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**PIERRE  
KARSMAKERS**

**TALES OF HIS PRO CAREER!**

**SIX-DAYS**

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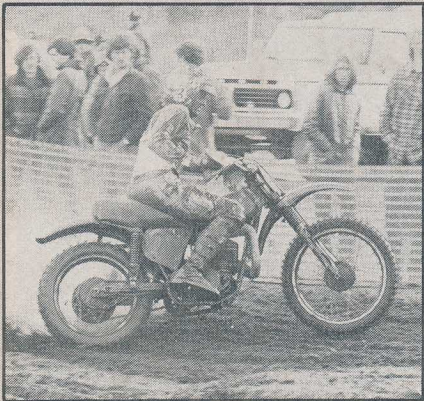
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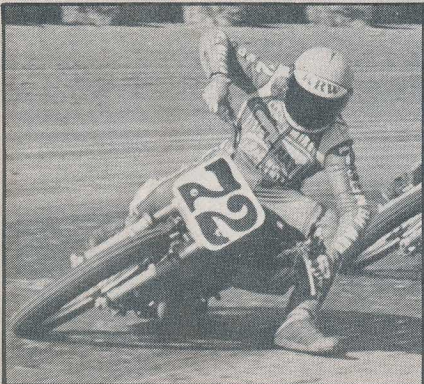
# POPULAR CYCLING



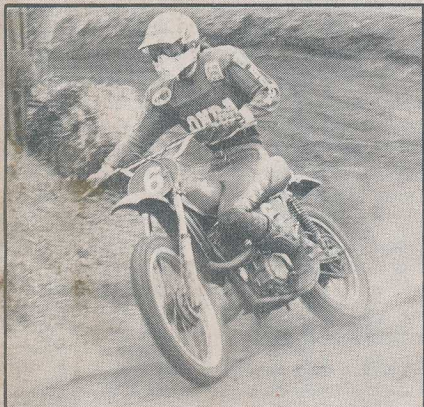
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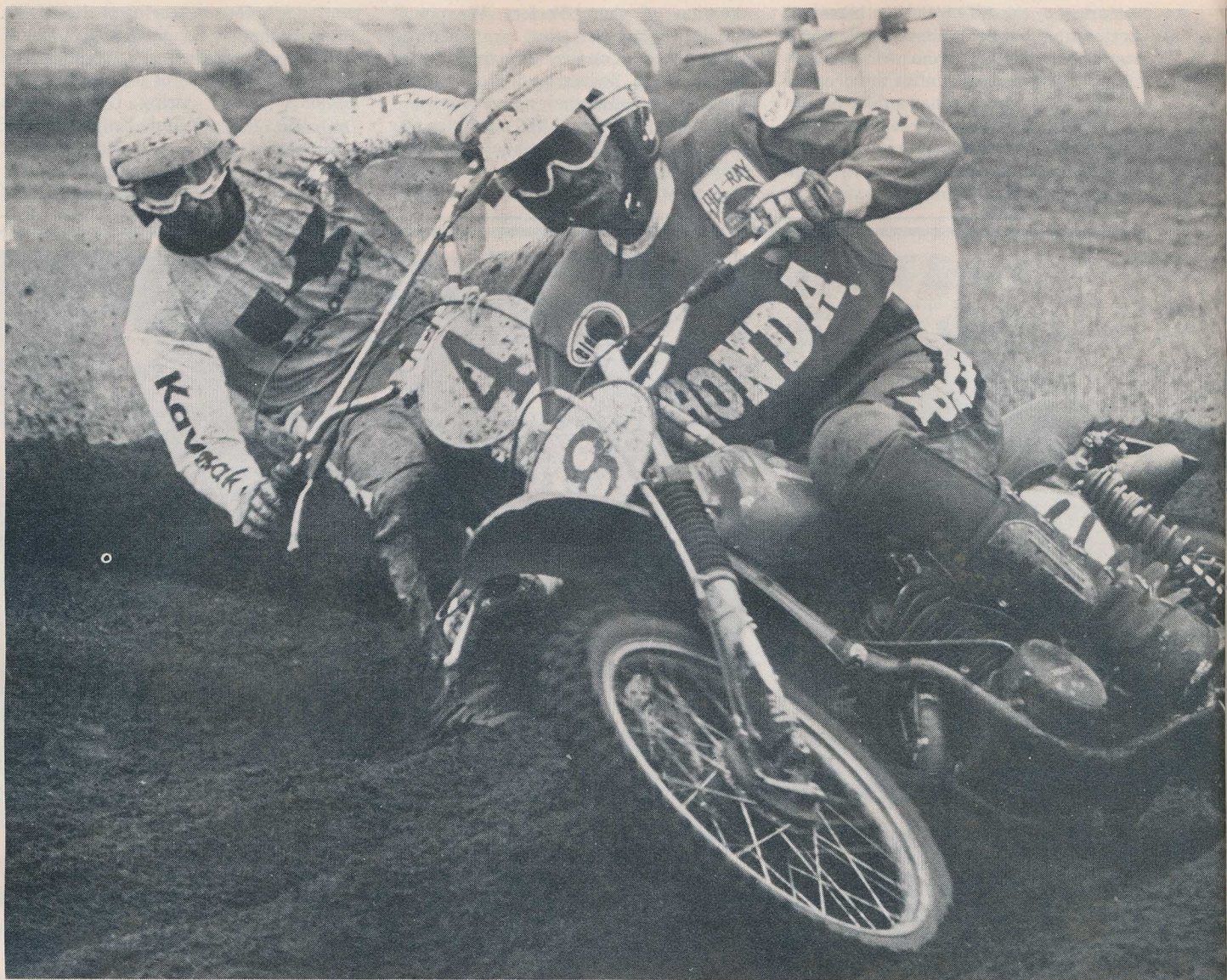
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Cover:  
Team Honda's Pierre Karsmakers in action at the Daytona International Speedway round of the AMA's Supercross Series last March. Photo by Steve Reyes.

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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*Pierre leads his former Mission Viejo, California, neighbor and long-time arch-rival Jimmy Weinert through a bermed turn on the artificial course at the Daytona International Motor Speedway. Both riders are candid and outspoken. In this photo, taken in March 1976, Pierre is in Team Honda colors while Weinert is in Kawasaki green. Part of the "controversy" between the two rivals is that when Karsmakers left Yamaha to join Honda in 1975, Weinert took over the vacancy, and went on to win the 500cc National Championship. Karsmakers spent the season having development problems on the big-bore Honda.*

**Y**ou really have to wonder what makes Pierre Karsmakers tick. He moved here to the United States from Holland to race motocross, at a time when the sport of motocross in this country was really only getting off the ground. The only times that the American motocross riders had to ride and race against the far superior European riders was once a year during the United States Grand Prix and during the fall Trans-AMA series, when a number of European riders finish off the season here in America.

Being a graded European Grand Prix motocross rider, Pierre was superior in ability to most of the American riders he competed against. That he moved here and almost immediately began riding as an American (he in fact was the U.S. 500cc National Champion in 1973) didn't exactly endear him to the 'real' Americans.

Pierre was, quite frankly, pretty unpopular with the riders he competed against. He was accused of "cherry-picking", or coming to this country to race against lesser riders to make more money and obtain more credit as a rider.

Right or wrong, that's the initial impression many of the riders Pierre Karsmakers competed against, had of the expatriate Dutchman.

\* \* \*

After driving south from Los Angeles, you wend your way through Mission Viejo, an upper middle-class community with a huge sign touting their Olympic heroes. Some eight well known athletes come from Mission Viejo, including several Olympic swimmers.

As you drive up one of the pleasant streets you come to Karsmaker's home.

The only tipoff to the fact that a motorcycle racer lives there is the ever-present trick-painted van in the driveway.

Knocking on the door brings Pierre, and as he shows me in he mentions that his wife Denise is out looking at fixtures for the new house he has just bought for investment reasons.

Like many athletes, Pierre realizes that he can't go on forever, so he's putting his money in places where it can grow and work for him. However, Pierre did say, "I'm just 30, so I've got a few good years left".

While we settled down in his living room and turned on the tape recorder, Pierre's six-year-old daughter Natasha came into the room and wanted to go swimming. Pierre said yes and took me outside to see his pool and Jacuzzi—where he goes "to work out some of the kinks after a hard, painful race".

A transplanted Dutchman; he now rides as a full-bore American.

# PIERRE KARSMAKERS

By Dave Hetzler



*Wearing his Yamaha team jersey, Pierre awaits the start of a race at SoCal's Carlsbad Raceway, site of the United States Grand Prix.*

After listening to him for about five minutes you realize that besides being one fine racer Pierre is also one fine father. "Coming home after being gone four or five days racing and having my 1½-year-old son Jarno recognize me, then run up and throw his arms around my leg gives me a bigger thrill than I've ever had in racing."

On the other hand Pierre *is* a racer and he does enjoy talking about his chosen vocation. One of the first questions I asked him, because I've always been interested in what one racer thinks about another, was which American rider impressed him the most this year. "There are many, but some that come to mind are Gary Semics, Kent Howerton, Jim Weinert, Brad Lackey, Tony DiStefano and Steve Stackable. They're all good and fast. Jim Pomeroy is fast but I haven't seen him all year so it's hard for me to





At the Oly Superbowl of Motocross, Karsmakers arches his Honda through a turn. Karsmakers is not a great fan of stadium motocross; much preferring European-style natural courses.



During the Hang Ten United States Grand Prix in 1974, Pierre gets the front wheel of his works Yamaha airborne.



During the 1976 Hang Ten USGP, Karsmakers holds the lead over Roger DeCoster, the five-time World 500cc Motocross Champion who spoke out against Karsmakers the previous year. DeCoster felt it was unfair for Pierre to be riding against the American riders, contesting Top American Rider in the Grand Prix. Another source of disagreement between the two riders was that DeCoster felt that Karsmakers should have moved over and let him pass, since he was in close contention with Heikki Mikkola for the World Championship. This all happened in the 1974 U.S. Grand Prix. This photo is from the '76 event.

say how fast he is right now.

"The guy that impressed me the most this year was Bob Hannah. Last year he was nothing, and now all of a sudden he's there. I've raced with him a couple of times this year and I'd put a move on him, then on the next lap he would do the same thing to me. It only takes him one time to see something and for it to register. That's very important in motocross. Of course Marty Smith is very clever also. Those two guys are the most impressive American riders, I think."

"In Europe of course Roger DeCoster is tough. Gerrit Wolsink is good, and he came close this year. Adolf Weil is very good also. He has so much experience and he knows how to use it. Adolf is especially good at setting up his own bikes. His equipment probably works better than anybody else's. I don't have any experience in the 250

"I still finished second but between motos my mechanic found that the frame was broken. They got it welded up but they didn't have time to go over the rest of the machine. A bracket that helped guide the front brake cable was broken and we noticed it just before the start of the second moto, but it was too late to do anything about it. We decided I'd start the race without fixing it, and see what would happen.

On about the third lap the cable hooked behind the fork crown and locked up the front wheel completely. It happened on a downhill and it sure was exciting. I had to make a pit stop to get it fixed and that cost me half a lap. It was really a bumper day.

The second race of the year was in France and there I broke the frame in eight pieces. In the first moto I was racing with DeCoster and after a while I pulled maybe ten or 15 yards in front

and wait for the second moto.

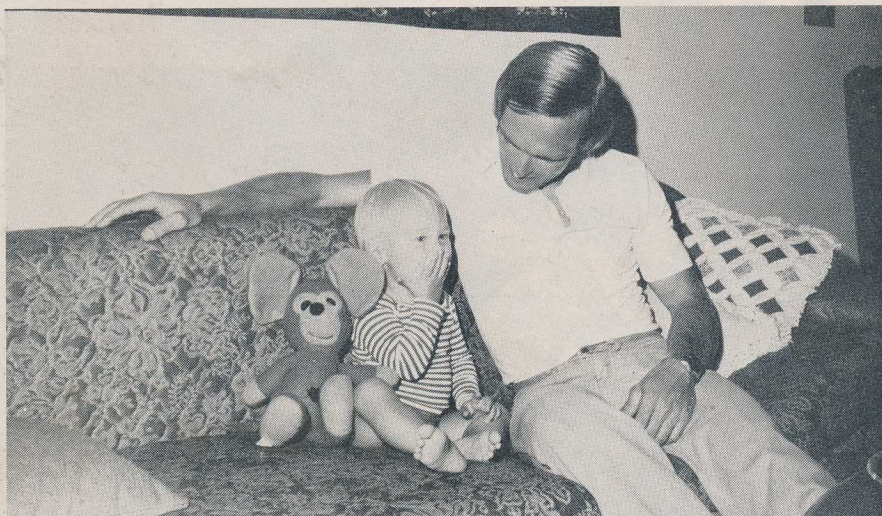
In the second moto I wheeled away at the start and won by 18 seconds . . . from Roger. I was gaining about one second a lap from him. That was a lot of fun. It was my first GP win. It was also disappointing because of the first moto too, but the second one made up for it. Actually, I was a little mad afterwards, because I could have won overall that day. I was riding well and the bike was just perfect. Ah well, that's racing."

"The next week was Austria, and there I fell down in practice. It was a really rocky track and I was coming down an off-camber hill with my front brake on and I must have rode over a little round stone or something because all of a sudden the front wheel washed away and I fell. I fell slowly but I fell on my chest. My shoulder pads have a buckle right over my ribs. I must have landed on a small rock and the buckle was pushed into my ribs and I bruised three of them. Oh, it was so painful."

"That was on Saturday, and on Sunday I raced anyway. I had a real bad start, maybe 15th or so, but I got back up to third, right behind Graham Noyce. In the second moto my gas tank came loose and it disconnected both the crossover line and the carburetor line. So that was that."

"After Austria we went to Sweden. It was the next week and boy, were my ribs hurting. You know, the first couple of days it isn't so bad, but then . . . Oh, did it hurt. I couldn't get a deep breath so I couldn't practice at all that week. On Saturday I could hardly practice at all. On Sunday in the first moto I got off the line about tenth but I worked my way up to third behind Roger, who was leading, and Frans Sigmans. There I was right behind Sigmans coming over a jump and he landed on a rock or something and crashed. I was right behind him and I landed on his bike, you know, just right behind him. Anyway I crashed too and I landed on that exact same spot in my ribs again. I laid there gasping for air! It really was terrible. That was that for the first moto."

"So I went back to the pits and told the guys I wasn't sure I could ride the second moto because now I really hurt. But a doctor had given me some pain pills so I took two of them and started the second race. Things actually went pretty good. I got a good start, maybe fourth or fifth, but the first few laps everybody was passing me. I kind of wondered what was wrong. I was in pain but I knew I could get over it after a while. After about five laps, even though the pain was still there it wasn't too bad, I started charging. I just kept going and going and going. At the end I



Pierre and his 1½-year-old son Jarno hold a serious discussion about racing, politics and family affairs.

class in Europe so I can't say there. Englishman Graham Noyce is coming up, but he's only 19 and he still needs more experience. But he's very fast.

Brad Lackey did well in Europe but broke down a lot. Lackey has too many ups and downs and I don't know why this is. Maybe it is because he does break down a lot."

Pierre had his share of problems in Europe this year. He rode in nine Grand Prix races but he DNF'ed in more than half of them. Little things gave him trouble, like a footpeg falling off. He won a moto in Italy, plus he took a second in Switzerland, a third in Sweden, and another third in Austria. Plus a fifth, but he can't remember where that was.

The first two Grands Prix of the year he rode on the '75 version of the Honda RC-400, and it weighed some 43 pounds more than DeCoster's Suzuki. Pierre led for most of the first moto but at the end, when "my forearms were as big as my legs," Roger got by.

of him. With two laps to go I was lapping some guy and he knocked me down. By the time I got started again I finished sixth. In the second moto the frame broke, the chain came off and I didn't finish."

"The third race was in Italy and there we got the new bikes.

"In practice we'd had some mid-range detonation so Steve Whitlock (Pierre's tuner) changed the spark plug to a colder one, but he didn't start the bike after he changed it. Since we were in a closed park we had to go to the gate before we could start the bikes. Right at the gate I asked him what he'd done to get rid of the ping. He said he'd switched plugs. "What" I said, "did you start the bike?" "No", he said, "that's not necessary." So I started the bike and in about 10 seconds the gate dropped. I let out the clutch and the bike coughed and sputtered away and I knew it was the plug. So I had to come in and change it. By then it was too late to get going again so I decided to rest

Continued on page 62

## KARSMAKERS

was in third behind Weil and gaining on him by about two seconds a lap. If I had maybe two more laps I could have passed him, I think, but the time wasn't there.

"If", there's that big word. It would be hard to race without "If."

"After Sweden came Finland and there we had our problems. The course was so dusty the air cleaner couldn't handle it and dirt got into the engine in both motos and seized the lower end."

"Next I came home for the first race in the 500cc National Series. Again we had air cleaner trouble. After that ride I flew back for the English Grand Prix. In the first moto I was leading and then one of the shocks broke. So I pulled in to get it fixed for the second moto. Again I took the lead and held it until the 38th minute . . . and then the footpeg came loose. With three laps left so many riders passed me, you know, trying to ride on one leg. You can see I had a lot of problems. Still, I did finish eighth in the World Championship table when it was all over."

Pierre would like to do better than that in the upcoming Trans-AMA Series. Even though he finished eighth in the World Championship, second in the AMA Super Series, and fourth in the 500cc AMA series, you get the feeling he isn't that happy with the year so far. If things go the way he would like, you can bet he's going to be tough to beat in the Trans AMA.

One of the main reasons Pierre is tough is because of his training schedule. It's hard to believe that any rider in the world takes care of his body better than Karsmakers. One example would be his running. Many riders run, but how many have a five 1/2-mile cross-country course that features both steep up and downhill.

He used to cover the course in about 38 minutes, but just the week before I got there he'd lowered his record to 31:16. He runs this course twice a week, timing himself every time so he will know what his progress is. Two other days each week he goes out and practices two to four hours a day. Pierre has found an area, the same place Marty Smith uses, where the beating he and the bike take can't be equaled on any track he races. There he can test both his body, and new components for his racing machines.

Pierre also goes to a gym four or five times a week and works out with weights. When I asked him what portion of his body he tries to build up, he said, "Everything. There isn't any part of your body that doesn't need building up when it comes to motocross." For those of you who'd like to beat Karsmakers you'd better believe you'll have to do the same thing. Pierre

believes you have to run just as hard at the end of the race as the beginning.

Karsmakers gives a good example of why you need the stamina over and above natural talent.

"Early this year I had a chance to watch Joel Robert in a 250 race in Belgium. Everybody was there, DeCoster, Goebors, Van Veltoven, Everts, you name them and they were there. For the first two laps Joel just took off and nobody could touch him. He still has more talent than anyone in the world, just like when he first started. But then he could goof off and win, because nobody could stay near him. He'd go out and play and win the World Championship. I can remember watching him and he made it look so easy. Not any more though. Now even his great talent isn't enough to keep him in the lead, or even near it. Racing has changed so much you have to be in top physical shape to have a chance, everybody in the top 15 or 20 has talent."

When Pierre practices he uses a standard CR-250. He has changed the shocks and handlebars, but everything else is the same way you'd buy the bike. In the very near future he hopes to get an RC-400 to practice on, because, "It's like practicing on one bike and then racing on something completely different. The CR is a nice bike but it's nothing like what I race. It is sometimes difficult to make the switch."

And just for clarification, let me state that Pierre's works bike is now, and was all year, a 400cc. "Some writers had me racing anything from a 370 to a 490. All along it's been a 400. At the first of the year it had enough power, but now I need more. After seeing how good the bike ran, some of the other companies got out their files and started playing with their ports.

One report I'd read said that the Honda put out about 50-some-odd horsepower, and so I asked Pierre about that.

"I don't really know what kind of power the bike has. Honda is very quiet about things like that, in fact we aren't allowed to put the bike on a dyno. Maybe it has 50 horsepower at the crank, I don't know. All I care about is that it has enough."

When I asked Pierre about whether he'd like to run in Europe again next year he said, "This year was kind of an experiment. Honda learned a lot, and so did I. If I go again I want to do the whole thing right. Make all of the Grands Prix and really try for the World Championship.

"Actually I guess the main thing I like about racing there is the tracks. Over here they're not as difficult as those in Europe. So many tracks here

are graded and have sawdust mixed in that they become a one groove track. A berm builds up and you almost have to go there. In Europe, though, it's better because the layout of the tracks is more difficult, plus on most of them there are many lines through a corner."

"I'd like to race there another two or three years and try to win the championship. You can make more money here, though. For example, the start money over there is only about \$170 per race. Prize money isn't super either, but being World Champ would make up for a lot of that; money isn't everything. Maybe I'll get to go back, but a lot depends on what Honda wants to do."

Besides keeping in shape by running, riding and lifting weights Karsmakers also tries to play as much tennis as he can. "I like tennis. It's competitive, you have to be in very good shape to play it, plus it is a good game to keep your reflexes sharp. Tennis players are real athletes, something golfers, who make a great deal of money, aren't. Golfers have to be smart, but they don't sweat like real athletes. I'm playing tennis tonight with a friend of mine . . . gotta win, I can't let him beat me." Such is the competitive desire of the true racer.

Possibly the biggest disappointment for Karsmakers was not being able to ride on the Motocross de Nations team for America. He felt that both he and Marty Smith should have been asked because they both had experience in Europe this year. He's not unhappy with the team that was selected, it's just that he felt they deserved the chance.

Actually, Honda wanted Karsmakers and Smith to ride a race in Hawaii at the same time, but they called the AMA and said that if the AMA wanted the two for the European race they could have them, if they let Honda know by a certain time so they could make plans for Hawaii.

Even though the AMA knew they had to notify Honda by this given date they waited until a few days after that before they called and said they wanted both Pierre and Marty. By then Honda had firmed up their plans to send the two to Hawaii. The only consolation for those two is that they are sure to be asked again.

So, all in all, Pierre Karsmakers had what this writer would consider a pretty fair year, and it's not over yet, what with the Trans-AMA yet to come. So in the next few months just like 50 to 75 other riders, Pierre will be pushing out his bike and trying to win more races. He has the talent, the desire, and perhaps most importantly, the physical conditioning to go all the way. I wouldn't want to bet against him.