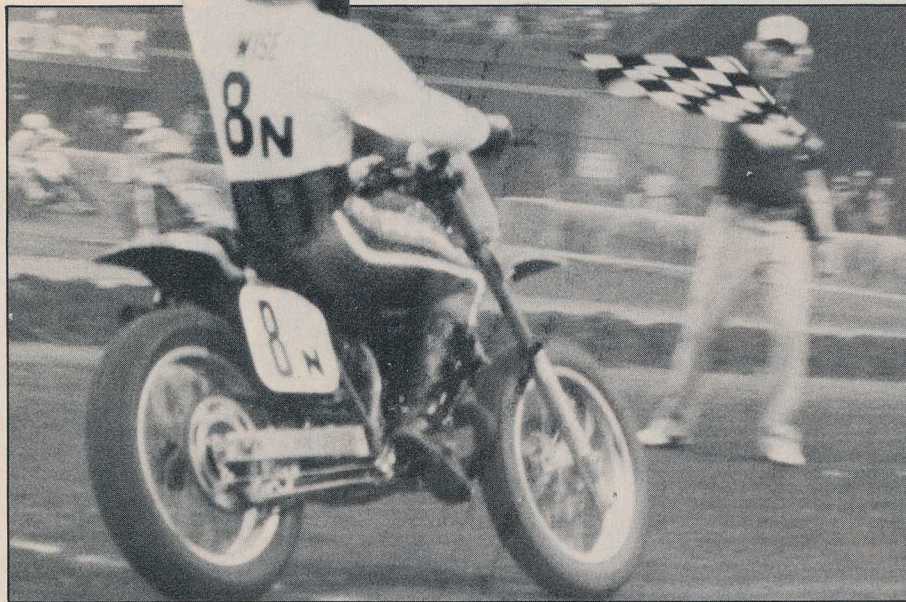
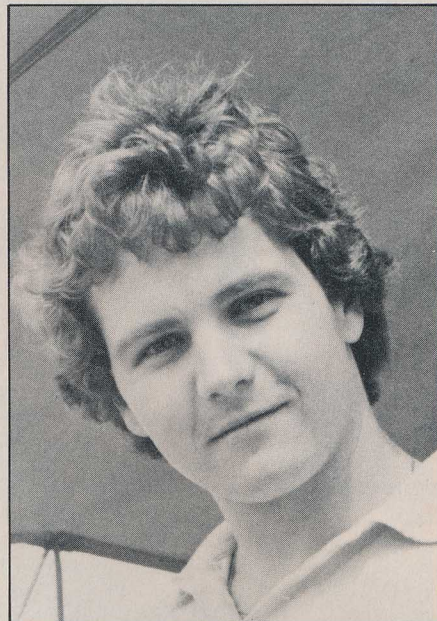


# STEVE WISE: MR. DO-IT-ALL

By Rick Oestricher



First across the finish line, after being sick for a week and missing practice before the race. Wise plans to continue his Class C challenge . . . and why not? After the first 3 rounds of the Series, he's in the points lead.



No matter what or where he's racing, Steve's philosophy is "a race is a race."

## Controversy surrounds the superbike champ

The perennial stars of the Winston Pro Series had better watch themselves this season, as they have some new competition in the form of a former motocrosser. In the space of 2 months, Steve Wise has set Class C racing on its collective ear. He stole the show from the regulars at the Houston Astrodome TT with an aggressive Supercross riding style. From there he went on to Daytona, doing what most thought would be impossible—running with the leaders in the Superbike Race and finishing in the top 10 in the 200-mile National. The salt in the wound for the Class C riders came a week later in Talladega, Alabama, where Wise finished 2nd to Eddie Lawson in the Superbike Race.

You might wonder why Steve, a motocrosser, is riding road race and dirttrack nationals. This switch came as a result of 2 things: a new AMA rule and Team Honda's belief in Steve's ability.

The new rule states that an expert from one form of AMA competition can move to another competition without losing his ranking. This eliminates the need to move up through the Novice and Junior ranks. The new rule has allowed Steve to change horses in midstream and pursue a new career with Honda.

Honda had a lot to do with the rule

change; the factory was interested in seeing how Steve would fare in Class C racing. Dave Arnold, racing manager with Team Honda, was present at last year's competition congress when the rule change was brought up for consideration. He was instrumental in "ramrodding" it through despite the protests of some present. Gary Scott, the rider representative for dirttrackers, was afraid some motocrosser would show up at Houston . . . namely, Steve Wise.

This push on Honda's part came as a result of a pair of consecutive wins by Steve in the 1980 and 1981 ABC Superbikers race. The televised event, run each November at Carlsbad Raceway in Southern California, features a hybrid track combining all the elements of racing. Pavement, motocross and everything in between make up the course layout. The best riders in several types of racing are invited, and for 2 years running, they've taken a back seat to Steve Wise.

The pavement section of this course is rather slick. However, Steve, who rarely even rides on the street, adapted to it well enough to even enjoy riding on the Tarmac. Steve's newly found love of pavement hadn't escaped Honda's eye. Neither had his newly acquired attitude toward racing.

Nineteen eighty-one was a stormy year

for Steve. He had been injured badly enough not to have placed high in the national standing. Having broken his ribs twice and his wrist once in a year, he was becoming tired of the hours of training, rehabilitation and the physical toll the injuries were taking on his body. His contract with the motocross team was up at the end of the year and it was unclear if it would be renewed.

Then in August, something occurred. He became a "born-again Christian." His attitude, which had been one of gloom, turned positive. This new mental picture of how things *could be* helped Steve re-establish himself in racing. He was able to be in top shape for the 1981 running of the race that has reignited his career: the Superbikers.

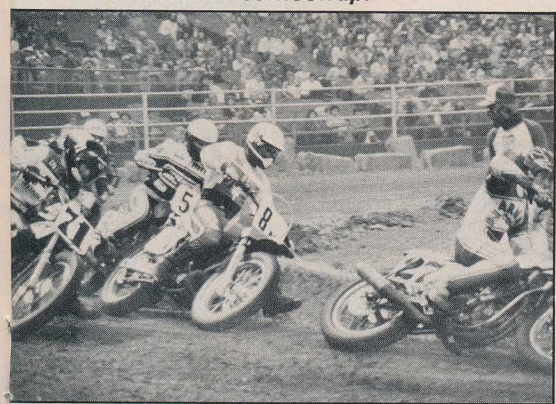
After the 1980 running of Superbikers, Steve had been approached by Honda and was asked if he would like to try a little road racing. It was impossible for him to do at that time; he was still involved in motocross and had a year on his contract. However, when the same offer was given in 1981, he jumped at the chance.

Steve felt he had accomplished most of what he wanted out of his motocross career, with wins in almost all of the series excepting the Trans-AMA. Being ready to





*Wise's TT CR480 was less trick than many people would like to believe. His pit crew was seen before the race fitting thicker base gaskets to the engine in an effort to slow down the revving and let the rear wheel hook up.*



*Seeing a motocrosser in the middle of the pack may be a funny sight, but few of the racers were laughing after the smoke cleared at Houston.*

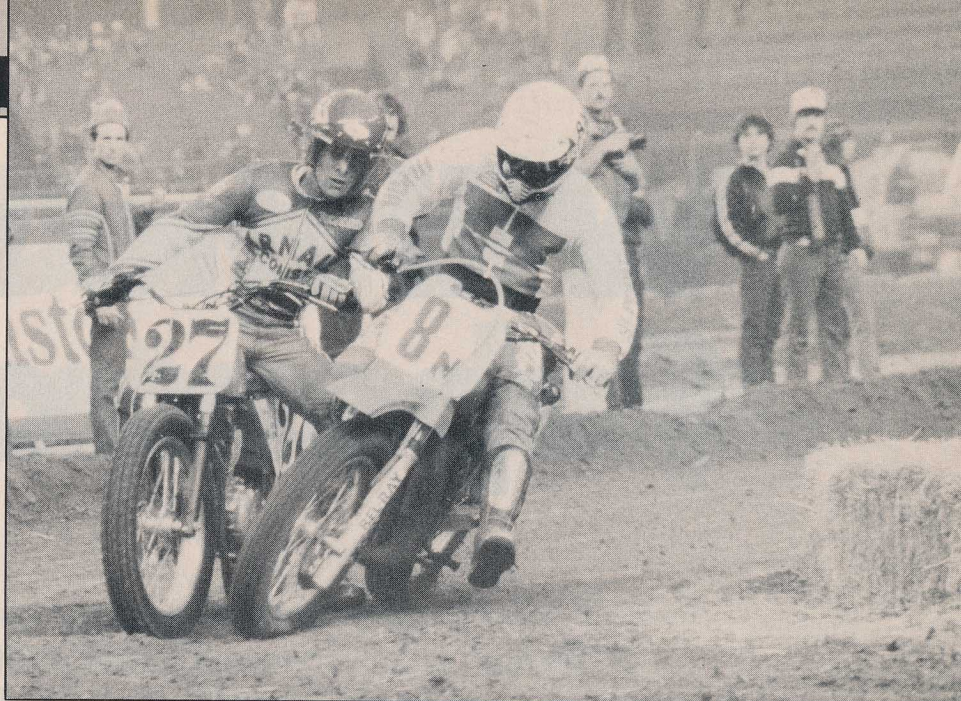
move on, he was delighted when Honda's Udo Geitl and Ron Murakami offered him a tryout on Freddie Spencer's superbike class road racer at Willow Springs.

The audition went well. At the beginning of the session, Steve was a bit stunned by the immensity of the machine, but he quickly adjusted and was really cooking by the end of the day.

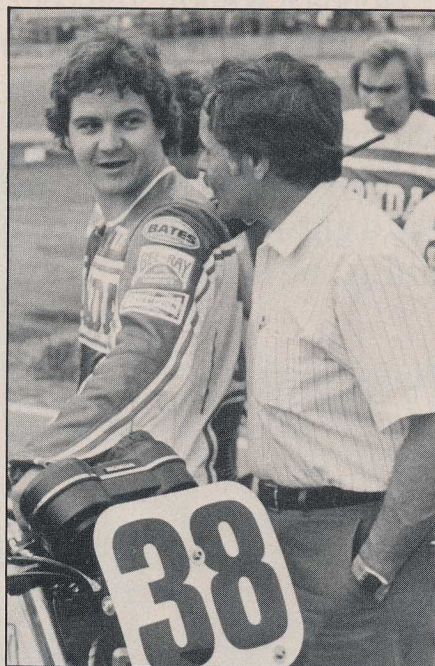
Steve soon found himself preparing for the Daytona Superbikers race. Daytona is the 3rd stop on the Winston Pro Series circuit, following the Houston Nationals.

As soon as Wise appeared at the Astro-dome, the controversy started. Not many people—racers or otherwise—gave Steve much of a chance even to qualify for the TT National program. Steve, who had been sick all week with a viral infection, didn't show for practice. The first time he even threw a leg over his modified CR480R was during his qualifying attempt. Wise qualified 34th fastest in a field of 48 riders. Not spectacular, but at least he was in the program with a back-row start in the 2nd heat.

That 2nd heat also had Steve Eklund on the line. A former National champion and 2-time winner of this race, Eklund was setting his sights on a 3rd trip to the winner's circle. For the first few laps Wise sort-



*An excellent example of good old American block passing—as fine a way as any for Wise to take the lead from Rich Arnaiz in his Houston Semi.*



*Is Steve telling AMA Racing Commissioner that motocrossers rule? Wise was running 2nd at Daytona until he scared himself.*

ed himself out on the still unfamiliar track, then took off. He worked his way up to a battle for 4th with Eklund. In the turn after the biggest of the 2 jumps, Wise and Eklund got close, with the former Champ coming out on the losing end. With Eklund down, Wise went on to finish one place out of a transfer spot.

Eklund was mad. The incident prompted him to head directly to the AMA officials before the heat was even over. Eklund was trying to have Wise disqualified on the grounds he was riding dirty and had knocked him down on purpose. Eklund wasn't the only person concerned with Steve's riding technique. A lot of the Class C riders considered the blockpassing and

jumping tactics used by the Honda rider to be overly wild and dangerous. Some were worried Wise might land on them off the jumps. This was a possibility, as he went off the main jump twice as high and twice as far as anyone else!

Cooler heads prevailed, even though Eklund was still trying to have Wise disqualified as Wise was being staged for his Semi. It was to no avail. The Semi soon became an all-Wise show after a blockpass left leader Rich Arnaiz stalled in a hairpin. Steve capped off his winning ride with a flashy one-hander over the jump on his first lap. This win earned Steve another back-row grid placing.

Before the race Steve was kneeling and praying. This was quite a contrast to other rider's pacing and last-minute preparations.

In the final race, Steve, along with teammates Mike Kidd and Mickey Fay, waged a terrific battle over 2nd place. This dice was broken up toward the end after Kidd was knocked down by a lapped rider. Wise now set sail after leader Rickey Graham. Steve began to reel him in at an astounding rate, only to have his rear brake stay arm fracture 3 laps from the end. This left Wise without rear brakes and allowed Fay to re-pass for 2nd place. Only a last-lap charge by Wise kept Rod Spencer from passing at the flat.

In the winner's circle, Fay congratulated Steve: "Steve Wise is one of the best motorcycle racers I have ever seen."

No matter what Mickey Fay said about Steve, a lot of people didn't agree. While the majority of the fans were behind Steve, a good many were not. One person who was vocal at Houston was road racer Dale Singleton, who put forth the idea that yes, Wise might be able to handle a 50 hp motocrosser on the pavement, but there is quite a difference between that and a 180 mph road racer at Daytona.

The road course at Daytona has made or



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## STEVE WISE

broken many a racer's dream in the past. This year it fulfilled the first part of Steve's goal in Superbike racing . . . to be competitive. Steve qualified 5th for his first big-time road race, in front of stars like Wes Cooley.

During the race he ran as close to the front as 2nd before running into some oil he thought had come from his own machine. After a couple of wild slides, he made a pit stop to check it out. Nothing unusual was found, and after losing a lap, he went out to finish 7th.

Steve had originally planned to ride another race during Speedweek—the Supercross. However, when he talked it over with Geitl and the others, they felt Steve shouldn't risk the possibility of an injury. Steve was duly compensated for this with a ride in the 200-miler. World Champion Marco Lucchinelli had originally been slated to ride but had withdrawn, leaving an empty road racer. The bike was offered to Steve . . . and the rest is history.

After a mid pack start, he began to move up and by the end of the race was firmly in 7th place. One week later, Steve finished 2nd at Talladega. A smooth pair of races for this motocrosser who was supposed to have been too erratic for the pavement.

Wise attributes a lot of his smoothness to the coaching he received from his teammates Mike Baldwin and Roberto Pietri, along with Freddie Spencer. But the bottom line has to be that Steve possesses na-



**A jubilant Steve Wise is interviewed by Larry Maiera after his Semi win at Houston. He says that the slow racing speeds make TT riding an easy and fun sport, a claim that many old-timers are quick to dispute.**

tural racing talent that needs only refinement to excel in any type of racing.

There is a chance Steve could be riding half-mile and mile races, along with his roadrace and TT duties. This raised more concern from other riders, including Pro Series Champ Mike Kidd, who hopes Wise won't try his "shove-it-inside" riding style on the longer tracks. Wise's reply to all this is that he likes his body and would like to keep it in one piece. He defends the Houston riding, "The speeds were slow and there was no real chance of anyone getting injured. But the half-miles are a different story."

Along with Superbike and the Formula I road races, Steve is, at the moment, contracted to ride the rest of the TT Nationals in 1982. His next race is Ascot and after Ascot there are 2 more TTs, Santa Fe and Peoria. Rod Spencer's bike builder, Jerry Greer, has already publicly predicted that Wise will win Santa Fe. Whether or not that will happen, no one can say.

But if you're taking bets . . . □

### NEW BLOOD AT ASCOT

• Steve Wise wanted to win Ascot—there's no doubt about it. Nearly everybody in the stands wanted Wise to win. He created more of a stir than any other Grand National rider present, and every time he changed position on the field, the crowd roared approval or dismay, depending on whether that position change was toward the front or toward the rear.

Any hard-core Ascot fan knew Wise didn't really have a chance. The Houston TT is one thing; nobody ever knows the track at Houston, and riders set up for the artificial surface on raceday morning. Ascot is a different story. The track has hardly changed in 10 years, and all the veterans of the Winston Pro

Series pretty much have the Ascot Formula wired—jotted down in notebooks or burnt into the backs of their brains. The old-timers know what it takes to keep a bike hooked up on the Ascot surface.

A first-timer really doesn't have much of a chance, but Wise hung in there and proved his point. His production CR480-engined TT bike would either spin wildly or wheely out on the track, and he wound up finishing 4th in his heat (one spot out of transferring), 3rd in his Semi (again, one spot away), and finally finished 4th in the Consolation race, after pulling some of the most amazing passes on the most unpassable parts of the track.

He needs a little more experience on the non-artificial tracks, and it wouldn't hurt him to have a bike that was slightly more competitive, before he'll be known as a true threat to the veterans of the Class C racing scene. But for a first-timer he caused quite a scene, and even the hard-core flattrackers are beginning to understand that that kind of scene is just what the sport needs. New blood and changes may be hard to accept at first, but a healthy future depends on them. •



**Steve's outrageous motocross style couldn't quite make up for Ascot's horsepower requirement.**