

**AFTER SEVEN YEARS WITH YAMAHA,  
IT'S A SWITCH TO HONDA**

# HANNAH LAYS IT ALL ON THE LINE

*"If I stay healthy, I'll murder 'em this year!"*

By the Staff of DIRT BIKE

**A**fter seven truly exciting years, the winningest motocross racer in America has left Team Yamaha for redder pastures. Specifically, for Team Honda.

In the last few years after the Hurricane healed from his horrible leg injury, his wins have been further and further apart. Some say it's him. Others say it's the bike. Some observers note the turmoil of the Ya-

maha racing effort and problems they've had with machines in the last three years and ruefully wonder how anyone could win under such chaotic conditions.

Yet, the new 1983 production Yamahas appear to be capable of winning National and Supercross races against full-blown works bikes. And the coming '83 works bikes are said to be in another world.



*"I've ridden (the Honda) for 20 days now, and I can't find one complaint yet."*

Why, with a full year left on his contract, would Bob Hannah voluntarily give up his \$260,000 contract (plus bonuses) before he even signed with Honda?

We asked Bob these and some other loaded questions during our test session with the new production 1983 Honda CR-250. As always, Hannah was straightforward and pulled no punches whatsoever.

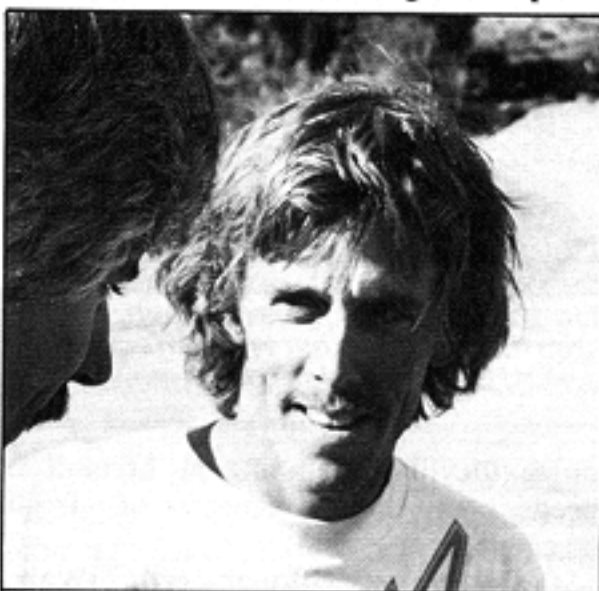
**D.B.:**—You just left Yamaha after how many years with them?

**Bob:**—Today is November 15th; seven years today.

**D.B.:**—Why did you leave Yamaha? We've heard all kinds of rumors.

**Bob:**—I had another year of contract left, but I had been having some problems the last couple of years. Since I broke my leg, I've never really had the best equipment—and neither did anybody else on Yamaha.

There were some management prob-



*"I'm not here for looks. I've been playing games for two years now and haven't won anything."*

lems, too. I went in there and told them a few months ago that this whole last year has been a bummer for me. The 125 was a turkey. I couldn't get any response out of them. I told them I would ride the 125s, but I wanted some backing; I wanted 100-percent backing. I got 50-percent backing. I got a motorcycle, and they told McCarty, "Hey, you and Hannah go take it and win." McCarty was as mad as I was. He said there were only so many things he could do to the thing; it needed some more development. It needed a shift lever, a cylinder, a different radiator location—all sorts of stuff. Everything I'd say they'd just say, "Well, you're crazy, go ride it. You can win on it."

**D.B.:**—We went out with you on a photo session on a YZ250 and you were riding one of your first works 125s. You were constantly missing gears, and your chest was hitting the crossbars going up hills. Then you went back and screamed and yelled at them that you wanted something that shifted at least as good as a stock bike.

**Bob:**—Yeah, right then, I started having problems. I seized six or eight engines, so they had to go to a different oil, which dropped the horsepower. Sure, it didn't seize; but it ran like a stinkin' 80.

# HANNAH

**D.B.:**—Some other riders, notably Glover, had a lot of success. Do you think you would have had a lot better year if you had stayed with the 250?

**Bob:**—I can't say that I would have won, because you never know, but I would have had a lot better chance than I did on the 125, that's for sure.

**D.B.:**—You're on a Honda now. Tell us about your works Honda compared to a works Yamaha.

**Bob:**—Well, to start off, I got on it and in five minutes I didn't have a complaint. I have ridden one 20 days now, and I can't find one complaint yet. We started with a low seat—lower than anybody else is riding with—and I ended up with one that everybody else is using.

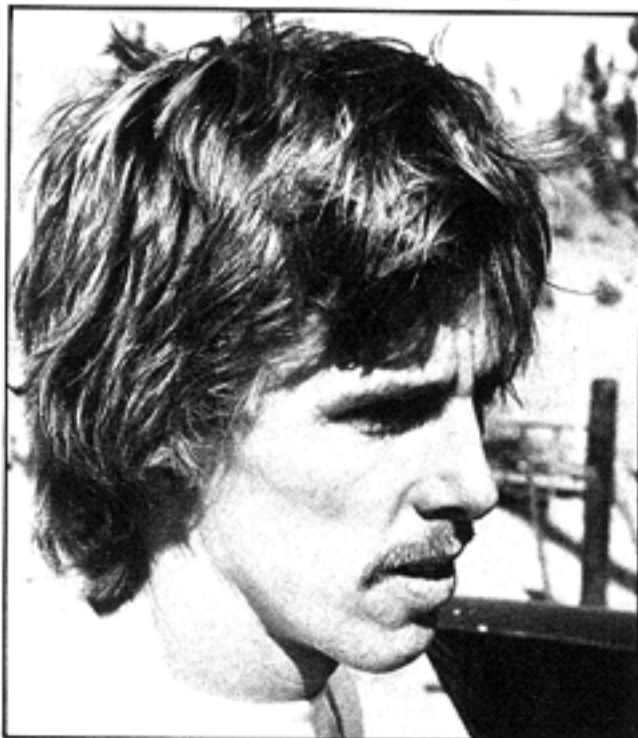
We worked on the suspension a little bit, nothing significant. I've never had a bike like that. I don't have complaint one: on turning, power, suspension, forks, rear, footpegs, shifting, clutch. It's fabulous! I can't gripe at all.

**D.B.:**—So you are practicing on a works bike. Today you just rode a stock '83 250. How would you compare this stocker with your works bike? How far apart are you on horsepower, turning, and so on?

**Bob:**—Oh, the engine is real good. The suspension, just standard. I would say the forks may be a tad soft, the shocks a tad stiff and the handlebars a tad wide. If I can cut down the handlebars, soften the shock a little bit, put a little compression in the front forks, I could ride the tar out of the thing. The handlebar bend is just not perfect for me. I like it a little bit lower and more swept back, and a lot shorter. Other than that, I could ride it.

The powerband is just phenomenal! Just turn it on and if you don't have the power you want, if you're in too high a gear, clutch it and you've got all the power you want; it will just keep pulling. You don't have to shift until you finally get your foot up there and get a chance to shift.

**D.B.:**—We're told you're riding two 50-



"Anyone who doesn't respect DeCoster is a moron."

minute motos per day, every day of the week, and running to training—

**Bob:**—For about 20 days now. Today is the first day I've missed in ten days straight.

**D.B.:**—Do you stand the risk of burning-out?

**Bob:**—I don't know if I'm going to burn-out or not. I don't have any choice. I plan on murdering them. If I'm not hurt and I don't murder them, it's going to be all me.

**D.B.:**—When you ride every day like this, can you ride 85 or 90 percent every day, or can you—

**Bob:**—I'm so pumped about that motorcycle right now, I can't believe it. I haven't had an attitude like I have right now since before I broke my leg. I want to ride!

**D.B.:**—When's your first race going to take place?

**Bob:**—January. Wherever there's a race. Probably the Golden State series.

**D.B.:**—Who is going to be your biggest challenge?

**Bob:**—Shultz and Ricky Johnson, Glover and Barnett, for sure. Those four guys will be there and you can't count any of them out.

**D.B.:**—David Bailey has been coming on real strong—



"I didn't go over to Honda to make any waves or pull a horsepower trip, okay? I was sick and tired of Yamaha."

**Bob:**—Bailey too. There are a few guys I'm not even thinking about who have been riding real good in the 250s that I haven't even been in there with this year. I won't take any of them lightly, believe me.

**D.B.:**—A lot of people were surprised that your mechanic, McCarty, didn't go with you. Any shedding the light on that?

**Bob:**—I didn't go over to Honda to make any waves or pull a horsepower trip, okay? I was sick and tired of Yamaha. Like I said, there are two people at Yamaha that I'm going to miss—McCarty and Bevo. And Bevo isn't there anymore, by the way. The rest of the place has given me nothing but crap for quite a while now. Nobody was working with me. If I would say something, it just went in one ear and out the other.



"I would have ridden for Honda for free this year, if that's what it came down to."

At Honda, I didn't want to cause any flak. If they had said you're getting this guy, that's fine. I quit Yamaha's \$260,000 contract with nothing to go on. Honda said, "We'll try." Kawasaki said, "You have a ride, if you will ride for this." I didn't even talk to Suzuki. I wanted Honda. I would have ridden for Honda for free this year if that's what it came down to.

**D.B.:**—You want to win that badly?

**Bob:**—That's right. I'm not here for looks. I've been playing stinkin' games for two years now and haven't won anything. I'm just about ticked-off about it.

**D.B.:**—We've heard pros and cons, and it seems that the crux of the controversy with the Yamaha racing team is Kenny Clark. It's said that if you can get along with Kenny, life is wonderful there. If you can't get along with Kenny, you can't get anything done. Is that right?

**Bob:**—I don't think you can get anything done, whether you do or don't get along with him. I sure can't. McCarty can't. There isn't anybody—I don't think Glover can. Glover can ride as good as anybody, and look at his motorcycle. Some changes are needed at Yamaha; some serious changes.

**D.B.:**—You have a man at Honda who still rides a motorcycle—Roger DeCoster. And he has a hand in development. He is literally the force behind Honda; do you think that could be the key factor?

**Bob:**—I think the whole attitude, the whole team, is bad at Yamaha. They're not going for it. You've got to go for it! You have to give 110 percent. If the rider does not give 110 and the mechanic doesn't give 110 and the management doesn't give 110, you can just throw your whole team in the trash.

Honda made an enormous commitment to dominate the sport. I think factories have to be behind the riders.

Yamaha is lucky they have the riders they do, or they'd be losing everything. If Yamaha didn't have Glover and Johnson, well, they would just be in the trash can. They do have some good riders, no doubt about that. That's why they're winning. But at Honda, Dave Arnold, my new mechanic, Lunniss, and Roger DeCoster sure have that place hopping! There's no messing around over there. They want to win.

(continued on page 67)

## **BOB HANNAH**

*(continued from page 36)*

They don't care how much it costs, they don't care what they have to do. That's the attitude over there.

**D.B.:**—*What kind of involvement, or contract, do you have with DeCoster?*

**Bob:**—Day to day, if we want. If we have a problem, he'll help us. He was out the other day watching me take a lap test—just to see what I'm doing. He just works with everybody. If there is a problem, he'll fix it.

**D.B.:**—*It must be good to have someone who has credentials and is still a good rider come up and say, "Hey, you're doing this wrong, or this isn't right." At that point, you really have to listen with a certain respect, don't you?*

**Bob:**—Anyone who doesn't respect DeCoster is a moron. I've hit handlebars with him many times in motocross races. I know how he rides. I know how he feels about it, and he is just as determined now. He didn't quit motorcycle racing and drop interest. He is more determined to win now than he was before—and he's not riding.

Most people are in there for the stinking paycheck. At Honda, nobody is in there for their paycheck. Dave Arnold or Roger DeCoster are not there for their checks. They are there for one reason—to win!

**D.B.:**—*Talking about winning, this year the American's had a phenomenal year. LaPorte, Lackey, and in Europe we had the Trophee and MX des Nations. We've never seen DeCoster look as satisfied. The Americans were the center of interest. The entire crowd followed the Americans and ignored every other country, much to the consternation of Belgium and so forth. Would you like to be on that team this year?*

**Bob:**—Oh, yeah. I hope I'm riding good and get to go, too.

**D.B.:**—*We took four good guys over. Incredible guys who had a lot of nerve and did the best they could. And we won. The European press asked us if this was our best team. We informed them that we have guys at home, like Hannah, Barnett, and Glover, and we could go one, two, three, four. Do you think that is a possibility?*

**Bob:**—Sure, I think so. Barring motorcycle breakdowns, I don't think it would be a problem.

**D.B.:**—*What are your plans? Let's say you have a good year. Will you want to continue racing, or will you just want to call it a swan song in 1983?*

**Bob:**—No, I want to sign about a three-year contract with Honda and continue riding with them; and when I'm done with Honda, I'm done!

**D.B.:**—*In other words, you want to ride until you are about 30 and then quit?*

**Bob:**—Thirty. Yup.

**D.B.:**—*You could then ride in the Vet's class and find out where the real competition is, right? Well, we wish you a tremendous amount of luck. Any predictions?*

**Bob:**—If I'm not hurt, they're going to take a beating. That's the prediction. □