

WHAT MAKES DICK TICK?

By Tom Webb

This year, Dick Burleson won his seventh National Enduro Championship. Ever the inquiring reporter, DB, wanted to see if this was just a fluke, so we sat down with King Richard the Seventh and pumped his glass-lined brain for some facts, fantasy and fast talk:

D.B. Why do you keep winning? Year after year, you demolish the enduro circuit. This year you won six out of twelve races. In 1980, all the big manufacturers put a lot of emphasis on the National Enduro's, and you still won.

DICK: Yeah, well. (A very long pause.) Lots of reasons; just lots and lots of reasons. There are a number of factors that are going to allow a person to win. First of all, he has to have the skill to ride the bike fast and the endurance to *ride it fast for a long time*. Also, he has to have the desire to do it and the discipline to train himself to do the things that are good for him—not the things that are bad for him, smoking, drinking, partying on Saturday night, staying up to watch Saturday Nite Live, what ever is involved.

You have to get down to the job at hand. Just getting ready on Saturday to race on Sunday isn't going to do it. You know, I start getting ready Sunday night for the next Sunday, and it's just an ongoing thing. What's going on in my mind, what problems did I have, what can I do to cure them and not face them in the future? That kind of stuff. I think I possess all those qualities I talk about.



STRAIGHT TALK WITH BURLESON

I'm a very competitive person. When I play anything, I want to win. I just can't go for a nice leisurely sail on the lake. I want to find somebody and race them.

D.B.: Do you think that one of the reasons you keep winning, even though you're 33 and most other top riders are in their twenties, is because of your knowledge of the areas and runs across the country? How clubs in one area lay out a run as compared to another area? How to set up your bike for one enduro, because you've ridden that race before and you know the terrain?

DICK: I think that you can classify that as basic experience, and yes, I feel that it probably helps. But not all the same clubs have runs, and if they do, they put them in different areas or change them around. So it's not like I remember each individual course or how every club puts on their event. It's just that I have experience from riding all over the country.

D.B.: What sort of events do you prefer?

DICK: Woods, eastern runs. I'm not real fond of the desert. Just about any other place is fine. It depends so much on organization of the run and the corresponding weather. My favorites depend more on those factors than the actual physical area. Some real crummy areas under the right conditions can put on a really nice race, and vice versa.

A lot of guys think they're going fast, but they don't even know what fast is.

D.B.: Is it hard to keep the desire to win, considering you've been doing it for so long. Especially when you've won so much!

DICK: I don't get quite as excited and pumped up as, let's say five years ago. But once I'm into the race, things change. A lot of times in the first part of the race I find that I'm doing okay, but not really good. Maybe on comparing scores with some guys, I'll find that I'm down a point or two. Then I start to get real serious and gas it up.

It takes me a little while to get

pumped up, that's for sure. It's not just like a job to me though. I really enjoy what I'm doing, and that helps keep that desire up there. It's not just the desire to win. I've won enough, so it's not like I have to prove anything to anybody.

I kinda like to blow people's minds—that's one way to look at it. There are people out there who'll see a group of 30-inch trees and start freaking; I'll come up and just floor it through them. It's fun to do what looks impossible. I get off on that.

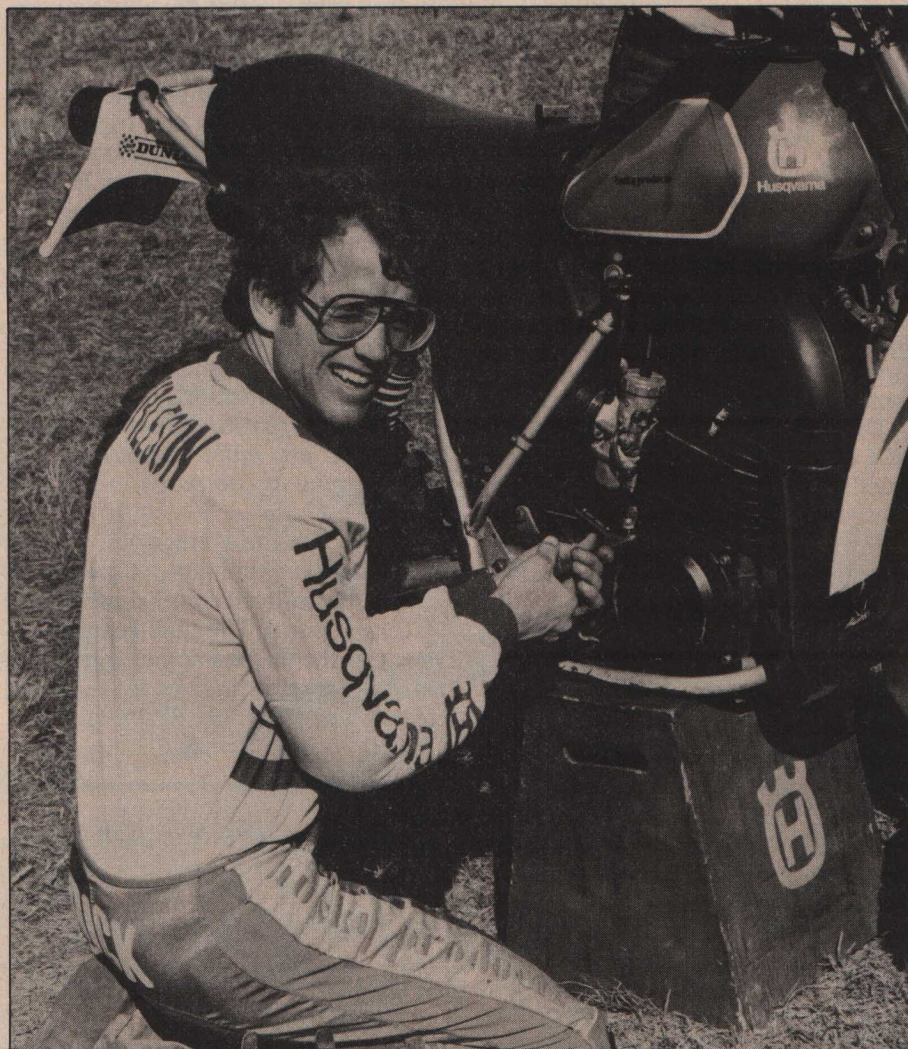
I definitely hate losing. If I do lose a race, I don't let it bother me or get me down. I try to figure out what went wrong or what I have to do. That's one thing that's a plus in my direction—my problem solving ability, my preparation for the race and coping while I'm racing.

I'm not immune to problems, that's

for sure. I think I have fewer than most because I'm very familiar with the bike I ride and have worked with it enough. Almost any possible problem that could come up, I've already seen it, and I know what the cure is.

Once I've seen the problem, I'll fix it so that, for all intents and purposes, it will not happen again. But, I still have problems: flat tires, broken speedos, whatever. In those cases, well, it's rather hard to describe. It's not like I have a back-up system or anything, but with a broken speedo, I can keep time from corner to corner. Or with a flat, you change your riding style so that you can keep moving without having the tire come off the rim.

Maybe if you get lost for a minute, where it would really discourage a lot of people and they think they're out of the race and lose their whole attitude, well, that just makes me try harder. So



Burleson shown going through the Husky ritual of tightening the mag.

ON TIME, UP FRONT & STRAIGHT TALK WITH BURLESON

a lot of times I've made problems work to my advantage.

D.B.: What about practice? Anything special that you do?

DICK: Practice, to me, has nothing to do with timekeeping. It's just riding. Every time I practice, I tie it in to testing the bikes. Make changes on the bike, then go out and test them by riding. But, from a straight riding standpoint, I like to find something challenging then play with it; like a group of trees that look impossible to get through at speed—I just keep jetting through until I'm satisfied with the speed.

Like when Bob (Popiel) worked here. He and I rode together for years and years. What we'd do is go out and find a really tough section and I'd follow him all the time. I'd let him lead, and by the end of the ride, I'm always the dirtiest guy from getting roosted all day. But it's really good practice for me to try to pass him. Follow real close and look for places to try to get by. It's not like I could just blow by Bob either. He's always on the gas.

D.B.: What about motocross?

DICK: When the Six Days come around, I have a very tough MX track that I set up. It's gnarly—all bumps and turns. Yeah, you could say it's Regulation Gnarly.

D.B.: How about motocross riding to train for enduros? The old theory is ride MX, and it will make you a better enduro rider.

DICK: I don't believe that being an MX racer makes you a good enduro rider. It's very good physical training, however, and it teaches aggression. When I started riding enduros—and maybe I'm totally off-the-wall crazy—I felt as if it was a survival thing—just getting through the woods. I got in there and started riding with a motocross-type attitude. I'd worked my physical capabilities up to where I could do that all day long. Then, instead of surviving the woods, I would attack the hard sections, slip the clutch and wheelie through the turns. Total aggression.

A lot of guys think they're going fast, but they don't even know what fast is. They think they're on the gas, but actually cruising is a better word. They're not using that motocross aggression and style. You know the obvious difference is that a motocrosser



You'd smile too if you had seven National titles under your belt.

has to have the ability to learn the course and get faster at it, where an enduro rider doesn't have that advantage.

An enduro rider has to have the opposite ability, which I have good sense at, and that's seeing the trail ahead and being able to read it. If you have this ability, you can keep your rhythm going through long, hard sections.

D.B.: That's said to be one of your main strong points, being able to read the trail ahead of you.

DICK: Yes, I project pretty far up the trail. Another thing is that I have a good sense of direction.

D.B.: Do you think that the runs in the West are more concerned with timekeeping as compared to the ones in the East?

DICK: On the average yes, but not all Eastern runs are flat-out special test either. Basically, it comes down to two different parts. The time keeping element of the enduro comes into effect in order to get to the start of the special test or what I would call a special test. To get to it at the right time—that's

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where the timekeeping ability comes in; to get there right at the top of the minute so you have the whole minute to work with. Then you have to go for the gusto, ride as fast as you can till the end of the special-test section. One thing is that the test sections in the East are usually much longer than in the West. There are many more test sections, and timekeeping parts are mainly transport sections—more or less to get from one section of woods to another.

The timekeeping element is important. Most of the Eastern runs have enough to keep you honest, combined with plenty of test sections to get you late or barely on time.

D.B. What do you do to train in the off-season?

DICK: Racquetball, cross-country skiing, weight training at the Nautilus during the winter—and we still ride.

D.B.: Even if it's snowing or grim?

DICK: Oh, you bet. It's really good fun in the snow. We ride all year round. Sometimes I go to Florida or California for a week or two. I don't really stop riding.

I really like the cross-country skiing. I ran so much when I was in high school and college that I just can't get into running anymore, and it's become very hard on my knees. I've been very lucky when it comes to my knees, and I want to try and avoid pushing them as much as possible. With cross-country skiing, you get a lot of physical exercise. It's really tough; I think it's tougher than running, but then there's a flowing movement that I enjoy.

D.B.: What size bike do you prefer to ride?

DICK: I don't know. I kinda get in heat for one bike every once in a while. I'll grab a 125 and really like it, so I'll have 125 fever for a while. Maybe when I ride the 430s, I'll have the open bike fever. It's hard to say. Right now, very tentatively, my plans are to ride a 125 in the qualifiers and a 430 in the enduros.

D.B.: Do you think staying with Husky all these years has helped you?

DICK: I think so. I have a good knowledge of the motorcycle, and it's a good motorcycle. There, I know I have an advantage. I know how to make it work right; setting it up correctly, dialing it in so it's working as good as it possibly can.

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DICK BURLERSON INTERVIEW (continued from page 46)

me that's the absolute bottom, the pits. As long as that motorcycle still moves, there's no reason not to finish the run. Sometimes, even if it's not moving. For example, if you run out of gas, there's still a way. I've been to Hare Scrambles that have no bearing on anything and pushed the motorcycle for about a mile and still won. I was about half dead from pushing it, but I finished, and because I was determined somehow still won the event.

The never-give-up, never-say-die attitude will produce amazing results. I think all of the guys who ride for Husky feel the same way I do. Melton's that way. Terry's that way. No matter what, the absolute worst result is to not finish.

As long as that motorcycle still moves, there's no reason not to finish.

A lot of times just finishing isn't going to do me any good, but at least I've had a chance to ride the course. By doing this, you get exercise from riding the race and the mental hassle of trying to ride and put up with the problems during the run. It's all good, good training. You've now added a little to your experience table that will build up over the years.

D.B.: Where do you ride on the minute during an enduro?

DICK: Always at the top; any place else and you're throwing away time. I don't ride hot, but I'll ride right at the top, and depending on how accurate your odometer is for a certain run, usually you can sluff off a few seconds if you see the check and you're a little warm at the time.

You can't sluff off anything if you are riding hot. It's instant burn time! The whole trick is, when you see a check, you know what the mileage is. You know whether to shoot in there or hang back until the minute changes.

D.B.: How much longer do you plan on racing competitively?

DICK: Well, I've never had any real long-range plans. Now, this may sound kind of funny, but a lot of people always ask me about beating Bill Baird's record. But, seven years ago I



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didn't sit down and say 'I want to beat Baird's record.' I never did that. I've always taken one race at a time, then one season at a time.

As long as I'm in physically good shape, and as long as I still enjoy it and can still be competitive and make a living doing it, basically, I'll continue to do it.

At the present time, I'm planning on riding next year, and I'll make a decision on the following year, after next year.

D.B.: Since injuries are a major factor in a racer's career, how do you attribute the fact that you've never had an injury throw you out for a whole season?

DICK: In '79, I sprained my neck in the Jack Pine. The weather conditions, for me, were the worst. It was early morning mist, and that's the worst for my glasses—as bad as it can possibly be, because that mist isn't heavy enough for the Rain-X to wash it off. It just leaves little beads that make it almost impossible to see.

I was riding very fast down a trail, wiping my glasses with one hand and riding with the other when I hit a log that was buried in the sand. Anyway, I went over the bars and landed on my head and sprained my neck. That didn't put me out, but it left me sore for the rest of the year.

One of the reasons that I've sort of eluded injuries is that I don't ride berserk. I can ride very fast but yet have a safety margin. I hardly ever ride over the safety margin that I've set. I ride at a pace that I feel fast and safe with yet isn't crazy enough to risk injury. But that's not to say I don't get loose. Usually on the second day of a two-day event, I start feeling pretty good.

D.B.: But at, let's say a qualifier, or a six days special test, you have to make up time, especially if your special test scores haven't been that good.

DICK: At so many qualifiers over the year, I got smoked on the first day, looked at the scores and went 'Jeez!' Then I gassed it up on the second day and won the thing overall. That's happened so many times it's ridiculous.

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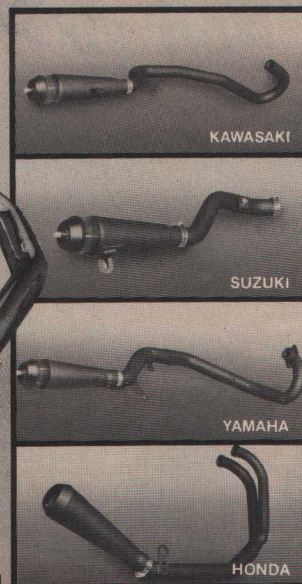
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