was pressing hard until his rear tire went away.



By taking third in the main, Springsteen gained enough points to all but wrap up the championship.

Corky Keener, Rex Beauchamp and Gary Scott took the fourth.

Getting three top riders in a semi that qualifies just two for the main is always a sheer delight for the spectators, but sheer hell for the third rider. In this case it was Aldana and Roberts over Boody, but only by means of a photo finish that kept the crowd in suspense for several long moments. It was a bummer for Ted, number two in the series points standings. By failing to qualify for the main he might well have put himself out of the #1 race.

And finally, **THE MILE.**

The main was classic San Jose from start to finish. Corky Keener, Gene Romero and Gary Scott moved immediately out into the front, but the bulk of the pack stuck right with them. It took a couple of laps for Scott to climb into the lead, but it was short-lived as Steve Eklund pulled out of mid-pack to take it for himself.

From turn to turn the pack was in a constant state of movement and rearrangement, like some giant amoeba flowing over itself as it moved.

Suddenly it was Kidd who came by in first, with Eklund, Scott and now Aksland and Roberts close behind.

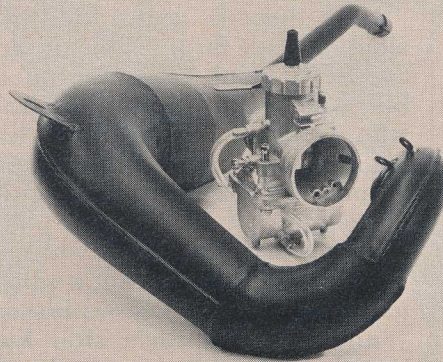
Roberts was diving deeper, pitching harder than any of them, and as he pulled past second, and into first, it began to look like he just might do it all with sheer determination.

Kidd immediately reeled him back in and, locked in a desperate duel, the two began pulling away.

Please turn page

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In spots Kenny's Yamaha actually seemed to be outpulling Mike's Lawwill-prepared Harley.

Then, just as Eklund was moving up to join the battling twosome, Kenny got into some serious tank-slappers and dropped back several places. He continued to get squirrely in subsequent turns, and his charge lost its fierce momentum.

With Roberts gone, Kidd was alone in front for a couple of laps. Suddenly, Hank Scott was on his tail. The next lap it was Aksland, who momentarily took the lead before Kidd recovered it. And Springsteen was pressing not far behind.

Finally the 25th lap. "He who leads into the final lap doth not a winner make," say the San Jose soothsayers.

And so it was. Right after Kidd took the white flag, he got sideways in Turn One, letting both Hank Scott and Aksland by. Aksland slingshotted Scott coming out of Turn Two and led down the back straight.

Kidd tried to recover his position, but in the attempt got sideways again in Turn Three, this time letting Springsteen slip by. Scott tried to slingshot Aksland back out of Turn Four, but Skip's bike had the edge, handing him the win and his first-ever Grand National victory.

The checkered flag froze the race at seemingly as arbitrary a moment as was possible. If it had fallen on any one of the other laps, the results would have been vastly different.

Yet, that is what race strategy is built around. That's why total concentration and control are indispensable elements for the riders. And *that* is, after all, what makes up a mile.

EPILOGUE

We trudged back to the pits, hoarse from shouting and knowing that we'd just experienced another classic.

As Aksland, Scott and Springsteen climbed onto the trophy platform not far away, amid the deafening cheers of the standing crowd, Mike Kidd sat on a gas can, alone in his pits, somberly staring into blank space, needing time to accept the difficult fate of his last lap.

Kenny Roberts walked into the camp. "Hey, you guys want to stop over at my place later for a little party?"

"Hey, that's too bad about what happened to you," Pora, one of Mike's mechanics, said. "You needed the points."

Kenny looked over without expression. "If I had a nickel for every time I needed points . . ."

That, too, is The Mile.

SAN JOSE MILE

September 25, 1977

1. Skip Aksland (CA) H-D
2. Hank Scott (OH) H-D
3. Jay Springsteen (MI) H-D
4. Mike Kidd (TX) H-D
5. Gary Scott (OH) H-D
6. Steve Eklund (CA) H-D
7. Corky Keener (MI) H-D
8. Rex Beauchamp (MI) H-D
9. Garth Brow (MI) H-D
10. Alex Jorgensen (CA) Nor



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