

HARD WORK PAYS OFF

Ward calmly completes his National title collection, Kiedrowski prevents Bradshaw's hostile takeover of the 125 Class

Karl Ockert



Jeff Ward (3), Jeff Stanton (7) and Rick Johnson (1) charged into the 500 season with clear intentions.

◀ Guy Cooper (10) flew in the face of danger all season. He needed the championship to keep his Honda ride.

Spectators could feel the tension in this year's 125 and 500 National Motocross title chases, so just imagine what it was like for the riders. Titles, egos and contracts were on the line and the talent in the race-to-race tug o' war produced some incredible rides.

MONSTER MASH

Rick Johnson's crash and subsequent injuries at the opening 500 round at Millville created some additional elbow room for other capable, title-hungry contenders. Ron Lechien was looking to generate some job security for himself and rode spectacularly to a third-place finish. Jeff Stanton, who had the confidence and momentum of his just-won 250 outdoor and supercross National titles behind him, took second. Jeff Ward, always the professional, looked at the championship as a major career goal, and what better time to achieve it? He won at Millville.

By the second round at Washougal, Wash-

1989 AMA 500 NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP MOTOCROSS

500	MOTO FINISHES							FINAL POINTS
	MN	WA	NY	PA	MD	NY		
1. Jeff Ward	Kaw	1/1	1/2	5/4	1/1	1/1	3/3	271
2. Jeff Stanton	Hon	3/3	3/3	3/1	4/2	3/2	4/1	250
3. Rick Johnson	Hon	5/4	2/8	4/3	3-4	10/11	2/7	199
4. Doug Dubach	Yam	4/6	5/4	6/5	7-6	5/6	5/5	190
5. J.M. Bayle	Hon	DNS	DNS	2/2	2/3	2/3	1/2	175

D=Did not finish. DNS=Did not start.

1989 AMA 125cc NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP MOTOCROSS

125	FL	CA	VA	MA	PA	MI	OH	MN	WA	ANY PA	MD	NY	FINAL POINTS		
1. M. Kiedrowski	Hon	4/1	4/4	2/2	4/8	4/8	6/12	2/8	2/7	1/1	6/5	2/17	1/1	3/2	479
2. Guy Cooper	Hon	6/3	3/2	4/10	5/4	5/2	13/6	1/3	3/5	2/11	1/13	1/6	2/2	12/16	476
3. D. Bradshaw	Yam	1/9	5/7	1/1	6/15	1/3	3/9	12/1	1/1	3/2	2/1	D/4	27/3	1/1	445
4. Donny Schmit	Hon	D/2	1/3	14/4	2/6	2/11	2/13	4/5	9/4	5/6	8/3	6/3	3/40	10/3	405
5. Mike LaRocco	Yam	3/6	15/9	3/9	3/9	6/7	1/22	5/4	4/14	10/5	9/8	3/5	8/5	2/8	382

D=did not finish. DNS=did not start

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Karl Ockert

500 & 125 WRAP

ington, the possibilities had narrowed considerably. Ward won again, extending his points lead. A first-moto start crash marred Stanton's ride, forcing him to settle for second. Lechien finished poorly in the first moto due to the same crash but was untouchable in the second, giving him a third overall. Johnson's injuries hurt his speed enough to put him out of the top three.

At the third round in Binghamton, New York, the current three-man, high-speed elite had to contend with another motocross superpower, 250 World Champion Jean-Michel Bayle. Despite announcing that he'd leave the championship to the Americans, Bayle wedged himself well into the points with a second behind a hard-riding Stanton. Johnson managed a third despite considerable discomfort from his injuries. Ward had an off day and got fourth. Lechien looked to be in the process of grabbing his first overall victory when a wheel bearing failure erased the advantage of his first-moto win.

Ward swept both motos of the fourth round at Delmont, Pennsylvania, pulling well away from Stanton, who got third overall. Bayle rode to an impressive second, adding to the American riders' points gap. Lechien's 500 season ended when he broke his right femur (that's the big bone connected to the hip bone; serious stuff) in an uncharacteristic endo over a jump.

Jump crash injuries sustained in practice dampened Rick Johnson's title pursuit at the fifth 500 round at Budds Creek, Maryland. Ward put together another impressive pair of moto wins to take the overall. Bayle earned a second overall with some impressive dices with Ward.

Bayle may have had no interest in the championship but he announced plans for victory at Unadilla. His 1-2 moto finishes gave him the overall and fifth in the final point standings. Doug Dubach's strong rides throughout the season earned him the fourth spot in final points. Rick Johnson's troubled season left him third overall in points. Jeff Stanton followed a troubled first moto with a win in the second to give him second overall at Unadilla and second in the final point standings. Ward rode two consistent races

Mike Kiedrowski (762) showed speed and smarts well beyond his 19 years by getting up and going while his younger rival, Bradshaw (45), was just getting up. He won the championship with a season of strong rides with tough competition.



Brad Nordloff

Damon Bradshaw's (45) go-for-broke riding put him out in front frequently, and on the ground almost as often.

which cemented his title-winning position. In winning the championship Ward became the first rider to win National 125, 250, Supercross and 500 championships.

STAYING ALIVE IN THE 125s

The 125 class is, in many ways, a more exciting and intense arena for battle. There are favorites, outstanding talents and wild card riders capable of snagging wins as in the larger-displacement classes. The difference is the drive in these young riders. Every rider with a realistic shot at a win hangs it way out at every race. It's rare to see a 125 rider stop taking the big risks necessary to stay up front because his season just isn't shaping up the way he planned. The 125 rider's mind is focused on a quest for survival and a hope of fortune, fame and a future in racing at the factory level.

Take the past season, for example. Mike Kiedrowski and Damon Bradshaw surfaced as the key players in a hectic supercross title chase and their rivalry continued into the national 125 motocross series.

500 & 125 WRAP

Kiedrowski matched Bradshaw's skill, nerve and speed at the 125 opener at Gainesville, Florida, and bettered him in professionalism by not crashing. Kiedrowski's overall win, his first, threw the first punch in what would turn out to be a free-for-all title fight.

George Holland showed why he got to ride around with the thin number on his bike at Hangtown by beating Bradshaw and Kiedrowski. His moto scores gave him the point lead, though Kiedrowski trailed by just two points. Strong finishes by Guy Cooper at Gainesville and Hangtown pushed him to third in the standings.

Bradshaw picked up his first national win at the third round at Axton, Virginia. Kiedrowski rode to two strong finishes and a second overall, grabbing the series lead in the process and scrambling the points lead structure again, an occurrence that became a feature of each race.

By the halfway point in the series just four points separated the leaders. Overall wins and consistent strong finishes by Holland, Kiedrowski, Bradshaw, Cooper and Larry Ward left the second half of the series as open to any of the top riders as it had been at the opening round.

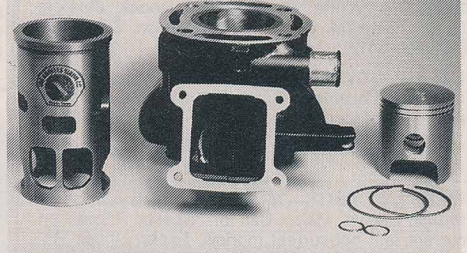
The ongoing Bradshaw-Kiedrowski dog-fight resumed at Millville, with Bradshaw taking the win. Kiedrowski retaliated with flawless 1-1 motos at Washougal, Washington, while Bradshaw and Cooper exchanged first-moto bike slams as they followed Kiedrowski at the front of the pack.

The final rounds saw Bradshaw riding as aggressively and effectively as ever. Guy Cooper repeatedly found Bradshaw using the same lines he was—often at the same time—but was unshaken by the Yamaha rider's zeal for the championship. Cooper simply advised Bradshaw to look over his shoulder regularly. Riders and spectators were looking back into the pack all season for Jeff Matiasevich. The problem, it seemed, was missing horsepower. When Kawasaki discovered how to make the KX125 run with the National Hondas and Yamahas, Jeff pulled off a win. Doctors saw more of defending National Champion George Holland's shoulder than anyone, as dislocation problems marred his late season rides.

At the final round at Unadilla the points split was frighteningly tight, but Kiedrowski put together the needed finishes, despite a flat tire in the first moto, to secure the title. "It was a long season," Kiedrowski said, "but my Gainesville win told me the championship was a strong possibility for me." Bradshaw's impressive pair of moto wins earned him second. Guy Cooper crashed in both motos and his disappointing finishes cost him more than the championship. His failure to win the title left him without a Honda factory ride. Cooper's plans for next year? "I want to be the first rider to win after leaving Honda." □

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