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MINI-ENGINE**

**BASIC CLUTCH  
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**POPULAR**

# **CYCLING** IND

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**PIERRE  
KARSMAKERS**

**TALES OF HIS PRO CAREER!**

**SIX-DAYS**

**THE OLYMPICS OF MOTORCYCLING!**

**COVERAGE:**

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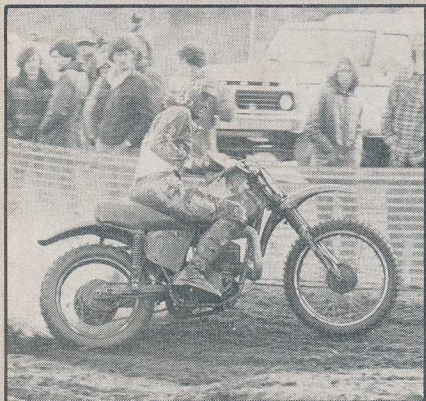
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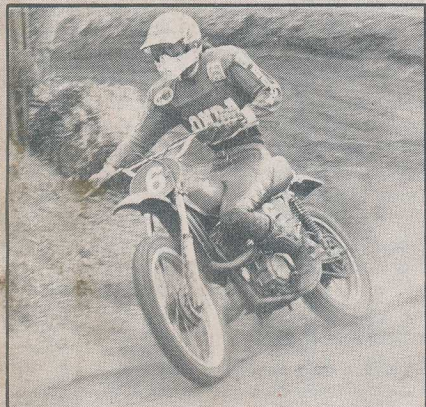
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JANUARY 1977

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Team Honda's Pierre Karsmakers in action at the Daytona International Speedway round of the AMA's Supercross Series last March. Photo by Steve Reyes.

Centerspread:

Another Steve Reyes photo, this time from the San Jose Mile. Privateer favorite Alex Jorgensen, on just about the last competitive Norton flattracker left in the United States holds a slim lead over Kenny Robers, on his trick Yamaha twin.



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# A BAD 8 HOURS



*Lined up for the start of the eight-hour classic is a field of riders from several states. This terrain, not exactly what SoCal desert riders are used to, is Colorado high desert. The race started with the dirt extremely wet, but the sun soon fixed that.*

*Half of the winning team, Rolf Tibblin races down a narrow Colorado fire road. Former World motocross Champ teamed with Bill Putnam on a works Husqvarna 360 for both the class and overall wins in the eight-hour marathon*



**F**or the third consecutive year, the Husqvarna team of Rolf Tibblin and Bill Putnam brought in a first overall victory at the 8-hour Marathon Desert Team Race, held at Grand Junction, Colorado.

This was the tenth annual running of the event, longevity which in itself gives almost classic status. Judging from the caliber and quantity of riders showing up each year, the Grand Junction team race will soon rank right up there with the Mint 400, Hopetown, SCORE's Baja events and the environmentalist-interrupted Barstow-to-Vegas cross-country desert race.

Like the legendary B-to-V, the Colorado event is all bikes. There is no sharing the limelight with a bunch of four-wheelers.

Off-road racers turned up in Grand Junction from all over the country. We saw license plates from Kansas, Wyoming, Mississippi, Missouri, Texas and Utah, along, of course, with the usual abundance of California contestants.

The race terrain, conveniently located just outside Grand Junction, is not exactly what West Coast racers would call desert. Instead of the common 'hare & hounds' course of rocks, sand, high-speed dirt roads and dry lakes, the place that Colorado locals call the desert is a mass of low hills with sharp ridges made mostly out of silt and clay. Some

of the ridges were only about a foot wide, with near vertical drops well over 100 feet down on each side. The course also crossed several square-sided sand washes, had the usual steep up and down hills, and ended in a lengthy motocross course.

The whole course was demanding and required skill. Most riders took nearly an hour to complete a loop. The best times were turned in the mid-40-second range.

Contestants were allowed to pre-ride the 24-mile course, to get used to the strange terrain while at the same time tune their bikes to the nearly 5000 ft. altitude.

The afternoon before the race, Mother Nature threw a curve at the organizers and contestants, by dropping two inches of rain on the whole area, turning everything into a gigantic mud hole. It got so sloppy that anyone out pre-riding was in danger of getting stuck and having to walk out for help. Most out-of-towners feared the race would be postponed.

Race morning dawned with threatening skies, but it remained rainless. Racers and spectators regrouped at the soggy pits and wondered how a 24-mile loop, eight-hour race could be run when no one could ride more than 50 ft. without their front wheel getting jammed with mud.





Race master Jim Cozzette called a riders' meeting and told everyone: "The desert will dry out faster than you think, and a one-hour delay in starting will be sufficient to let us have a race."

He was right, so at 9:45, starting riders lined up and awaited the boom of the cannon starting the eight-hour race. A minor mix-up at the starting line created momentary confusion. The cannon never went off, but most of the riders saw the alternate system, a waving green flag. It was hardly what you would call a classic desert race start.

Most riders finally got underway, leaving only about a dozen or so guys sitting at the line.

Team riders assigned to the first loop found a tremendous contrast to the previous day's pre-riding. Deep mud had replaced the dust and by the time the pack had gone five miles, the CB-equipped check points were unable to read the number plates.

Crashes galore occurred on the first lap, mostly from the mud, but there were no serious injuries. Once the sun came out, it didn't take long for the desert to dry out and become its usual dusty, dry self.

After about 45 minutes of the first loop, the leading riders came into sight on the motocross course. First through the pits was the KTM ridden by the

team of Craig Adams and Charlie Conway. Hot on first rider Adams' tail was former World motocross Champion Rolf Tibblin. Rolf and partner Bill Putnam had decided to alternately ride two laps at a time, to cut down on pit time. Bringing up third place was the Preston Gerber/Dave Blaylock team, on a 360cc Husqvarna.

Early into the second lap, Rolf managed to get by the Adams/Conway KTM. Gerber hung on to third. Even though it was early in the day, it became clear that, barring accidents or breakdowns, Tibblin and Putnam were going to be hard to catch. After taking the lead on the second loop, they were never challenged.

By the third lap, Gerber and Blaylock had moved into second place. Taking over third was *Pop Cycle's* own George Elliott with AMA District 38 ace Mike Stearns. George and Mike put in a commendable performance, working their 125cc Husky up through the pack from an early eighth-place standing and stayed in the top four overall throughout the afternoon on a course that strongly favored big-bore bikes.

As the afternoon wore on, Tibblin and Putnam continued to hold a substantial lead, but a back and forth battle for the next three places had developed between the Gerber and Blaylock 360 Husky, the Elliott/Stearns 125 and the

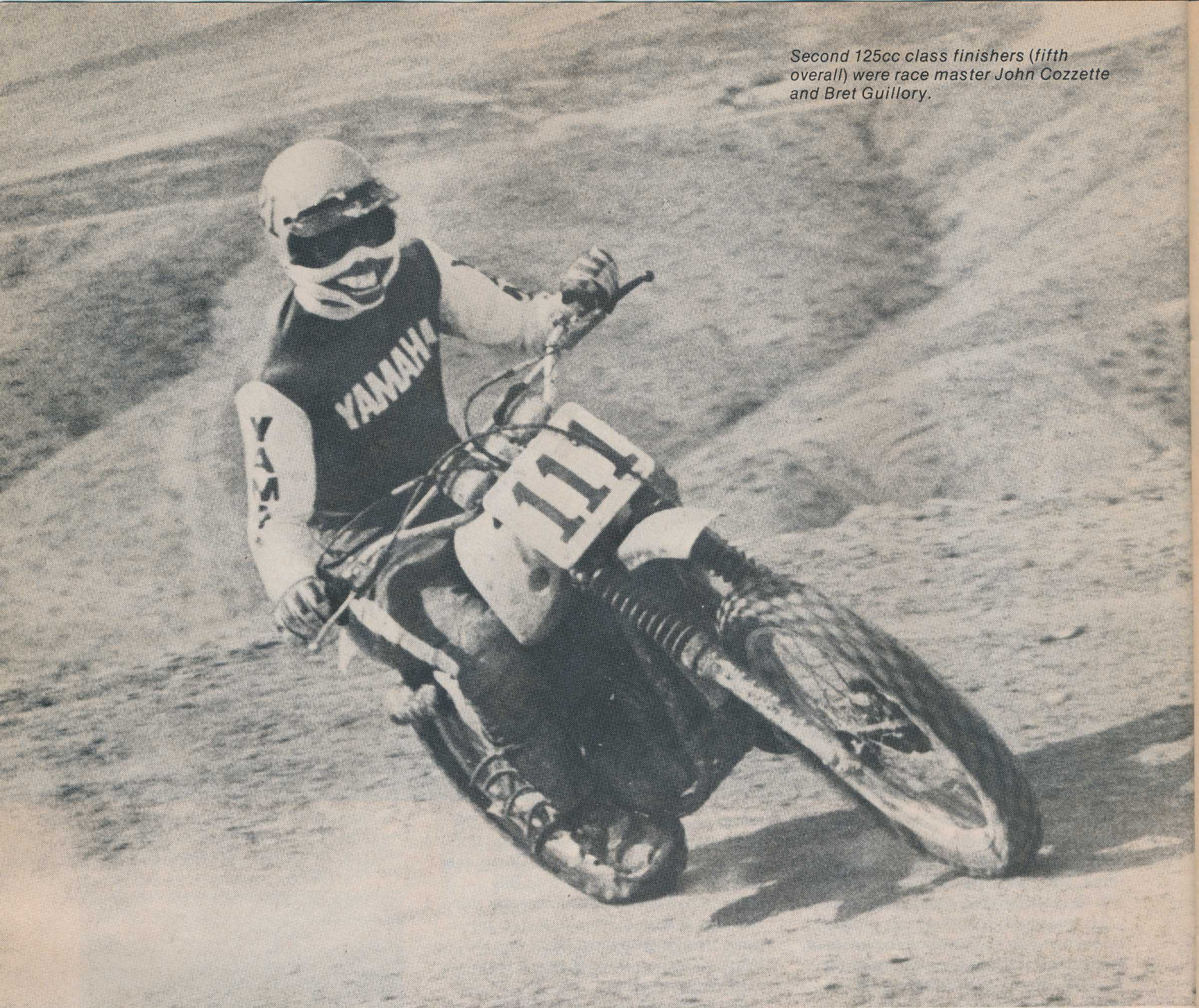
*Second overall and second open bike was the Preston Gerber/Dave Blaylock entry. In this photo, Gerber is astride the 360 Husky.*



Photos by Wayne Gales and Sharon Gales



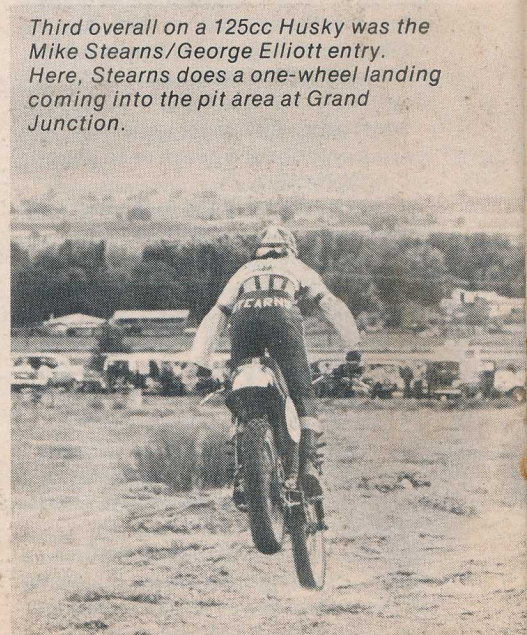
Second 125cc class finishers (fifth overall) were race master John Cozzette and Bret Guillory.



Pop Cycle's Editorial Director George Elliott, on the third overall, and first 125 Husky he shared with Mike Stearns.



Third overall on a 125cc Husky was the Mike Stearns/George Elliott entry. Here, Stearns does a one-wheel landing coming into the pit area at Grand Junction.





250 Husky ridden by Andy Kirker and Bill Halbert.

All three teams rode the remainder of the race within a few minutes of each other, and although everyone was getting increasingly tired, the lap times were faster each loop, because of the closeness of the competitors.

At just about the 7½-hour mark, Bill Putnam motored by, starting his tenth lap with a comfortable lead over all competition. Mike Stearns flew into the pits shortly after and turned the 125 over to Elliott with barely a 20-second lead over the Gerber/Blaylock team. Elliott kept the 125 ahead of the 360 for nearly a half a lap, until he was finally overtaken on one of the long fireroads.

For the rest of the lap, and the race, Blaylock used his advantage in horsepower to hold Elliott on the 125.

At exactly six p.m., the checkered flag was brought out, signalling that the eight-hour mark had been reached and no new laps could be started.

As each rider pulled up to the final checkpoint, he was stopped and given two finisher pins.

The ageless Bill Putnam was aboard the 360 Husqvarna at the finish, having completed 10 laps and finishing first overall and first in the open class.

Blaylock, after passing Elliott, maintained his position, thus taking second in the open class and second overall. George was next, for first 125

and a fantastic third overall. First place in the 250 class went to fourth overall finishers Andy Kirker and Bill Halbert. The first four finishers were all aboard Husqvarna motorcycles.

Taking into consideration the grueling course, a surprisingly large number of riders and bikes were still in contention after the eight hours.

One noticeable exception was California desert pro Art Knapp. Knapp teamed this year with Fred Ramsey and the two were expected to be tough. But the ignition coil gave up on their 360 Husqvarna about five miles from the start of the race, so Art spent the rest of the day playing pit chief and den mother for a very successful Team Husqvarna.

Art's teammate, Fred Ramsey, owns one of the finest restaurants in Grand Junction, so if you're ever in town, you should stop by La Coquille Restaurant for good food and bench racing.

By sundown, the stragglers were all in and the pits were just about empty. The winners were getting ready for the victory party, while the also-rans were admiring the only prize they had to take home, a super-neat Bicentennial-styled finisher pin.

The thought of a non-sponsored rider driving up to a thousand miles for a one-day race is almost hard to believe. Outside of a two-day ISDT qualifier, we don't know of too many other off-road races that draw such a widespread entry. Maybe it's a great way to spend a vacation. By early October, most of the summer tourist crowds are gone, the weather is usually super and the scenery around Grand Junction, Colorado is sensational.



*Probably the two oldest riders entered, overall winners Bill Putnam and Rolf Tibblin congratulate each other at the end of the eight hours.*



*Now this is slippery! We can't read this rider's number, so we don't know who he is. Such treacherous track surface as this is what earned the Grand Junction Marathon the nickname "Bad Eight Hours."*