

## Miller Time

□ "They're just trying to get even and I won't let it bother me," Jay thought. Then he rolled over, pressed one ear into the thick carpeting on his van's floor and covered the other with the heavy gray sweatshirt they had such a hard time getting off that young fellow who broke a collarbone two weeks ago. He recognized the partially muffled sound of Mel Down's ancient XL350 four-stroke single; as usual it was afflicted with a "fat" carburetor condition that made it sound as if it was running under water. Opening one eyelid slightly he saw it was still dark and guessed the time at 3:00 A.M. Mel, parked next door, was probably running his motorcycle in retaliation for being kept awake past his usual 10:30 bedtime. You see, Jay had started his small gas-powered generator so he could plug in his TV and watch Barney Miller in the van.

At 1:00 A.M.

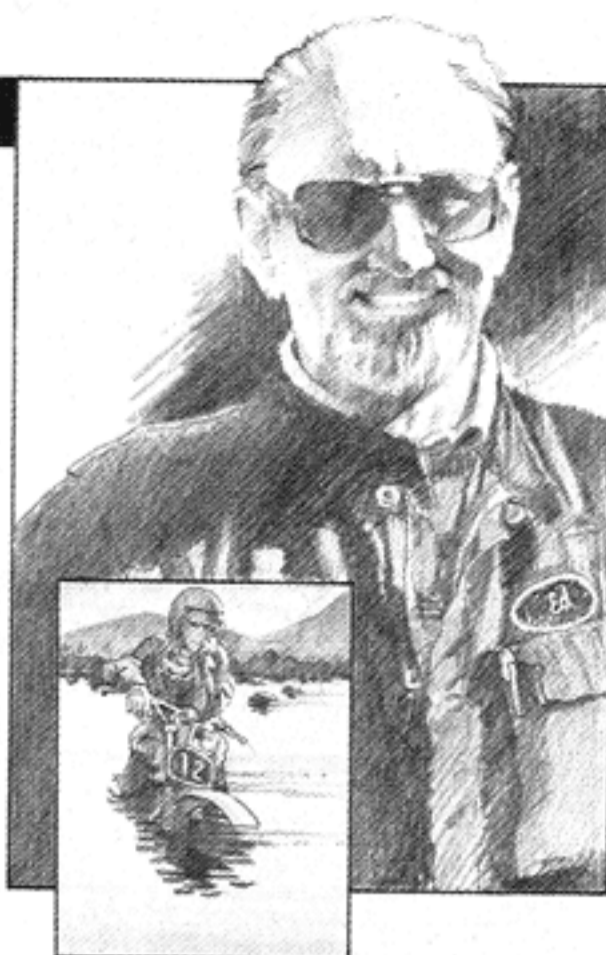
Jay might miss a meal, a night's sleep, or even a chance to meet the girl who had worked her way through the Phillies ball club, but he would NEVER miss a Barney Miller re-run. In his garage, propped midway between the pile of Hodakas and the slowly decomposing quartet of Triumph Cubs, he kept an old knobless TV set tuned to the Barney Miller re-run channel.

His wife had threatened to leave him if he ever again dared to turn Barney on in the house. "I don't mind the re-runs," she had screeched, "but when they re-run the re-runs of the re-runs, I've HAD it up to HERE!"

Jay respected her desire—he had grown fond of home-cooked food, pre-warmed bed sheets, clean, folded shorts and tennis shoes. (When he was single he wore nothing but boots; he didn't really like boots, but wearing them was easier than digging through a drawer full of socks to find two of the same suit.)

Jay was addicted to enduro riding; he was *obsessed* with the Barney Miller Show. When it was time for what his wife called "The B.M. Show," Jay would retire to the garage, sit on a pile of worn-out 19-inch knobbies he was saving for no particular reason, prop up his feet on one of the Cubs and proceed to laugh his wallet loose. If he had to be away from home, he would take the TV and his portable generator with him in his van.

One Sunday it cost him \$45 to see Miller. Jay had finished the Sandy Lane 125-mile National looking good with a definite-maybe for third in class. He was on his second bowl of chili, third



can of cream soda, and just beginning to get apprehensive about gas pains when two fellow club members gathered him up to help get Old Man Hyde's bike out of the cranberry bog back at 96.4. The bog was just a straight-shot piece of cake—trying to be a smartass around the edge was to look for a tragedy.

Hyde was embedded up to the seat in one of the tragedies.

The Old Man had tried so hard to lift the thing himself that he was four inches shorter and 10 years older than when he started. Though the four of them managed to muscle the machine to dry land, they were talking in awfully short sentences before they finished. Jay left the group after they got the bike upside-down and spritzing water out of the spark plug hole. He *had* to—a Barney Miller re-run was on at 4:00.

Jay's motorcycle had been acting a little squirrely on the way out to Hyde's predicament, but he'd passed it off as a combination of fatigue and imagination. It was neither. No sooner had he gotten up to top gear on the way back than the front tire began flopping from one side of the wheel to the other. The steering became a bit imprecise, and the bike developed a magnetic attraction to fresh lumber. But with show time approaching, he kept riding. By the time he'd hammered the thing back to his van—just in time for Barney Miller—the tire looked like two pieces of dry-rotted Romex cable wrapped around the rim. And worse, the re-run had been preempted that day!

Another Miller re-run skunked him out of a trophy at the Forked River Mountain Enduro—the least mountainous mountain event in history. Jay was unhappy with his score until he heard they'd even suckered Burleson into "burning" the same criminally devious checkpoint that had pinned his ears

back. Was it completely legal? Certainly. Was it in the rule book? Of course. Would they, might they, "throw it out"? Forget it, buster.

They were trophying the first five slots, and Jay was counting on picking up some brass before he left. He figured up the last rider's latest possible finishing time before being disqualified, added an hour for the protest period, a half hour for general jerking around and was overjoyed to find that the 4:00 P.M. Miller re-run would be over before they started handing out trophies.

He was wrong.

By mutual consent the protest period was shortened to 30 minutes and there was no general jerking around at all. When Jay hopped out of his van to turn his generator off all he saw were some rolled-up balls of used duct tape, the remains of four hundred dollars' worth of McDonald's take-outs and a family of chipmunks who thought they'd died and gone to heaven. He learned from the last man to leave that he had placed fifth, and his trophy had been picked up by Borelli. Later he discovered that Borelli had given it to Stryker, who lived in the next town. Stryker had passed it to Rainey, who lived nearer to Jay. Rainey still had the trophy. Rainey worked for IBM—which stands for I've Been Moved. By the time Jay had traced the trophy that far, Rainey was living in Tucson, Arizona.

Jay rolled over on his van floor as another motorcycle coughed and came to life in the darkness.

"Inconsiderate bastards!" he thought. He pulled the sweatshirt over his head again but had trouble falling asleep. Fully realizing his noisy generator had annoyed everyone within earshot from 1:00 to 1:30 A.M., he was curious about how early in the morning *they* had gotten up to annoy *him*. Rooting his lighter out of his pants, he flicked his Bic to read his wristwatch.

It was 8:05 A.M. His start time was 8:07!

When Jay opened the side door, bright sunlight blazed into the dark van and laughter roared in from all directions. He dressed as quickly as he could, fumbling everything he touched as his heart pounded with shock and rage. When he stepped outside, he saw heavy cardboard duct taped over all his van windows and strips of tape framing all the door openings. And neatly lettered on the front door with black vinyl letters he read: TWELFTH PRECINCT, N.Y.P.D.

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CYCLE