

Mystery Man of Motocross



In 1977, in a display of complete domination, 29-year-old Russian ace Gennady Anatalievich Moisseev won the world 250cc motocross title, riding his Austrian-built KTM; in so doing, he regained the world crown which he had held in 1974 and which he had failed to win by a single point in 1976 when he was beaten by 1977 500 Champion Heikki Mikkola.

Moisseev, in true Russian tradition, is a difficult man to interview and staying close by the champion at any meeting is a blue-serge-suited gentleman who speaks just long enough – on his rider's behalf – to answer most questions. It doesn't take an interpreter, however, to recognise talent.

Moisseev, who is married, to Irina, was born in Leningrad on 3 February 1948. During any breaks in the International season he returns to his birthplace and works as an instructor in a youth club, teaching skiing, fishing and, of course, motocross riding.

His own riding career began in 1964

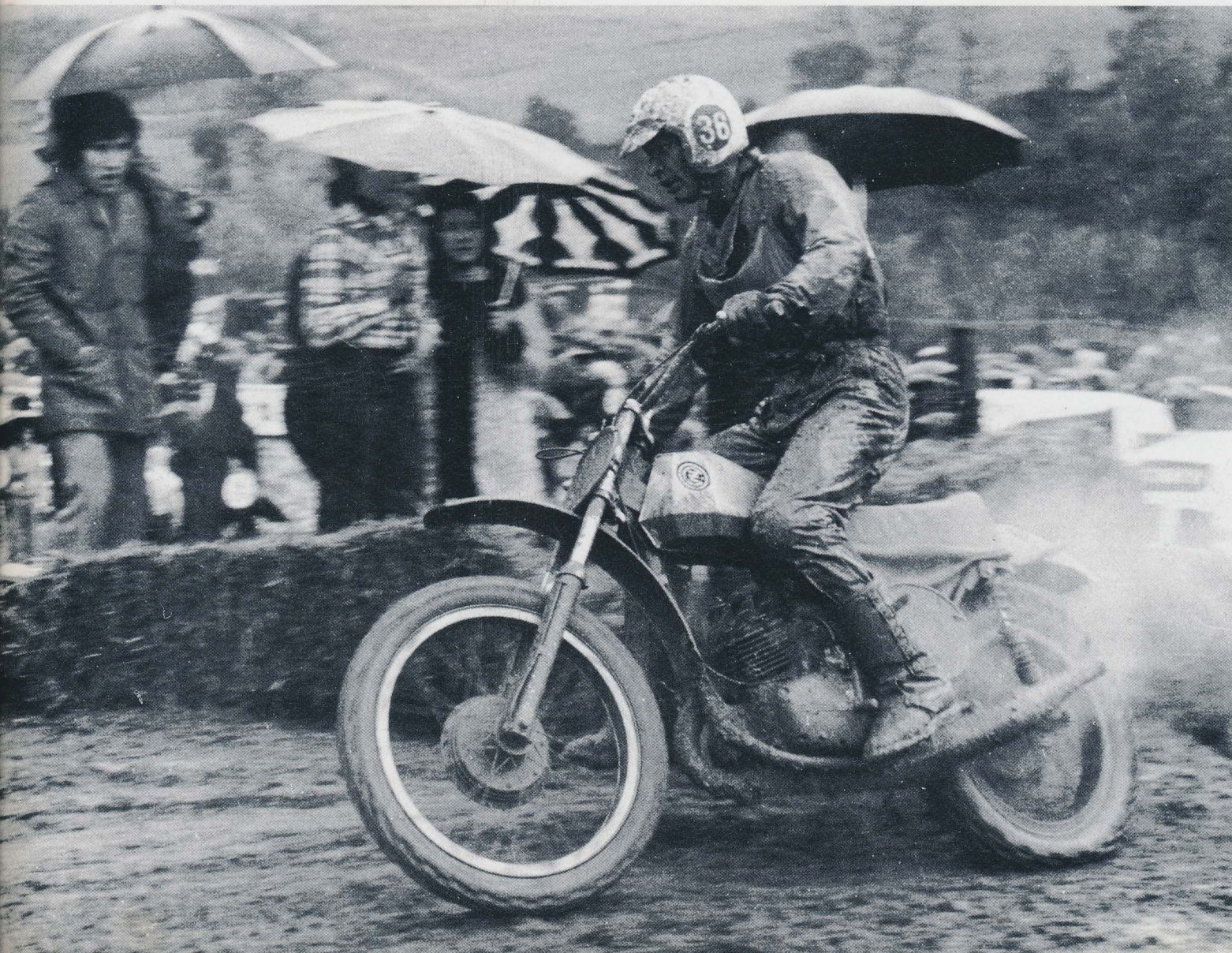
and he turned professional three years later. His first major success came in 1968 when he won his own national championship for the first time. Since then he has been consistently successful in the Soviet championships, repeating his victory in 1972, 1973 and 1976.

He won his first world title in 1974, but only after an extremely controversial protest which still produces fuel for argument today, years after the event.

At the decisive final round of the 1974 series Moisseev had problems and failed to score any points. While Moisseev struggled, his season-long rival, the Czech Jaroslav Falta, won the round and took maximum points, moving him ahead of the Russian in the

Left: Gennady Moisseev, World 250cc Motocross Champion in 1974 and 1977

Below: Moisseev aboard a 250cc CZ during the 250cc Spanish Motocross Grand Prix of 1972. He was later to join the works KTM team



Moisseev/THE MEN

points table, apparently to snatch the title. Moisseev's team, however, protested that Falta jumped the start (something that often does happen at a grand prix event); the protest was upheld and Falta was penalised one minute, relegating him to ninth place. Moisseev was thus reinstated at the top of the points table and his first World Championship was in the bag.

Sadly, he was unable to defend his title in 1975 having sustained a complicated fracture of his left arm early in the season; his injuries kept him out of racing for almost the whole year. He now counts his return to form in 1976 as one of his luckiest breaks.

At the end of that season he had failed by the narrowest of margins to regain his World 250 title, finishing a single point behind Heikki Mikkola on net scores. Each rider had finished on top at three rounds during the year and the title was open right up to the final round, in Sweden on 25 August. There Moisseev did everything that could have been asked of him to take maximum points, but Mikkola picked up twelve on his way to third place and the

Moisseev in action on the works 250cc KTM during the 1977 British GP (right) and at the Dutch GP of 1976 (below)

championship was his.

The injury problems that had dogged Moisseev for two seasons spared him in 1977 and he totally dominated the World Championship to regain his crown. His countryman, Vladimir Kavinov, finished second on another KTM.

As one of the three Russian KTM works riders, Moisseev receives aid from the State to support his racing and is recognised as a national hero. Although, by Western standards, he gains little in terms of financial reward, he is in the privileged position of being able to run two cars, a Mercedes and a Russian Lada, though he does not own a bike for road use!

Undoubtedly many fans would love to see Moisseev follow in the footsteps of his great rival Mikkola into the ranks of the 500 racers but, for 1978 at least, he declared his intention of staying with his 250. His ambition, as the mysterious blue-serge-suited gentleman was happy to explain was simply 'to win the title again'.

Few who have seen Moisseev in action would doubt that he has the ability to fulfil his ambition.



NH/BL