

● HE WAS 28 YEARS OLD, COULD DRESS himself and was toilet trained, and that was about it. Ralph was content to go through life single, with mismatched socks, ring around the collar and dried shaving cream behind his ears. He would push on doors marked PULL and pull on doors marked PUSH and thought the greatest invention in history was a door that opened both ways.

He was not exactly the type who would lose money betting on a rerun of the 1979 Superbowl, but he was close.

Ralph rode a 1976 CZ that he bought new in 1980 because it was cheap. It suited him; not because it handled well, or was particularly powerful—it suited him because it was cheap. Ralph believed cleanliness was next to godliness, but above godliness he ranked frugality. Some would call him a man who knew the value of a dollar; others would call him an over-the-borderline cheap son of a bitch. In reality, Ralph fell between the two types: he was a cheap son of a bitch who knew the value of a dollar.

We became friendly after establishing a tradition of his borrowing my tools on a return-one-take-one basis—a never-ending process similar to a revolving charge in a department store. The only tools he owned were a camp ax, a bastard file and a self-contained drill with a dead battery. At one time it began to seem like he borrowed tools for no reason—just to keep his credit open, so to speak. I made a test; I put a layer of antique tools in my toolbox. Don't you know, Ralph returned a 3/8-inch-drive ratchet and took a saw-set tool that no one on this continent has used since about 1880. Then he returned the saw set and walked home with a bullet mold, caliber .50. Also not a very hot item nowadays.

He helped me and Woody do the layout on one of the Curly Fern enduros and he was a good guy to work with. For one thing he wasn't running off over to the Hedger House for victuals and refreshments every time he started spitting cotton. He was too cheap to actually spend money on something he could make at home and brown bag, and he would drink from any flowing stream he could see the bottom of.

His frugality, however, was misplaced on a section of sand road we asked him to arrow. It was 4.8 miles long; he used two arrows.

Once he learned the mechanics of proper layout, Ralph became quite good at it and seemed to enjoy laying out events as much as riding them. It might have been that he enjoyed riding the trail without having to pay an eighteen-dollar entry fee, which is nothing to get excited about under the best of circumstances.

He made a slight error when he helped the fellows in the MCI club with their annual end-of-the-season LET IT ALL HANG OUT WE DON'T CARE IF WE

BREAK IT bash at Warren Grove. He had found a really nice, flat and grassy field for the fuel stop. It was next to a paved road and couldn't have been better.

There was one problem with it.

On the day before the MCI enduro, the field was also the meeting place for the Springer Spaniel, Labrador Retriever, and Mastiff Fanciers Association annual field trials.

The field was covered with about an equal number of blades of grass and dog dirt. The riders who knelt in the stuff as they tightened their chains were medium miffed; the guys who sat down in it as they swapped air filters were miffed completely. And the lucky guys who were on time and could enjoy some lunch during the 30-minute layover said the aroma left everything to be desired.

Ralph wanted to put on a cross-country event for "C" riders only, and the main reason he did it was because he'd just gotten divorced and one of the local "C" riders had been competing accompanied by a widowed mother who could run gas and adjust chains with the best of them; she was also the cutest thing Ralph had ever rubbed against.

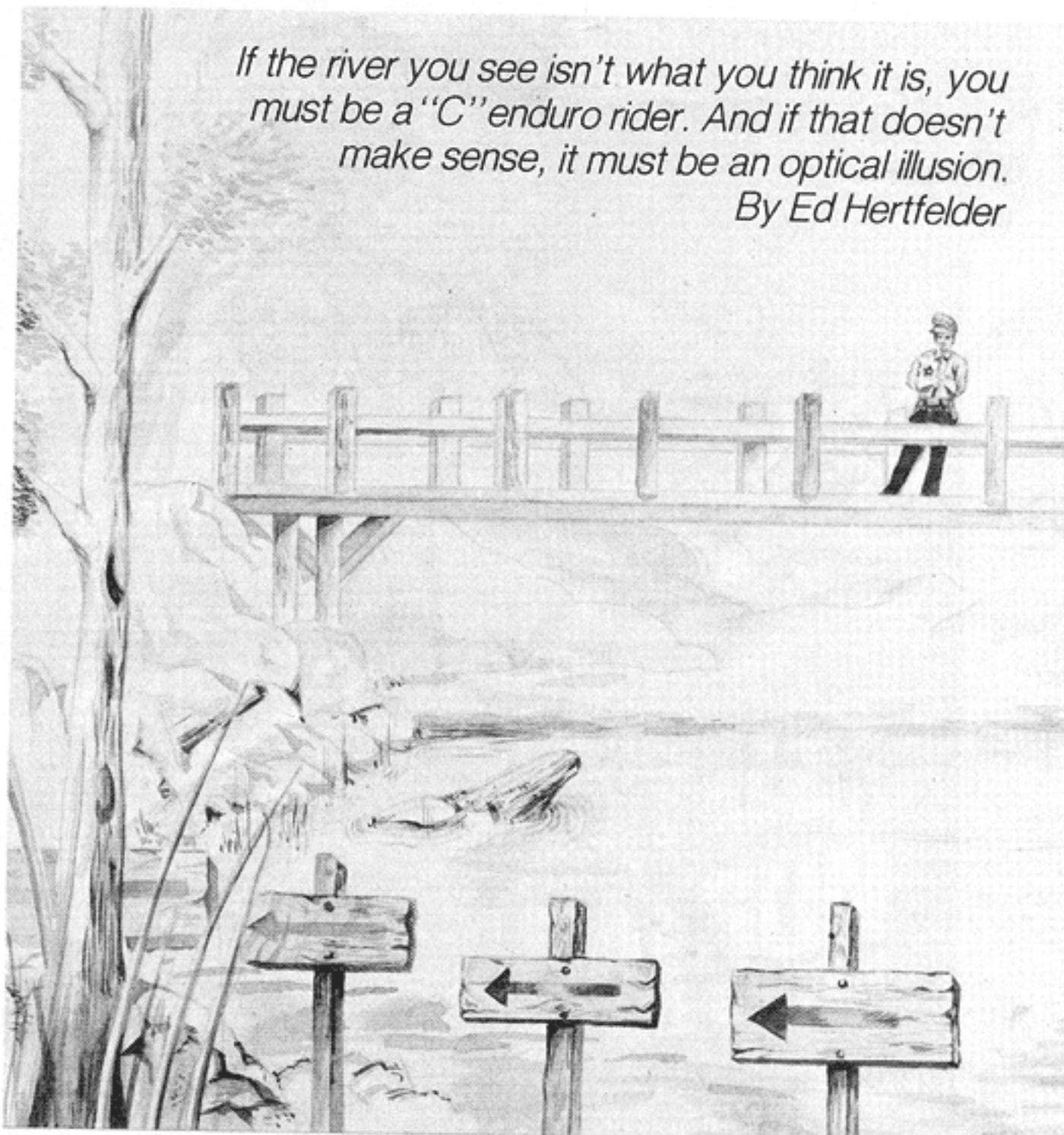
I thought it was a great idea—the cross-country run, not rubbing against the widow—because "C" riders have a tough time of it watching "AA" riders zap between the trees like airplane shadows while they—the "C" riders—are putting a foot down at every turn to keep from toppling over. In the first event I ever finished, a real mud run, I came out at the end looking like a muskrat alongside a three-man team of "A" riders wearing slightly spotted WHITE coveralls. It was enough to make me quit right there, but I persevered and developed my skills to my present above-mediocre level.

"C"-RIDER-ONLY events can take some of the hurt out of reading result booklets, flipping to your class list and ALWAYS having to turn the page to find your score. "C"-ONLY events are like farm teams: they give a rider the opportunity to compete without being overwhelmed by talent all day, an opportunity to be BAD, an opportunity to take a sandy corner so far out of shape that he pulls a muscle in his back and leg at the same time while watching the fellow in front of him get so far out of shape he's no longer attached to the motorcycle but

OPTICAL ALLUSION

If the river you see isn't what you think it is, you must be a "C" enduro rider. And if that doesn't make sense, it must be an optical illusion.

By Ed Hertfelder



is still holding his hands clenched and knuckles up as if he were.

Ralph was sort of planning a 50-mile course but accepted a suggestion to cut it to 45 so he wouldn't have so many out-of-fuel motorcycles quietly littering the trail at the end of the day. The theoretical mileage possible with a 2.6-gallon tank goes away fast when you're standing alongside the motorcycle bouncing it against a wet log seven or eight times before the thing decides to jump its front wheel over and then bite a branch stub between the brake pedal and skid plate. Falling down on the right side is also not conducive to good mileage because the throttle tends to wind itself wide open and stay there. Neither is trying to force a bike up a hill and digging the rear wheel into the hub. Many "C" riders also get low mileage because they forget to cinch down their gas caps and find themselves

trapping the loose cap between one knee and the tank as it tries to jump overboard. Sadly, in their anxiety to stop and replace the cap, they tend to brake abruptly, which sloshes a small replica of "Old Faithful" out of the tank, which can sometimes create a small replica of the Chicago Fire.

Ralph recalled that the last "C" rider he towed out turned his 20-foot tow rope into one 10-foot tow rope and 10 one-foot tow ropes, plowing up a good half-acre of ground in the process.

For the most part, his layout consisted of easy trails connecting a series of commercial campgrounds; the trails were also used by the O.T.H.E.R. club (Over The Hill Enduro Riders) for their annual enduro, Miss Piggy contest and underwater motorcycling demonstration. Ralph asked if I might be good enough to mark the last 10 miles for him in exchange for

an O-ring chain for my Yamaha, a GUARANTEED seat up front at the next Miss Piggy contest, and his forgetting the 10 dollars I owed him, which I'd forgotten months ago. I was also required to nail up a checkpoint of my own choosing near the center of the section.

For you readers who are unfamiliar with cross-country events and wonder how you can nail up a checkpoint, an explanation is in order.

Cross-country events are typically manpower efficient, which is also probably their chief attribute. One man can, and usually does, run the whole show. Scoring is on elapsed time with riders starting at intervals. To insure riders run the complete course, markers nail old books to dead trees along the trail and the contestants have to collect a page from each or be disqualified. One notorious event near Manasquan used to be laid out by a fellow with a criminal mentality. He was great for arrowing dead-end spurs off the main trail; half of them would have a book at the end, the others a sign reading, SORRY 'BOUT THAT. With two-way traffic on the spurs—an unhealthy situation—riders coming from the dead end might yell "No check!" when in fact there was. Riders foolish enough to turn around found that finishing a 12-check race with 11 pages was the same as staying home. On the other hand, some riders would hold up a retrieved page indicating there WAS a check when there wasn't.

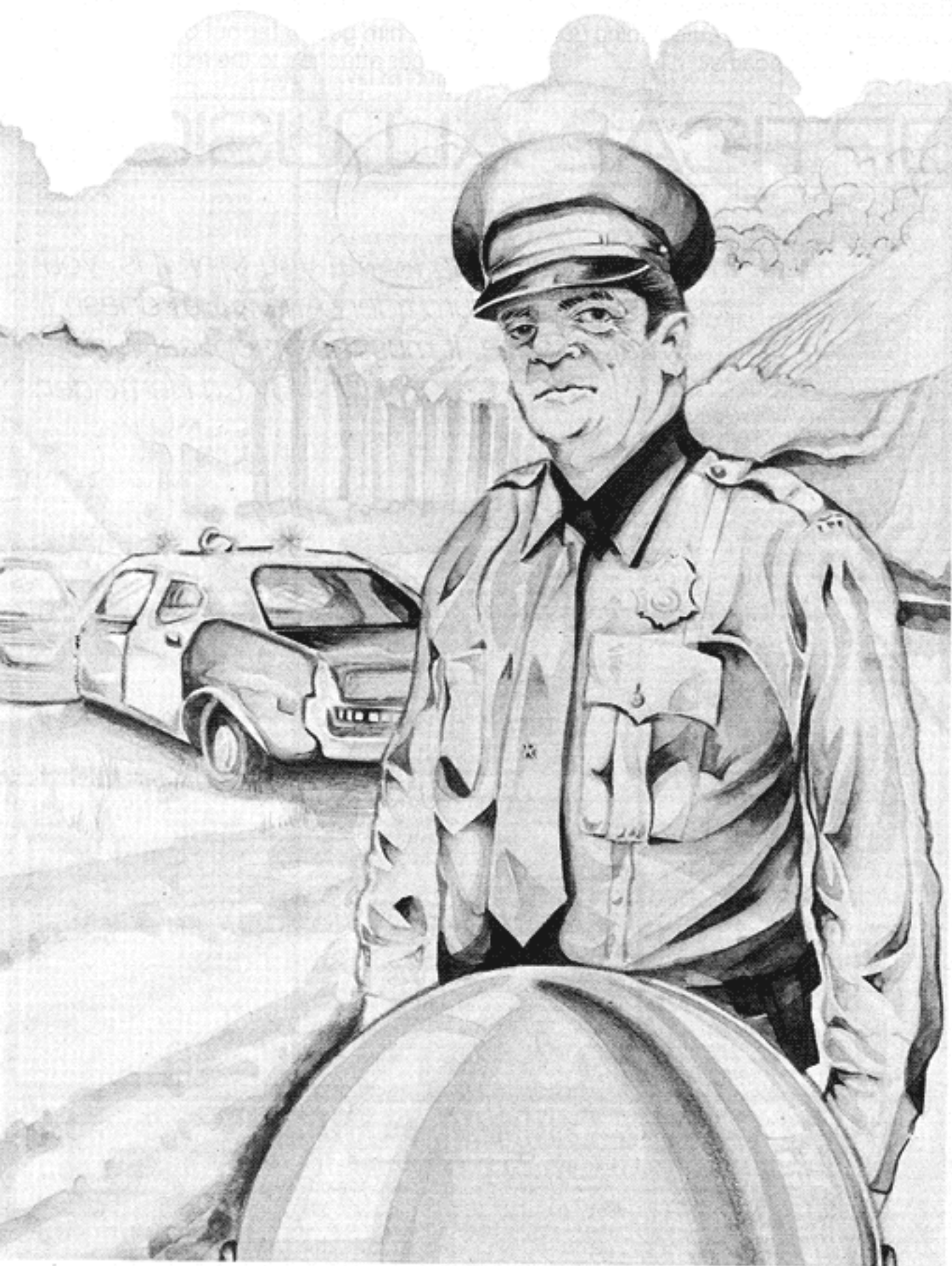
The section Ralph asked me to mark I knew well, intimately, in fact, because I once pushed my Triumph the entire distance when it upchucked its primary chain tensioner—ruining, among other things, my weekend. I arrowed it out the day before they ran it, nailing an old copy of *Vanity Fair* to a tall stump, on the belief that "C" riders should be exposed to good literature once in a while as everything else they read has a center foldout.

Two miles from the finish there was a flooded section near the New Jersey Parkway, which was then under construction. This section, larger than a city block, had been flooding often for many years, and all the trees were dead, turning gray, and beginning to tilt. From one side to the other the water was never more than 16 inches deep but, just for a gag, I dropped the arrows lower and lower on the trees all the way to the middle and then gradually raised them near the other shore.

Sunday morning I went down to see how the event was going for Ralph. It began terrible; the "C" rider with the cute widowed mother showed up in a 44-foot motor home driven by a graying widower who looked a little better than Paul Newman and was riding around on a 400 KTM and wearing a blue and white skunk-striped helmet he'd earned with a bronze in the 1973 Six Days. And none of the

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OPTICAL ALLUSION



"Cs" wanted to get an early number for fear they'd get lost with no tire tracks to follow and were wandering around waiting for each other to sign up. Ralph had stuck a long strip of wide adhesive tape on his sign-in table, sliced it into squares and numbered each one. When no one was looking he peeled off the first 10 numbers. When the "Cs" saw he was up to number 11, they signed up in a rush.

If number 11 saw any tire tracks, he was looking over his shoulder at the time.

Ralph had figured they would need two hours to complete the 45 miles, but he was at the finish a half hour early to score any super-fast young fellows who hadn't yet got hurt bad enough to ride sensibly. Two hours came and went and no one was even close enough to be heard. Three hours passed and a crowd of concerned women and pre-distraught parents gathered. At three hours and forty-five minutes, two motorcycles—thumpers—could be heard approaching.

As a general rule, cross-country riders rarely finish alone; they tend to hang back near the finish to ask the next fellow behind him how many pages he'd collected. If they arrive at different counts, some frenzied page-swapping often takes place, because each has extra pages from each check. You see, it's hard to rip off fewer than two or three pages when you're wearing heavy gloves and can't let go of the throttle too long because the idle circuit is playing dead, or the clutch is dragging because you got confused and turned the adjustment the wrong way.

The incoming cycles were numbers 24 and 28, a strange state of affairs. They were "Cs" but sounded like "AA" hot-shoes as Ralph wrote down their times.

"Who laid out this monstrosity?" one of them asked.

"Yeah," the other said, "it's like a damn Qualifier!"

"Give me a break, guys." Ralph was pleading, because the waiting crowd was working themselves into a lynching mood. "They laid the whole thing out with a Yamaha Excess Eleven!"

"Like hell," number 24 argued. "You got a river crossing about two miles back and they told me at least 10 guys drowned already before I got there."

Thankfully, none of the spectators heard this.

"How did you guys get through?" I asked.

Number 28 said, "We looped around up on the Parkway embankment and dropped off just as two watchmen with shotguns drove up; I think they're holding everyone behind us for trespassing."

Ralph shook his head dejectedly for a full minute and then turned to me and said, "Did you ever wish you'd taken up slot-car racing?"

"Been thinking about it, Ralph. Do they run a Super Senior class?"