

Three Big Wins For Mighty Mark

BARNETT TELLS HOW IT FEELS TO WHIP THE WORLD'S BEST

World 125 USGP puts the icing on the cake

By Brian and Nanette George

DB: You have an amazing winning streak going now. Tell us about it.

Mark: It started at Carlsbad. I didn't race for about four weeks before that and I stayed here and trained.

DB: You didn't race for four weeks?

Mark: Yeah. Probably longer than that.

DB: How can you go from a no-race condition right up to a winning level of competition?

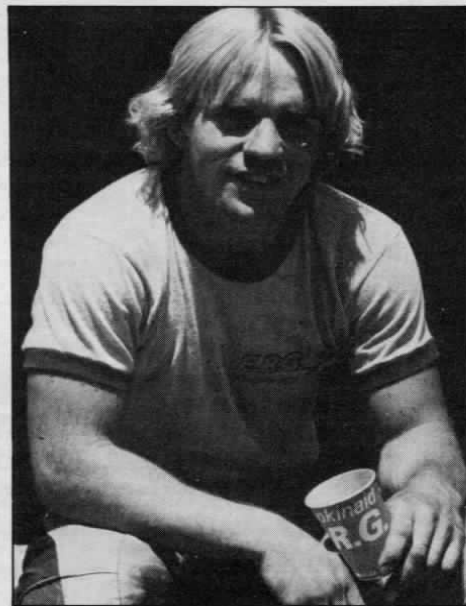
Mark: Down here in Alabama, you're on your own and you don't really think about anything else but racing. I just ride every day. I don't go out and practice every day, I go out and trail ride to stay in shape. And then when the race does come, I'm really looking forward to it.

DB: For the readers who aren't familiar, tell them how it went at the World 125 U.S. Grand Prix in Ohio.

Mark: I had a really good start, until I got pushed off into a fence. I had to stop, so about 30 guys got around me. I think Glover got the holeshot and I was 13th by the end of the first lap. I just kept on going wide-open until I could see Ward in second place.

DB: Who did you pass, that you can recall, on the way up?

Mark: I couldn't really tell, 'cause I was never looking back, just forward to see who was ahead of me. I passed a lot of guys with no trouble until I was about sixth, then I passed Myerscough pretty easily. I came up to Cantaloupi



and had problems with him, and the next four guys, because I had to pull my goggles off, and I didn't want to get my eyes knocked out. From there it was hard, because I had to take a different line and ride with my head down. It was difficult to concentrate on where I was going.

DB: Where did you do most of your passing?

Mark: In the corners, going in deeper. Then I caught up to Gaston Rahier and I got him.

DB: Passing the World Champion! That's got to be a good feeling. How did you nail him?

Mark: It was on a long straight where there were two different lines, an outside and an inside. He went to the outside and I went to the inside and drifted out, then shut the door on him so he couldn't pass me back down the straight. After I passed him he faded back and I had no problems with him. The next guy I came to was Watanabe and I passed him in the same place as Gaston. He wasn't as tough as I thought he would be. He didn't impress me that much. The one who really impressed me was Everts. He was going pretty good.

Broc won that first moto and Hannah took second. On the last lap I was a bike length behind Hannah. He passed me early in the race when I took my goggles off.

DB: What's it like to try and pass Bob Hannah?

Mark: It's hard. He holds the same line in every corner, and it's usually the fastest line there is. It's hard to find another line that will get you by. He doesn't really ride crazy; he's just got a wild style all his own.

DB: So there you were between motos with third. Did you feel at that point that you had a chance?

Mark: Yeah, I felt I had a chance, but the first moto wasn't a very good one,



'cause I took third and Glover had a 30-second lead. I didn't concentrate on winning, just on doing well. When the second moto came, somebody jumped the start, and I didn't know if they'd start it over, so I went anyway, and I was second at the end of the lap. They red-flagged it! So next they put us back on the line, and we had to sit another 25 minutes because there was no ambulance. No riders got hurt at the track that day, just all the spectators got hurt and they were hauling them away.

On the restart, I got third behind Everts and Rahier. I passed Gaston again easily, and Everts was ahead of me, slowing me down everywhere. I got him in the same place as Gaston, a lap later.

DB: It sounds like you had *one real hot spot* on that course?

Mark: There were two. The first moto I had that straight, and the second moto

I found another one. I just followed for one or two laps to figure out where they were going and where I could pass.

As soon as I got around those two, Broc was on my tail, and I didn't know if he was going to pass me, or not. I knew I had to beat him by over 30 seconds, and I just kept concentrating on going faster and faster!

DB: At what point did Hannah try to slip in between you and Broc?

Mark: Halfway through the race, they showed me a sign that said "Hannah 50-60 seconds." I wasn't really worried about Hannah, but I knew if he beat me, I wouldn't win, so I held it wide-open and didn't look back, trying to go faster into every corner. At three-quarters through the race, he wasn't that close to me anymore. He and Broc faded way back, while I kept going stronger.

DB: What was the margin at the end?

Mark: I had about a 51-second lead. The bigger the lead, the better I liked it!

DB: At what point did you know you'd won?

Mark: The boards just said pour it on, keep going, and I didn't know until the last couple of laps when the board said, "You got it."

DB: At Mid-Ohio you saw the Europeans for the first time. Were you a little intimidated by all that talent?

Mark: No, I saw the previous year at the USGP that the Americans could beat 'em, so that kind of showed me that they weren't that tough. I didn't know for sure, though, because I hadn't raced against them. On Saturday, I had a good idea how fast they could go, and they couldn't go much faster than we could.

DB: The 125 USGP win has to be considered one of the biggest things that has ever happened to you. Did you rank that higher than the Superbowl win the week before?

Mark: No, I thought the Superbowl was a more exciting moment than the GP was, because there were 80,000 people there! I was happy at the USGP, but not as happy as at the Superbowl. I was up for the Superbowl because I had just won the 250 Support class at the 500 USGP at Carlsbad right before the Superbowl.

DB: Some of the riders pre-rode. Did you practice that killer jump on Tuesday? The one where Super Hunky got splattered?

Mark: Yes. The first time around, I didn't jump it. You had to get going pretty fast, just hold it wide-open. If you shut off, or hesitated, you'd ram the other side, which is what you did.

Super Hunky: Yeah. I know. In previous years it was a narrower thing and I didn't even think about it and I came down the hill in fourth gear on my 250, at three-fourths throttle. Maybe it would have taken fifth gear full-on like you said, right?

Mark: Oh yes. It's a wide-open jump! I got the holeshot during the race and the jump was about three feet lower than it was on the other side, and then right away there was another jump. So I landed and I had to jump again instantly and I wasn't ready for that.

DB: How do you handle something like that? You're flat-out off one jump, you land, less than a second passes, and you have to leap off a four-foot drop-off without setting up?

Mark: You just have to set up for it right away and hope you make it.

DB: Do you just hit it and skip, is that it? Like a stone across the water?

Mark: No. I just land right away and cram the brakes on really hard.

DB: While you're landing you start

cramming the brakes on? That's got to be a hard thing to do.

Mark: I had the brakes on before I landed.

DB: You had the brakes on in the air?

Mark: Well, as soon as I touched down, like an airplane, I had the brakes locked up. It was kind of weird. It looked a lot lower than it was, and then I hit it and I just went flying off.

DB: Did you win your qualifier?

Mark: Yes, I won it by about ten seconds.

DB: Nobody gave you any trouble at all?

Mark: Hannah was on my tail for a couple of laps and Tripes was behind me for a while, and I held the same pace all the way and won it by about ten seconds.

DB: Then came the big main event.

Mark: I got second off the line in the main. Ward got the holeshot and I was following him for a while, but he started slowing. I was right behind him and then Mosier came up and he got around me. After that, I followed him for about a lap and then he got around Ward and started pulling away.

DB: Were you worried when Mosier got by you? You know, Mosier's a very hard guy to pass, very crafty.

Mark: Yeah, I was kind of worried. I wasn't really expecting him to pass me. I passed Ward about a lap later and then Mosier pulled away. I was about five seconds behind him. Then Bell got on my tail. About the last three laps I went on the inside of that Toyota Tornado and just slipped by on the inside of Mosier. Right there, I knew I had it in the bag. Then Bell got around him and was pressuring me. But I held my lines and won. It felt fantastic. I was pumped.

DB: Did you ever think you'd come this far when you first started racing?

Mark: That goes back a long way.

DB: How long have you been racing on the National level?

Mark: Three years, since 1977.

DB: What about before that?

Mark: Just amateur in the Midwest area.

DB: What did you win in the amateur ranks?

Mark: The biggest I won there was the Amateur National Championship. That was in 1975 in Baldwin, Kansas. I also won on minicycles at Mid-Ohio on an XR75. The Am Champ was on a 125.

DB: Where are you from originally?

Mark: Originally, from Illinois, but I'm living in Alabama now.

DB: Tell us about the early riding days.

Mark: I first started riding a mini-enduro Yamaha and I went through about four of those, then rode a Honda XR75 for about a year or so. Then one day, I broke my frame in half, so I got a 125 from the shop that I was sponsored

by. I rode that, but all I could do was touch the footpegs and the seat. I couldn't stand up through the bumps or anything. I went pretty good on that, and rode it for the next few years, riding in the Amateur Champs. By then, I was riding both classes, 250 and 125. In '77, I went professional.

DB: Do you remember your first race? How did you do?

Mark: I think I got last place. I was riding the 100cc class with a 60cc mini-enduro, because they didn't have a mini-bike class then.

DB: Were you a natural rider at first?

Mark: It's always been pretty natural. When I first started, it was on a 3½-horse mini-bike and I had a track around the house. I finally got a mini-enduro, and as soon as I went on that, it took me maybe a week or so and I was riding really fast. The first lap I went around, I fell right away, but then I learned to use the clutch and brake and it always seemed pretty natural to me. When I was little, I got my first trophy at flat-track, but it never thrilled me much, because there wasn't that much in it. The same place had an MX the next weekend. They alternated each week and I felt really good riding motocross. So I stayed with MX.

I was 15 when I rode money races in the Michigan and Indiana areas. We rode the East guys against the West guys, and we traveled to different tracks and got money for that.

DB: What was the big difference for you between sportsman riding and money riding?

Mark: The money would draw a lot faster guys, and that was my advantage. Traveling back and forth, I'd never race the same track or race against the same people all the time.

DB: How did you and Suzuki join?

Mark: After 1977, I was riding for Moto-X Fox, and I won the Trans-Am Support class at Unadilla. After that, I talked to Mark Blackwell about a ride for the following year. After Sears Point I went there and they showed me a contract. We read it over to see how it was and it was pretty good. Since it was the only offer I had, I took it.

DB: Do you have any interests besides riding?

Mark: Not really. Around here I ride, and I've got a lot of stuff that needs to be done, like cutting the grass. I bought one of those old Willys Jeeps, and I usually go riding with that, and I got me some pigs, so I take care of those.

DB: You seem to ride an awful lot. John DeSoto said that if he ever rode more than three times a week, he got so stale he did not want to win on Sunday.

Mark: I don't know. If I ride all day, and all week, I feel really confident on

the weekend.

DB: What do you do in a normal training day?

Mark: I usually get up at 7:30, eat breakfast, then go out to the shed and see what has to be done to my bikes before I ride. Then I'll usually work on 'em for a while.

DB: You mean you practice on stockers?

Mark: Yeah, production bikes. I usually fix them up, or whatever needs to be done. Then I'll go riding in the morning, do a couple of 45-minute motos on a track I have set up in this field.

DB: Do you pace yourself; go maybe 90 percent?

Mark: Yes, about that. It all depends on how I feel. If I don't feel like riding a lot, then I'll just do a little practice and toward the end of the week I'll go out and ride hard.

DB: What do you ride in practice?

Mark: A 125, 250 or 400.

DB: Which do you prefer to practice on?

Mark: It really depends on the upcoming race. If I have a 125 event coming up, then I'll ride the 125, but if it's like a Trans-Am, I'll ride the 250 or 400.

DB: Do you have any trouble switching from a 250 to a 400?

Mark: Yes, usually from the 125 to the 250.

DB: Do you run, or work with weights, or anything else?

Mark: Usually, if I ride all day long, that's all I need to do. I like to run, but there are a lot of bugs around here, so you can't run. These yellow flies will bite me when I'm running, then I'll swell up, and I can't hardly ride.

DB: What about injuries?

Mark: I was hurt last year, my shoulder, and Leon Wolek, owner and producer of ERG, took me to emergency. They patched me up, but didn't really tell me anything about it. We got home the next night and I went to see the doctor for the Chicago Black Hawks. He gave me a couple of alternatives: put a sling on and let it heal like it is, or have two steel pins put in my shoulder, which would take a lot longer to heal, but would be the right way. That was kind of a hard decision to make, so I went home and talked to my dad about it, and talked to Mark Blackwell, and we decided to get the pins. So I got them in, and it was like the last five weeks of the Nationals, and we weren't sure if I should ride the Trans-Am or not.

DB: What do you think about guys riding with injuries, like Howerton's bad knees?

Mark: I think a lot of guys are screwing themselves up for life. They ought to

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be totally healed before they get on that track.

DB: What do you normally weigh in at a race?

Mark: Right now, about 160. And I'm around 5'7".

DB: Isn't that a little heavy for a 125?

Mark: Yeah, a little.

DB: How do you set your motorcycle up?

Mark: I usually have the front end kind of soft, and I like to have the rear end not really stiff, but medium, so it will bottom.

DB: How would you set up a bike for a National compared to the Supercross?

Mark: For the Supercross I would probably have a different bike anyway, with a lower frame, about 10 or 11 inches of travel or so. In stadiums, you need to turn. Real long travel bikes just don't turn well. For a regular fast outdoor track, I'd probably run about 12 inches of travel, front and rear.

DB: Are you hard on your equipment?

Mark: No, I think I'm fairly easy on machines. I'm pretty hard on my practice bikes, but my race bikes only go once a week, so I am pretty easy on them.

DB: How long does one of your stock RMs hold up for you?

Mark: The 250 will last two to three weeks, then everything's gone; the shocks are worn and the sprockets are gone.

DB: But you're riding five times a week on them. That's probably a whole season's usage wrapped up in three weeks for you. What about a stock RM125N?

Mark: Actually, the 125 seems to hold up better than the 250. The 250s start vibrating really bad after they get thrashed.

DB: Could you take a standard RM125 or 250 and do well?

Mark: I could place at least in the top five, or probably better. No sweat. Maybe better.

DB: What would you change on a stock RM if you were going to race one?

Mark: I don't think I'd get anything done to the motor. I'd probably do something with the rear shocks, get a pair of Fox air shocks, and I'd get some Metzeler tires. Probably just shocks, tires, new air cleaners, and grips. I'd leave the forks stock and get a Preston Petty front fender. That's all I had on my bike in '77.

DB: That's all you had in '77, and you finished second to Bob Hannah. So a lot of people are spending money in the wrong place, huh?

Mark: Sure. Guys are going out and buying 520 chain kits, and I haven't broken a chain yet. They really just don't line it up, or adjust it right, and find the stress point. And it takes a lot of power to pull that 520 kit, too.

DB: We're going to throw some names at you, guys you run up against on a regular basis. We want you to rate them, or give us your impression of them, no holds barred. Marty Tripes.

Mark: He's a really nice guy, but I don't think he's into it all the time. I know he could win all the time if he wanted to. He just has a lot of natural talent. But, something's wrong with his mind; he doesn't want to give it everything.

DB: How about an exact opposite, Danny Chandler, "Magoo."

Mark: Aggressive. If he'd slow down and think a little bit he'd be a lot better.

DB: Jeff Ward.

Mark: He's fast and he'll be up there in a couple of years, but he's a little small. I don't think he'll ever last 45 minutes. He doesn't seem like he can hang on that long. I don't worry about him in a long race. He's a 20-minute rider.

DB: Hannah.

Mark: He's fast. He's got a different style. When I first saw him he was squirrely, but he's a lot better than he used to be. It used to look like he was just hanging on and riding over his head, when he wasn't.

DB: Last year, Bob won everything. Now he's getting beaten. Is he slowing down, or are other riders just getting faster?

Mark: I think right now he doesn't have the drive that he had at the beginning of the year, because he's won everything. At the beginning of the year, you're always going for it, because you know you have to get all of your points *right now*. He won everything early, so he's kind of tapered off a little bit. It's been a long year, and maybe he's getting a little tired.

DB: Kent Howerton.

Mark: He's hot and cold. I think he could go faster all the time if he didn't have on and off days. Last year, Kent was pretty conservative, but now he's faster, a little wilder. And the last few races he's been going real strong.

DB: OK, Mosier.

Mark: I don't know. Gaylon's not really a 125 rider. He does a lot better on the bigger bikes, and he's been around for a long time. It seems he's a better Open class rider than a 125 rider. I don't know why he was picked to ride 125s.

DB: Weinert.

Mark: I think now he's just riding on experience. He's not taking chances, but if he gets a good start, he'll try hard. If not, he's no problem.

DB: Is he a difficult man to get around?

Mark: No, not really. I had to get around him in Pontiac, and he was no sweat.

DB: Just two more. Mike Bell.

Mark: Bell is really fast, especially in the Supercross because of his long legs. He's got about 14 more inches of travel than I have! I've got about three inches over the seat, and he's got over 14. He and Hannah are the hardest competition in the Supercross.

DB: OK. We're saving the best for last: Broc Glover.

Mark: He's fast, but the first half of the year, I had some bad breaks. But if I get out there and get the holeshot, I'll usually beat him. Right now, he gets the holeshot all the time, and he'll get way out there while I'm stuck fighting the traffic, and by the time I get out of traffic, he'll be too far ahead to catch. But, the same thing applies to me.

DB: Let's say someone sent Mark Barnett to Europe to compete in the 125 World chase in 1980. How would you fare?

Mark: I think I'd have a pretty good chance of winning.

DB: Who would be your main competition?

Mark: Everts.

DB: You seem to respect Everts more than the others. Why?

Mark: I've talked to him, and he's beaten everybody over there, so he'd be the one to beat. Watanabe might do better over there, but I don't know.

DB: Compare your Mid-Ohio bike to a stock RM?

Mark: The works bike seems lighter to start with, 10 pounds less, and it seems more rigid. There's no flex in it at all and it feels stronger than the production bike. As for power, the low end is about the same, but the top end will rev higher and pull longer.

DB: What about suspension?

Mark: It works well. I have factory KYB shocks, and they don't fade out at all. In fact, they work better toward the end of the race.

DB: Anybody you'd like to mention here; anyone who's helped you along the way?

Mark: I wouldn't be anywhere right now without my dad, that's for sure. Everything I've done, he's been right there. He never pushed me, but always helped. After a race he wouldn't need to say anything. All I had to do was look in his face.

DB: What are your future plans?

Mark: I want to keep riding, win a class championship, maybe. I don't know whether I'll ride 125s or 250s next year. I haven't decided yet. I'd like the 250s. That way, you don't have to switch around all year, just ride one bike in the Nationals, Supercross and Trans-Am. 1980 could be my year.

DB: So far, 1979 hasn't been too shaky. □