

# DONNIE HANSEN

## The Making Of A Champion

*Though everybody dreams about becoming a champion, the odds against reaching the Number One spot are overwhelming. Donnie Hansen may just beat those odds. By Ken Lee*

**T**o be champion—it's a natural desire. Everybody aspires to be the best at something, anything; most people voice those dreams only during childhood: I want to be President. I want to be the all-time home-run king. I want to be the National Champion. Children don't know enough to be disillusioned. They haven't yet learned about statistics, about odds, about hard work, about reality—they haven't learned that thousands, even millions, of also-rans, mid-packers and backmarkers must trail the one person who becomes champion.

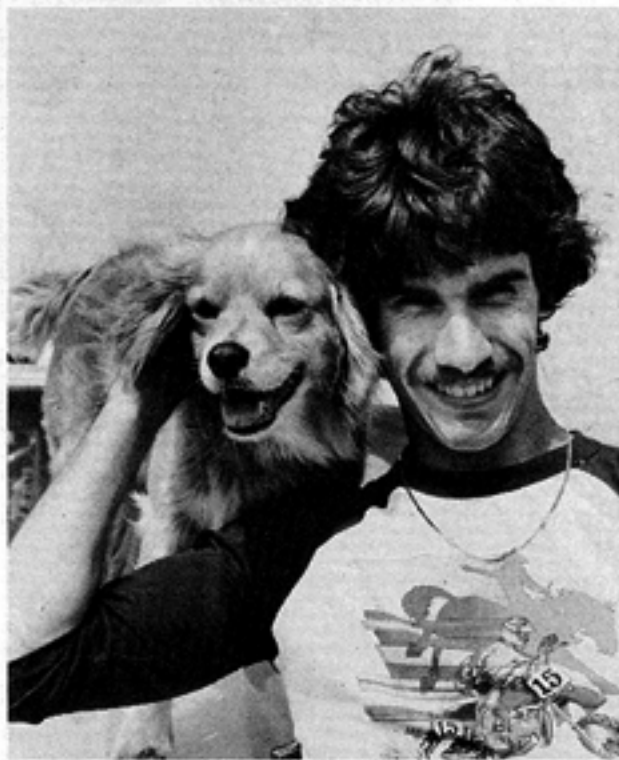
When Donnie Hansen started riding motorcycles at age seven, he knew nothing more about statistics and odds than any other kid. This year, at age 23, as he battles for the right to wear the 250 National crown and is on the verge of clinching the Supercross Championship, Donnie looks back on his accomplishments.



# DONNIE HANSEN

Like countless other motorcyclists, Hansen started riding for fun. Unlike most riders, though, playriding was for him the cornerstone, the first of a series of building blocks that were destined to support a championship effort. "My father had raced scrambles, so we always rode bikes for fun; the whole family would go out playriding in the desert. When I was 13 or so I started racing scrambles. My dad paid for everything, and it was expensive; it was hard for us to do. But I started winning, so we kept at it for a couple of years."

Hansen switched to motocross and soon worked his way up to Expert rank. He attracted some sponsors and even found himself with a production YZ from the Yamaha Support program. The real breakthrough came when he signed with Can-Am in 1977. "Up until then, I'd been riding for fun; no training, no real work. Now a lot of people were making a serious effort to back me up; I had good bikes, a mechanic, and we were traveling to races. I started training seriously. Riding the 1978 Florida Winter series was a big shock—the tracks were incredibly rough. But the challenge brought a positive mental change, and that, along with my new training program, made a big difference



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in my riding. When I got home it seemed that all I could do was win."

The next big step in Hansen's ascent was Supercross racing. "In 1979 I rode the Supercross race at the L.A. Coliseum. It was scary. All the top riders were there, crowds of people were watching, and the narrow track was completely different from anything I'd ridden. I knew I couldn't win, but I thought I could do fairly well. Once I was out there dicing, it all came together; I finished seventh overall and first privateer."

That finish, along with Donnie's continuing success at the local level, attracted the attention of Honda's Gunnar Lindstrom. He called Hansen with an offer to ride for the factory team in 1980. Donnie rose to this new challenge by finishing eighth in the Supercross series and eighth in the Trans-USA series; because of ankle injuries, he missed some of the National races. "I guess Honda was pleased with my results; they offered me another contract at the end of the year. I signed on for two years instead of one in case I had more ankle problems."

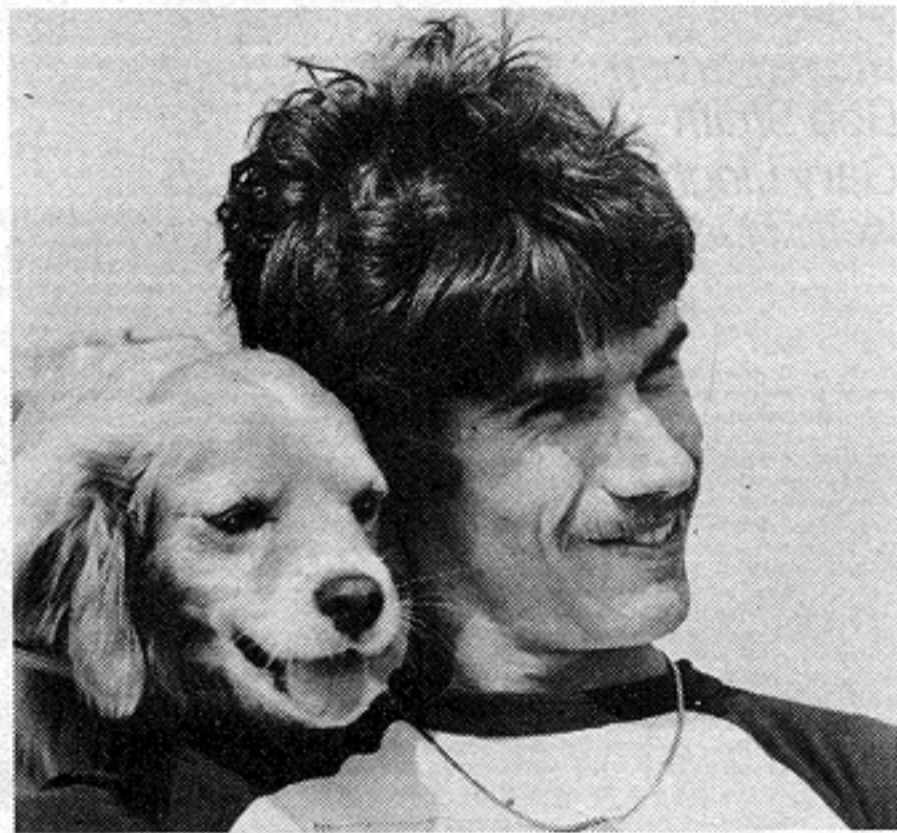
Last year Hansen finished sixth in the Trans-USA series and a remarkable third in both the 250 National and Supercross standings; suddenly, he was

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**Hansen** *Continued from page 74*

knocking on the door of a championship. "I felt I was fortunate to get picked up by Honda, but I also felt it was a natural progression. Each year I was learning, getting better, gaining experience, gaining confidence."

On the subject of natural talent versus training and practice, Hansen says, "I think you have to have a talent for riding. If you lack talent, you can work as hard as you can at it and not get anywhere. . . . I think I have as much talent as any other pro rider out there. If someone beats me, it's because he's stronger than I am in some area. I used to think all the guys that were winning—Bell, Hannah, Barnett, Glover, Howerton—just had more talent, but this year I raced those guys and started winning, so that idea changed. I've been learning, getting faster, and this year it's paid off. I'm in better condition, my attitude is better and the bike is good. Now I'm going as fast as they are, maybe faster. But being able to win—that was the big difference. I definitely have more confidence now, and that's important."



What does Donnie Hansen view as the high point of his 23-year climb toward championship status? He had many to choose from. Getting a full factory ride from Honda was surely one. What about working with Honda's renowned Racing Consultant Roger DeCoster? Beating the riders he used to idolize? Competing in the European Trophee and Motocross des Nations and beating the guys that invented motocross on their home tracks?

Hansen's answer, which came slowly and deliberately, was of a different nature: "The things I remember most are the help and support my family has given me: my dad spending his time and money, the rest of my family and my friends supporting me. They've been behind me 100 percent while I've worked toward this goal of winning a championship; if it wasn't for them I wouldn't be racing at all."

Donnie Hansen, it seems, never had to learn about statistics and odds and disillusionment. And an answer like that makes Hansen a champion, even if he were never to climb on a bike again. ●