

THE WHOLE

Getting lost in the desert for love or money?

The intended object of this article was to shed a little light upon the enigma which SCORE racing has represented for years. You know, down and dirty motorcycles versus cars racing, man against the terrible elements of the desert, or what have you. Your reporter set out to discover the nature (from cause to result) of an increasingly popular form of competition.

In that case, let's start this off by saying that despite his uncommon sobriety and general noble intentions our word-wielder came away far more confused than upon his arrival in Parker, Arizona. Not necessarily disdainful, awe-struck or weary; just baffled. Why, at this very moment his eyebrows are piled in the corners of his eyes like sediment at the San Andreas fault. His ears twitch while he nervously nibbles upon an oatmeal cookie. Whahappened?

Take Parker itself, nestled on the artificially bulging banks of the Colorado River, the very lint between the toes of Los Angeles: Interstates 10 and 40. 1,948 people farming a little, retiring some, and serving the wants of the L.A. gringos out for a romp on "the river." Surrounded on all sides by desert in most of its manifestations: sand, rocks, shrub and cactus. Joshuas occasionally, saguaros more frequently and good representation from Arizona's innumerable small desert succulents. Beautiful rock scapes loom over the river, their colors working the width of the red spectrum in the world's most spectacular sunsets. But more than anything else Parker is one of the hottest spots in America, year-round.

On February 11, the day of the running of the Parker 400, the thermometer accommodated with a morning chill of 50 and an afternoon high in the 80s. By May Parker's mercury will climb into the 100s with boring regularity. Not what most of us would envision as nirvana, but for a growing number of weekend denizens Parker is that

concept incarnate.

Some 15-20,000, the bulk from Southern California, migrated for the weekend, bringing throngs of motor homes, campers, trailers and, of course, the two- and four-wheeled off-road vehicles. The masses of the entourage flowed out from the motels of Parker into the

surrounding desert, circles sprouting like paranoid settlers. The streets were jammed with frequently unlicensed two- and four-wheelers, most with, at the most, a visual condescension to silence. Meanwhile, local cash registers jingled and the police happily settled for directing traffic.



Rolf planted himself dead center on his Husky and let it rock him home.



Da winners.

Deep within the traffic jam lay the Bluewater Marina, home of the SCORE race center. Here, on Friday, the entrants, some 40 motorcycles and over 350 cars, spent the day wandering sponsor's lane picking up appropriate stickers entitling the pilots to contingency money, and finally, as the sun crept away, came the harrowing passage through technical inspection. Here

DAM THING

by the staff of DIRT BIKE

sloppy mechanic/tuners such as Carl Cranke and Eric Jensen made up for their negligence by safety wiring spokes. At a distant corner lay the motorcycle section of the impound area, not dissimilar to the fire-breathing act in the corner at the circus.

Amidst the ever-present hordes of



Bob Balentine spurts rocks on the 250 winning KTM in California.

beer-drinking onlookers, obviously quite rapt at these mysterious goings-on and flowing with the shoulder-bumping confusion, our heroes made their way through pump and circumstance and put their scooters to bed. Then, before the sun could tickle the horizon, they made their way, by escort, to the outskirts of town for the 6:00 a.m. start.

In ten-second intervals, from big to little, the riders departed down a few miles of asphalt to turn up the first sandwash into the rising sun. There were Larry Roeseler and Brent Wallingsford on 390 Huskys, riding for Husqvarna. Teammates Rolf Tibblin and Jack Johnson waited across the Colorado to pick



Then Tom Kelly brought it in through Arizona. In background sponsor Ted Lapadaikas goes for the champagne.

things up for the California loop. John Hateley thundered off early, on his way to hand off to Al Baker. From there the riders' list trailed off through the notables: Cranke, Jensen, Fero, Blackwell, to the SoCal desert hotshoes and finally, it seemed, to the boys out for a nice trail ride.

A few hundred yards into that first wash the pecking order began to settle. The overzealous overgeared and had a devil of a time managing to pull fourth after the shift from third. The Husky Huskys blurbled and blorched under their rich jetting and 17-tooth countershaft sprockets, but 390cc quickly won out and they skittered off to adopt their rightful front-running positions. The Baker Honda growled and Hateley got by in a squirt. His

lead stretched with consistency for most of the first leg. The gang followed. Tom Kelly pushed a 250 KTM forward to be the front-running 250 and Cordis Brooks pushed his brother's 400 KTM into a boulder while riding blind into the dust-shrouded sunrise. The KTM came out somewhat shorter, and Cordis severely shaken. Among the small-bores shifting continued and Carl Cranke put a very quick 125 Penton out front on the clocks.

Down the way at check seven Hateley was in such a hurry he missed greeting the Great Powerline Road Crunching But Yellowish-Brown DIRT BIKE Truck. Both Huskys swooped by in form and the Kelly/Balentine KTM was crisp and moving. Slightly later Cranke whistled through on his 250ish 125. The Maico Qualifier ran well.

Back down the powerline road the GPRCBYBDBT got shaky knees, but there was a race to cover and our man was off for the California side still looking for the elusive picture of the leader. Careful not to be evaded again by riders not limited to a 55 mph speed limit, he picked a spot sufficiently far down the way to precede the leader's passing. Tuning into the local radio station's race coverage provided much information. "In class 6, Freddy Shmerdy and George Swillgut have failed to reach the first check and we'll keep you informed on that. A motorcycle has turned the fastest time for the first loop, 107 miles in 1:48:12. We can be sure our cars will be here soon."

Photo spots were investigated, the radio station listened to for similar revelations, and the race program read cover to cover. Did you know that there were \$110,000 worth of contingencies posted for the Parker 400? The nerve-racking wait was finally punctuated by a blurbling Husky. Down the hill and over the humps and around the turn and up the hill and over the hill and down the hill, it was Rolf Tibblin sitting comfortably aboard the Roeseler/Tibblin bike. No one else in sight.

At hill bottom Rolf swept wide in the corner in a wobble, punched a rock, got both feet off the pegs, did a little handstand and gassed it. The Husky went blurp, brupp, flurt, braaaap. Rolf regained composure immediately and settled back to the business of leading the Parker 400 by over 20 minutes.

Finally Bob Balentine came by on his hot 250 KTM looking more in a hurry than Rolf. Slightly later a four-stroke sounded in the distance. Was it Baker finally making his way on the Honda? No, a Yamaha, a Cucamonga Yamaha. Running high but the thumper was in its death throes. And just seconds behind Bob



Rick Finger pilots the Finger/Secor Husky 250 to third overall.

Rutten chased on the Dale's Cycles Harley-Davidson. Over in Arizona Bruce Ogilvie waited to make a run on the Balentine KTM for 250 honors. Later and more bikes passed. The riders were tired and rear wheels pawed the air in sickening sways. In contrast to the terrifyingly fast sandwashes and roads of the Arizona side, the California side, with the exception of flat-out Thunder Alley where 110 mph on a bike is not unheard of, was a brutal combination of cross-grain rain ruts and sharp-edged rocks of various sizes.

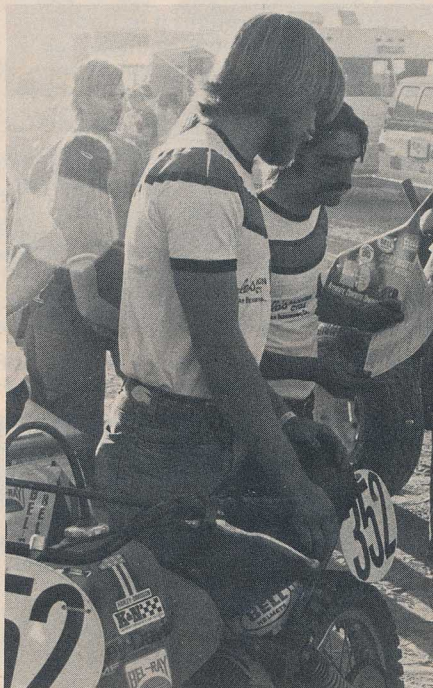
By the time Jeff Kaplan arrived on a 125 Husky, Rolf had spent his half-hour downtime in Parker, replaced a clutch on the 390 Husky



125 winners Kaplan and Payton picked some slick lines around the nasties.

and Larry was well on his way for the third loop. Eric Jensen? The leading Penton 125 now sported a severely eroded piston only three miles into loop two. The Maico persisted with aplomb.

Back in the truck and down to Parker to pick up the finish and find out about the Baker/Hateley Honda. In the Bluewater Lagoon the teaming throng surged and the police droned on about yellow ropes. Class 11 Volkswagen Bugs trickled in from their first loop and a frustrated man attempted to keep kids from spinning donuts in his carefully manicured grassy yard. The word was mum: "Parnelli



Bob Rutten and Bruce Ogilvie put their Harley in the march, but luck caught up.

broke down before check one and Shmerdly and Swillgut are still on the loose."

Almost anticlimactically Roeseler screeched to a stop, presumably the overall winner of the Parker 400. Champagne popped and bodies and bike were carefully arranged to show off Almaden's poster to pressful f-stoppers. Larry imbibed happily and Rolf sipped carefully alluding to the healthful benefits of wine. Fifteen minutes later Bob Balentine arrived aboard the 250 KTM to pick up the last of the cool champagne. Slowly over the next hour came a 250 Husky belonging to Rick Finger and Ric Secor and another 250 KTM. Then the Max Eddy/Charles Barney Maico 250 slid in sideways on a flat. Their only problem, mind you. The Payton/Kaplan 125 Husky was first small-bore, only 57 minutes behind the overall winners. Where were Bruce Ogilvie and the Harley? Both sitting in check one awaiting a ride.

More bikes filtered in and finally, what everyone was waiting for: the single-seat buggy. In a certain sense we got the last laugh: it was Malcolm Smith. It was over and the question remained, what happened? Rolf and Larry geared tall and rode fast. Unlike their Husky teammates (Johnson and Wallingsford) they kept the motor together. They endured the danger and the nastiness. They won.

But what did they win? Prestige? Not too much. Because of the preponderance of cars in SCORE racing and the weight they carry, bikes are basically a sideshow. They don't receive wide press coverage or attract the attention among motorcyclists that a motocross, for example, does. Pleasure? It seems doubtful that they truly enjoyed the rather dangerous and gnarly terrain.

No. What Rolf and Larry and Bob and Tom and Mitch and Jeff won by winning their classes was one thing in particular: money. Because of the extensive organization of SCORE, the purses they can offer from high entry fees and the importance assigned to four-wheel off-road racing by the industry, bikers slide in on the hubbub. Rolf and Larry split something over 2600 bucks between them, a large purse for any form of racing. Then there were contingencies... But money obviously isn't the answer. If not, what is the question?