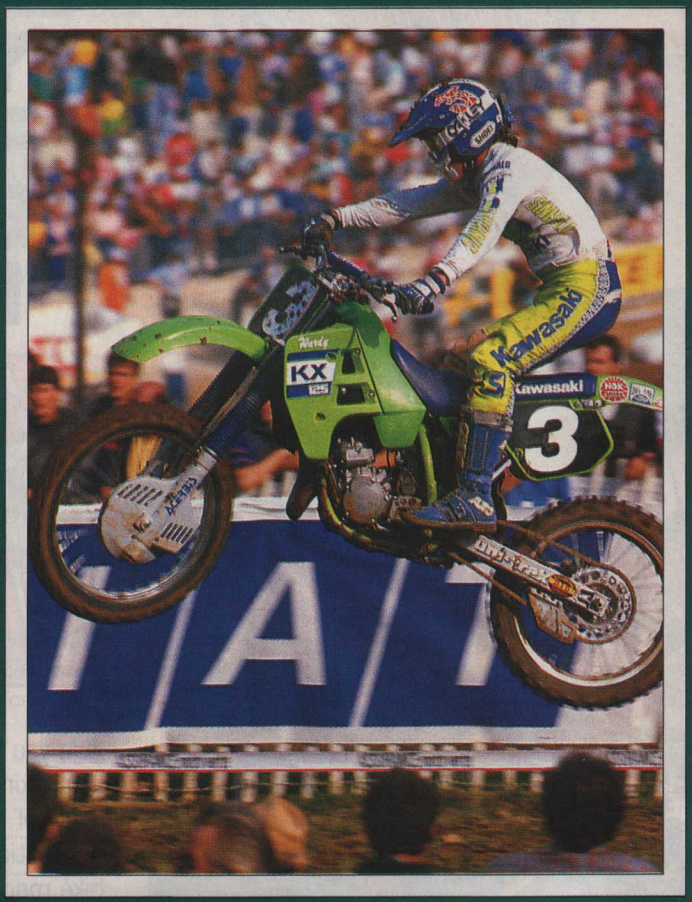
BACK-WARD

In Jeff Ward's own words

If you are like us, then you tend to remember years by what was happening in the world of motocross. The late '60s and early '70s might have been a time of social upheaval for most Americans, but we will remember it as an era of Euro-bike domination and leaky fork seals. The mid-'70s was the "Hey, Japanese Bikes and American Riders Are Pretty Good Era," the '80s was the "American-Domination, Liquid-Cooled-Super-Bikes Era," etc. Motocross has seen some unbelievable changes, but one thing has stayed the same for most of the sport's U.S. history: Every era has been a Jeff Ward era. Ward rode his last motocross championship-chasing lap at the final round of the '92 AMA 500 series, but he will always be a part of motocross because of his incredible career. Here's a look at the many eras of motocross as Jeff Ward saw them.



"This is the Motocross des Nations in '88 in France. I'm on a 125. I hadn't ridden a 125 for four years at that point. It's a big adjustment when you're used to 500s. I passed up a chance to ride a 125 in the '86 des Nations; now I wish I had ridden."

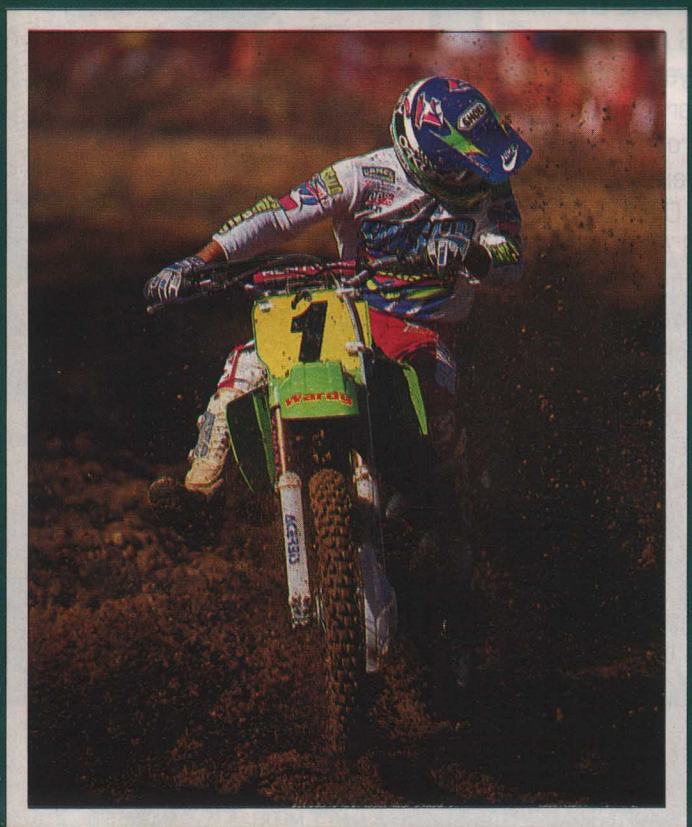


Photo by Mike Sweeney

"I'm getting roosted pretty hard here, but that's part of the game in 500 racing. I always loved the 500s from the first time I raced them in the early '80s. My bike was an air-cooled KX420 then. I'd hate to see the 500 class go."

"I'm behind Bradshaw here in '90 at Axton, but I eventually passed him. He has speed and talent but at that time he wasn't focused enough on racing. He wanted to be flashy and get the limelight and win, but it's hard to do it all. I just concentrated on racing and won that day."

"This is the start at Binghamton, NY. Ricky [13] is the only rider I had to think about in all the years I was racing."

"I remember when I couldn't wait to race a supercross and I always enjoyed the intensity it forced me to have during the race. Now I just ride for fun and won't go near Kawasaki's supercross practice track. I don't want to work that hard." ►

"These are the bikes I won championships on. Kawasaki wanted to give them all to me but I didn't take them. I don't have the space for them and I think Kawasaki might show them now and then, so more people will enjoy them than if I just crammed them in my garage." ▼

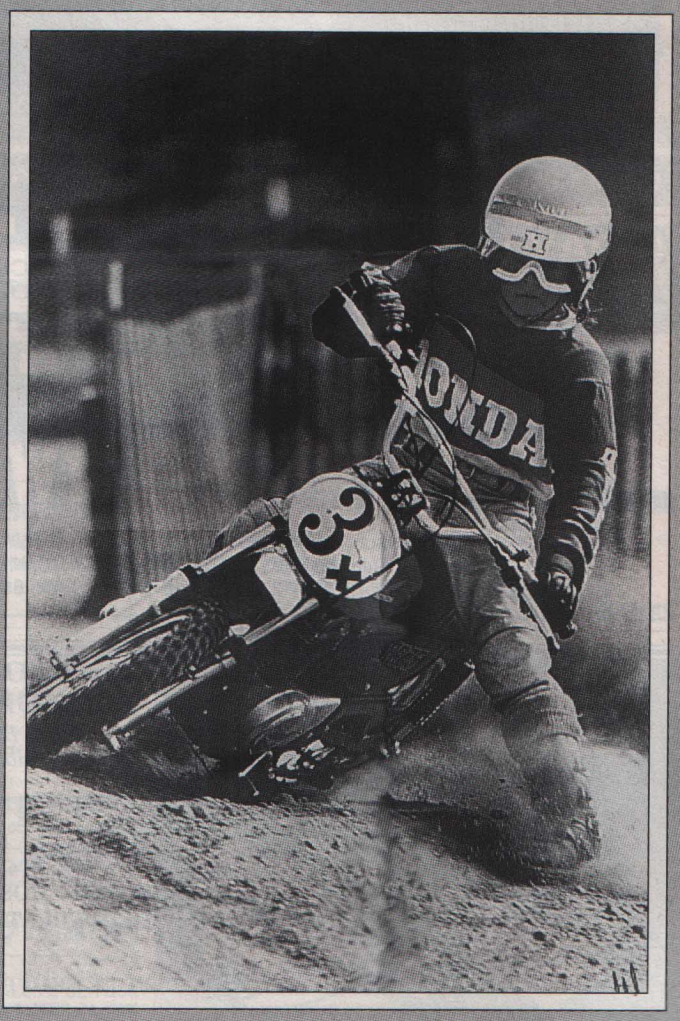
9
Kawasaki
HONDA

WARD

◄ "Here I'm riding the '83 works bike at the Dallas Supercross. We were struggling with the bike, sorting it out all season. People thought works bikes were magic but they were a headache until you got them working right."

"I'm about seven here. I don't have a gear sponsor yet, and my Bonanza mini bike is a little big for me, but I'd ride anything I could get my hands on—even my dad's Triumph. My dad was a good motocrosser and second in the National trials championship in America. Riding with the trials guys helped me a lot." ►

"The hard realities of racing hit me at an early age. I thought racing was just bikes and fun but I never expected the girls, fame and money. The trophy girl is Larry Huffman's daughter."



"This is an ad I did for Honda in '75 for the XR75. I got the first XR75 Honda brought to America around '72 and had a factory-supported XR ride by '75. It was a great bike to race until the two-strokes got better."

WARD

◄ "This shot of me winning the final 125 round in '84 reminds me of what a difference physical training made in my results. Before I trained I just rode, didn't lift any weights. I trained hard before the '84 125 Nationals and won eight out of the ten races in the series. Training isn't as much of an advantage in motocross today because everybody who is serious is training."

"I was pumped when DIRT BIKE interviewed me for this story in '77, but I was bummed because I didn't get to meet Super Hunky." ►

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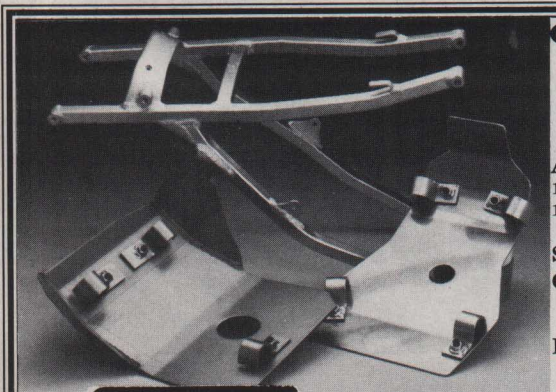

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QUICK KIDS

Looking into the knobby ball

MINI STARS

By Hillary Clay Hicks

Photography by John P. Hesson

JEFF (THE FLYING FRECKLE) WARD BORN 6-22-61, 4'10". 85 lbs. Mission Viejo, California. HERO: Marty Smith. FAVORITE TRACK: Carlsbad. Jeff's been racing for seven years, is currently a Honda factory rider. MAJOR TROPHIES: NMA World Mini Race of Champions Winner, 1975; 1974 and 1975 AMA Winternationals Minicycle Champ; First Place in YAMA flattracking and National Champion, 1974. BUSINESS: Jeff Ward Racing Products, 1315 E. St. Andrews Place, Santa Ana, California 92705; (714) 546-6923. They sell a sleeved-down 100cc Elsinore, and Yamaha, Suzuki and Honda products. CAREER PLANS: "Within a year I'll be riding 125 pro, as soon as possible. I'll continue with NMA, though, while I shift to 125s which NMA also runs. I'll try a 250 when I can handle one."

"Don't look back — something might be gaining on you." Leroy Robert Paige said that. Ol' Satch probably wasn't talking about motocross, but the sentiment applies. In Europe the riders in their late 20s — early 30s tend to dominate, but over here it's a young man's game: Marty Tripes — Superbowl hero at 16 and 17; Marty Smith — national champion at 17 and 18; Tony DiStefano — national champ at 18 and 19; Bob Hannah — national champ at 19.

These guys are all pushing 20 now, but what about some of the

"Yamaha protested me for riding backward on the course after this crash in a qualifier at the Rose Bowl in '85. You can be fined or disqualified for riding backward on the course, depending on how much of a hazard you are to the other riders. It was the last race of the season, and I would have lost the championship had I been disqualified. Three months after the race I got the answer to the $200,000 question—the AMA decided to fine me $500 rather than disqualify me."

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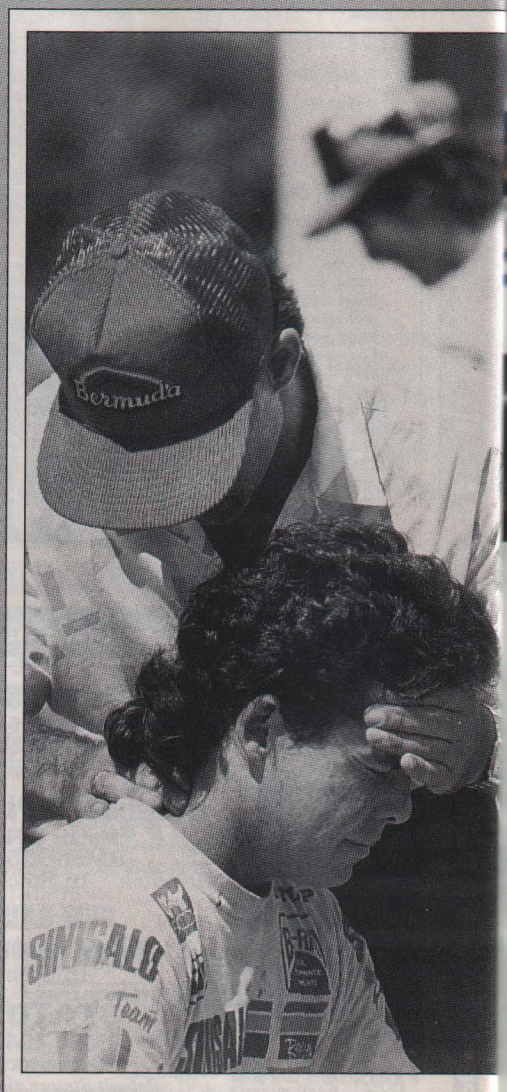
WARD

◄ "Wow, the '87 des Nations at Unadilla—the muddy mess, a nightmare race, the conditions were the worst I ever raced in. I had to take off my goggles after the first turn. It just shows how determined we are to win the des Nations—that's why we always win it."



"Here's Jeff Spencer cracking my neck for the millionth time. He helped me a lot with training and motivation. For me, it's much easier to stay motivated if you have someone to report to."

◄ "Here's me, Ricky Johnson and Jeff Stanton. Stanton approaches the sport more like I did than any other rider. He rides within his limits, avoids crashes and injuries and goes for results rather than trying to get noticed for flashy riding. I don't know if that's a formula for a long, successful motocross career, but it worked okay for me." ❑