

Your Turn, My Turn

□ When a motorcycle competitor lags 60 minutes behind his schedule at a timed event he is officially disqualified.

He is also officially completely pissed off at himself.

Ordinarily he is late because the motorcycle has let him down due to poor preparation; or his body has let him down due to poor preparation; or he has developed a case of intermittent brain fade. This last affliction can cause a normally rational rider to do something really dumb, really frequently.

When I went "over my hour" 66 miles down the trail on the 84-mile Pine Cone Rough Reliability Run I was guilty on all three counts. The motorcycle had been so poorly prepared it quit five times—twice with a clogged fuel filter, twice with a fouled plug which had far too many miles on it, and once when the criminally worn rear brake shoes locked up solid because they were riding on the tip of the brake cam and wouldn't retract. My body had been so poorly prepared that it quit at the top of a snotty little 20-foot hill that was all push and strain—inching a 254-pound motorcycle along with a knee into the hill and boot heels braced against slippery roots no bigger than telephone cords can be physically taxing.

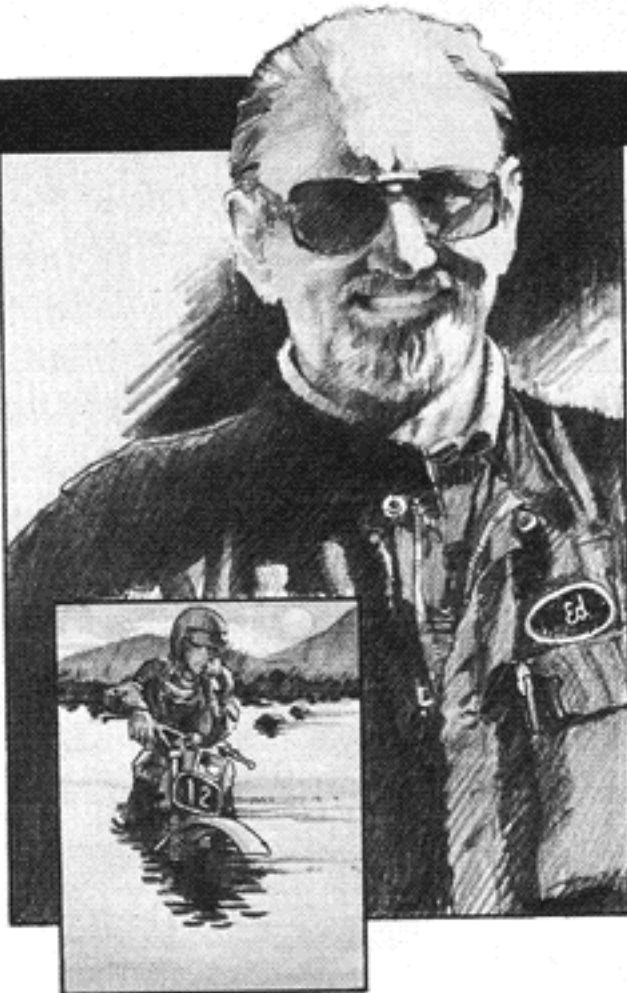
When I say my body quit I don't mean it gave me two weeks notice; it walked out on me is what it did. A lousy 20-foot hill I wouldn't even have noticed last November had me gasping for breath with my heart pounding hard enough to hurt my eardrums and everything below my neck feeling like a wet dishrag. The three-month winter layoff from competition is noticeable even to a young man: after 40 the months seem like years.

After 50, the weeks seem like years.

It was brain fade that made me tackle the steep side of the hill; the arrowed trail was a much easier climb but it was jammed with a herd of buddy-class riders acting like they were at a hillside picnic. Rough Reliability Runs are supposed to be easy off-road events; in fact the rules call for the course to be passable by a two-wheel-drive American sedan. Mel Downs, who arrows the Pine Cone, has often been called to account for what appears to be impossible terrain. His standard reply is "Give me the keys to your car and I'll show you it's passable."

To the best of my knowledge no one has ever accepted Mel's proposition.

Since they are supposed to be so easy, a Rough Reliability always draws a large buddy-class. Many solo competitors simply add rear footpegs and a



larger seat to their machines so they can carry their children, wives, or girl friends along to get a taste of off-road riding. As a general rule the wives and girl friends go once; the kids pester Dad unmercifully for another ride and are frequently given their own small motorcycle. This not only assures the future of the sport but gives Dad the opportunity to take the damned rear footpegs off his own bike before they do any more damage to his legs.

It was a second case of brain fade that made me think I could scoot around three or four stalled buddy-classes at a small creek crossing. I scooted out of water one-foot deep into water three-feet deep and sat there enveloped in a pillar of steam from the hot engine, listening to jeering spectators whose day I had just made. Peering over the top of my hopelessly fogged glasses, I pushed my bike to shore.

Appreciative for giving them the best laugh of the day, and some dramatic photos, three young fellows waded in and helped me get the bike ashore. This is illegal and I explained this to them, but not forcibly enough so that they would throw me back in, you see. Clinching the gas cap tighter, removing the spark plug, and lifting out the air filter, I laid my bike on its side, then rolled it upside-down. A fair amount of water fell clear as I pumped the shift lever into gear, and more water splattered out the plug hole as I motored the engine by turning the back wheel.

Nearby, I could hear the "chuf-chuf-chuf" of another rider doing the same thing somewhere behind me. As I started to lift my bike straight up onto its back wheel to drain the exhaust system, the other chuffing noise stopped and the rider came over to help me. "Move over, you old fart," he said. At times I might take offense at this.

When sweat is crawling down both sides of my ear is not one of these times, however.

"Knock yourself out," I said as he raised the motorcycle straight up and shook it.

"I will repay you a thousandfold," I promised, "maybe even two thousandfold."

"No need," he said as he dropped my bike neatly onto its wheels. "This is one I owe you."

He must have noticed the puzzled look on my face because I didn't recall ever seeing him before.

"Do you remember," he asked, "the skinny little kid with the thick glasses who used to ride buddy behind Chester Gatherow?"

"Sure do," I said, for who could forget Gatherow, who had dropped big BSAs on his leg so often he walked like the *Gunsmoke* character called Chester, played, I think, by Dennis Weaver? "He had glasses like the bottom of 7-Up bottles and a pair of ears that made him look like a coupe with both doors open."

"Yes, I did," he said, and he was smiling, thank God.

"Well, give me a minute to get my foot out of my mouth, will you?" I implored as I slid my helmet under the sidestand to keep it from sinking into the soft ground. While I was replacing my spark plug and air filter, I glanced at the young man walking toward his overturned bike and noticed another rider also turning his back wheel to change the suddenly water-cooled engine back into an air-cooled motor again.

I went into my super-dumb routine, kicking the engine over and developing a bad case of hyper-frustration before remembering that it's a good idea to snap ignition wire 36B onto spark plug 16E before booting start pedal 22C.

I was puffing the snow out of my eyesight as the fellow who'd helped me went on down the trail with a wave of his muddy glove. He was running buddy-class and his passenger, instead of a little kid or a light lady, was *bigger* than he was. Even a rider as bad as I am could keep up with them in the dense brush, and I was close enough to see that the guy had, get this, eyeglasses as thick as the bottoms of 7-Up bottles. Curiously, the name neatly lettered on the back of the passenger's helmet read GATHEROW.

Later the young fellow let me in on his secret.

"I regained my sight," he said, "but Chester started losing his."

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