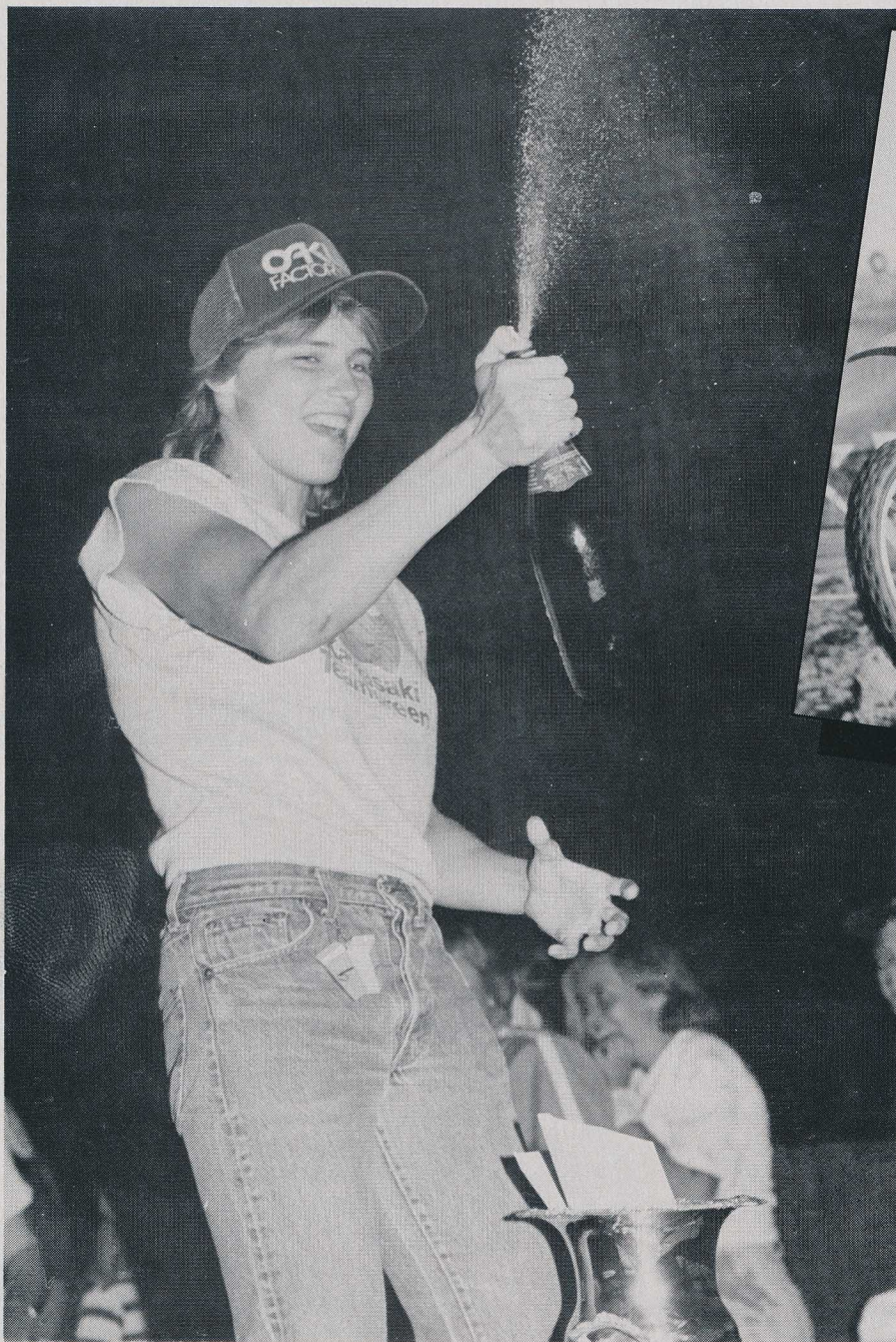


Woman's Place

WOMEN'S MOTOCROSS NATIONALS



Kim Douglass (above) enjoys the fruits of victory, complete with trophy boys and champagne. At right, she flies her Kawasaki while it was still too early for celebration.



Michigan's own female fireball, Lisa Akin, had already been crowned the AMA's number one woman motocrosser at their Amateur Nationals at Loretta Lynn's Dude Ranch in Tennessee. Akin came to the Continental Motosports Club-sanctioned event to pit her Yamaha YZs against Douglass' Team Green Kawasakis to settle in the minds of those in the west, as well as those in the east, who was this country's fastest woman motocrosser.

Douglass was intent on proving that point as well, but the opportunity for either Douglass or Akin (or Mercedes Gonzales or Doreen Payne or former champ Kathy Holman or British-hope Vicky Jackson, the other women thought capable of taking the championship) to be the best was not available in 1982. A lack of sponsors, particularly someone with enough time, energy and belief in women's racing to put up with the hassles of such an event, forced a one-year hiatus for the title.

Of the women in contention, Douglass, Akin and Gonzales were known to be extremely physically fit—Douglass to the point of having strong enough quadriceps in her legs to

I went to the doctor to have my knee scoped, and one of the tendons was detached and another was gone. He said that if I was a normal girl off of the street that I wouldn't be walking." These are the words of Kim Douglass, a 20-year-old college student from Garden Grove, California. Yet as the new Women's National Champion,

Douglass has proven herself far from "a normal girl off the street" in more ways than simply her determination to overcome injuries.

Douglass was neither the only girl riding in the face of adversity, nor the only Women's Champion in the Women's Motocross Nationals held at Saddleback Park in Southern California.



Lisa Akin (above) works out her Yamaha. (Top) Mercedes Gonzalez (161) leads Doreen Payne (82), Douglass (9), Vicky Jackson (7), Kathy Holman (1) and Akin (063) at Saddleback.

make up for most of the deficiency of tendon strength in her bad knee.

Gonzalez was healthy, but Akin, after winning the opening round of the Michigan State Championship in the 125cc Expert class against the men, fell and badly bruised some ribs. She was not able to train or ride in the two weeks prior to the event.

Payne was trying to make the adaptation from Japanese machinery to Italian Cagivas, so her speed was an unknown, although she had earlier made history as the first woman in a National motocross after she transferred to the final of the AMA National in Colorado.

Douglass led the first wave of racing as the 125cc Expert class crested Saddleback's start hill in the first of four 30-minute motos. Four 30-minute motos take a toll on racers of any sex or level of conditioning; it's twice as much racing as the men complete in their quest of their National Championship.

Akin stuck to Douglass' Kawasaki's rear wheel and the two picked up 30 seconds over third place in the first six laps. Akin attempted a pass on an uphill double-jump, but crashed, saying later, "I was clearing the doubles every lap and I thought I could get Kim there, but she moved over the lap I tried. I landed with my front wheel turned and fell pretty hard." She got up and found a stuck throttle, but a spectator chanced breaking the throttle and twisted the grip open until the stretched cable housing shortened back up again. Akin continued from near-10th place to move into second in the late stages of the race. To do so she had to make up a half of a lap on second, while Douglass cruised in for a win with a half-a-lap margin on second.

Payne was third for the moto after Jackson (who was fit enough, but was suffering from a broken nose she

incurred while bodysurfing the day before the race and had a chiropractor work on her between motos) fell and finished fourth.

Douglass holed out again in the opening 250cc moto, but Akin caught and passed her to take the win. Douglass remained in Akin's shadow, but kept the pressure on for the entire moto.

Douglass was still feeling fine after the 250cc race, but Akin said she was very tired and had wanted to pull off the track at the halfway point. Mercedes was a strong third place.

After that point, the day belonged to Douglass. Akin got close enough after working past early leaders Gonzales and Payne to bump wheels with Douglass, but she could not get by. Then, in the final moto, she fell on her then-tender knee twice in the same turn, but still finished second. Four closer motos there haven't been in recent memory.

Gonzales finished third in every moto but the first, where she fell, and Payne suffered from riding two motos without a clutch. A flat front tire in the final moto ended her hopes and put her into fourth overall. England's Jackson was fifth.

Douglass, who is studying to be an athletic trainer and wants to compete in triathlons, says working out is a part of

her life. In winning, Douglass has achieved a goal she said she has wanted more than anything else in the world. "Everything went perfect for me. In Tennessee, I had some bike trouble and I got nervous. I didn't train any different or harder for this race, I just learned to settle down."

Akin was "disappointed. I wish I had been able to come in top form. If I had one or two more days on the track there wouldn't have been any home-track advantage."

Gonzales commented, "I haven't been that tired in a long time, but we are professionals and we take racing seriously, like the guys, and it proved we have the endurance. But for the people watching, it would have been better to have the races shorter."

So the two fastest women in the country are tied at one title each. Who is the fastest? It's too close for us to say. Said Kim, "Lisa was really good competition. We are really close. I wouldn't want to say that if we were at a certain kind of track that she would win, because I would always try my hardest. But she tries really hard too." Trackside wags say it would depend upon who was having the better day. We'll just have to wait until next year to enjoy it while they settle it between themselves.

—Karel Kramer