



APRIL, 1978

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two wheels

EXCLUSIVE
ASPES 125MX
FLIER

HOW
TO HOT
XT/TT500
Yams

INTERNATIONAL
VINTAGE RALLY
PREVIEW

3 BIKES TESTED

two wheels

VOLUME 18, No. 2, APRIL 1978

TESTS

- 8 SUZUKI GS1000 First Test
10 ASPES 125CRC Hot-shot Italian MXer.
16 HONDA CB400T The classiest commuter.
34 YAMAHA IT250D We finally ride the enduro king.

FEATURES

- 15 BIKES OF THE YEAR The choice approacheth.
22 INTERNATIONAL RALLY Preview of the big vintage event.
38 WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT DISCS Little known tips.
66 ALL TORQUE, NO ACTION Hotting the TT/XT500 Yams.

SPORT

- 42 FLYING SANDGROPPERS WA MX guide for '78.
50 GUNTER HAD GALL Australian MX titles.

TOURING

- 58 THE CONQUEST OF KILIMANJARO Part two.

HISTORY

- 54 OLD GOLD Pics from the past.
74 THE MARSTON MASTERPIECES The Sunbeam singles.

DEPARTMENTS

- | | | |
|----------------|----------------------|------------------|
| 5 FIRST STROKE | 32 THE SOCKET FILE | 84 VIBES |
| 6 BEHIND BARS | 49 JUST CRUISIN' | 88 CLUB REGISTER |
| 6 ENCOUNTERS | 65 TARLETON'S CORNER | |

PEOPLE

JEFF BROWN / Editor

LINDSAY HANNINGTON / Artist

BRIAN WOODWARD / Technical Editor

JOHN CARNEY, BOB BOWIE / Production

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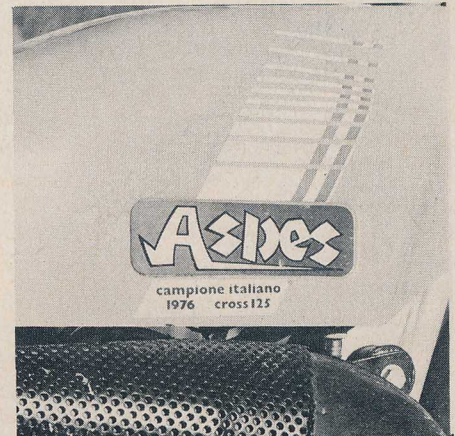
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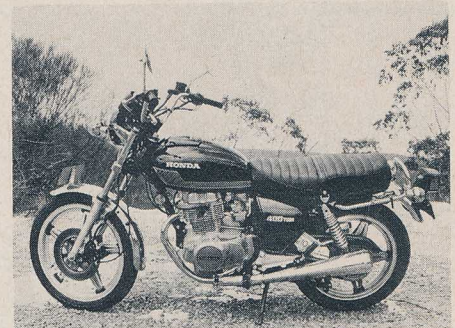
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Page 10



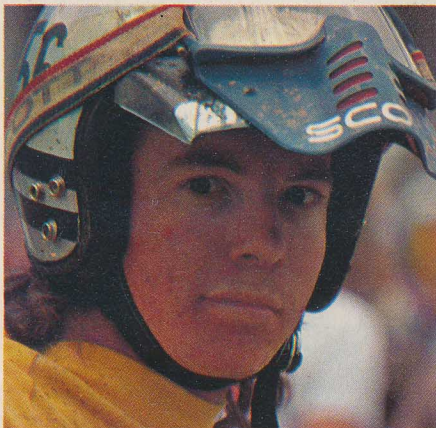
Page 16



Page 42

COVER: The Aspes 125 (test p10) through a crystal stream. Photo by BARRY ROSS.

AIRBORNE SANDGROPPERS FOR '78



Russ Speak of the Shellsport Suzuki team now rides both 125 and 400 class racers, but has been most at home in the 125 class.



Jim Turner rides a YZ125 Yamaha for the Ken George team. He was dogged by bad luck and machine hassles with his D model racers last year.

WA correspondent RAY RYAN compiled this guide to the motocross scene in the west; the talent is there and should spread east more this year, but the home scene needs a shake-up before it matches the eastern states for professionalism.

WEST COAST racers invariably ask what the eastern states tracks are like and whether the eastern boys really go that much faster.

During the past 12 months both questions have proved to be of little relevance as the west coast guns have realised their hopes of meeting the foreigners on their own ground and most have come away thinking "Hey, we're not really all that bad after all!"

Gunter, Gall, Vick, Landman and Rowley all made the transcontinental run during '77 to battle the west coasters at Noble Falls and Southern Cross. National 500 champ, Graeme Smythe, returned home for a successful Yamaha ride that led to the coveted crown and the WA racers scored placings in the '77 Nationals at SA's Acusa Park (story p50) that put smiles on their sponsors' chequebooks and led to the thought that maybe 1978 would be WA's year.

Competition on the west coast tracks is rougher and harder than ever before with up to 250 riders cramming the program at any major open meeting. Eyes flicker, hands fan the clutch levers and the pre-race psych game is as heavy as you'll find at Amaroo, Clarendon or Wallan. The days of the guy who just went out for a Sunday ride are over and the sponsored pros of the west are aiming for little short of total national domination this year. Racing generally starts in March when temperatures are still in the high 20s and when dust and bushflies are at their peak. After a five-month layoff during the summer, the racers have had the time to test and sort their machinery for the coming season, but little chance to ride and tune both body and mind into the integrated unit that's really necessary for race winning success. In the west

there's no short circuit racing to keep a rider's nerve and skills in top form; the sport died a slow death over here some years ago and has never been revitalised despite a lot of wasted words from dirt track advocates.

When the last flag drops in late October or thereabouts, it's "see ya next year" for most riders, as no enterprising club or promoter has yet seized the opportunity to launch what could be a major summer drawcard in the western state. Night motocross in the balmy summer evenings would keep the sport alive during the long, hot layoff and give the riders a welcome opportunity to keep their \$1500 investments on the track instead of gathering dust in garages throughout the state.

WHICH WAY TO THE TRACK?

Most major country towns in WA have a motocross track of some sort, from the red dust basins of the northern mining towns to the broad, open layout of the Albany circuit, deep in the south of the state. Some tracks such as the tight, loamy circuit at Narrogin in the south west have not received full national status from the WAMCA, the ACCA representative body in WA.

Starting gates are virtually unheard of and with the recent WAMCA decision to retain hand-on-helmet starts for all open meetings, it's unlikely that clubs or promoters will go to the trouble of installing any effective automated starting system. Lights are the norm at big meetings on tracks such as Noble Falls or Northam, with semi-automated flags being the standard at most other big-time circuits.

Track surfaces range from deep sand along the wide coastal plain, to gravel or red dirt loam such as at Kalgoorlie or



Above: Some of WA's top talent in a moment of pre-race confusion and internal butterfly invasions at a Noble Falls meeting.

Left: Richie King grabs a handful of thump on his Clem Nunn CCM at Noble Falls' wet September meeting in '77.



Southern Cross in the Goldfields districts. Nearly every Sunday of the winter season there'll be a major meeting on one circuit or another, but thanks to inadequate or amateurish promotion, it's uncommon to see a crowd of any size in attendance. In most cases it's simply "bring your own spectators", a sad situation for the sport in a state where the potential for growth is enormous.

Heading the list of the six major circuits in WA is the Cosy Creek circuit at Manjimup in the deep forests of the South West karri belt. A few years ago the circuit played host to the national championship and the fast and rugged European style circuit is one of the finest for both riders and spectators. A blindingly fast downhill straight feeds riders over a tall jump, through an off-camber right and down a double jump straight before the action roars off to the back of the arduous layout.

Manji has the lot: soil changes ranging from mud, loam and gravel through to bottomless, power-robbing sand and all wrapped up in a package of whoop-dis, berms, bumps, corners and slick mud patches that push both rider and machine to the limits of endurance. If you can ride Cosy Creek fast you're good enough to ride anywhere and as Per Klitland confided one evening in the local pub: "It's the best bloody track in Australia. That straight scares it out of me, every time!"

Race organisation is always first class at Manjimup and it nearly always rains, but the townspeople still make the trip to the track in droves. Perth riders always place Manji high on their list of events that cannot be missed. Most people camp overnight in the scenic area surrounding the track and are ready after a sleep in the van to follow the action as the racers wind through the green and brown landscape.

Visibility and track access are spot-on and there are few riders who can ever blame anything more than their own lack of physical condition for a poor performance on this amazing circuit.

Noble Falls is the home track of the BSA club; tucked away on the side of the Toodyay Road about 40 minutes' drive from the heart of Perth. Enormous improvements to the track and greater parking facilities for spectators are slowly transforming the Falls into one of the top venues on the west coast.

Our map tells the story on the tight, 1.2km hills district track that has attracted more national names over the past 18 months than any other in the state.

Big prize money and butter-smooth race organisation bring the national pros to Noble Falls and the rough, gravel surface keeps them honest. Rahier rode Noble Falls during his visit to Australia and was impressed, although the western bushflies made him seek shelter in a caravan for the best part of the day!

During the '77 season the BSA club



opened out much of the track and cleared some of the heavy undergrowth from the natural bushland setting to improve spectator visibility. Several fast berms and a wide starting chute were also added, along with permanent safety fencing for the fast and sandy main straight. Grass was planted on all areas cleared for spectators on the tall hills surrounding the track and new, permanent showers and catering facilities are on the way.

Tommy Crimmins, former motocross star from the Gold Star era and now secretary for the BSA club says, "We're hoping for the national championships next year and the track will be the best in the state, if not the best in the entire country!"

The Wanneroo circuit of the AJS motorcycle club is a vast, sprawling track developed on land within the car racing complex some 40 minutes from Perth. The track surface consists of both gravel/limestone base and deep sand along with some hard packed clay in the

area known as "the Quarry". The track was designed and constructed primarily by Tony Stipanicev, father of junior motocross champion, Max Stipanicev, and reflects thousands of man hours expended with Tony's heavy construction equipment. Tony effectively carved the circuit from sandy soil in the virgin scrub and it stands as a monument to that man's dedication to the sport that his younger sons love!

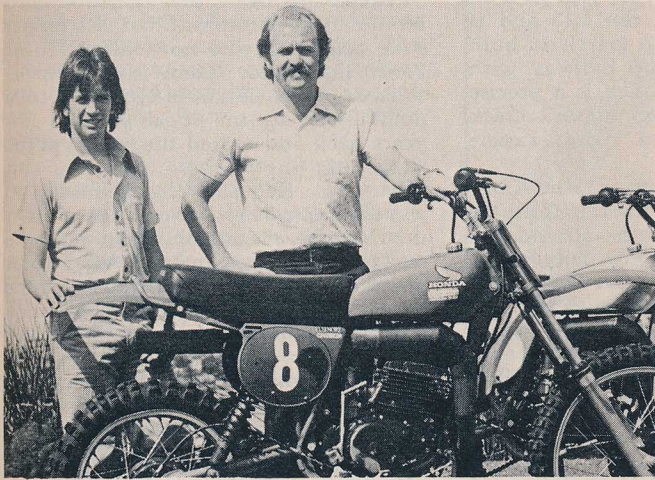
The main spectator feature is a deep quarry with horrifying elevation changes that send bikes soaring against the skyline, before plummeting into the twisty, rock-filled quarry bottom. The action is fast and full-on, as bikes powerslide into the start-finish straight with gravel churning from the rear knobs. Down the tight, sandy turns to the back of the track is a test of stamina even for the fittest of the pros, with neither the light 125s or screaming 400s holding any advantage on a circuit that places the emphasis on skill and physical endurance.



Graeme Smythe, now on Yamaha, scored the national 500cm³ title in 1977 and is aiming to repeat his win this year.



Above: Rob Woodward and Rick Gill campaigned highly modified Hondas during '77 and will stick with the bikes this year.



Above: Rob Woodward and Rick Gill campaigned highly modified Hondas during '77 and will stick with the bikes this year.

Left: Max Stipanicev soars over the Quarry Jump at the Wanneroo Park circuit.

Pit and spectator facilities are excellent and the tall cyclone wire fence keeps the "freeby freaks" away, making the circuit a very promotable proposition for the AJS boys.

Wanneroo's proximity to Perth amidst relatively flat countryside makes it a natural for direct telecast of events but the media moguls have yet to realise that motocross is on their doorstep. The circuit is going from strength to strength and '78 will be a crowning year for the track management and a justifiable reward for their mammoth efforts so far.

South of Perth in the gravel soil beyond Armadale is the Henley Park circuit at Byford, managed and promoted by the Lightweight motorcycle club. In conjunction with a Perth radio station, Byford attracted a record crowd to one major meeting in the '77 season and despite a lack of track watering facilities it is still one of the state's most popular circuits. The loose, rocky surface makes for a change

for the sandgroper riders, most of whom pray that no rain will fall on race day. In the dry it's dusty, but when the skies fall the surface changes to high-traction action at its best. A seemingly bottomless dropaway at the end of straight slows the front runners before they blast into a high berm and funnel down the narrow back straight into a sandy section of whoopdis and braking ruts. There's also a section designed solely for mini-cycle racing and it's a popular battleground for the young guns who race there with almost monotonous regularity.

A few tall jumps mark the approach to the main straight giving the spectators big eyefulls of footpegs as the riders fly by. There were some plans in the works to incorporate a short-circuit dirt track within the Henley Park grounds, but the idea appears to have suffered a terminal seizure. If it ever comes together it will add even more charisma to a track which has a lot going for it in every way.

Heading east into the farming community of Northam, the motocross circuit is about two km from the town's centre. Managed and promoted by the local club, the track hosts several major meetings throughout the season including the annual Northam Scramble. Most big names appear at Northam, which is a long but tight circuit that has few permanent facilities. On racedays however the area is alive with porta-dunnies, food stalls and campers and the riders make up a program with at least 200 names on the gladiatorial menu. There's no track watering facility so dust is often a problem in the early winter months, but the track is normally meticulously prepared by the managing club prior to any open event. Grading of the fine soil restores the surface and the rough, hilly sections at the rear of the track are retained "au naturelle". Being isolated to some degree has handicapped developments at the Northam track but it is still a strong crowd puller.

Bob Couzens runs a pub in Southern Cross, on the western side of Kalgoorlie in the Goldfields district. He also makes up a solid 90 percent of the effort which promotes the annual "King of the Cross" meeting at the motocross track just outside the town. Each year the King meeting draws the state's best riders and the '77 meeting warranted a second west coast trip by South Australian champion Lester Rowley, to fight it out for the huge prize money offered by the promoters. Rowley competed as part of local CCM agent, Clem Nunn's racing effort, along with Mike Wellman and former state champion, Richie Kings.

The meeting receives professional promotion and media exposure in the Goldfields areas and the high-speed, red dirt circuit is a favorite amongst the open (500cm³) class riders. Travelling to Southern Cross is wrought with radar traps and RTA patrols, but the crowds keep on coming to witness high speed racing at its best on a track which is the closest in the west to what is commonly known as "an eastern states speed bowl".

WHO DAT BEHIND DE JOFA?

Top of the WA talent list for '78 is current national 500 class champion, Graeme Smythe.

Graeme hails from Kalgoorlie and often wears a T-shirt with the message, "Shafting is a way of life at Kalgoorlie", screened across the front to betray his loyalties. Smythe rode for Suzuki (WA) for some time on an evil TM400 and was finally grabbed as a hot property for the now-defunct Kawasaki-Amco Eagles team. The Kawasaki works bike which he rode that year had a lot of problems and when the team dissolved Graeme was helped out by Blair Harley with a Maico.

Smythe began to fire early in '77 on the Maico but Blair disbanded the team after spending countless dollars on an exercise which met only with criticism from some major promoters. Graeme left Blair on the best possible terms and returned home to WA to compete for the big money in the McCulloch Suzuki-6IX Motocross meeting at Noble Falls in June. He rode the RM370 of Alan McCarthy but finished a few points down to Anthony Gunter, narrowly missing out on the \$1000 first prize in the final 24-lap moto.

McCarthy had retired from racing due to severe head injuries suffered some months prior; a sad loss for west coast racing.

Ken George Yamaha and Radio 6IX heard of Smythe's interest in the YZ400 racer and added him to the Yamaha team, with Kevin Russell (YZ125 and YZ400) and young Jim Turner (YZ125). Smythe repaid their faith with his shattering Adelaide win in the nationals and is set for an even stronger performance this year. A major oil company has also shown a financial interest in Graeme, who may become

the west's first full-time pro-crosser with a little luck and good management. Off the track Smythe is usually quiet and reserved with only his beard remaining as a remnant of his "Wild Boy from the Bush" days.

Neville Cutts, the 18-year-old whiz now known as the "Manjimup Flyer", is the most prominent member of a family that's spawned some of the most talented dirt racers in Australia. Neville rides both RM250 and RM125 machines for the Shellsport-Suzuki team under the management of tuner John Thompson.

Nev is also a quiet type whose favorite dislikes include both smoking and alcohol but his sole ambition for the future is to become Australian Motocross champion. Last year Cutts just missed the boat and had to settle for second place in the 125 class at the Acusa Park nationals. This year he's on an RM370 as well as the 125 and is aiming at capturing the laurels in both classes! He doesn't stop halfway with anything and on the track is a precise but powerful rider who doesn't crack under the pressure of expert competition.

After work he trains at the Cosy Creek circuit a few kilometres from his Manjimup home and runs around the track as a warmup to his daily riding practice. Many critics claim that Cutts' bikes are heavily modified to near works standards, but his equipment is always frighteningly close to showroom stock. The Shellsport bikes ran optional alloy swingarms and 125 type forks on the larger bikes in '77, while Cutts experimented with Moto-X Fox suspension that he finally found to his liking. In his spare hours he burbles around in a Torana SLR5000 or wheelies through the bush on his RL250 trials bike, but his ambition goes a lot higher. Nev's favorite set of wheels is the Lamborghini!

Bevan Blakers also made a big mark on the west coast scene in '77 and like Neville Cutts is a product of the south west town of Manjimup. Blakers rides Maicos under the sponsorship of Western Australian importer George Cowie and along with team mates Geoff Mouritz and Peter Benson, went a long way towards putting the Maico name back into the winner's circles last season. Bevan shone at the '76 national championships in Queensland and was a regular top placer in state competition in '77. He finished the year with a big win in the Hang Ten championship on the sandy Spearwood circuit. Consistency and precision are his calling card on the track and along with the other big names, Blakers is almost unimpressive to watch. He doesn't wheelie — he just goes fast and wins!

Rick Gill is now over 25 and therefore eligible for a pension by contemporary racing standards. Rick rode everything from a CZ-powered sidecar through to both 250 and 400 CZs in 1976, but last year dropped the

chair to concentrate on his own highly developed CR Honda equipment. Even the CZ400 was put into mothballs following the CR360 Honda which Rick developed along with local tuner, John Ballarine.

Rick is married and operates his own bike shop in Osborne Park, completely independent of his father's CZ-Montesa outlet in Leederville, and has been one of WA's top talents for many years. He rode in the nationals this year along with Honda team mate, Rob Woodward and also went east to compete in a few rounds of the Mister Motocross series. Rick is on Hondas again this year and is proud of the fact that he's never broken any bones in his racing career. "Some of the other guys try too hard," he says, "but I ride to finish and don't take too many risks". For Rick Gill that formula often equates with winning!

Richie Kings, the moustachioed farmer from Southern Cross, is a former state champion who now rides CCM for Perth distributor Clem Nunn. Richie took the early CR250M Honda to total domination of the local scene a few years back and scored the honors at the King of the Cross event in his hometown. He's also one of the few to win the annual Harley Scramble event at the hillside circuit of York and is a regular top runner at all west coast events. Kings crashes rarely, but when he does it's spectacular. His recent endo completely destroyed the Marzocchi front end of his exotic ground-shaker and left Richie with a giant headache. He's back on CCM this year, along with Mike Wellman, a former trials rider and expatriate Englishman who has taken to the CCM like the proverbial duck. Wellman even uses an XT500 Yamaha as his daily transport and rides to work wearing an ancient helmet with a Union Jack emblazoned on the sides!

Occasionally two heads are better than one and the Woodward brothers, Robert and Anson have proven that point during their motocross riding careers. Both guys originally rode for Team Honda (WA) but Honda and Anson parted at the end of the '76 season, leaving him as a privateer on his own CR125. Ironically, Anson began to shine soon after the change in sponsorship and during the '77 season he placed consistently — when his bike kept going!

Anson was plagued by machine failures with the CR and his future for '78 is uncertain. He has the talent and the inherent cool that's necessary for any racer and with a reliable machine and some sponsorship support he may well be the surprise package in the 125 class of '78.

Rob put in his best year yet on the Mugen-kitted CR250, claimed to develop 27.5kW (37 horsepower)! After an outright win at the Bel-Ray/Harley event at York, he travelled to SA with Rick Gill as representative of the WA Honda team. Last year Rob proved he could mix it with the heavies. Both



Dealer teams are big news in WA. This is the very young team from Cully's Motorcycle Centre in Perth. Cully's also has a four-man road race team!



Above: Part of the Shellsport Suzuki line-up: (L to r) Neville Cutts, Glen Hollands and Greg Thomas.

Below: Noble Falls track.

brothers are never short of practice areas, as they have their own motocross training tracks built on to the Gidgegannup property which they share with neighbor Austin McCarthy and his son Allan, a former WA 500cm³ champion.

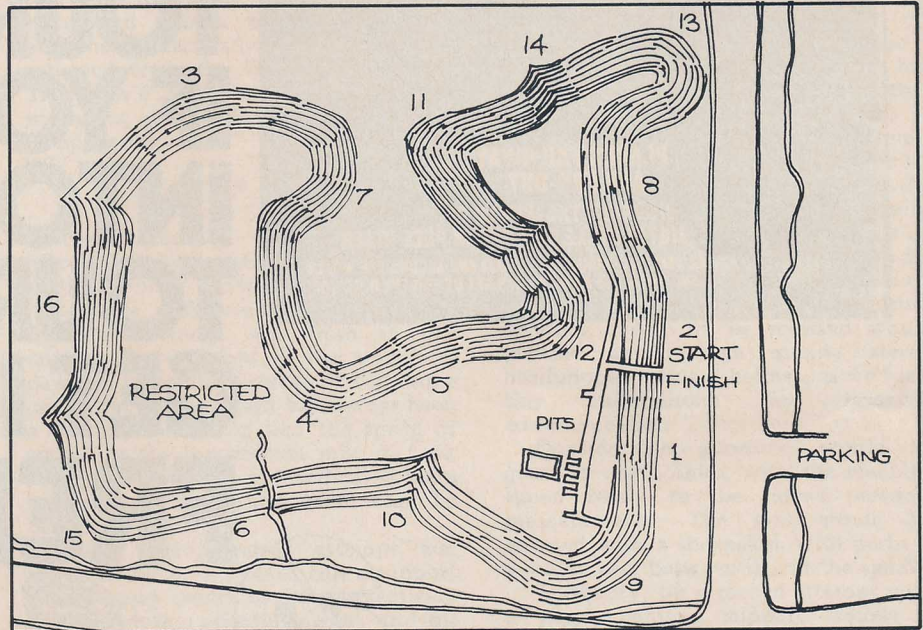
In the 125 class Jim Turner (WA Yamaha team), Rob Moores (Ron Gill Suzuki team) and privateer Garry Turner (no relation to Jim) all put in a year of savage competition challenging Shellsport-Suzuki riders, Glen Hollands (WA 125cc champion in '76) and Greg Thomas at every meeting. Clayton Mills, a former gun in the junior classes, didn't have a fun time for his first year with the "real racers". The move from a light 125 to the booming power of the one-off CR420 four-stroke didn't help young Mills' confidence and the mid-season swap to a CR250 only added to the confusion for this potentially promising young rider.

Craig McCarthy, a fiery, red-haired throttle jockey who rode originally for Honda during a period of short-lived sponsorship, switched back to the privateer existence on his own RM370 and then landed a light sponsorship deal with Midland Motorcycles. When Craig's firing he's insane, but his irregular performances and lack of self-discipline might keep him from ever making the progress which his raw riding talents deserve. We hope he gets his act together.

Also on a Suzuki, Morgan Smith of the McCulloch-Bel Ray team had a season of mixed fortune with frequent machine problems that were not reflective of his standard of meticulous preparation. Smith used to be the terror of the 125 class, then moved up to the 250 bracket and tamed his performance by diluting it with a dose of precision. He has the talent and '78 should be a winning year for this young man with a 100 percent professional attitude.

CRYSTAL BALL GAZING

Limited promotion on the professional level has dogged the growth



of west coast motocross. The WAMCA offers no consolidated promotion or public relations assistance while professional promoters are few and far between in the west. Westsport Promotions conducted two Noble Falls ventures in a nine-month period which drew strong crowds, offered more than \$6000 in prize money and returned virtually zero accountable profit for the group. The Hang Ten involvement was supposed to do wonders for the sport but realised very little in long term effects, even after a state final round which was televised direct in Perth. Most other meetings receive little or no publicity apart from a few posters scattered throughout the state's motorcycle shops. Westsport are no longer promoting motocross meetings and don't intend to become involved in the future. There are no other professional promoters within the WA motocross world and the renaissance of the Mister Motocross series seems highly unlikely in the west. Negotiations for a '77 round of this national series were

rejected by the BSA club and Westsport, after they received a proposal which both parties regarded as "ridiculous" from an eastern states promoter.

My personal involvement as manager of Westsport may appear to tinge this summary with some bias, but I firmly believe that the sport will lie in mothballs until a consolidated, professional approach is formulated by all involved clubs and the ruling WAMCA body.

No one wants to see west coast motocross lost in limbo, particularly with the talent that's kicking about the state in '78. The sport's fate as a professional enterprise, is dubious and no one really seems convicted sufficiently to make a firm commitment for future growth. That growth will only come through public awakening of the existence of motocross and through money spent on advertising and promotion that will draw the Sunday crowds away from the weekend rags to see just what's going on out there in the hills!