

TENTH ANNUAL SPRITE SUPERBOWL OF MOTOCROSS



BARNETT BURNS THE BOWL

And the Alabama Flash takes home the Championship

By Paul Clipper



Just because it was the Superbowl doesn't mean there weren't any crashes.

Mark Barnett entered the Superbowl with a 40-point lead in the Supercross Championship Series and surprised no one by taking the Coliseum by storm. After neatly winning his qualifier, he needed only a seventh place or better in the final to wrap up the championship. *This* he proceeded to do; in the process, making the 20-lap final look like child's play.

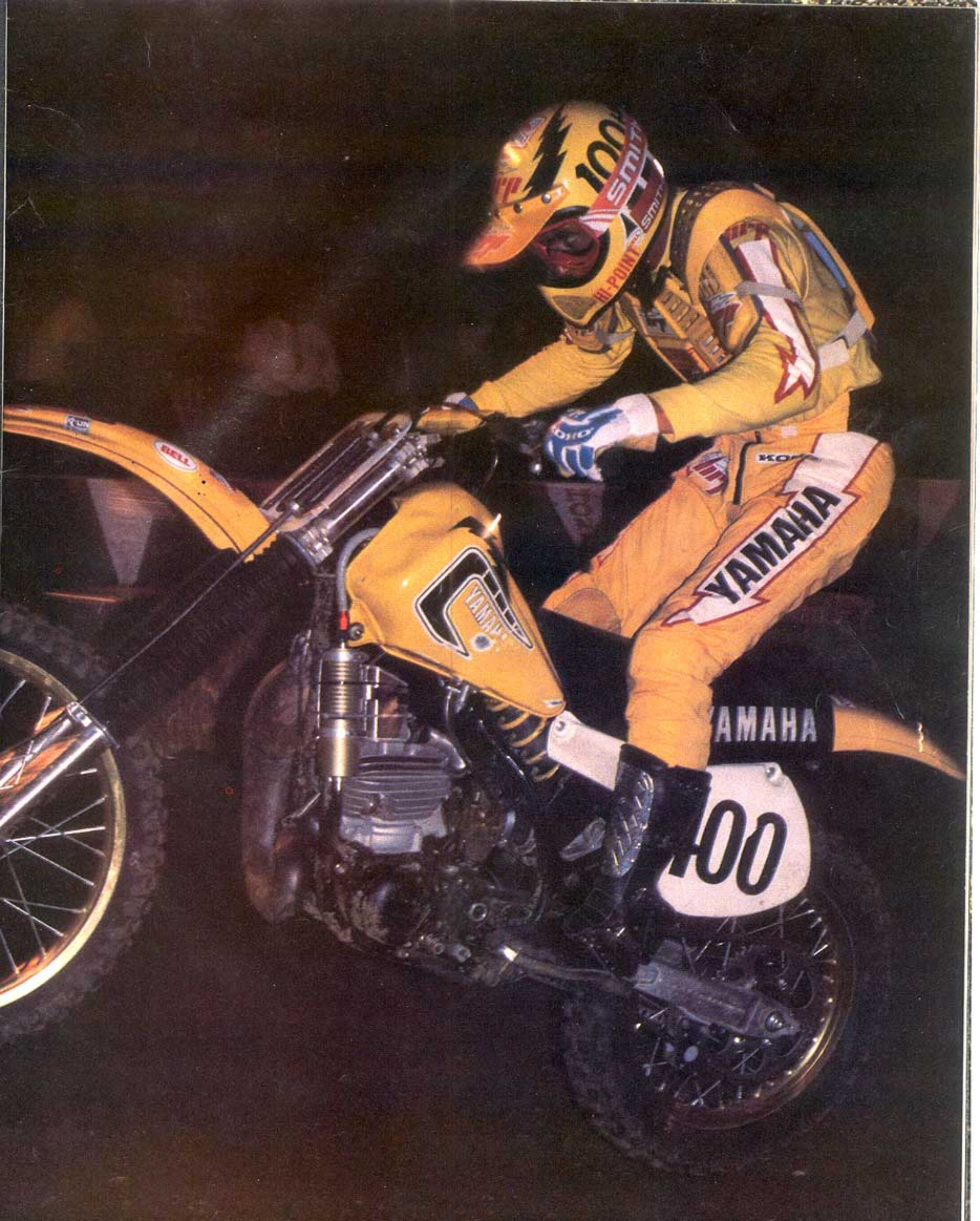
The only threat to Barnett's Series win was posed by Kent Howerton, and as luck would have it, Kent was suffering from a twisted back he'd picked up while practicing earlier in the week. Howerton struggled through his heat race, obviously in a great deal of pain, and managed a third-place transfer spot. The "Rhinestone Cowboy" did not find a miracle cure before the main event and spent the last race of the evening circulating in mid-pack, finishing a disappointing 13th.

Last year's Supercross champ, Mike Bell, also had a bad night, appearing burnt out from the rough job of title defending. His already-laidback riding style was even looser than usual, and it couldn't carry him to anything better than a third-place finish in both his qualifier and the main. Third place was good enough to move him into second for the series; there's one more race left for him to nail that second down solid.

Points and politics aside, the crowd favorite was Bell's teammate, Bob Hannah. All the "Hurricane" had to do was pass somebody...*anybody*, for *any* reason...and 60,000 people were on their feet and screaming. Down on the race track, the roar is deafening—enough to make your blood run cold—and a few of the racers must be wondering what's happening in the lead to make the crowd go crazy like that. The lead? Nah. It's just Hannah passing a rider, down about fifth place.

Hannah and Howerton have had a heated rivalry going in the National Series, and before the race, a good amount of speculation was spent on whether or not the "Howerton/Hannah Thing" would erupt into a pitched battle on the Coliseum infield. Had Howerton felt well enough to do some front-row dicing, the story may have been a little different, but the two never came together in front of the L.A. crowd. How's that saying go... about living to fight another day?

Bob Hannah drew the most response on the applause meter, but never found his way into the lead.



SPRITE SUPERBOWL OF MOTOCROSS



Last year's series champion, Mike Bell, looking worn out before the race even started, finished third. He sure is tall, though.



Team Honda had riders out in force. Jim Gibson (#7) skyshot every jump for a fourth-place finish.

Team Honda made an impressive showing Saturday night, with USGP winner Chuck Sun finishing second, and Jim Gibson, Rich Coon, Donnie Hansen and Steve Wise all finishing in the top ten. There were times when the infield seemed to be taking on a red, white and blue glow from the sheer number of Honda riders on the track. Sun won his qualifier handily and held the lead of the main for about three laps—until Barnett decided to storm on through.

Last year's Superbowl winner, Team Yamaha's Broc Glover, had a trying night. He transferred into the main with a fourth-place finish in his heat, only to get stuck in the starting gate when the final event was flagged off. He put together a decent charge but still couldn't finish any better than 12th.

This year's Superbowl track was a new design, much easier than past L.A. tracks, according to some of the riders. Gone was the infamous "Toyota Tornado" of recent years; in its place were a couple of flat switchbacks and a sand pit. There didn't seem to be as many jumps, either, obvious by a lack of broken bikes and bodies littering the track—a too-common feature of last year's race. The high-speed course still had its challenge, though, as three sections of tricky, rock-hard whoopdies kept the riders on their toes and aided in the sudden death of a number of unfortunate haybales.

But, if the whoopdies weren't enough of a challenge for the field, "Magic" Mark Barnett gave them all fits. With one race still left on the program, he has the number-one plate wrapped up.

Does this mean that the San Diego Supercross is going to be a yawner, a Mark Barnett Benefit night? No way! There's still plenty of prize money up for grabs, and Bell, Howerton and Hannah will be scrambling for it on the floor of San Diego Stadium. That is, *after* Barnett takes his cut and heads back to Alabama for a well-deserved vacation! □

RESULTS

Los Angeles Superbowl of Motocross
July 11, 1981

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|-------------------|-----|
| 1. Mark Barnett | Suz |
| 2. Chuck Sun | Hon |
| 3. Mike Bell | Yam |
| 4. Jim Gibson | Hon |
| 5. Bob Hannah | Yam |
| 6. Marty Smith | Suz |
| 7. Richard Coon | Hon |
| 8. Donnie Hansen | Hon |
| 9. Steve Wise | Hon |
| 10. Denny Bentley | Suz |