

Tai Chi

BY RUSS DARNELL

First you get your body ready,
then you get your mind ready.

Then you introduce them
to each other.

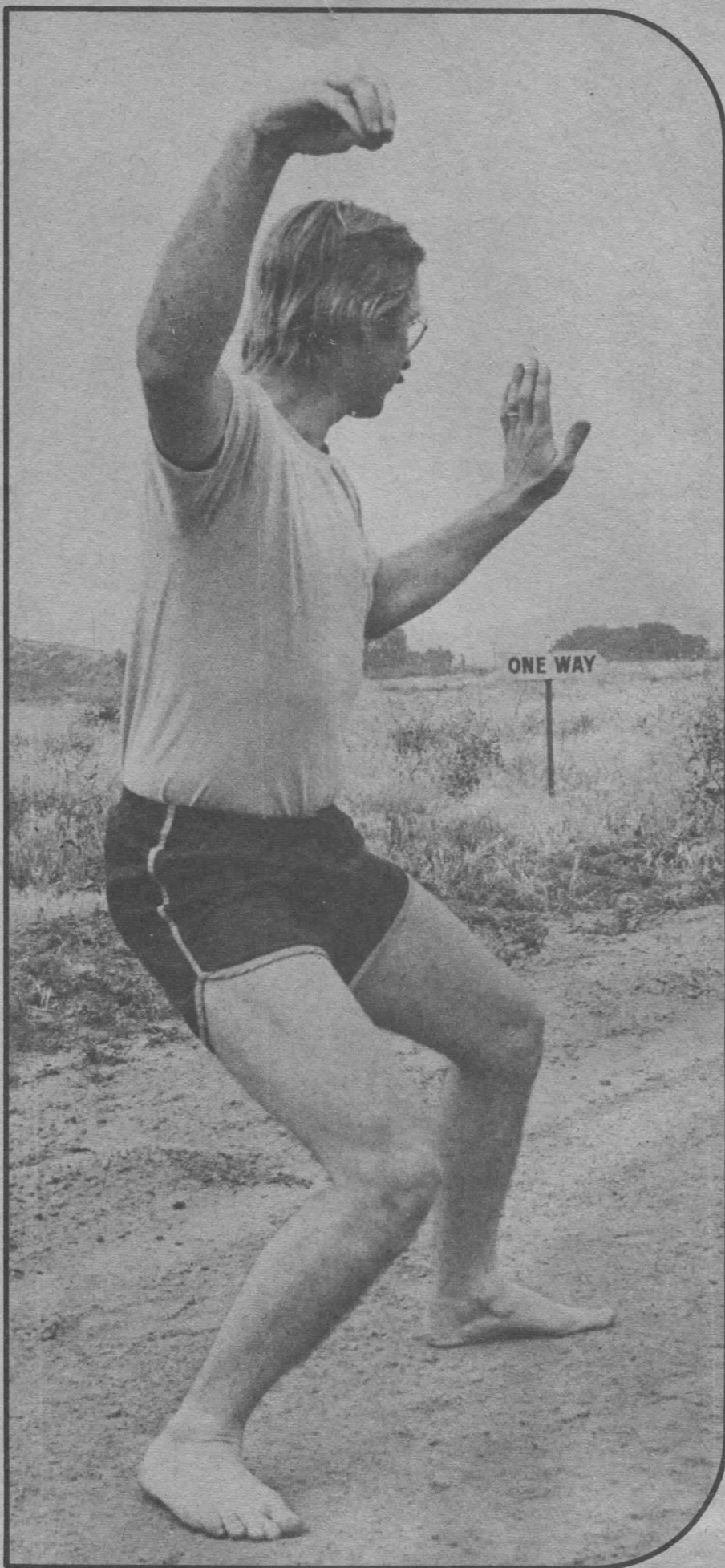
What is it that separates a good rider from a great one? The answer is the same in motocross as it is for basketball, ballet, or gymnastic events: Mental preparation, and state of mind. Confidence. The feeling that you *will* win!

It takes several years to master a motorcycle, and when you learn all the necessary racing techniques, control comes by instinct. The same set of techniques is there for everyone to study and learn, so to gain advantage, you train your body to increase strength and endurance. At the top, all the best riders train physically, and ongoing technical developments insure that everyone has equal equipment. At this point, racing comes down to the difference in mind tuning. On this level, motocross racing is 75% mental. To win, the synapses of the brain must be firing in time, and working in perfect harmony with your body.

Many riders aspiring to greatness train their bodies rigorously, yet neglect their mental conditioning. Development of the mind/body relationship can be accomplished in many ways. *Dirt Rider* mentioned Transcendental Meditation in the May 1975 issue. Yoga, Kung Fu, Karate, in fact, all the martial arts stress the harmony of mind and body. In that group Yoga, of course, is not a martial art. Another type of meditation is Tai Chi.

Tai Chi is a form of moving meditation developed in ancient China by Taoists monks. At first it was used as a self-defense method for the weaponless monks, then it evolved into two different concepts. Done at fast speed Tai Chi is still a deadly form of self-defense closely related to Kung Fu. Performed slowly, it becomes a stylized meditation-exercise.

The meditation form of Tai Chi is characterized by smooth, rounded, flowing, and gentle motions of the body and hands in a set routine. The routine can't be learned from a book. You must have an instructor. I studied under Li Chien, a petite, pretty,



and extraordinarily graceful Chinese lady who teaches Tai Chi, nights at Pierce College near Los Angeles. Many colleges and high schools now carry Tai Chi courses at night. The cost in a group is between ten and twenty dollars.

To learn Tai Chi takes patience and a lot of memory because the exercise has 81 postures to assume. To perform, the whole program takes about fifteen minutes. During that time you are continually moving from one balanced posture to the next. There is no perceptible hesitation between postures. When you have completed the exercise, you aren't tired because very little actual labor was done, but you are exhilarated and refreshed.

To get a good mental picture of Tai Chi, imagine standing in neck-deep water and moving around. If you move quickly your motions will be jerky and uncoordinated. On the

other hand, if you move slowly and smoothly the water won't resist you. The slow, languorous motions are exactly like those in Tai Chi.

At first, you may be self-conscious doing Tai Chi. You will most likely be awkward and forget parts of the routine, but once you memorize the whole thing you will be amazed at how it heightens your awareness of the mind/body relationship. It makes you feel as though all your nerve endings are standing out on the surface of your skin just waiting for stimulation. You are so completely tuned, you may want to do something radical, like run out to the garage and mount that 4:50 Trelleborg that's been sitting by your bench for a month.

More than anything else, Tai Chi makes you *feel*. You feel the blood coursing through your body, the steady four-stroke thump of your pulse, you even feel the hair on your

head. You are alive and vibrant. It's one of the few legal highs.

Tai Chi is best performed outdoors in the woods, at the beach, in the desert, but it can also be done anywhere you have a space twenty feet by twenty.

What does Tai Chi actually do for motorcycle racers? Since all the movements are natural, the routine exercises the complete musculature of the body. It makes you more aware of the mind/body relationship, and helps you to be more graceful in everything you do including racing a motorcycle. Balance, poise and body control are enhanced by the practice of Tai Chi. It promotes good circulation which helps to fuel your muscles in racing situations. It elevates your mind to a peaceful state of readiness. Most importantly, Tai Chi focuses your concentration, the lack of which is the downfall of most good riders, seeking to be great. ●

