

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Eating your way to victory

By Jeff Spencer

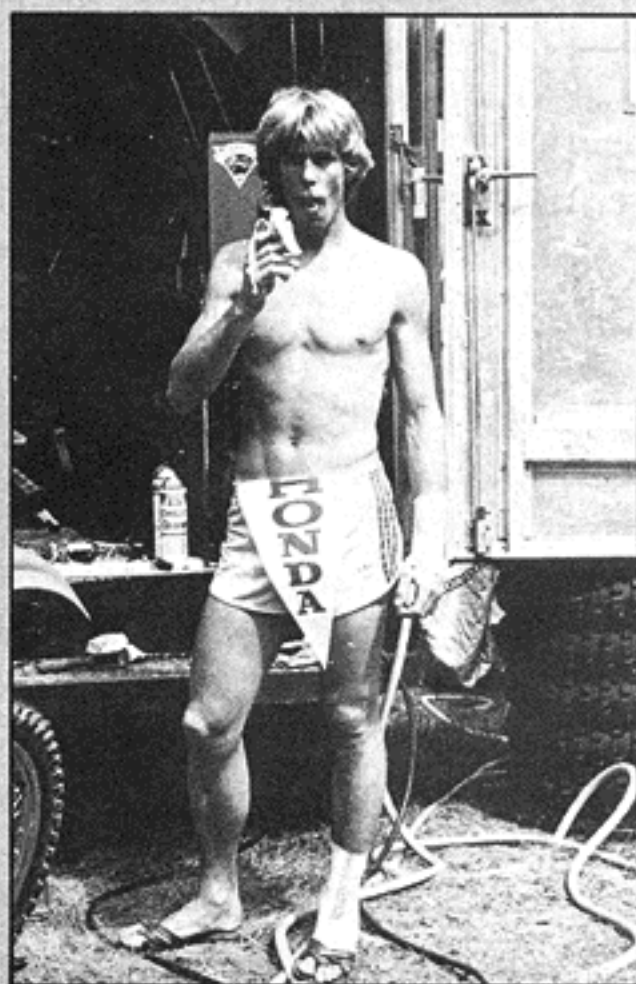


There are many similarities that exist between your motorcycle and your body. Your bike has an engine to set it in motion, and your body has a heart and muscles to propel it. The air filter in your bike filters the air similarly to the way your lungs process oxygen from the air you breathe. Your nerve impulses spark your bodily functions into action as the spark plug in your bike does when it ignites the gas in the cylinder. To make these processes possible, your body and bike need fuel. The quality of fuel will determine in great part how efficiently your bike and your body will run. You wouldn't expect your bike to run well on 80-octane gas, and neither should you expect your body to function up to full capacity with inferior fuel (food) being put into it. Believe it or not, many riders race undernourished. Sure, they eat enough, but the food is not always of the quality and proportions that

will produce a first-rate performance. Young or old, a factory superstar or just a spectator, without proper nutrition your performances will not be what they could be.

ENERGY CRISIS

All of us have experienced days at the races when we just couldn't seem to get our bodies out of first gear. To walk from the pits to the bathroom can be agony. A worse feeling yet is when you've come in from practice and feel as if you've just ridden back-to-back Baja 1000s. It's a horrifying experience to realize that your body is running on only two of eight cylinders and you must still race two motos. At times like this, most riders panic and frantically try to salvage their energy by all manner of means. One popular method that can be heard being discussed at least a dozen times in the pits on race-day is to "eat a candy bar for quick energy." Another one I've heard several times is, "You're tired, huh? Drink a Pepsi because it's got lots of potassium in it." With this one usually goes the solemn warning: "Make sure you shake it up and get the fizz out of it so it won't mess up your stomach." With these two solutions to the energy crisis in mind, let's explore the questions of how food, energy and racing relate to one an-



While Bob Hannah munches a banana, his favorite raceday food is a peanut butter and honey sandwich. The best foods to eat on raceday are fruit and whole wheat bread.

other in greater depth.

DOWN ON HORSEPOWER?

Before we look at how we can enhance our physical performances through nutrition, it's worthwhile taking a look at some of the reasons why our bodies can be down on horsepower on raceday.

Overtraining is one of the most notorious culprits in producing underenergy. It seems strange that the very training that is supposed to improve our ability to produce energy can actually decrease it. Without the proper training-to-rest ratio, your body is never given the chance to sufficiently recover from training. In this case it will never be running at more than 75- to 80-percent efficiency. The harder you train, the slower you go. It's important to remember that your rest is as important as your training.

Undertraining can also cause underenergy. If you're not in top shape, just riding in practice can put a substantial dent in your energy reserves. This condition naturally becomes worse as the day's racing drags on. The answer to this part of the energy puzzle is to develop a consistent, well-rounded training program in which your fitness is gradually improved over a several month period of time.



R.J. and Broc Glover chow down at the local salad bar emporium. Salads are high in complex carbohydrates and are the best source for vitamins and minerals.



Keith McCarty looks up to see who ordered the peanut butter and banana sandwich.

Your general state of wellness can have a profound effect on your vitality. Have you ever tried racing with a fever or chest cold? It's difficult, isn't it? Regardless of how fit you are or what type of equipment you're racing on, when you're sick, the chances of putting in a top performance are very slight. The moral to this aspect of energy control is to avoid sickness as much as possible by training, eating and resting in proper proportions to one another.

The amount of rest you get plays a significant role in how frisky you'll be on raceday. Rest is more cumulative than it is on an individual daily basis. You'll be more rested and generally have more consistent vigor from day to day if you sleep a reasonable amount each night than if you night-owl it Monday through Friday night and then expect to get a good night's sleep on Saturday night to energize yourself for Sunday's races.

As far as nutrition goes, regardless of how well you eat, if you don't manage these four areas properly, your batteries will never be fully charged for racing.

While the SSM special might be just the ticket after the races, loading up on it before your race isn't the hot setup.



FACTORS THAT AFFECT ENERGY PRODUCTION

Above and beyond the available energy stored in the food you eat, there are several other factors that influence the amount of energy you can generate. Heredity and training head the list. Some people, by virtue of the physical traits they inherit from their parents, have a greater physical capacity to generate energy than their competition. Their muscles are bigger, chests larger and lungs more efficient, to name only a few of the physical differences. Raw talent alone is not enough. Physical potential, to be of value to an athlete, must be developed through systematic training and competition. Great nutrition combined with poor genetics and lack of training will not produce a championship. Nor will the consequences of poor eating habits (diminished strength and endurance, fluctuations in weight, and poor concentration) be compensated for by training.

FOOD ENERGY

Food is broken into five categories, each offering a different service.

Protein (meat, fish, chicken) is a poor energy source but provides your body with the raw materials it needs for growth and repair.

Fat (dairy products and oil from seeds) is a highly concentrated energy source that is burned when doing low-intensity exercise for long periods of time.

Carbohydrates (fruits, grain, vegetables) are the primary source of energy used for motocross. They are easily digested and burn efficiently.

Vitamins and minerals are not direct sources of energy, but they assist the body in burning fats and carbohydrates for the purpose of energy production.

Water composes 70 percent of your body and in it is where the chemical reactions of your body take place.

MAGIC FOODS

All athletes have wished at some time for a magic food that would ensure them of success and stardom. Popeye ate his spinach and was "strong to the finish," but regrettably, that's about as far as it went. There are no foods in and of themselves that will automatically produce winning performances. Simply put, to be properly fueled for racing, you must eat a well-balanced diet. No amount of vitamins (which can be toxic in large doses) or exotic foods such as bee pollen, ginseng, or royal jelly will make a racehorse out of a plow horse.

A balanced diet will afford you the greatest opportunity of performing with a consistently predictable energy supply while minimizing the possibility of less-than-optimal performances caused by nutritional deficiencies. To this end you can see that neither a Pepsi nor a Snickers will provide the needed boost of energy. In fact, highly concentrated simple-sugar foods such as candy bars and soft drinks have a de-energizing effect on the body. When such items (they can't really be considered food) are eaten, your

body's energy systems short circuit. Your blood-sugar level goes haywire and your body metabolism speeds up to process the substances which it perceives as damaging to itself—none of which will help you win races.

EATING MISTAKES

There are several fundamental mistakes that many riders make concerning the relationship between their diets and performances.

They often eat too close to a high-intensity workout. For example, if you were going to do an interval workout or race, you wouldn't eat any closer than two and a half to three hours before. To eat any closer would affect your performance, because food would still be in your stomach and could make you nauseous.

Eating too much too late the night before a race can interrupt your sleep, which is all too important to being fresh on raceday.

Riders often mistake foods that are high in fat for carbohydrates. For example, the night before a race, when they want to have a meal high in complex carbohydrates, they may eat pizza or lasagna. Both do have carbohydrates but also contain an undesirable amount of fat. In essence, they are fat-loading instead of carbohydrate-loading.



There are no secret, mystery energy foods. Flat cola drinks or candy bars won't give you the burst of energy you might feel you need.

BASIC FOOD GROUPS

Now that we've established many of the dos and don'ts of sensible nutrition, it's time to get down to specifics. Probably the only thing we all remember about food from school is that we are supposed to eat from the four basic food groups. This is sound advice because there isn't any one food which when eaten alone will provide us with all the nutrients we need. When one eats a variety of foods from the four food groups daily, he will in most cases get all the needed nutrients to train, race and grow on. The four food groups include: meat, fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and dairy products.

The meat group consists of major protein sources such as red meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and legumes such as lentils, peanuts and peas. As a general rule, your daily intake of protein should be .8 grams for every kilogram (2.2 pounds) of body weight. A 154-pound rider (154 pounds ÷ 2.2 = 70 kilos) should eat 56 grams of protein a day (70 × .8 = 56).

FOOD

Your best sources of carbohydrates are fruits and vegetables. Most riders eat enough fruit, but not enough vegetables. Vitamins A and C are derived primarily from these foods.

Whole grain products such as whole wheat bread and brown rice should be an important part of every rider's diet. The iron derived from these foods is an important mineral for endurance sports such as motocross.

Dairy products are an excellent source of the mineral calcium. Calcium is important for maximum functioning of your muscles. Other nutrients found in dairy products include B vitamins, protein, and vitamins A and D.

EATING ON RACEDAY

Your raceday diet should be simple and uncomplicated. It should not be significantly different from your normal eating pattern if you have a well-balanced diet. Too many riders look to magic foods on raceday and only end up with a stomachache or gas pangs. If you've ever ridden with either, you know how uncomfortable and performance-limiting they can be. Breakfast should be eaten several hours before racing. Unsweetened cereal and toast with a few pieces of fruit should do fine.

The best foods to eat on raceday include whole grain breads, and fruit. Fruits that sit best with most riders include oranges, strawberries (David Bailey's favorite), and bananas. Apples often produce gas and must be eaten accordingly. Breads and rolls should be whole grain. White bread is full of chemicals and provides almost nothing in the way of nutrition. One of Bob Hannah's favorite raceday mini-meals is a peanut butter and honey sandwich. Sandwiches that include lunch meats, mayonnaise, mustard, lettuce, and a host of other ingredients often slow down digestion and are not recommended. Foods that contain sugar and salt should be avoided on raceday because they negatively affect your blood-sugar level and promote dehydration. Check the ingredients on the labels of the foods you eat to determine the amount of salt and sugar in them. Other names that manufacturers use for sugar include corn syrup, glucose, fructose and turbinado. Salt is also disguised in the same way by using the word sodium.

Liquid consumption is also important on raceday. If you don't begin your race fully hydrated with plenty of liquid, you can kiss 10 to 20 percent of your performance goodbye. Diluted fruit juice or just plain water is best.

All in all, to have a sound diet for top fitness, eat consistently well from day to day. Emphasize plenty of fruits, grains and vegetables. Eat a variety of nutritious foods from the four food groups and don't look to any food for a "magic" energy answer, because there isn't any. With this in mind, you'll enjoy good health all the days of your life.

Eat well to race well. ■