

SIMONS SETUP

Still cool after all these years

By Len Weed

□ Remember Ake Jonsson? Remember when he won nine straight Trans-AMA overalls in 1972? Steve Simons remembers. He watched Ake race. He also recalls that it was the first time he had seen shock coolers. Remember shock coolers? They got fairly popular for a year or so.

Steve Simons was 17 back in 1972 when he saw the Koni coolers. "To my knowledge there were factory riders using them then, but nobody was manufacturing them for sale." Steve got to work on the project. At 18 he had his own company and was selling shock coolers. Several other manufacturers leaped on the bandwagon. By the time he was 19 the bubble had burst, the shock manufacturers were in the midst of intensive development, and forward mounting, long travel and gas shocks were upon us.

"The coolers were an experience that taught me a lot, but didn't make me much money. We fell down in the mass-marketing effort. The coolers were a fad. I felt the gas shocks would take over and I thought it was time to get out."

What's the story behind this teen technician? Steve raced for about four years, realizing that he would never become a great rider. "Design always was of great interest to me." He traveled with Mark Blackwell during the Florida Series in '74. He was attending college when he became a businessman and his reading switched from classroom assignments to researching specific problems related to design, development, production and marketing. Seventy-hour work weeks became the norm. "Anybody planning on getting into this is going to get into a very high-pressure field."

After phasing out of the coolers, Steve worked on a full-time consulting and development basis with Moto-X Fox while they were developing their spring/air shock, lending technical as well as market experience to the project.

Then, a year and a half ago, he set to work full-time on developing his own forks. Some units started trickling out last spring, and when we met with him last fall most of the production intricacies had been ironed out to permit full-scale production.

People like Brad Lackey, Pat Richter and Steve Wise, involved with testing on the Fox Shox, also lent their talents to development of the forks, along with Jimmy Ellis. The Bengt Aberg replica we reported on in the November issue had Steve's forks.

Talking about the difference between forward and rear suspension, Steve comments, "With shocks you just have to dial in the springs or pressure rates and the dampening, but you have to steer with forks. They affect the handling much more than shocks do. And, in addition to springing and dampening, you have to consider rigidity, offset, axle design and seal friction, which is much more critical with forks. Five years ago a guy could get by without good suspension, but you can't win without good forks and shocks today. For the most part, a rider feels he's stuck with the forks he has. We just want to offer a quality alternative.

"Like the Air Shox, Bob (Fox) has been working with Honda a long time and now he's reaping the benefits. Personally, I don't think it makes that much difference to the public what shock

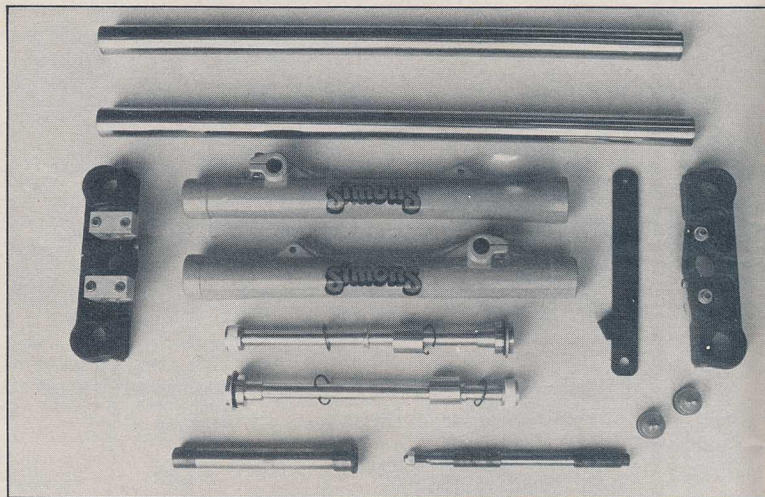
Honda has on production bikes. Whatever Honda is using on their race bikes is probably what the public will buy. I don't see that as a negative thing for Honda or their race team. They're out to win. Shock-switching is so accepted I don't think it bothers the manufacturers, at least not some of them.

"But, forks are such a major item that from a marketing standpoint there is resistance to having race bikes running around with different forks. They probably feel that this would lead the public to believe the bike needs forks. I think that a race team would use other forks, though, if they were considerably better than the works forks they have available. The primary reason for having a race team is to win. It's better to win non-stock than lose stock. I've had a factory race team express interest in my forks, but I can't say who."

Simons forks are spring and air. Steve uses a straight, soft-wind spring, about nine pounds, that affects the lower portion of travel only, the first three inches or so. Then the air gives a very progressive effect. "You can tune them to infinity if you want them that stiff.

"There are lots of places where we could cut costs, but I feel our quality would go down. When a manufacturer gets big his quality tends to go downhill. They're looking to cut a penny on a hundred parts." That's why he's not looking for an OEM contract right now, but his long-range goal might be supplying a manufacturer.

"My main marketing technique is to get good riders satisfied with products I'm associated with. From there you'll create a fairly big demand. At first you don't need a great deal of marketing. People will come to you. After that initial surge, you have to go into more in-depth marketing, and that's really what



Ten inches of travel. The fork tubes are heat-treated 4140. The 1 1/2-inch-diameter fork tubes are the largest on the market. The aluminum damper rod is tapered. A soft spring handles the small bumps, air progressively handles the big ones. Axle is 4140 chrome moly. Forks are tuned by changing air pressure and changing oil volume. Seals include lathed cut, knife edge scrapers. Fork weight is lighter than those used on RM125 or Yamahas or Hondas.

Moto-X Fox is good at." Fox is Simons' biggest distributor, selling the air/fork kits he designed for Brad Lackey several years ago.

Right now he has eight different models of forks. They have been designed so no modifications are necessary for installation. Steve settled on ten inches of travel as his standard. "That's about the maximum for the aftermarket. If

we gave them more the bike wouldn't handle right for most riders. Our forks will fit on most late models and not affect the handling."

Simons forks retail for \$325 and can be ordered directly from Steve. The address for a brochure and model/price list is: Simons Setup, 2625-D Miller Avenue, Mountain View, California 94040; (415) 948-3470. ■



On the bike and ready for traction action.



Steve Simons with his current pride and joy and his very first Koni cooler.