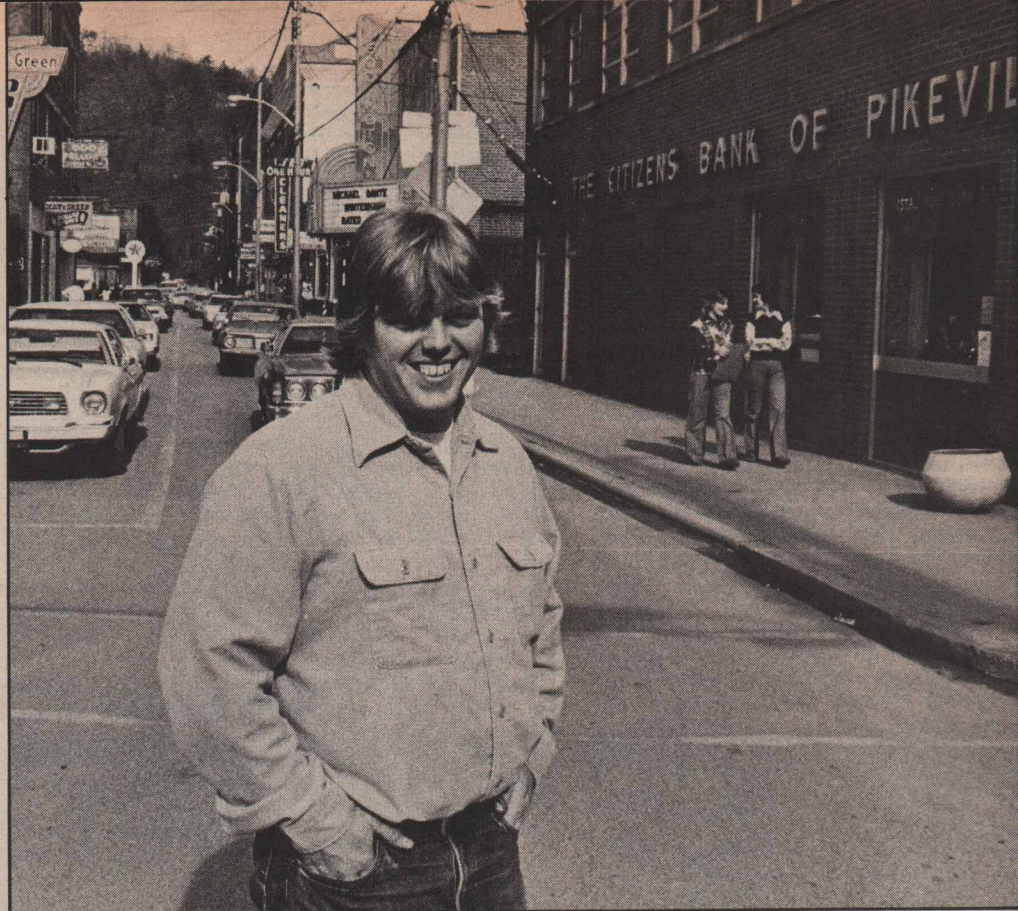


**T**hroughout the summer months, a handful of leathery competitors troupe across the Midwest, matching their machines and riding skills against the sheerest and roughest of the heartland's inclines. The machinery is exotic—extended rigid frames, clawing chained tires, thundering exhausts, pungent nitro fuel. The riders represent a unique microcosm of motorcycle racers, completely devoted to the rough-and-tumble uphill race against time.

The sport, of course, is Class A hillclimb. It's a down-home sport where riders and fans are on a first name basis. And although quite sensational, it is the least covered and least publicized of motorcycling's wide spectrum of events.

Last year, however, the sport received a much needed shot in the arm from two-time Grand National Champ Terry Kinzer. For Kinzer kicked off the



# A VIEW FROM THE TOP

## OR—What Does Your Mom Do For A Living, Son?

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY RICK KOCKS

season aboard a Japanese multi, an almost unheard of occurrence in a sport that has long been dominated by Harley-Davidson big-bore twins.

A few had attempted to conquer the slopes using two-strokes, to little or no avail. Kinzer, however, had planned his entire campaign to retain the #1 plate aboard a very potent 750 Honda. It was a very successful strategy; by the end of the season, he had not only copped his third consecutive title, but also established himself as the most consistent force in hillclimbing.

Terry Kinzer might best be described as a "good ole East Kentucky boy." On race days, he can be found sporting an East Kentucky Mack hat and a vented Honda MX jersey. During the week, he can be found working on a drilling rig somewhere around Pikeville.

Pikeville, Kentucky—"Gem of the Highlands"—according to a billboard—is nestled in a crook of the Big Sandy River, surrounded by the Appalachian Mountains. These same mountains have been the training ground for Kinzer's uphill riding skill. "Flat land is at a real premium here," the king of the hill ironically states.

Outside of town, past the Queen Burger ("Home of the Smashburger" the flashing neon announces), and up a serpentine road is the Kinzer residence and base of drilling operations for Kinzer Drilling.

His home, secluded on 130 mountainside acres, is rich in local color—"the bricks are from a local whorehouse!" His shop, tucked in a section of the drilling company garage, is immaculate and incredibly stocked—Sears could shoot their next tool catalog in Kinzer's work room.

The Honda, at the time of this interview, was but a shadow of its former magnificent self. The Ceriani forks and wheel assembly, complete with #1 plate, stood docilely in the corner. Engine parts were meticulously placed on a workbench, waiting to be cleaned or replaced. The frame had been sent to California for inspection and repair. It was late winter in eastern Kentucky, warm breezes were beginning to blow and Terry Kinzer was starting to think about the upcoming season.

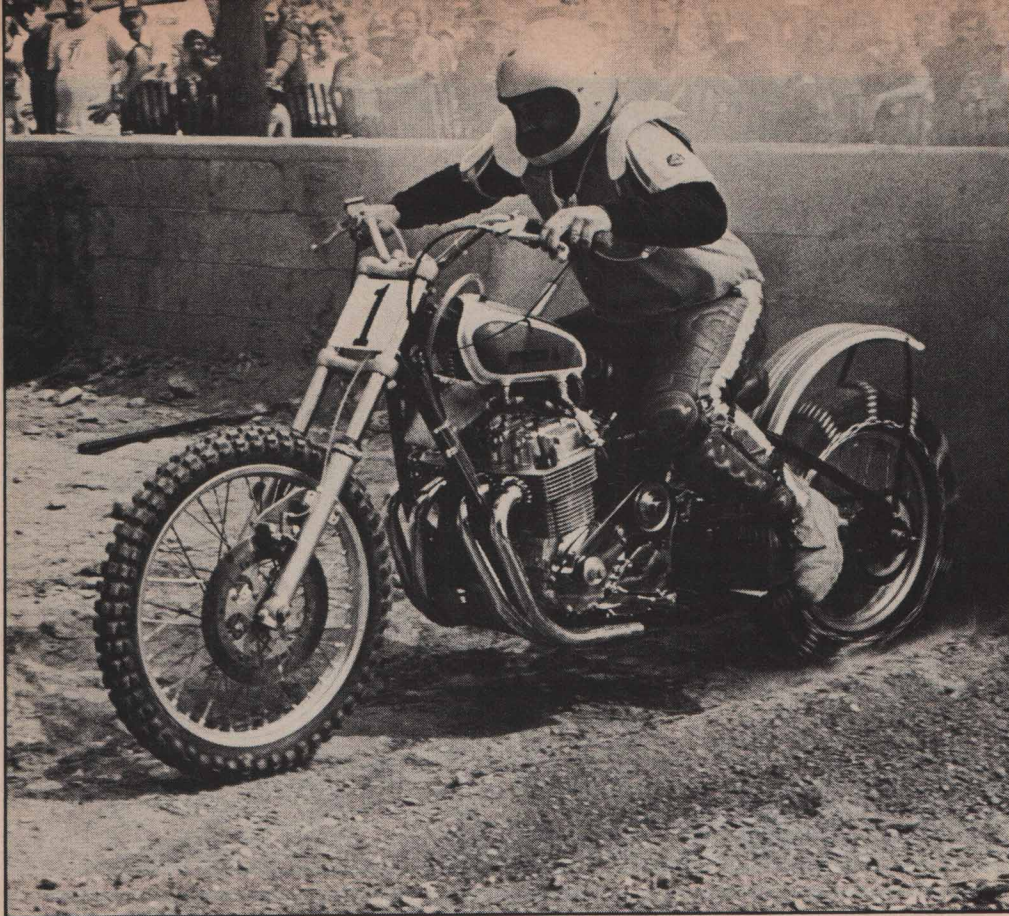
For all champions, the climb to the top must begin somewhere. For Kinzer, those early steps were taken in his own backyard in the late 60s. "My first climb was in '67," Kinzer reminisces. "I rode a stock Honda 450 to a third place finish in an amateur event... third in a class of three!"

By 1969, he had pre-

pared a very competitive 650 Triumph. So competitive in fact, that the 1970 amateur season saw Kinzer top 36 of 38 climbs to clinch the amateur national hillclimb title. Quite a prelude to his professional debut in 1972. "The change to chains and fuel was incredible," he notes. "The Triumph was so much more powerful—I was convinced that there was no way that I couldn't win hillclimbs."

His first professional outing ended in a disappointing seventh overall, with no place to go but up. It proved to be a valuable learning experience and it was an early meeting between Kinzer and hill honcho Doyle Disbennett.

Disbennett is acknowledged by those connected with the sport to be the best rider—the man to beat. "Doyle probably is the best," concedes Kinzer, "but I think I'm more consistent." Disbennett is also



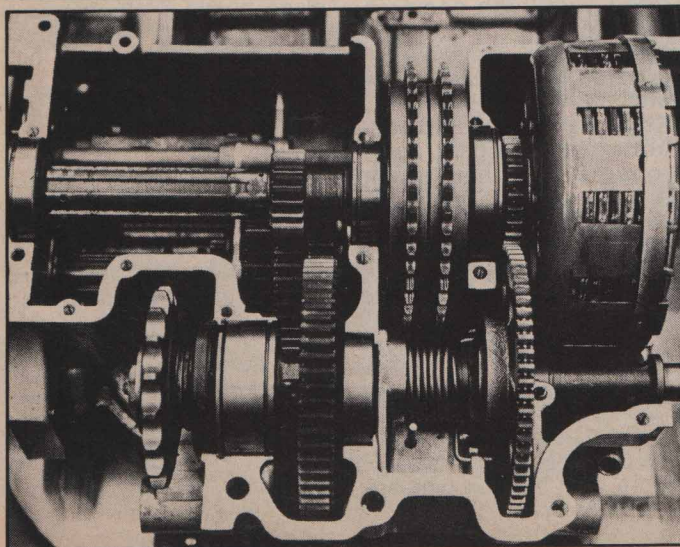
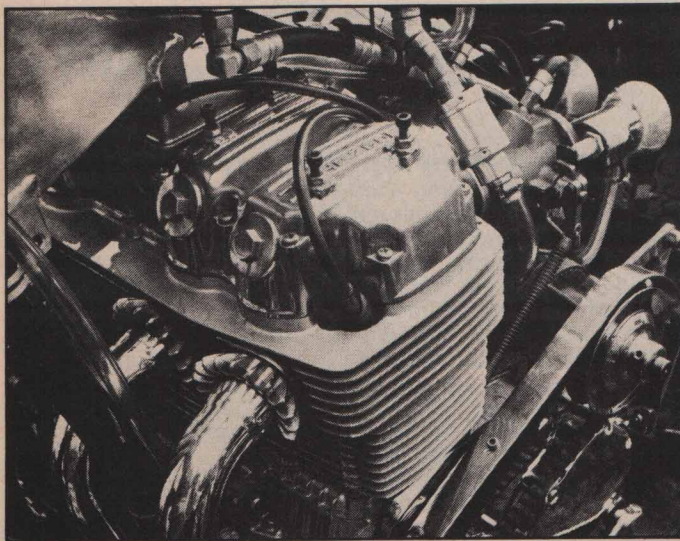
a master in psyching out his fellow riders; nothing malicious, he just gently undermines the competition's mental preparedness.

At their first competitive meeting, the two were both studying the hill's surface near the top. Disbennett wryly probed, "What are you doing way up here? Go on back down the hill, son . . . you'll never get this far."

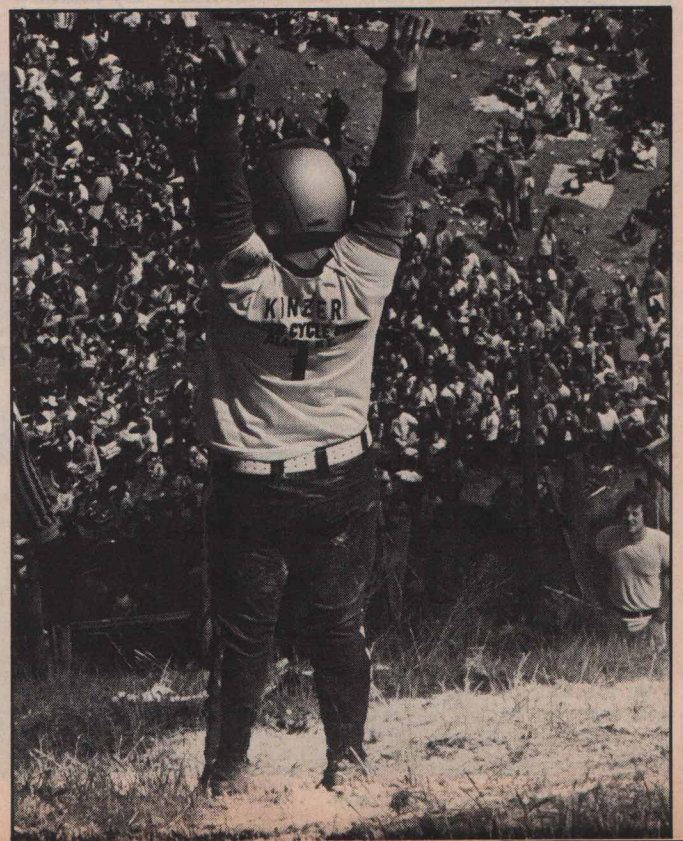
But Kinzer did make it to the top. In a wild "I'll-show-you" ride, Kinzer wrestled the Triumph to the top in 19 seconds. Winning times were in the nines, but he had taken a few more steps toward championship status. And the groundwork for an intense, ongoing points rivalry between Kinzer and Disbennett had been laid.

In three more outings that year, Kinzer finished sixth, second and first. The higher finishing positions gave him the needed confidence to campaign the entire 1973 season.

1973 marked the end of



Above: A hole shot here means a fraction of a second gained or lost, and a fraction of a second is the difference between winning and losing on the National Hillclimb circuit. Left: Fuel injected, nitro burning "four" pumps out 150 to 200 hp by seat-of-the-pants calculation. Never been on a dyno, but sure digs a furrow. Lower left: Only one speed forward, don't need all them other gears. Double row of sprocket teeth is for primary drive from the crankshaft. Narrow set of gears on right is for kick starting. Overall hillclimbing gear ratio is 7.3 to 1. Below: Only one photo required to tell the story.

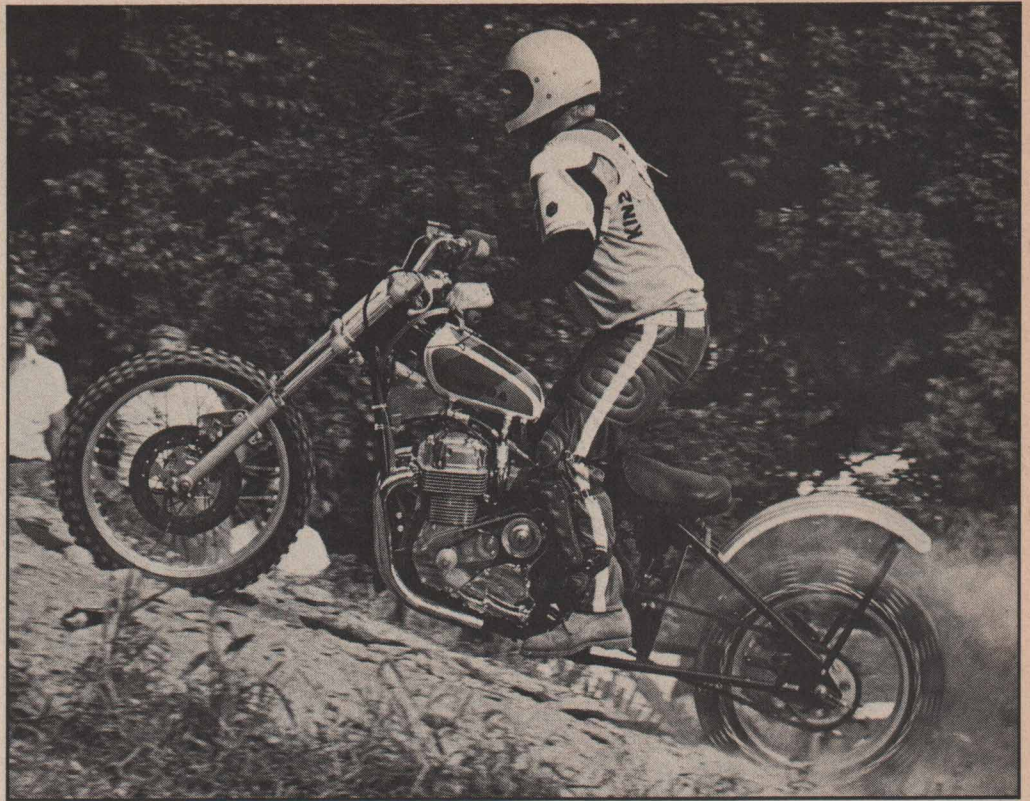


an era in Class A hillclimbing. Until then, the Grand National Championship title and #1 plate had been awarded on a one-event, winner-take-all basis, similar to the old Springfield Mile. It was decided that a point series should be incorporated.

By the end of '73, Kinzer, riding a Triumph sponsored by his mother's cycle shop, had copped overall honors to carry the #1 plate back to Pikeville. To show that his performance was no fluke, he retained the title the following season.

Yet, during both those years, Kinzer failed to win the still-prestigious National hillclimb. In '73, Carl Wickstrand edged him from the limelight by a fraction. And in '74, it was Kinzer's nemesis Doyle Disbennett who unsettled his bid by less than two-tenths of a second.

Kinzer's first ride that day was nothing short of awe-inspiring. He blitzed the hill



## What Does Your Mom Do For A Living, Son?

in record time, looped the machine spectacularly just past the timing lights and emerged from the swirling dust, grinning wildly with arms outstretched.

But Disbennett, on his final run, shattered Kinzer's hopes for a 1974 National title. Kinzer recounts, "I wasn't mentally prepared for Doyle to beat me. Later he told me, 'Son, you get three tries at the hill. I came ready to ride all three times. You came prepared to ride one time. You used all three of your tries on that first ride!' That bit of information will cost Doyle one of these days."

Another piece of helpful advice came from Earl Bowlby, a nine-year veteran of the slopes. "Earl once said that it takes three things to win at hillclimbing—a good rider, a good motor and a lotta luck." Kinzer continues, "I've found that you must also have enough horsepower. Hillclimbing is a horsepower game."

At the end of the '74 season, Kinzer traded his Triumph jersey for a Honda jersey. He was dissatisfied

with the machine, parts availability was becoming a problem and besides, "My mother doesn't sell Triumphs anymore, she only sells Hondas!" By making the change, Kinzer ushered in a new age in professional hillclimbing.

The machine performed well during its premier season: Kinzer managed an impressive six wins in 18 events. Some of the riders grumbled about the sport turning into uphill drag racing, but the fans loved the new excitement. The snorting machine established Kinzer as the man to beat.

Kinzer continues, "At first, I felt that we had brought it out too early; everything we did was an experiment." One experiment, with a wrinkle-wall drag slick, may have cost him yet another National victory. The slick had worked well during tests on a dirt hill. But on loose rocky surfaces, it had a tendency to kickout uncontrollably. Kinzer finished fifth, his worst National finish.

Originally, the 750 powerplant had been built by R.C. Engineering. During

the season, however, Don Land, a Honda employee and former drag racer, rebuilt the engine. Land's presence at the National prompted rumors of factory sponsorship. Kinzer emphatically denies sponsorship; his efforts are still on an individual level.

The engine is bored to 785cc (well within the legal bounds of hillclimb rules which permit a maximum displacement of 800cc) and fitted with high-compression pistons. The head has been ported, polished and outfitted with larger valves and heavier springs. R.C. Engineering provided a hotter cam and stronger rods. Clutch plates and springs were beefed up to withstand the demands of hillclimb starts. Wedged behind the bank of cylinders is a Hilborn pump and fuel injector.

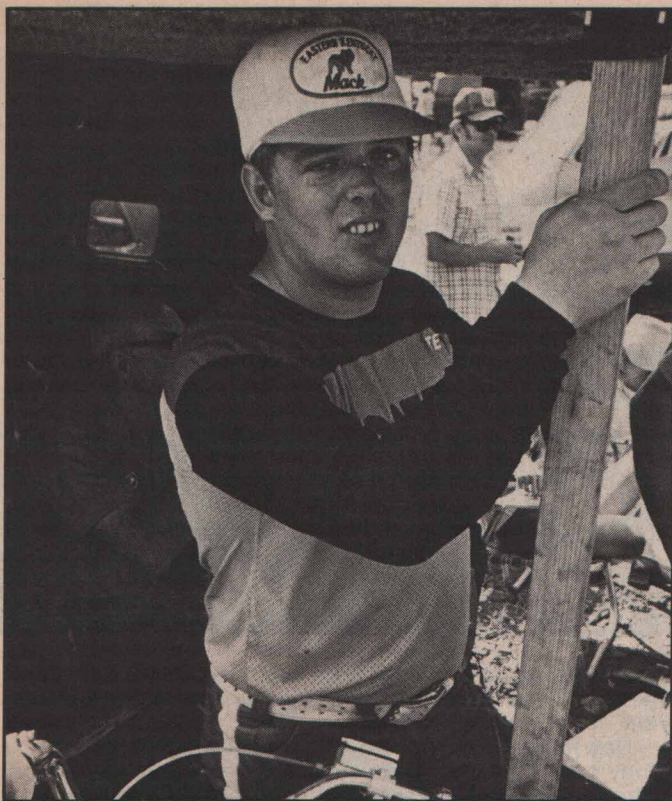
The engine was slipped into an extended frame—total axle-to-axle wheelbase 70 inches. Total weight for the machine is around 339 pounds, nearly 100 pounds more than the competition.

The transmission was a box stock five-speed. Kinz-

er enjoys relating his win at Rochester using second gear. In the process of setting fast time on his first ride, he tore out first gear. He hoped that his time would not be bettered and he would not have to ride again. As luck would have it, he slipped to fourth place by the end of the day. His options were to either risk destroying the engine or lose his point lead by settling for fourth-place points. Not only was he able to win in second gear, but he set a new hill record in the process. By the end of the season, he was running only one gear, 7.30:1.

Like all Class A machines, Kinzer's bike runs on a mixture of nitromethane and methanol. Each rider has his own formula—exact quantities and mixtures are well-guarded secrets. In fact, it's difficult to pry any information out of riders about their equipment. According to Kinzer, "Everything that you tell a guy is just one more way of beating yourself."

When asked about horsepower, Kinzer says, "Well,



it's never been on a dyno, but it's between 150 and 200 horsepower." He grins sheepishly at the mention of 200 horsepower and reiterates that it has never been on a dyno.

"I've definitely had a horsepower advantage," he says. "But I need every advantage I can find to carry my body to the top! This year I may not have that much of a horsepower edge so I'm going to experiment with suspension systems."

At the National last August, he was considering equipping the bike with a monoshock frame but has since changed his mind to the Foo-bar parallelogram configuration.

"Shocks have been tried before," Kinzer explains. "Their main drawback is that they tend to compress out of the hole. That causes the bike to wheelie and that, in turn, costs one blip of the throttle. You can't afford to lose any-

has been built for his father's hillclimber, a 350 Honda. Kinzer is presently testing the Foo-bar-equipped 350, and although there are a few problems, he thinks they will be ironed out in time for him to be riding a Foo-bar at the beginning of the '76 season.

Terry Kinzer may be heading for his fourth consecutive Grand National Championship aboard a multi-cylinder machine equipped with a suspension system. If successful, he will usher in yet another important era in Class A hillclimbing.

While many scoffed at the idea, others are already building Honda Four rigs. Kinzer's brother Jerry will ride the Class A circuit aboard a 750 and Dave Mosley, a top Class B contender, will ride a 500 Four. If Kinzer proves the value of suspension systems on hillclimbers, there will undoubtedly be followers.

Terry Kinzer... innovator



Opposite page: Hillclimbing takes more skill than endurance, some strength, and lots of courage. Kinzer wears as much body armour as a motocrosser; reason for all this is protection from his own scooter if it decides to thump him back down the hill. Below: Off season teardown reveals ultra sanitary conditions Kinzer works in.

thing out of the hole. From everything I've read, the Foo-bar seems like it will do the trick."

To avoid last year's frustrations of constant experimentation during the season, a Foo-bar system

... trend setter ... pioneer ... and above all else, a good ole East Kentucky boy with an appetite to win. He invests and expects his returns. Winning isn't a necessity—it has simply become a way of life.

