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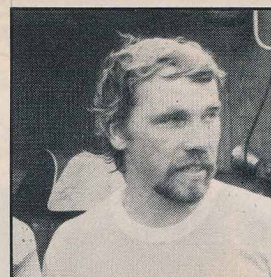
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VOLUME 9, NUMBER 10
OCTOBER 1976



Cover:
Action from the U.S. Grand
Prix at Carlsbad, with Adolf
Weil and Tommy Croft.
Shot by Steve Reyes and
Ektachrome, loaded in a
6x7 Pentax.

Centerspread:
More race action from
Carlsbad—this time at the
start of the second moto.
Steve Reyes again doing
the honors.

POPULAR CYCLING

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STAFF

Editorial Director
George Elliott

Editor
Brad Zimmerman

Graphic Director
Gary Wallace

Photographic Director
Steve Reyes

Copy Editor
Julie Ryan

CORONADO BOOK
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Gordon Behn

Art Director
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Advertising Coordinator
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By Brad Zimmerman

Smith wins the race for the second time,
Rahier wins the World Championship again.

THE MID-OHIO 125 U.S. GRAND PRIX

(Opposite) In the first moto, after breaking away from Danny Turner, both Billy Grossi (8) and Danny La Porte (14) ran together, trying in vain to catch the two leaders who weren't even within sight.

"All year in Europe I race, win many races on 125, become World Champion in '75. Two years now I come to United States, and two years now I do not do good. Everyone here thinks Marty Smith is the fastest."

Gaston Rahier, sitting between two Suzuki trucks, trying to get some of the moisture back into his body at the 125 United States Grand Prix, explains the situation.

At Mid-Ohio Moto Park, located near Mansfield, Ohio, Gaston again lost to Marty Smith. This year, however, things were a bit different.

The first welcomed change was that of the track. Promoter and owner Pete Weidner had put water soluble oil into the track surface. The course itself was changed for the better. More tight turns and a couple of tricky off-camber sections were put in, making a loop at least twice as hard to cover. As Bob Hannah put it, "On this track there isn't any place to sit down and just hold the throttle open. You're always working, always thinking about what you're doing."

In Sunday morning's time trials, where a rider goes around the course as quickly as possible to decide start positions, the riders who were thinking got the best spots. After the tally, it was found that Yamaha's latest rocket-ship, Bob Hannah, had piloted his water-cooled Yamaha around the course quicker than anyone else.

Marty Smith, still suffering the after effects of a case of the flu, put in a good time and was obviously the crowd's favorite. Everyone wanted to see a repeat of last year, when Marty won both motos.

Yoshi Sugio on a Yamaha put in an excellent time for qualifying, as did Gaston Rahier, Jiri Churavy and Zdenek Velky of Czechoslovakia. Masoru Ikeda of Japan was also in the top ten. Bill Grossi of Suzuki cruised most of the time trial section, put in one fast lap, and qualified ninth in a field of 23.

Before the race, many of the spectators and press were betting on one of three people: Rahier, Smith or Hannah. The majority of them were for Hannah. He had gone the fastest in time trials. But Smith was right up there with him. So was Rahier. Sugio could be a threat, and when Grossi is "on" he's hard to catch. At this Grand Prix there was really no way of telling who would win.

As the gate went down for the start of the first moto, Bob Hannah came rocketing across the grass infield, ahead of the pack. His lead margin was slim,

and no mistakes were to be tolerated if he wished to keep the top spot. But in typical Hannah fashion he threw his Yamaha completely sideways, blocking all comers, and led the pack through the first turn.

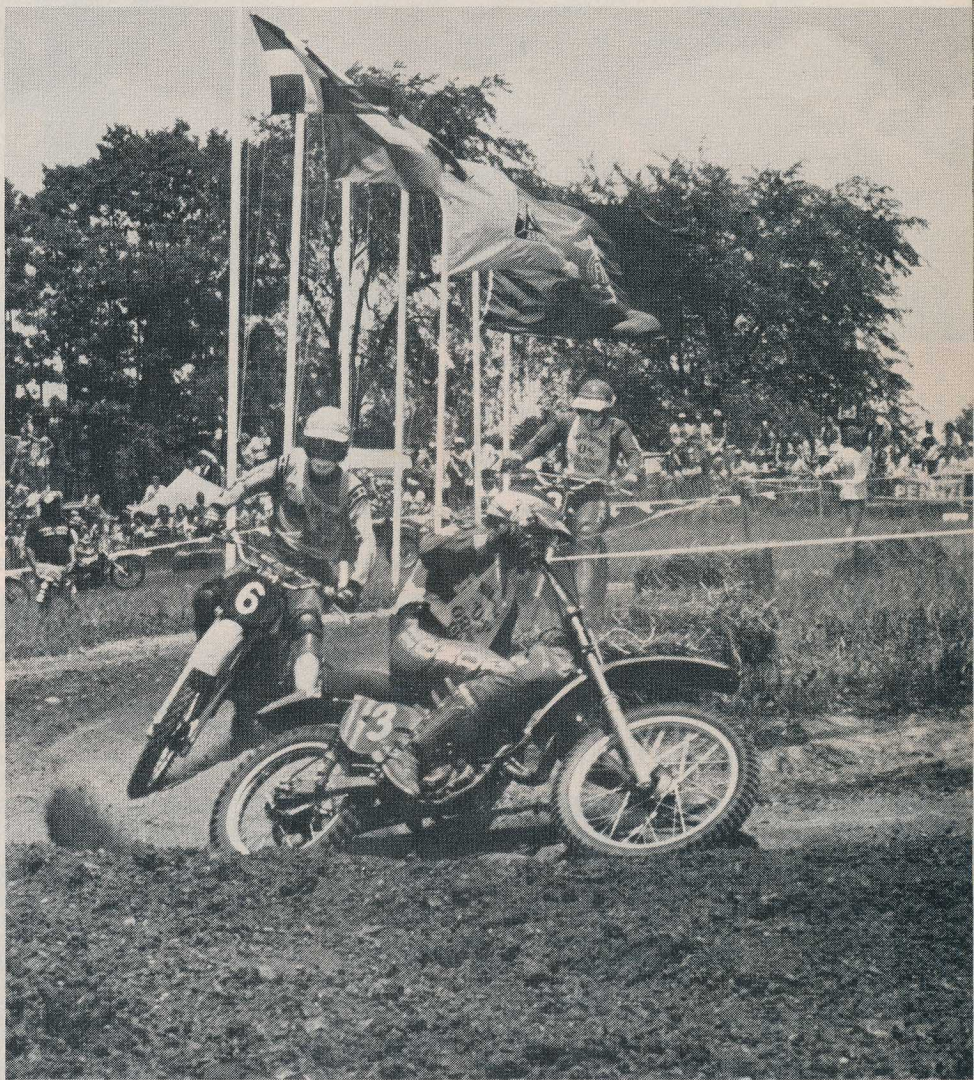
Right on his tail was Marty Smith. He wasn't about to be kept back. After being trounced in the 125 Nationals so far this year, Smith had something to prove. Besides, this was a Grand Prix, and Marty could definitely use the additional points.

At the three-lap point, a lot of the big names were running together. Grossi,

around the course, his 125 just didn't seem to be doing the job anymore. Although the two riders were well ahead of the rest of the pack, Smith had the advantage.

Meanwhile Danny Turner and Billy Grossi were fighting over who would get third position. Danny LaPorte seemed content to follow the two riders, waiting for a mistake so he could slip by both at the same time.

Grossi finally got around Turner and his strange lines, and took off after the leading pair, but it was almost to the halfway point and they weren't even



Racing was tight all weekend. Here Smith (3) Hannah (6) and Churavy (3) play freight train going into one of the slight off-camber turns at Mid-Ohio.

his teammate Danny LaPorte, Steve Wise, the two Czech riders on CZ machinery, Rahier, Sugio and others were circulating together. Danny Turner, now riding for Yamaha, was in third position.

Going into the fourth lap, about 12 minutes into the moto, Hannah made a slight bobble in a corner. For some reason it seemed that his machine just stopped in a corner, sliding out and allowing Smith to slip by. Hannah immediately remounted, but as he went

within eyesight. La Porte also squeezed by a fading Turner, who was possibly slowing because the temperature was in the low nineties and the humidity a stifling 90 percent.

Getting off to a bad start, Gaston Rahier was still running in the top ten, but wasn't within any threatening distance. He fell down a couple of times, misjudging corners, and although he didn't lose much ground, he didn't pick up any either. It looked as if he were content to stay where he was

running at the time.

In the front with the gas held wide open, Smith was still charging. He had momentarily rid himself of a badgering Hannah and was going for all he could get. Each time around the start finish area, which afforded the rider a good view of much of the course, he would look back to see where the Yamaha rider was and judge his speed accordingly.

Riders started to fatigue, both from the heat and the constant demands the course put on their abilities to stay astride a bike while competing with the best in the world. Danny LaPorte was eliminated when he put his foot down on a rock, bruised his heel and retired to the pits. Turner, seeming to have exerted all his energy during his dice with Grossi, allowed both LaPorte and a second-winded Rahier to pass.

With four laps to go until the finish, it was apparent that unless Smith fell down or threw a chain, Hannah wasn't going to catch up. Grossi was all alone in third position, with no one immediately behind him, and no one in sight ahead of his front fender.

What Grossi didn't see was a hard-charging Yoshi Sugio on the Yamaha. Sugio, looking like a lapped rider, had worked his way up behind Rahier, and in a tight turn, had passed the World Champ for fourth position.

He was now leading towards Grossi, with his unusual conservative riding style (for a Japanese). The two-lap sign came out. Smith visibly sighed relief, knowing that there wasn't much more racing left for a while. Hannah came through, determined to still catch Smith, but still having bike problems. He dropped his machine once more, and before picking up the bike, checked out



This tight little downhill section was taken at about 2-3 mph. Even for a CZ rider like Velky, it was almost like riding a trials course with a motocross machine.

pulled across, went to the infield and immediately took his helmet off, riding around in circles in an effort to cool down from the heat.

Grossi, aware of Sugio's presence now, came through with a grin on his face for third position. He wasn't

Ellis who put in a late charge, Turner, Churavy, Steve Wise and Velky.

Later in the pits Hannah explained what had happened to him in the first moto. "After a few laps my front brake was hanging up because of the cable. Sometimes I would go into a corner and the front brake would completely lock up. I fell down a couple of times because of that and Marty got past me. I couldn't catch him after that."

Gaston Rahier came back to the Suzuki camp, stripped down and poured a lot of cold water over himself trying to cool down. "I need better physical condition maybe," he told the author, "I not ride too good today, but maybe good enough. How did Churavy do, he did not win, no?" I assured him that Churavy finished behind him. "Then today I am World Champion again. After first moto today, nobody can take World Championship for 125 away from me. I win more races and Churavy cannot catch me." He smiled as we shook hands.

Grossi, finishing third, was delighted. He liked the track, but was unhappy at not having the chance to dice with Smith and Hannah. "That Turner, he sure takes some really strange lines. By the time I got by him, I couldn't see Bob or Marty anymore. They were just gone!"



Warren Reid wheelies his Honda out of the tight uphill section, while Jimmy Ellis drives his water cooled Can-AM through a sandy rut.

Grossi's position—there was enough time without hurrying.

As the final flag, the elusive checkered, was unfurled, Marty Smith on his Honda was the first recipient. Bob Hannah, about eight seconds behind,

considered a real threat at the Grand Prix, and had proved that he can run up there with the others on any given occasion. Sugio had run out of time and had to settle for a fourth position. Rahier came in for fifth, followed by



At the start of the second moto, Smith had the holeshot, but second place was a toss-up between LaPorte, Hannah, Reid and Steve Wise. Hannah led out of the first corner.

Smith's machine was in the Honda pits, getting wiped down, gassed up and having the chain tightened. Hannah and Buchka fixed the Yamaha front brake cable. Sugio stripped down to swimming trunks and had friends pour

cold water on him.

After some deliberation with the American riders, the United States Jury member for the FIM asked the jury for an extension of starting time for the second moto. Originally the second

moto was to start at 3 p.m., exactly an hour after the first moto had finished. He checked with riders, and then asked for an additional 30 minutes. Even Rahier agreed. "In this heat you need more time. Last race in France it was hot and we get almost two hours between racing. Don't start until at least 3:30 to give drivers time to cool."

At almost 3:30 on the nose, the gate dropped for the second moto. Again, it was Americans in front. Again Hannah had the holeshot, followed closely by Smith and Grossi. Rahier got off to a very bad 17th position. LaPorte was in fourth.

After about five laps, the riders towards the back of the pack were getting sorted out. The opposite was true in front. The Hannah, Smith, Grossi trio was running wheel to wheel. They quickly pulled away from the pack, leaving LaPorte behind to fight it out with Wise, Velky and Churavy.

The riding going on for the first position was incredible. Racing of this caliber hadn't been seen by American spectators for a long time.

At times Hannah would appear to gain about two feet on Smith, up until the corner would come up. Then Smith would wait a little longer before shutting off the gas. His Honda would bump the rear wheel of Hannah's Yamaha



Bob Hannah had the lead in both motos but had to relinquish it to Smith each time. Here on the back speed jump, he puts his Yamaha up with the tree branches.

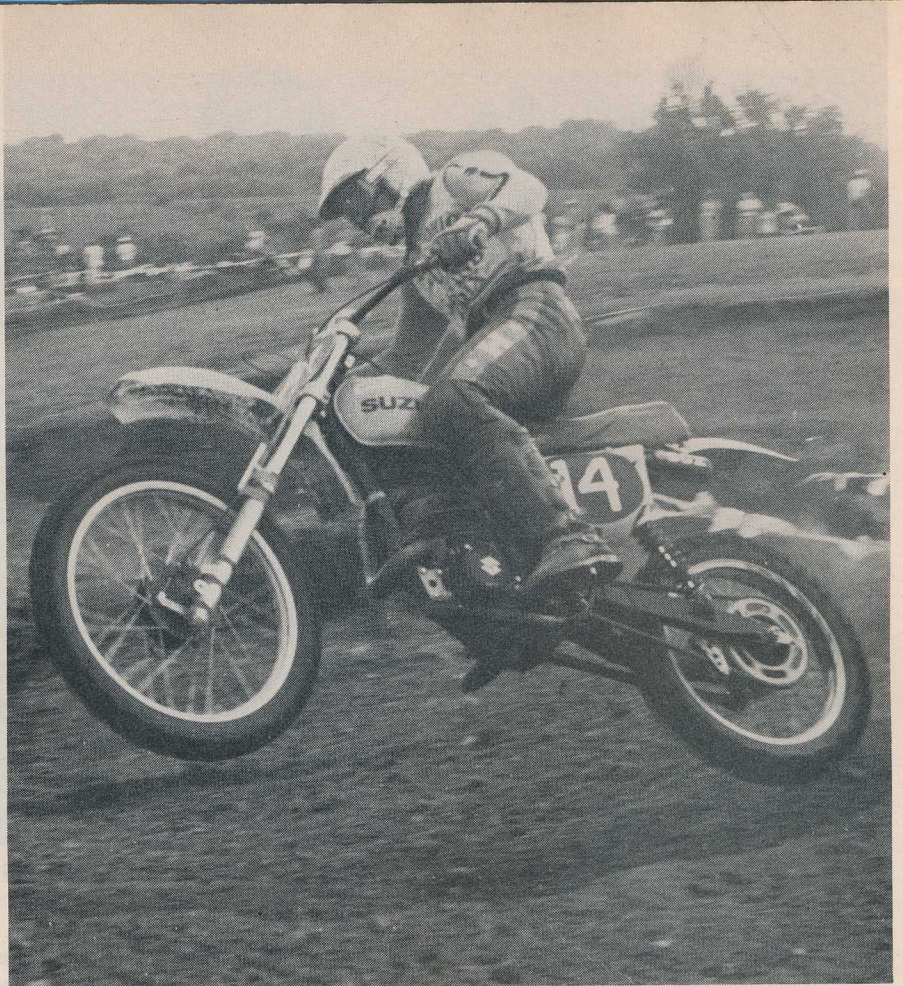
just to let him know that he was there.

In certain sections Grossi would get past Smith. At one time he passed both riders and took the lead, but going into the next corner he braked too late, slipped out of the berm and once again was relegated to third position. Smith also passed Hannah twice, but both times got repassed in a corner.

They went on like this for almost a full 20 minutes. Anyone could take the moto. If all three fell, they had enough cushion ahead of fourth position that they could have gotten up, restarted their machines and continued their battle before anyone came along. The crowd was screaming and waving programs, cheering on their favorites of the trio. The Japanese from all three factories conversed quickly in their native tongue, pointing at the riders, jumping up and down, slapping each other on the back when their rider did an outstanding job of passing, threatening or just plain hanging in there.

Just past the 20 minute mark Hannah made his mistake. Going over a tight section his machine got hung up on the slow first gear, allowing Smith to slip past and take over the lead. Even though the lead was changed, the riders were now five or six seconds apart, and it was still anyone's ballgame.

With only three laps to go, Danny LaPorte, his mind clouded by the heat and physical exertion, pulled off the track and headed into the pits, thinking that he had gotten the checkered flag. Gaston Rahier had retired early in the moto after running towards the back of



The factory Suzuki machines have offset axle forks, Hoss Ind. fenders, square swingarms, lighter frames, 250cc tanks, stock RM bottom ends and ported top ends.

Gaston Rahier listens as Bob Hannah explains what happened to him at Daytona Beach a few months ago. Due to heat and bad starts, Rahier didn't get points at Mid-Ohio but still clinched his World Title for the second year.





Jimmy Ellis was a surprise finisher at Mid-Ohio. Ellis, who didn't show up until Sunday morning, still got the track wired enough to place in the top 10.

the pack and falling down once. He saw that there was no way of catching the leaders.

When Danny pulled off the track, Gaston, who was standing in the exit area, went running after him, trying to tell him to come back out and finish. It was too late.

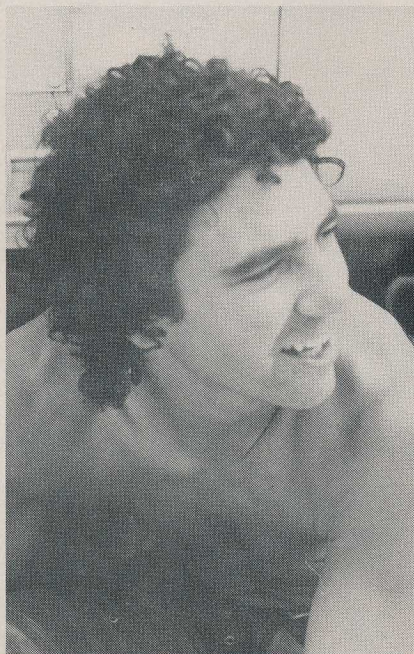
At the checkered flag Marty Smith won the second moto, making it 1-to-1 for the day's event and picking up valuable points towards the World Championship final standings.

Bob Hannah, still charging and still running strong, took another second overall, proving that he can run not only with the Americans, but could also put it to the Europeans in this, his first year of real National caliber competition.

Billy Grossi, his ankle badly swollen due to his habit of grabbing the bike tightly with his feet, finished for his 3-3 position placings.

Grossi had tuning problems Saturday before the race and eventually changed motors. His forks were also wrong the day before the race, but apparently his mechanic, Brian Lunnis, squared things away enough to allow Billy to finish in third position.

When LaPorte pulled off, Steve Wise, fresh from winning the 125 National the week before, picked up the fourth position. Velky took fifth, followed by Churavy. Both Czech riders



were obviously having difficulty with the Ohio heat and humidity. Although France was hot this year, they weren't accustomed to the humidity and surely suffered more than many of the American riders. Yoshi Sugio, who appeared to use much of his physical reserve in his brilliant ride in the first moto, still hung in there and finished a respectable seventh.

This year at the Mid-Ohio track where the 125 GP is run, the Americans proved three things. The first was that they could run with the Europeans. Many argued last year that the course was too easy. This year Weidner toughened it up, and although it wasn't nearly as bad as some of the European tracks, it certainly wasn't the easiest.

Thanks to the talents of Smith, Hannah and Grossi, we also showed that we can win in force. This is the first Grand Prix in history where the American riders not only took the top position (a rarity that is becoming closer to commonplace at each race), but that we can finish in force. When you take the top three positions of a Grand Prix, you've got to consider yourself a world threat in the motocross battles.

For many spectators it also settled the controversy of who of the Smith/Hannah combo was the fastest. A lot of people feel that Smith hasn't been treating the 125 Nationals with as much importance as the World Championship races, allowing Hannah to get past easier. Many feel now that when the event is important enough or tough enough, that Smith is still the King of the 125 class.

Actually the 125 Grand Prix over here doesn't have to prove anything like this. The important fact is that we won, fairly and decisively. The United States has come of age in motocross. Particularly in the 125 class, we are a group to be reckoned with. Gaston Rahier won the 125 World Championship for 1976 at Mid-Ohio. Next year, with competition like Smith, Hannah and Grossi, it's going to be even tougher.

Results 125 Grand Prix

| | | |
|--------------|--------|------|
| Marty Smith | Honda | 1-1 |
| Bob Hannah | Yamaha | 2-2 |
| Bill Grossi | Suzuki | 3-3 |
| Yoshi Sugio | Yamaha | 4-7 |
| Steve Wise | Honda | 9-4 |
| Jiri Churavy | CZ | 8-5 |
| Zdenek Velky | CZ | 10-5 |
| Dan Turner | Yamaha | 7-12 |
| Masoru Ikeda | Suzuki | 11-9 |
| Jimmy Ellis | Can-AM | 6-15 |

Note—As of the Mid-Ohio race, neither Churavy or Smith can numerically catch Gaston Rahier, resulting in Rahier again winning the 125 World Championship.