



THE BLACK-JACK ENDURO CIRCUIT

Racing against the clock in the heartland of America

By Rick Sieman with special thanks to Terry West & Tony Orihuela

Welcome to a new series that will feature pockets of culture around the country. However, in this case, we are not talking about the opera or the latest zoot-capri art gallery. Nope. We're talkin' dirt bike culture.

You see, in the good old US of A, we have perhaps 20 hardcore centers of dirt bike activity. These groups, or organizations, hold all sorts of sanctioned off-road events. Truly, this is the heartbeat of dirt biking as we know it today. These people make up the backbone of the sport, and it is with a great deal of pride that *Dirt Bike* now be able to give them some well-deserved national recognition.

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Leading off our series, we will salute the Black-Jack Enduro Circuit. If you live in the middle of the country, and ride in the woods, you surely know about these people.

Started in 1975, the BJEC was formed from a loose group of enduro clubs from Oklahoma, Missouri, Arkansas and Kansas. Initially, they managed to scrape by with seven events a year to determine various class champions, but within five years they doubled the events to 14, and also added clubs and co-sponsored events from Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi.

During this growth period, the BJEC got their act together and gained a reputation for putting on well-run National Enduros. It certainly didn't hurt having the fantastic facilities of the John Zink Ranch in Oklahoma at their disposal.

WHO'S WHO, & WHERE THEY ARE

Here are the key clubs and people, in no particular order: Arkansas Dirt Riders,

Little Rock, AR, c/o Gary Corum, (501) 224-0688; Friends of Chadwick, Springfield, MO, c/o Ron Shreve, (417) 678-4623; Missouri Mudders, St. Louis, MO, c/o Bob Caplinger, (314) 868-4128; N.W. Arkansas Razorback Riders, Fayetteville, AR, c/o Rafe Essary, (501) 442-3879; New Frontier Dirt Riders, Ft. Smith, AR, c/o Luther Stem, (501) 646-7772; Okie Dirt Riders, Oklahoma City, OK, c/o Pete Holcombe, (405) 524-2140; Stillwater Trail Riders, Stillwater, OK, c/o Ralph Cooper, (405) 743-2522; Texarkana Dirt Riders, Texarkana, TX, c/o Tony Orihuela, (903) 832-5323 (Note: Tony is also Circuit Chairman for the BJEC. Vice Chairman is Terry West, [903] 831-5500); Tulsa Trail Riders, Tulsa, OK, c/o David Pearson, (918) 834-2351.

TOUGH TERRAIN

What can you expect at a Black-Jack event? Well, it could be anything from the slate-rock-infested trails at the John Zink Ranch, where pencil-thin branches from ironwood trees hit you hard enough on the knuckles to bring tears to your eyes.

Or it could be an enduro that runs around beautiful lakes in Arkansas through some of the most breathtakingly beautiful woods to be found anywhere. It is pretty hard to cut the course with a few miles of water acting as a natural border.

West Coast riders would feel right at home at some of the Missouri runs held near the Flat River area. Plenty of sandy whoops are to be found, and if it has not rained, conditions will be dry and almost desert-like.

Ride in Texas and you will find sandy loam, lots of pine trees, many small hills—but no mountains—and extremely

tight trails. Also, most of the time the Texas runs are bone-dry and dusty.

Near Oklahoma City and Stillwater, there are no hills to speak of. We are talking flat land and red clay dirt. When it's wet, slippery is an understatement, and the trails are very, very tight. Once an enduro was run there with a very slow 18-mph average. Guess what? The top riders, pushing as hard as they could, zeroed many checks without even thinking about looking at their clocks!

REAL PEOPLE?

Like any group of dirt bikers, the BJEC has its share of genuine certified characters. And the stories. Ah, yes, the stories. Like the time a group of Black-Jack racers were camping out the night before the enduro.

It seems that one man who must remain un-named (but let's call him Bobby, just for convenience), got up in the middle of the night to relieve himself. So Bobby (obviously not his real name) stumbled out of a warm sleeping bag into the cold night air.

Bobby (a fake name) pushed the tent flap aside and, barefooted, stepped through the opening. This was not such a good idea, as his big toe centerpunched the milk crate his bike was perched on.

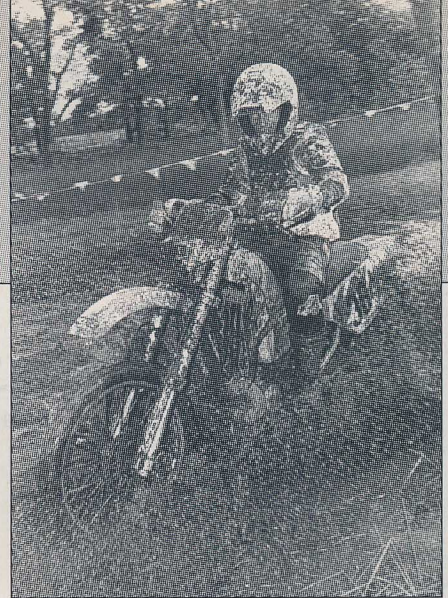
The bike then fell slowly over, while Bobby (an alias) clutched his injured toe and howled like a coyote on steroids. The falling bike hit the bike next to it, starting a domino effect, which caused the neatly arranged row of ten bikes to fall over, one at a time.

Picture, if you will, Bobby (a name devised to protect the guilty) hopping around on one foot, his impressive belly



◀ In 1994, the Blackjacks will host the ISDE at the John Zink Ranch. For years, that has been the location of the U.S.'s toughest qualifier. David Rhodes wrings out his Husaberg at the ranch.

You want it easy? Go elsewhere. Steve Hatch spews through a Blackjack mud hole. ▶



hanging over the single piece of clothing on his body, a pair of tatty Fruit-of-the-Loom shorts, shouting profanities and watching in dismay as bike after bike topples over, and then the last bike slowly falls into side of his new van, taking chips of paint out down to bare metal.

Poor Bobby (not necessarily his real name) incurred the wrath of his friends that night, and had to ride the next day with a giant throbbing pickle of a toe stuffed into his boot. He received little or no sympathy.

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Then there was this alleged incident of a former BJEJ secretary (but not necessarily a secretary; who knows what position he held?) who was blasting down a trail at full throttle, when he (or she?) rounded a corner and was startled to see a check spring into sight! Since the former secretary (it could have been a chairman) was running hot, he immediately dove into the woods off the trail, to hide.

The check crew could not identify the errant rider and could not leave the check to find out who was trying to hide in the bushes. Shortly thereafter, another row of riders approached the check, and right before they reached the markers, our friend

darted just in front of the oncoming row, pointing at a dressed-alike rider behind him, yelling, "Hey, that guy came out of the woods from nowhere and just about killed me!"

The confused check workers immediately converged on the innocent look-alike rider, as Jerry H. (a name we picked out of the clear blue sky) motored away with a nice clean zero. Since this alleged incident, Jerry H. (for sure a made-up name) has moved to California (or maybe some other state), and is now doing much of the same kind of stuff out there (or somewhere).

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There is also a rider on the Black-Jack Circuit who is so old that he won't buy any green bananas. Also, some of the Youth Class riders have unique problems. One lad (who must remain nameless) would have won numerous events, but nervousness—and possibly an undersized bladder—forced the youngster to make frequent stops off the trail to answer the call of nature.

You can also find the standard assortment of course-cutters, crashers and guys who get lost on the way to the sound check that you have in just about any racing organization.

EXCELLENCE IN ACTION

The BJEJ is a first-rate group and riders have come to expect a smooth sign-up, well-marked trails, plenty of course workers, properly manned checks, quick results and excellent trophies.

At the end of a season, there is an awards banquet and trophy presentation, and it is a class deal. We know. The Black-Jack folks invited us to speak at the last awards banquet held in Arkansas.



Would you buy a used motorcycle from this crew? A herd of Black-Jackers.

Brand-new helmets, with the name and class hand-lettered, were the prime prizes, in addition to classy trophies.

The Black-Jack Circuit Awards Banquet is a big enough deal to draw celebrities like Terry Cunningham and guys like the *Dirt Bike* staffers who show up for the free meal.

With thousands of members in the BJEJ, one might think that success came automatically. Not so. When the BJEJ started in 1975, dirt riding and racing was at its peak. However, due to land use hassles, rising costs and all the legal hassles, they had a dramatic drop in events.

Instead of whining, the officers of the circuit sprayed some chain lube on the old work ethic machine and got busy. Now they have a full schedule of 14 events again. Part of the secret to their rejuvenation is the fact that they have made many new classes to get the younger and older riders involved. Yes, they have classes for the old coots and even have the kids classes divided into A and B, under 12 and 13 through 15.

You can go to most any Black-Jack event and see everything from a brand-new KTM with \$1000 worth of time-keeping gear on it to a clapped-out old IT-175 with mismatched colored fenders. However, the important thing is that they have made competition fun again.

These guys are good enough to earn the trust of the International Enduro people. Yes, in 1994 the Tulsa Trail Riders will host the I.S.D.E. at the John Zink Ranch in Oklahoma. They will be assisted by clubs in the Black Jack Circuit, as well as clubs from all over the nation.

And you can bet the event will be run right!

WANT TO HAVE YOUR GROUP FEATURED?

Dirt Bike plans to do a profile on all of the deserving competition groups in the country. If you want to get on the bandwagon, drop a line to:

Dirt Bike Magazine, 10600 Sepulveda Blvd., Mission Hills, CA 91345; Personal Attn: Rick Sieman/CLUBS USA. □