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**PERSONALITIES: BOB HANNAH, NEW MX HERO!  
DAVE MUNGENAST, ISDT STAR!**

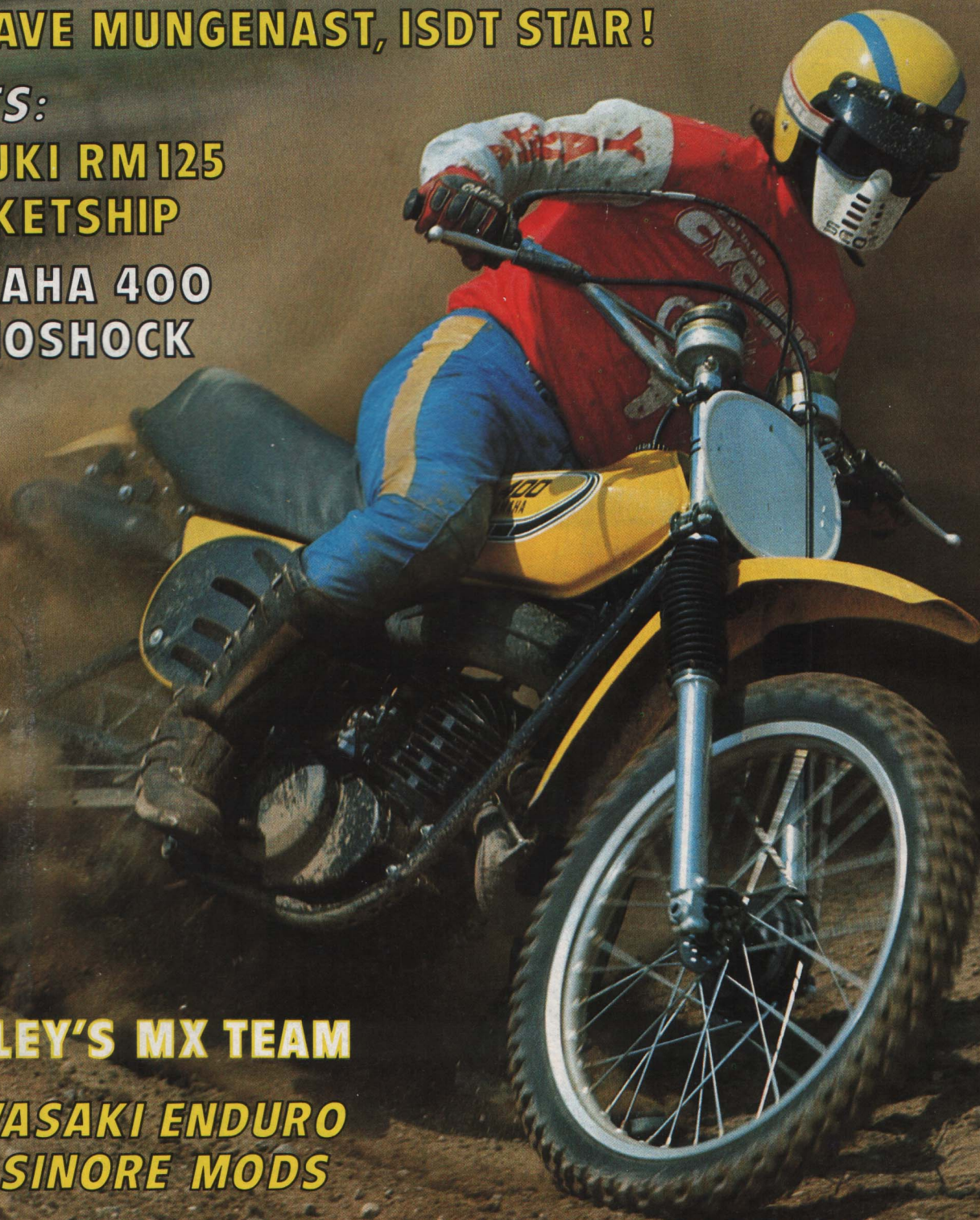
**TESTS:**

**SUZUKI RM 125**

**ROCKETSHIP**

**YAMAHA 400**

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**HARLEY'S MX TEAM**

**KAWASAKI ENDURO  
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interview with

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# BOB HANNAH

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Talking with Yamaha's Latest Star and Motocross' Biggest Threat



By Brad Zimmerman

Every once in a while, a rider will surface to the top of the National scene, seemingly out of nowhere, to come by and blow the socks off the seasoned veterans. It happened a few years ago with Marty Smith. Suddenly there was a rider who could put it to the troops in such a convincing manner, it left the competitors just shaking their heads.

Now there's another outstanding rider. He's Bob Hannah, a factory rider on the

Yamaha team this year. Bob seemingly came from nowhere. For a few months we in Southern California were told about this new guy (that nobody had ever heard about) who was out there getting first place finishes at every outing.

His riding style has been called "crazy, uncontrolled, just plain bananas," and so forth. When he first burst upon the scene many of the seasoned pros figured that he wouldn't last—nobody could get away with that type of riding style and live too long.

But Hannah is still here. He totally dominated his class in the Florida Series. Once again, the knowledgeable ones said that aside from Stackable, Hannah didn't have any competition. Then came the first 125 National of the year at Hangtown. The crazy rider on the Yamaha went out, and with a brilliant ride that took him from last to first, convinced both the spectators and the other riders that he was serious, he is a good rider, and most importantly, he's here to stay.

**PC:** Obviously you didn't just crop up from nowhere and start winning races all over. You must have had some kind of racing background. When did it all start?

**BH:** A long time ago when I was seven, my dad bought me my first bike. It was a Honda 55 step-through that I rode for about three years. My dad used to do a lot of riding on the weekends and I would go with him.

From there, I got a Hodaka 90 which I practically rode into the ground. When it was done under, I got a Hodaka 100, and finally a Yamaha 125.

**PC:** When did your racing career start? Nobody heard about you up until about a year ago.

**BH:** I didn't start racing until I got out of high school in 1974. About a month after I got out of school a friend of mine asked me if I wanted to race his bike. It was a 250CZ, completely stock. I think it even had the stock shocks on the rear. I raced it for the first time at Indian Dunes in the Junior class and won that. The guy who owned the CZ said that I should come back the next weekend and race in the expert class. That next weekend I got a fourth. Then I was hooked. I knew that I wanted to do a lot of racing. I even moved down to Whittier with him so I could get a job close to where I could go racing a lot.

**PC:** How could you stand racing a machine that wasn't really competitive at that time?

**BH:** The CZ? Well, at the time I didn't know any better.

**PC:** Did you race the CZ for a long time?

**BH:** I raced his bike for about twelve races. It was then that I found out it wasn't the hot setup. I couldn't do any better than about fifth or so in the 250 Expert class. The bike just wasn't doing the job. I was working at J&R as a welder, and I had a truck, a couple of little motorcycles and a racing go-kart. I sold all of that stuff, saved my money for three months and bought a brand-new Husky. It was one of the GP models with the laid-down shocks. I raced that bike for about five months and won a few races on it.

**PC:** When did your first sponsorship come along?

**BH:** While I was racing the Husky, Gary Harlow of DG asked me if I wanted to ride his 125 bikes for him. That worked out to be a pretty good deal. I got to ride in the 125 class in the local races at Saddleback and Carlsbad with CMC.

**PC:** Didn't you go to Suzuki after that?

**BH:** Yes, they offered to let me ride their stock RM machines in local meets out here. I was allowed to work on my bikes in the back of their racing department

and they supplied parts and let me use a van to go to the races.

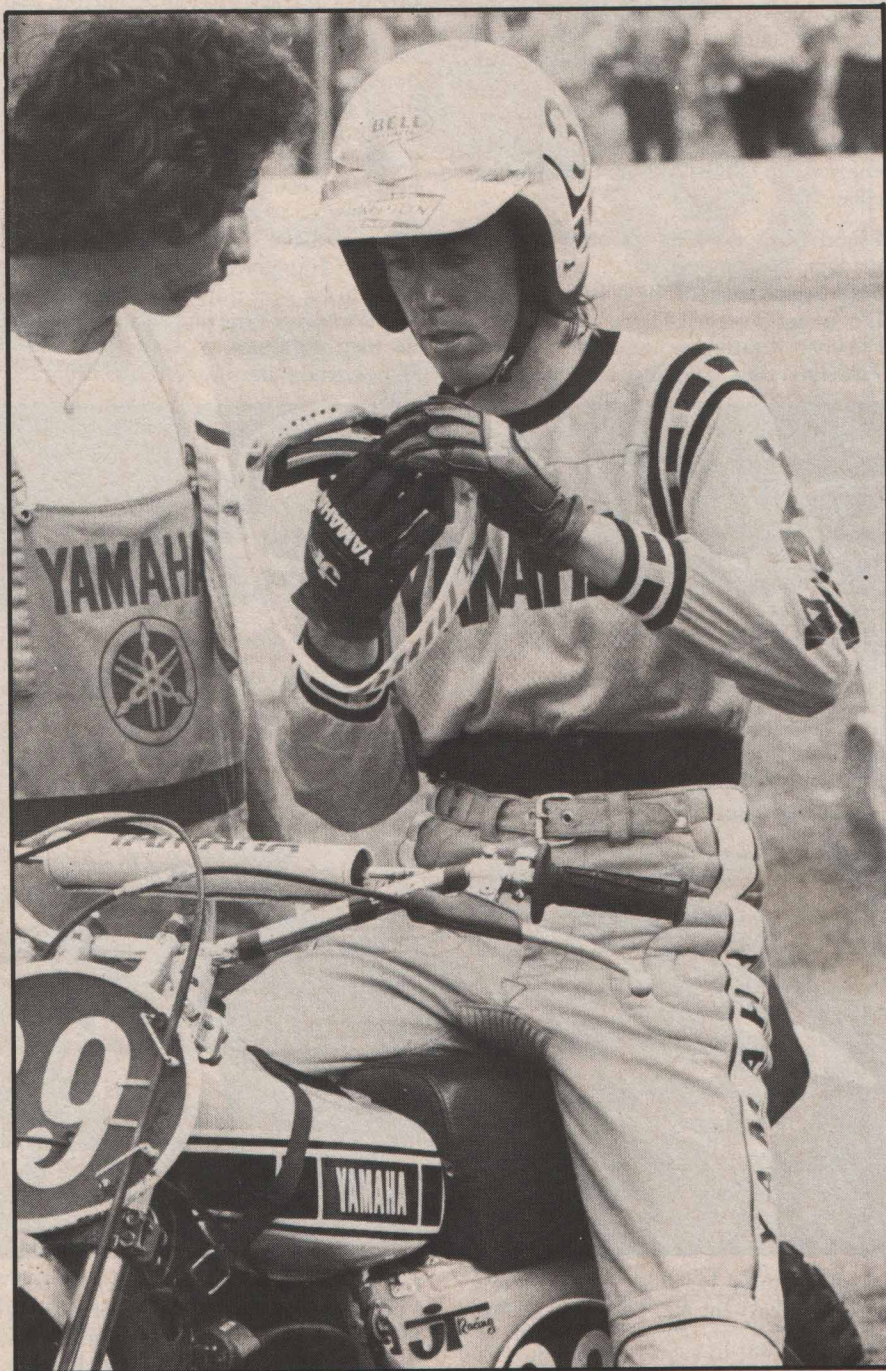
**PC:** How did you get hooked up with Yamaha?

**BH:** I think they talked to Gary Harlow and he told them where to find me. I went over there to talk to Pete Schick about riding their bikes. But I didn't walk out on Suzuki. I rode for a few more weeks and told Suzuki about the deal Yamaha offered. They said that they couldn't match it. I explained that I

**BH:** No, I raced local for a few weeks, getting used to the bikes and sorting myself out. Then at the end of the year I kicked back and went up to Canada to visit my mom and sister, and get in a lot of skiing. After that vacation I came back and went to the Florida series.

**PC:** The Florida races weren't your first nationals, were they?

**BH:** No, I rode two Nationals last year in the 125 class, but Florida was the first time I went up against the big names, or



wanted to go to Yamaha, and I came over here the next week. When I went there Tim Hart, Jimmy Weinert and Bruce McDougal were all still there.

**PC:** You didn't race nationally?

raced at the same tracks as the guys that I had read about. Last year in the 125 Nationals I got a sixth in one event and broke in the other. It wasn't really what you'd call experience in the National class.

**PC:** In Florida you had quite a winning streak going.

**BH:** Yes, it was fun. I won Gainesville and Orlando. I didn't do too well in Daytona, finishing tenth, but I won the class overall for the series.

**PC:** A lot of people have said that you didn't have any competition in your class down there and that you were just picking through the local riders. Is that true?

**BH:** I don't think so. When the gate went down it was always me and Steve Stackable, out alone, unless Rick Burgett or Terry Clark came up. But it was still hard racing. The Florida tracks are really rough and sandy, with a lot of whoop-dee-dooos out there. It wasn't easy at all. It was really hot down there, but I enjoyed it. I liked riding the big bore class.

**PC:** What is your favorite size of machine to compete on?

**BH:** I really like all the classes, but the 125 is my favorite. That's the one that I'm concentrating on the most this year. The Open class is fun too, but I'm a little

haven't had one thing go wrong with any of my bikes since Bill started working on them. Nothing at all, even small, has gone wrong or fallen off.

**PC:** After the Florida series you went to the indoor night tracks. How did you get along with them?

**BH:** I really enjoyed the indoor racing, at least at the Houston track. When we were there the track lighting was great. It was like sticking your hand directly under a fluorescent light, it was that bright. The track was a little narrow, and it was hard to pass, but at least you could see where you were going. That's why I don't race at night in Southern California. I can't see where I'm going on the tracks around here, and can't go fast because of it. I never raced at night races because I couldn't see.

**PC:** From the night stadium races you went to Hangtown. The bikes that you and Turner were riding, the water-cooled 125's, were creating quite a stir. How well do they work?

**BH:** I really like the water-cooled 125's

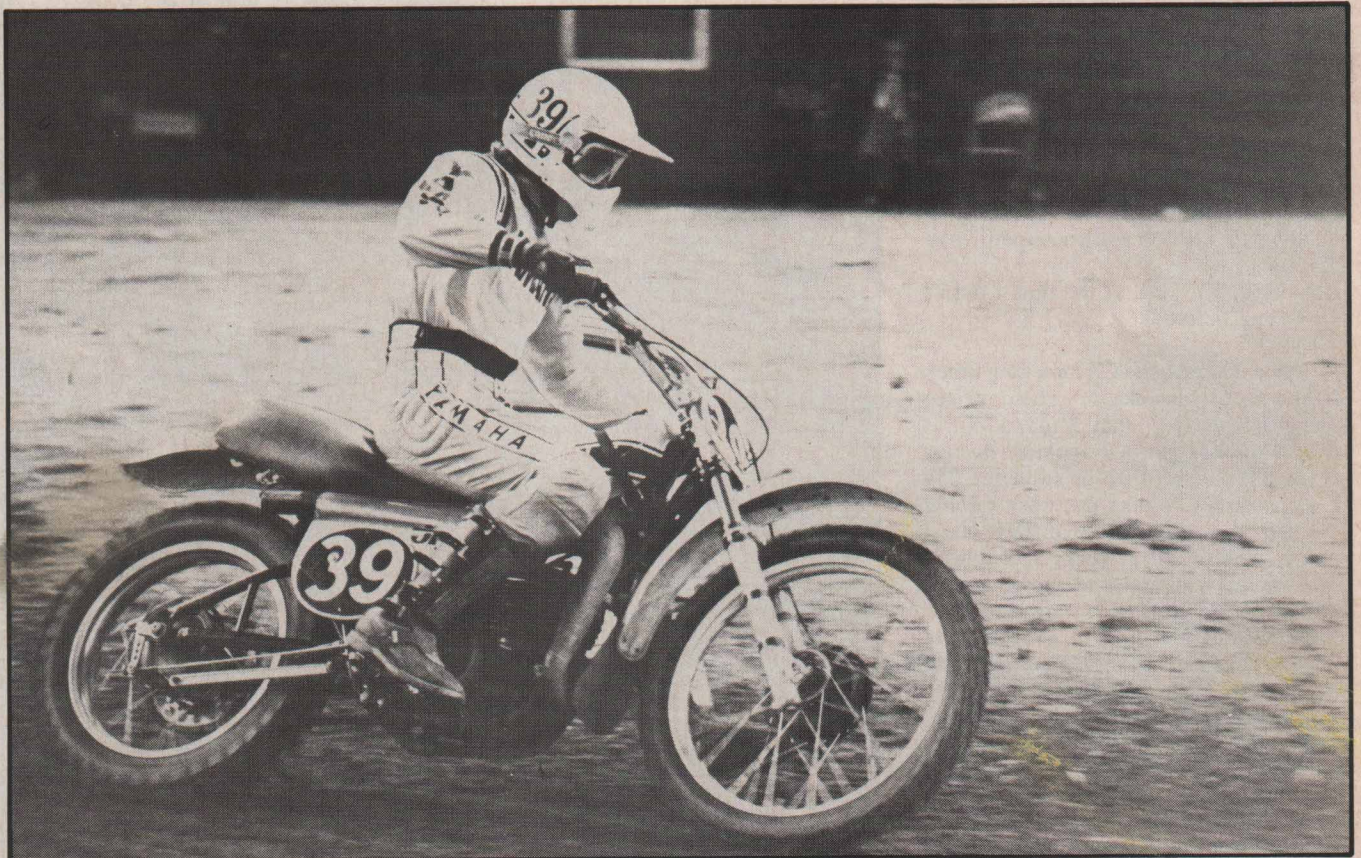
**BH:** Marty does everything perfect. He doesn't do anything tricky or different, he's just smooth and doesn't waste any energy. Every move he makes out on a track is thought out in advance and he works it out just like he planned. He knows what he's doing.

**PC:** At Hangtown Smith was having some suspension problems with his bike that appeared to be slowing him down.

**BH:** Yes, it was really obvious in this one section of whoop-dee-dooos where he was almost falling off every time he came through. Honda was trying out some new five-way adjustable front forks and I think it was giving him some problems. I really didn't pay that much attention to him. I was behind him for a while, and then I got in front and took over the lead.

**PC:** In the first moto you had a lot of problems, yet you still won. What happened?

**BH:** In the first moto Gary Wise cut me off completely at the line. I don't know if it was accidental or not. We all came out of the gate and Gary turned over my way



small for those big bikes and they're a little too heavy for me. They sure go fast, though.

**PC:** We did an article on Bill Buchka last month. When did you team up with him?

**BH:** I started with Bill at the beginning of the Florida series. He's the best mechanic out there as far as I'm concerned. His bikes never break. I

that we have now. They work really great. You get about three-quarters of the way through a 40-minute moto and everybody's bike is dying, except for the Yamahas that have the water-cooled engines on them. They just keep going fast, and don't slow down at all.

**PC:** At Hangtown you had to battle with Marty Smith in the 125 class. What kind of a rider is he?

and I had to stop. I couldn't believe it. When I got going again I was last into the first corner, because I had to come to a complete stop so I wouldn't get knocked down.

I worked up to sixteenth and was just about to pass this guy when he did a big tank slapper in front of me and I got centerpunched. On the first lap when I came past the mechanic's area, I was running in 33rd position.

**PC:** Even with those problems, though, you kept going.

**BH:** I was feeling really good and kept working up. Bill had a watch on me and he wasn't worried because I was turning faster times than Marty and if I kept up the pace I was going at, I could get to the front and eventually pass him. I knew I could win if I just kept going as fast as I was going. Eventually I caught up to him and when he made a mistake in those whoop-dee-dooos, he was slowed down, and I passed him for the lead.

**PC:** You have a good starting gate strategy, and are usually the first one out of the gate. What is your method?

**BH:** When the minute board gets to the one-minute signal, Bill punches in his stop watch. I watch that until there are only five seconds left, and then I put my bike in first gear and watch the starting board. When the board goes sideways, I leave. I don't watch the gate or the other riders. If the "1" on the board is sideways, I'm gone.

**PC:** What about your pacing speed?

**BH:** When I race I set my own pace where I feel comfortable and where it's faster than, or as fast as, the other guys. I try to ignore the other riders, except the ones that I have to pass. Usually my pace is the same from about the third lap on, until I finish.

**PC:** What about your passing procedures?

**BH:** When you've got to pass somebody, you don't want to take the same line as he's taking, because then you'll never get by him. You've got to take a different line. Even if it's not faster, you've still got a chance that he's going to make a mistake or miss a gear or something and you're going to get by.

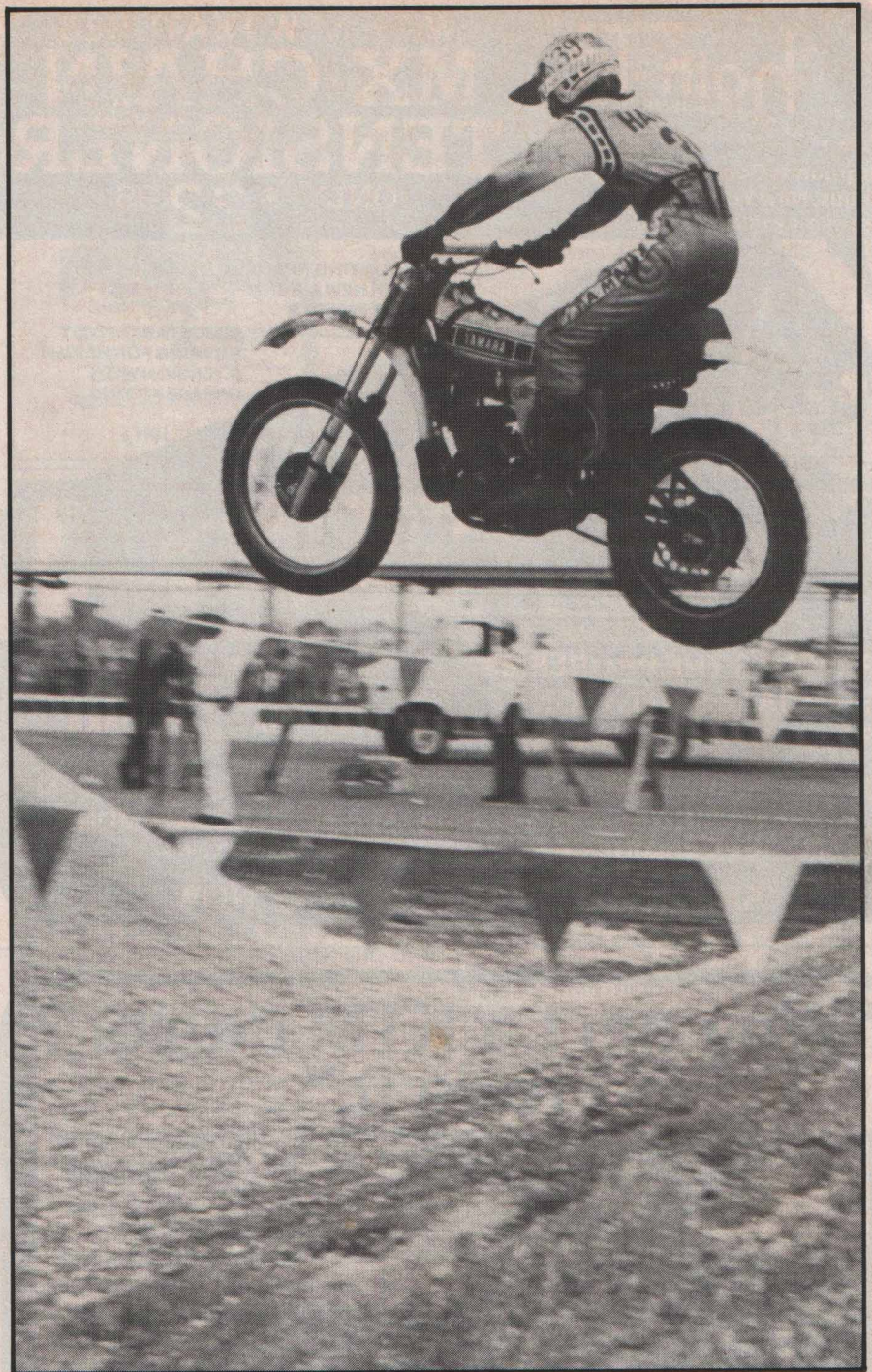
In pro racing, you get knocked around a little bit. A lot of the other riders will block your line so that you can't pass them. So you've got to really know three lines. The one that he's going to take, the one you're planning to take, and the one that you've got to take if he moves from where he is to the line that you had planned on using. You've got to know about three different lines and places to go at the same time.

**PC:** What type of a training program are you in?

**BH:** I go training three days a week, on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. I go running in the morning, and do exercises later in the day. Then I go out to a track and run two 45-minute motos for practice.

**PC:** What do you think is the main difference between being a privateer and a factory racer?

**BH:** The bikes, mainly. You get paid better, too, but the main thing is that the



factory riders get the best bikes. Nobody can put out as good a bike as the factory, you just can't do it. The 125 people come pretty close to the factory jobs, but they're still at a little disadvantage. When it comes to the 250 and Open bikes it's just too hard for the private business to come up with a bike that's as fast, handles as good and works as well as the factory efforts.

Flying to the races is a lot easier on you. You're not doing all that driving and you're not burned out when you get to the track. It's more relaxed and you can concentrate on doing your job.

**PC:** Finally, what is your schedule like for the 1976 season?

**BH:** This year I'm mainly concentrating on the 125 Nationals. I'm also going to ride the 250 and Open nationals, but if there is a 125 National on the same day, I'm going to the 125 race. It looks as though I'm going to be able to ride three or four of the open Nationals and most of 250 Nationals. After that's all over, I'm going to compete in the Trans-AMA. I'm also going to race the 125 Grand Prix, but probably won't get to the Carlsbad GP because there's a 125 National on the same day.

**PC:** Sounds like a busy schedule. Have fun and good luck.

**BH:** I will, and thanks a lot.

