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VOLUME 10, NO. 9



## **TESTS**

- **KAWASAKI KX 420 A1** 
  - The Truth Comes Out
- **CAN-AM 175 QUALIFIER** Baja Bruising
- 36 SUZUKI RS 250
- Collective Bargaining

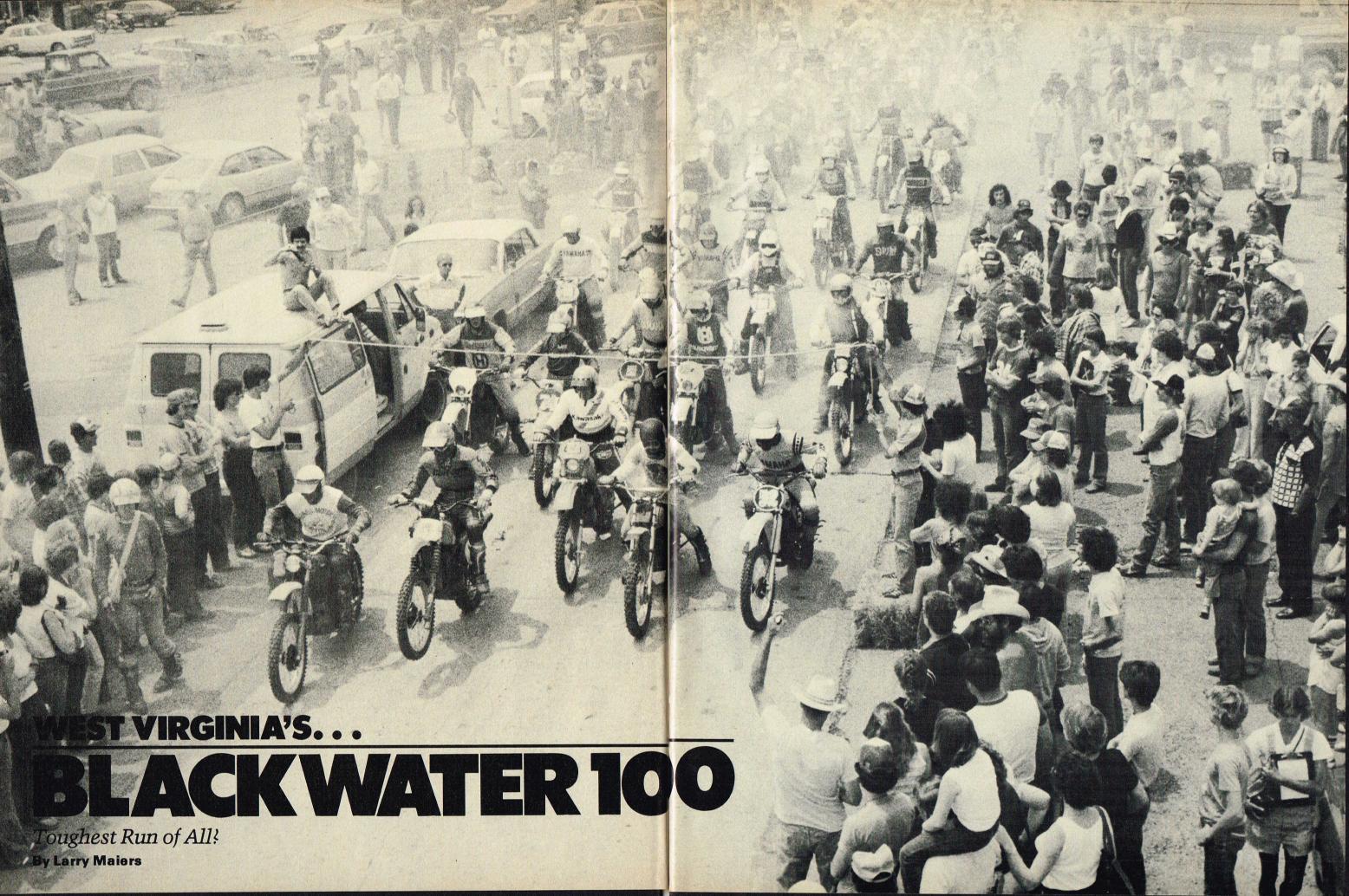
# **FEATURES**

- **HONDA CR 125 BUDGET MODIFICATIONS**
- Low Cost Racers
- **LIFE AND DEATH OF AN IT 425**
- Long Range Abuse
- CRUD
- The Little Things Can Stop You
- LEGAL UPDATE
- Military Straightens BLM Out
- DG WORKS 80s
- 52 What Kids Dream About

# COMPETITION

- **BLACKWATER 100**
- The Toughest Race?
- **BEL-RAY 500cc USGP**
- Moates Whips The World
- **DIRT DIGGER'S DINOSAUR RUN**
- **Thumping Through Time**
- **OLD TIMER'S NATIONALS** Maturity In Mammoth

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Photos by Dave Smith and Bob Mansberger.

For the past six years, the community of Davis, West Virginia, has welcomed entrants in the Blackwater 100. They have made the annual event a highlight of their summer, with bluegrass bands, streets blocked off, a parade, fire truck rides, a dance and friendly partying.

Driveways and front yards are turned into campgrounds, complete with water and electricity. Want a shower? You need only mention it and one is offered.

The riders begin arriving on Friday. By Saturday morning, the small town of Davis is overrun with vans, motor homes, campers, trailers and cars with out-of-state plates. By Saturday afternoon, it looks like vagabond city. Tents are everywhere. There are no motel rooms to be had, and the merchants do a land office business.

It's the sixth annual Blackwater 100, held in "Almost Heaven, West By God Virginia."

It's only "almost" because Heaven isn't full of rocks, mud, ruts, downhills, uphills, river crossings, mosscovered bogs, and rain every day.

It's the toughest, meanest, gnarliest, rockiest and muddiest run anywhere. Ask any of the 500 riders who race there annually.

The run itself was the brainchild of Anita Barton, Public Relations Director of Tucker County, West Virginia. "We were looking for an exciting event to promote Tucker County. We were all skeptical when a cycle race was suggested, but I agreed to look into it. I saw "On Any Sunday" and then traveled to a nearby event being held by Dave Coombs. More than anyone else, Dave convinced me we could do it, and keep it under control."

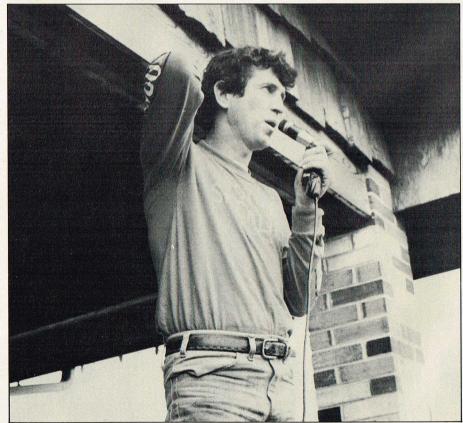
Dave Coombs, one of the most active amateur and professional cycle promoters in the country, put on the first and all subsequent Blackwater events. He takes particular pride in laying out a course so nasty, so demanding, that a rider's objective is often survival, with no thought of winning.

Riders return year after year to meet the Blackwater challenge. It's developed a cult-like atmosphere with chants of "We love it . . . we love it," and "Make it rougher." Out of 500 riders, only a handful will complete the full five laps. A slightly larger handful (less than 50) will complete four laps.

It's rained every year at Blackwater, making the already tough course even tougher. Bikes are often in need of major overhauls after running just one



This year's overall winner John Ayers bogs through one of the river crossings, where spectators gathered like vultures.



Dave Coombs, the man behind the Blackwater 100, puts some fear into the racers at the riders meeting.



Big bore bikes seem to have the best chance at finishing the Blackwater. Lots of Huskies with O-ring chains are found.

lap, and every bike on the course will. at the very least, need new cables, brake shoes and wheel bearings. Still, the riders come back and the Blackwater traditions continue.

Each year something is added that improves the run. This year a sound system was strung throughout the town and an announcer kept pit crews and spectators informed of leaders, times, and behind-the-scenes information relayed from various parts of the course. Riders stopped and offered comments that ranged from "I'm having a miserable time, but I love it." to "Tell Coombs to stick this run up his . . . oh, never mind. I'll tell him next year."

The Blackwater tradition continues to grow as each year's run gets tougher and the stories get bigger.

Several riders in the field of 500 were capable of winning this year's event. They come from Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia and surrounding areas that host Hare Scrambles every weekend of the year.

Riders who are well-versed in riding swamps, gnarly ruts, deep water and

mud, while temperatures are at freezing or below, stand the best chance. But the pre-race favorites boiled down to three riders: John Ayers, a professional motocrosser from Pennsylvania who cut his teeth on Hare Scrambles. Fast Frank Gallo. Frank enjoys the distinction of being the fastest and toughest of all off-road riders in the East, and possibly in the U.S. Ed Lojak. A young rider from Pennsylvania with visions of inheriting Gallo's crown, and overall winner in 1980 of two ISDT Qualifiers.

The Blackwater start is almost a tradition in itself. Riders begin lining up with a full hour to spare. The singleline staging stretches the full length of the main street of Davis. Bikes are parked and stories of past Blackwater events are exchanged. First-time riders become fear-stricken as downhills get steeper, and rivers and mudholes become bottomless pits that suck up bikes right and left.

The single line gradually turns into rows of five riders each in anticipation of the start. At five-second intervals, rows of riders claw, elbow, clash and

wheelie down the main street of town and disappear from sight. It would be a full 45 minutes before the leader returned . . . 45 minutes and 18 miles of Blackwater trail!

The first of four river crossings was less than a half-mile from the start. The riverbeds are littered with rocks that range from baseball to bowling ball size. Before the day was over, shift levers, broken engine cases, mufflers and miscellaneous cycle parts and rider apparel would join the rocks and become part of the Blackwater legend.

From the first river crossing, a narrow, rutted road leads to a highspeed powerline section. And then . . . the treacherous downhill that has become synonymous with Blackwater. It's the other side of the mountain that riders spend several minutes getting up and often just a few seconds getting down. It's steep and full of ruts and rocks that alter a rider's direction in split seconds. A miscalculation could mean the end of the race.

Frank Gallo made the most spectacular downhill ride of the day. Halfway down, and riding on the ragged edge, Gallo bounced off a rider who fell in front of him. He shot to the left, hit a rock and bounced onto the narrow ledge that separates the trail from disaster. For 75 feet, he rode inches from the edge and delicately throttled his way down. The spectators gasped and cheered as he saved it. Gallo said later, "I thought I'd bought it! You know, the next time around they expected me to do it again!"

The "bog" is another Blackwater tradition: a quarter-mile of two-inchthick moss with several feet of mud underneath.

The trick, of course, is not to stop. Hit it, gas it, and stay on top. By the end of the race, the bog is a sea of mud as riders continually alter their lines in search of the scant two inches of moss

Steep river banks are also part of the Blackwater. Banks that by day's end, have turned into quagmires that suck bikes in to the cases and often deeper. The last mile of the course is through the streets of Davis. It's the riders' only relief in the 18-mile track.

At the end of lap #1, it was John Ayers with a three-minute lead over Gallo. Unbelievably, Ed Lojak had passed over 400 riders, and was running 15th. Riders and bikes were mud-covered and already showing

(Continued on page 60)



Churning through tank deep water is the easy part of Blackwater. The mud bogs are the tough parts.

(Continued from page 29) signs of fatigue.

With lap #2 in the book, it was still Ayers, but now with a five-minute lead. Gallo had hit a rock at high speed and unloaded. He was uninjured, but his bike suffered a quarter-sized hole in the transmission case. A two-minute pit stop for silver tape repairs, a quart of oil, and Gallo was back in the hunt.

Lojak suffered a flat front tire on lap #2, and another one on lap #3. He hung on to finish, but was out of contention.

Then, in Blackwater tradition, the skies opened up. For the sixth consecutive year, it poured during the race. Riders coming through the check were completely soaked, mud-covered beyond recognition.

The severe weather took its toll, forcing riders off the course. Ayers' third lap was six minutes longer than the first two. Gallo picked up two minutes, but lost it back while retaping and adding oil to his transmission. The emergency repairs were holding, but he was not able to gain on Ayers.

The rains stopped during the fourth lap, and the sun broke through. Riders who had quit, and were refreshed, headed back onto the course. Reports filtered in of bikes buried in mud to their tanks. The riders who brought the reports had teamed together to haul

and lift bikes through impossible mudholes. Common sense said, "Don't try another lap," but very few dropped

Ayers started lap #5 with the lead and a rear tire that had been flat since midway through lap #4. Gallo, in a desperate bid to overhaul the leader, blew by his pits with a wave. Spectators and pit crew alike were astonished. He had a transmission problem that without attention would end his ride. Then there was the question of gas. Did he have enough? Would Avers' tire stay on the rim, or would the four-lap leader fall prey to the rocks that could strip a tire in seconds?

The drama built as the minutes ticked off. Then Avers came boiling down main street all alone. The winner of the sixth annual, and toughest, cross-country run in the U.S., the Blackwater 100.

In the victory circle, Ayers said, "I wouldn't have put a new tube in if I'd had one. Under normal circumstances I can change tires in under five minutes. But the water and mud would have added at least another two. I knew Frank was close and I couldn't afford to stop."

Gallo, with an extremely loose transmission, held on to win the open class and take second overall. "Hey! I had to go for it! If I had stopped, there was no

way to win. At least this way I gave it a shot."

Behind Gallo were Tom Buckles, Joe Lojak, Stan Lojak and Sam Bosnik. A total of ten riders had completed the five laps. The Blackwater 100 is only six years old, but already it has taken its place with such legends as "Big Bear," the "Mint 400," "Hungry Creek," "Elsinore" and other giants long since discontinued. With just a little bit of luck, the hospitality of the fine people in Davis, and the good attitude of Blackwater participants, this one will live for years to come.

## Overall Winner • John Ayers Suz

#### 125 Class

1. Charlie Huegel		 									 		.HUS
2. Dave Dinger													
3. Gary Roach											 		.KTN
4. Forest Stark													YAN
5. Todd Tate													.HUS

#### 175 Class

1. Mark Wilkes
2. Dwight CallawayCAN-AN
3. Dave HolbertHON
4. Jack WeichselSUZ
5. Ron Roberts KTN

#### 250 Class

1. Tom Buckles	KTM
2. Sam Bosnic	SUZ
3. Ken Costello	HUS
4. Kurt Klingman	HUS
5. Rick Wagner	HUS

#### **Open Class**

1. Frank GalloHUS
2. Joe LojakHUS
3. Stan LojakHUS
4. Randy Mansberger KTM
5. Allen QuimbyMAI

## Senior Class

1. Nick LengyelHON
2. John LeeHUS
3. Jack LloudsMA
4. Tom Baily
5. J. CuppetKTN

## Super Senior

1. Dick LoefflerHO	N
2. Herb Leppelmeier KT	N
3. Ernie Huffman KT	N
4. Jim SeibertKT	N
5. Dirty HarryKT	N

#### Powder Puff

1. Linda Mansberger												. H	US	3
2. Paula Mazzarese .												. H	10	1

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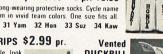
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