



IN A SINGLE HORRENDOUS DAY
 WITH MASOCHISTIC BREAKS, DING-A-LINGS,
 LEECHES, STINKING WEATHER AND OTHER ADVERSITY,
 IT MAY BE DEMONSTRATED UNEQUIVOCALLY
 THAT ENDURO RIDING IS A BUMMER.

BY EDWARD BLOCH

Sculpture By Leo Bestgen / Polaroids By Dan Hunt

THE OLD Volkswagen bus, which I am driving until I can afford an automobile, whined along at the unreasonable speed of 52 mph. Behind me, the Bultaco gently rocked, sloshing gasoline out of its tank onto the rubber floor mat which was disintegrating. In the outside rear-view mirror I could see the right handlebar and front brake lever sticking out a window that happened not to be opened, and it looked like it was going to be one of those days.

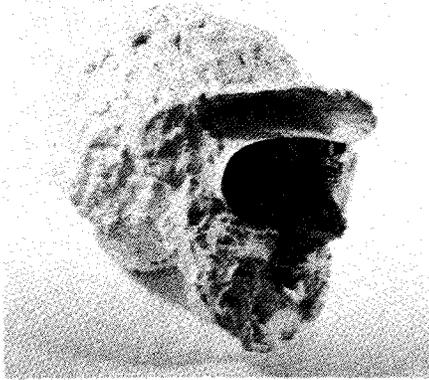
I pulled onto the shoulder of the road, got out, and threw up again.

Last week I had been chased down a hill and run over by my own motorcycle and, I suppose, you *should* throw up a lot after suffering such indignity. I don't, however, think you should faint every time you sneeze.

Back underway, and pretty soon pickups loaded with cycles came past with much derisive horn tooting and arm waving over the handlebar through the glass. A.J. Foyt says a car will go faster with all the windows shut, so I shut everything up. (Keep those speed secrets coming, A.J.) But the gas and the floor

mat and the vomit on my boots and all didn't make it seem worthwhile. I decided that 52 mph is something you just have to get used to, like your hair falling out, for instance.

The announcer on the car radio, with the sincerity and authority of God, said; "...40 percent probability of snow, present temperature 30 WIBG degrees." Now what does that 40 percent mean? Is he reading the whole report? Is there also a nine percent probability of rain? Or a four percent probability of a sandstorm? Or a one percent probability of a plague



of locusts? I immediately made a vow to write WIBG to hereafter give us the entire 100 percent report.

Fortunately, I'm very bad with vows.

I wound my pocketwatch as I waited for a time check and read the folder on the sun shade once more: Mid-Winter Enduro..Feb. 12...Two 30-Mile Laps... Approx. 70 Miles.

The deity and my watch both said 8:05, but I suppose a minute either way wouldn't matter too much in a 70-mile enduro of two 30-mile laps.

Just like the folder said: The route to the clubhouse is marked with lime from the highway. We jounced up this dirt road that twisted and turned past the town dump, up a small hill (at the top of which I met one of those clowns who ride like maniacs *before* an enduro; his eyes were open about three inches across as he slid between my bus and a substantial looking tree) then some more turns, then past the dump again and, finally, to a big field where cars, trucks, buses and trailers were lined up in neat rows.

I swung in at the end of a row, taking up enough room for another car on my right because that's the way Volkswagens unload. I ran around and swung the side doors open and, just to make sure no one tried to pull in, opened the door on the pickup truck next door. A rider was sitting in there, transcribing his route sheet onto adding machine paper; he growled something unpleasant, but I had my own problems.

After a titanic struggle, what with the slippery floor mat and my aching guts and the handlebar through the window and all, I finally rolled my machine out of the bus. Just as the front wheel hit the grass, a voice behind me said, "Wait a minute and I'll give you a hand with that, Ed." It was Herb.

Herb works at the same printing company as me, in the shipping department. He operates a portable steel-strap-ping outfit and straps toolboxes, lunch pails, car doors and, I suppose, the outgoing stock. A few weeks back, Herb came into the shower room as I was leaving, and I soon found my locker strapped shut. Since I couldn't break the steel strap with only a bar of wet soap and a moldy towel, I went to Herb's locker, put on his clothes and drove home—in his car. Old Herb never commented much on my ingenuity.

Herb rides one of those English two-

strokes that have the front downtube made from narrow-gauge rail track and are made in a shop that can't afford someone to paint 'em and the shop scales ain't working too good. Either that, or 210 lb. in England is a lot heavier than on this side of the creek.

"What number you riding on, Herb?" I asked, as I leaned my bike against the bus.

"Early," he said. "Three A."

"'Bout time you got to work trying to start your bike, ain't it?" I taunted. The marque is not revered for its ease of starting.

"Some start hard, but stop easy," he said. "Some start easy and don't stop at all." Touche! A fine back-hand reference to the candy-ass brakes on my Bultaco. I started to laugh, but my guts hurt too much to enjoy it.

"Where do you sign up, Herb?"

"Inside that trailer," Herb pointed, "but I don't know why you bother."

There was a row of tables in the trailer with entry blanks, route sheets, spectator sheets and route sheet changes. Somebody laid them out backwards because I got the route changes before I got the route. It was the same old story; the spectator sheets had been printed on a brand new press at the Prudential building and the route sheets had been run off at a vocational kindergarten class. (Spectator sheets are handy if you want to find your way back without having to follow some spectator who expects you to go 65 running a 13-tooth front sprocket, seven spokes in your front hoop and a cramp like a baseball in your left leg.)

I filled out my entry: Mediumweight B, Bultaco, South Jersey Enduro Riders and AMA number, which I couldn't remember so I added one to the guy in front of me's number.

At the front of the line, a lovely blonde sat at a table with a brace of dusty AMA safe driving flags nailed to the wall behind her, their fringed borders fluttering.

The blonde was wearing an angora sweater that had been washed in hot water, very hot water. I gave her my entry and a five dollar bill and asked, "Would you like to take a chance on an Indian blanket?" She didn't answer and handed back two sticky numbers and \$2.50. "I think it's only \$2, honey," I said. "That's right, honey," she sneered and pointed to a sign on her table. WISECRACKS 50 cents.

I was No. 28A.

Back at my bus, I changed into my long johns and a pair of cold leather pants. I got to shivering, and my guts felt so bad I would have gone home except I knew that miserable broad wouldn't give me my \$2 back. I'm not cheap, just frugal, very frugal.

The sun was up. My boots had dried into quarter-inch marine plywood. As I kneaded them, by dropping a five-gallon gas can on them, one of those substantial looking German cycles came sneaking up to me. The substantial looking German

rider whispered, "Riders meeting," then glided eerily away. I had my heavy socks on, so I put the boots in the VW engine compartment to soften up and walked toward the trailer. Now, when I walk without shoes, I have this tendon that snaps in my left heel. So help me, when I caught up to the German machine, the rider turned to see what the noise was! They shouldn't be allowed to make motorcycles that are quieter than a guy's feet. It's downright embarrassing.

They told us that the arrows pointing left meant a left turn and a W sign meant "wrong" and the speaker held up the arrows and signs, but everybody was saying "hello dere" to each other and trying to line up somebody to haul their gas about 40 miles out because we *knew* we could read the course and it's difficult to average 24 mph when you're out of gas. Things quieted down as one of the best riders in the country politely asked if the checkers' clocks were set by the clock in the trailer or by radio time. He held up a marine shortwave radio that was giving one-minute time checks, from a station in Canada, I think. "The trailer clock," he was told. "Thank you," he said.

Then they told us that the 10.2 left on the route sheet, that the route sheet change said was a 10.2 right, was really a 10.2 left, got it? (Deep groan from assemblage, especially those who had to unwind a yard of tape to correct it.) Also, said 10.2 left, not right, ran up a church driveway, and watch for cars as it's real narrow in there. "Nice layout," somebody shouted. Wow! Two machines a minute up a church driveway on Sunday morning; that should help the old image.

"And listen, you guys." He waited for quiet. "That blue Ford pickup is going out to the gas stop, but for krissake don't lean your bike against the fenders, willya."

"Well, park it near some trees, not in the middle of a field," someone yells. Amen, I think. My sidestand got wiped out the first time I came off the high side of this machine.

The rider behind me taps my shoulder. "Ain't you the guy the cycle fell on last week?" I admitted I was. "I thought you was dead," he said. "So did I," I confessed.

"Can you breathe all right?" he asked. "Sure," I replied. "That's good, real good, but if you have to sneeze, bend over like this." He jackknifed almost to the ground. "Will that help?" I asked. "No, not really, but if you faint you won't have so far to fall." I thanked him for his concern.

On the way back to my bus, I see Frank the Leech disemboweling a motorcycle he has borrowed someplace. Frank's forte is borrowing. On returning he's not too high on the list. If he didn't talk so much, you could charitably call him a sneak thief, but he can rob you blind while he's asking to borrow two dollars. It's guys like Frank who give

panhandling a bad name.

I see he still has my can of spray start that he had borrowed for a couple minutes—two weeks ago. "I was just gonna bring it back," he swears. The can feels very light, very light. I push the button and it expires with a final sigh. I hurl the can into the trees with such vehemence that my arm still hurt the following Thursday. Frank asks to borrow a five-sixteenths open end. I suggest that he...

The engine heat had softened the boots enough so I could get my feet into them. I taped the laces good. If there's one thing I hate, it's having a rawhide bootlace dragging my foot into a rear sprocket. Something like that can ruin a whole day.

I stuck a 28A on my front plate, another on my helmet, wound the rest of the tape around my ankles and I was as ready as I'd ever be. Herb came by and offered to take my gas can over to the truck. I thought that was mighty neighborly of him and, to show my appreciation, went over to his truck and drank his thermos of coffee so that he wouldn't get heartburn. It's nice to be nice.

The watch on my handlebar jumped to 9:00 and I heard a "Woop, whoop, woop!" as a two-stroke, shifting on the kill button, took off.

Herb's coffee sloshed agreeably in my contented stomach as I walked to the start line to assess the competition.

Lots of new riders, some not due to leave for an hour, sitting in line on their jazzy street scramblers. Tires and steering angle like a Schwinn bicycle, four inches shy on wheelbase, ground clearance and fork travel, running full lighting, turn signals, Wellington boots, white ducks and long sideburns. Well, they sure dressed the place up, you could say that. Threading up between them as their time came up, steering the back wheel with short bursts of throttle, came people wearing anything that won't be missed on Monday, riding cycles that seemed to be held together with electrician's tape. Under the tape, of course, were spare parts and tools. Their pockets bulged with spare parts and tools. Some carried small G.I. bags filled with spare parts and tools. Do they break down *all* the time? No, Virginia, they very seldom break down. More than likely those tools will be used by some clown who only carries a dime to phone the nearest service station.

A rider came in all loaded up with sacks of arrows and a big stapler around his neck. He looked like he just rode cross-country from Sweden. I had that duty once and I watched him. Sure enough, he was done in. He got to the trailer, but couldn't get off the cycle. I went over and held the bike up and got him to put his hands on the cylinder head and his feet up on the crankcases. His nose was running, the kerchief over his face was frozen stiff and his eyes looked like a three-day drunk. If I had had a gun,

I would have shot him.

In a few minutes, I helped him get his sack of arrows into the trailer and tried to get some information out of him. That guy was cold, hungry, exhausted and evasive, very evasive. All I learned was we were using a wide trail through the woods. This trail was so wide, he said, so wide, that there's trees growing in the middle of it.

Shooting would be too good for that guy.

When I went to leave, the blonde stopped me and asked, "How much are your chances?" I said, "Six for a nickel." She asked "Can I just take one?"

As I left the trailer, a cycle chugged up behind me and stopped just as its front tire knocked my helmet and gloves out of my hand. It was a BSA Gold Star, a machine that has a good start on lasting forever.

Now here is a strange thing; the Gold Star rider and I have pulled and tugged and cursed each other's bikes out of swamps in three states. His former front brake cable operates my clutch, and my spare inner tube is in his rear tire; he's wearing my bandana and I'm pretty sure I'm wearing his socks. I don't know his name; never did.

"Hello dere, 28A," he says. I pick up my helmet and rest it on his kill button. The big lunger takes maybe 20 gasps just to die. "Do me a favor today," I say. "If you stick this hernia-factory in a swamp, don't talk to me." He nods, rearranges all the little levers on his bars and expends about a thousand calories in a tremendous stomp on his kick starter. She lit right off and he deftly swung the little levers again.

They start easy, if you can read music.

He sat there for a minute with everything from his belly button to the ground vibrating back and forth about a half inch, like a double exposure. "Keep your jacket zipped tight," he said. "When I run over you, I want some traction." He took off, yelling, "Ying, yingg, yingg!" in a good imitation of a two-stroke. That machine was ten feet away in about five exhaust shots.

They don't build them like that anymore. I'm awful glad.

Three minutes to go now, I turn the gas on and tickle her until she drips. If I put my helmet on, the thing will need about 20 kicks and I'll get my glasses steamed up. If I don't put it on, she'll start easy but, as she won't idle, I'm liable to stall when I put the helmet on. No helmet. She goes on the second kick. I lean forward and roll on some throttle with the back of my elbow as I cinch on the helmet. I pull the gloves on with my teeth.

I push over to the start. I don't put this machine in gear until I mean it. The only time I can be sure of finding neutral with this particular machine is when I'm on a 45-degree slope, going in either direction.

We pass Frank the Leech. He is busy hammering the kick starter onto its shaft.

He has it backwards. It does my heart good.

Out of respect for Frank's reputation, I open my gas cap and check the tank. OK.

Numbers 27 and 27A take off, and I push up to the starter. He holds my throttle while I initial his clipboard. No. 28 is none other than my unknown good friend with the Gold Star. The starter gives us five fingers, four, three, two, one, I go into gear and start my clutch biting as he nods us off. Twisting up into the trees with that big thumper right there all the way. I follow a black swipe into the brush, and that's the last I saw of him that day.

Furious at myself for getting off the trail in the first hundred yards, I hit the brakes, lock up the rear and kill the engine.

How stupid can a guy get? A hundred yards out on a 34-mile loop and I'm lost, stalled, tangled in brush so thick it's holding me upright with both feet on the pegs and my glasses are steaming up and I gotta slide them down my nose until my ears begin to peel off. I listen for the next number to pass so I can tell if the trail is to right or left. I hear him coming and then I see him, coming right down the same wrong slot I'm in.

Now I've got this heavy rod bolted to my bike sort of like an oval luggage rack behind the seat. What it is, is a lifting grip, and it also protects the seat if the bike should be sliding without my leg under it.

The rider, in a marvelous display of riding ineptitude, rams his chromed fender into this bar, and the fender ends up looking like the cigarette butts in the waiting room at the IRS. There is nothing to say. I get started and circle to find the course. The brush is really thick, and you just gotta get your head down and rock from side to side to keep your handlebars clear and just hope you don't find the trail just as Kamikaze Sam comes charging along.

I find the course, but don't know which way to go. Now I'm getting awful impatient because I'm losing time fast. Two cycles flash past, nose to tail. I go and try to pick up my lost time and secretly hope for a reason to stop so I can zip up my jacket before I freeze to death.

We run for over two miles through this brush. The layout crew must have been queer for tight left hairpins at the bottom of hills. It didn't bother me at all, but some poor guy riding a 650 would blast past me and wind up way out in the brush on every downhill left hairpin. I was beginning to feel sorry for the guy. He'd fly past me, and I'd pass him while he was clearing underbrush on the next left.

It got so that every time I'd get to this downhill cloud of dust, I'd make a tight left. The last time he passed he had so many branches sticking out of his machine it looked like he was riding a porcupine. I believe he had to give up when he ran out of clothes.



Then we're on good sand roads. Watch the turns now. These sand roads, in the morning hours, are infested with hordes of Volkswagens with canoes on their roofs looking for water. Around noon-time, another flock of VWs with canoes on their roofs come through looking for VWs with canoes on their roofs. In the afternoon, another fleet of canoeless VWs, looking for canoes.

I stop at the edge of a stream crossing. Fast water, lots of big, peg-bending rocks. A wet rider grabs my arm very dramatically and, water dripping out of his long sideburns, declares mightily, "It's impassable."

For you, pal, I think, for you, but not for me.

I sat there awhile, holding my clutch and lifting and stomping the shift lever, trying to find neutral. But my whole right foot was just frozen solid, and I couldn't find nothing but gears. I reached down and tried stirring the gears with my hand.

The clutch was heating up something fierce, and the bike was taking little lunges when I decided, "The hell with the rocks!" and just motored on down into the rocks, through the water and up the other side like it was a wet spot in my driveway. No one, positively no one, was more surprised than I was. I heard someone shout, "That's the way, baby!" I felt real good until I reached the next fast turn and found I had left my brakes in the water. By the time I remembered my new compression release, I had slid out into a small pine tree, amputating all the limbs on one side and getting so much gum on my gloves I couldn't spread my fingers apart the rest of the day.

From the looks of the torn up ground, I was sure half the machines before me had dissolved their brakes in that creek. Three or four footpeg rubbers were laying around and a complete taillight assembly was near my front tire. As I picked the bike up, I spotted a tool roll, neatly rolled with about six pounds of tools. Beautiful! Whoever lost this would be gnashing his teeth at the gas stop. I slid the roll under the rubber bands around my headlight and covered it with my bandana to keep road grime (and guys with gnashing teeth) off it.

The bike wouldn't start, so I pushed it across the trail and watched the next two riders slide into the same spot almost side by side. The little pine tree was looking a little peaked after that. One of the riders said to the other, "That turn sure comes up fast, don't it?" The other guy was too busy pouring sand out of his gloves to

answer. Then a Triumph Twin came along, running about twice as fast as possible, and nonchalantly turned, the machine bolt-upright and the rider relaxed on the seat, and tore off trailing a rooster tail of dark brown, wet sand he was chopping from a groove deep enough for a pipe line.

"That," I informed the others, who looked as if they had just witnessed a miracle, "that was Baird."

We turn into a new power line project. A 50-yard wide swath, straight as a die, bulldozed through the woods. It's very smooth, and the trees and roots are piled in neat piles for burning. A street machine, not in the run, pulls alongside, then passes easily. He's only pulling half the teeth I am. I hate this smooth stuff. Just sitting there with the engine all rung out and nothing to do but point the front wheel and watch the scenery go by. Well, at least I can check my pockets to see if I lost anything. Wallet, OK; partial plate, that's OK.

I catch up to the street machine as the cut gets, for him, progressively worse. Lots of small branches lying around. I pass. I swing wide, because he's flipping some good-sized pieces of lumber into the air. At this speed you could get skewered, or flatten a knuckle. More branches now and some small logs. I can hear the stupid guy behind me as his forks top and bottom. Into the good stuff where they're still dynamiting stumps, and it's like a battlefield without the barbed wire. My front tire starts to graunch the bottom of the fender. Ease up a bit now, we don't want a two-piece motorcycle.

There are two arrows pointing under a fallen tree that's hung up just higher than the bars. No thanks, dad. I go around.

Bad move on my part. I hang up jumping a log and bend my chain guide. As I twist it straight with a wrench handle, another rider gets hung up on the same log. I give him a lift and he takes off. I bet he thinks he got off all by himself. While I repack my toolbox, (a Chinese puzzle) I look up to see a fellow member of my club go over that log, feet on the pegs. Now I feel really inept.

After the power line, we get into those deep trench fire cuts. You ride these like a bobsled run, swooping high on the walls on tight turns and really pulling 'G's. Sometimes it's hard to see ahead 'cause you're looking straight up and the helmet edge is in the way. A good rider blasts past, so tight against the side that he's kneeling one knee on the seat and the off-side grip is plowing a furrow.

"Thanks," the rider yells. I guess he thought I slowed to let him by. I didn't.

6.2 L Hwy. DANGER

Down to second before I pass the Danger marker, up a four-foot slope, and I am on the grassy shoulder of a three-lane concrete highway. A sharp left and I accelerate on the wrong side of the

road. It is very smooth, and I see by the swaths in the grey dew that others have used the same route. The next turn is almost two miles, so I decide to make it legal and use the road. It is glistening in patches and worse than treacherous under these knobbies. I hold a steady speed as I angle across, and when I get to the painted center line, I stop chewing my gum, blinking my eyes and breathing. She skittered a bit, and my heart stopped until we were across.

As I crested a rise, I saw two riders turning left at the bottom of the hill. That layout man was true to form. Some riders were running straight past the turn, but slowing. I estimated I'd also have to overshoot before I lost enough speed to turn off. I was winding a little throttle off when a 500 Twin rumbled past, saw the turn and hit his brakes. He went down right in front of me, dragging four or five plumes of sparks in assorted colors and lengths.

Instinctively I hit my brakes and, instantly, found myself rumbling along the road with the bike on its left side, rear wheel forward with no apparent loss of speed. We clattered along for an ungodly length of time, rotating counterclockwise and coming to rest on the opposite side of the road near the shoulder.

The guy who had put me down yelled over, "Boy, these new leathers are GREAT." I didn't answer him. The stuff I was wearing was in bad shape six months ago, and right now I could feel some drafts. Well, let's get this Bultaco squared away first. These things have clamp-on bars, thank you, Sr. Bulto, and they swing around rather than dig in and get the bike flipping. I was pounding them back with the heel of my hand when Mr. Great New Leathers came over and said, "I tore off the whole rear brake rod and pedal." I said, "Wonderful."

The ball end on the clutch lever had put a crack in the fiberglass fuel tank, but it was only weeping a bit, and it was pretty high up on the tank anyway. The brake pedal had been pulled off once before, and the only way to get it off now would be to break the cycle into two pieces. I rolled down the hill, put her in fourth and she was motoring over, but not firing, when I heard that skate board sound. I looked back to see two more machines slide down the road. That clown with the new leathers was wandering around the highway looking for the pieces his machine had shed. I hope he sweats to death in 'em.

My engine started to fire and I shifted down and turned onto the course. I went slow while I checked to see if everything worked all right—no, not the bike, ME. The road had sandpapered through the clothes, but not through my skin. The front wheel was still headed a little southwest, but it made it easier to ride tilted over so I could save some of the gas. About the last problem I expected was

the rear brake, but when I tried that, I went right through the roof.

My left boot was opened up like a banana peel, and all those little curvey nails were merrily chewing my foot off. Surprising myself with my brilliance, probably caused by hitting that concrete, I stashed the tools from the tool roll I had found, wrapped the case around my foot and strapped the whole thing together with an inner-tube rubber band (the red tube, prewar, good stuff). It didn't look like much, but I was moving, I was breathing, I was still warm and I had a newfound respect for people who ride motorcycles on *streets*.

We turned along the bank of a creek—nice, well-beaten path. Going good until I meet a ditch running into the creek. Should have made it down and up easy, but I climbed out right up against a log on the top. Down again, but slowly, comfortably almost. Before I can regain my feet, the next two riders cross the ditch, then come back and pull my bike off me and shove it up the ditch and park it against a tree.

Things like this bring tears to my eyes sometimes.

It's getting warmer now that the sun's up and we're getting a good workout. I pass a rider who's peeling off a jacket. No good, I think. No matter where he puts that jacket, it's a good bet it'll be gone 30 miles from now. Better to take it off at a check. The checker will bring it back and he knows your number and can find out your name. Besides, if you change at a check, some kind soul might hand you a drink of water and a sharp timekeeper might spot something dropping off your bike.

There's the first check. "How late am I?" "You're still in it." "I know, but how late am I?" "Don't worry, you'll make it up." I can see I'm not going to get much help from this guy. Somebody's yanking at my destroyed boot. He's wrapping it with friction tape!! Talk about sharp timekeepers!

Just past the check and we cross the creek. Lots of spectators standing around. It was deep with a soft bottom, but not what you'd call bad. The oldest rider in the district is sitting in the middle of it on a dead bike. He's getting a bad time of it from mud thrown back by spinning tires climbing the bank. "I'll remember you, you punk," he yells at a guy pushing a 500 up the slope with the wheel throwing gallons of muck all over the place. I have to stop in the water to wait for a shot at one of the three places to climb out. The water is swift in the creek and really pulls me down. I stall twice trying to break loose. The third time I give her all she's got and slip the clutch unmercifully to break loose. When I get moving, we start up one of the slots and some poor kid learns the facts of life about keeping an exit clear. I had every intention of going back and helping the

kid, but that clutch was home to stay until it cooled off. Sorry.

After we cross the creek we run along the opposite bank in the same direction. Suddenly, the engine quits. Plug, I hope. I change 'em from the saddle, but my aching insides didn't like the bending at all. Three riders come up from behind. They look awful clean, awful clean. "Did we miss a check?" one asks. "Some of the arrows are down," he explains. "No," I lie. They pass on and they look as clean as the Motor Maids on the Fourth of July. Personally, I thought the layout crew used more arrows than the Sioux nation in '78.

They weren't too far away when the first rider yelled back to the others, "Did you see the *feet* on that guy?"

I loosen the plug a few turns, then kick the engine over a few times to blow some of the muck away from the hole. The plug looks all right to me, but they *always* look all right to me. I unpeel a new one from the masking tape wrappers I use, and we are on our way in no time. What a difference a new plug makes! Feels like an added cylinder. I drift the rear out on the next turn. Wonderful! Sit back, get a good bite, lift that front and fly awhile.

Jam up on the trail; bikes nose to tail packed solid as far as I can see. Son of a gun, just when I get going good. I lean her on a tree, shut the gas off, cleared her throat and shut down. I walked past 20 or so cycles and maybe 15 guys talking and smoking and still saying "hello dere" to each other.

It was a disaster. A small stream at right angles to the creek had cut a ditch with sides like a brick wall. Some logs ran over to the other side, but the early riders had knocked the cross planks into the mud below. Somebody was passing up the fallen planks and I helped lay them down. It looked good, but the first cycle over, what with the slippery logs and mud, just slid the crosspieces over and fell through the logs till the bars caught. This could take all day.

When I got back to my bike, some of the riders were easing a bantamweight into the creek. I thought that was a good idea, but this could take all day also. I decided to try to climb the slope and get into that cross ditch where the sides weren't cut so steep, then ride right up it until I could climb out on the other side. About halfway up, it just plain got too steep to climb, so I angled off until it got so steep I had to get off and sort of waddle along, reaching down for the bars with the back wheel way down the slope trying to climb up. She couldn't do much more than throw leaves.

We were losing maybe a foot of height for every three feet sideways when we got to a sort of ledge angling up. It must have been an old Indian trail or deer trail or something. The going was lovely now and, if it wasn't for the thick brush, I think we could have pulled second. The

higher we climbed, the thicker it got, and I found myself belly down on the seat with both feet pulled back by the vines. Then a big vine slid the wrong way off my helmet and lifted me off the machine by my Adam's apple. The Matador ran on up the trail by itself. Well, I had to take a few steps backwards to get that vine out from under my chin, and I was sure glad it wasn't the thorny kind.

The Matador, all by itself, had found the ravine.

There she stood, her front tire in a tiny stream, upended perfectly in a ditch four feet wide and seven feet deep. She was being held by yards of vines around her footpegs and some tree roots on each side of the rear wheel. I grabbed some roots and lowered myself alongside. I was afraid to go near it, much less move it.

Utterly disgusted, I splashed down the little stream toward the creek. Sounds of stuck motorcycles drifted up the ravine. Engines revving high, then chopping off as a muffler dropped underwater. Another revving his valves out as someone goes down with his right hand and twist grip pinned in the mud and worried more about getting his knee out from under the hot plumbing than he is about his engine. A big lunger banging slow and loud. I know he's shoving a hole as big as a bathtub up that creek.

What I had in mind was helping some guy get unstuck, then getting him to help me get my machine back on the ground.

Four or five guys were stuck around the edges of the creek, but they all had that bent-back, head-down, helmet-off, matted-hair look. No good to me. Two riders had their machines almost clear, and it wouldn't do to give them a shove because once they hit that dry ground they'd be *gone*. The next machine coming up the creek was a 650 with one of those special, nickel-plated frames. The rider might have weighed 140, but I doubt it. The little guy didn't have enough leg to foot her through the bad spot near the edge, so I gave him a hand. All I had to do, all I *could* do, actually, was keep his front wheel headed straight as the little guy picked up the rest of the bike and shoved it out like a wheelbarrow. "How much is like this?" he asked. "It's *all* like this," I told him. "Good," he says, "I hate an easy run." Sometimes the big ones are small.

I heard a yell and turned to see a guy who must have locked his front wheel coming down the creek bank. The machine landed in his lap, and his head and one bar were the only things out of water. "Woody," he yells, "Woodyyy!" Well, I don't know who Woody was, but it was obvious that this bird would be breathing water before his pal Woody came along. Somehow I managed to get him out from under, but it made me hurt so bad I grayed out and went to my knees. Dimly, I saw him get up. Get up!—he looked like

(Continued on page 98)

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ENDURO RIDING

Continued from page 95

a U-boat surfacing. By the time I had got myself back to dry land, he had his dripping bike up the bank and was trying to start it, but she had so much water in her, the kick starter wouldn't even move.

In no time, he had the plug out, the bike on its back and he was turning the rear wheel to pump her out. He flipped it over like it was a kid's tricycle, put the plug back and kicked her up to about 2000 rpm, but it wouldn't fire. "Well, I'm out," he declared. "It'll take an hour to dry this out." He looked at me and asked, "You still in it?" "Yeah," I said, "but I'm hung up in that cut." I pointed.

"Let's get it," he declared. Thank God.

We surveyed my upright machine. "Hung up!" he said. "That thing's hung up like a side of beef." The big guy turned to me and, in all seriousness, asked, "Did you ever consider taking up slot-car racing?"

I wasn't a lot of help, but we got her on her feet. He kicked her for me until it started, but it was smoking terribly. "Primary oil in the crankcase," he explained. "Stay up on the pegs and you won't hurt so bad." I nodded my thanks and took off while I was still able to breathe.

The machine showed her breeding and crossed the creek with no help from me. I rode slowly up a forest trail until my legs gave out and I have to sit. Every root and branch on that trail felt like a baseball bat in the ribs. The next checkpoint comes through the haze. "Disqualified," I hear. The best news all day. The checker has to put his car right in front of me before he can hear me croak, "How far is the next blacktop?" The checker points, and there it is! And there is the gas truck too! "Don't lean that bike on the fenders," he warns.

I park against a tree and slowly, slowly, dismount. I was going to gas up, get the checker to kick the bike over and ride back on the blacktop. I didn't care if I had to go by way of Des Moines, as long as it was smooth.

My gas can was right near the back of the truck. Good. I took as deep a breath as I dared and tried to lift it out. It didn't budge. I took a few more breaths and gave it another try. Nothing. Just pain in the guts. How can a five-gallon can feel so heavy? I tried again and very distinctly felt something tear down below the short ribs on the left side. Arms outstretched, I leaned against the tailgate, sweat burning my eyes and sputtering off my nostrils as I panted like a dying Airedale.

Then I see it. A steel strap running under the tailgate and around my gas can! Herb had steel-strapped my gas can!! I just had to laugh, and when I laughed, I fainted.

I finished the run in a Ford pickup. Came in 44th Mediumweight B, too. ☐

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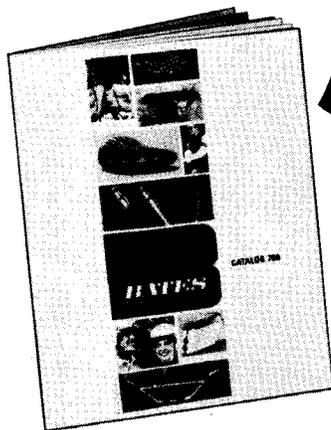
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