

PREMIERE ISSUE

MARCH / APRIL 98 \$3.95

# RAIDER

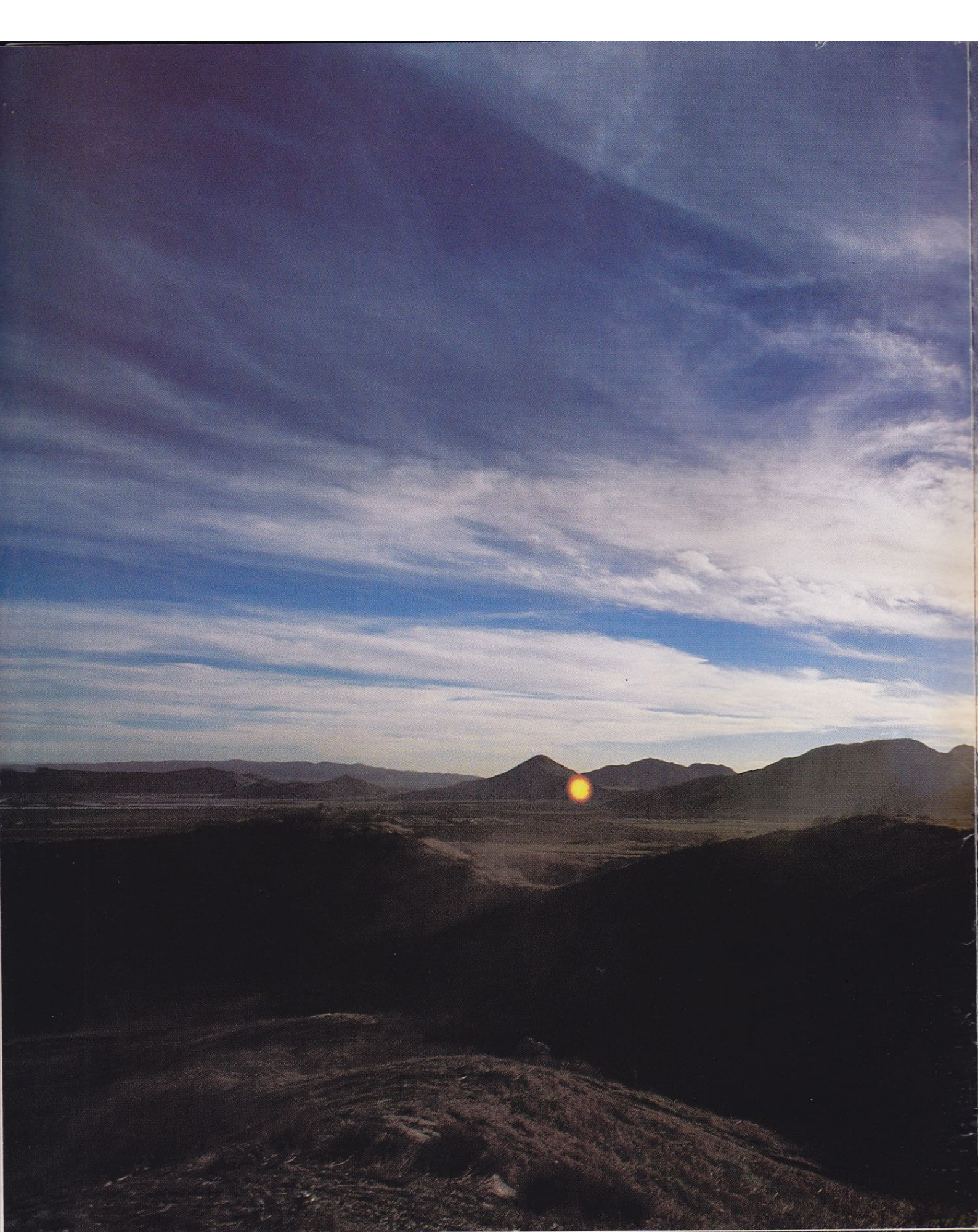
ILLUSTRATED

№1



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Balzer photo



Jeremy McGrath at Beaumont, CA

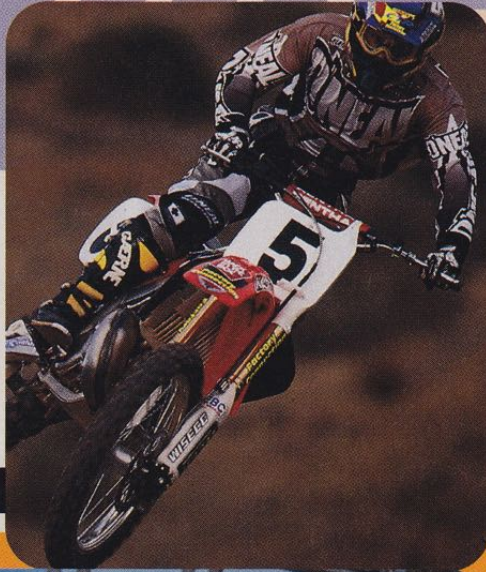
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*Mike LaRocco might be one of the most misunderstood guys in motocross. We already know for sure that he's one of the fastest.*



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*Want to meet beautiful models and get free clothes to boot? You can tell everyone that you're a factory rider. Or just hold a fashion shoot in L.A.*



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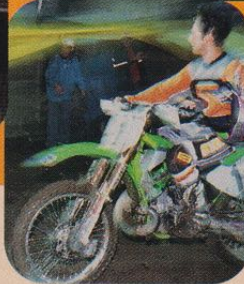
*Once upon a time the kings of motocross were Broc Glover, David Bailey and Ron Lechien. They all had the same tailor, and his name was John Gregory. Our own Eric Johnson takes a long, hard look at what used to be an empire.*

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*In case you haven't been paying attention, those French guys are pretty fast.*



*The 1998 Supercross Series kicks off in Los Angeles and some guy from France wins in front of 61,588 fans.*

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**WARNING**

The photos in this magazine are of highly trained professional or expert riders. Don't even think for a minute that you're badder than they are. They're know what's up—you'll get hurt if you try to copy the stuff they do. But if you must try to duplicate their stunts, wear the appropriate safety gear and never ride beyond your capabilities. Use your head.

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Mantoni

# REASON FOR BEING

Obviously, rumors of our existence aren't rumors anymore. After several years of planning, several months of talking, and a lifetime of hard work, the first magazine version of Racer X Illustrated is finally in your

BY DAVEY COOMBS

hands. For some time now we have been trying to hone our skills and find our audience in a crowded marketplace. When you think about it, it may seem a little reckless to start a magazine when there are already several other titles out on the shelves that cover our sport. Why the big makeover for Racer X Illustrated?

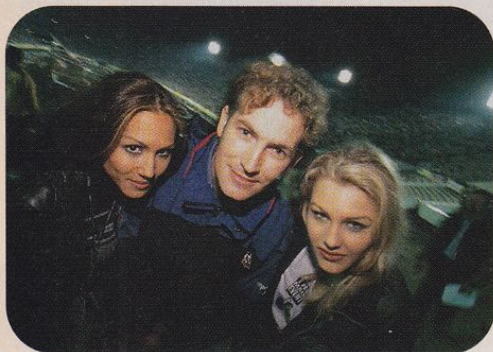
The answer is simple. We at Racer X III feel that motocross and supercross are finally poised for adoption into mainstream America. The crowds are bigger than ever at events across the country, television coverage seems to grow bigger and better with every season, and outside-the-box corporate sponsors are finally starting to tap into our sport. Dirt bike racing is all over the Internet now, so much so that a guy from West Virginia has as much access to information as a guy standing right in the pits. There are also more motocross videos out there than you can fit into a small Blockbuster. All of this exposure can only mean one thing - company is coming.

The promoters, both indoors and out, have picked up on this theme and are laying out the red carpet. The tracks are better, the show is better, the presentation is better - everything in our sport seems to be changing for the better.

So why not a better magazine?

(One last thing. I always promised someone that I would do this if we ever went big:

This issue is dedicated to Damon Bradshaw. Happy hunting, Damon.)



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Sure,  
Racer X  
Has Informative  
Interviews, Great  
Race Coverage  
and Valuable  
Articles...

But We Read it  
For the Ads.

(Congratulations  
Racer X  
on Your Premier  
Magazine Issue)





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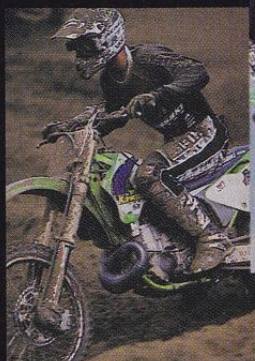


**Q: When was the last time  
the same brand won all  
the major Motocross  
National Championships?**

**A: This year.**

( The brand was Alpinestars.)

Jeff Emig. 250 Supercross #1



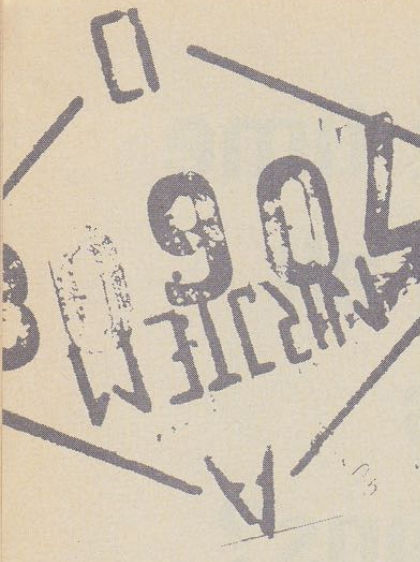
Jeff Emig. 250 National #1



Ricky Carmichael. 125 National #1



Alpinestars. Tech 8 and Tech 5. 1997 National Champions.



# MAZDA

## Television

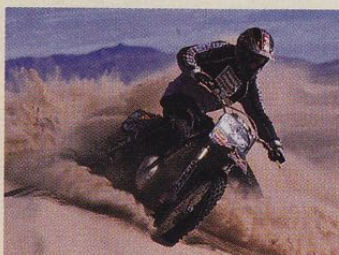
How about that new Mazda truck commercial? It's pretty cool. Motocross bikes are cranking around and a hawk-eyed Mazda owner sights a rider stranded at the side of the track. Whoa! It's a hotty under the helmet and she's in distress. She must've had her fanny pack (ed) and broke a wrench while attempting a trackside repair. A thrown chain. I suspect. (Or maybe a broken neck-lace.) The gate drops as Mazda Man motos directly across the tack, flying downhill like the toy truck scene in Crustyfirma IX. Over jumps and under riders, to the rescue he races! But then only a jackass carrying standard American tools in a Japanese truck would ask this question to a model/motobabe: "5/8 or 3/4?" She smugly answers, "Ten millimeter." The jackass coolly redeems himself by pulling a 10mm from his back pocket with Emig-like speed. "My favorite," he says. So smooth is the Mazda Man! **Ryan Doyle, West Sand Lake, NY**

*(Does anybody here remember the old pick-up truck commercial from about a dozen years ago where the guy forgets his red bandanna in the pits and goes out racing, only to have his mom go chasing him the truck? She finally runs him down in the mud or something. It might have been the first commercial about motocross ever. Editor.)*

Did anyone see the recent "Diagnosis Murder" television show that aired on December 11, 1997? If you did, you would know - it was fairly comical. Seth, I mean "Spleen," was murdered when his front axle broke. (It was sabotaged!) All of the stunts that weren't footage from Crusty Demons of Dirt, er, I mean Down and Dirty, reminded me of that scene at the end of Terraforma 3 where the guys were pulling the full-on goon session. Oh yeah, what about the acting? I haven't seen acting of that caliber since Winners Take All, or maybe even Grease 2. The best part was when they Spleen's jump was faked with trick photography.

What was that all about? It's no wonder that the public has such a negative image of our sport. Our image is formed by people who are subjected to this crap!

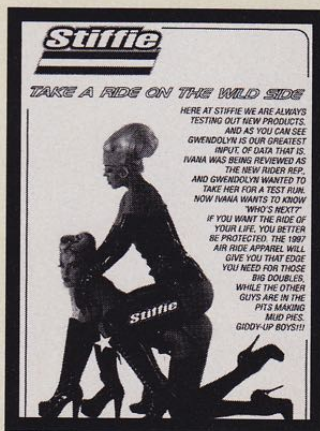
**Pat Kearney  
Sales Scum  
Acerbis USA, Poway, CA**



*(That's like saying that "The Dukes of Hazzard" are responsible for the redneck image that NASCAR has. On second thought, maybe it is. Editor.)*

## X Grrrlz

Help! I'm confused. After intensely reading through your recent issues while looking for all the trickiest, latest stuff, I found myself staring endlessly at the advertisement for Stiffie. Is Stiffie expanding into the world of suspension components and systems? By the looks of the equipment in this advertisement, I would say they have the most refined fork legs and rear suspension components available on the market. I'll bet they have the very best compression and rebound dampening settings available for me to fine-tune my ride. No doubt Stiffie has experimented with over and over with the clickers shown here until they obtained the most desirable settings for each particular riding style. Depending on which positions they favor, of course. But on a related note - tractability - I thought spikes were illegal unless racing on ice. Guess I'll have to call the AMA's Pro division on that ruling. I'm also interested in the new graphics but it is very difficult to attain



color coordination from a black-and-white. Please advise Stiffie to upgrade to a full color advertisement in Racer X's upcoming issues.

Sincerely,  
**Alan Brutto, Waverly, TN**

There seems to be some question in the last few numbers whether Racer X should go with Ryno or Leeann in the "Ask Someone" column. If we can only have one, I would like to see you go with Leeann Tweeden for reasons given below, but if you want to make me a happy reader, you will find room for both. I've never met Ryno, but if he is half as sharp and funny in person as he is in print, he would be a blast to see in action.

However, I have met Leeann Tweeden. She was busy at the time so I was only able to talk with

her for a few minutes without making a pest of myself. Then I got out of her way and watched her in action. She is some kind of impressive! And I'm not just talking about her looks. Where did someone her age (24, I'm told) get all that poise and self-confidence? I'm in love with her! Okay, so I'm old enough to be her grandfather - it makes no difference! Women seem to like her too, at least those not intimidated by her. My daughters, ages 21 and 23, liked her and found her very interesting.

By the way, I like those Stiffie ads, even though I feel a little bit guilty about it. They're so clever and funny, they're almost not lewd. Hey, a dirty mind is a terrible thing to waste.

Racer X is a nice piece of work. Good job. Who knows? Today Racer X, tomorrow The New York Times.

Sincerely,  
**Vincent M. D'Addio, Signal Hill, CA**  
P.S. I just got Leeann's pin-up calendar. Best pin-up calendar I've ever seen!

## Readers

You guys are undoubtedly the best. I'm a moto-x'er as well as a flat tracker. I subscribe to Cycle News, Dirt Bike, MXA and Motocross Journal, and Racer X Illustrated, of course! Yours is the one I look forward to the most! I love your dedication to Evel Knievel! How do I get a back copy of your issue with your interview with him? Also, please send out some catalogs of your stuff/apparel etc. I need stickers for my whole team-we want to do what we can to support Racer X! **Larry Harris II, Freebird Racing, (via email)**

*(The entire Evel Knievel interview can be found at our website: [www.racexill.com](http://www.racexill.com). Back issues of the infamous "Evel Issue" are long gone. Editor.)*

Racer X is looking better all the time. Every time I take a look at what the other mags are doing, it makes me wonder if these people even have a clue on what the real world of the sport is about. Is there some kind of law that says a big circulation, slick magazine is not allowed to have a sense of humor. Glad to hear you're on a roll.

**Rick Sieman, Somewhere in Baja, Mexico.**

*(Rick Sieman is better known as "Super Hunky," the legend behind original Dirt Bike magazine. Editor.)*

*Got something to say? Write to us at: Racer X Illustrated, Route 12 Box 267, Morgantown, WV 26505. Fax 304-284-0081. Or you can find us at our website: [www.racexill.com](http://www.racexill.com).)*

SMOKE 'EM IF YOU GOT 'EM.



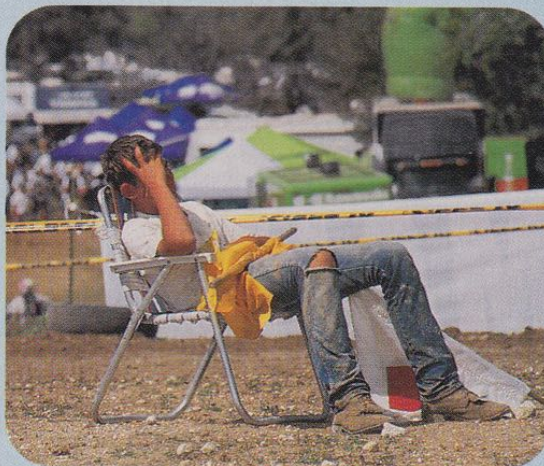
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## Is that a Mazda under the tent?

It wasn't just the supercross series promoter that was able to procure outside-the-industry sponsorship support. Team Chaparral and its main man Jeremy McGrath are competing in 1998 with corporate support from Mazda trucks. The deal, which was brokered by Dave Damron and Larry Brooks, will provide a nice infusion of cash into the operation, which is filling its financial war chest from a number of unique sponsorship arrangements. Furthermore, Team Factory Connection has hooked up with southern California-based fast food giant Jack-in-the-Box to create a substantial sponsorship program for their new rider Mike LaRocco. More about that elsewhere in this issue.

# FLAGMAN HALL OF FAME



# IGNITION

## Red Wardy

Ever wonder what Michael Jordan would look like in a Los Angeles Lakers uniform?

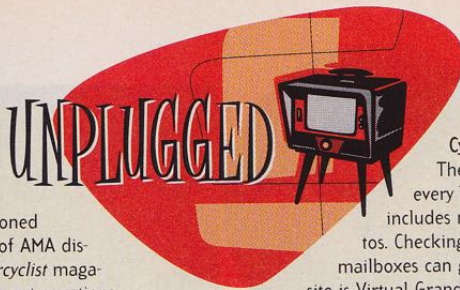
Check out this rarely-seen photo that we lifted from the JT archives: That's Jeff Ward, one of the greatest motocrossers ever and Kawasaki's all-time poster

child, wearing Honda gear and putting a Honda sticker over the Kawasaki logo! It seems that early in his career Wardy was unsure

whether he was going to sign with the green team or split for the Red Riders, and JT Racing wanted to be ready with a cool advertisement if Ward decided to make the switch. He ended up at Kawi, of course, and together they won seven AMA titles during their long and successful relationship. Now imagine how different the motocross world would have been had Wardy gone over to Honda. Instead of riding red bikes, would Wardy's rivals David Bailey, Rick Johnson, Jeff Stanton, and J-M Bayle all have ridden for Kawasaki instead? Food for thought....



## 8 Motocross Web Sites to Check Out



### American Motorcyclist Association ([www.amacycle.org](http://www.amacycle.org))

The official Website of the 220,000-member AMA, this comprehensive page is the place to find AMA-sanctioned schedules, race results, and communications, plus a list of AMA districts and clubs. The in-house produced *American Motorcyclist* magazine is also attached for your reading pleasure. If you've got questions about the issues and positions of the AMA, this page has the answers.

### Racer X On Line ([www.racexill.com](http://www.racexill.com))

If you like reading *Racer X Illustrated*, you'll really enjoy surfing our Website. Racer X On Line includes many of our standard features, plus assorted race reports, road trips, and video reviews. The page is also the new home of Mikeee P.'s Fresh Dirt, a weekly gossip column that's as funny as it is informative and the raucous Racer X chat room. New readers might also want to check out the Archives section for such nuggets as Ask Leeann and the now-infamous Evel Knievel interview.

### Motonews.com ([www.motonews.com](http://www.motonews.com))

This is basically a massive home page for our buddy Steve Bruhn, aka "The Factory Spectator." Using a digital camera, a laptop and a lot of frequent flyer miles, Steve posts a comprehensive site that includes coverage of just about every major race in America. There's also a bunch of Moto- subsections, such as MotoChat, MotoTalk (message board), MotoSoftware (downloads of games and features), and a strong links page. The Factory Spectator sets the standard for Internet race-reporting.

### Off-Road.Com ([www.off-road.com](http://www.off-road.com))

An excellent site for the off-road riders of the world, this massive page includes trucks, cars, bikes, and buggies. Go straight to the Dirt Bike Pages to find all kinds of dirt bike articles, tests, race and ride reports and the always-interesting motorcycle musings of *Dirt Bike* magazine legend Rick "Super Hunky" Sieman. You can spend hours reading his articles alone.

### Cycle News On Line ([www.cyclenews.com](http://www.cyclenews.com))

The weekly motorcycle newspaper brought to cyber-life. Updated every Tuesday just after the ink dries on the actual newspaper, the site includes most of the major stories and interviews but just a few of the photos. Checking out In the Wind on the Net before the paper gets to your friends' mailboxes can give you a real bench-racing advantage, but the highlight of this site is Virtual Grandstand, where you can get live Supercross and Outdoor National reports as the laps are happening.

### MX Large ([www.mxlarge.com](http://www.mxlarge.com))

Need to know who's leading the Irish National MX Championships? How about the Swedish Side-Car Series? Look no further than M.X. Large. This British-based page is a great place to find out just what's happening in Europe, whether it's motocross and supercross, or enduro and trials. The page is split into two main sections: Sportscentre, with results and news from all over the world, and PointMXL, where visitors can find features, archives, links, and other features. The quick and comprehensive GP results alone are worth the trip.

### Motocross Unplugged Online ([www.xcelco.on.ca/~mxu/](http://www.xcelco.on.ca/~mxu/))

Another good site to find out all the latest information on motocross, supercross and arenacross, but it doesn't feature a lot of pictures yet. Visitors will find a screen full of tech reviews on bikes and products, a motocross track directory, and a rare Yellow Pages section that lists good, old-fashioned phone numbers and mailing addresses.

### AMA Supercross Series ([www.supercross.cyclenews.com](http://www.supercross.cyclenews.com))

The official Website of the series promoter, this page is loaded with race and rider information, including bios, results, point standings, schedules, ticket information, and lots of other good stuff. There's also a direct link to *Cycle News'* Virtual Grandstand, there's an official SX merchandise mall, and a fun feature called Scoopercross that has all the latest series info. The recent addition of cyber pit reporter "The Factory Spectator" to this page should liven things up even more.



## MYSTERY PHOTO

If you've been a regular reader of *Racer X Illustrated* or live somewhere around LAX Airport, then you've probably seen the infamous Oakley billboard that went up last fall. (The billboard was featured on a recent cover under our old newspaper format.) The photo of Carmichael was taken at the Pontiac SX last year and handed over to Ricky at another race. Ricky in turn gave it to Johnny O' at Oakley, who passed it on to the art department. The photo was then chosen for the one-time only billboard, but there was one small problem: No one at Oakley knew who took the picture, and consequently they did not know where to send the check. No one in the magazine business seemed to know who the photographer was, either. However, when the billboard photo appeared in our "Lowlifes On Wheels" issue, someone finally stepped forward. A reader saw the photo and recognized it as his own, which proves that seeing your photo on the cover of *Racer X* is even cooler than seeing it on a milk carton! Contrary to what Nappi told his Journalism teacher, it was Buffalo, New York's Dave St. Onge that gets the glory for the Carmichael photo. Congrats on a fine shot, Dave. Next round's on you!



Above: RC, Jeffro and Ty Davis on the streets of Vegas.

Far right: The Bostrom brothers and friends.

Right: ROY Brock Sellards.

(Photos Bonello)



## VIVA

Add the AMA/Speedvision 1997 Rider of the Year Award to the list of Jeff Emig's recent accomplishments. At an awards banquet held in December at the Flamingo Hilton Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas, Emig edged out flat-track-er Scott Parker, superbiker John Kocinski, speedway rider Greg Hancock, and road racer

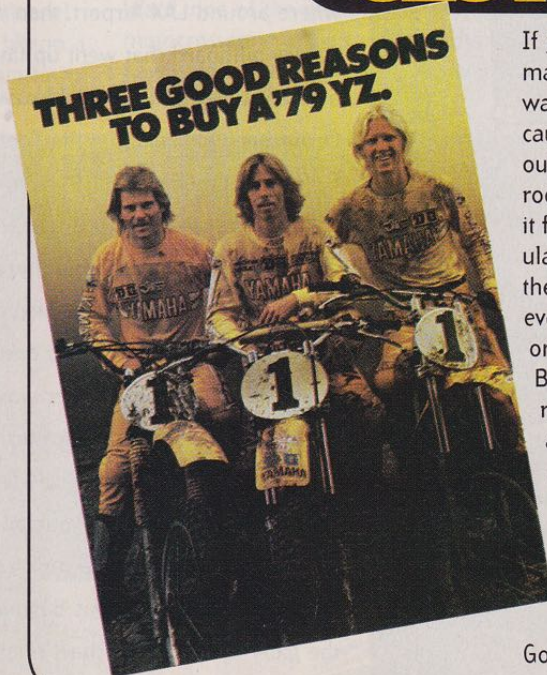
Doug Chandler for the AMA/Speedvision ROY award. Jeffro accepted the trophy and the \$5,000 check that came along with it while sporting a nifty black Shift suit, which led banquet emcee Larry Maiers to crack a few jokes about the progressive threads. "I guess we just do things a little differently in motocross," said Emig. 125cc National Champion Ricky Carmichael was also on hand to pick up his 125cc National Championship trophy, but he decided to take the traditional dress route with a classic black tuxedo which he rented from Cisino's Tuxedo back home in Tallahassee, Florida. Brock Sellards earned AMA Pro Rookie of the Year honors while Nick Wey won the new Horizons Award. 125 SX Series winners Kevin Windham (West) and Tim Ferry (East) were awarded their N<sup>o</sup>1 plates, but Ferry was on his honeymoon and skipped the Vegas gig to be with his new bride.

# IGNITION

## DOUG HENRY

Doug Henry was recently featured in a comprehensive human interest profile on CNN. The television news superpower chose Henry for an expanded piece because of the significant challenges he has faced in his racing career, which include a broken back, simultaneous broken arms, and an intestinal disorder... And that's just since he became a factory rider! CNN, regarded as the most respected news service in the world, did a wonderful job of communicating Doug's inspirational story, in addition to making motocross look like the serious professional, athletic endeavor that it is. In fact, they only called the racers "daredevils" once.

## THE PITCH



If you grew up reading all of the motocross magazines like we did, chances are there was an advertisement or two that really caught your eye. Maybe you ripped the page out of the mag and stuck it up on your bedroom wall, or you took it to school and used it for a book cover. The point of this new regular feature is to salute some of those ads — the coolest, most creative ads our sport has ever seen. Take the 1979 Yamaha YZ pitch on the left. Rick Burgett, Bob Hannah and Broc Glover combined to give Yamaha a rare three-title sweep in 1978, and their ad agency put the riders' success to good use in this advertisement. Check out the old school haircuts and those boss N<sup>o</sup>1 plates — isn't that bitchin'? And all three rode in JT gear, of course. You just don't see a lot of ads like this anymore... Or do you?

Got any suggestions for the next Pitch?



photo by Pat Boulland

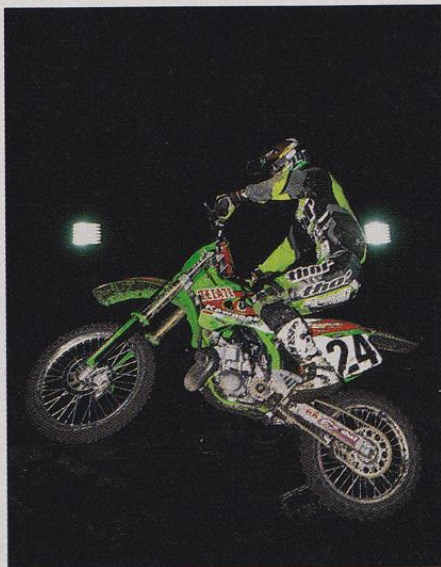
## Electronica

In a bold step towards making racing more enjoyable in this age of electronics and easier for riders to find more

sponsors, the FIM is changing over to electronic scoring for the 1998 250cc World MX Championships. Each motorcycle that qualifies will be equipped with an electronic transponder, as shown on the fenders above, so that each rider's current position can be seen on television screens and scoreboards. Because number plates will no longer be necessary for scoring, the riders may use their side No plates to feature sponsors. (The front No plate will still carry a small digit for the benefit of on-site fans and simple identification.) The U.S. supercross promoters have expressed some interest in purchasing just such a system, but the cost is said to exceed \$100,000.00. However, after the problems that many had trying to figure out whether or not Sebastien Tortelli was lapped at the L.A. SX, PACE Motor Sports is said to be fast-tracking the project.

## Team Kegger

Ever see an old movie called A Touch of Evil with Charlton Heston? In it Heston drinks a lot of Carte Blanca beer while hanging out in a Mexican border town. The movie is said to have done wonders for the Mexico-based Carta Blanca label. This year the same brewery (Cerveceria Cuauhtemoc Moctezuma) is trying to make a similar splash with another one of their brands by sponsoring a supercross team. Tecate Beer has teamed up with Thor and Kawasaki of Mexico to back Phil Lawrence, Pedro Gonzalez, Ryan Clark, and Erick Vallejo on the widely-watched stadium circuit. The four-man squad will be managed by journeyman pro racer Paul Lindsey. "The company is hoping to promote the sport and team for a future generation of Mexican riders," says Lindsey. Here in the Racer X Illustrated offices, there's a movement underway to see if they have any desire to help promote a new off-road magazine.



# CC'S

## MX BY THE NUMBERS

**\$1,250,000**

The total pay out, in purse money, point fund and bonuses, up for grabs in the 1998 AMA Toyota Supercross Series

**1,110,785**

The amount of hits Cycle News On Line/Virtual Grandstand received on the weekend of the '98 Los Angeles Supercross opener

**\$71,500**

The record-setting supercross purse for the opening round of the '98 series in Los Angeles

**61,855**

Announced attendance for the Los Angeles Coliseum race

**12,000**

Estimated amount of people (according to one official) that did not attend the LA race due to the threatening weather

**#224**

Ron Lechien's number at the Orlando SX in '83, the highest number of any rider ever to win a 250 supercross

**#103**

Sebastien Tortelli's number at the L.A. SX

**18**

Number of laps that Doug Henry led in the 250 main event at LA

**10th**

Eventual finishing position of Henry after he fell and had trouble restarting his bike

**2**

Number of laps led by the 19-year-old Tortelli in L.A.

**1st**

Finishing position of Tortelli



FREERIDE GEAR FOR THE GOLFER IN YOU. COMING SOON



Aim for the hole.



## MCGRATH US YAMAHA DEBUT

The first shot of the 1998 American racing campaign was fired at the windy, sand-whipped Glen Helen circuit on Sunday, December 29. Over 5,000 fans poured into the high desert facility to watch a number of the world's best pilots shake down their bikes and get the kinks out of their bodies. Incorporating a three-moto format (125 main event, 250 main event and a Super Final with riders from both classes), the event cooked up some serious racing.

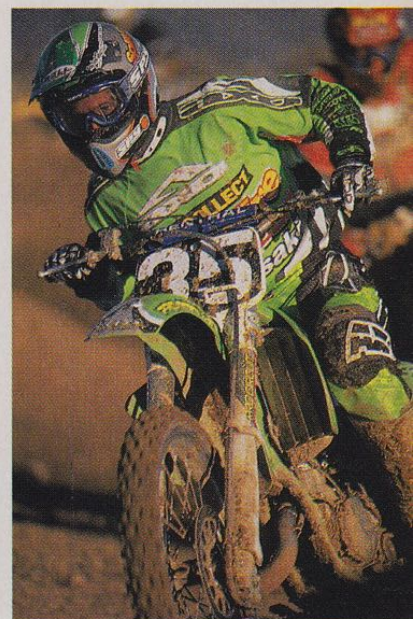
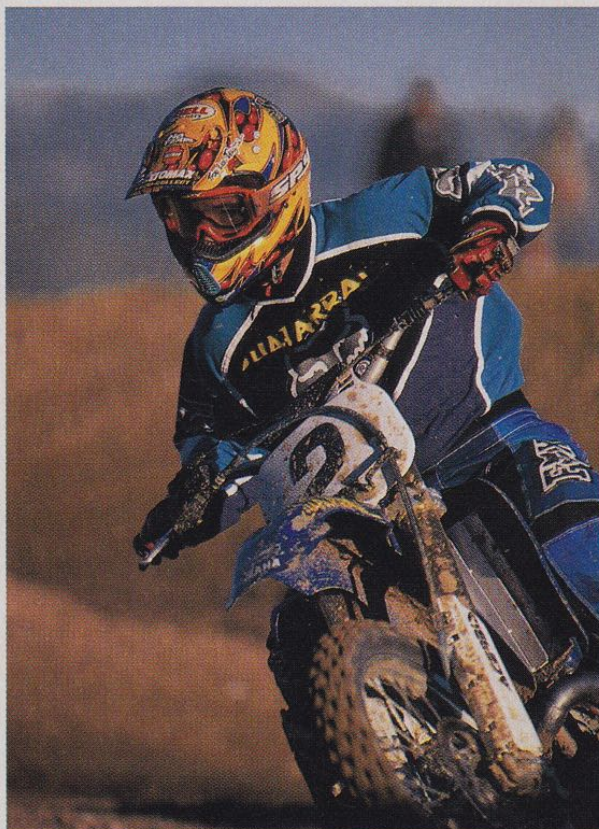
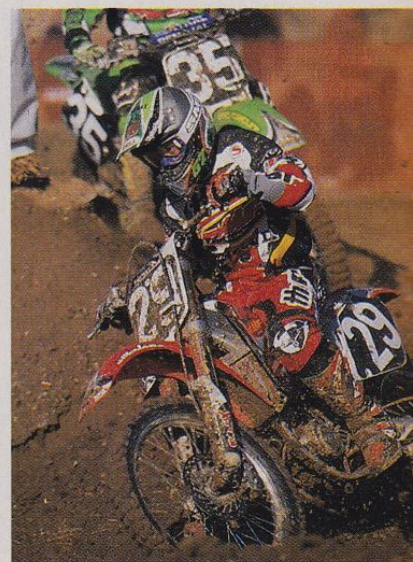
After numerous qualifiers, the 125cc final saw new Team Suzuki recruit Ryan Huffman grab the first holeshot of the season before giving way to new teammate Robbie Reynard. The Answer-clad Reynard held the point for a number of laps before his arms pumped up, thus letting a hard-charging Nathan Ramsey into the lead. Frenchman Stephane Roncada followed Ramsey's draft and was pulled past Reynard into second. Ramsey would go on to win, followed by Roncada, AX expert Buddy Antunez, and Reynard.

There was a frightening moment at the start of the 250cc main event at Glen Helen when Jeff Emig was sent tumbling into the fence in a first turn smash up. Fortunately,

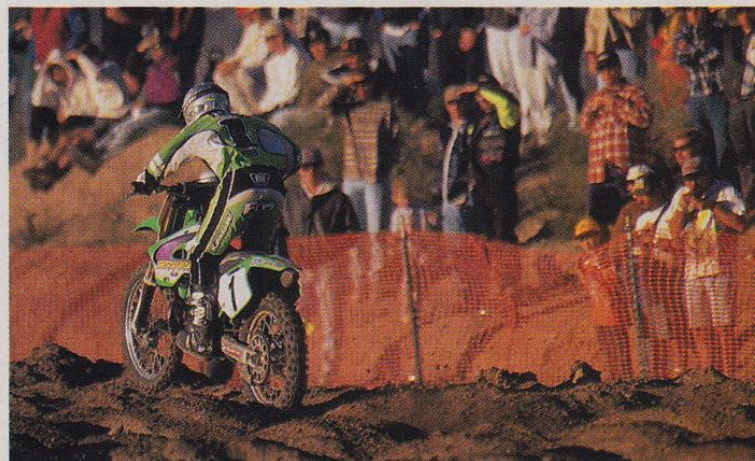
Emig got to his feet after a few moments and the crowd let out a huge roar of appreciation when it was clear that he wasn't hurt. (The fence wasn't so lucky.)

Meanwhile, at the front of the field, Jeremy McGrath sailed alone out front to take the win, followed by new Honda of Troy rider Mike Brown, who showed impressive speed on the purpose-built supercross track, and Chaparral teammate Jimmy Button. Kawasaki's Ryan Hughes was fourth.

In the Super Final, Ryno rounded the first turn in the lead and would hold it to the halfway mark before Jeremy slipped by. Undaunted, Hughes would stay very close to the 4-time AMA SX Champ, chewing on his rear fender all the way to the finish line. It was McGrath's first major win in American aboard the blue bike and a welcome ending for the entire Chaparral clan.



*Clockwise from top: Mike Brown is back flying with Honda of Troy; David Pingree got with FMF Honda; Nathan Ramsey is riding for Splitfire/PC; Jeff Emig attacks the Glen Helen moguls; Jeremy McGrath won his American Yamaha debut. (Kinney Jones pics)*



# HALF CENTURY. FULL THROTTLE.



One morning in 1954,

Soichiro Honda gathered all of his employees and made an outrageous statement: Their tiny company, Honda Motor Co., was going to race at the Isle of Man. Race, and win.



*Mr. Honda and his racers bring home the gold at the Isle of Man.*

stood for almost twenty years.

So, in 1961, when Hondas won not one but two classes

at the Isle of Man, the world may have been surprised, but anyone who knew Soichiro Honda wasn't.

Honda Motor Company was founded by a man who believed in racing. And in the fifty years we've been in business, we've actively pursued racing as a way to test our

also achieved quite a track record: championships in every class we've entered from Road Race and Off-Road to Motocross, Supercross and Flattrack, with over 100 National and World



*Gary Jones and his number-one Elsinore.*

Championships in all.

So the next time you walk into your Honda Dealer's showroom, take a second to look around. Because you're looking at the total of half a century of racing heritage and philosophy. And the vision of one man who



*Freddie Spencer and his championship-winning 1985 NSR500 Grand Prix bike.*

Now you have to understand that at this time, Honda Motor Co. made little 50cc stepthroughs and clip-on engines for bicycles. But you also have to understand that Soichiro Honda had the blood of a racer coursing through his veins, that in 1936 he set an automotive speed record at the All-Japan Speed Rally which



*The great Mike Hailwood heads towards victory.*



*Four-time 500GP Champion Mick Doohan and his NSR.*

knew that racing was the most important thing his company could do, and had the faith and skill and tenacity to back up that dream.



*Dick Mann rode his Honda CB750 into history at the 1970 Daytona 200.*

innovations, to prove our designs, and develop our technology. Along the way, we've produced some incredible machines, and worked with some phenomenal riders. The lessons we've learned have directly influenced the way we build our bikes. And we've



*Celebrating the Dream*

1948  HONDA 1998

## TORTELLI RAILS PERRIS

### Something Special in the Air

In the early-to-mid 1980s, California was the site of the annual CMC Golden State MX Series. Used by both the factories and penny-pinching privateers to test their bikes and get into fighting form before the supercross series started, riders from all over America would cram the dusty pits at places like Saddleback, Carlsbad, Sunrise, Sandhill, Lake Madera, and Barona Oaks for one last warm-up swing.

However, in the late 1980's, the hallowed series fell upon some hard times. The lengthy international supercross season, the development of private practice tracks by the factories, and the change by the AMA Supercross series to open in Florida in mid-January instead of California at the end of the month led to an evaporation of the "National" feel of these events.

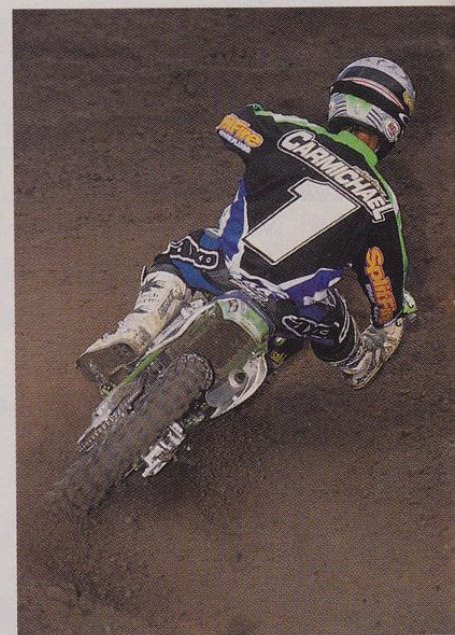
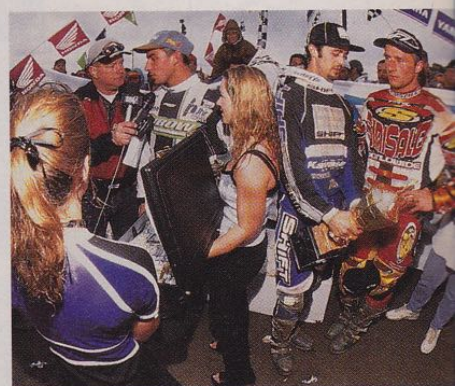
A revival seems to be underway, at least for a couple of such events. A few years back, Goat Breker stepped in and created the GFI \$10,000 Invitational Supercross. The race was a resounding success from its inception (Jeff Ward won the inaugural event). Now the Perris, California event is on most schedules as the last, best chance for top racers to blow out the cobwebs before the AMA Supercross opener in L.A.

The 1998 version will go down as a classic. Although a light rain fell throughout the afternoon, over 7,000 spectators were treated to some spectacular old school racing in both the 125cc and 250cc finals. Both groups incorporated Breker's unique and funky race format, where the riders are stopped at the halfway mark, lined-up in staggered fashion according to their on-track position, and then relaunched for a sprint to the finish. While the format may sound bizarre, it's actually quite exciting for the spectators.

First up on the dreary and damp Saturday afternoon was the 125cc class, which included 38 (!) riders in the final. 125cc National Champion Ricky Carmichael passed Honda of Troy's Casey Lytle early and disappeared with the lead, whipping it lap after lap over the track's massive jumps.



*Above: Sebastien Tortelli and Jeff Emig battled to the finish at Perris and Tortelli came out with the win after a controversial late pass. Top: While Tortelli practices his English, Jeffro and Mike Brown talk about their trophies. Right: Ricky Carmichael looks like he didn't lose a step during the off-season. He's going to be tough to beat in 1998. (photos by Chris Hultner)*



After the race was stopped and restarted, RC picked up right where he left off to take a very popular win over Lytle and Greg Schnell.

The 250cc race was a thing of competitive beauty. Honda of Troy's Mike Brown and Mike Craig, Frenchman Sebastien Tortelli, U.S. supercross superstar Jeff Emig and his Kawasaki teammate Damon Huffman all got together for a full-on battle royale. Lap after lap the quintet blasted their bikes around the boulder-lined facility, thrilling the cold and rain-soaked crowd.

As the race wound down, Tortelli captured the lead after putting a controversial

pass on Emig. While no one contested it officially, some argued that Tortelli had inadvertently cut the track. Nonetheless, the result stood and Tortelli is to be applauded for his impressive riding and aggressive on-track nature. Second fell to Emig, who could have made a big deal of Tortelli's banner infraction but chose instead to take the high road, and third to Brown.

With the exception of Brown's presence on the podium, the results of the GFI Invitational were a good indicator of what was going to happen one week later at the L.A. Coliseum.



*Jeff Emery*

**SHIFTER**

**zucchette**  
**Z**

## EVEL UPDATE

Evel Knievel is alive but not very well

The news out of Florida is not good for our tender hero Evel Knievel. The world's greatest motorcycle daredevil suffered a broken hip just before Christmas in a golf-related accident, which probably means that the jumping kick was probably trying to clear a sand trap in his cart or something. The 59-year-old Knievel was scheduled to undergo hip replacement surgery.

If you're keeping score at home, this latest smash-up gives Evel a grand total of 38 broken bones and marks his 15th career surgery, by our own humble count. "The doctor said they had never seen a worse hip in their lives," said the ever-proud Knievel, who thinks nothing of this pain. "They tell me I won't be able to walk for four months. I'll cut that in half." Damn right.

On a lighter note, Evel got all kinds of play on ESPN and ESPN 2 when he helped hawk the Winter X Games as their inspirational spokesperson. The commercial spots featured Evel chilling on the slopes behind some Elvis specs while they showed crash and party highlights of his life. Knievel offered us gems of wisdom like, "No one remembers the name of the second man who walked on the moon - I know I don't." Or how about, "Any fool can ride a snowboard, just like any fool ride a motorcycle." And then there's his all-time classic, "Up here, it's one bad jump for man, one superbad jump for mankind." Right on!

Knievel was all over the place before that nasty little spill on the golf course. He appeared on Conan O'Brien's talk show to push some products (like his double-flamed cigar lighter). There was casual reference to him during a late-season NFL game, something like, "This guy plays more hurt than Evel Knievel." We also caught sight of his outfit on display in the animated comedy "South Park" when the chef wore an Evel-inspired jumpsuit.

We were also handed a note from a preferred reader who goes by the name Ed. He tells us that T-Shirts Galore & More, based in Smithfield, Rhode Island, has landed a licensing agreement to sell Evel goods like t-shirts, hats, toys, X-rays, or whatever. Call 401-233-2184.

Until Evel Knievel is up and running, er, well, at least walking again in a few months, we'll be sure to let you know. In the meantime, always wear a helmet.

## HOOP DREAMS

Have you ever wondered who the best basketball player is out of all the top pro motocrossers? If you guessed Splitfire/Pro Circuit's Nathan Ramsey, you were probably right. Ramsey displayed the most skills among the many racers who spent a December night playing ball deep inside the futuristic Oakley compound in Irvine, California. The huge building, which looks like it part of the Blade Runner movie set, has a regulation indoor basketball court said to have been paid for by the Chicago Bulls.

The game was the brainchild of Renee Ching, who works in Oakley's media/dealer relations. "The idea was to get a bunch of guys together for a fun, off-season event and in the process introduce them to our company," says Ching, who helped put together a similar game for the surfing crowd.

# IGNITION

## BUZZ

### GOOD

**SUPERCROSS** The 1998 AMA Toyota Series kicks off with huge crowds, close racing and lots of sex appeal. Big purse, big names, big sponsors. The expensive makeover of the whole presentation proves that PACE Motor Sports (SFX) plans on being here for the long haul.

**SHAUN PALMER** The extreme athlete-turned-semi-pro supercrosser makes the main event at the L.A. SX. By doing so he wins a bet with Mitch Payton that lands him a full factory ride when he's ready to get off the slopes. And what about kicking all that alternative ass at the Winter X Games?

**FRANCE** During the first two weeks of the SX Series, this much smaller nation split main event wins with these United States in both the 125 and 250 classes, and JMB wasn't even there. Six French kids are already here and more are packing their suitcases. Whatever happened to just going to Club Med?

**OUTDOOR NATIONALS** While everyone was getting ready for the '98 Supercross Series, the Outdoor National MX promoters finally got together and found themselves some series sponsors. The Nationals also have a points fund now, and it's worth more per event than you-know-who's.

### NOT SO GOOD

**L.A. SOUND SYSTEM** The sound system at the ancient Los Angeles Coliseum just wasn't set up to deal with all those motorcycle noises. It was like watching a supercross on TV with no sound, graphics or Sportscenter commercials. No wonder the Raiders and the Rams left.

**YAMAHA YZ400F** The bike is awesome. Doug Henry is a hero when he's behind the wheel, and the thumping noise is hair-raising, but really needs to figure out how to restart this beast when it gets dropped after 18 or 19 laps of supercross racing. Maybe they can give the flagmen jumper cables or something.

**THE DAILY FIX** The much-heralded coffee shop owned by Jeff Emig is forced to lock the door for good due to a lack of traffic on Clinton Keith Road. Maybe someone else can turn the place into a call-in joint where they actually deliver the coffee, tea and half-baked brownies.

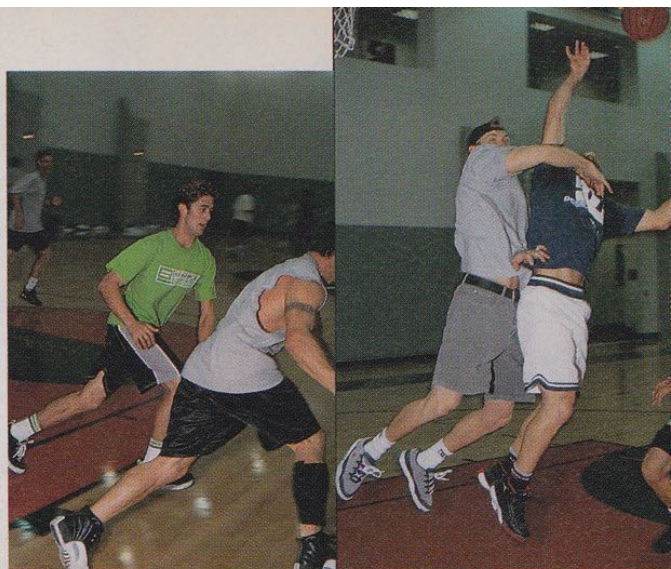
**DAMON BRADSHAW** While some French teenager named after a pasta dish comes from behind to win the LA Supercross on a mean and rutted Coliseum course, Damon was back in Idaho working on his airplane. It was the perfect opportunity, Damon! Next time just fly yourself to the races.

Invitations were limited to top riders and industry wags, and teams were split into Oakley guys (the home team, obviously) and Non-Oakley guys (away, duh?).

The visiting squad included Jeff Emig, Ryan Hughes, Phil Lawrence, DC Shoes boss Ken Block and the aforementioned Ramsey. Oakley's line-up included Ricky Carmichael, Johnny O'Mara, Mike Brown, Buddy Antunez, Davey Castillo, Jet-Ski god Victor Sheldon and some ringer that was 7-feet tall and might as well have been named Shaquille. Nevertheless, the fake Shaq was pretty much held in check by the very aggressive play of Non-Oakley centers/bullies Mike Raring (Team Green) and Ed Longacre (Antunez's mechanic). Still, the home team pulled off a five-point win (83-78). Lawrence had about a dozen points for the visiting team while Emig and Ryno scored eight points apiece. Even with tough D and all, Shaq led

Oakley with about 20 points.

As for Ramsey, the Tennessee native was hindered by a separated right shoulder but displayed some exceptional ball-handling while playing primarily left-handed, thus maintaining his rep as the best hooper on the track. (The absent Ezra Lusk is also known to have some game.) Also among the missing was Jeremy McGrath, a regular player who skipped the scrimmage in order to attend the Hollywood premiere of *Scream 2*. Who could blame him? McGrath gets to see his fellow motocrossers every weekend, but how many times does one get to go to the movies with Neve Campbell and Courtney Cox?

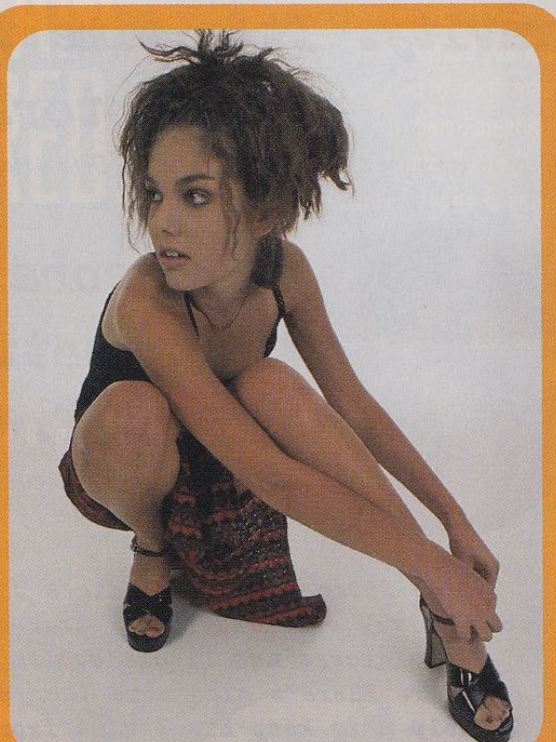


*Emig was playing tough D, but not as tough as Chad Watts on Ryno.*

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PHOTO: JIMMY T

#### EVERYDAY PEOPLE RACE

The final piece of the jigsaw puzzle that the supercross promoters had been so desperately looking for has been found, hopefully completing the positive, aggressive image makeover of the AMA Supercross Series. During the off-season months PACE Motor Sports was able to lure Toyota and their successful truck line into becoming the title sponsor of the 1998 season.

Originally a sponsor back in the early Eighties, Toyota has been welcomed back by the supercross contingent with open arms. Moreover, the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Bureau has also joined the series as "the official destination of Supercross '98." That's why the 1998 series is officially being referred to like this: "Toyota Trucks presents the 1998 Thor/Parts Unlimited AMA Supercross Series, brought to you by Las Vegas.

" Got all that?"

# NOISE



**"I remember sitting on the couch watching, telling my girlfriend, 'Wardy's gonna win it, Wardy's gonna win it, Wardy's gonna win it!' And then he runs out of fuel—what the hell?"**

Ryan Hughes on watching motocross legend Jeff Ward come oh-so-close to winning the 1997 Indianapolis 500/MW2's *Rev It Up* on ESPN 2

**"It's the AK-47, for when you absolutely have to kill every motherfucker in the room! Accept no substitute."**

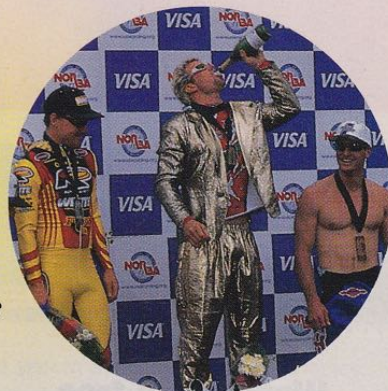
Jerry Bernardo's answering machine message, lifted from "Jackie Brown"

**"As moguls and musicians, the Beastie Boys blow away the boundaries of cool—they're public enough to have an impact on the ways people walk and talk, underground enough to publish a fanzine devoted to analyses of Evel Knievel's paintings."**

Review of the Beastie Boys' Tibetan Freedom Concert CD/*Details Magazine*

**"I've gotten all the speed I can get out of gravity. It's time to try a motor."**

Extreme athlete Shaun Palmer on his plans to enter the 1998 Supercross Series/*Details Magazine*



**"Sure, modern day high-tech jumpers have jumped very long distances at drag strips and stadiums using 15-foot-high take-off ramps, but what about jumping over 15 cars with a 7-foot-high takeoff ramp at a venue that only has room to jump 11 cars. Now that's exciting!"**

Press release for motorcycle jumper "Super" Ken Mackow, who is coming out of daredevil retirement after 10 years



**"Personally, I'm betting on myself."**

Jeremy McGrath's prediction for the 1998 AMA Supercross Series/*Dirt Biker Rider*

**"The 250cc engine of Emig's bike is a dual-overhead cam, four-valve, single-cylinder four-stroke with double counterbalancers and liquid cooling, which provides fade-free power. There's also more than nine inches of wheel travel to help Emig keep his brains from getting completely scrambled on the course he navigates."**

A misguided report on Jeff Emig's Kawasaki KX 250 engine/*Unlimited Magazine*

**"Motocross is a G-rated sport."**

*Motocross Journal*



FAST. SMOOTH.

QUICK.

AGILE.



NOW GET  
**\$300** IN  
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with purchase of RM125 or RM250

# JUST WHAT TEAM SUZUKI ORDERED.

When Team Suzuki's Greg Albertyn, Mickael Pichon and Larry Ward are slicing through an MX course, it seems only fitting they ride an RM250. Which for '98 is even more dialed in. With new port and ignition timing. New PowerJet carburetor. Refined clutch. Beefed up tranny. And improved front & rear suspension. Fact is, about the only thing we didn't tweak is the color.

Go get one. Or get a highly refined, Supercross-championship-winning RM125. Or a race-proven, great-place-to-start RM80. Any of the three will help you shorten the distance between the starting gate and the checkered flag.



Free Tony D. Motocross School with purchase of any '98 RM.

MAJOR BUCKS.



\$3.8 million in Suzuki MX and Off-Road contingency funds, plus Suzuki support trucks at all major MX events.

### Hit the Books.

Suzuki's Good Scholar Program rewards you with \$500 savings bond when you purchase any '98 RM, maintain a B average, and race at least 5 events.



RM80

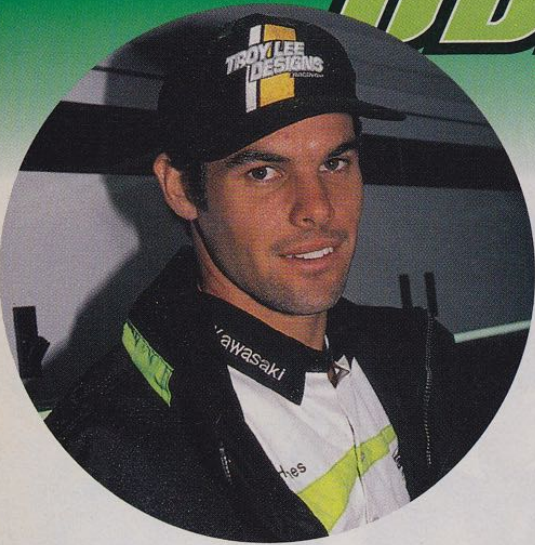


RM125



\*Offer available on 1998 RM125 and RM250 purchases made between January 5, 1998 and March 31, 1998 only. Restrictions apply. See participating dealers for details. For the name of your nearest Suzuki RM dealer, call 1-800-828-RIDE. At Suzuki, we want every ride to be safe and enjoyable. So always wear a helmet, eye protection and protective clothing. Never ride under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. Study your owner's manual and always inspect your Suzuki before each ride. Always supervise young riders. The RM series motorcycles are for closed-course competition and related practices only. Professional riders shown on a closed track.

# ASK RYNO



*Now that you mention it, I've never really thought about chicks in motocross gear, at least not since they stopped making real leathers. Girls-in-goggles? I think goggles are a must, in case I get a little roost in your eye. As for what we pro guys really feel about women racing, I think it's totally great. It doesn't matter what sex, color or nationality you are, everyone is the same when you put the helmet on. Good luck and thanks for writing. Your pal, Ryno.*

Hey Ryno, how's it going? I'm a 21-year-old chick from a very small town with a craving for more of y'all's beautiful, balls-to-the-wall grace and hell-raising antics! I love watching you race, and especially Crusty and Moto XXX (videos). Anyway, my only question is, can you get me pictures of Seth Enslow and Rusty Setzer? They are just too damned sexy! I would love to party with them. Well, gotta go raise hell.

Thank you for being you, Celeste.

*Dear Celeste. Forget what I said in my last answer - some of you are idiots. No, I don't have any hot photos of Seth and Rusty, but I do have a photo of Huffy in his Fruit of the Looms. I'll send it if you will send me a photo of yourself to Racer X in your Fruit of the Looms. By the way, readers, I need some more photos for my refrigerator. I'm getting tired of looking at Huffy and Ricky (Underoos). And, Celeste, I passed your letter on to Seth and Rusty-they should be calling you soon. Your pal, Ryno.*

Dear Ryno,

I hope this question doesn't make me sound too old-fashioned, but is it okay to date a stripper? I met this girl who works at a strip club, but I didn't find that out until like six weeks later. By then we'd been hanging out a lot and she's pretty cool. She says she just does it for the money, and I guess I believe her. She doesn't even like me to use the word "stripper" but prefers "exotic dancer." I just don't know how to feel about this. She's 22 and she looks like Carmen Electra (I swear!) and I want to be able to accept her for all she is. I just don't know about the stripper part.

Your friend, Allen H. (Colorado)

*Dear Allen. Again, back to my first answer: Some of you are idiots! Allen, if she looks like Carmen Electra, it wouldn't matter if she picked up poop for a living. Just think all of the benefits of where she works - learn to live it! If this were my situation, I would put a pole up in every room of my house. That way Carmen could have her friends come over and work here at home. In closing, ask Carmen or whatever her name is to send me a picture. And her friends, too. Your pal, Ryno.*

Hey Ryno, you wanted some letters from chicks, so here's one! I really dig watching you guys ride, and was lucky enough to go a recent race. From

a chick's point of view, it looks to me like being good-looking must be a prerequisite for motocross or something! Although I can understand why chicks like you guys so much, I gotta ask, What's up with the "pro ho's"? Those chicks who meet up with a pro rider then go psycho on them? Like they think the guy's in love with them? It gives girls like me a bad name! While I'm definitely not a prude, just because a guy is a pro rider doesn't mean I'm going to jump into bed with him! Do psycho chicks like that scare you?

Michelle, Mississippi

*Dear Michelle. Please leave me alone. It's chicks like you that scare me. Your pal, Ryno.*

Dear Ryno,

I have a problem. Ever since I left for college, I've had precious little time to spend with my girlfriend. When I do get a weekend off or take a break between semesters, I can't decide what to do: Go riding or just hang out with her the whole time. My girlfriend is pretty hot, but sometimes you just want to be alone with your machine, ya know? It appears something is going to get the shaft - either my girlfriend or my riding days. What should I do?

Moto Guy.

*Hey Moto Guy, I think can answer this one: I would give your girlfriend the shaft first, then go riding. Then after I'm done riding, I'd go back and give her the shaft again. Hey, when you're say your girlfriend is hot, how hot are talking here? Like carne-asada hot, or like Africa hot? Hey, I was just thinking - maybe I could give her the shaft while you're out riding with your buddies. Send her picture. Your pal, Ryno.*

Dear Leeann,

If this is you, feel free to apply your sage advice here. However, since your career already involves satisfying the opposite sex, you may not realize how difficult it can be when it does just the opposite. By the way, my roommates and I watch you show between classes everyday. Sometimes, we even take the TV off mute.

Thanks,

Jason W. Rowan University. (New Jersey)

*Dear Jason, It's not Leeann, and I'm confused about your letter. What the hell are you trying to say here? What exactly do you and your roommates do when Leeann's show is on? What kind of college do you go to? Get out from in front of that television and go riding or something. And take that guy in the last letter with you. Your pal, Ryno.*

**Need some advice? Got a pressing question that no one else can answer? Ask Ryno! Send your letters to: Ask Ryno, c/o Racer X Illustrated, Route 12 Box 267, Morgantown, WV 26505**

Dear Ryno,

Congratulations on your new baby. Anyway, I think you're pretty cool and I was wondering if you could help me out. I'm having trouble clearing some of the big jumps at my local riding area and I thought maybe you could give me some tips on how to do triples.

Thanks! Alex E. (California)

*Dear Alex. Thanks for asking about our baby, but don't you have any other pressing matters you would like to ask me about? Something about chicks or something? Okay, let's start with something easy, like doubles: Say you're having problems with two chicks... Or would that would be two sets of doubles? Oh well, on to the triples! I suggest you start out by doing them one at a time. Show a little patience, respect each one of them, and feel them out real well. Then picture all three of them together. Do you see what I see? Now go BIG! That's what I did with my first set of triples... Or were they triplets? Oh well. Your pal, Ryno.*

Dear Ryno,

First, let me tell you how much I really love to watch you ride. Your aggression and fearlessness really amazes me, and I wish I could feel more of it in myself. How do you pro guys feel about female riders/racers? Do you think it's cool to see chicks on dirt bikes? Or would you prefer to see us in short shorts and mid-riffs on the sidelines, cheering you on? I compete on a 125 (CR, sorry) in the Vet class against the guys. I love the respect I get from racers, spectators and track officials. I will always love motocross and the people that are into it. So, are we (girl racers) just a bunch of Butch wanna-be's to you pro guys, or do you find something appealing about girls-in-goggles?

Sincerely, Marie (New Jersey)

*Dear Marie. Well, first of all, if you would really like to see some of my aggression and fearlessness up close, you can come out to my training center here in California for some private sessions. There is a dress code for school, but I think you're in luck because it sounds like you've already heard about it: Short shorts, mid-riffs, cheerleader accessories.*



# PURRR

BY LEEANN TWEEDEN  
LEEANN GETS HER OWN COLUMN

*If you've attended a recent supercross, chances are you know who Leeann Tweeden is. Leeann is one of the infield floor announcers for the AMA Supercross Series. She's also a model, she has her own workout show (Fitness Beach on ESPN 2), and she is a devoted motorcycle fan. Leeann has also been a regular contributor to this magazine for two years, mostly writing her "Ask Leeann" advice column. That is, until Ryan Hughes decided to take that column over. But because she has her ear to the ground, we figured Leeann would be a great source for insider information. So from now on she'll bring you the infield buzz from the world of racing.*

It looks like I've lost my advice column to Ryan Hughes because the editors of this magazine have set me up with this column at least until Ryno gets too busy with the racing season to answer your letters. But as long as I can have "Purrr," I guess he can keep "Ask Ryno." .... I am writing this as we prepare for the first supercross of the year in Los Angeles. I'm stoked for the series because I think the title is totally up in the air. Jeff Emig has to be the favorite because he's the champion, but there's a bunch of guys out there on new bikes that can win, such as Jeremy McGrath, Ezra Lusk, and Mike LaRocco .... The LA. race marks my first anniversary as one of the supercross floor announcers. I am really excited to have the job back, so here's a **big wet kiss** for all the people at PACE Motor Sports who gave me this great opportunity! .... The one race I'm really looking forward to this year is the New Orleans SX ( March 14 ). It is one of my favorite cities, and I bet the supercross crew turns that town into our own private Mardi Gras party .... I really wish they held a race somewhere around **Washington, DC**, like at RFK Stadium. I'm originally from Manassas, Virginia, and I have a lot of friends and family back there who would love to see a

supercross live .... The KTM 50cc Challenge will be back during intermission and I can't wait to work with those kids again. We always interview the winners after each race and ask them if they want to give me a kiss, and more often than not they say, "No way!" I think I would have better results with the 125cc class .... Speaking of kids, what's with the sudden **baby boom in supercross**? During the off-season Ryno, Steve Lamson, and Davey Castillo all became fathers. Add them to them to the growing list of recent 250cc class fathers like Mike LaRocco, Doug Henry, and John Dowd, and the factory pits are starting to look like one big day care center .... It's been almost a year now that I've been dating a racer, but he's not a motocrosser by trade. His name is **Ben Bostrom** and last year he rode in the 600cc class and 750cc class for a Honda farm team called Zero Gravity. Now he's Miguel DuHamel's teammate on the full-factory where he'll race Superbikes and 600s. I've gotten a lot of flack from some of the MXers about how I abandoned them for a pavement guy, but that's not true! Supercross is still my **NO.1 sport** .... Ben's baby brother Eric is set to ride for the Erion Racing Honda team in a couple of divisions. Last year he was the AMA 883cc National Champion and he's definitely one to watch. In December we went with Eric to **Las Vegas** to see him pick up his NO.1 plate at the AMA Banquet, and we showed up in the full retro gear! It was Vegas 70s style and the boys wore leisure suits, platform shoes, and gold chains that held Dick Mann-style trophy tops. I ran a satin jumpsuit while Eric's girlfriend Rachel did the mini-

miniskirt thing. The AMA people might seem a bit stuffy at times but they seemed to be loving it! Jeffro was also at the Awards Banquet to accept his 1997 AMA Rider of the Year award. He was wearing this totally **cool Shift suit** that also caused quite a stir. I was really glad to see the award go to Jeff instead of some of the other nominees because he really earned it by winning both the supercross and motocross series last year. Question is, can he do it again?.... One more thing about Ben: Last week we pulled out a

video of

him and his brother racing arenacross in San Francisco's Cow Palace about seven years ago, and I have to say they made the right career move by going into road racing. They're jumping styles-front wheel high, elbows low, landing sitting down-reminded me of **Evel Knievel jumping cars**. Thank God there are no jumps at Laguna Seca. Actually, both Ben and Eric ride dirt bikes just about every day, and I must say they've gotten a lot better at jumping over the years.... Do you ever check out the **Internet**? I hear there are a couple of unauthorized Leeann Tweeden Websites out there with a bunch of my modeling photos posted. I have no idea who these people are, but I would like to get my hands around their necks and choke them! It's a little flattering, but very, very scary .... During my off season I got to release my first swimsuit calendar, which went over pretty well-my dad was really proud! I also did more work for **Frederick's**, Flirt and, some other companies, and I'm pretty excited to be up for some television commercials, so I'm keeping my fingers crossed. One of my goals this year is to work out something with Sports Illustrated to be in their '99 **swimsuit issue**. If that doesn't work out, maybe my girlfriends and I can talk the guys here at *Racer X Illustrated* into doing one of their own ... See ya next time with more supercross news from the early rounds.

XXXOOO LEEANN.



*Seth Holden*  
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# CAFFEINE

THE JEFF EMIG COLUMN

I'll tell you what's fun: I get home on Sunday morning after the LA Supercross and see that my buddies Wiggins, Snoop and Matt have taped a poster of Sebastien Tortelli to my 'fridge. What the hell? Actually, it's pretty cool when you can take things lightly like that. I was pretty stoked to finish second behind Tortelli because that's still a lot better than I started off last year (sixth), and I ended up with the title.

Going into the first race my only goal was to ride my best and have a top five finish. I almost out-reached my goal because I nearly won the thing, so that's why I was happy to finish second this time. A few guys put too much pressure on themselves at the first race, which is easy to do. But I think there's enough pressure at the opening round already! You have all the fans wanting to see how much better you are than last year, and there's a lot of pressure from the team, too. They've done lot of work during the off-season with no chance of getting a race result. It's just testing, testing, testing. At the first race everybody would like to think the last two or three months of work were worthwhile, because that part of the job is really hard work.

It was a long day, but it was a fun day. With the involvement of all the new sponsors and me being N°1 now, I talked with a lot of people. There was, like, a million fans there, and it seemed like most of them were in the pits all day long. I shook a lot of hands, spoke to a lot of industry people and old friends, and just tried real hard to be available for everyone. I met up with Kennedy from MTV and her boyfriend. I knew her from last year when we rode together in Orlando. Zoe Bonham was also there to give me one of her dad's *Led Zeppelin IV* platinum albums, which was really cool. (The late John Bonham was the drummer for Led Zep.) And then right before the race PACE Motor Sports gave me the annual SX Champion's ring. I didn't know anything about it until they got me up there on the podium. I was amazed that they made it the ring so special. It looks like it should have gone to the winner of the NFL Super Bowl or something. It's 14-carat gold with my birth stone (blue sapphire), and a big diamond set in the middle. One of the PACE guys told me it's valued at over \$10,000. Since it's so heavy, I figure it's legit.

When I got up on the podium for the pre-race introduction - they didn't do the usual parade lap introduction because of the weather - Terry Boyd (infield announcer) asked me about the mud and I said, "Who gives a shit? Let's go racing." That's really the way I felt, and I can't express how much fun it was riding out there. I grew up going to Area and Regional Qualifiers for big amateur races like Loretta Lynn's and Ponca City and when it rained, you raced no matter what. It's actually been like that my whole life because my dad would drive us five hours to a race and it would be raining and he'd say, "Who gives a shit? Get out there."

A few people asked me about the round Shift hat I was wearing during the opening ceremonies. It wasn't because I was having a bad hair day or anything. It was a conscience decision as the president of Shift to debut a new product. (Now I'm getting all serious and stuff.) Everybody else wears ball caps, so I thought it would be cool to wear a round hat. If you check the hat out up close you'll see N°47 stitched in there. The significance of that number that it used to be my amateur number. The Shift designers stuck

it on as a sort of dedication. You know, keeping it real and all.

I can't really tell how much I enjoyed being back racing again. It's like everybody seems to want time off, and anymore all I want is time on! I want to be racing all the time because it's the funnest thing I do. Win or lose, first, second, fifth, tenth - it doesn't matter as long as I'm trying. Why would I not want to be there? It's like the feeling I used to get when I was a kid and all I wanted to do was race.

L.A. was tough because of the mud but there was that one good line around the whole track. There were a couple of instances where I kind of got off it a little, like going up the peristyle. One time I almost jumped into the stands! I guess Button and Ryno did the same thing but they actually went off the track into the seats. Believe me, it was easy to do. When you're sitting in the stands or even watching on TV, you can't understand just how dark the grooves were and how bad the lighting is at the Coliseum, especially because the mud was wet and dark.

I really don't get so excited when I'm actually racing anymore, at least not like I used to. When I get an okay start, I don't worry too much about getting right to the front. Without Jeremy's dominance anymore you don't have to get right into the lead and try to get away because there's going to be, like, eight guys who can run the same speed. No one can really run off.... except for Tortelli, I guess.

The finish of the L.A. race didn't really shock me but I was a little surprised with Tortelli. I didn't think anyone was capable of coming from behind like that anymore. Now I'm thinking to myself, I should have tried a little harder and maybe he wouldn't have gotten by. Oh well, I wanted to get a good finish and that's what I got. My whole attitude at L.A. was like this: If I'm going to be the man, then right on. If not, I'm not going to worry about it. If somebody else was going to steal the show, I wouldn't get sucked into it. And that's what Tortelli did. L.A. was just the first race, and you can't win the series there. But second is a lot better than sixth, or tenth, where Doug Henry ended up.

As for Tortelli, I think he's a pretty good guy. He was going for it because he really had nothing to lose. His season doesn't start until he goes back to Europe, so he didn't have the pressure we did in L.A. He seems real focused on what he wants to do, which can be hard for a lot of other guys out here in California. We have to deal with a lot of distractions; I can't see him having the same things to deal with as Jeremy and I have at a local race. I'm sure he didn't have a hundred friends there wanting passes. So many people want to shake our hands, wish us luck, and be part of our race day that it can be hard to focus. That used to really affect me in the past, but this time I kind of gave in to it and didn't stress at all. I went with the flow and was way more relaxed when it was time to race.

So how would I sum up the opener? It was a good day. A great day would have been to win. You know, they're all good days when you're racing. Ask me about great days after La Vegas.

*(Team Kawasaki's Jeff Emig is a 4-time AMA National MX/SX Champion and the '97 AMA/Speedvision Pro Athlete of the Year. That's all we really know about the guy.)*



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# VIEW FROM THE FENCE

BY ERIC JOHNSON

"Hey Eric, you know how you're always wearing those motocross shirts around?" asked my friend Corey, a co-worker down at the Ground Zero ad agency. "Well, I just saw a bunch of it on display down at the 3rd Street Promenade in Santa Monica. There's a bunch of motocross clothing on sale right by the front door."

When I went down there to see for myself, I remember thinking, "Man, I never thought I'd see the day when motocross clothes are sitting on the rack next to blue jeans in a department store." It was two weeks before the opening round of the AMA Toyota Supercross Series and it seemed like something special was about to happen. The buzz had started early - earlier than I have ever seen. Long before the racers would gather at the ancient, clapped-out Coliseum, an intangible excitement began to shroud the Los Angeles basin.

"I can't believe how many people are coming at me for media passes and credentials," said PACE Motor Sports p.r. manager Pat Schutte ten days before the race. "And I think we already have over 50,000 tickets sold." Free media passes make for strange bedfellows: Schutte took calls from everyone from apple pie-like USA Today to the notorious Big Brother skateboard mag. "Can't you just imagine the Big Brother crew in the press box with all those VIPs?" asked Schutte. "I shudder at the thought."

From the cutting edge buyers and display people at Urban Outfitters, to the full-court media press (equal parts radio, print and television), to a number of savvy P.R. stunts, a massive wave of attention began to swell and crest a shadow above the concrete jungle known as L.A. for a dirt bike race.

Helping to throw fuel on the fire were a number of publicity-seeking rider appearances. Leading up to the event, Jeremy McGrath appeared on the entertainment muck-raking show "Hard Copy." The show featured the former champ's new video Steel Rows and his indelible place in the sport. In addition, McGrath also rubbed shoulders with the Hollywood monarchy at the Scream 2 movie premiere in Tinseltown. Jeremy also appeared on radio station KROQ's popular "Love Lines" program, the radio roots of the MTV television show which ushers in celebrities to provide advice on various issues revolving around sex, drugs and rock-and-roll.

Not to be outdone, McGrath's antagonist Jeff Emig did an impressive live stunt on Fox's L.A. morning news program while Jeff Matiasovich rode around in the background behind him. Emig even took a moment to do an impromptu weather report, just as he does every year on Fox Radio at the Loretta Lynn's Amateur Nationals.

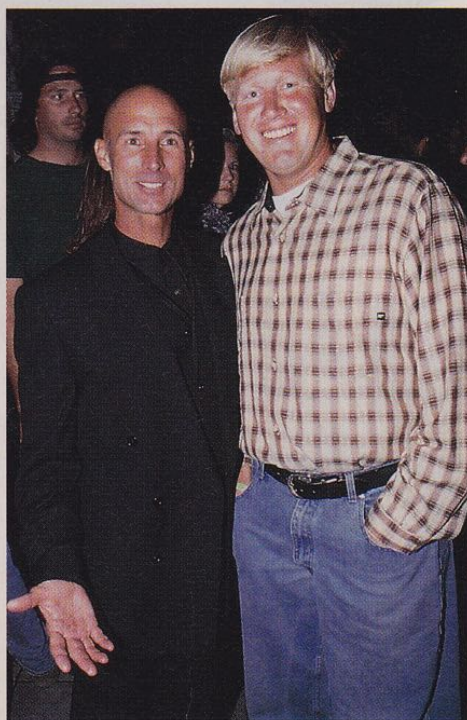
Supercross is booming right now and the PACE Motor Sports people are to be lauded for encouraging things. The advertising, so long an albatross around the sport's neck, was significantly better this year (but there were still a few "Voice of God," monster truck-type radio ads to suffer through). PACE even placed a right-reading print ad in Details magazine, which ran back-to-back with a Gucci ad. The magazine is perfectly aligned with the 18-34 year-old male demographic that supercross also has, so the ad will not only catch the readers' eyes, but the thousands of advertising people that pour through that mag's pages each month. Good call.

Oakley also helped further the cause with their dazzling black-and-white billboard on the San Diego Freeway. The huge ad featured Ricky Carmichael pitched over in a classic whip, and no doubt caused more than one driver to swerve out of his lane.

The pre-race press conferences were actually attended by legitimate, hard-working press, not just Kinney and I in search of the Official Ice Box of Supercross as these functions turned out often were in the past. There was a supercross party at the International Racing Bar in Newport Beach that attracted a huge crowd of pre-race revelers, plus riders Emig, McGrath, Button and Enslow. (Enslow?) As a matter of fact, the place was so packed that someone stole Tony Armaradio's Race Tech bike by rolling it right out of the front doors from its display site.

However, no pre-race bash was as crowded as Team Chaparral's open house/autograph session. Thousands of people showed at the huge San Bernardino motorcycle mall to meet Jeremy and Button and get some autographs. The line snaked all the way through the store, out the front doors, and down around the parking lot. McGrath had to split after nearly three hours for the Love Lines radio gig and never got through the epic line, leaving Dave Damron's crew to pass out stickers and posters to the disappointed but otherwise understanding crowd.

The most impressive gauge of measuring the growing popularity of this sport was the huge social scene that played out in the stands, pits and press box of the Coliseum itself. Looking more like Johnny Depp's Viper Room than a race track, the L.A. SX teemed with celebrities galore. "90210" swinger Luke Perry started off the star search when he took to the microphone and told the boisterous crowd, "If I had a bike, I'd be out on that track in two seconds!" Young girls were screaming in delight while Chris Hultner and I, stand in ankle-deep mud down on the stadium floor, laughed at the very thought of it. Other stars said to be roaming around the mud, beer and pre-mix fumes included "Friends" star Matt LeBlanc and his actor friends Stephen Baldwin (Half-Baked), Jason Gedrich ("The Last Don") and



Jeremy London ("Party of Five"). Laconic MTV personality - and Trent Reznor's friend - Kennedy was there as well.

Intriguingly, a big buzz swept through the press box when word came through that the biggest player in all of movieland - Steven Spielberg himself - had one of his security detachment call ahead to see what the situation looked like in case the big boss wanted to drop by. The man with the Midas touch never made it out. Perhaps the rain scared him off.

Speaking of rain, promoter Gary Becker's worst nightmare came true, to a certain degree, in Los Angeles. Hyped-up to fever pitch proportions as if the world were coming to an end, the "Pineapple Express" storm front was welcomed with open arms by the otherwise bored L.A. weather people. Friday's practice sessions were completely washed out by the typhoon, and things looked pretty bleak on Saturday as well. However, after a nasty mid-afternoon downpour, the rain mercifully packed it up and hauled ass towards Arizona. The storm had made a shambles of the Coliseum track and no doubt discouraged the walk-up ticket sales, but the race drew 61,588 fans, which was another good indicator of the sport's well-being. You can bet your little brother that if the same weather pattern had hit this city four or five years ago, the event would have been blighted significantly.

On a bright and sunny note, the Coliseum was a vacation-destination for a number of world famous motorcyclists. 125cc World Champ road racer Valentino Rossi of Italy - arguably the most famous of all European motorcycle racers right now - walked around telling anyone who would listen how much he loved supercross. Loris Capriossi, a former World Champ currently with the Aprilia marque, was on hand as well. Motocross legend Broc Glover made the pit scene to shake some hands and introduce himself as PJI's new Brand Manager. Former World MX Champs Danny LaPorte and Bob Moore were running the show over at the new FMF operation, and the great Roger DeCoster was doing likewise for Suzuki. Pekka Vehkonen (past 125 World Champ) was in town from Finland, and so was Jacky Vimeond to watch his star pupil Sebastian Tortelli ride into the record books. Someone even saw Seth Enslow there! Alas, no sign of Evel Knievel.

As an epilogue to the glittery season-opening event, extreme sports legend Shaun Palmer showed up on the set of ESPN's massively popular Winter X Games. There to provide some keen insight on the aptly-named snowcross event which he won, Palmer appeared to be much more eager to talk about supercross and recount his tale about qualifying for the 125 main event in L.A., where he finished 22nd. In other words, Palmer was more stoked about getting last place at a supercross than winning his third-career Gold Medal at the X Games. "It was the happiest day of my life and tears were shedding down," Palmer told the interviewer. "I'm serious - tears were shedding."

I believe it was Italian Moto Sprint magazine editor Enrico Borghi - one of the more than 60 foreign journalists on hand in LA - who best summed up the current state of stadium motocross in America: "Supercross is as big here now as road racing is in Europe. Everyone goes crazy over road racing in Europe, but not motocross. Look at all of these people - I just can't believe this is a supercross. It looks like road racing in my country."

I just looked at him and smiled.







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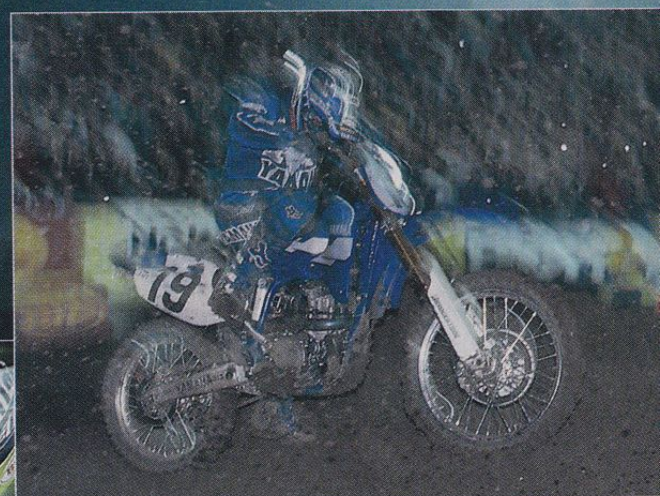
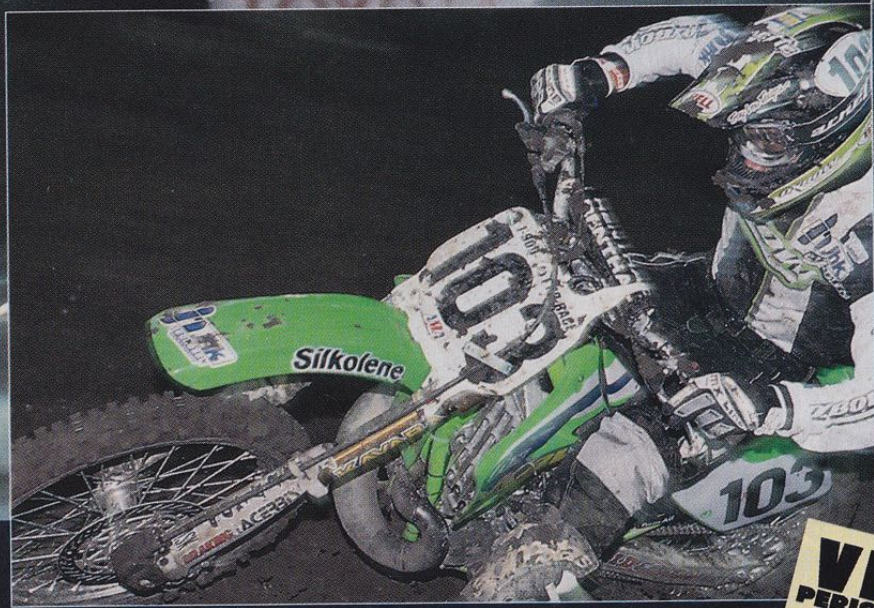
BY ERIC JOHNSON  
PHOTOS: FRAN KHUN, CHRIS HULTNER, PAUL BUCKLEY



*Doug Henry (19) looked to be a shoe in for the LA win, until Sebastien Tortelli (103) blew by him late in the race. After Tortelli got by, Doug (19) fell over and couldn't restart his YZ400F. Jeremy McGrath (2) sat back in third and watched the whole heartbreaking scene unfold.*



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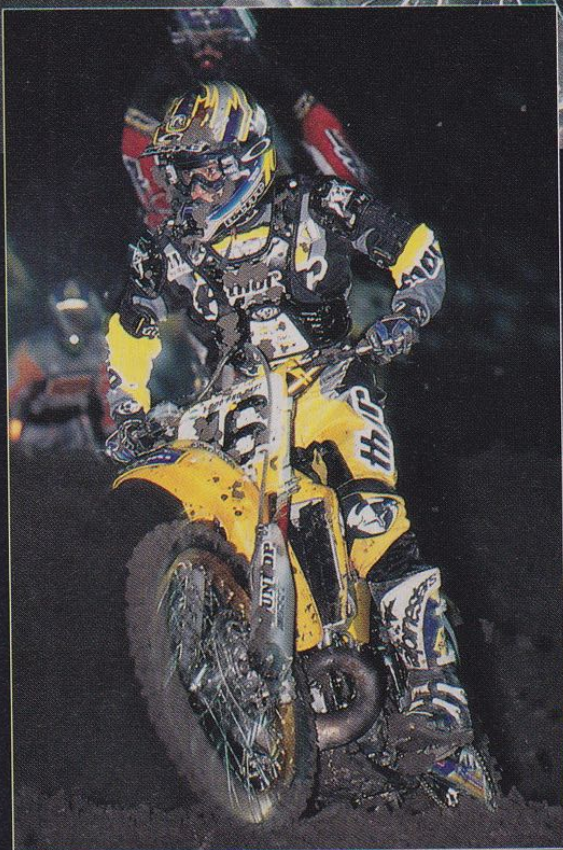


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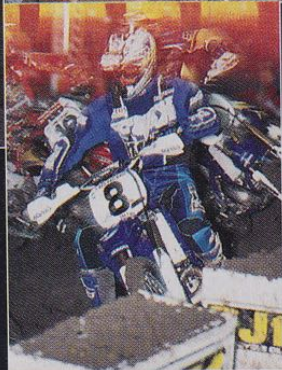


(Above) Jeff Emig and Jeremy McGrath is where the smart money is going for the '98 SX title. Pick your horse!

(Left) Mickael Pichon looked very strong at L.A. In the main he was heading for the front of the pack, until a crash blew his chances for a win.



Kevin Windham sure can bang out a start! Now that Kevin and Ezra are no longer teammates a lot of people think there may be some bad blood developing between the two. They both say it ain't so.



hings looked bleak and my heart was slowly beginning to sink. It was just past noon on Saturday and I was standing within the shadow of the huge Los Angeles Coliseum. It was also raining again-raining hard. As I leaned against the big yellow Suzuki transporter, trying to avoid leaks from the awning, I was hoping and praying that the sun would somehow find its way through the slate gray clouds and the rain would finally stop.

Although such weather is rare in the Los Angeles basin, the cleverly named "Pineapple Express" - not the overly-hyped "El Nino" - had paved the way for a massive storm to blitz southern California, and it was wreaking some serious havoc on the opening round of the 1998 AMA Toyota Supercross Series. Friday's practice was canceled, and Saturday's already tight schedule was in jeopardy. Despite the fact that the shiny, happy TV weather people had predicted that the storm was over, the rain just wouldn't stop. The perimeter of the track was said to be under a foot of water.

Fortunately, the rain finally did let up and the clouds began to break. As the riders crawled out of the big rigs, mechanics scrambled to prep the bikes for what was no doubt going to be a muddy affair. The track had taken a serious beating, and the world's best supercross pilots were about to ride down through the tunnel and take the plunge into the stadium soup. You could see the look of concern on most of their faces as they rode down into the hole for practice.

As I waited to collect my photo pass by the tunnel entrance, the first rider I saw riding off the tapioca-like track was Frederic Bolley, a 250 GP contender here on



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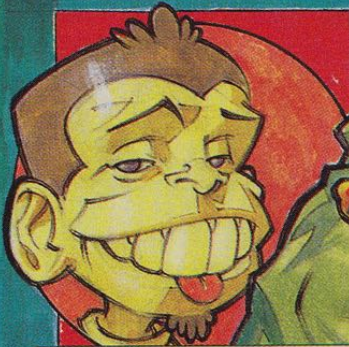


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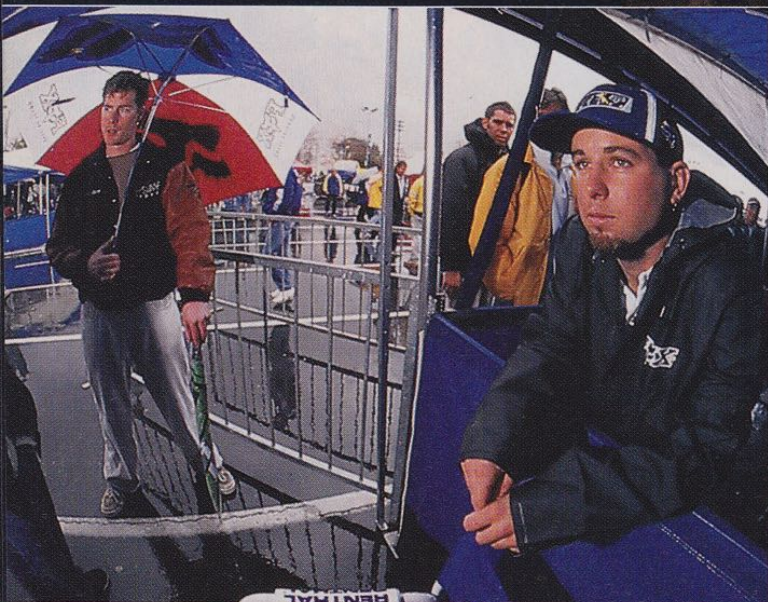
a working vacation. The young Frenchman was covered with the heavy brown mud. He didn't look too happy as he blinked repeatedly to clear the mud from his eyes. The track was a mess.

Later, as the power washers hummed and filled the pits with mud and brown water, the place began to fill up. It was the usual SoCal crowd, made up of thousands of race fans, industry types, journalists, television stars, rock musicians, road racers, race car drivers, beer drinkers, loudmouths, and other hangers-on. The boxed-in pits were like one big court where everyone jockeyed for position on the supercross social scene. Claustrophobic and, at times, ridiculous, the entire beer-soaked L.A. pit scene is something that has to be seen to be believed.

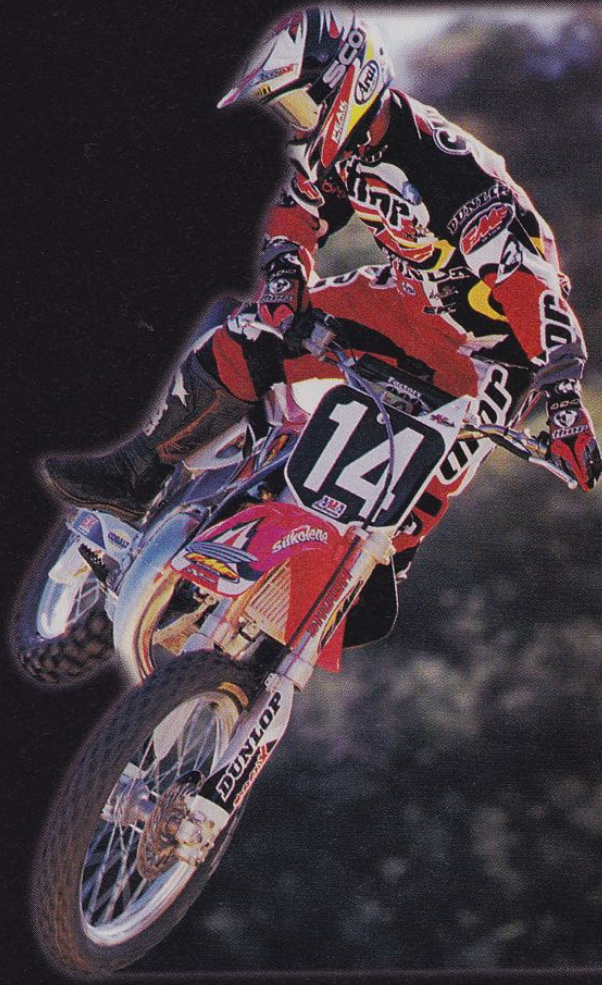
With the afternoon qualifying about to get underway, it was time to head for the floor of the ancient Olympic stadium. When I got my first look at the circuit after practice, I was shocked. I had anticipated rain damage, but this was horrible. The mud was ankle deep; large puddles of water were scattered about. The Rich Winkler-led Dirt Wurx grounds crew was working at a fever pitch with their bulldozers and skip-loaders in an attempt to get the track into some kind of racing condition. Again, everyone looked worried. They had their work cut out for them.

The initial qualifying heats reminded me of standing in the mud at the Mid-Ohio 125cc USGP when I was 12 years old, but nonetheless the racing was quite interesting. French racers Mickael Pichon and Sebastien Tortelli - no strangers to this type of mud-filled adversity - made it look easy as they splashed to impressive heat wins.

"If it stays this way, I think Pichon or someone from France may win tonight," said none other than Roger



(Counter clockwise) Ezra Lusk is riding like a new man since switching to Honda. Jeremy tries to shake the pre-race jitters by cold chillin' in the pits. Damon Huffman (15) is due for a win...streak. Team Suzuki's Larry Ward (4) had a great offseason. Hopefully he didn't peak before the start of the regular season.



*thor*

DeCoster, the definitive authority on mud racing. We were standing alongside a pile of dry, road base dirt that was about to be poured onto the track in order to absorb water. It didn't seem like it was going to get much better.

Immediately following the glittery opening ceremonies, all of us journalist-types slogged out onto the infield like foot soldiers being ordered into the trenches. Everyone was struggling to keep their balance and footing under the weight of photographic equipment. One of my Doc Martens was pulled right off my foot! But once I got into position, I was amazed at what Winkler and his track crew had pulled off. Although deeply rutted and a bit slow, the track was in excellent shape, considering the inlimate conditions. Like a brigade of Army engineers under the gun, the Dirt Wurx crew had risen to the occasion and pulled off an amazing feat.

The first heat race of the evening program were full of excitement. Young American superstars Ezra Lusk and Kevin Windham dazzled the crowd with their antics as they fought for first bragging rights for both themselves and their Japanese bosses. The last turn tangle which left Windham on the ground was the result of old school supercross bar-banging. It was apparent that the funky track was going to set up as a one-liner-quite conducive to a close, competitive main event.

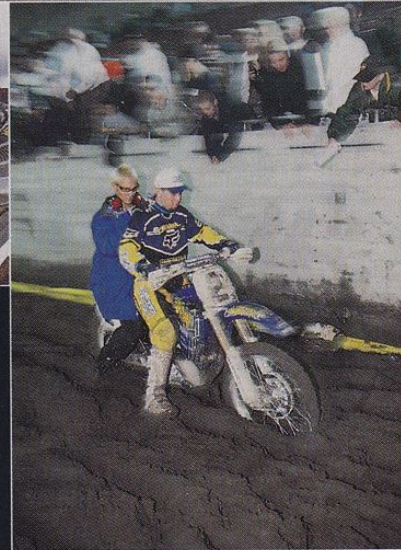
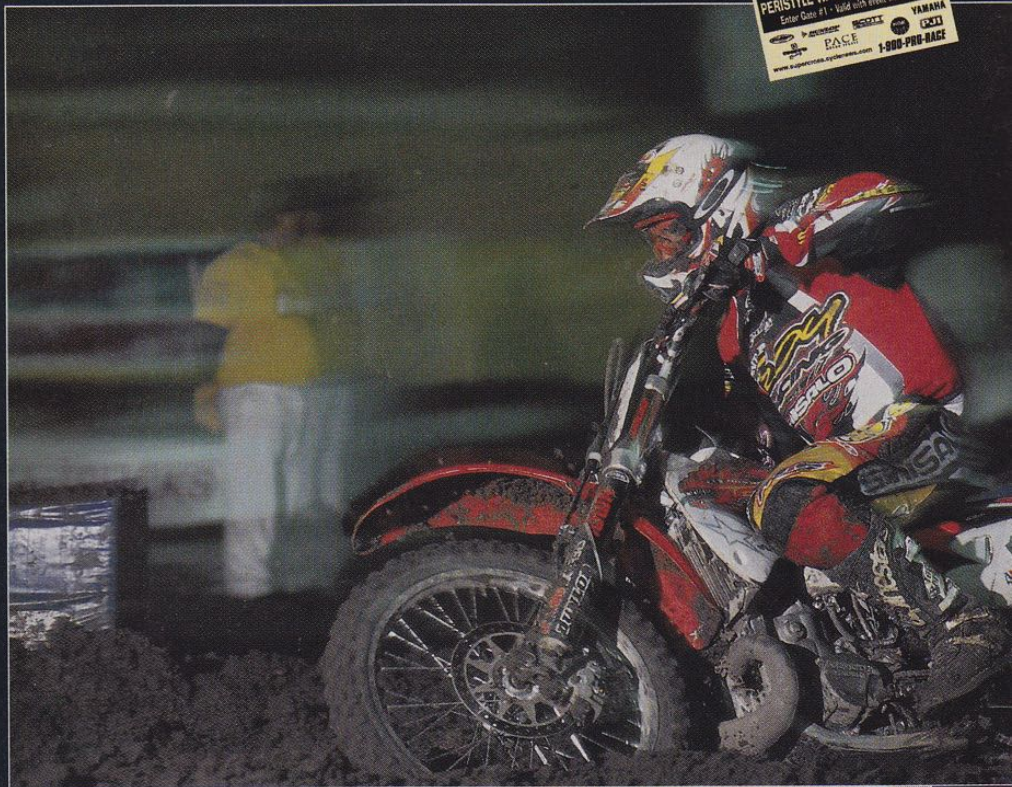
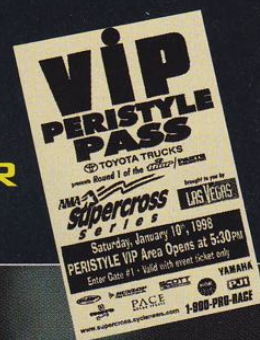
However, the 125 finale did not go off like that at all. Veteran John Dowd, arguably the best mud rider on the U.S. circuit, sailed to the win ahead of Honda of Troy's Stephane Roncada (yet another Frenchman) and Team Stiffie bad boy Michael Brandes.

As I drained the tepid cup of coffee brought to me by DC's parents, my heart started to beat in anticipation as the 250 racers began to stage for the final race of the night. In an attempt to stake out a unique vantage point, I trudged over to the dark and soggy area at the base of the infamous peristyle. Looking around, I realized there was no one else in my general area. In some whacked-out way, it was like being in a muddy movie theater all by myself.

I have been fortunate enough in the past to watch a few supercross races from the floor of various stadiums. It is an assault on the senses. From that vantage point, the racing appears to be far more intense and chaotic than it does from sitting in Seat 8, Row T, Section 56. The Los Angeles race was no different.

After Michael "Let's Get Ready to Rumble" Buffer read off the names of the 20 men who qualified for the 250 main event, the crowd rose to their feet. As the revving engines reached a crescendo, the gate clanked on the ground and it was on! Leading the way out onto the deeply rutted course was everyone's hero Doug Henry and his booming Yamaha four-stroke. No doubt aided by that blue beast's dragster-like acceleration, Henry held the advantage over Chaparral Yamaha's Jeremy McGrath and Kawasaki's Jeff Emig as the pack came screaming towards my dark corner. And despite the fact that there were more than 60,000 people up in the stands, it seemed as if I were at a local race. I was so close I could see the racers' eyes bulging in intense concentration as they cranked their bikes over in my berm. Relentlessly, Henry pointed the big Yamaha towards another place in the record books, this time as the only four-stroke rider ever to win two supercrosses in a row. He seemed to hold a true advantage over the rest of the field because that bike is so damned fast. The power was most obvious in the whoops. Each lap Henry would exit the deeply-rutted corner cautiously, get himself lined up for the washboard straight, and then just

## 1998 AMA TOYOTA SUPERCROSS SERIES OPENER



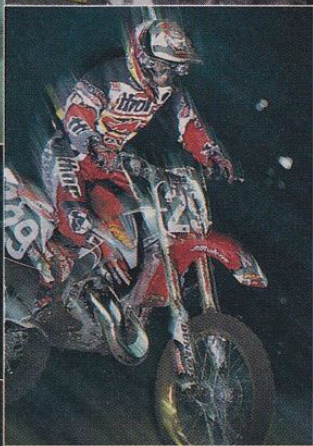
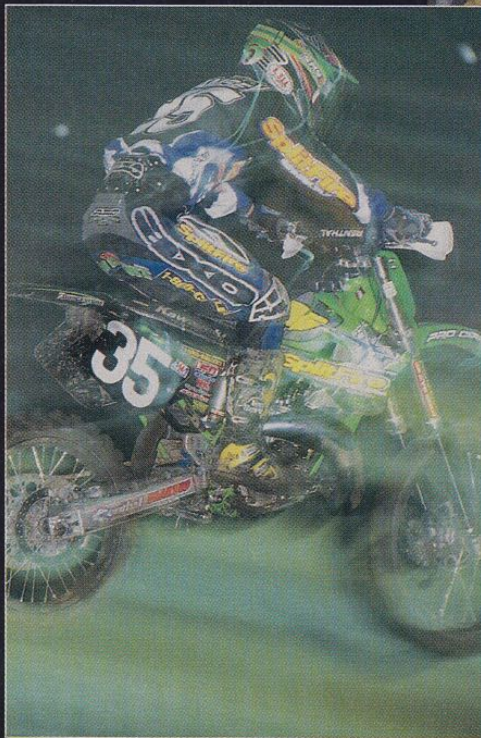
floor it! He seemed to skip across the top of the whoops where others floundered. Lap after lap, it went on, Henry aiming and pointing the booming machine around the circuit, ricocheting off the berms and ruts, and drawing upon all of his talent and determination in order to keep the beast churning, and more importantly, between the banners.

Try as they may, the wailing two-strokes of Emig and McGrath could not reel Henry in. But as the laps clicked off inside the cavernous old ball yard that O.J. Simpson used to play on, the action in Henry's vibrating wake began to intensify. The surprising Pichon - in his first U.S. SX since he broke his leg at this very same race one year ago - had joined the fray and quickly found his way around a seemingly out-of-sorts McGrath. With Henry cruising, maybe the Frenchman was now the fastest man on the track. But before Roger D. could even start thinking about another Suzuki upset at the Coliseum, ala Greg Albertyn in '97, Pichon plowed into the face of jump and went down.

*(Clockwise) Albertyn (7) always lets it all hang out. The crowd at the LASX was pretty pumped up during the race. The prerequisite beach balls were being batted about, but things didn't start getting ugly until someone busted out the blowup doll. Jeremy keeps his distance from the rowdy section. In an effort to save the race, the track was hermetically sealed. Mike Brown (100) knows what it's like to live in a foreign country and ride on unfamiliar tracks and eat food you can't pronounce the names of. Now that he's back home he's trying extra hard.*



(Clockwise) Michael Brandes (25) has been showing a lot of potential lately. His gear looks pretty cool too. Isn't it weird to see Ping (29) on a Honda? Jeff Mataisevich (111) got dogged on his deal to race in Japan this year. Lucky for Chicken that Mitch Payton was cool enough to kick down a Pro Circuit ride for the season. Chicken joins Nathan Ramsey (35), Nick Wey and some kid named Ricky in the PC big rig.



DeCoster's earlier prediction about a Frenchman winning wasn't going to pan out. Or was it? While the crowd was counting down the laps to another amazing effort by Doug Henry, Sebastien Tortelli was hauling ass. Few people seemed to notice that the 19-year-old Tortelli had risen from 16th place in the second corner to catch the leading trio of Henry, Fro and McGrath. Almost immediately Tortelli put a classic block pass on McGrath that was so quick and deft that the 4-time SX Champion seemed startled. With four laps to go Tortelli closed in on Emig and a buzz began to sweep over the cramped stands: Who was #103? Was he a lapped rider? What are all these movie stars doing here? When do they quit selling beer? Adding to the intrigue was the fact that the sound system was practically inaudible while the bikes were run-

ning. The majority of the people in attendance probably had no idea who the guy on the Kawasaki was as he bore down on Emig. Just as the 2-lap signal went out, the frantic Tortelli shot past Emig and was instantly on a surprised Doug Henry's rear bumper. Time out. Doug Henry undoubtedly loves the sport of supercross as much or more than anyone. One gets the impression that he treats racing less as an occupation than as his passion. He's returned from an intestinal disorder, a broken back, and two cracked arms. No matter what the obstacle, Henry does whatever it takes to win races, whether it be through old-fashioned hard work or countless hours of practice and rehabilitation, which is the exact approach required to race and win on the exotic Yamaha YZ400F. No one but a total professional would be capable of developing and test-piloting

this intimidating machine, not to mention completely changing his riding style to adapt to four-stroke equipment. For such reasons, my heart sank when Tortelli passed the Connecticut-based family man just before the white flag. After leading almost the entire way, Henry was the last victim of the dashing and impressive young Tortelli, who was competing in only his second-ever 250 main event. And to add insult to injury, Henry wound up on the ground moments later and lost almost everything he had fought so hard for when he could not restart his engine quickly enough. By the time he got back in the race, Henry had dropped to tenth place. To say the huge crowd was stunned by all this would be an understatement. As a matter of fact, Tortelli didn't even know he was the winner when he crossed the fin-



(Clockwise) The 125s break free.  
 The multi-talented, snowboarder/mountain biker  
 Shaun Palmer showed up at LA with one goal in  
 mind...qualify. He made it all the way to the main.  
 Nothing else matters.  
 John Dowd gives his longtime friend and mechanic,  
 Brian Berry, a little moral support.



ish line, so chaotic was the conclusion. But the smart and savvy Emig knew where he was and was satisfied to start the SX series off better than he ever has. All too aware of the long haul between L.A. and the Las Vegas finale, Emig seemed to let the race come to him. So did McGrath, who looked much more at ease than he did in last year's disastrous opener, though Tortelli certainly gave him a start. And so it was. As I walked up the crumbling steps of the venerable peristyle, I began thinking that the 1998 season opener had had it all: Rain and mud, heroes and goats, an upset winner and a massive crowd of ravenous fans. Even under the ominous winter clouds hovering over downtown L.A., the rest of the series looked very bright indeed.

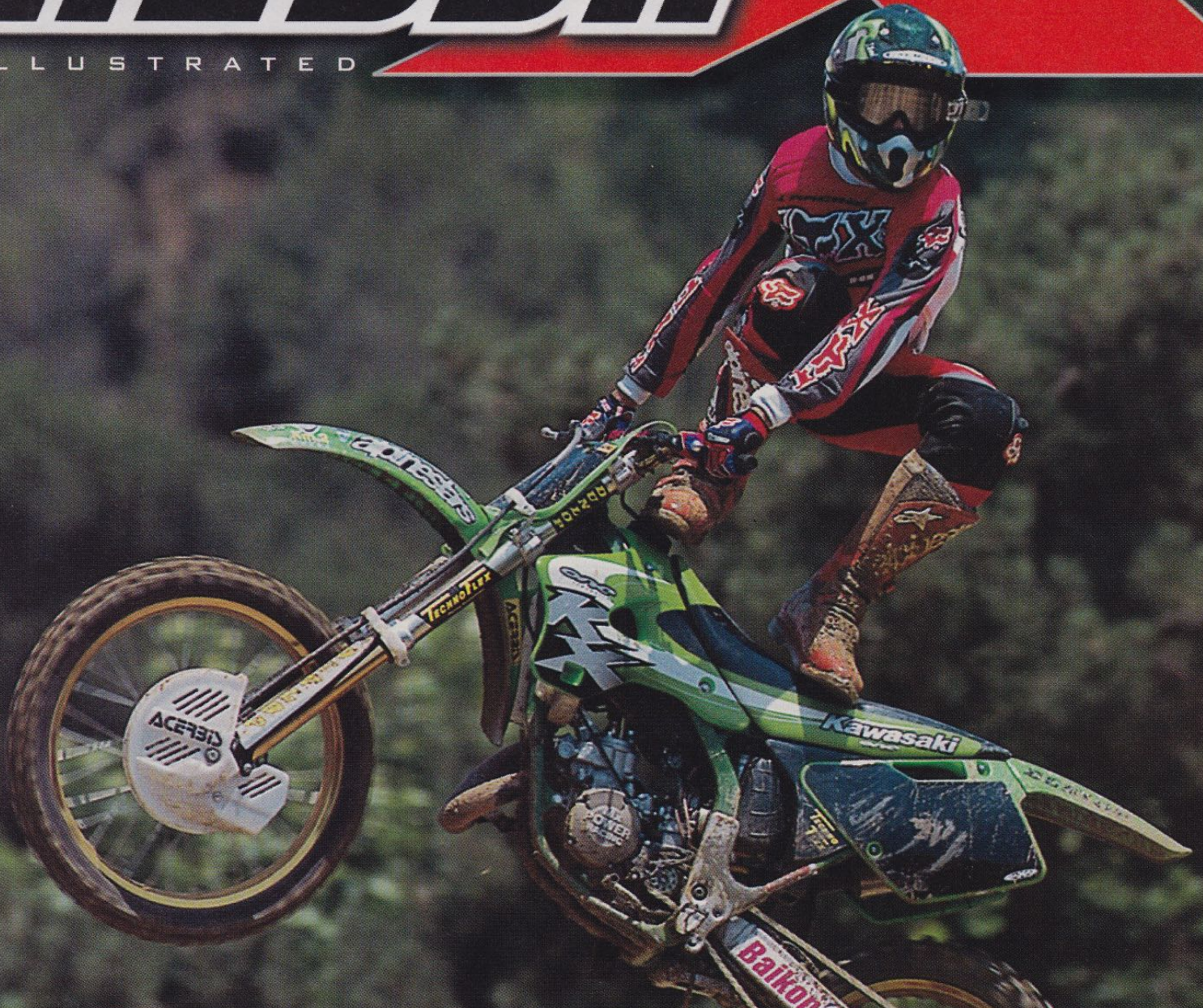
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CR125	'91	16.63
CR125	'92-93	17.96
CR125	'94-96	19.99
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CR250	'88	17.10
CR250	'89-90	15.92
CR250	'91	16.63
CR250	'92-94	17.96
CR250	'95-96	19.99
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CR125	'95-96	27.79
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CR250	'84-92	24.31
CR250	'93-94	25.97
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CR500	'93-94	25.97
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CR125	'87-92	24.31
CR125	'93-94	25.97
CR125	'95-96	27.79
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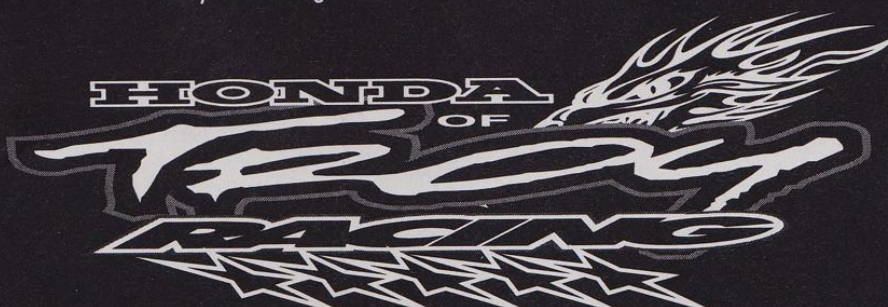
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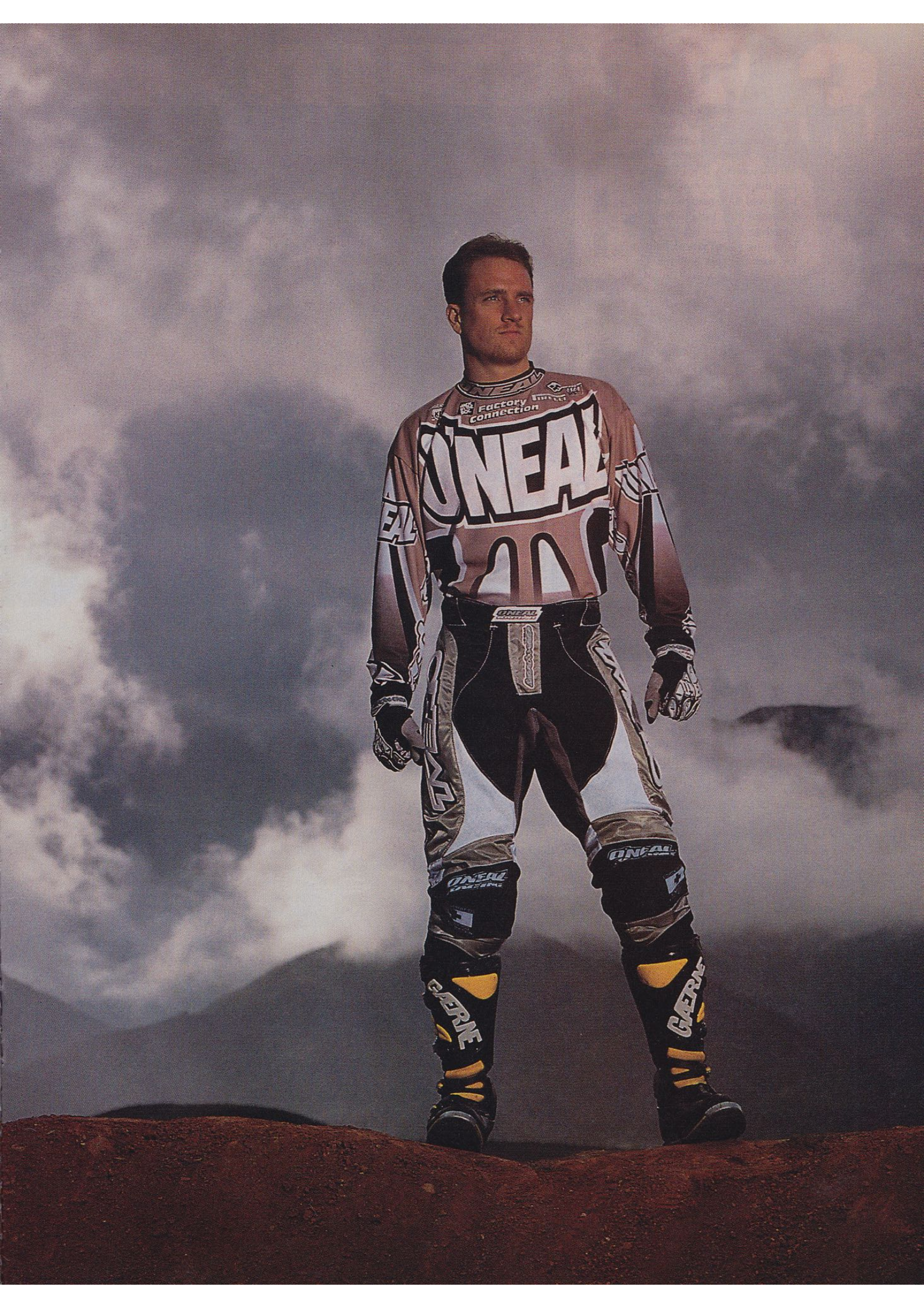
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# REINVENTING MILK LABOR

*By Davey Coombs Photo: Fran Kuhn*



**W**hat do you really know about Mike LaRocco? If you're like most racing fans, you probably know that he's fast, he's from Indiana, he gets bad starts, and that's about it. If you know more than that, then you must watch the background of the motocross set closely, because Mike LaRocco has never been center stage.

In case you haven't noticed, LaRocco has been the most consistent performer of the 1990's. He's ranked in the top 15 on the AMA's all-time win list, he has earned a Top 10 number for nine straight years dating back to 1990, an accomplishment surpassed only by the great Jeff Ward. LaRocco has also pulled off the very rare feat of having won a supercross, a national in all three divisions (125, 250 and the late 500 class), and his class in the Motocross des Nations (1995). He also has two outdoor National Championships ('93 500cc, '95 250cc).

By all rights, LaRocco should be a motocross megastar. Instead, the "Predator" is a bit player in the Big MX Show, mostly as a result of his shy, sometimes introverted demeanor. He has made few efforts to get himself noticed anywhere except in the results. He likes to win races, not jumping contests, so there were no video shoots. He hardly ever gives (or is asked for) meaningful interviews. This general sense of privacy has made him hard to get to know for both fans and the industry, which didn't seem to really matter to the 26-year-old from South Bend, Indiana. At least not until LaRocco discovered last fall that his market value had plummeted so much he couldn't get a factory ride even though he's still wearing #5. It was time to take drastic measures: Mike LaRocco decided it was time to reinvent himself.

## THE RIDER

There should be no question in anyone's mind that Mike LaRocco can ride. However, his career has been plagued by infamous episodes of bad luck, breakdowns and terrible starts, the latter resulting from a general lack of confidence. For instance, in '92 LaRocco blew the 125 National Championship after a string of late-season mishaps, and what should have been his first career title went to Jeff Emig instead. A few untimely injuries have also resulted in dashed title hopes, and the bad start thing has haunted him throughout his entire career.

"Starts?" Laughs. "I don't really know what to tell you except that I've been working on them a lot. I think it's always been a confidence thing. Last year I was gating real well, but I was having a hard time getting down the straightway. If I know I can go out and win, I'm going to be more motivated and confident about my starts. Right now I'm ready and I am anxious to get out front."

## THE IMAGE

Mike LaRocco ready and anxious? Laughing? Doesn't really sound like the quiet Predator we've come to know over the years - but not known very well - does it? LaRocco has always been awkward on camera, dry on the microphone and rarely at ease in public. Such disposition doesn't play well in today's sound-bytes-and-self-promotion motocross racing world, where media-savvy riders like Jimmy Button and Mike Craig can find more support than someone like LaRocco even though their win totals pale in comparison.

"I was actually pretty comfortable as the outsider and because of that I never really tried to fit in or get myself noticed unless I won," admits LaRocco. "I missed out on being at the very top sport, which is okay because I know I would not be comfortable with any more fame than I have now."

"You know, I've always had a hard time expressing myself," continues LaRocco, "mostly because I'm a shy person. But when I put my helmet on, it's a way open up and express myself. One part says if you're going to do it and be a motocross star, you have to do everything that comes with it. But the other half, the half I listened to, always said 'Just train, race and win.'"



LaRocco's still listening to that half, but he realized after last season that he could no longer ignore the other side of the coin. For instance, he now knows that his failure to get involved in the video movement cost him some serious visibility while making underground stars out of the unproven likes of Seth Enslow, Mike Metzger and Larry Linkogle. (When pressed on this matter, LaRocco says the reason he's not in any videos is not entirely his fault. "No one ever called!") So in an effort to make himself more attractive to potential sponsors - and hopefully extend his racing career a little longer - LaRocco made some big changes for 1998. Very big changes.

## THE EQUIPMENT

It's no secret that LaRocco had a bad stint with Suzuki. For most of this latest two-year stint with that team LaRocco and his dad (Mike, Sr.) were at odds with team manager Roger DeCoster over a myriad of things that ranged from bike development and testing to who got what from Japan. The LaRocco/Suzuki deal nearly fell apart in the middle of the supercross season but in the end both sides decided to just get through the season. When the last checkered flag dropped, so did their relationship.

"There were no talks with Suzuki about 1998," says LaRocco, not mincing his words. "It was over. I'm sure they felt the same way, so it would not have been wise for either of us to continue. I would like to say that it wasn't because of Suzuki not trying. It was just the team and the way it was structured."

With three months to go before the '98 season, LaRocco had few suitors. Having already gone around with Suzuki twice, Yamaha before that and Kawasaki somewhere in between, LaRocco didn't have a lot of options. Honda was, of course, one place to go, but the time had already allotted most of their budget on Ezra Lusk and Steve Lamson and supporting semi-factory teams FMF and Honda of Troy.

In stepped Rick Zielfelder and Factory Connection. Zielfelder, or "Ziggy" as he's often called, is a renowned suspension guru with a competitive streak. Factory Connection

is not one of the big southern California aftermarket conglomerates. In fact, only six people work there, including office help, shippers and receivers.

"A friend of LaRocco's told me last fall that he was looking for a ride," said Zielfelder. "It bothered me that someone of his caliber didn't have something a little more concrete. Knowing the relationship I have with American Honda, I knew I could find bikes and good equipment, and we could certainly give him the suspension, so I just called him."

The big question was this: Would a career-long factory pilot take the step down to semi-privateer status in order to continue competing? "Mike's biggest driving factor is that he wants competitive equipment," says Zielfelder. "I had never really thought of putting together a team; that has never been our intention, but I'm an east coast guy like Mike and I've always appreciated his work ethic. He never gives up, never stops charging. I believed that with the right equipment he could get right back up there. So after I made the offer to start a one-man team just for him."

"Rick really stepped up and I feel like he wants to win as bad as I do," compliments LaRocco of his new primary sponsor. "Honda is helping out, too, but they're not giving me all the good stuff and they are there to help. As soon as he started training LaRocco has been giving access to Honda's test tracks, plus he's been receiving parts from Japan to test, including ignition, works head and cylinder, and linkage."

## THE MECHANIC

Let's cut to the chase. A lot of people disagreed with the fact that over the course of most of LaRocco's career, his family welded a strong hand. LaRocco's father Mike, Sr. has been spinning the wrenches for him for almost his whole career while his mother May helped out with business contracts, travel plans and the like. The LaRoccos won a lot of races the industry felt that the sometimes abrasive father was holding the son back. LaRocco adamantly disagrees, but he nevertheless decided that it was best that he find a new mechanic.

"There's definitely an understanding that this is what it's going to take for me to move on," says the son of the break-

# 3 OUT OF 3 AIN'T BAD



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up of the most famous father & son motocross battery since Gary and Don Jones. The LaRoccos still plan on being at as many races as possible, but their most important duties now involve helping Mike, Jr.'s wife Elizabeth keep an eye on their grandson Ryder.

The person LaRocco chose as his new mechanic is Paul Delaurier, the ever-smiling tuner who spent last season working with the now-retired Damon Bradshaw. "This is a big change for me and it's going really well," says LaRocco of his new mechanic. "We've been setting the bike up together because he rides himself, so he's not doing things blind. We're also kind of the same age and we seem to have a lot in common." But that's not to say that Delaurier is much different than LaRocco's father was as his mechanic. "I feel like he's a friend who is trying to make it better for me. My dad always did it like that when I was growing up and it was second nature to us. It's just that we kept working together longer than most fathers and sons do and some people didn't like that."

So why don't father & son teams usually work? Jeff Stanton says it's a matter of respect. "Maybe a rider like Mike doesn't want to say no to his dad about a set-up or is maybe afraid to criticize, and vice-versa," says Stanton, who is another one of those riders who spoke louder on the track than off.

had his hands full. "Mike is a tough guy to recast, but I don't think it's my job to recreate him but rather just redefine him. All bullshit aside, Mike's a helluva nice guy, but he's also one of the most misunderstood riders this side of Damon Bradshaw. Unless you get to know him on a personal level, you don't really know what he's like. He never knew how to handle himself, let alone the media. He's just like Stanton: He worked so hard to win that he didn't have time to work on his personality. Guys like that put more effort into their riding than their self-promotion, probably because they had to sacrifice something. Their image and their relationships with the media get put on the back-burner."

Bramblett found that LaRocco was a tough sell. "I think there were several reasons for the difficulty," says Bramblett. "He had become stagnate to the market, he had worn the same clothes for a long time, and he was never in a video or anything. People forgot about him even though he's still #5!" So LaRocco ended up going the incentive-based route with his personal sponsors: Less money up front, more on the backside with performance clauses. Bramblett also wanted to see Mike pushed more in advertisements.

"Mike felt that this program was the best way to get his foot back in the door and also guarantee himself some exposure," says Bramblett. "That's the point that I became sold on

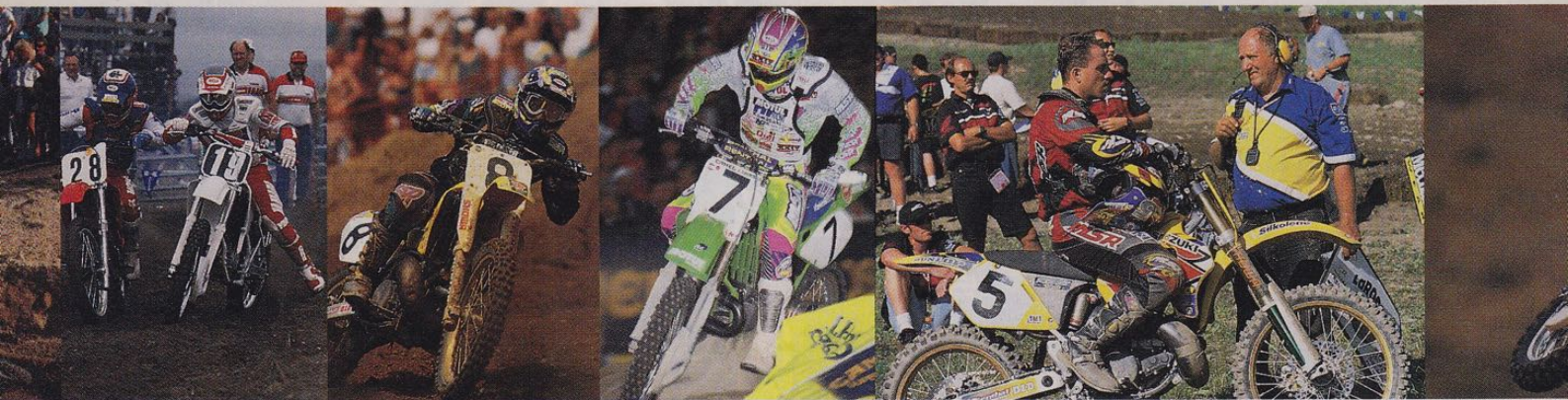
ly - it's been four years since O'Neal had a rider win a supercross in their clothes. "I haven't worn another brand since I rode for AXO with Yamaha," says LaRocco. "It's really weird because everything I have is MSR, even my casual clothes. I pretty much lost my whole wardrobe!"

One thing LaRocco did not change was his goggle company. "I think he stayed with Scott because we stayed with him," volunteers Bevo Forti. "It's a mutual thing, I think all he needed was a chance to be a happy racer and that's what he is now. He was in a situation he didn't like and now he's out of it. Last year was bad for him, what with the Suzuki deal and all, plus Elizabeth having a really rough pregnancy with Ryder. Now everything is fine and there's nothing on his mind but racing."

## THE DRIVE-THRU

Another new sponsor that stepped up was the popular California-based fast food chain Jack In The Box. It's an unlikely pairing for a quiet rider from Indiana and semi-privateer team based in New England.

"Jack In The Box came about through a friend of Bill's Pipes and a customer of ours named Wayne Townsend," says Ziefelder. "His kids race in California and he owns several restaurants. He heard about LaRocco called us to ask if we



When you're just friends the mechanic can take orders better and make the changes you want without questioning you. Mike's dad was pretty hard-headed at times; maybe he did what he felt was best instead of what Mike felt was best."

Mr. LaRocco says he misses being a mechanic, but not enough to go looking for another gig. "I really don't want to work for anyone else," says Mike, Sr. "I was happy with the arrangement we had. I was tickled to have the chance to work with my son and watch his career progress."

## THE MAKEOVER

With a new lease on his career, the next thing LaRocco did was find himself someone who could do his bidding with the rest of the industry. After years of sponsorship tie-ins through the factory teams, LaRocco needed to find his own support for everything from riding gear to spark plugs.

"I wanted to do things right this time, not just take what was there on the table," says LaRocco of his desire to do better business. "I wanted to do what's right for me and my motivation. I'm not in the position I was in the past as far as being a desirable rider to sponsor, but I want to get back up there."

Stanton and Ziefelder again stepped in to help, both suggesting that he call Fred Bramblett, the man best known for guiding the career of cross country icon Scott Summers. The timing was right; after years of working lucrative deals for Summers' own program, Bramblett and Summers decided to expand their efforts into working with others.

"Our task is to offer career-management and development for racers, which means everything from contract negotiations to media coordination and image development," says Bramblett of the company OMS Limited. With LaRocco, he

Mike LaRocco—he was willing to bet his wages on the idea that he would get back on top. He left a lot of money on the table for the added incentive of proving himself."

"He's just a hard-working guy," adds career-long friend and sponsor Bevo Forti of Scott USA. "This is his year to be the next Guy Cooper - everybody's favorite underdog. Larry Ward took his place at Suzuki, now Mike's going to take Larry's place as the factory-beater. People will start cheering for Mike because he gets to play the giant killer now, and there's more Davids than Goliaths out there."

## THE CLOTHES

Another radical move (in LaRocco terms) was his break-up with his long-time clothing sponsor MSR. After years of wearing the conservative but classy threads of MSR, LaRocco found himself shopping for a new tailor.

"MSR and I just stalemated on our negotiations," says LaRocco with a hint of remorse. "I think the problems came up because they got together with Greg Albertyn for '98 before we had a deal, and it was obvious to me that I would be taking a back seat to him in advertisements and stuff. I just felt like I should be promoted at this point in my career, not pushed aside." When pushed for more details about the split, LaRocco shuts down the controversy quickly, just as he does when asked about Suzuki. "I had a good relationship with the people at MSR, nothing more and nothing less. I think their decision to go with Alby was more of a corporate thing than a personal thing. I'm not a factory rider right now and that made a difference to them."

Stepping up to the plate to ink a deal with LaRocco was O'Neal, which has been in equal need of a transformation late-

had any interest in working out a sponsorship. I was like, 'Sure!' He went through the marketing group and they called us. They have been a little bit nervous, trying to dot all the i's and cross the t's, but fast food caters to the 18-34 year old males, and so does supercross. They weren't sure they wanted to do it at first because they had been pitched before but with the wrong program. In the end it all worked out."

There are ten cities on the series tour that also have Jack In The Box restaurants, and LaRocco will make appearances at many of them. The chain is also planning to mention of the rider and race onto advertisements when he's in town, plus supply autograph stock with redeemable coupons attached.

With that stroke of corporate luck - and a food per-diem to spend - LaRocco needed some wheels to get to all of those races and restaurants. Next into the fold was rig Pete's RV Center. The company built a hybrid camper/box van for the team which uses a motorhome chassis and a classic box van back. In the words of Ziefelder, "It has all the comforts of a motorhome and all the necessities of a normal box van: Built-in generator, water, showers, generators, the works."

## THE FUTURE

Mike LaRocco seems comfortable with his new image, though he has yet to get that call from one of those video producers. In this new era of independent motocross teams, he's not the only Top 10 rider with his own team, but Jeremy McGrath's Chaparral Yamaha program might actually be better than a factory ride. And even though LaRocco no longer has the luxuries of the big rig, he might have something more valuable to him at this point in his career: renewed desire.

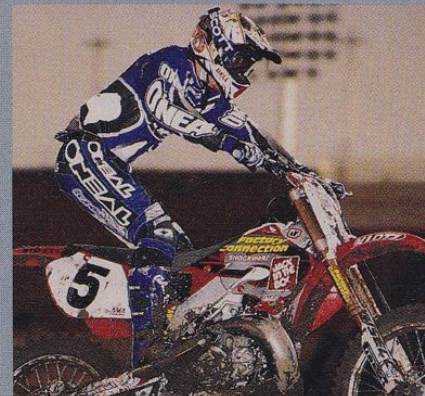
"He's much more relaxed now because of his situation



## OPENING NIGHT

In the parking lot of the 1998 AMA Toyota SX Series opener at the Los Angeles Coliseum, Mike LaRocco's black and gray race headquarters looked formidable enough. In the muddy practice sessions and qualifiers, he looked fast enough. But when he got into his first main event aboard Honda, he didn't look comfortable enough. His inability to get a holeshot hurt his chances from the start, but he soon moved up to catch the tail-end of the half-dozen riders in the leading freight train. However, LaRocco crashed twice - the first time while eventual race winner Sebastien Tortelli was still behind him - and slipped back to a mediocre 9th place at the finish.

"I just dorked out," said LaRocco of the crashes that cost him at least a fifth-place finish. "I'm obviously disappointed with the results, but I'm pretty pleased with the way things were going up to that point. I feel like the team is great, the bike is great, and I'm riding really well. I think I will do much better in the next few races. It was just a mistake and I'm mad at myself for making it. My plan is to get on the podium very soon."



One week later in the Houston Astrodome LaRocco got another bad start after he hesitated just before pulling the trigger off the start. "If I had just went for it, I would have had the start!" said an exasperated LaRocco later. But this time he was stronger, faster and much more comfortable than he was just seven days earlier. His late charge took him past Kevin Windham and Ryan Hughes into fourth-place, right on the heels of the runner-up McGrath and third-place Emig. LaRocco just missed the podium at the checkered flag.

uation. Now he's in a great mood. He's happy with the equipment and his team is totally behind him. There's a lot of positive people with him now. I know I'm pulling for him."

"Having Jeff coming around will definitely help," adds LaRocco. "I kind of grew up with him is probably one of the riders I have the most respect for because he always worked so hard and I knew where he came from. I can't really say I learned a lot from him, but I got a lot from him. Now that he's at Honda advising them, hopefully he can do a little of that for me, too. Even if we can just be friends like we always were, it will be a big help."

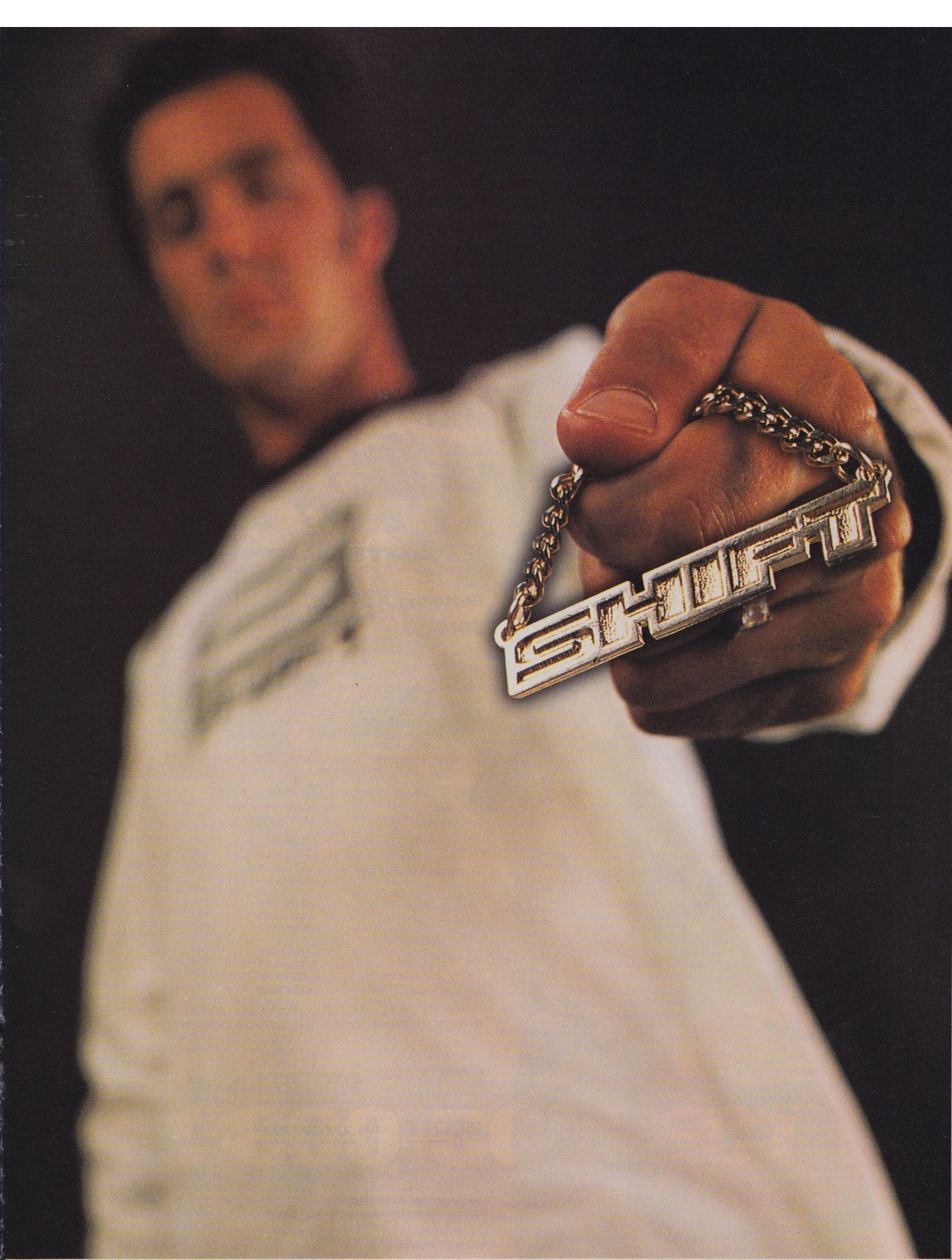
Right now, Mike LaRocco is asking for all the help he can get, but only in the image department. He already got a new bike, a new team, new clothes, new desire, new mechanic, new everything. Now if he can he only find a way to get off the starting gate, Mike LaRocco might win again.





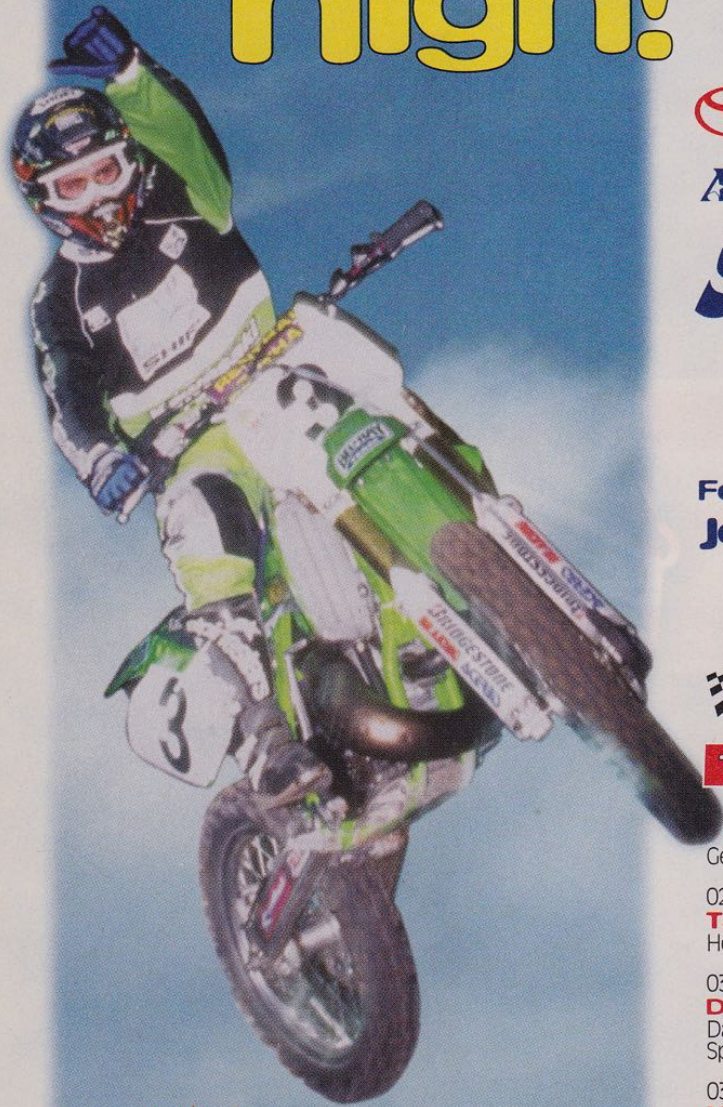
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# THE LAST

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# THE STORY OF JOHN GREGORY'S JT EMPIRE

BY ERIC JOHNSON

PHOTOS: JT ARCHIVE, PAUL BUCKLEY AND JIM GIANATSI

# TYCOON



**“W**here did you get that photo of Ron Lechien?” Greg Fox asked while standing in the living room of my Manhattan Beach apartment. The poster on the wall showed Lechien pitched over in a classic, no-nonsense whip. “Man, look at the clothes he’s wearing! That gear epitomized the Dogger’s style—that was the best race clothing ever made. How much do you want for that picture?”

Surprised by his fascination with the poster, I told him to go ahead and take it. The Lechien portrait was one of my favorite photos, too, but I was feeling the effects of one too many beers before the 1995 Anaheim supercross. “I know you guys will give it a good home.”

Three years later, that poster hangs on the wall of a conference room deep within the Fox Racing compound in Morgan Hill, California. Set amongst hundreds of pictures of Fox-clad racers, the Lechien poster sticks out like a sore thumb. Why? Because the gear in question, “the best race clothing ever made,” is a classic white Honda JT Racing jersey, bright-blue JT pants, a blue ALS helmet, and a JT V-500 chest protector.

## ONCE UPON A TIME IN AMERICA

The fact that this poster functions as anything other than a dart board in a competitor’s war room is a bit incredible. But this poster’s place of honor is a complimentary nod to JT Racing, the clothing company that once cast a huge, intimidating shadow over world-wide motocross. In a time when the motocross clothing business generates roughly \$100 million in worldwide sales annually it seems unbelievable that JT Racing once controlled as much as 50 percent of the market. But despite brilliant innovation, marketing, and a bit of clairvoyance, somewhere along the way it all went wrong. What used to be the most celebrated clothing company on the planet has lately been reduced to a bit player in the clothing wars.

The creation of John and Rita Gregory, San Diego, CA-based JT Racing was so influential that its products and philosophy often transcended the sport itself. Beginning with an early 1970s sponsorship of multi-time 250cc World Champion Joel Robert and Roger DeCoster, his young partner in crime, JT Racing grew into an international empire. Over the next 20 years, the company developed a dizzying array of products and sponsored virtually every major motocross star to ever pull on a pair of racing pants. Besides Lechien, Robert, and DeCoster, JT Racing was the brand of choice at one time or another for Heikki Mikkola, Marty Smith, Bob Hannah, Broc Glover, Jeff Ward, Rick Johnson, David Bailey, Kent Howerton, Rick Burgett, Darrell Shultz, Bob Moore, Jean-Michel Bayle, Jacky Vimond, Gaston Rahier, Georges Jobe, and the entire U.S. team for the 1981 Motocross and Trophee des Nations. Amazingly, every one of these riders achieved National or World motocross titles during their careers.

In many ways the rise of JT Racing personified the growth of American motocross. As the sport gained mainstream popularity, the company continued to develop and mature, eventually creating a brand of clothing that would come to epitomize the spirit of the sport.

## THE HUSTLER

“I think it was 1969 or 1970 when I first noticed them,” remembers Gary Martini, now a member of American Honda’s motorcycle operations staff. “I was 15 at the time and my dad and I were waiting to get in at Carlsbad. When we finally pulled up to the entrance, there was this guy standing out front, wearing a big cowboy hat, like Hoss on the TV show ‘Bonanza.’ He was with this really hot chick, and they were selling motocross socks out of the trunk of their car. My dad was eyeing this chick, and he ended up buying a pair of yellow motocross socks. I later found out that the guy with the hat was John Gregory and the woman was his wife Rita.”

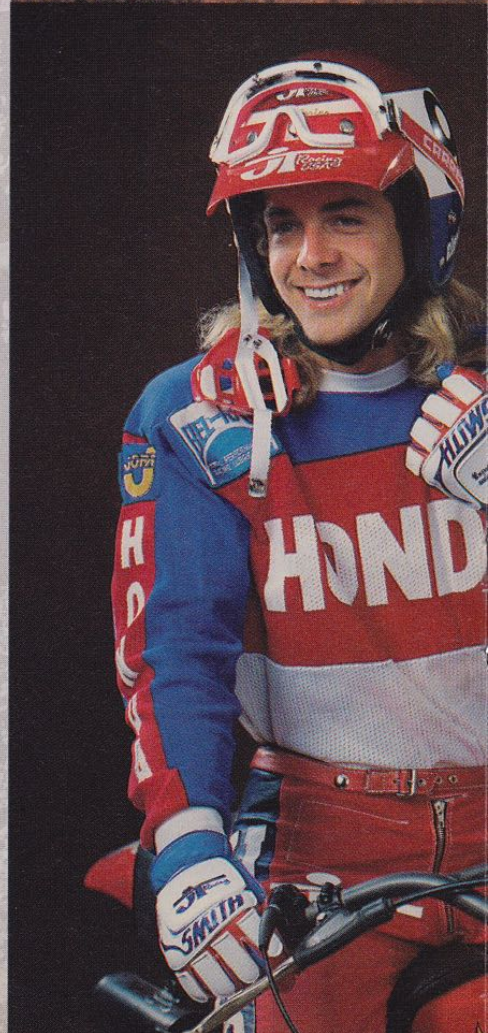
The image of Gregory selling socks out of the trunk of his car brings to mind the humble beginnings of Nike boss Phil Knight, who used to vend waffle iron-molded shoes out of his car at track meets, or Oakley founder Jim Jannard doing the same thing with grips and goggles on the Golden State motocross circuit. Both were entrepreneurs with more vision than capital, and all three were about to be taken on a wild ride.

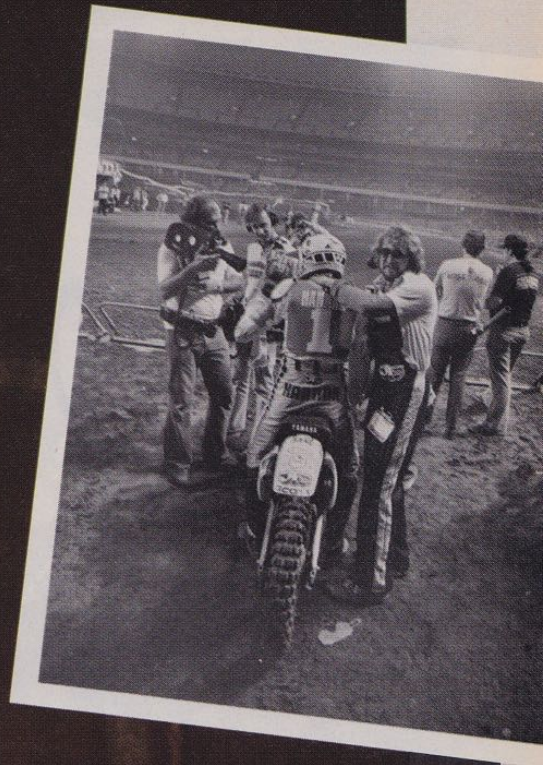
“I rode desert in the late ‘60s and early ‘70s while living in Corona, California,” says Gregory. “A friend of mine owned a local Honda dealership and we rode all throughout the area. I also belonged to a couple of riding clubs, one called the Jackrabbits and another called the Cactus Cats. I never really raced any motocrosses—probably no more than a half a dozen times. But I could see that motocross was going to be a big market. I remember being at a local race and I saw a guy wearing these long socks. He told me that he bought them in Tijuana, Mexico. That gave me the idea to go down to Mexico myself, buy a bunch of those socks, and start selling them.”

That was how John Gregory started his small clothing company. Buying inexpensive products in Mexico and selling them for profit in the States. Originally a pharmacist by trade, John started this unique importing business on the sun-baked outskirts of San Diego. With Rita, he brought it to life by haunting the dusty local motocross tracks of southern California, pitching the products and spreading the word, sometimes right outside the front gate.

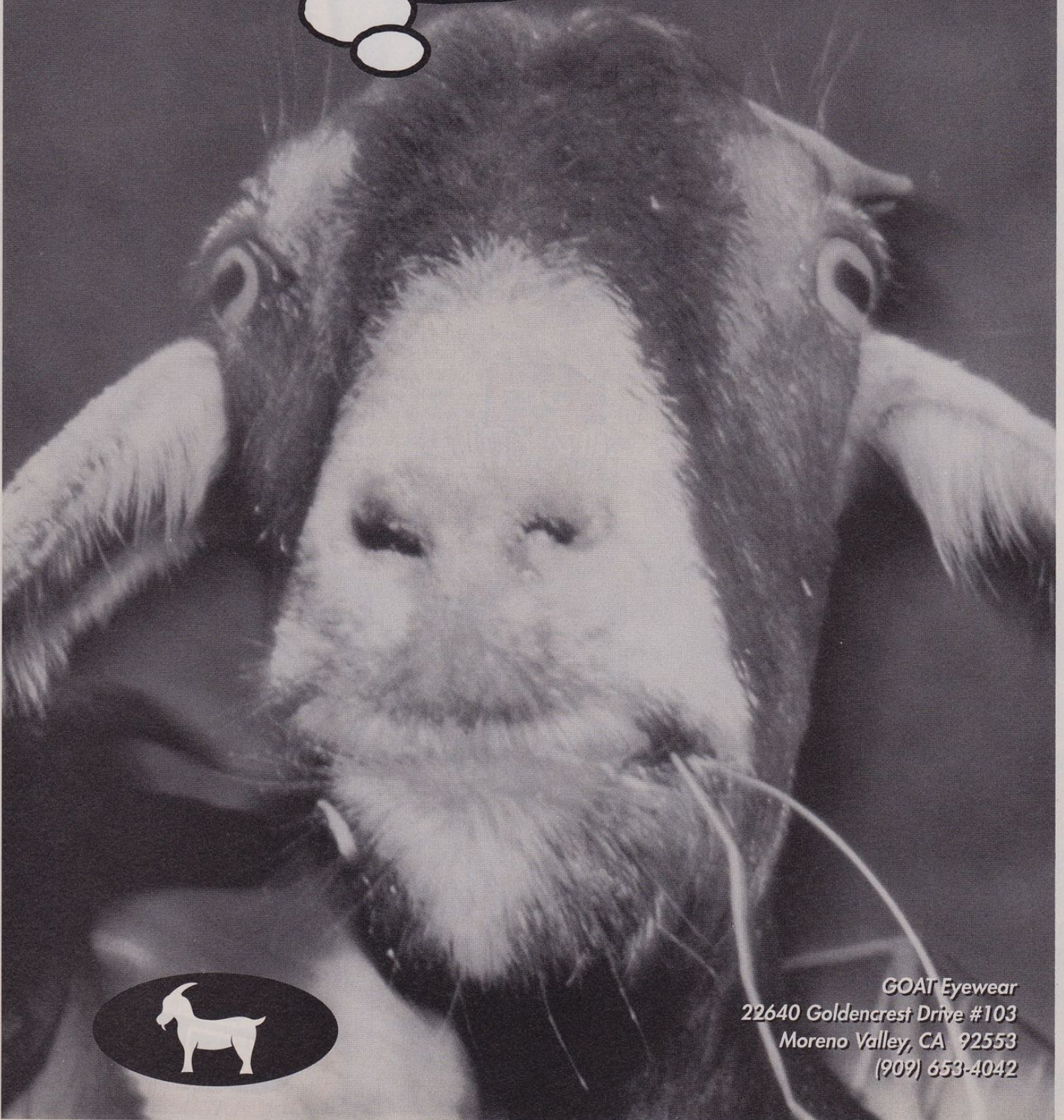
“Remember, I was associated with desert racing, which was very big at that time,” continues Gregory. Big enough for him to hand over some socks to Billy Silverthorn and a few other major desert racers—the first riders he sponsored. “At the same time, I was starting to meet some of the big European motocrossers. I started to hang out at Saddleback Park, where I would watch the Europeans compete in the Inter-AMA races. One day I approached Joel Robert and Roger DeCoster about endorsing our socks. At the time riders were wearing their socks outside of their boots, so I figured getting Joel Robert, the 250 World Champ, to wear them was pretty important for us. We ended up paying Joel \$100 a year plus giving him all the socks he wanted. I believe we were the first company to begin paying motocrossers to wear product.”

“We were so stupid at the time!” laughs DeCoster. “When John approached Joel and I, I remember us saying to him, ‘What do you want to





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give us money for? For wearing socks? Sure, we'll take it!"

So the seemingly insignificant motocross sock was actually the first iteration of the motocross clothing business. Sensing that he was on to something good, Gregory began to see the significant potential in selling motocross clothing.

"I wasn't really thinking about the gear much at first," admits Gregory. "Most of the great riders were wearing Hallman, and I thought the stuff was fine. The first thing I noticed—other than socks—were the Australian rugby jerseys a number of guys began to wear. Right after that, Brad Lackey began to wear a brand of jersey called Buffalo Breath. So we decided to make rugby jerseys that matched our socks. That same year we also sponsored Team USA at the ISDE with shirts and socks. By that time I had hooked up with Torsten Hallman, and through that relationship Hallman became our first distributor, and we worked with him in the domestic market for many years.

"Rita and I began to see more ways to match clothing and I began to put it all together in my mind," continues Gregory. "You have to remember that not a lot of thought was put into the style part of [racing] back then. And Rita and I were both from Oklahoma and had never ridden motorcycles before living in California, so all of this was very new to us. Rita's dad loaned me \$2,500 because the banks wouldn't, and I began purchasing more product in Mexico. There was a cotton import quota during those years, so I would drive my El Camino into Mexico, load it as full as possible, then rush back across the border to beat the quota!"

It soon became apparent that the small operation was getting big enough to warrant a business license. So John and Rita went down to the local business bureau in order to make it legal.

"We stood in line for nearly two hours before they handed over our one-page business form," remembers John. "The obnoxious lady at the counter said, 'You have to have a name for your business on the form. If you don't, you go to the end of the line.' Well, there was no way I was going to wait in that line again, so I said, 'We'll name our company T.J. after Tijuana.' But Rita said, 'John, flip it around—JT sounds a little better.' That's how we came up with JT Racing."

## THE PHARMACY

"I started to meet all of the big names in motocross, including this crazy bastard from Holland named Bob Twin," Gregory remembers. "Bob owned Twin-Air, which was the first filter to utilize a twin-foam design. He was very active on the European grand prix scene and really wanted to sell his product here. Twin hooked up with us and we pushed the product heavily, selling it through Torsten Hallman. I don't think a lot of people are aware of this, but Hallman was part owner of JT Racing at that time. Back then, the company was jointly owned by myself, Hallman, Lars Larson, and a woman named Brigitta Berlin. Twin wasn't happy with how we were selling his product, and due to his reaction, we decided to go direct and make our own twin-air product called

Phase 2." The filter became a phenomenal success for JT Racing.

"We were beginning to make money, so we converted half the pharmacy into a motorcycle shop/distribution center," recalls Gregory. "We were selling helmets and boots and working on motorcycles right inside the pharmacy—then I would go back behind the counter to fill a prescription when a customer came in."

As the mom-and-pop operation gained popularity and experience, John began making more contacts. One of those introductions helped change the face of JT Racing and, for all intents and purposes, the sport of motocross forever.

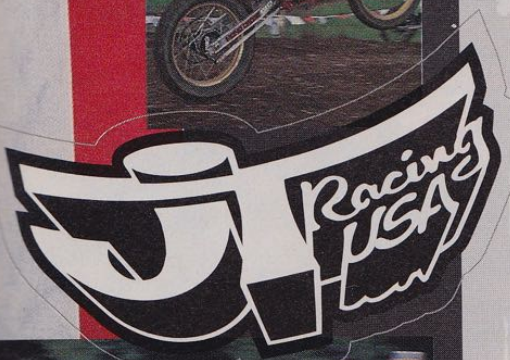
"I began to meet more Swedes—Rolf Tibblin, Kent Ohlins, and Klaus Nilsson," explains Gregory. "They were a very big influence on us and they kind of took me under their wing. Rolf was teaching motocross schools for Husqvarna, and he introduced me to Juha Tirninen, whom would prove to be one of the best friends I've ever had. Juha MX products at Koho, a Finnish company that manufactured ice hockey equipment. Koho was a real pioneer in modern motocross protective equipment. They came up with a lot of innovative products, like the idea of a combined nylon/leather pant.

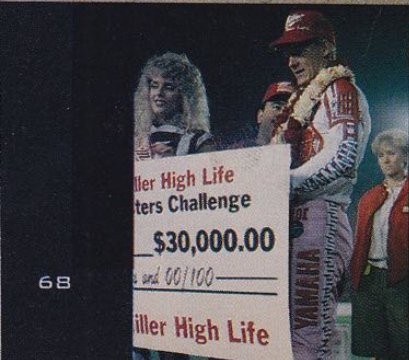
"One afternoon a big truck pulled up in front of the shop. The driver jumped down from the cab and asked me where I wanted all of the boxes. In the boxes were numerous pairs of red, white, and blue motocross pants made up of nylon, with a conventional leather saddle stitched into them. Come to find out, a promoter named Edison Dye got into a major dispute with Koho, and rather than send the cargo back to Finland, Juha called Koho and they agreed to give the shipment to me for virtually nothing. It was that shipment that started the JT clothing thing. At that moment we became the Koho importer."

The revolutionary nylon pants took a while to catch on, and JT didn't get any help from the AMA. "The AMA was in tight with the Bates Leather Company, which was very big in dirt track at the time, so they banned nylon leathers because they were a fire hazard!" says Gregory. "This, despite the fact that the riders were allowed to wear a nylon jersey! That lasted about nine days, then I turned my lawyer loose on those bastards. Boy, those AMA guys hated me, and whenever they saw me coming, they would run and hide."

Sponsorship and endorsement deals soon began to play a larger role in the evolution of the motocross business. Heikki Mikkola, a 250 and 500 World Champion from Finland, was brought on board by Koho to help promote the Koho product line. At the time, both Koho and Sinisalo were supplying product to JT Racing in America, so Mikkola became a partial JT rider as well, wearing Sinisalo clothes with JT accessories.

"Mikkola was the first real star to ride for Koho," explains Gregory. "The first product he endorsed was the 707 Finn Fighter faceguard that bolted onto the helmet. Juha was responsible for putting that deal together. Eventually we met the people from Sinisalo and they began to supply product to JT Racing directly. We were supplied gloves, pants, and shoulder pads which they made, but with our name. This was around 1975 and I





started to go to all of the trade shows and major races in order to meet people. It's kind of funny, I've been told the motorcycle boom peaked in America in '71, but 1975 was really just the beginning of it!"

## Young Americans

During this same period Gregory picked up the first of his riders that would become American motocross legends: Marty Smith and Bob Hannah.

"Marty grew up near us in San Diego and was the first kid that we directly sponsored," says Gregory. "Marty was typical of all the kids that rode around San Diego. He had the nicest parents you'll ever meet, and they handled all of his clothing matters. I probably paid him about \$10,000 a year to endorse our entire product line."

"I was with John and JT in 1975," says Smith. "He and Rita are really good people. Even then, JT was what all of the other clothing manufacturers wanted to be. Since I lived near them, I ended up doing a lot of their testing. John would have me ride in stuff to see how long it would last. He was real good about accepting creative input."

"Marty was the first true American motocross hero," declares Gregory. "He was just awesome. In fact, due in part to Marty, JT is stronger today in Europe than it is in the United States, more so than even Mikkola. Mikkola was more of just an association for us because he always ran with the Sinisalo name, who was making all of our JT gear. However, it was JT that made Sinisalo famous because Mikkola always raced with JT stitched on his ass and with JT stickers on his visor. Gerrit Wolsink (from Holland) began to wear our stuff, too, so we were really starting to generate a lot of publicity around the world." Especially when Wolsink won the 500cc USGP at Carlsbad five times on ABC's "Wide World of Sports."

JT was now the major player in the U.S. clothing business. However, the biggest variable of all was about to be factored into the equation. In 1976, Gregory hooked up with Bob "Hurricane" Hannah, who was poised to replace Smith as the best racer in America. Hannah would ultimately become JT's top salesman—and guinea pig as well.

"Hannah started to show up in '76 and we worked with him all the way up to the time that he broke his leg in 1980," recalls Gregory. "Bob was probably the first superhero of international motocross, and in terms of bang for our buck, the best rider we ever had. He also helped me a lot with design. I remember one year at Unadilla, I heard all of this banging going on in the back of his box van, and there's Bob punching holes in his chest protector. That gave us the idea to outfit our chest protectors with two separate, ventilated pieces of plastic. The lightning bolts were also Bob's idea. He would cut them out of contact paper for himself. We just took it a step further and mass-produced stickers. When Bob was at his zenith and winning everything, we had him wearing things like the blue or red pants and jerseys with the lightning bolts and Superman logos all over them."

Another of Hannah's personal innovations would re-thread the entire industry: The long sleeve cotton race jersey. "Bob went to JC Penney one day and bought a long-sleeved T-shirt. He told

me he wanted to race in it, so he got it printed-up," laughs Gregory of the breakthrough jerseys. One of the first things he had printed on the chest was 'J & D Floor Coverings,' a family-owned carpet store in Pennsylvania whose owners Bob had befriended at a national back East. "Those shirts were so successful that it took until just recently for the clothing companies to start going back to synthetic materials."

Such early dealings with the volatile Hannah made a lasting impression on Gregory, and the friendship between the two would last to this day. "I just worship Bob!" says Gregory. "When it comes to anything with a motor, he can deal with it better than anyone in the world. Bob was the best rider I have ever had."

One of the innovations that Hannah helped make popular was the logo and letters on the back of the pants, a stylish breakthrough that came about through a lucky accident.

"We received a shipment of pants and when this guy went to open the box with a razor blade he accidentally sliced up the ass of one pair of pants," recalls Gregory. "So a guy named Jerry Parks went to a sewing shop to get them fixed and decided at the last minute to have the JT logo stitched onto the ass. Gaston Rahier was the first rider to ride with the logo on his butt, but Bob really helped us with that because he was never hesitant to try new things. He was like, 'What do you want me to wear this week, John? I remember one time we stitched 'East at Joe's' on his pants!"

During his tenure as JT's most prolific on-track salesman, did Hannah have any favorite articles of JT race clothing? "You're talking to a 40-year-old guy here!" scoffs Hannah. "I didn't care how the clothes looked. I wore the clothes to race with, and I didn't care what I looked like. If John had a new idea or style he wanted me to wear, I was like, 'Yeah, why not? I'll wear it, I don't care.' I was more concerned with riding the bike than how I looked. John made the clothes for the riders. Now it's just how it looks, not how it works. It's all crap now."

## Golden Years

As JT rolled through the early 1980's, the company continued to increase in both creativity and popularity. Sales were booming, riders were winning, and JT Racing had the market firmly by the throat. Motocross magazines were chock full of ads featuring virtually every major pro motocross racer clad in JT clothes, and kids everywhere were clamoring to purchase such cutting-edge products as the Flo-Form vented jerseys and race pants, Half-Breed gloves, Euro Replica jerseys, Supercross Rock Guards, Team Screen chest pros, and the notoriously trendy Legaitors.

"Man, it was like Nike!" laughs David Bailey. "I remember when the blue nylon pants came out, and I called up to order a pair, complete with the JT logo on the butt. They ended up sending me the pants, a face mask and a jersey, and they hardly charged me anything for it. I was really stoked because the blue and white pants matched my Bultaco perfectly!"

There's hardly a man in motocross who doesn't remember seeing the JT ads in the

motocross magazines of that time. "As a young enthusiast, I was in awe of them," says Bob Rathkamp, now the head of Sinisalo Pacific. "The product was right, and they had all of the star riders. They were really on the gas as a company and the chemistry was just working. John was a marketing genius and they were very visible in advertising. They had all of the accessories, too, the bib mechanic's overalls, cowboy hats, sweat pants, shoes, T-shirts—all those accessories that made them so cool."

"The first thing I remember about JT were the advertisements," says Greg Fox. "You would open up a magazine, see their ad and just think that JT was the best. I remember sitting on the floor in my dad's office, staring at the ads and circling everything I wanted. That was when they would pretty much put everything they sold on a few pages. I would fill out the order blank and take it to my dad. He would yell, 'There's no way in hell I'm going to buy you a bunch of JT stuff!'"

"They were the Nike of MX," says AXO president Jim Hale. "They were the highest standard of which to be measured. They were the coolest in everything, be it a mouthguard or a pair of pants. If it wasn't for JT setting the standard, none of us would be here."

## Collective Soul

"Cool" is the operative word here. Not only were legions of kids blown away by JT's image and mystique, but the riders were as well. In fact, it became so important to be involved with JT Racing that many riders were willing to forego money and security in favor of being part of JT's in-crowd.

"John had all the top guys. I remember in 1982 when he did that big line-up shot with all the guys from the different teams," reflects Rick Johnson. "In that shot were guys like Broc Glover, Donnie Hansen, Johnny O'Mara, the Kawasaki guys—it was just unbelievable! If you weren't with JT, you weren't cool."

Geoff Fox, Fox's founder, concurs. "Hiring riders was difficult because JT's reputation was so strong. I was only able to get guys outside of Southern California who weren't so aware of JT's reputation. Guys like Steve Wise, Chuck Sun, and Mark Barnett weren't so influenced by JT's power. But someone like O'Mara, who was from southern California, it was a prestige thing. JT was so important to him that the money just didn't matter."

To O'Mara only one clothing company truly mattered to him after began to ride for Team Honda.

"When I joined Honda I didn't have a clothing sponsor," explains O'Mara. "John was excited to talk to me. When I was a kid, I really admired JT riders like Brian Myerscough and Jeff Jennings and loved how their clothing looked. John let me incorporate some of my ideas, too. The boot Gaiters were my idea. John was kind of unsure of them at first because they covered up the boots, but he was confident enough of the JT brand to let me try. We made pairs up with 'Johnny O' printed on them, and they went over well. In fact, people stopped asking me for my jersey and started asking for my Gaiters. People wore Gaiters for years."

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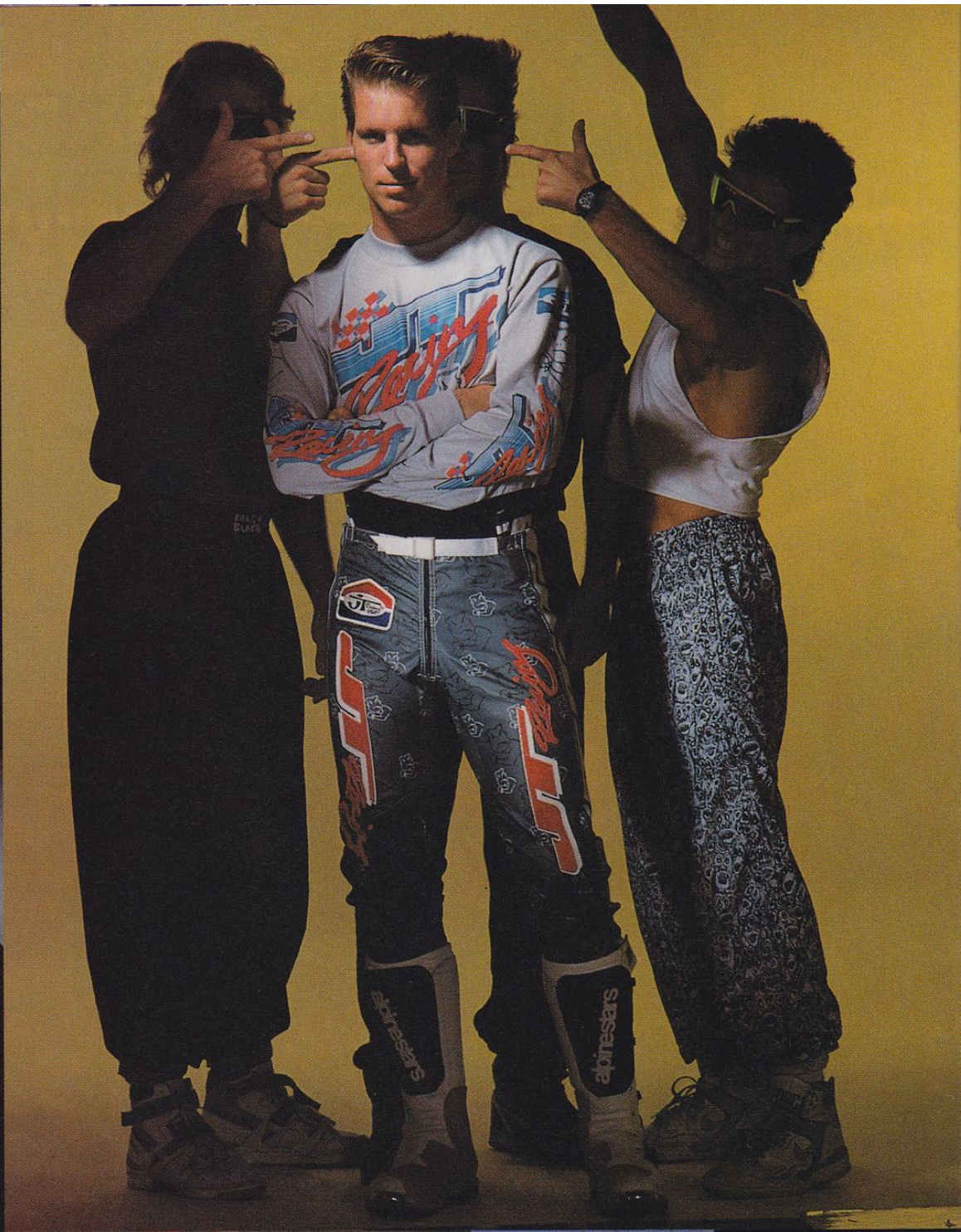
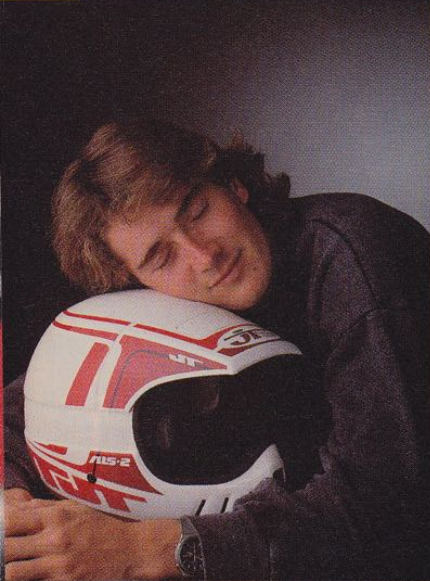


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It wasn't just O'Mara that was dazzled by the lure of JT. David Bailey also has an interesting account of how he came to be a member of the powerful clothing syndicate—Bailey signed up with JT when he was partying after winning the MX des Nations.

"It's horrible, but it's the truth," reminisces Bailey. "In '82 I was sent to the MX des Nations when Donnie Hansen got hurt. I was riding for Honda and still wearing Fox but when we raced in Switzerland I needed a chest protector. All that anyone had there was a JT V2000, so I wore it, and I felt like the biggest stud in the world! Team USA won and we had a huge party after Magoo Chandler crossed the finish line. I started drinking Champagne and was feeling pretty good. While this was going on John Gregory walked up to me and said, 'Hey David, how about riding for us?' Well, I always thought that riding for Honda and JT would just be the coolest. My defenses were already down, and when John put the contract down in front of me, I signed it right there! Later I felt crummy because Fox had always treated me great, and they were really disappointed when I told them the news. I never did something like that again. I never changed my sponsors."

While JT had a stable full of world-class champions, John and Rita always managed to remember where they came from. Because of this they always managed to keep in touch with what was going on at the local races.

"I was racing local pro around San Diego when I first met John through Broc Glover," recalls Rick Johnson. "My dad had built a 110cc mini for Broc to race when I was about 10 years old. So we became good friends and I watched Broc climb the ladder. I even wanted to look like him, so we bought a pair of the JT pants with black on the back and yellow on the front. But every time my mom would wash them, the black leather would bleed into the yellow. So mom takes the pants down to JT and says, 'This is ridiculous!' Rita kept replacing them, and mom kept ruining them, until one day Rita said, 'Tell you what—why don't we just sponsor Rick?' I guess it was better for them to just give me three pairs of pants and let them bleed in order to keep my mom out of their hair."

Gregory soon signed the up-and-coming Johnson to a full-blown contract. "I was 13 years old then, and there was no way I could race the Pro National circuit," says Johnson. "So John offered me a deal for the big CMC races where I would get \$75 for first, \$50 for second, and \$25 for third. I actually made a pretty good living as a kid with that arrangement. I also tested gear for them until I turned pro."

What was it that made JT so strong and desirable to the motocross public? Equal parts cutting-edge product, unorganized competition, and a number of very charismatic and hugely popular athletes.

"Back then we didn't have much competition," explains Gregory. "We were going up against Lancer, THOR, Hi-Point, Griffs, Fox and the Tony D. line. A lot of their stuff was archaic, while ours fit and looked good. Also, we had all of the Southern California guys in our area, so we were able to work with them on production and endorsement

issues. At the time, Bob Hannah was making about \$30,000 to \$40,000 a year, while R.J. Wardy, and O'Mara were getting \$5,000 or \$10,000 from us in base salary, but we had a very aggressive contingency program, and they were making a few thousand more for every overall win."

## WHOOPED-OUT CATWALK

Through clever design that factored in equal parts style and performance, they were still the company to watch. Outrageous and sometimes accidental innovation kept JT ahead of the pack during its decade on top. Gregory and his design team often relied on their superstars for advice and inspiration. In fact, it was rider input, especially in the early '80s, that made for some of the most memorable products.

"We were really into doing things that made us different," confirms Gregory. Relying heavily on Bailey, O'Mara, Glover, Johnson, and Lechien to promote the product line, the company hit their creative stride. No idea was too outlandish as the rider think-tank was given almost total freedom.

"Towards the end of '85," Bailey says, "I cruised into JT before the Rose Bowl SX and saw this bright orange material laying on the floor. A few minutes later, I told John if he made me a set of pants out of that orange fabric, I'd wear it at the Rose Bowl on Saturday night. So they made me a pair, along with a chest protector and a helmet. They whipped it out just in time because the paint on the helmet wasn't even dry yet and the roost from the track was sticking to it! Man, was that stuff trick. I wore it that night and it went over great, then I wore it again at the Japanese Grand Prix a few weeks later. I didn't wear the gear all week over there, then on Sunday morning I put it on and went out for the parade lap. The Japanese fans went completely crazy! They began running from one side of the track to the other just to see me."

Another rider that capitalized on JT's creative think tank was Broc Glover. In fact, it was Glover who came to personify the JT spirit in living color.

"When it came time to race the '81 Carlsbad USGP, my mechanic, John Rosentheil, said to me, 'Get a white helmet and jersey because it's going to be hot as hell,'" recalls Glover. "So Gregory had a white jersey and pair of pants made up and the stuff really worked. Before that, I can remember being at some Nationals where it was so hot I could feel the black number on my jersey burning on my back! I was the first one to wear that white stuff and I remember people saying, 'Why are you wearing white at a motocross race?' But it worked and JT really jumped on it. We talked about doing an ad in Sea World's penguin cage to show how cool they were, but it didn't work out."

Glover had become Gregory's favorite fashion plate, and he decided to utilize the Yamaha factory pilot for his most shocking outfit of all.

"The pink gear was John's top-secret idea," laughs Glover. "He first showed me the clothing at the L.A. Coliseum race and I told him that I wouldn't wear it in the main event, but that I would wear in it during the Miller Masters race. But in the

main event, Lechien and I ran into each other and falling. I was really frustrated, and back in the pits for some reason I only put on the pink pants and helmet but not the boots or jersey. When I came out of the truck I remember Warren Reid laughing at me and saying, 'That stuff is so stupid!' But I went out and won the race, and after that the pink JT gear really took off."

"That mid-1980's era was just an epic visual time in the sport," says Pete Fox, the head designer at Fox. "The white boots, the JT ALS helmet, and the V-2000 chest protector were just fantastic pieces of gear. And the factory bikes that Team Honda rode were just incredible, so far from stock it was amazing. And Bailey and Lechien wore the ultimate outfits: White boots, blue pants and chest pro, Scott Venturi face mask. Man, that look can never be duplicated."

## HEROES

When asked about his troupe of superstars, Gregory comes across as an admiring uncle of sorts. "Danny LaPorte was great," recalls John fondly. "He had no enemies. He was like a son to Rita and me. David Bailey helped me the most because he was really involved in the clothing and the ideas. Georges Jobe and Broc Glover also liked to get involved. Marty Smith had his own style. When we would fit him for clothes, the first thing he would do was a deep knee bend, then he would go look at himself in the mirror. Ronnie Lechien was one of the nicest kids I've ever known, but he was just too busy driving cars, chasing girls, or doing whatever it was that he did. Rick Johnson was okay. He was real young when we first worked with him. My wife Rita made me sign him again later on in his career. She thought he was a great fit for JT. European racers such as Jacky Vimond and Jean-Michel Bayle just didn't work for JT in America as well as they did in Europe."

"We had problems with Motocross Action tearing down Jean-Michael Bayle here in America," explains Rita Gregory. "And it wasn't just him. They tore down other riders we had. For every \$1 we spent at the magazine advertising, we had to spend \$5 to overcome what they wrote."

There have been numerous things said about the way Gregory treated his riders. And some of them may be true. However, among the riders that John worked with consistently throughout the years, there seems to be a deep, mutual respect.

"John really liked working with us," says LaPorte. "He actually became more involved at a friendship level than he should have. John was like a father figure to a lot of us. He would show up at the big races with jerseys with your name and number on them, pants with your name sewn on, visors—he was like Santa Claus! I didn't have a lot of loyalty to the motorcycle companies I rode for, because you have to keep moving to what's best. But with JT I felt like I was loyal to something."

## FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS

As the sport moved into the '80s, the first rum-

blings of challenge began to sound in the distance. A prelude of things to come occurred when Bob Hannah broke his leg water-skiing. The incident cost Hannah a year of his career, and when he came back he wasn't the same old Hurricane. And he wasn't in JT clothes, either.

"When Hannah came back from his water-skiing accident, I offered him more money than anyone, but he turned it down," says Gregory. "Bob decided to go with HRP (Hannah Racing Products, a now-extinct clothing company). There were a number of people whispering in his ear and he chose to go with them. That's the way it goes in life: People get better deals and go with them. When I think about it, I've certainly done some things I don't feel good about and I feel like I let myself down."

After Hannah moved on and Smith, Tripes and Kent Howerton began to slow down, the next wave of JT racers included Glover, Johnson, Ward, O'Mara and Bailey.

"Things were beginning to change a little bit," recalls Gregory. "We went through some problems with Sinisalo. The Finns were great in technical matters, they couldn't design for shit—they just weren't responding to our design needs. At that time, I started designing and manufacturing BMX stuff and realized we could make the pants for a fraction of what the Finns were charging us, and we could do it better. So in 1980 we split apart from Sinisalo—we were finally on our own."

It wasn't the best timing for such a declaration of independence. At about the same time the socialist Finnish government granted money to domestic companies to boost Finnish exports.

"Raijo Sinisalo came back to the U.S. with a million-dollar grant and started buying my riders," remembers Gregory. "O'Mara went to Answer. Rick Johnson went to Sinisalo for an unbelievable amount of money—he went from \$3,000 a year with me to \$30,000 with them! Fox was also a force to be reckoned with, but they never really hooked up with the right riders. Lackey and Barnett were great riders, but they had no flash. But it all changed because of all the money floating around. I just couldn't hang onto everyone, so I kept the guys I thought were my best bets: David Bailey, Broc Glover, Danny LaPorte, and Ron Lechien in America and Jacky Vimond in Europe."

"I didn't want to leave JT but I went to Answer because it was a much better deal for me," admits O'Mara. "They created an Answer signature line with my name on it, and I had a lot of input into the look and the design of it. There was never a falling-out or a bidding war with John. It was just an issue of the other guys stepping up."

As the talent was being redistributed throughout the industry, momentum began to change as well, and other companies were starting to grab the public's attention. The competition, for the first time, smelled blood, and there were chinks in JT's once impenetrable suit of protective armor. Although the personality part of his endorsement empire was crumbling, John remained pragmatic and philosophical about it all, choosing to look at it as a fact of business life.

"People have to live," figures Gregory. "That's the way I rationalize it. When we were working with all of the guys, it was easy. But when the com-

petition found the money to buy riders, I kept the guys I got the most out of, like Broc and Danny. I just lost the other guys to a lot of money, and I couldn't blame them."

## TO HAVE AND HAVE NOT

Bad luck came at the most inopportune times. One of the first casualties was the steadfast Glover, a six-time National Champion whose speed started to wane after he broke his navicular bone. LaPorte was already in the twilight of his career and would soon fade back in the 500cc GP results. The notoriously irresponsible Lechien was arrested in the fall of '86 for marijuana possession while standing on the runway of the Tokyo Airport and Honda fired him on the spot. Then Bailey, at the very peak of his talent, suffered a career-ending back injury during practice at a Golden State series race in January of '87. Later that year, Vimond, the reigning 250cc world champion, suffered a bizarre accident that nearly killed him. While celebrating his title at a banquet in France, Vimond was being lowered from the ceiling on a motorcycle when a wire snapped and he plunged to the stage. Vimond suffered a broken back and would never be the same on a race track.

After a career of good luck and foresight, it was apparent that Gregory had bet on the wrong horses.

"If there was ever a turning point, that was it," laments Gregory. "When you lose talent like that, it's hard to come back." But Gregory says the loss of the riders wasn't the only cancer eating away at his empire. "We listened to people who were telling us to diversify so we got into a lot of different areas—road and mountain bikes, skiing—a bunch of things. Ultimately, we overextended ourselves."

Rick Johnson was one rider who left JT for a competitor, but through some political maneuvering and clever thinking, eventually found his way back. "Sinisalo came after me for the 1984 season, but I stayed in good contact with John," remembers Johnson. "I ended up back at JT in '89 when I went through that ordeal with Fox and Hondaline. I was running into some legal problems over my contract, so I called John and asked him what he thought about me coming back to JT."

After Honda's Machiavellian attempt to pull Johnson from Fox, his crafty defection to JT appeared to be a stroke of brilliance but it short-lived. Upon his return to JT in '89, Johnson won the first five supercross events. However, at the Gainesville National RJ broke his navicular bone in a practice collision with Texan privateer rider Danny Storbeck, marking the fifth time that JT saw one of its heroes go down in a non-racing incident. The injury would ultimately end Johnson's brilliant career. It also marked the last time JT Racing's line-up included a bona fide American superstar.

"That incident really hurt the company," claims Gregory. "We were able to get Rick back and he started winning right away. When it came to charisma, no one could hold a candle to Rick and we felt he could have taken us to another level. But it didn't work out that way."

JT seemed to redeem itself in the talent lottery one last time in 1991 when French ex-patriot Jean-Michel Bayle dominated the American motocross and supercross scenes by winning an unprecedented three titles (250 SX, 250 MX, and 500 MX) in JT clothing. However, the enigmatic Bayle was already preparing himself for a career in road racing and would soon spurn a return to JT in 1992 for an obscure deal with Taichi, the Japanese clothing magnate with a strong foothold in road racing. It was a bittersweet moment for John to see all of those No. 1 plates Bayle earned in JT being displayed in Taichi clothing.

"Jean-Michel Bayle is one of the best kids I have ever worked with," reasons Gregory, "but he didn't sell one pair of pants for me."

## THE WHITE ELEPHANT

Was it Bayle who couldn't sell the clothes, or the clothes themselves that wouldn't sell? That was the question being whispered around the industry. The market had become more specialized and more competitive, and JT's market share was dwindling. While many feel that it was the exodus of riders that loosened JT's hold on the clothing market, there were a myriad of reasons as to why the wheels began to fall off John's war wagon.

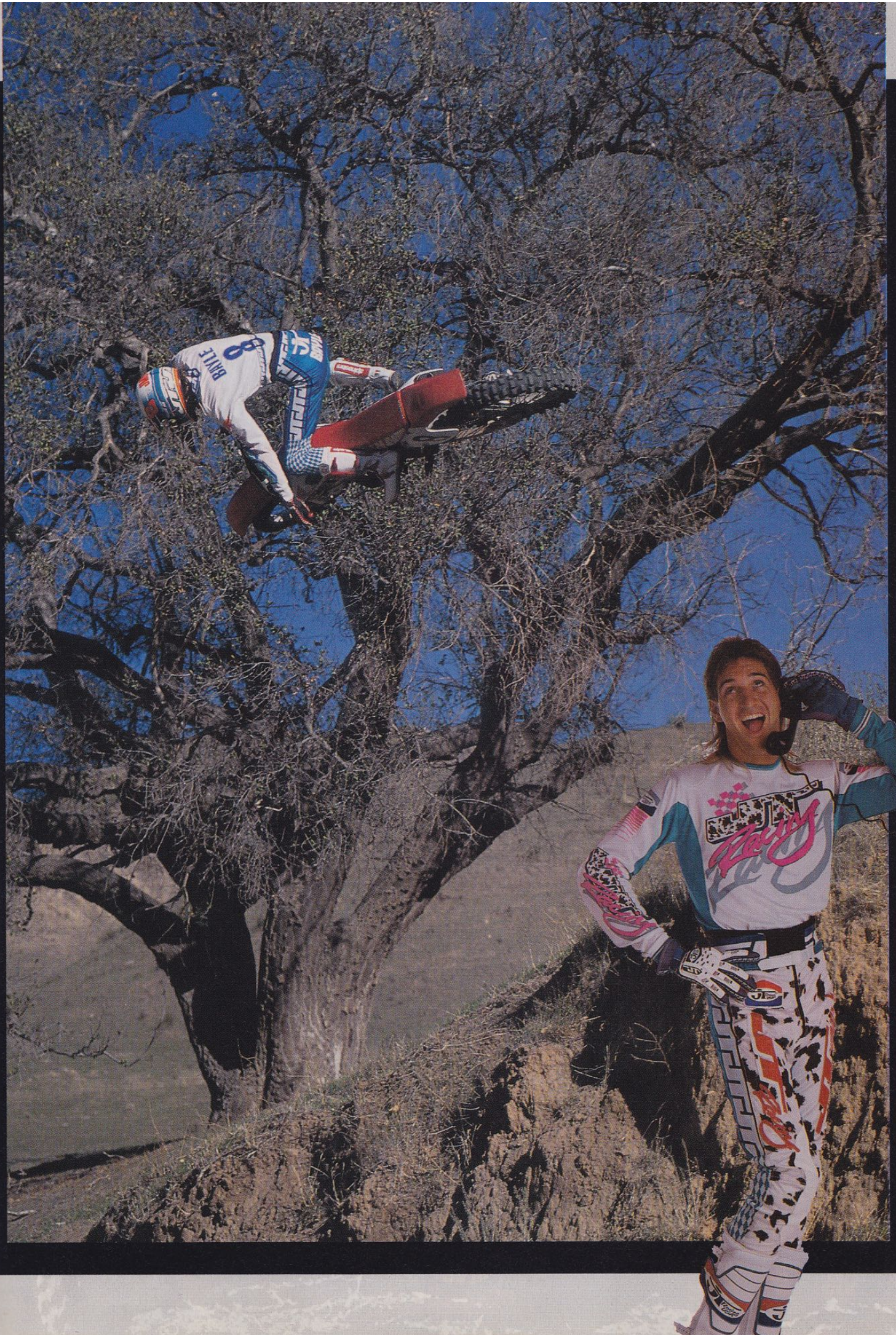
The buzz on the street was that JT's designs were stale: motocross had undergone a quantitative change since the '70s, and a new generation of riders wanted to distinguish themselves from their predecessors. They looked for fresh, innovative designs and JT wasn't providing them. But other companies were. The huge gap between JT and the rest of the field had narrowed drastically.

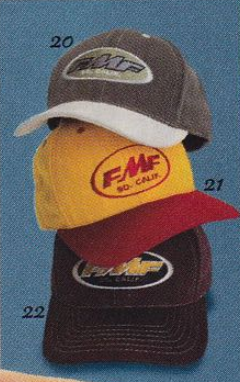
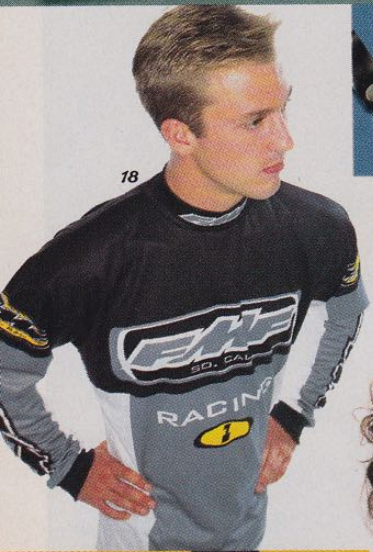
"John was probably the most responsible for the demise because he seemed to lose interest," says Sinisalo's Rathkamp. "The industry was changing and he didn't like that. If you look at 1980 and look at things today, some products may actually be cheaper today due to the increased competition. It's more of a dogfight now than it was then. John was really profitable and he controlled a big part of the market share, so the competition looked at his pricing and positioned themselves just underneath JT."

"Maybe it wasn't something JT did, but more of something the rest of us did better," says Jim O'Neal in reference to the slow slide. There were also numerous legal issues that popped up that seemed to sap Gregory's creative energy. Says O'Neal, "If I had to pick a single thing that probably hurt John and JT the most it would have to be the attorneys. John put a lot of time and money into legal issues over the years. Business has to be fun, too - you can't waste the energy pushing papers with attorneys forever."

There was also the growing presence of AXO and Fox, who's product innovations and ads were having a big influence on the industry. The two companies were also focused on going JT at distribution with a strong national sales force. It was all part of a formula that emphasized sales.

"Things changed, people changed," demurs Jim Hale of AXO. "If you lose your energy, little things might slip through and really hurt you in the long run. I don't think it's fair for me to pass judgment on why JT faltered. Only John Gregory





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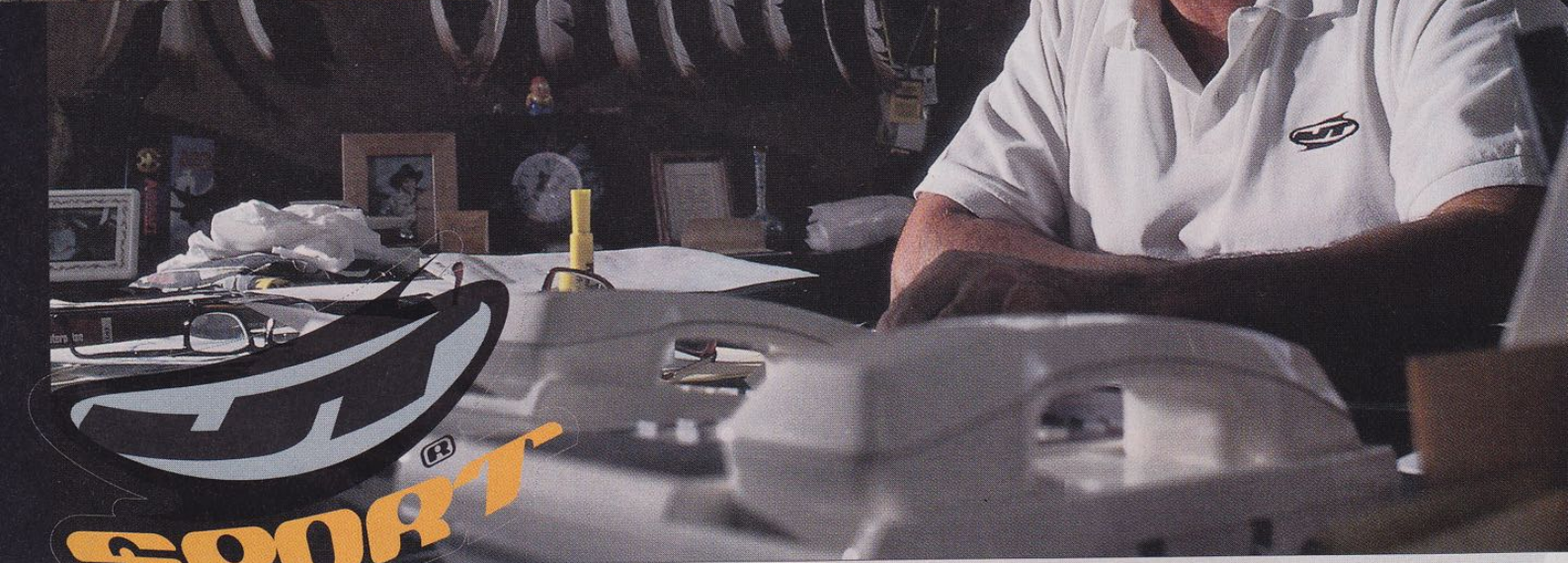
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knows what really happened."

Maybe what happened was this: After years of working non-stop on product innovation and then following his racers around the world to see how the products went over, Gregory was starting to burn himself out a little.

"He accomplished what he did through hard work. Then he just lost interest in it and wanted to go off and do other things," says Bob Hannah matter-of-factly.

"John is not burned out," says Rita adamantly. "John is not a maintenance man. I've been with him for over 25 years and he still loves the sport. If you look around the motocross business you will find John's fingerprint on everything. He's an innovator. John went to the races because he loved to see his ideas working."

If there was a single moment or product that signaled the end of John Gregory's reign as the king of clothing, it was the introduction of JT's own helmet: the ALS. Despite all the critical acclaim, the revolutionary ALS ended up a failure for JT.

"Our helmet just didn't fly at all," laments Gregory. "Despite the fact that it was light, ventilated, adjustable, and had an integrated visor and recessed goggle strap groove, it just didn't do well at all. We didn't have it Snell-approved, primarily due to a number of people telling us we didn't need to, and I didn't want the Snell approval because I didn't think it was a correct reading for what was required in motocross. The DOT-

approval was a far superior standard for motocross. But a number of dealers wouldn't buy it because of that and we ran into all kinds of legal problems. As if that weren't enough, we had all kinds of bad luck with the helmet manufacturers. The first company that made it burned down, then Bell, who took up production, also burned down. That completely disrupted our distribution. It was a disappointing project."

The helmet's poor performance seemed to cap the company's slow slide. The best riders were gone, the creative well was dry, and Gregory himself was looking at other arenas to enter. After holding an overall market share of almost 50 percent in the mid 1980s, JT fell to about 4 percent before the downward spiral stopped.

## STAND BY ME

Something had dampened Gregory's passion for motocross racing, possibly the creative curve, the competition or the marketplace. According to John himself, part of it what caused him to lose interest for awhile was the inflation of the sponsorship game that he had pioneered

"Today, clothing contracts are totally out of hand," declares Gregory. "I'm getting too old to deal with a lot of it, but I always felt that I had a good eye for riders and designs. There is nothing I can do now to compete because I'm not going to pay some piss-ant \$300,000 or \$400,000 to wear a pair of pants and jersey. The current mar-

ket conditions in the MX clothing business just can't hold it. The whole thing is cyclical. Take Fox—they won't be on top forever. But the best thing that happened to Geoff Fox is that he had two sons who wanted to carry on. That has helped him and his business immensely.

It can't be denied that in 1998, JT racing is a shadow of its former self. In fact, the company did not sponsor one big-name racer during the 1997 race season. During the company's economic high point, there were upward of 200 people committed to the motocross segment of the business. Today, while JT's labor force is close to the same size, a substantial percentage of them manufacture and produce gear for other sports. JT now devotes most of its resources to the fledgling paintball market and other segments of private-sector business.

"You can't imagine how successful it has been for us," says Gregory, proudly. "In 1987, when [paintball] was starting to take off, some girl walked in here and asked me to create a chest protector for her to play in. We've also entered some other big-money areas, like the U.S. Special Forces. When the U.S. Army went into Kuwait City in those tanks and dune buggies a few years back, they were wearing JT goggles.

"I'm not going to cry in my beer [about the MX business]," says John. "I may have lost in one area, but I'm the undisputed king in another. I'm 57 years-old and there's a big generation gap. I've never grown-up, and I still love to ride off-road in

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Mexico. But we're a paintball company now, and not a motocross company, and I guess that's kind of a sad moment for me. It's not any fun to be nothing like we were. However, in the last year we have taken a step back and reevaluated our situation. Donnie Emler (from FMF) has been my inspiration. He felt that going back to the grass-roots level was the way to go. We're starting over at a very basic level. We want to key on the rider as an individualist."

"We've had a lot of fun in this sport and its been a total adventure that's taken us all over the world," says Rita Gregory. "We are going to be around for a long time because dealing with young sports people is a real pleasure. There's not just one company in any sport. I mean our grandson (Ocie) keeps telling us he wants one of those jerseys with the coyote on it." (To a pre-schooler, a fox looks a lot like a coyote.)

"Once John and Ocie went out to ride his new minibike behind the JT building and they took the training wheels off, you could see John light up," says Rob Silva, current motocross manager at JT. "It totally inspired him. In my opinion, Ocie may have single-handedly saved JT's motocross division. John's been discouraged about motocross but recently he's shown more enthusiasm. We're going to put more back into the sport. We are helping out the riders who are working their way up to be the Jeremy McGraths of the future. We're supporting everyone from pee-wees all the way up to the semi-pro guys. In other

words, the guys that need the most help."

"I know that John doesn't like to see the same products and no real innovation going on," says Rita. "In the late 1980s John saw the potential in the paintball business. People were playing and getting hurt and I remember John saying, 'If these people love the sport, they are going to play it no matter what.' Now John could be innovative in a whole new market. It was just like motocross when we started in it.

"The picture of motocross has changed," continues Rita. "John lost interest because he felt he couldn't be creative anymore. The money that used to go into development is now going into rider salaries. We had to make a business decision, so we went back to the way we always did it - making the product ourselves, making it high-quality and supporting the grass roots-level riders and the dealers." But only time will tell if the latest reincarnation of JT will be a major player again.

## Legacy

JT had it all: the best riders, the best products, the best innovations, and most importantly, the best brand image. But somewhere along the way, the company got off course. All things considered, John Gregory should be lauded for what he built. To many motocross enthusiasts, JT Racing will always will be synonymous with the 1980s.

"Riding gear makes a big difference to a

racer," confirms Bailey. "I remember sitting with Ron Lechien in Japan. Ron looked at me and said, 'You know what my favorite part of racing is? Getting dressed. You put all the cool clothes on, you go to the starting line, get the holeshot, and you're the man! You know, I would have rode for JT for nothing. You were either with JT, or you weren't. Being with JT put you higher on the list. We all really loved being a part of JT.'"

To illustrate just how much influence JT had on the sport, you don't have to look any farther than today's industry leader. Fox now holds the largest share in the clothing market. In its grip are the best racers, the most innovative products and the strongest image. Sound familiar?

"It was like JT had the fire, and everyone else was a caveman looking at them in awe," says Pete Fox. "I don't think that we will ever see that much dominance again. I have nothing but respect and admiration for what JT did."

And what does Geoff Fox think of not only the picture of a JT-clad Ron Lechien hanging on his conference room wall, but of his two sons' fascination with his old rival?

"At times it wasn't easy on me because they were so enamored of John and JT, but I would guess that it probably made them work harder to make us a better company."

And to John Gregory, that should be the ultimate compliment.



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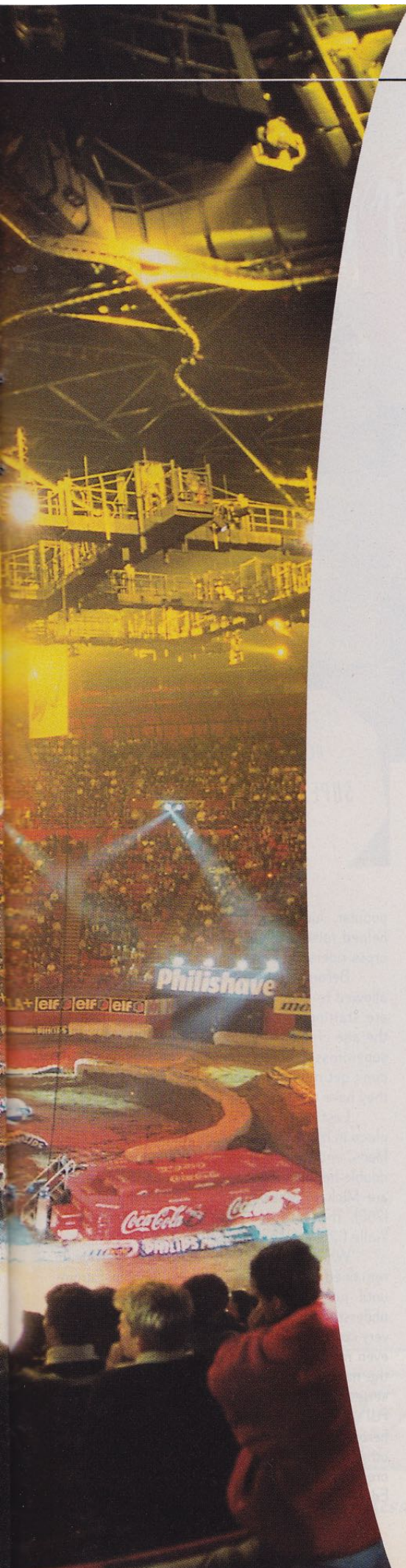
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# What's up with France?

***The second fastest state in America  
is now France***

by Davey Coombs

American supercross is under siege. Over the last four years the western European nation of France has been infiltrating the pits at U.S. races and the talent pool of the American motocross industry more and more. Now, at the start of the 1998 season, there are French factory riders, French support riders and French workers all over the U.S. map. Only the California motocross factory itself remains ahead of France in regards to where the most talent is being churned out. Why is France now the biggest European motocross power? Whatever happened to Belgium? Or Florida, for that matter?

Take the supercross circuit, for instance. At the start of the 1998 season there are a half-dozen fast young French riders on the tour, and two of them won races in the first two rounds of the series: Sebastien Tortelli dropped a bomb on the Yanks when he stormed to the 250 win at the L.A. SX opener and David Vuillemin ran off and hid with the 125 win one week later in Houston. Backing them up were Stephane Roncada, who made the 125 podium in LA, and Mickael Pichon, who finished fourth in the 250 opener.

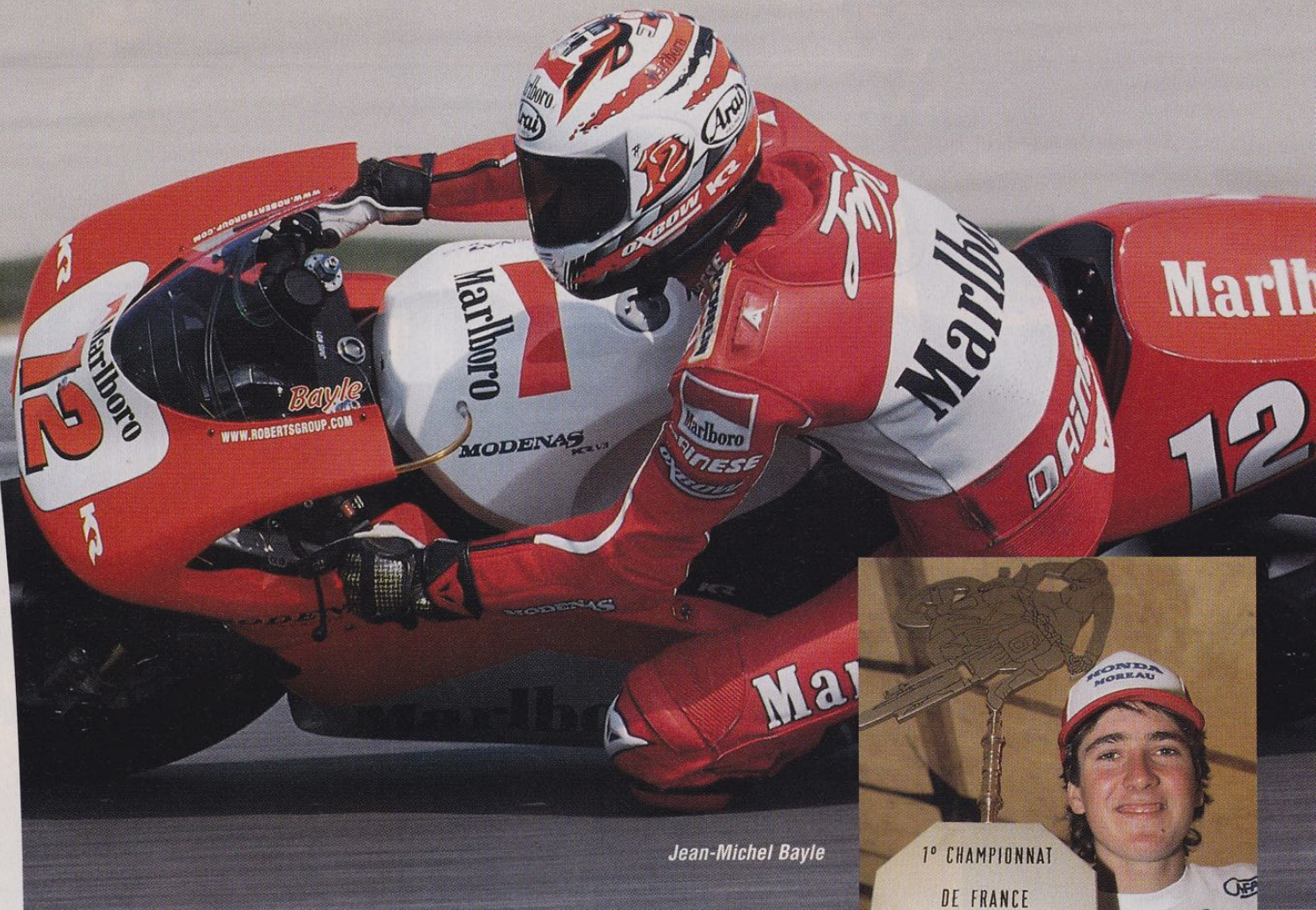
For more evidence of this invasion, check out the motocross industry itself. Several com-

panies have French designers here full-time, including Spy, JT Racing and No Fear. There's a Frenchman working his way up the food chain in the Fox design department, and Braking USA, Desert Only Yamaha and Artcore Designs are all led by français. And then there's FMF Racing's Danny LaPorte, who's not really French but his name sure sounds like it.

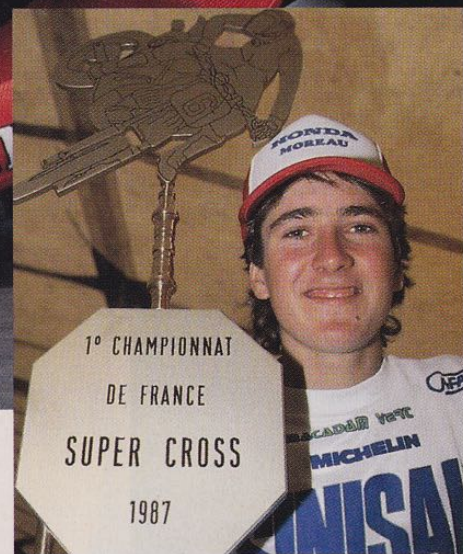
So what's up with France? How can a country that is smaller than the biggest U.S. state and located in cold and wet Europe become the second biggest player in the motocross world? Why are these riders so fast and why are they coming here? Don't the French hate Americans and everyone else? Que se passe t'il en France?

#### ***Fun facts about France***

Before we go any further, there are a few basic things you should know about France. The country has about sixty million citizens and is roughly twice the size of Colorado, which is still smaller than Alaska. The most important historical figures include Napoleon Bonaparte (who was actually from the island of Corsica), Charles DeGaulle and Louis XIV, who is often referred to as "the Sun King." The French helped win World



Jean-Michel Bayle



War I but dropped out of WW II early, which is still a sore subject. The capital is Paris and all kinds of supermodels live there, like Victoria's Secret pin-up girls Yasmine, Estelle Haliday and Latetia Casta. Automobiles made in France include Peugeot, Citroën and Renault; the motorcycle companies are Voxan (scooters and street bikes) and Scorpa (trials bikes).

Although it's hard to gauge exactly how many motorcycles are sold in France because of parallel imports, otherwise known as "grey market" sales, the popular guess puts the number at 4,000 to 5,000 dirt bikes annually. Within the country are more than 300 official MX and SX tracks, according to the French Federation Motorcyclisme (FFM), and French Grand Prix MX races draw better crowds than the biggest outdoor races in this country. Each summer more than 30,000 fans turn out for GPs at tracks like Brou, Villars Sous-Écot, and Pernes-les-Fountaines.

Motocross racing did not originate in the battered north of France after WW I trenches (as my older brother used to tell me) but rather in England. According to Peter Carrick's classic book *Motorcycle Racing*, a group of club riders in Camberley-Surrey decided to hold a classic trials event between World Wars without including an "observed" section, which meant the riders could put their feet down all they want without penalty and only be scored on elapsed time. In other words, the first bike across the finish line was the winner. The federation would not sanction such an event as an official trials, so the club decided to call it a "scrambles." The French

heard about this form of off-roading and decided to hold a few of their own. They changed the name to "motocross," and fell in love with it.

However, the French were never really that good at motocross until just recently. French riders from back in the day had cool names like Serge Bacou and Coco Gomez but they were never really title contenders. In the late Seventies, Daniel Pean and Jean-Jacques Bruno became the first Frenchman to win GPs in the 250 and 500 classes, respectively. But it wasn't until 1986 that a Frenchman actually won a World Championship. Jacky Vimond became a national hero when he won the 250 world title. Cruelly, Vimond did not get to defend his title after he suffered a broken back at a celebration party at the Paradis Latin Cabaret. He was being lowered to the stage from the ceiling on a motorcycle when the wires snapped and he fell to the hardwood floor, right in front of the entire French motorcycle industry. Vimond eventually made it back to racing but his speed was never the same.

#### **The French SX Series**

As Vimond was rehabilitating from that tragic faux pas, Jean-Luc Fuchet, a former national champion himself, created the French Supercross Championship Series. Fuchet was the first man to realize that supercross could take a major place in his country's motorcycle racing, just as it had done in the U.S. The first series took place in 1987 and the winners were Christian Bayle in the 125 class and his younger brother Jean-Michel in the 250 group.

Over the years the series has grown into a

popular, lucrative form of racing. It has also helped raise a generation of fast French supercross riders.

Before '87, young riders in France were not allowed to compete until they were 18. Now they are starting in the Cadet class, or Miniverts, at the age of 10. Ironically, without "Amateur Day" supercross programs here in the U.S., our kids don't get much SX experience growing up unless they have the keys to a private track.



Last year the 8-race French Series took place in four different cities: Marseilles, Metz, Le Mans, and Bordeaux. Each city hosts a weekend double-header. The current National SX Champs are Mickael Maschio (125) and David Vuillemin (250). The outdoor series champs are Frederic Vialle (125) and Nicolas Cailly (250).

While the French Series grew in prestige, it remained the only series of its kind in Europe until just recently, which makes it easier to understand why the Belgians and Italians aren't very competitive in stadiums. In France there are even more chances to ride supercross than just the national series. There is also an outdoor SX series that is more or less the equivalent of our PJI Arenacross Series - a circuit for B-level heroes who do not race the GPs. Spain is the only other country to have recently caught the supercross bug, probably to capitalize on jumping fool Edgar "E.T." Torronteras.



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## Sebastien Tortelli Interview

### Here we go again

by Eric Johnson

*A few days after his stunning upset win in the 1998 AMA Toyota Supercross Series opener, we got Sebastien Tortelli on the horn at his California winter home in order to get his take on just what went down in the Los Angeles Coliseum.*

**Sebastien, did you expect to win in the Los Angeles Coliseum on Saturday evening?**

*No, I did not expect it and the win was a big, big surprise! I came to the U.S. to ride the first seven races just for experience and to learn more for next year. American Supercross is the very highest level. I am just here to learn and hopefully do good.*

**Now that a few days have past, why do think you won the race?**

*I really don't know. I had a bad start, so all I thought about was catching all of the riders that I could before the finish. I rode very hard the entire 20 laps. Also, the track was good for me. There was very good traction and a lot of ruts-I ride well in those conditions.*

**We heard that upon pulling off the track, you didn't even know that you had won the race.**

*Yes, that's true. My mechanic wrote on my pit board "2-4-2," which meant, I had gone two-for-two with wins because I had won the GFI race the week before and now the L.A. Supercross. But I thought the signal meant that I was in second place! When I rode up to the podium, Davey Coombs (ESPN 2) told me that I was the winner. I was very surprised and I was so happy.*

**You must feel like your on top of the world right now.**

*Yes, I do. Especially for me to win in America-I could not have dreamed of this. Do you believe that to in order for a rider to be known as the best rider in the world, he must be a great supercross rider?*

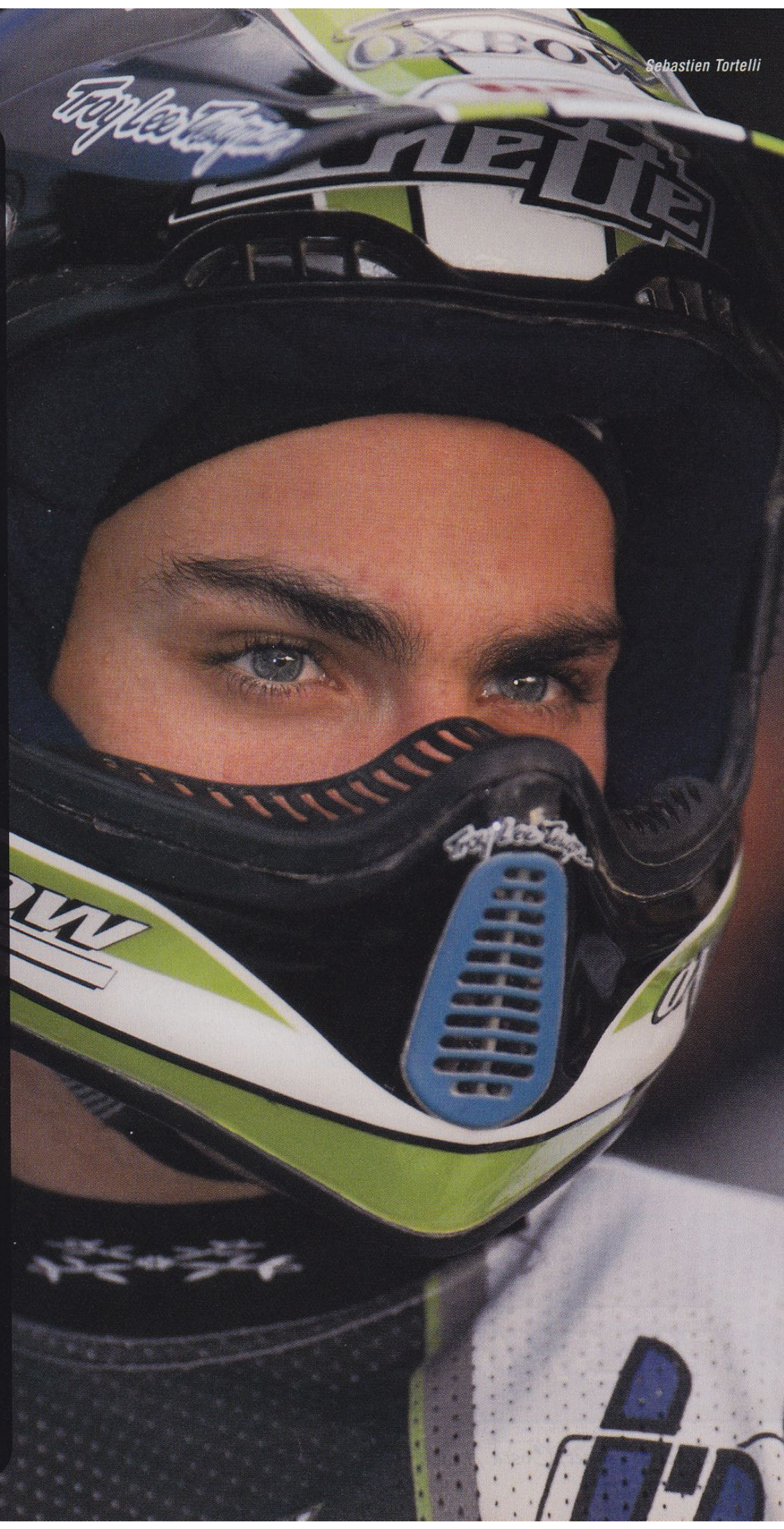
*Yes. For me, to be the best rider in the world you have to be a World Motocross Champion, but you must also be very good in supercross, not just in motocross. Supercross is extremely important, especially here in America. Supercross is probably more important here than motocross. So to be the best you have to be a champion in America.*

**How did it feel to beat the best supercross riders in the world? Right now you're the top-ranked supercross rider in America.**

*(Laughs) Hey, I'm the leader of the Supercross Series! All of my neighbors here in California have been coming over to congratulate me. California is a special place. There are many riders here and a lot of people are into motorcycles. It's very cool and many people know of me and I feel great about that. I'm really not expected to win here and every race is a new one for me. I'm just going to ride very hard and see how it goes.*

**What are you goals for the future?**

*To be World Champion in the 250cc class this year and to do as good as I can. In 1999 I will come to America for good. 1998 will be my last year in Europe racing Grand Prix.*





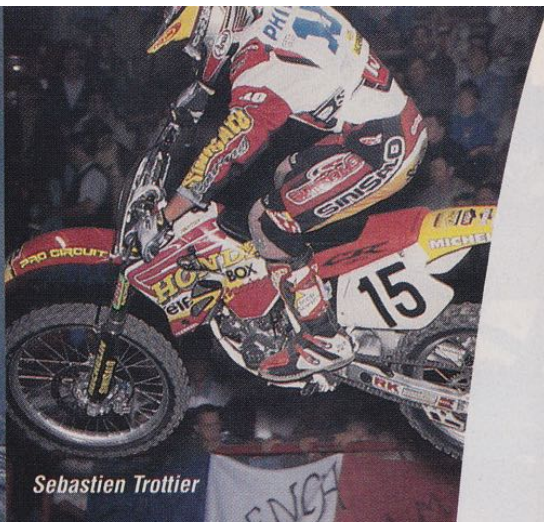
Stéphane Roncada



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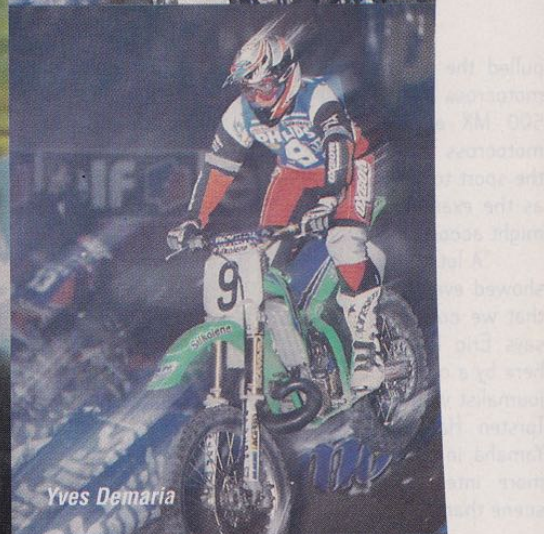
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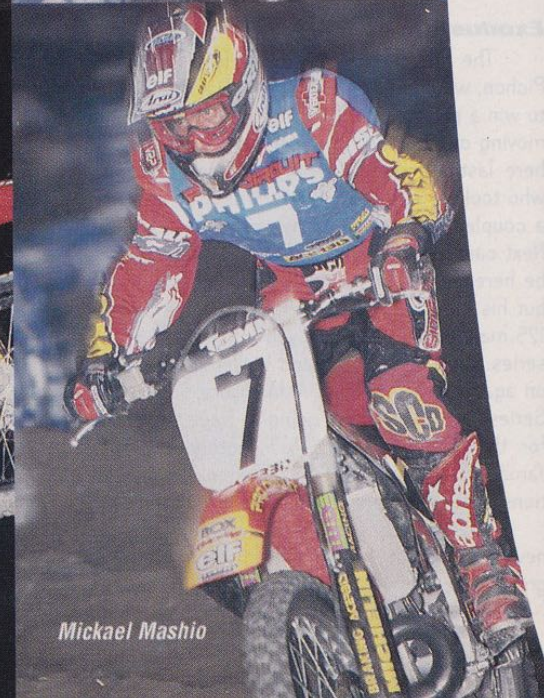
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# What's up with France?

## Bercy

Ironically, the annual Paris-Bercy Supercross is not considered a part of the French SX Series, but for all intent and purpose, it is the most significant race on the French calendar. Beginning in 1984, the influential French magazines *Moto Revue* and *Moto Verte* began inviting the top Americans to come to Paris for a special supercross race which they helped promote. For one weekend each year Bercy Stadium becomes the SX capitol of the world. The three-night event completely sells out far in advance and is seen on television all over Europe. Bercy is arguably the most famous single supercross event in the world, mostly due to the presence of all the top Americans. Beginning with the likes of those mid-'80s heroes Bailey, Johnny O', Ricky Johnson and Ron Lechien, through Jeremy McGrath and Jeff Emig, just about every top American has competed there. Over the years they have had a huge effect on French enthusiasts.

So have the French magazines, who picked up on this infatuation with the American motocross scene and began to cater to their readers' thirst more and more. The early Eighties were a time when the talent pool in France was very shallow - right before the short, tragic reign of Jacky Vimond. By pushing the Americans, the magazines had something positive to write about, and the articles were studied intently.

"It was always my goal to come to America, mostly because of the magazines," says Spy's notoriously hip designer Jerome Mage. "When I was growing up *Moto Verte* always covered the U.S. scene. A couple of journalists named Pat Boulland and Xavier Audouard were always writing about companies like Pro Circuit, Oakley and JT Racing. Their stories made these companies very famous in France. They also made heroes out of the American riders. Going to America became a goal not only for the riders but for the people who worked in the industry as well. We knew as much about American motocross as the people in America probably did." Mage says he can back that statement up by looking at a photo or video of any track or stadium on the U.S. circuit and tell you which track it is and probably the year. "I've never been to Southwick or Mt. Morris but I've seen a million photos, so many that I could almost tell you the layout of the tracks!"

## The Legend

A lot of people might be wondering what happened to Christian Bayle after he won that first French 125cc SX title back in 1987: Christian rode a couple more years and now runs Bayle Motorcycles in Manosque. However, his younger



Mickael Pichon

brother went on to far greater things which, according to many of the people we talked with for this story, is a big reason all of these Frenchmen are here today.

The year after winning the inaugural French 250 SX Series, Jean-Michel Bayle won the 125 world title to become France's first champion in that class. The following year JMB (as they were starting to call him) would completely dominate the 250 World Championship Series. But before that GPs started in March, the journalist Pat Boulland - a good friend of Danny LaPorte's - brought Bayle to the U.S. to introduce him to American supercross. Before the trip ended Bayle decided that he wanted to race in America full time. Although his first 250 SX that year ended in last place when landed on a hay bale, JMB made the podium once (Miami) before returning home. He also shocked the world when he won the season-opening Gainesville 250 Outdoor National.

Bayle made arrangements with Roger DeCoster (then with Honda) to return after the 250 GPs ended in September and stay on for the entire 1990 season. The FFM had a problem with that and slapped a 30,000 francs fine on him (about \$5,000 U.S.) before they would release him to go back across the Atlantic. So Bayle renounced his French license completely, signed up with the AMA and stuck American flags all over his bike. When the series was over, JMB went straight to the States to work out of the back of DeCoster's mini-van for the last few 500 Nationals, two of which he won.

The point of all this is that while Bayle fought with the FFM on one front and was beating the American riders on another, he was becoming what Vimond had briefly been - a French national hero. Two years later, when he

pulled the only three-title sweep in American motocross history by winning the '92 250 MX, 500 MX and 250 SX titles, he became a motocross legend. Even though he abruptly quit the sport to take up road racing in 1993, he left as the example to all Frenchmen of what they might accomplish in America.

"A lot of people followed Bayle because he showed everyone - riders, designers, everyone - that we could be successful here in the U.S.," says Eric Peronnard, who actually beat Bayle here by a couple of years. Peronnard is a former journalist who went from gigs here at O'Neal to Torsten Hallman before opening Desert Only Yamaha in Las Vegas. "French riders are really more interested in the American motocross scene than their own."

#### Exodus

The first rider to follow Bayle was Mickael Pichon, who hooked up with Splitfire/Pro Circuit to win a pair of 125 East Region SX titles before moving over to the Suzuki truck. He was joined here last year by teenager Stephane Roncada, who took up a spot with Honda of Troy and won a couple of 125 main events in his first season. Next came David Vuillemin. He was supposed to be here on a short working vacation last winter but his plans changed after he won the Seattle 125 main event and he stayed for the rest of the series. Pichon, Roncada and Vuillemin all signed on again to race the '98 AMA Toyota Supercross Series, but Vuillemin is going to back to France for the 125 GPs and a full factory ride with Yamaha Europe. For 1999 Vuillemin has aspirations of moving here for the whole season.

So does Sebastien Tortelli, which is very big news. The most feared Frenchman since the great Bayle himself, Tortelli is already famous in

Frederic Bolley





Europe for winning an astonishing 11 Grand Prix races in a row on his way to the '96 125 World Championship. The previous record had been five. (Editor's note: Tortelli was later DQ'd from one race along with a bunch of others over some questionable gas, but who cares? Eleven sounds better.) Tortelli is also remembered for embarrassing U.S. 125 National Champ Steve Lamm and 250 World Champ Stefan Everts at the '95 MX des Nations in Slovakia. But no matter what Tortelli did over there, it was his shocking upset win at the L.A. Coliseum in January that first convinced Americans that he could become a Bayle-like world-beater, and that's okay by Tortelli.

"I grew up with the image of Jean-Michel Bayle as inspiration," says Tortelli, 19, of his country's national supercross icon. "All French riders look up to what Jean-Michel did in the United States and hope to do what he did. I'm about the same age as Vuillemin and Roncada, and we're all racing in America now. Part of the reason is Bayle and also because France is the only country in Europe that has a supercross program for its riders. We learn the sport through his program, and as we race supercross while we are growing up we all talk about going to America because the best riders in the world are there."

Tortelli's career has been greatly influenced by Vimond, who is his manager. And so were the careers of Roncada and Vuillemin, but to a lesser extent. The three were part of Vimond's first official motocross academy. The French education system helps promote the talent of young athletes through INSEP, a program which combines athletics and education in one institution. In other words, it's a special school for premiere athletes. After a couple of years at the helm, Vimond left the program to focus entirely on Tortelli. His place was taken by another former racer, Patrick Boniface, who's son Steve is leading the next fast wave of French racers.

One lesson that hasn't been lost on any of the young immigrants is the one that Bayle learned the hard way: Don't get on the wrong side of the American media. Bayle came to the States at a very bad time for a foreigner - right in the middle of the patriotic fervor of the Gulf War. Event announcers, especially SX voice Larry Maiers, played up the us-against-them factor and pushed Damon Bradshaw and Jeff Stanton as American defenders to this one-man invasion. Bayle didn't help the situation either with his c'est la vie attitude. He was very aloof and didn't really want to be bothered by it all. Instead of trying to mend his relationships with announcers and magazine editors, JMB just let it happen.

"Jean-Michel once told me, 'I can win with the fans cheering for me or I can without them - it doesn't really bother me either way,'" remembers Arcoire's Mark Blanchard. "Everyone in France knows all about what happened with Bayle and the media, and none of them want to have it happen like that for them. Jean-Michel was just a unique guy who didn't care about his popularity in America. He had a much different relationship with the media in Europe. He was funny and outspoken, like at Bercy, but he was never like that in the States. There's a big contrast between his image in Europe and his image here."

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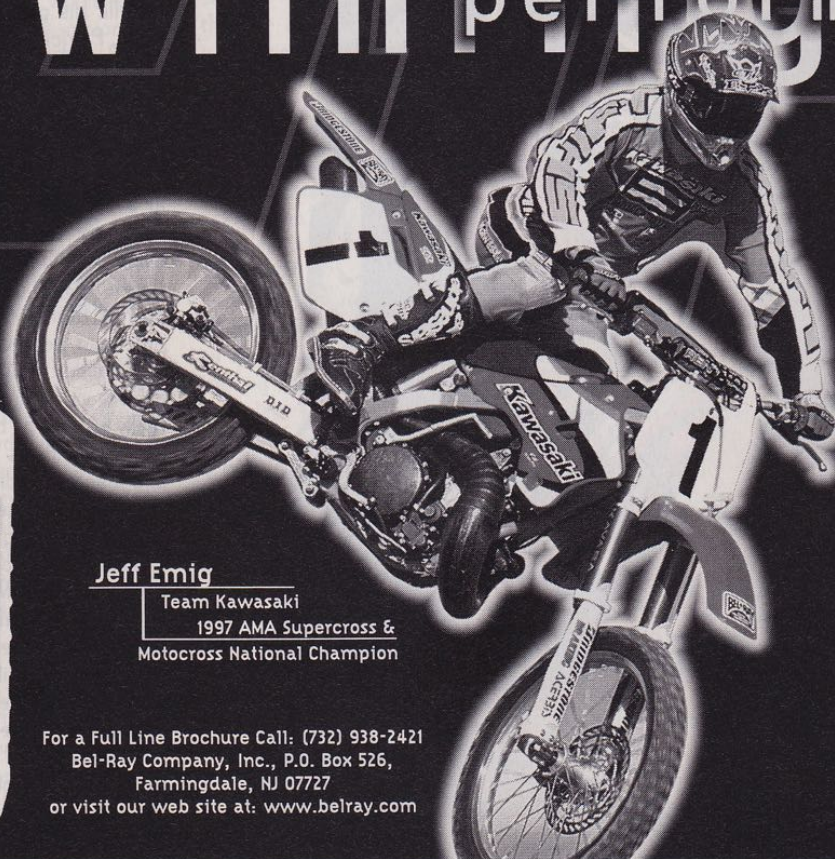
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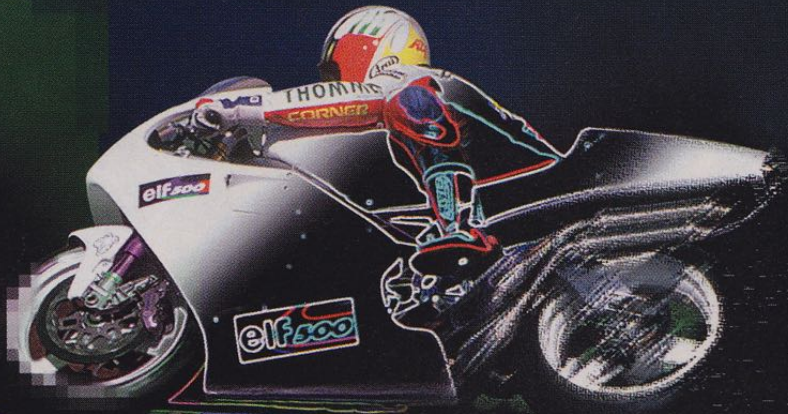
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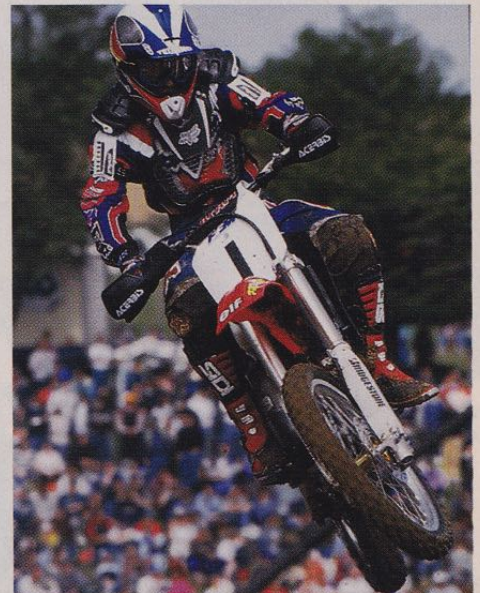


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# What's up with France?



15 year old Steve Boniface

"The more they booed me, the more I wanted to win," says Bayle himself in retrospect. "And to win is the reason why I went there."

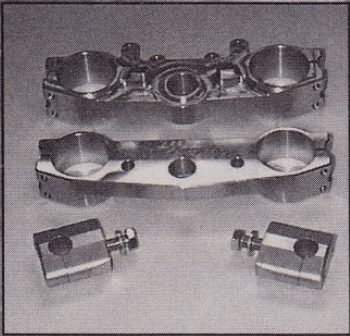
### Les garçons

There are still some fast riders left in France who are more comfortable racing in Europe. Frederic Bolley, Yves Demaria, Mickael Maschio and Cyril Porte all came up through the French ranks while Bayle was still here and before the INSEP program. But chomping at the bit to begin their own American crusades are Johnny Aubert, Stephane Cousin, turbulent teenager Eric Sorby (who has picked up DeMaria's reputation as l'enfant terrible), and the highly-touted Boniface. "Remember this: Boniface is the next Tortelli," says Moto Verte editor Bertrand Sanlaville. But The 15-year-old Boniface will be different from the last Tortelli in at least one way: He's not waiting to win any world championships before he comes to America - he's already feeling out support for as early as 2000.

"They're all chasing the ghost of Bayle, a lot like Californians in the 1980's were trying to become the next Bob Hannah," says Joe Bonnello, an American journalist with a passion for all things français. "They love supercross, and they know America is the place to go if you want to ride against the best riders in the biggest series. I think we're going to have our hands full here for awhile. France is the new El Cajon zone."



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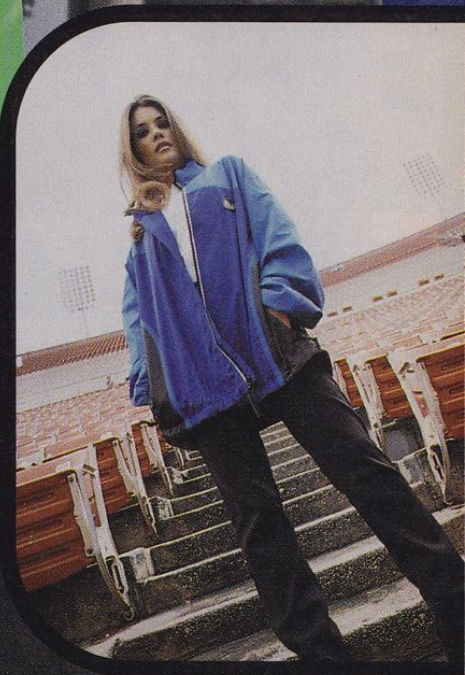


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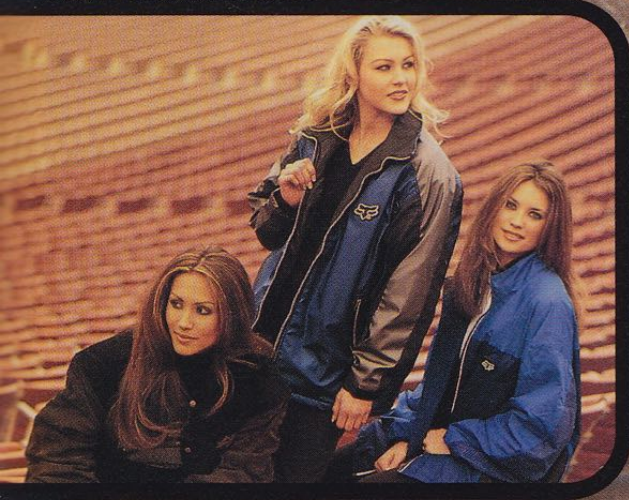
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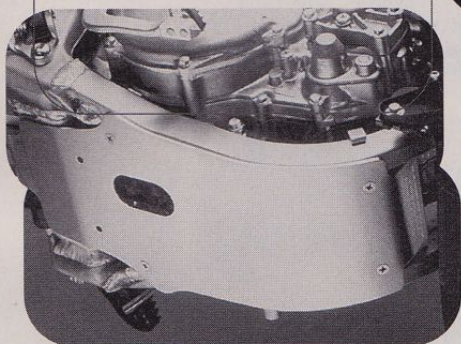
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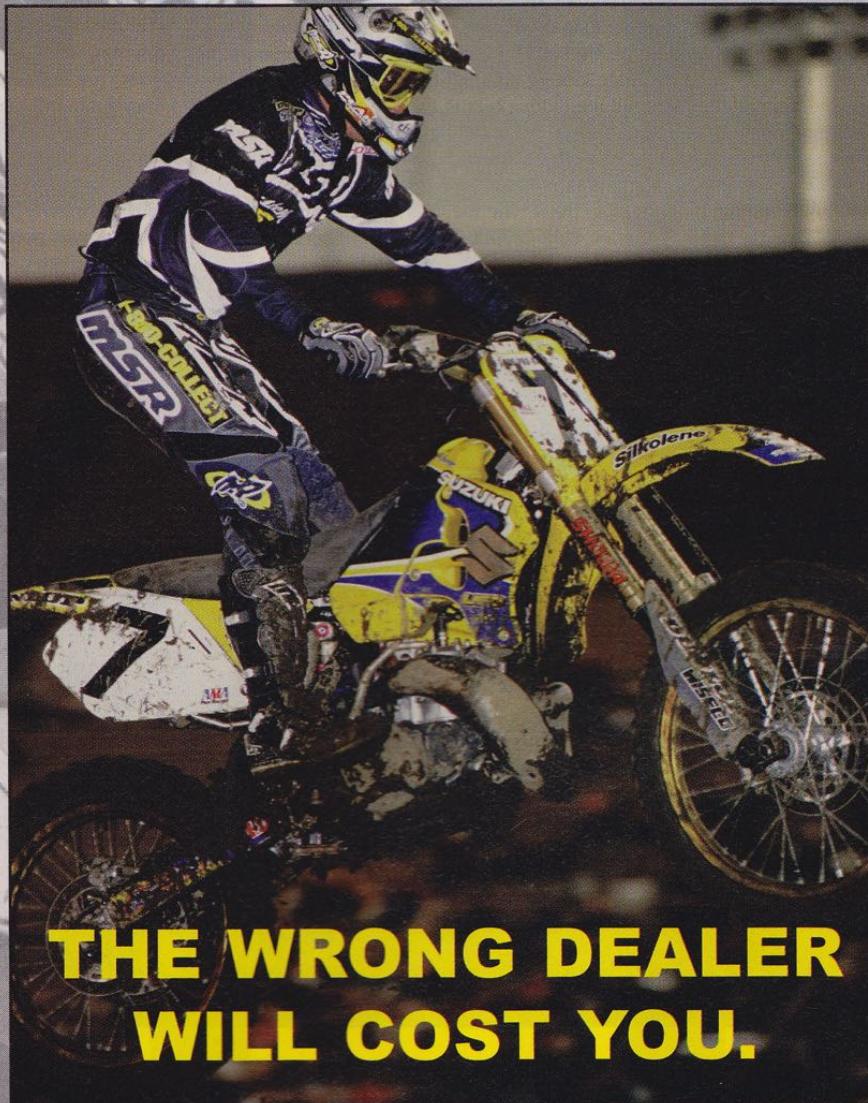


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The motocross video market has become big business in America—very big business. It seems like everyone from clothing companies to goggle companies, racers to race promoters, record companies to, well, video companies, are putting out their own moto-video titles. For the most part, the videos follow

the same formula that was first employed in the genre's breakthrough films, Fleshwound Films' *Crusty Demons of Dirt* and Fox Racing's original *Terra Firma* release: Huge jumps, nasty crashes and head-banging alternative music. And the better ones sell by the truckload.

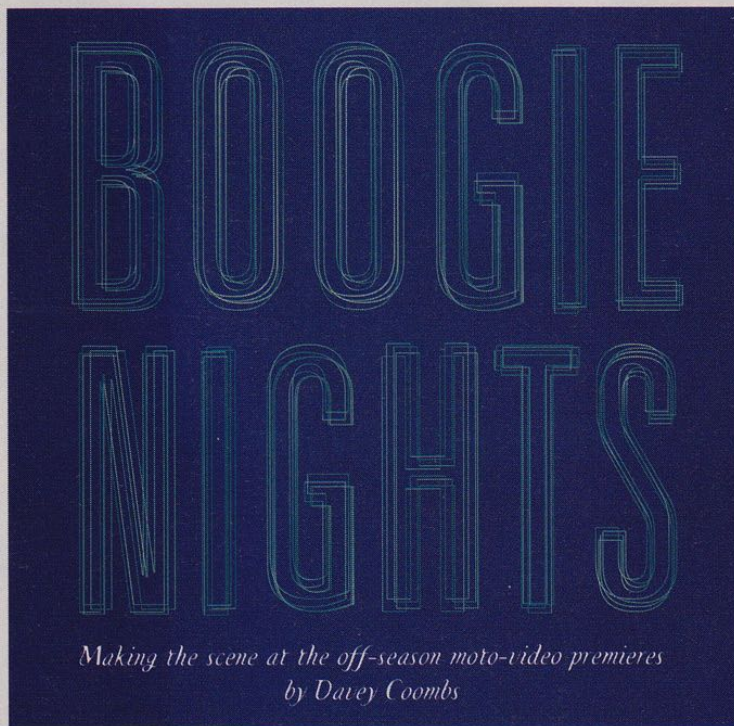
Last fall four major videos were released within one month of each another. In chronological order, the moto-video market was swamped by *Moto XXX 2*, *Crusty Demons of Dirt 3*, Arnette's in-house surf-and-moto movie *My Way*, and Jeremy McGrath's much-anticipated personal reel *Steel Roots*. With so many names clogging the highly-competitive market, each group decided to do something special for the release of their respective films in order to attract more attention for prospective buyers and future sponsors. The motocrossers all borrowed from the time-honored Hollywood tradition of hosting big deal, downtown premiere parties, complete with bright lights, big stars, live music, and tons of cute girls. These were the types of parties that could only happen in Los Angeles, what with the metal detectors, pat-downs, paparazzi, porn stars, and, on at least two occasions, the Los Angeles Police Department's riot squad.

The kick-off to the video premiere season was the release party for Phat Records' *Moto XXX 2*, a film featuring some of the more extreme video stars out there: Brian Deegan, Mike Metzger, Larry Linkogle, and Shawn Highland, to name a few. The party took place at an Anaheim club called *Cowboy Boogie*, which is within sight of Anaheim Stadium and about one hour south of the big Hollywood sign. The bar was filled with about 2,000 partygoers, none of whom were allowed to wear shorts or t-shirts. This strictly-enforced dress code created a real problem because it wasn't mentioned on advertisements or invitations. Consequently, the neighborhood K-Mart got a huge boost in collared-shirt and pant sales that night.

Once inside the joint, it quickly became apparent that among the invitees were just about every hot little wannabe-model girl in Orange County. The joint looked more like a fashion show than a motocross party, but then again, anyone who's even been inside the pro pits at a California supercross knows what we're talking about here. As the night went on, the music got louder, the beer got better, and all of those girls started climbing up on the bars and tables to dance a little and show off a lot. It was just like heaven.

As for the *Moto XXX 2* video itself, it's a well-produced film with lots of cool tricks and excellent location shots. The newly-discovered Shawn Highland is a graduate of the Mike Metzger Flight Academy, and we will no doubt be seeing more of his stuff in future films. As for the rest of the video, the regular menu of hard-driving tunes from sponsors *Strung Out* and *NoFX* were laced throughout, a few of which were played in the jam-packed club. The video teased with a few shots of scantily-clad women, but the most obscene parts were some very big crashes. All in all, it's a worthwhile video to have laying around the house. Two nights later the bomb went off as *Fleshwound Films'*

held an all-time motocross blow-out at the Hollywood Palladium for the long-awaited video premiere *Crusty Demons of Dirt 3*. Again, the girls were out in force, this time a little more dressed up and a little less inhibited. The top pro riders came out for the gala, at least those that weren't out of the country on the World Supercross tour. Ryan Hughes, Phil Lawrence, Denny Stephenson and Buddy Antunez were on hand pimping in their best zoot suits along with a bevy of hooker'd up girls. Video stars Seth Enslow and young Travis Pastrana were present, as were the retro members of the Shift basketball team - four white guards and an Asian center. Adding to this *White Shadow* theme was the bizarre cameo appearance of Chicago Bulls basketball star Dennis Rodman, who was also said to be on hand at the *Moto XXX 2* party. And



then there were porno stars Ron "The Hedgehog" Jeremy, who has a key role in the Shift movie *Fresno Smooth*, and Tori "Night Trips" Wells, who is said to be dating one of the owners of *Black Fly's*.

The *Crusty 3* party was going great until the second musical guest of the night started playing mosh pit music and the crowd was whipped into a frenzy. The problems arose from the fact the Palladium does not allow slam dancing of any sort, and when the band was subsequently shut down, a small riot broke out. (In my opinion it was started by the club's staff and was blown way out of proportion.) Just as things were calming down, the L.A.P.D.'s SWAT team came crashing through the doors with batons drawn and, as they say on the West Coast, it was on! Ever since the Rodney King Riots, L.A. city cops don't take things like this lightly. In the end a few people went to jail and "Dirt Bike Riot" made headline news the next day all over town. Look for the highlights on the final cut of the film.

As for the video itself, the *Fleshwound Films* brain trust of Dana Nicholson and John Freeman have done it again with

*Crusty Demons of Dirt 3*. And that's a good thing, for the most part. "It" means big air, big crashes and funny stunts, all of which are filmed with a good eye. There are fast cuts and clean edits, and the opening shot of a guy busting big out of an airplane is way cool. So are the standard Seth Enslow endo's. However, the music is more of the same soundtrack stuff that made up the first two *Crusty* reels. (Why doesn't someone try a techno or funk soundtrack instead of all this alternative thrash?) Overall, the film, the party, the people were great; even the riot was kind of cool. And the X-rated Tori Wells is as beautiful standing up in person as she looks laying down on my TV screen.

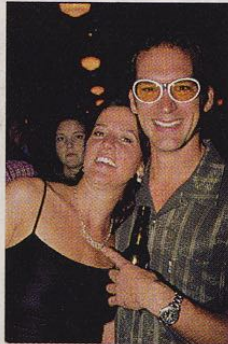
The third film festival of the season was the Arnette release *My Way*, which may go down in moto-video history as the most crowded video premiere of all-time. A shoulder-to-shoulder crowd of about 3,500 packed the intimate Palace Theater, including featured motocross stars Jeff Emig, Steve Lamson and Mike Metzger, plus surfer Taylor Knox, BMXer Rick Thorn, skater Tony Hawk, and probably a few of the snowboarders involved. The film was a compilation piece featuring all of the eye wear company's best athletes, and the shots of the motocrossers were excellent. (In my opinion, a Jeff Emig whip is about as good as gets in the 250 class.) The party was filled with the usual doses of wine, women and song, but after the *Crusty* riot, it all seemed a little tame, to say the least.

The final flick of the premiere season was the Jeremy McGrath video *Steel Roots*, a long, loving look at the most popular rider our sport has ever produced. Most of the sequences show Jeremy on a Suzuki, even though his ill-fated 1977 stint with that team was a huge letdown for both parties. But regardless of how many races McGrath didn't win on the yellow bike, he was still "Showtime" on it. *Steel Roots* is filled with a lot of Jeremy's signature stuff, like the nac-nac and Superman jumps, to name a few. Cameo appearances are made by several of Jeremy's friends, including Seth Enslow, Jimmy Button, Buddy Antunez, Ryno, Guy Cooper, Ricky Carmichael, and Kevin Windham. There's also a few clips from back in McGrath's Honda days and recent footage of him on his new Chaparral Yamaha. Also look for Jeremy wake-boarding, Jeremy jumping off cliffs, Jeremy talking about his career, Jeremy's house, Jeremy's etc., etc. *Steel Roots* is a good to great film, depending on whether you just like Jeremy McGrath or you love him.

Jeremy's premiere party was also held at the Hollywood Palace Theater, and it had more motocross star-power than any of the other gigs. MC himself was the host, and he was backed by all of the guys in the film, plus industry icons David Bailey (ESPN), Mitch Payton (Pro Circuit), Troy Lee (Troy Lee Designs, duh!), the Fox brothers, Chaparral's Dave Damron, and others. There were even a few real-life movie star-types, like one of the guys from *Party of Five*, one of the girls from *Baywatch*, and a few Playboy models. Sublime was brought in to rock the house, minus the lead-singer, of course, who overdosed on heroin last year. The party was going great until some overzealous fan let off a pepper spray canister near the upstairs bar. That brought out a couple of ambulances and fire trucks, followed by news helicopters, paparazzi, and, of course, the police. Just another one of those boogie nights in American motocross.



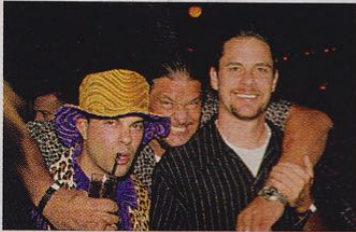
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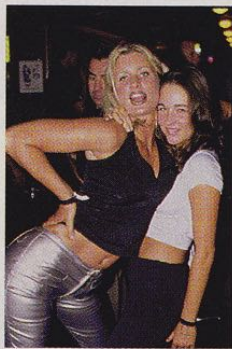
Seam Honda, Mike Hoopes and his wife at Moto XXX



Greg Wright, Rene Ching, Yann and Jerome Mage at the Crusty party.

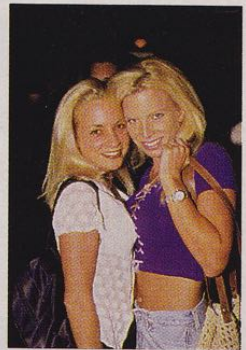


Jordan from "Strung Out" hangin with his bro's at Moto XXX



Chicks rule!

The Moto XXX premiere brought out a body of cute C girls



McGrath's new mechanic, Randy Lawrence and his wife Miriam

McGee!

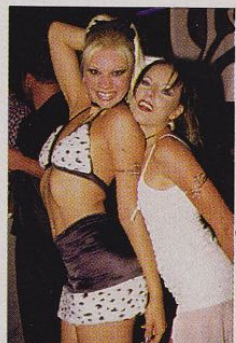


The Pastrana Family at Crusty

Denny Stephenson shows off his battle scars at the Crusty's premiere.



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MINUTES WITH . . .

## Larry Naston Bridging the NASCAR Gap

by Davey Coombs

Do you remember Larry Naston? During the past few years Naston been announcing the NASCAR/Craftsman Truck Series for MRN Radio, but before that he spent a lot Saturday nights calling the race action as the "Voice of Supercross." Since Larry seems to know the score pretty well in both sports, we thought he would be a great guy to ask about promoting the growth of supercross in America.

**Racer X:** First of all, how did you get the NASCAR gig?

**Naston:** I started out announcing the AMA Supercross Series and selected Outdoor Nationals for about a dozen years. I had a nice run there, working for about ten years straight. Along the way I met a lot of people and got a lucky break when I got hooked up with NASCAR.

**Racer X:** Is that a full-time job?

**Naston:** No, just on race weekends. My full-time job is working on national sales accounts for Mechanix Wear, which is a sibling of AXO Sport (in Valencia, California). We specialize in performance-related products for do-it-yourself guys who do home-related work, garage automotive mechanics and all other types of hobbyists.

**Racer X:** How do the two sports - supercross racing and stock car racing - stack up? NASCAR is obviously the pinnacle of American motor sports but supercross seems to be on the rise.

**Naston:** I think that there are a lot of similarities between the two, especially when you get down to the brass tacks of it. Supercross has grown dramatically in the last couple of years and, with the right direction, it's going to grow even more. I'm pretty impressed with how PACE Motor Sports has improved the overall quality of the series now that they alone are in charge of operations. But the series still misses several things that I'm seeing in NASCAR, like the accessibility of the riders to the fans and the way they are being marketed. I feel that the AMA can make the riders more savvy when it comes to souvenir sales and overall marketing. For instance, Dale Earnhardt with never drive another car except the N<sup>o</sup>3 car, so souvenir people can make all kinds of stuff with the N<sup>o</sup>3 on it and his fans can purchase those products without worrying about it becoming out-dated. Instead of changing all of the numbers each year based on points scored, the AMA should assign one number that the rider would carry throughout his professional career.

**Racer X:** That's a point that Kit Palmer recently made in his Cycle News column - a static numbering system for motocross and supercross.

**Naston:** I really think it should be that way. It would be a big improvement for just about everyone. The 250 class is the premiere class and the numbers should reflect that. That means that some 125 riders might have an area code or even a zip code for a number, but that's really the way it should be until they establish themselves on the circuit. And although the N<sup>o</sup>1 plate might be important to the guy who wins the series and for his team, in the long run

I think that it would be better for the fans and ultimately the riders if they kept their same numbers.

**Racer X:** What about the fact that the turnover ratio and the shorter career span of supercross riders compared to Stock car drivers? There's a lot of here-today, gone-tomorrow guys on the supercross tour. Wouldn't that make the numbering system more confusing?

**Naston:** It wouldn't be any more confusing than it is now with everyone being given a new number each year. If Jeremy McGrath wore, say, N<sup>o</sup>5 throughout his entire career, it would increase souvenir sales greatly because you could put out all kinds of N<sup>o</sup>5 products that people would identify with Jeremy McGrath, plus the products could be sold long after McGrath hangs up his helmet. Look at the retired NASCAR drivers - King Richard Petty still sells a lot of N<sup>o</sup>43 souvenirs but he hasn't driven a car for three years. Don't you think people would still buy Roger DeCoster or Rick Johnson souvenirs if they were available?

**Racer X:** Good point. What about ways we can make the riders more media savvy? Is it true that NASCAR has some kind of "charm school" for drivers where they are taught how to act in front of television cameras?

**Naston:** Sure they do. And it's not unusual for us announcers in the Truck Series, the Busch Series or the Winston Cup Series to work with the drivers individually on how to brush up on their microphone skills. It's very apparent to the viewer that these guys know what they're talking about and are comfortable on camera, but with supercross I would have to say that 95% of these guys don't know how to talk in those situations and that's a sad thing. When I was announcing supercross I offered to work with the guys but they didn't really take me up on it. Now that supercross is on television every week, this is becoming more and more something that really needs to be worked on. The riders need to say the things that the people at home need to hear. Jeremy McGrath is a good example of someone who has worked at

improving himself in this regard and I think the results speak for themselves. Jeremy backs up his success on the track by showing the same professionalism in front of the cameras, and therefore he's the most popular rider with the mainstream media.

**Racer X:** How old are the NASCAR drivers?

**Naston:** Usually 35 or 40, and I know that we're dealing with teenagers and young men here in supercross, but they are still entertainers and they can't hide behind the age thing. Look at the U.S. Olympic figure skaters and gymnasts - they're even younger than the racers but they know how to speak to the press. Just look at LeAnn Rimes or the guys in Hanson! When you're a young entertainer it has to be part of the training - the ability to market yourself and your sport. That's exactly why some motor sports are also having trouble finding outside sponsors. If the big corporation feels that they aren't going to get their money's worth, they can go right down the road and find some AAU tennis tournament to sponsor where the kids know how to talk to the media and like to talk with the media.

**Racer X:** What are some other things that you feel need to be fixed in this sport before it can reach that next level?

**Naston:** Supercross has made some big steps lately, like bringing the 18-wheelers into the garage area, but there's still such a disparity between the top five guys and the rest of the field that it's almost impossible for privateer riders to make it on the circuit. There needs to be an increase in rider pay-out to make sure those guys stay in the sport longer. There also needs to be outside sponsors that will not only spend money on the purses but will spend money on publicizing the event. The promoters are spending a lot of money filling up the seats but they also need to invest more in bringing out the mainstream media for these sold-out races. The riders also need to spend more time signing autographs for the fans because they are the people paying the riders' salaries. You wouldn't believe how many time during a race weekend that each NASCAR driver holds an autograph session.

Another key is doing more charitable work, like visiting hospitals before a race or contributing some sort of donation from ticket sales or the prize money to an appropriate charity. You would be amazed at how far things like that go with mainstream media and corporate America. For instance, look at the National Football League and its work with the United Way. It's a huge windfall for both the NFL and the charity. Along these lines maybe the AMA could set up some kind of an award at the end of the year for the rider who does the most charitable work and make a further donation in that rider's name. That's the kind of stuff that I think the sport needs. All in all, supercross and motocross has an excellent group of people, both on the track and off, and the sport is doing more right than it has ever done in the past. We just need to shine a few things up. ★





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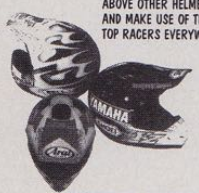
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MINUTES WITH ...

## Larry Brooks Managing the scene

by Eric Johnson

Early last September, Chaparral team manager Larry Brooks helped broker one of the most unique and controversial race deals in American motocross history. Through deft planning and clever political maneuvering, Brooks and team owner Dave Damron managed to convince the world's most famous supercross pilot to join their team. It's been full speed ahead ever since as Brooks has had to organize and execute every element involved in putting together a competitive race team. It wasn't easy. On any given day Brooks, a former national-caliber racer himself, has had to deal with representatives from Team Yamaha, Mazda Trucks, No Fear, Spy, Fox, 1-800-COLLECT, not to mention Dave Damron, Jeremy McGrath, and Jimmy Button. Now, as the dust seems to be settling, it looks as though Brooks has managed to pull it off. We got caught up with Larry at the recent Chaparral 125cc/250cc Shootout at Glen Helen. It was two weeks before the first round of the AMA Supercross Series and the new team was preparing for its maiden voyage. Somewhere in between his numerous other duties we managed to get Larry's take on Team Chaparral's upcoming season.

**Racer X:** The warm up race at Glen Helen was certainly a big deal for you guys. What's your take on how the team's "world premiere" went down?

**Larry Brooks:** It went great, but it was tough at times, as well. We were anticipating a big crowd around the team transporter, but didn't think it would be that chaotic. The crowd is a difficult part of dealing with Jeremy McGrath. There were thousands of people standing around watching Jeremy and the team while they worked, and at times, it got to be a bit of a hassle. He has so many friends and fans that it can be pretty difficult-especially at a southern California race.

**Racer X:** You've had your nose to the grindstone since this new team first started up back in September. Is it a relief to finally have the team up and running and the first race under your belt?

**Brooks:** Yeah, after the weekend was over, I was pretty relaxed. McGrath had risen to the occasion and we had our first win. There were a lot of very good riders at the race like Jeff Emig and Ryan Hughes, and Jeremy rode from the heart. I feel good now that we are set and ready-but we're never really completely done because we're always work-

ing on something.

**Racer X:** What are your goals for the 1998 season?

**Brooks:** The championship is our No.1 goal for 1998.

**Racer X:** In 1997 you managed a team that consisted of six to seven riders. This year, you guys will hit the circuit with two. Is there a pronounced difference between the two strategies?

**Brooks:** It's a lot of work either way. With his team there's not as much work involved with the bikes and mechanics. However, everybody wants a piece of McGrath and Jimmy Button. From publicity to public relations to photo shoots, it's much more difficult with this team. The bike part is easy, you get everything done and go racing. Now there is much more promotional activity going on.

**Racer X:** How much influence does the Yamaha factory effort on have on your team?

**Brooks:** Besides the motorcycle, none at all. The only way they are involved is with McGrath's motorcycle. We're trying to beat them this year and I think we have everything it will take.

**Racer X:** How have McGrath and Button been to work with?

**Brooks:** They work great together and never get jealous of one another. They live together and get along really well. If you can live together, you can certainly race together (laughter).

**Racer X:** Have you run into any major challenges since forming the team?

**Brooks:** Yeah, you run into problems and dead ends. Sometimes you find out that some people aren't as cooperative as you want them to be. But it always works out in the end.

**Racer X:** What do you want to get out of the approaching season?

**Brooks:** (Pauses) I'm not too sure. I've set this whole deal up and I certainly want to win races! I want McGrath to win races and gain a lot of publicity for Chaparral Motorsports.

**Racer X:** In your day, you were a pretty good racer. How does it feel to manage the situation as opposed to being out on the track racing?

**Brooks:** It can be difficult at times. Now, I can see it from both sides-both from the rider's and the team owner's. It's my job to find that right spot. I want the riders to be happy and Dave to be happy. After racing for so many years, this is as close as I can get to being competitive and being out there trying to clear that big triple jump.

**Racer X:** How do you feel about traveling for the next 13 consecutive weeks?

**Brooks:** It's going to take a lot of time away from my family, and I was kind of getting used to the five-days-a-week, in-the-office lifestyle. Now it's going to be pinned seven days a week.



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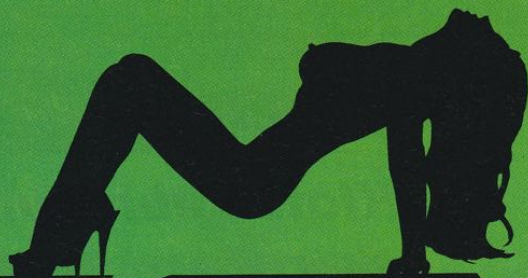
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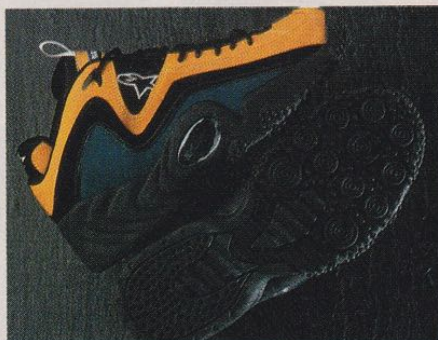
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## Big Gun YZ400F Pipe

Three-time AMA National Four-Stroke Champion Mike Young introduces Big Gun Exhaust Systems with their new YZ400F Pipe. Big Gun is designed to deliver more and better power throughout the entire rev-range. The product achieves this high level of performance through its exclusive stamped, tapered head pipe and the use of a motocross-type silencer rather than the traditional megaphone. The hand-made prototype shown here does not feature the durable nickel-plating that will come on the production version. The YZ400F pipe also features Big Gun's unique 3-piece design which is held entirely by high-tension springs to allow for vibration without clamps to shake loose or mounts to crack. The Big Gun will be sold as a complete

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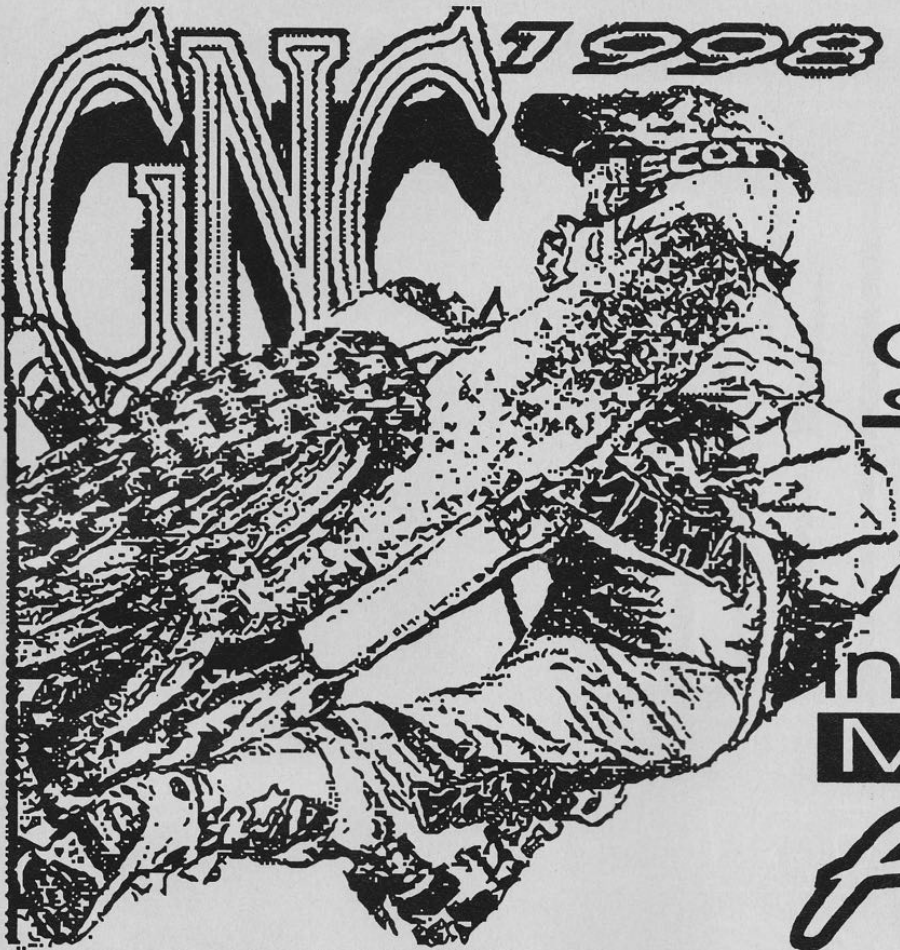
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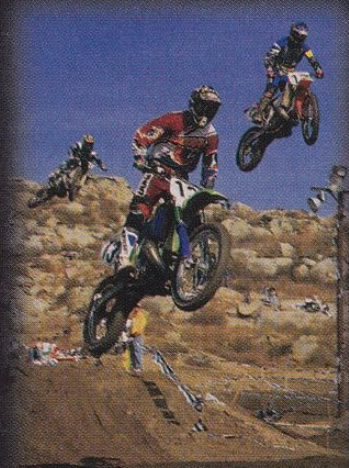
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# 5

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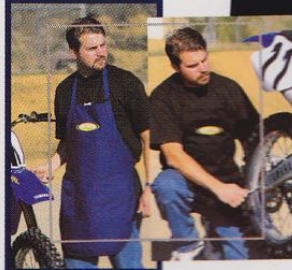
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