

Interview:

Jim Pomeroy

“No Matter
What I’ve
Done—I Can
Do Better.”

By Brad Zimmerman



DICK LAGUE

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Jim Pomeroy has never won a National motocross event, never (before 1977) ridden in a 250 National (this year he even has to ride the qualifying motos to make the main) and currently has a front number plate sporting a three-digit number—102.

Yet he's one of the best riders to come out of the United States, he's the only American to win both a 250 and a 500cc Grand Prix moto, and the first ever to win the overall of a GP (Spain).

"Bimbo," a childhood name given him by his family that stuck, grew up in Yakima, Washington, one of the nation's largest hop growing areas. Hops, the main ingredient in beer, are strange, climbing plants suspended from telephone poles by miles of rope, strung in such a way that cutting just one small strand can instantly drop several acres of hops to the ground. Thus, Pomeroy says, "As a kid, I was told that you *never* want to get caught in a hop field—you'd get your tail shot off for sure!"

Pomeroy's career (in riding, not "hop dropping"), started at the wise old age of 10. With his father involved in TT racing, Jim soon became the proud owner of a Yamaguchi 55 (no longer in production) that he "rode until the wheels almost fell off." TT racing and scrambles eventually became the "in" thing to do, and the Yamaguchi was forsaken for a racing mount, on which Jim competed every few weekends with his dad.

When Jim was just 13 years old, a veteran of one racing season, his dad was involved in a serious TT accident, and hung up racing completely—in effect, also ending Jim's career due to the lack of transportation or support to get to the tracks.

For the next two years all his riding consisted of trail riding in the Washington mountains, touted to be some of the best woods riding found in this country.

Some neighborhood friends, Rick Poulen and Hayward Murphy, had the distinction of introducing Pomeroy to a new phase of bike racing that was catching on in the Northwest—motocross. "At that time," he explains, "my dad didn't care to race anymore, and was very down on the idea to the point of suppressing the notion as best as he could. He didn't see any future in it, and felt that racing bikes couldn't be a promising career. He wouldn't take me to the races, or help me buy a truck. He felt that if I wanted to race, it would be all on my own."

"When I was about 15 I started racing motocross with Rick Poulen,

who had first brought me to a motocross event, and eventually invited me to go along and enter. I had a bike then, for which I had to get a loan on my own. As soon as I was 16, I got another loan from the bank and bought an El Camino to get myself to the local tracks."

Despite the fact that his family wasn't exactly thrilled with the idea, Pomeroy continued to race, getting more and more competitive, and thoroughly enjoying himself every Sunday. "Looking back, I can see my dad's point and why he initially tried to discourage me from racing," he explains. "At that time, motocross wasn't very big, the purses were small, and it looked to be more of a hobby than a serious profession. But I was having fun, and wasn't really planning on making it a career at that time. Maybe my dad knew more than I thought!"

With high school behind him, and enough money saved, Jim decided that he wanted to see the country—and what better way to do it than load up the bike and go racing?

The Inter-Am series, then the forerunner of the 250 Nationals, went well for Pomeroy, what with support along the way and cutting financial corners whenever possible. But the big money wasn't there, and Jim started thinking of trading leathers for textbooks and college.

"I was on the way back from the circuit," he remembers, "and I planned on entering school when I got home. I figured that I could go to college for about two years, get my basic classes out of the way, then enter a business college."

"But just before I got going on that project, Bultaco called up and offered me a chance to go racing for them in Europe. I thought about that for a while, and talked to a lot of people, most of whom said I should go, try it out, and if it didn't work, then I could always continue with my original plans the following year."

Fortunately for both Jim and motocross racing, that "following year" never materialized, and three solid years of racing in 250cc GP events in Europe followed.

On the subject of his first year in Europe, Pomeroy says, "At first, it was very hard. I didn't know the language, the procedure, how to travel or really where to go. The winnings or show-up money were very small. But I got a big break by winning my first GP. From then on, everything was set, working well, couldn't have been better at the time. That GP win helped me more than anything, and I feel that without it, I couldn't have gotten this far."

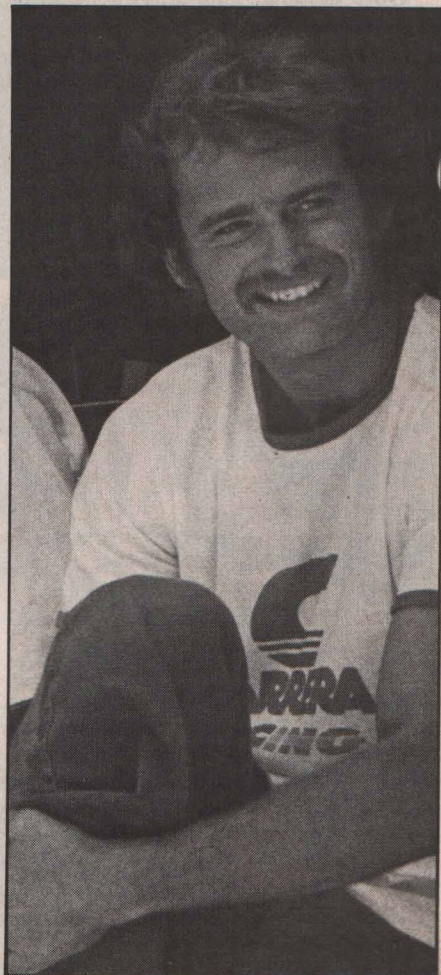
Unfortunately, that help and sup-

port gradually tapered off, until in his last year with Bultaco, Pomeroy was working with less support than what an average local stateside rider has. A GP racer with less support than a local U.S. racer just can't successfully campaign the circuit.

"It was really rough towards the end," says Jim. "It was very hard to get the support from the factory that I so badly needed. At the time, they were paying me enough to put up with all the hassles. But finally I couldn't take it anymore, even with the good money."

"If I had stayed with Bultaco this year, and they had let me down like they're letting Eierestedt down, I would have probably quit riding motorcycles all together. It was that much of a mind trip. You can't be successful with all that going on."

"For instance, at one time I had between \$2000 to \$3000 worth of titanium given to me here in the States—not by Bultaco, but by people I knew and shops that helped me out. I'd taken all that titanium over to Europe with me, given it to the factory for material for my bikes, and they never even used it for me. It turned up on the road racers! The people over here (U.S.) gave that to me—because they were enthused to see me do well—and it ends up on



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something else. I couldn't believe it!

"I think that the only reason I kept going and doing so well was the support that I got from people other than Bultaco. There were a lot of folks helping me out at the time, and I felt that without them, and my responsibility to them, I wouldn't have continued racing."

The fact that the honeymoon with Bultaco was over, and the divorce close at hand, really came to light to the American public during the 1976 Trans-AMA. According to Pomeroy's contract, he had to ride the Trans-AMA series, but if he felt his machine wasn't capable of doing well, he could stop (a clause built into just about every factory rider's contract).

Thus, at many of the events, Pomeroy rode the first few laps of a moto and pulled into the pits, or packed it all in after practice. He was fulfilling his contract with Bul—he was riding the Trans-AMA—but the idea of riding a machine that he had proved to himself was not capable of doing the job seemed fruitless.

Word spreads quickly when a good rider has problems with his sponsors,

and even before he got back into the United States, he was approached with offers from the Japanese companies with the so-called megabucks.

Pomeroy explains that contrary to popular belief, his switch to Honda wasn't for the dollar increase: "I was going more for the support than the money. The money part wasn't that big a thing; as a matter of fact, there was less than 10 percent difference in what Bul used to pay me and what Honda pays me now.

"The support was the key. Honda really knows how to do it right. For instance, they'll fly the bikes back to a race, plus the mechanics, and the rider. So when you get to a race, you're rested, ready, and prepared to do a good job.

"At times Bultaco was just the opposite. They would squeeze out a little money, try to do it cheaply, and often end up with the whole thing messed up, have to spend more money in the long run, and still have a disaster!"

The biggest problem Jim has had with Honda is getting used to the brakes on the red rocketships. "Getting off the Bultaco, which didn't stop too well, onto the Honda with fantastic brakes, was very difficult," says Pomeroy. "I kept killing the engine in the corners in the 250 Nationals on the Honda because I was us-

ing the brakes too hard. Now I'm just starting to get used to the machines and I haven't killed the engine in the corners in about a month, when before I was doing it every week. I don't feel that I'll really be good until next year. Right now, I'm getting familiar with the bike, the company and everything involved with racing in the States. I'm doing good enough for now maybe, but next year . . . next year, I'll be a *lot* better.

"That's part of the reason that I feel a one-year contract (instead of the usual two-or three-year signings) is important for me. When I got to Honda, I didn't know how it was all going to work out. I didn't know the bike, or what I was capable of doing on it. I feel that until I do really good, at least a National championship or a World Championship, I should stay on a one-year contract. Then it's fair to all parties concerned."

Pomeroy is obviously doing a good job for his sponsor already this year. Even with his personal high standards, he admits that with a switch to an unfamiliar machine and new company, he's surprised himself. For instance, if you were to add up all the points of the 250 Nationals and the stadium races (ridden on 250cc machines) Pomeroy would be leading the class.

He puts everything into racing, and has a heavy drive to be the best. For instance, his training for this season was done in the high altitudes of Mammoth Mountain in the California Sierras. Working with former Olympic skiing trainer, Dave McCoy, Pomeroy got up with the sun every morning, and worked at getting into shape, pounding his body until the sun set.

Yet for Pomeroy it isn't enough. He's been away for four years, racing in Europe, and he's learned much of what it takes to be the best. "I'm always looking at what I've done and telling myself: 'It could be better—you could do a lot better than you're doing now.' I'm not trying to downgrade myself, but to accomplish the things that I want to do, I've got to be better.

"Right now, I'd like to be the 500 National Champion—change that—I *have* to be the 500 Champ. Then I want to go back to Europe and race the GPs again. I feel that by next year, I'll be ready to race either in the 500 or the 250 class, and get out there, wave good-bye to the other riders, and wheelie away. That's my ambition—to be World Champion."

That might seem to many to be a rather high goal, but if you know Pomeroy, know the type of person he is, and have been around him for a while, you also know that he's one of the best bets for the first-ever American World Champion.

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