

The Duct Tapes

Don't Mess With The Big Guys

● IF YOU ARE THE TYPE WHO CAN LAUGH himself silly when his riding partner walks into the tongue of a bike trailer, if you chuckle when someone drives off with his gloves and helmet on the roof of his van, or if you get tears in your eyes watching a guy pull a runover milk crate out from under his truck, then be warned—this could happen to you.

The night before the Stumpjumper Club's enduro last August, meteorological conditions would barely support human life. It was hot, humid and airless; anyone trying to sleep in a van had every door but the glovebox open hoping to catch a breeze that never came. Just before midnight Mel T. Downs, the walking nuclear catastrophe, closed all the windows on his motorhome and started up the loudest auxiliary generator since World War II. His air conditioner, which he couldn't hear inside, made an intermittent tinny rattle more annoying than the barking exhaust. I could hear people pleading with him to shut the thing off and I could hear Mel's laughter over their discomfort.

The NICEST thing they called him was an inconsiderate bastard.

Personally, I thought he'd run the thing just long enough to cool his place down and then shut it off, but he let it run until just before dawn. When it stopped, a ragged cheer from sleep-starved throats echoed across the campground.

Mel and his 500 Yamaha finished fourth in Open "A," just one point down from Ed Fletcher who was giving the coup de grace to the last surviving Rokon in the state of New Jersey. Getting skunked out of a trophy (they paid the first three places only) didn't seem to bother Mel a whole lot but what DID bother him was finding a two-hundred-pound block of ice melting itself into the driver's seat of his motorhome. In what he thought was justified retaliation he started a war against the poor Stumpjumper.

At first he was putting Scotch tape on unattended bikes to hold the kill buttons down—a dastardly deed, indeed, but it worked only a few times before the Stumpjumper successfully got the word passed around.

Next Mel began Scotch-taping their gas cap vent holes (on cycles with vent hoses he used sheet-metal screws in the hose end). Fuel starvation is easy to diagnose—usually a sudden surge of power, then spitting back through the carb, then silence. That the problem is a blocked

vent is really hard to find because the very first thing a rider will do is take off the gas cap as he grinds his mind in reverse trying to remember when he filled the tank last. Any further checking of the fuel system is fruitless because removing the cap temporarily eliminates the problem. Mel was devious enough to make sure that the Stumpjumper he sabotaged were more than five minutes apart; he knew they would be stopping at almost the same spot on the trail and didn't want them telling each other when they finally spotted the problem.

In all, seven Jumpers lost from three to 33 minutes before discovering their clogged vents. They didn't SUSPECT Mel had done them in; they were SURE Mel was the culprit.

At the trophy presentation, which they attended only because they heard a wet T-shirt contest was on the agenda, they began arguing over who should kill Mel and by what method. Hanging him by something tender was first choice; second was handcuffing him to his Yamaha and then forcing him into a right turn in the middle of the Delaware Memorial Bridge. John Bell insisted they should retaliate immediately and they enlisted the most devious Jumper of them all, one Mike Little, who is so devious that no one except himself knows where he lives. He has his mail delivered to a P.O. box in Pennsauken and that's the only thing anyone knows about him.

Pennsauken, if you're interested, is Lenape Indian for "zoning variance."

When Mel rode his thumper back to his motorhome there was a lady there trying to kick start a Husky 125. Mel took one look at her and it was lust at first sight. He was so captivated he forgot to put his foot down when he stopped and punched his elbow right through the top of his cheap Styrofoam-type cooler. When it comes to obvious, Mel has more than his share.

And the lady, when it came to the obvious, had more than her share too—just about 32 pounds worth, and all below the belt.

Mel had been a dedicated haunch man ever since he spent the summer he was 14 years old at the sheep ranch in Aurora, Colorado.

He picked himself up and shuffled over to the lady with his suavest introduction: "Futzer won't start, huh?"

All in all, the lady was a good solid

three-cover-girl-for-Mother-Earth-News type—the kind that begins to look good when you've been away from home for two weeks and it's been raining a lot.

I was standing almost alongside the pair waiting for a break in traffic so I could get a run at my ramp; it used to be I needed four feet; now I need 40 feet and a following wind.

After four or five minutes of banter, which was fortunate because Mel stocks only six minutes' worth, it appeared the pair was getting ready to mate. Drooling from the mouth, Mel started the lady's motorcycle while she straightened her hair. I'd be willing to bet he was the first man she'd spoken with since the Rumanian diplomat she met during a rainstorm. They drove off on their bikes, the lady leading the way and Mel so excited he was trying to shift with the brake pedal.

John Bell told me what happened after they rode off.

The lady was one of the Chatsworth Dunfees, a clan with an inbred ability to ride motorcycles with inhuman excellence. She had once been a waitress at the Hedger House and remembered Mel as the customer who wanted her to do everything but chew his food and the only tip he ever gave her was "Don't stand up in a canoe."

She led Mel to an abandoned sand pit, an old one with almost vertical sides containing a good many deer antlers (these beautiful animals cannot climb out and they starve to death). Dropping neatly over the edge the lady rode down the 20-foot wall at a 45-degree angle. Mel gleefully followed with his head, no doubt, full of PG thoughts.

Before Mel realized what was happening the lady tore across the flat bottom of the pit and bulled her way ten feet up the far wall before her rear wheel buried itself. She reached down and picked up a half-inch line that was lying there and threw a clove hitch onto her steering head. Aided and abetted by a half dozen Stumpjumper on the other end of the line she and her Husky rose majestically up and out of the pit.

Dumbfounded, Mel watched from below until a paper bag sailed over the edge and landed nearby.

It contained a single item—a roll of Scotch tape.

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