

Eddy Lejeune and Honda

WORLD CHAMPIONS!



Mannix Devlin
traces the fortunes
of Eddy Lejeune in his
world title-winning year on
the four-stroke
Honda RTC360



He is 21 years old, he was married this year and has just clinched the 1982 World Trials Championship for Honda after having dominated the series like no one else in trials history. This season, Eddy Lejeune won eight of the 12 World Championship events and he placed second three times. His fourth place in the final round in Poland in September was his most modest result of the year.

For Eddy Lejeune, 1983 will be a year to remember, and to cap it all off he has just re-signed for a further three years with Honda to campaign his trusty RTL 360cc four-stroke bike.

Lejeune created the sensation of the 1980 season when he became the youngest rider ever to win a world championship event. With fourth place finishes in 1980 and 1981 the Belgian had shown that both he and his superbly tractable Honda were capable of making a challenge for top honours in the 1982 series.

At the start of the season, Eddy was considered as one of the elite of the sport and a potential winner of the 12-round competition which takes riders around Europe and to America and Canada. After all, he always started the season off well and in fact only lost second place overall in 1981 because of a weak performance in the final round.

Torrential rain had lashed the sleepy Spanish town of Olot for a number of days before this season's opener and the organising club were forced to alter the course at the last minute.

But all their problems meant nothing to the Honda star who stated his intentions by scoring a convincing 14-mark win over American Bernie Schreiber, whilst defending champion Frenchman



Honda proved their lead in four stroke technology by winning the world championship with the RTL 360.

Gilles Burgat came home third, a further seven marks in arrears.

A repeat performance followed at the Belgian round, where Eddy notched up his hat-trick of victories for Honda in the event. The enormous partisan crowd roared and cheered the Honda's every movement as they chased Lejeune from section to section. With this support he took a 27-mark victory over SWM-mounted Schreiber on the hazards which consisted of slippery roots on steep hillsides and steep rock climbs and drops with a liberal coating of slimy clay which prevails in the Verviers area —





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HONDA OFF-ROAD '83

conditions ideally suited to the engine characteristics of the 360cc four-stroke motor.

A branch which hooked off the chain and caused a 'feet-up' five almost certainly cost Eddy victory in the third round in the Yorkshire Dales. In a close-run contest Schreiber pulled back a few points in the title chase by posting a four-mark winning margin. The Honda man was in second spot again, being chased round the course by enthusiastic crowds of four-stroke fans.

Despite being pipped to the post on the final day of the Scottish in early May by arch rival Schreiber, 'Dede', as he is affectionately known by his many fans, did not let the defeat affect his morale at the fourth round at Val di Ledro in Italy just a week later. There was a now-familiar result with the Honda taking the laurels again, Schreiber's SWM in second and Burgat's Fantic in third.

The talented, slender but strong Belgian now had three victories under his belt and held a six-point advantage over the American in the series, but there was still a long way to go.

Rain again greeted the riders for the French round at St Leonard, near Le Mans, but with the majority of sections on rock outcrop it didn't affect the course too much.

The defending champ, Burgat, got his act together to complete the three-lap event for 93 marks lost, six less than the bespectacled Belgian, with only those two remaining on double figures at the end. Schreiber was adrift by 20 points but still managed to secure third.

The championship points now read: Lejeune 69, Schreiber 61, Burgat 53.

In the predominantly dry conditions with sections in rocky dried-up river beds, through winding paths in the Black Forest and a couple of slippery hill climbs, Lejeune's Honda was in its element again at the West German round near Stuttgart. He proved that he was the current master by delivering a tremendous 24-mark victory over Schreiber — dropping less than half the American's score in the process. He had pulled out an 11-point margin in the title chase, with Burgat's challenge fading somewhat.

No one before had dominated the world title competition the way that Lejeune had done so far this year and he went on to win his fifth event of the season at Heinrichs in Austria. In the very warm conditions Schreiber was expected to go well but Eddy was in very determined form and lapped for 15, 14 and 16

marks to finish on 45 — eight better than Burgat and nine in front of Schreiber. The Honda camp were delighted that Eddy now had a 16-point margin in the hunt for the world crown.

There was a free weekend before the Canadian round and Eddy used it to marry his girlfriend Dominique.

In what turned out to be the easiest world round for a number of years, centered at MacLean Creek, 30 miles from Calgary, Schreiber completed the course for just six marks.

French youngster Thierry Michaud and Eddy both dropped 13, but the teenage SWM star was awarded runner-up position on the greatest number of cleans — 37 to 34. The gap was back to 11 points.

But the Belgian was back to his brilliant best at Reno, Nevada, the following week at Schreiber's home round in the States. It was a complete contrast to Canada and the Honda star posted best performance on the first and third laps to win with a score of 113 marks to Burgat's 129 and Bernie's 135. Eddy had notched up his sixth win and the points difference was stretched again to 16.

After a ten-week break in the programme he finally clinched the world title in Finland. This super-tough event staged at Tamiseeri was again to the liking of the Belgian and his incredible four-stroke machine. He won on 99 marks lost. Schreiber had injured his shoulder

in an indoor trial and placed a lowly tenth to make the points gap 30.

It came as no great surprise that Eddy scored an eight-mark victory over Gilles Burgat at Varnamo in Sweden to make it a record-breaking year. He had clocked up more points in the 11 rounds than anyone had ever done in a full series of 12. He had won his eighth round of the year and his 13 in total were just three short of the joint record held by Schreiber and three times champion Yrjö Vesterinen.

Eddy posted his poorest performance of the year at the final round in Poland — a fourth spot. But it didn't matter — the World Trials crown belonged to him and Honda!

