

NAT'L MX OPENER / WHAT'S WORKS FOR '77

DIRT BIKE

JULY 1977

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175cc ENDUROS

YAMAHA CAN-AM PENTON

WHICH IS KING?

CAN-AM 250 MX3- WONDER IN ELLIS LAND?



DIRT BIKE

JULY 1977 VOLUME SEVEN NUMBER SEVEN

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ON THE COVER:

Pomeroy is back! Wegner shot the Hangtown photo.

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NINTH IN THE WORLD

SCOTT AUTREY

First top ten American in 39 years

by Len Weed



Late last year Californian Scott Autrey, 23, became the first American to crack the top ten in the World Speedway Finals since Jack Milne, Corde Milne and Lammy Lamoreaux swept the first three placings in 1937. Autrey's ninth in the world championship event in Poland capped four years of British Speedway League competition.

Scott started riding at age 11. He competed in scrambles and gravitated toward road racing. He finished second Novice at Daytona in

1971 and took fourth Junior the following year. He had begun riding speedway in 1970, moving up to first division (Expert) racing in 1971. He finished second in the 1972 National. A month later he journeyed to England to watch the World-Final. This prompted his decision to get really serious about speedway.

Autrey joined the Exeter club in the British Speedway League in 1973 along with multi-champion Ivan Mauger. Racing against and yet for team captain Mauger provided a

great opportunity to learn.

Autrey has resided in England for nine months of each of the past four years, returning to California each winter. We talked to him early in March before his return to British racing.

You left home and went overseas at the age of 19? What was your thinking?

You have to do it if you want to be world champion. There are a lot of guys right now, they sit at home and they say: I'm going to become world champion someday and they never become world champion. It's because they don't want to work for it. You have to go out and start right at the bottom. Especially in speedway. If you're a really good motocross rider you have a factory that'll sign you up. You ride good equipment and you have men working on your bike. In England I prepare the bike myself, drive six hours to a meeting, unload the bike and change gear and tires. The next day I'm the one that's cleaning the mud and the dirt and doing the maintenance. You have nobody really helping you. I think speedway riders are the number one privateer riders in the world. The only help the factory riders get is the trick parts, but they have to work on the bikes.

What does it take to ride speedway?

You can take any other kind of super-good rider and put him on a speedway bike and he'll get tired in two laps. You use completely different muscles. Most speedway riders are small. You have to have a certain amount of natural ability but you really have to be hungry. I think other kinds of motorcycle racing hurt you for speedway. I decided when I first got into speedway that I had to give up everything else and become just a speedway rider.

Mike Bast (four-time national speedway champion) rides a trials bike and also does a lot of cowtrailing.

Yeah, he keeps in shape like that, he's a good motorcycle rider. I'm not sure other riding will help anyone become a world champion. Ivan Mauger told me he can't do a wheelie for five feet on purpose. Yet he's been world champion four times. You go faster with both wheels on the ground.

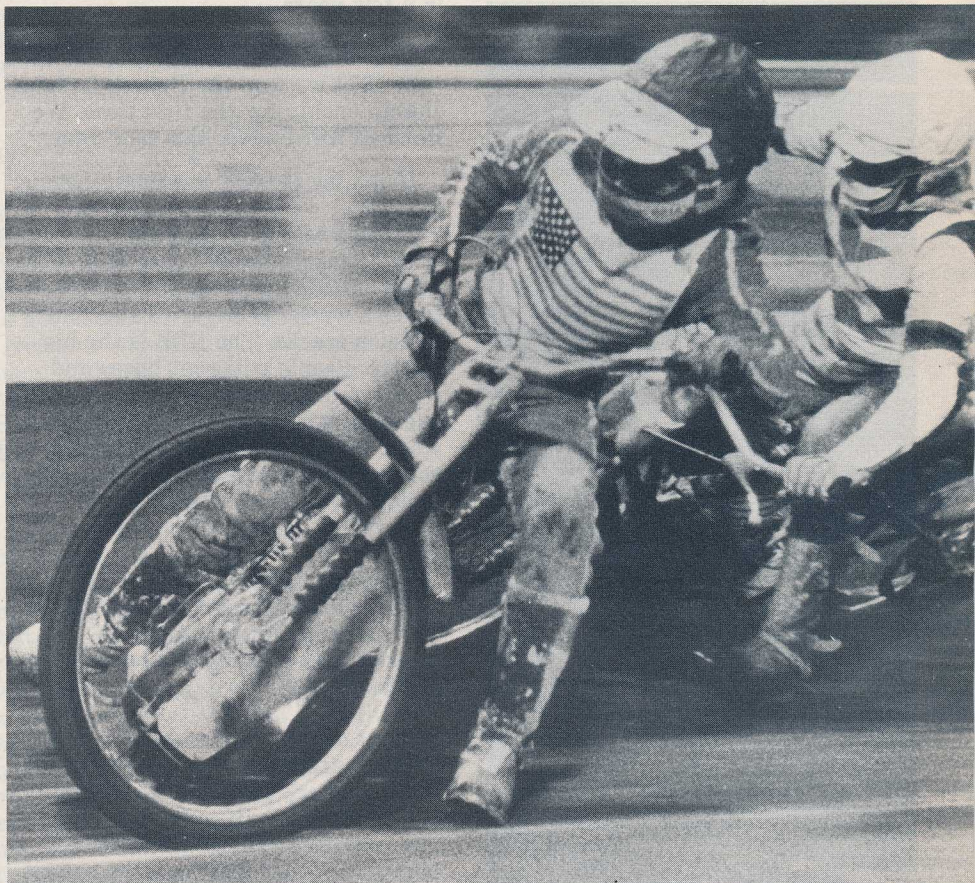
What about physical training?

Usually I get so busy I don't have time. I'll run a hard two or three miles. I eat well and don't drink during the season.

Is Southern California's team program patterned after the British League?

Yes, the only difference is, over there the second half is individual scratch racing. The tracks are so much bigger that the added speed makes handicap racing (better riders positioned behind the start line) more dangerous. The 1962 world champion was killed in a handicap race up in Scotland and they got away from it after that. It's one thing if somebody falls down in front of you if you're going 30, but if you're going 60 or 80 (with no brakes) you're in trouble.

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You can take any other kind of super-good rider and put him on a speedway bike and he'll be tired in two laps.
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How have you done in England?

I've been racing for the same team, Exeter, for four years. There are 12 possible points during a meeting, normally. (3-2-1-0 scoring for four four-rider heats.) In my first year, '73, I had a 6.5 average, which was the highest any foreigner had ever had in the British Speedway League. In '74 I had an 8.5 average and 9.5 in '75. I had some trouble with my four-valve engines last year and finished just over a nine-point average. I've won international open meetings in Rhodesia, Germany and Sweden with all the world champions racing. You're on the podium afterward and they play the national anthem just like the Olympics.

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There are a lot of kids out there right now that could make great speedway riders, but they'll never get the chance.
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What about other Americans overseas?

Mike Curoso came over last year.

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Ivan Mauger told me he can't do a wheelie for five feet on purpose. Yet he has been world champion four times.
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If it's promoted right speedway can become the biggest thing since football.
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He went really well after he got a four-valver. Steve Gresham has been over since '74. Steve has been a bit underrated, but he's known throughout England as a real charger. I think the experience the three of us are getting is going to help us get invitations to the World Best Pairs and World Team events (FIM Championship events matching national two- and four-man teams). We have real good riders sitting right here in Southern California. We could do real well in those events in a few years.

How has Exeter done?

In 1974 we won the British League championship for the first time. We finished third again this past year.

How's the British Speedway League set up?

Sixteen teams in the first division with 36 meetings. We race at Exeter every Monday, overall two or three times a week. There are 18 second division tracks. The BSL is the big league. People will rent buses and travel and cheer us on. Attendance averages a quarter of a million a week. The *Daily Express* readers vote on Sportsman of the Year and motorcycle riders seem to get it every year.

What about track length?

My track at Exeter is the biggest, 440 yards, a quarter-mile. It's banked. The smallest is about 320 yards. They all vary.

What about grasstrack?

Those are separate, usually held on some farmer's land. They're usually 600 yards to a half-mile. The bikes have shocks on them. The long tracks are basically the same except they're dirt. There's a world championship for Longtrack as well as Speedway. I just missed qualifying for that last year.

Has Jawa gone to a four-valve yet?

They have their own. Ivan Mauger has been riding it and so has Ole Olsen. It has a dual overhead cam; the factory claims 65 horsepower.

How's the money in speedway?

Not too much at all. If you work for it you can make pretty good money, but it's not like other sports. If you win everything in one night's meeting you might earn \$120, and you're living in a country where the cost of living goes up 25 percent a year.

What was the winner's purse for the World Final?

Peter Collins might have made \$2000 for winning. I made about

three or four hundred dollars for finishing ninth and it cost me more than that to get over there.

Who would you consider likely American candidates for overseas?

Mike Bast and Bruce Penhall. They would probably wind up about the same as any of the other Americans who have gone over. It doesn't matter what ability you have. There are too many variables the first year.



Should the AMA be involved in the promotion of the sport in the U.S.?

Definitely. Right now it's like back-woods. If the sport is going to grow it's going to have to come out of Southern California. It's going to have to come out of an organization big enough to handle it. I know a lot of people are down on the AMA, but I think it's the only alternative. Right now there are many potential newcomers but there just aren't enough tracks to support them. And that's where the sport is killing itself. That's one thing about motocross. You can buy a bike and go compete in a local event.

In Houston we had a demonstration race and the people had never seen it before. They just go: what's this. They don't know what they're looking at. If it's promoted right speedway can be the biggest thing since football. Anybody

I know who sees speedway, even if they don't know anything about motorcycles, says they like it.

Speedway is the bastard of motorcycle racing. Nobody wants to touch it here. It's a shame it can't get accepted as it is in Europe.

What we need are some 300- to 350-yard tracks with a consistent surface, medium width and sharp corners. There are numerous facilities where speedway could be held.



Do you think team racing is the way to go?

Yes. They had some trouble here last year. If a team is losing, attendance will drop off. Within a couple of years people would support their team. The whole thing is, there aren't enough riders right now to go around. There are a lot of young kids out there right now that could make great speedway riders but they'll never get the chance.

What's it cost to race speedway?

The bike is around \$2000. Here in Southern California the wear and tear on the engine isn't so bad. All you replace are the tires. In Europe I usually run two bikes and two spare engines. I go to about eight or nine meetings and I need to have the engine completely rebuilt. I spent over \$3000 last year just on engine maintenance and parts.

Of course you're a professional.

Well, the bike wears out quicker over there. The thing that's really great about motocross now is the high school competition they've had for the last few years. If speedway was handled in the right way it could be the same way. Can you imagine a high school speedway team competing against another one? Like in the Iron Curtain countries it's unbelievable how many riders they have. They pick a guy out and tell him he's going to become a speedway rider, give him a bike and train him. It's like becoming a gymnast at six.

How does the qualifying for the World Final work?

America had one spot open last year and I had to come back from England and ride two qualifiers here. I had to win here to qualify for the intercontinental final. Then I had to get in the top eight there. Steve Gresham and Mike Curoso came back with me. I broke the tapes in my first heat of the final at Sacramento and was excluded. Then I won the next four to get into a runoff and then I won that.

How do you feel about the one-night championship approach?

Everybody says a series would be more fair, and it probably would be, but there really haven't been that many flukes among the speedway world champions. It's only happened a couple of times. All you have to do to put that out of your mind is go to a stadium and see 105,000 people all sitting in an electric atmosphere, everybody knowing it will lead to one world champion. That one-day thing, everybody cheering, it's something else.

Will you try another sport?

No. I'm a speedway rider. That's it. I feel I'll have a better chance of winning the world final this year than I've ever had. It'll be held in Sweden. I've always done well at the stadium. It's my kind of track.

You took your time about deciding to return to England this year.

I wanted to, but the situation with the English economy has gotten so bad. It really affects you when you're earning English money right in the middle of the inflation. The cost of living has doubled while I've been there and the wages have remained about the same. As long as I feel I have a good chance to win I'll continue, especially now that I'm in the top ten in the world. I want to continue my progress. I don't want to stop now. ❁

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