

# Supercross Racing From Behind The Handlebars

# THE RIDERS' VIEWS

## How Do They Feel About This New Sport? By Brad Zimmerman

**N**o report on stadium racing would really be complete without the addition of the riders' comments and feelings on racing supercross. Their positions, their outlooks, and attitudes going into a supercross race are totally different from those concerning regular motocross racing.

To understand their feelings, you've got to put yourself in their position. Most of the riders started before stadium racing was ever invented. They got involved to race motocross, with no idea or intention of getting inside a coliseum and competing on an artificial track.

Most of them, especially the factory contracted riders, are required to ride in the stadium events to fulfill their contract obligations. Their feelings about competing on these tracks are all pretty similar—most of them don't like the idea, but on the other hand, they do enjoy the money.

Bob Hannah, the current super-

cross points leader says that "I'm really not that greedy for money yet. I'd rather race outdoors on the varied conditions found on a motocross track. In the stadiums, I feel we're too packed in like sardines. The start is super important because the race is so short and if you make one mistake you're out of the running. It's easier for me to win an outdoor race. I can get a bad start, and in a 40-minute moto, work my way towards the front of the pack."

We then asked Bob what he felt could be done to make indoor racing better. He got a funny gleam in his eye, a big smile and said, "You know what would be really great? Have everybody ride mini-bikes! I'd be so pumped then, it would be great! The track would seem huge. You could get 10 guys going into a corner together instead of two."

"The courses are pretty good for what they have to work with. I can see that they're limited in space and

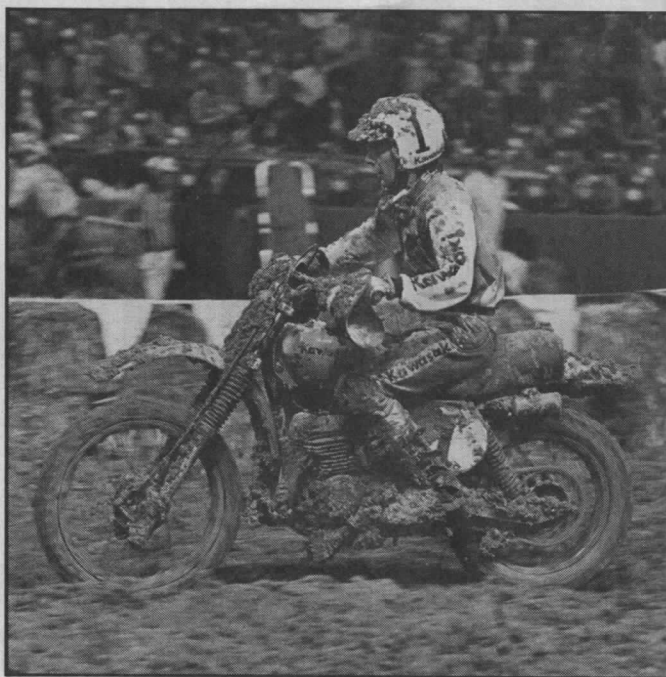
they do a good job with what they have. The supercross races are good because they bring in people that wouldn't normally go to a motocross race. Maybe after seeing a stadium race, those people will go to a motocross track and watch. Then possibly we'll get better purses and more respect."

Jim Pomeroy, holding the second position in the series standings at the moment, feels that many people make the mistake of labeling supercross as motocross racing. "It's not motocross, it's supercross. It originated from motocross, but it's a totally different thing. For instance, if you take short track, half mile and TT racing, they're all very similar, but at the same time, they're extremely different in their methods, machinery and the combinations needed to win."

"I think that pretty soon you're going to see a different type of racer winning supercross, just like you have different racers who are better



*Relaxing between motos in Dallas, Hannah explains, "The start is super important because the race is so short and if you make one mistake you're out of the running."*



*"Spectators are beginning to understand that we're athletes, that we have to train very hard and we don't just sit down on a motorcycle and go around and around," from the Jammer, Jimmy Weinert.*

at TT than short track. It requires a different riding style, and I feel there isn't as much of a physical demand on the rider in order to win."

Jim Ellis, currently in third position with 102 points, has mixed emotions about stadium racing.

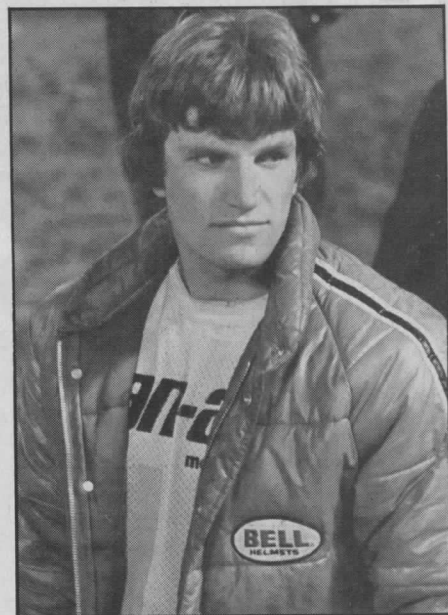
"Stadium racing is good for the spectators," Ellis explains, "and it's good for us from a purse standpoint and the amount of riding. But the stadium courses, I feel, are more dangerous because you're always riding on the ragged edge, you can't make any mistakes, and in some cases, you're actually going faster in a stadium than you are outdoors.

"Often you'll find that you can't go 100 percent on a section of the course, because the design of the track won't allow that. Other times you're going faster than outdoors.

"As far as physical exertion I think that you work a little harder in a supercross event than a motocross event because of the course. On a natural terrain course, there are some areas where you can rest a bit. In a stadium you're constantly working, gassing it, or hitting the brakes. There are no resting spots.

"Sometimes a stadium supercross race makes us professional riders look foolish. For instance, it takes a professional rider about five laps in some cases to pass a guy on an indoor track. We could most likely lap that guy in less than five laps on a natural course. Because of the space limitations, most of the courses are too narrow to pass or get a good drive going.

*Jim Ellis has mixed emotions about stadium racing. "It's good for us from a purse standpoint and the amount of riding. Stadium courses are more dangerous because you are riding on the ragged edge."*



PHOTOGRAPHY: BRAD ZIMMERMAN

"For actual coverage by TV, for promoting and for purses, I feel that the indoor races will do more to promote the sport than outdoor motocross ever could. It's easier to follow, you've only got one winner, where outdoors many first-time spectators can't understand why a guy can get two third places and win the overall."

Gaylon Mosier feels that supercross is eventually going to be the main attraction in racing. The promoters make better money, the coverage is good, and the spectator turnout is bigger. He agrees with the other riders that the courses are tight, but doesn't feel that the tracks are more dangerous.

"They're really not unsafe," says Gaylon, "because it's all up to the rider. If he wants to crash, he's going to bail off. Whether you fall down indoors or outdoors doesn't really matter. You can make the same mistakes anywhere. Inside a stadium the atmosphere is different than at a national race outdoors. I'm going at it 100 percent, but I'm sure not going to berserk it and fall down. I ride as fast as I feel comfortable."

Tied for fourth position with Mosier is Tony DiStefano who is really enthusiastic about stadium racing. "I really like it," says Tony D. "I feel that it's in its proper place. It's not motocross, and not meant to be. It's a different format, pulls a lot of spectators who would normally never come out, and there's a lot of money for the riders.

"I don't feel that the tracks are more dangerous. I'd rather say that

they're different, and it's not fair to compare motocross to supercross and complain. Before I wasn't happy with the tracks because I was always comparing it to motocross. Supercross has entirely different demands on both the rider and the machine.

"I'm going 100 percent in the supercross races, because I feel that this series is an important one, and it would be good for me to win it. It's just as important as the rest.

"You don't get as physically fatigued as during an outdoor race, but you're so tensed up. I get tense in my arms, and get cramps. It's more of a mental strain and your concentration has to be much better in order to win.

"I think that eventually we'll end up with 12 events around the country in the Supercross series. It would be good to have a strong Supercross series, which we've already got now, and a strong national series. Then there would be an indoor champion and an outdoor champion. The way it is now, there are too many champions and it's too confusing for the public. With supercross, one guy comes across the finish line first and he wins the race. Outdoors, it's more confusing. I think that motocross will eventually go to the same format as supercross racing so the people can better understand it."

Kent Howerton judges his speed and how many risks he'll take by the design of the course. "At Anaheim," he explains, "I felt really comfortable. The double jumps were good, the rough spots were safe, and you



*Kent Howerton (#4 on the left) plans his racing solely from the safety factor. "I'll only go as fast as I feel comfortable. If a guy is trying to pass me, I'm not going to go faster than I feel safe in order to hold him off."*



# RIDERS' VIEWS

could go fast without worrying too much about getting hurt. In a track like Houston, I'll only go as fast as I feel comfortable. If a guy is trying to pass me, I'm not going to go faster than I feel safe in order to hold him off. In a course like Daytona I felt very comfortable. The course was wide, there was more than one line, unlike Houston, and you could pass. I went from 24th to 4th in Daytona. I could never expect to do something like that in Houston because I wouldn't feel safe going that fast on such a tight course with such sharp jumps. In Houston the only way you could pass was if a guy got out of the rut. For instance, I was stuck behind Roger Brow. The only way I got past him was when he made a mistake and got out of that rut.

"I think that all the courses can be made to be good. The tracks at Anaheim and Atlanta are done by Lynne Saunders, and they're good tracks. It can be done, provided you get the right people."

Steve Stackable also has some comments on how to make the stadium races better.

"I feel that they should limit the amount of riders a little more," explains Short Stack. "Maybe only have 20 guys out there instead of 26. And then pay appearance money for the guys who are currently in the top ten, because many of the spectators are there to see those guys. Without the riders, there isn't a good show."

"I don't think that the tracks are more dangerous indoors, but they're tighter. Nobody really got hurt this year, but a lot of guys got bumped off in the corners because of the small course. Outdoors, you've got trees and other obstacles in the way that you don't find indoors. By the same token, we're going a little faster outdoors, and we've got a little more room to avoid trees and big rocks. I think that both race tracks are equal as far as danger."

"I don't take more chances on an indoor track, but I don't take fewer either. I'm trying 100 percent on both types of tracks to do my best. Every time I race I try to win, and that means I've got to put my full effort into what I'm doing."

"I'd really like to see supercross go back to a two-class race. The way it's set up now, there's an abun-

dance of good riders in one class, and the competition is extremely intense. But maybe that's what is needed for supercross. It's definitely doing a lot for the sport and I think that it will eventually do a lot for motocross racing."

Danny LaPorte probably said it best when he explained that "Supercross is doing an enormous amount of good. It's introducing people to racing, and bringing them out to the motocross races. Supercross can't do anything but good for motocross racing. I think that's why many of the guys are riding supercross, even though they complain. They know that it's helping, they know the purses are good, the racing is fun, exciting, and short enough to keep the fans' enthusiasm".

Jimmy Weinert, last year's Supercross Champion, likes the reaction from the crowd after an event. "It's doing a lot of good for the image of the motocross racer," says the Jammer. "Spectators are beginning to understand that we're athletes, that we have to train very hard and we don't just sit down on a motorcycle and go around and around. The respect for the racers has improved, the purses have gotten better and

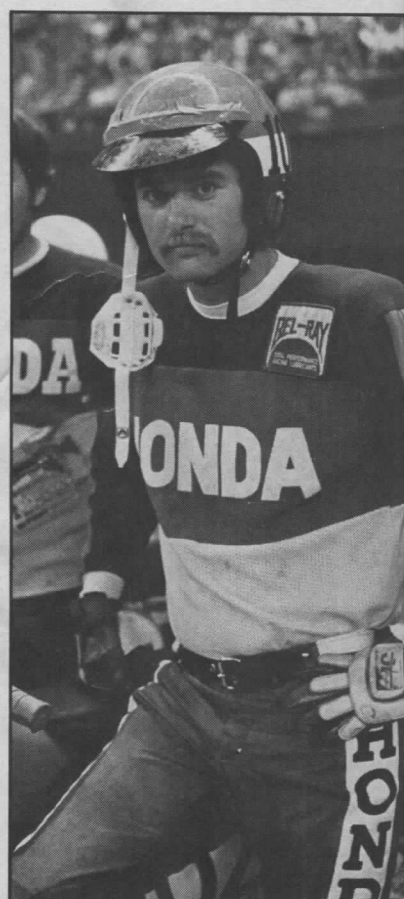
we're now getting more attention. More people come to Nationals now because they get acclimated and introduced to racing through the stadium events. I've seen the attendance picking up at motocross races as a result of the stadium events."

After we were done interviewing the riders, we discovered that they are split down the middle on certain topics. The competitors who have accepted supercross as a type of racing in itself are enjoying the track, understand the problems of space limitations and its effect on track layout, and are riding accordingly. It appears that most of the complaints come from riders who feel that supercross racing is a type of motocross.

But they all agree on one thing: Supercross is doing a lot of good for both itself and motocross racing. It's enlarging the purses, attendance, and most importantly, broadening the general public's view of motorcycle racing, giving riders the respect and admiration that they deserve. It appears as though supercross is an excellent vehicle for bringing both itself and motocross into the status that has deserved in the past, but has been shunned for one reason or another.



Talking about race strategy, Mosier (on left with Terry Clark) feels that "I'm going at it 100 percent, but I'm sure not going to berserk it and fall down."



Jim Pomeroy explains that most people don't understand that stadium racing is different. "It's supercross, originated from motocross, but it's totally different thing."