

SIX BIG BORES TAKE THE MX TASTE TEST

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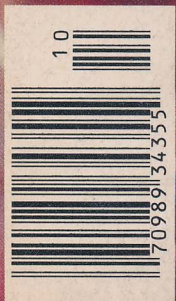
DIRT BIKE

USGP:
WOLSINK WINS

OCTOBER 1976
\$1.00
UK 50p

YZ175C
NEITHER FISH
NOR FOUL

WOMEN'S
NATIONALS



ALL DAYS OF TWO DAYS
250 NATIONAL MOTOCROSS WRAP

DIRT BIKE

VOLUME SIX NUMBER TEN OCTOBER 1976

SHOOTOUT

- 23 BIG-BORE MXers MIX IT UP**
Finding the best among the rest.

TEST

- 35 BULTACO ALPINA**
Grunt for the tight stuff.
- 57 YAMAHA YZ175C**
Looking for a home.
- 61 MONTESA 360 CAPPRA**
She's a man-eater, meat-grinder!

FEATURES

- 30 IAN ANDERSON INTERVIEW**
Despite the pictures, Ian wears a helmet when he rides, honest.

COMPETITION

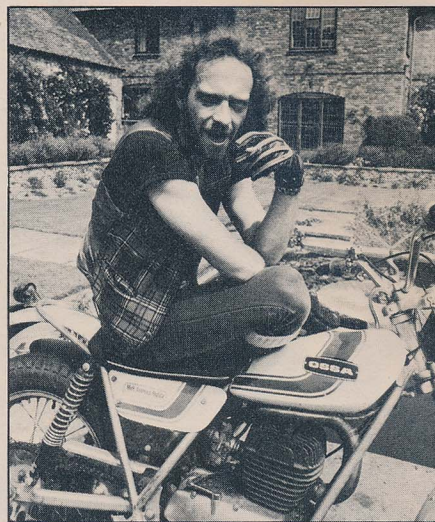
- 41 TWO DAY QUALIFIER WRAP-UP**
There's only SIX DAYS left.
- 45 UNITED STATES GRAND PRIX**
Without a single dentist joke!
- 53 WOMEN'S MOTOCROSS NATIONALS**
Wham, bam, thank you, ma'am.
- 74 250CC NATIONAL MOTOCROSS WRAP-UP**
Tony D. and Suzi Q.

TECHNICAL

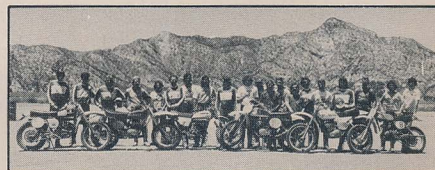
- 51 ENDURO COMPUTER EVALUATION**
Let your fingers do the riding . . .
- 71 HOW TO: TRAIL LIGHTING TIPS**
Shine little glow worm, glimmer, glimmer.

DEPARTMENTS

- 6 EDITORIAL**
The 40-pound helmet.
- 8 CHECKPOINT**
The CB Jeebies, Ten-four?
- 10 ASK THE EXPERT**
Plastic fantastic.
- 12 BITS AND PIECES**
And odds and ends.
- 14 RIDERS WRITE**
A nerd in the hand.
- 20 TRIAL FILE**
Love it or Leavitt.
- 22 HOT SET-UPS**
Casting about.
- 89 CRASH AND BURN**
Was this trip really necessary?



Why is this man smiling? p. 30



Hail, hail, the gang's all here. p. 23



Why isn't this man smiling? p. 45

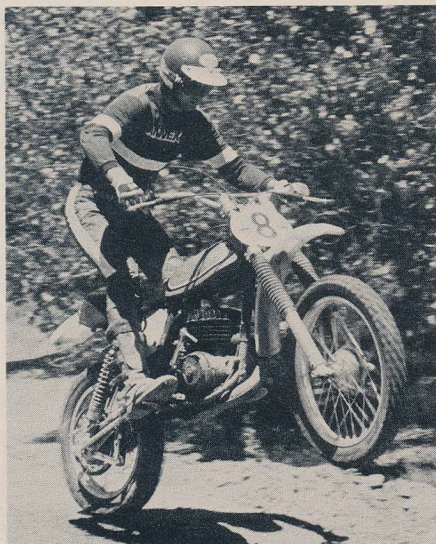
ON THE COVER: Gary Jones shows the results of an afternoon of open class testing.
Photo by Bruce Woods.

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE OCTOBER 12

OPEN CLASSIFICATION: IS SUPERB BETTER THAN EXCELLENT?

Evaluating the performance of today's dirt racers has become more and more difficult. Not only has the performance increased tremendously, but most brands now offer packages so complete as to have been unheard of a few years ago. Power, suspension, detailing, are all there. The performance of dirt bikes is hard to measure in stark numbers. Dyno charts give a hint but they are only a small part of the whole picture. Drags on a dirt strip don't work. Lap times at the local racetrack are unreliable since there are too many variables involved. Most motocross races last more than a lap or two so at least 15 minutes on each bike would be necessary to include the fatigue factor. Some bikes are faster, but more tiring to ride, than others. Additionally, no other magazine but DIRT BIKE has any staffers who can handle open class machinery expertly. The only logical conclusion to the problems of performance evaluation came to us one day a while ago. It's time for DIRT BIKE to do a multi-bike open-class motocross evaluation. After having tested most of them individually we would put together some of them on the same track on the same day. For this we needed more riders than the staff could provide, riders who could take a whole day of testing and still be fresh enough at the end to be able to give concrete comments concerning the bikes' performances.

So we set about planning. We invited all the distributors of the



Cover guy Gary Jones gets the feel of the 360 VA.

Gary Jones vs. Suzuki vs. Rich Thorwaldson
vs. Husqvarna vs. Billy Clements vs. KTM vs.
Al Baker vs. Bultaco vs. Gary Hymes vs.
Montesa vs. Mike Bell vs. CZ vs. . . .

500 CLASS PERFORMANCE EVALUATION



major brands that have open class bikes to participate, bringing a bike and a technician, in a one-day "performance evaluation," as we decided to call it for want of a better name. Then we had Gunnar call some of his old buddies, all very qualified experts, who are now independent from the brands that we planned to test. It was imperative that we complete the entire performance evaluation in one day of riding, since a multi-day affair would take an entirely different approach. Six brands participated, making this, to our knowledge, the biggest "shootout" of dirt bikes to date.

It turned out that we had picked one of the hottest days of the year for the test, a few degrees over the hundred mark, but the low humidity made it tolerable.

A track had to be chosen, too. We picked the Indian Dunes Park, north of Los Angeles, which has three different tracks available for use. It also has a sandwash and a river, the latter at this time of the year always dried to a small creek. The sandwash has knee-deep whoopies from years of pounding, and through this DIRT BIKE has set up its own test track. It's the L.A. version of the Dutch St.



Mike Bell cookin' on the Bultaco.



The mighty, late arriving, KTM.

Anthony sand track and will make a man out of any rider. The creek is frequently used for testing water-proofing.

THE BIKES:

BULTACO. Mike Hannon from Bultaco International brought the latest 370 Bul out, which incidentally was identical to the test bike that we covered last month. Work had been done to the rear shocks to lighten the dampening.

CZ. The Czech firm sent their new 400, with air suspension all around. Bob Bucklin from American Jawa was kept busy.

HUSQVARNA. A new 360 CR was taken care of by racing mechanic Dean Goldsmith. Service Manager Nils Nilsson was there to supervise. A Metzeler rear tire was the only non-stock item that we could discover. Different than our 1975 test bike, this 360 had new forks (again) with 210mm claimed travel and improved rear shocks and footpegs.

KTM. Jeff Foland, So. Cal. hot expert rider, finally appeared with his own personal bike that he had ridden in the U.S. Grand Prix a week earlier. Chuck Daly from KTM Imports of America was there

to supervise. The bike was naturally personalized to Jeff's liking and not completely stock.

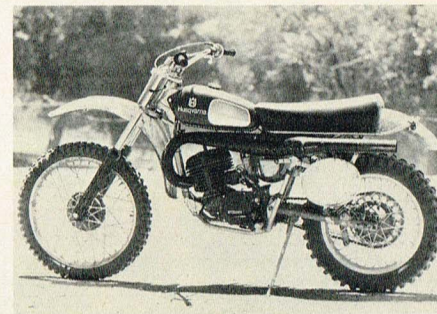
MONTESA's new 360 Cappra was temporarily relieved of its duties as DIRT BIKE's test bike of the month. It was checked out by Montesa's Derek Edgar, who also accompanied the bike on the test day. Optional LTG shocks and Metzeler tires were used.

SUZUKI. The RM370 brought out by Jay Lewis from U.S. Suzuki was stock in all respects, so far as we could determine.

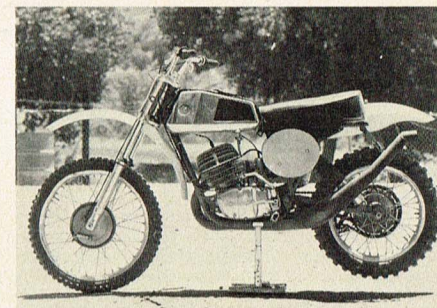
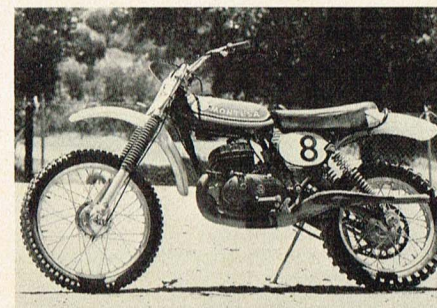
THE RIDERS:

BILLY CLEMENTS. Bill is a former Team Husqvarna MX member of many years and has European experience (took points at the '72 GP circuit). He is now training instructor at the Pasadena La Spa in California, where he uses some of his knowledge of physical training to help other people lose weight. Bill has not raced professionally for almost a year now.

GARY HYMES has been a California expert rider for over six years. Originally a desert rider, he turned to motocross early, and has had sponsorships from Montesa, Hercules, Penton and CZ. He now



And the stars of the show . . .



owns a shop called Off Road Racing Specialties in Santa Monica, California, where he does suspension work on motorcycles and off-road racing cars.

MIKE BELL. A local CMC and AMA expert who is just on the edge of making it into the big-time with his first free ride, Mike has lots of experience despite his youth. His latest feat is winning the Open Expert class at Mammoth Mountain, a highly regarded event on the west coast, on a 440 Honda four-stroke built by his father Bill.

GARY JONES. Presentation unnecessary. Gary is the only rider to date to win three 250 National championship titles in a row and, on top of that, he did it on three different brands. He now has a development contract with the Islo factory to develop the AMMEX motocrosser.

AL BAKER. Former Kawasaki MX Team member, and 1975 SCORE #1 off-road rider. Winner of countless Baja 500s and 1000s. Runs a motorcycle specialty shop in Van Nuys, California, between races.

JIM O'NEAL. Ex Can-Am and Bultaco rider for many years, Jim now devotes all of his time to a motorcycle accessory distributorship in Reseda, California.

RICHARD THORWALDSON. Originally a #1 desert racer, Rich turned to motocross when the Suzuki team formed a U.S. division. He stayed three years with team Suzuki MX. Thor now manufactures specialty components in his own shop in Los Angeles.

BUTCH DARLING. Currently #1 AMA D-37 motocrosser in the 125 Expert class.

THE DIRT BIKE regular staff testers: Jim Connolly (District 37 #1 Open Expert), Gunnar (Swedish expatriate sand track pervert), and Zeal (#1 philosophocrosser).

All in all — six hot bikes and 11 experienced test riders. The stage

was set for the most comprehensive comparison test yet.

GOING FOR IT

It was a long day. The plans called for an 8 a.m. start with conclusions drawn at dinner after 5 p.m. As the day went on it became obvious that the riders were not going to give any of the bikes a break. As soon as one rider pulled in there were others waiting to take it back out. At the end of the day, however, most everybody had ridden as much as they wanted.

The first bike to arrive in the morning, and consequently the first bike on the track, was the Husky. It was not until after five that evening that it was finally shut down, after almost nine hours of continuous running. The Husky had very little down time, only as much as was absolutely necessary to lube the chain and top off the tank. Dean had to borrow gas from the less fortunate competitors in the end. At the end of the day it was easy to understand why Husky keeps winning the long-distance events time and time again.

Early in the afternoon the hard-packed track started to take its toll. The Suzuki came in with a wobbly front wheel, which took Jay a while to straighten out. The CZ had suspension problems and on top of that refused to run from time to time because of an electrical short. The Bultaco had its rear brake checked out after complaints from the riders of lack of efficiency, and later a cracked front rim was discovered. The Montesa chipped a tooth off third gear and, although Derek managed to fish the piece out, the noise got worse and the VR had to be grounded for the remainder of the day. The KTM stuck its throttle on its first ride because of hasty prep. The problem was corrected and did not appear again. Because of its late arrival the KTM was the

bike that was ridden the least. Each rider was on the other bikes at least twice, but the KTM was ridden only once per rider.

An interesting observation was made during the day. All of the riders easily adapted to the different bars, pegs and levers. Adaptability is part of what makes a great rider.

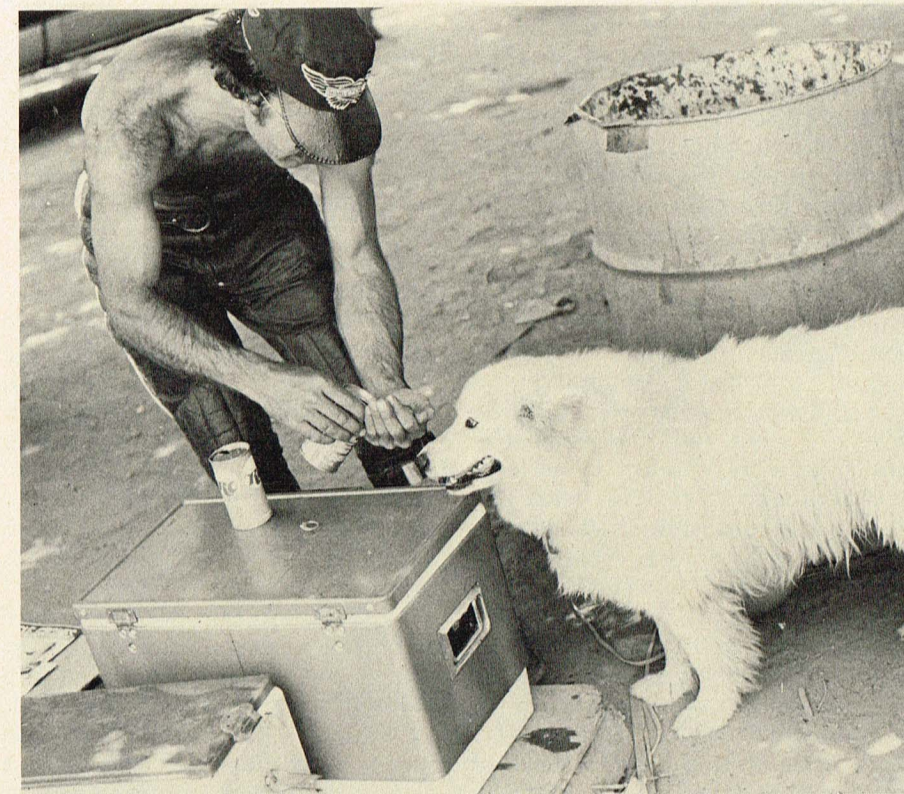
As the day drew to a close each rider's comments were recorded by our very efficient secretary, Jan. Jan got her notepads out between her runs to the market to buy soft drinks and Gatorade for the riders. Each rider was asked to list the best three bikes and then to make any other comments he might have regarding the machines. The comments as you see them are edited by the staff, but the original messages are there.

RIDER COMMENTS:

Billy Clements: I couldn't find



Zeal was zealous about the RM370.



It weren't a fit day out for man nor beast . . .

anything wrong with either the Suzuki or the Husky. The KTM was also really good, except the rear shocks were a little stiff on both up and down dampening and would bottom out in places. Gear ratios felt a bit too close. The power was really good, top and bottom, but was better still on the Suz and Husky. I'll go with the Husky first because of the higher dependability, in my opinion, and its lighter weight. But the Suz is close because it steers better in the slow stuff and it's got better brakes. The KTM is third.

Gary Hymes: The Bultaco had the best powerband, lots of smooth low end. It also turned the best and had the best front suspension. It's a comfortable bike to ride. The Suz was second. It vibrated more than the Bul and wasn't as comfy. It also had plenty of good power but it

wasn't as smooth as the Bul's. Suzuki had the best rear end, Bul the best front. Husky is the best of the remainder. The rear end seemed oversprung through the whoops. Seemed to turn in, wasn't smooth, and didn't want to stick in the corners. The Husky had good power, but was a little rich when I rode it. It needed to be set up for the individual.

Mike Bell: The Bultaco gets my vote for #1 despite the poor rear brakes and the slow shifting. It feels good especially in turns, and the power delivery is smooth and predictable. The Husqvarna and the Suzuki are close, but I felt a bit more vibration through the bars on the Suzuki, and I also expect the Husky to have better reliability. So the Husky gets the number two vote from me, even if I think that it should turn a little better in the tight

stuff.

Al Baker: It's a tight race for first between the Suzuki and the Husky, but the Suzuki wins because it immediately feels right when you jump on it and it steers, brakes and shifts better. The Husky is also very good, however, and possibly given some time I could adjust it and myself to where I could go even faster on it. It feels lighter, but I didn't care for the kickstart arrangement. The seat, bars and pegs and their locations are really good. I couldn't pick a third between the Bultaco, KTM and the Montesa.

Jim O'Neal: I felt most at home on the KTM, despite the fact that the bike feels a bit heavy compared to the competition, and the rear shocks were a bit stiff. I liked the power, the brakes, the steering and the front suspension. It was hard to decide for second place between the Suzuki and the Husky. Everything on them worked very well, except that I found the rear brake a little hard to find on the Suzuki. The Husky needs a berm to corner really well. I can get used to the rear brake, so the Suzuki gets my vote for second, though the Husky has a lighter feel about it when ridden.

Rich Thorwaldson: The Suzuki, Husky and KTM were quite close, in that order. There was absolutely nothing wrong with the Suzuki. The Husky felt lighter than the other two, but did not steer as well. Also, the Husky's rear shocks felt over-sprung. This may have been a function of the track conditions during the test. On a rougher track they would likely be just right. The KTM is very fast, but doesn't have as smooth power as the Husky or Suzuki. It may also have been a bit stiff in the rear. The KTM's gearbox ratios felt a little close and I didn't care for the seat. It also felt heavier than the Suzuki or Husky.

Gary Jones: I consider the Husky to be the best under all foreseeable



conditions. Even trail riding. It is lighter than any of the others and turns reasonably if you sit well up on the tank. Although it corners better and has the best brakes of them all, the Suzuki has a front fork that feels too stiff. It may need a thinner oil (*it does . . . Ed.*). The grips were also too short for my hands. I had some difficulty finding the rear brake pedal at first, and the bulges in the side panels bothered me when jumping. The KTM was probably the fastest bike there, especially on top, but didn't seem as versatile as the other two.

Zeal Anderson: Both the Suzuki and the Husky felt very, very good to me, but the Suzuki had that little edge needed to win: easier braking and steering. You have to move around more on the Husky (sit on the tank to keep the front end sticking). Overall the Suzuki's suspension was plusher, but the Husky's forks seemed a little better when braking in stutter bumps. The Bultaco gets my vote as third because of its good, usable power and despite its poor brakes and stiff rear end. It corners very well. It is also quite comfortable to ride because of the riding position and control placement.

Gunnar Lindstrom: I would choose the Suzuki and Husky and would make third a tie between the Bul and the KTM. The Suzuki has the best suspension, brakes, steering and shifting, but the Husky was close behind. The forks and shocks

are the best Husky units I have tried to date. The stability of the bike is also improved. Though the Husky's kickstarter arrangement is no more than poor, the bike does have better fenders than the Suzuki. The Bultaco and the KTM are opposites in the engine department. The KTM has a short fuse (fast pick-up and small flywheel), while the Bultaco has nice, smooth acceleration and a fair-size flywheel. I definitely prefer the Bultaco in that respect. The KTM rear end only needs a better suited pair of shocks to perform competitively. The Bul rear end design still needs work (all works riders use different solutions) and the poor brakes and slow shifting also require attention.

Jim Connolly: First is a tie between the Bultaco and the Husky, though the Suzuki is a very strong third, especially when price is considered. I have ridden Bultacos for so much of my life that I guess I am ready to forgive some of their weaknesses. Despite the poor rear brake and the slow shifting (it shifts much better when converted to right side shifting), the power is so gentle and smooth that you don't get a feeling of great acceleration or speed until you see the next corner coming up too fast. Though the Husky and the Suzuki are very close, I liked the Husky better for long-distance reliability reasons and for its better wheels. This is certainly the best Husky I have ever ridden. The steering was better and the tank/seat

junction (important especially on a Husky) is the best I have encountered. And the pipe doesn't bother me at all. It was very stable at speed and in jump landings; better, in fact, than the Suzuki in those areas. The Suzuki had the best brakes, however, and turned better than the Husky, but the front fork needs more spring.

Butch Darling: I preferred the Suzuki over all the others. It felt just right from the very beginning. Everything works just super. The Bul would be my second choice because of its broad powerband and excellent front forks. It also tracks and steers well. I rate the Husky third for its good powerband and smooth ride. My only specific complaint is its handlebars.

CONCLUSION: The Suzuki was first choice for five of the 11 test riders. Husqvarna and Bultaco were next with three each and the KTM earned one. The answers, provided by each rider as an individual, indicate that the testers tended to track down the same qualities in each bike. In order to pick a winner each rider considered a bike's varying qualities in terms of his priorities. Because of this, four of our six bikes earned first place ratings by at least one rider. Lower ratings on the CZ can be related to the simple fact that it was outdated, something we can hope will soon be corrected by the normally proficient Czechs. Difficulties we encountered with the Montesa held it back from any top-notch finishes. The specifics can be gathered from the full Montesa test in this issue.

That four of the six bikes rated first place ratings by our team of expert test riders indicates both how well matched and how generally excellent the bikes are. Personal preference was the determining factor for our testers, as it should be for you. Hopefully, after reading this article you will have a clearer picture of which one might be right for you.



RIDERS' CHOICE

	1st	2nd	3rd
Suz	5	4	2
Hus	3	5	3
Bul	3	1	3
KTM	1	0	5
Mon	0	0	1
CZ	0	0	0