

● This year's Baja 1000 once again proved that mechanical failure is the determining factor in who beats whom on the peninsula. Never have the two fastest entrants battled wheel-to-wheel down the length of Baja with one of them winning by mere minutes on the basis of rider ability alone. The middle spots in the top ten are often close, but the winner's win is always decisive and relatively trouble-free. This year A.C. Bakken and Mitch Mayes rolled their Husqvarna into La Paz 3 hours and 18 minutes ahead of the Dempsey Brothers' Triumph after 875 grueling, miserable miles. The fact that Bakken and Mayes were two of the fastest riders entered played no part in the actual victory—only in the vastness of their winning margin.

To understand how this can be so, you must understand Baja. Its geological chaos will batter a rider into physical and mental exhaustion, and his motorcycle into a pile of junk. Its maze of unmarked roads will confuse those who have pre-run inadequately and lose them in a wilderness far from the course. Its asphalt will stick engines at the beginning and extract their last breath at the end. Its distances will

empty gas tanks. Its jagged rocks and spiny cacti will flatten tires. Its evil dust will clog air filters and cake goggles. Its night does not accommodate human eyes. The cars in the race are great ogres which attack from behind. To survive these horrors without stopping because one of them has hit your jugular vein is to win Baja. That's what it's taken in every 1000 so far—no major breakdowns and a consistent ride. Sheer speed is not paramount.

Thus the performance of Bakken and Mayes is doubly impressive because their ride was both trouble-free *and* fast. They were the only ones who truly deserved the victory. Anyone who wins a race because the fast guys dropped out is lucky, and luck doesn't generate a full and proper measure of respect. Bakken and Mayes deserve full credit because their riding twirled the spines off cactus, sent Mexicans scurrying and humiliated a lot of cars who had expected to swallow the bikes like appetizers. It's likely that Bakken and Mayes would have won even if all the other hot-shots had held together. Their bike, their support and their abilities didn't leave any other choice . . . ex-

cept perhaps their teammates Mickey Quade and Howard Utsey, also on a Husky and also with the same solid support. Indeed, the 1000 was a real duel between these two pairs for 525 miles. But Utsey broke just outside of San Ignacio and that was the end of that.

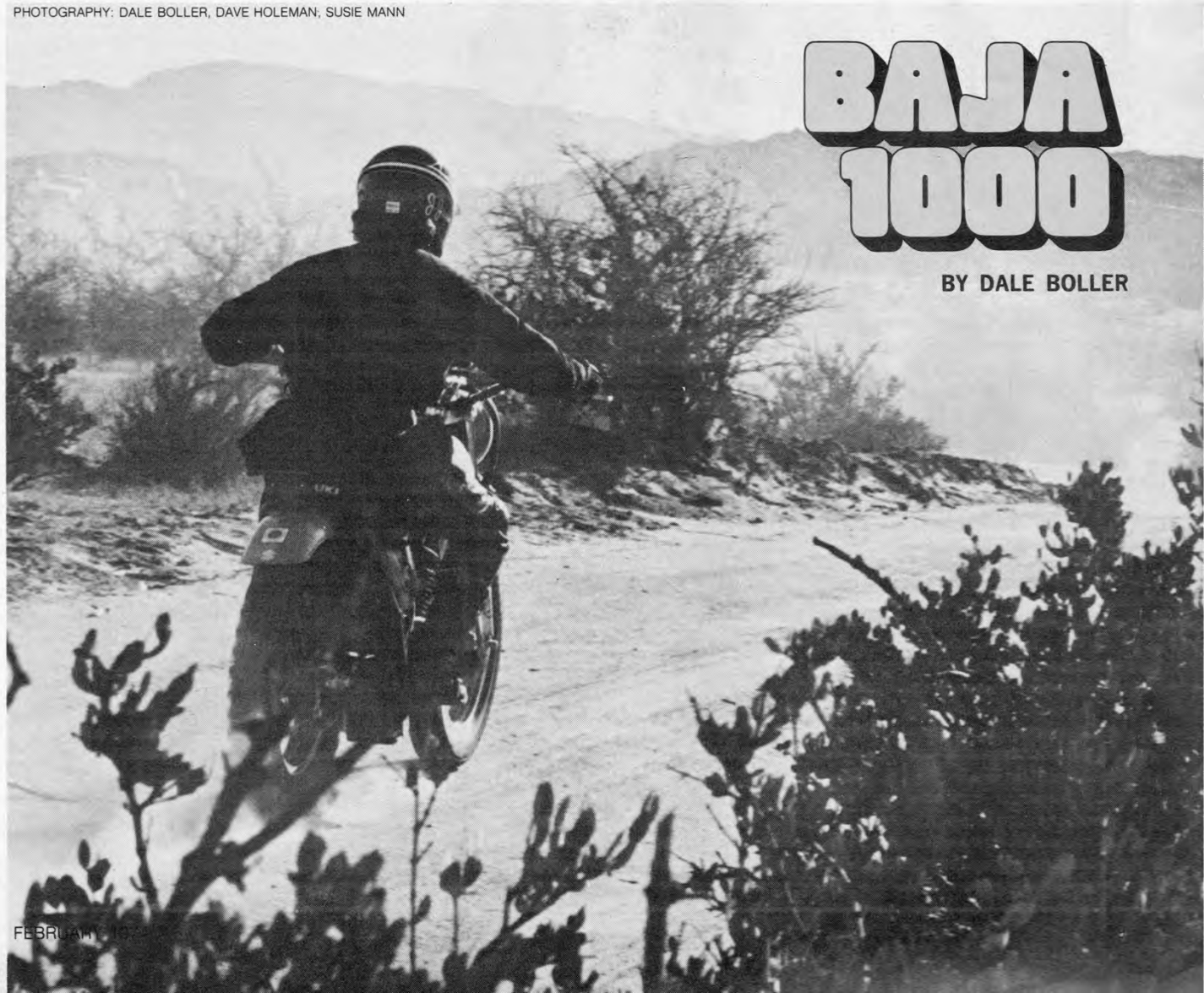
Mayes was originally scheduled to ride with Rolf Tibblin, but Tibblin broke his foot a month before the 1000; so a young desert rider named A.C. Bakken was chosen by Husky team manager Claes Nilsson. Bakken was a Baja greenhorn so Claes sent him prerunning with old pro Mickey Quade, who drilled the pupil with two trips down the 360 miles between the start and Bahia de Los Angeles (L.A. Bay). That was also Quade's section—so the week-long exercise wasn't just a friendly gesture. Mayes would ride the longer bottom half because of his night riding experience. Same with Quade's partner, Howard Utsey.

Few people realize that most of the 1000, in both time and mileage, occurs in darkness. This year every finisher except the winner left L.A. Bay at night and headed toward La Paz, some 515 miles distant. Mayes took over at L.A. Bay with

PHOTOGRAPHY: DALE BOLLER, DAVE HOLEMAN, SUSIE MANN

BAJA 1000

BY DALE BOLLER



FEBRUARY



over an hour of light remaining, and still spent 10 hours in the lonely, dangerous world of his Husky's feeble light. That 10-hour night stint was 56 percent of the winners' total riding time and 53 percent of the course's total distance. The other finishers spent all night in the outer-space-like hollowness of a black Baja. During this time there's no way to determine east from west or north from south. All the landmarks are cloaked in sable. All the ground looks the same. Hazards show up as shadows instead of the real snares they are. A rider's world is a white tunnel 75 yards long and 30 feet wide.

Many of the archaic lighting systems, including the one on Mayes' Husqvarna, have no battery and rely strictly on engine speed for current. Each time the bike slows for a turn or rough section, the clutch must be released and the engine revved so the light stays bright enough to see. This is done at least a thousand times, probably more. If the rider locks up the rear brake and kills the engine the light dies too, and he's as helpless as he'll ever be in life—blind with his eyes wide open, skidding forward toward some unseen Baja peril. If he jams the front brake hard the bike dips down and suddenly the light points only 20 feet ahead when he needs 75 yards.

Not too much real racing is done at night. It's up to the daytime rider to establish position; the night pilot merely tries to hold it. Of the first five motorcycles, only the Dempsey's Triumph changed position after dark.

Things were a bit different for this 1000 because the Mexicans had taken over the race from NORRA, the U.S.-based National Off Road Racing Assn., because they felt too much money was leaving the peninsula. Mexico established the Baja Sports Committee (BSC) to conduct the race and distribute all profits to the children of Baja. "Por La Ninez," For The Children, was the race slogan.

In retaliation NORRA scheduled a state-side event in Arizona almost simultaneously with the 1000, with the effect that the number of entries in Mexico was reduced about 40 percent. But none of the big guns in off-road racing was lured away from Baja. It's the big one, and no matter how many laps they turn around Parker Dam, no one can upstage it.

The Mexican takeover hardly altered the race except in one important rule change—motorcycles were allowed three riders for the first time. This option was set up by the BSC after many entrants returned from prerrunning with serious misgivings about the difficulty of the course and the physical toll it would take. Most concern centered around the never-before-used L.A. Bay to El Arco section, which was 107 miles of miserably huge rocks set off by cactus stalks so close to the road that people's gloves got pinned to their hands by spines. This was also the section that contained The Big

CYCLE

Hill and The Other Big Hill, both killers. Many people felt the first rider couldn't handle the section because he would be exhausted from riding 360 miles to get there, and the second rider would be worn out by it and still have 408 miles looking him in the eye.

The obvious solution was to allow three riders, which the BSC did, "for safety's sake." In reality some teams had devised elaborate ways of sneaking a third rider on their bike anyway, and since the BSC had no sure way of exposing the cheaters short of a helicopter fleet, they allowed three-man teams as much to eliminate the need for cheating as for safety.

Opponents of the plan argued that tradition was more important, and that any new records set with three men would degrade the accomplishments of the two-man efforts before them. Some teams didn't feel the course was that tough, and

1973 Baja 1000 Finishers

1. A.C. Bakken/Mitch Mayes
400 Husky 18:42.51
2. Gene/Wally/Sam Dempsey
750 Triumph 22:00.54
3. John Watkins/Todd Martella
400 Suzuki 22:51.17
4. Bruce/Larry Bornhurst/Bill Isherwood
350 Honda 23:04.54
5. Leonard/Susie Scott
250 Honda 27:00.35
6. Fred/John Solheim Steve Croquette
450 Husky 29:36.05
7. Mary McGee/Steve Bridge
Lynn Wilson
175 Can-Am 32:04.54

125 Class

1. Dick Miller/Preston Petty
125 Honda 27:30.15
2. Jorge Lim/Mario Lopez
125 Carabela 33:47.52
3. Jim Ellis/Dave Jacobsen
125 Suzuki 34:15.46

doggedly stuck with two men. However, in some cases the riders leap-frogged in an airplane so neither one rode a full half continuously—except for the winners, Bakken and Mayes. Of the ten finishers, five were with two riders and five were with three riders. Since Bakken and Mayes left tradition intact, most people would prefer to see it remain so by removing the three-rider option next year. Baja isn't supposed to be easy.

Most of this year's riders would describe it as an ordeal. Here's who they were, what they rode and what happened to them:

First—A.C. Bakken and Mitch Mayes won on a 400cc Husqvarna six-speed in stock 1974 trim except for Curnutt shocks, Akront rims, heavy-duty spokes, a Vesco tank, a special Goodyear rear tire and an ultra-preparation job by Claes Nilson. Bakken's clockings between the five

checks in his section either tied the fastest time or were one minute behind it, except when he was 9 minutes off-pace after he got lost and ran out of gas going into Punta Final. He also ran out of gas going into San Felipe and waited 5 minutes at a public service station while a spectator ran to his camper for a can of two-stroke oil. Bakken's only other misfortune was vomiting from exhaustion and heat just before completing his stint at L.A. Bay. At that point, 3:37 p.m., Mayes took over after the crack Husky pit crew (including 125 MX World Champion Arne-Nils Nilson) had installed the top light, changed the air cleaner and mounted a new rear wheel to get fresh rubber for the second half. Quade had arrived 20 minutes earlier and sent Utsey on his way, so Mayes would have to play a catch-up game. Utsey, riding with more sunlight, made it over the two killer hills and into El Arco in 2 hours, 53 minutes, 3 minutes faster than Mayes, who was having trouble with deathly amounts of dust from Walker Evans' Ford pick-up, the first car to penetrate the bike ranks. Then Bobby Ferro's Sandmaster buggy snuck by at La Purisima and left its dust hanging in the night.

All the while Mayes' vision problems were compounded by a headlight ready for the Smithsonian Institute. Yet he set fast times through all the bottom half checks except one. He and Bakken finished in 18:42.51, about 175 miles ahead of second place. Only three cars were faster. Two of them were co-piloted by famous motorcyclists: Bobby Ferro and Malcolm Smith. Ferro and his teammate Johnny Johnson were overall winners in the 1000 and collected about \$20,000. Their time was 1 hour, 53 minutes faster than the Husky primarily because the buggy could hold 120 mph on straight-aways compared to 85 mph for the bike.

Second—Gene, Wally and Sam Dempsey, three of the four Dempsey Brothers, rode a 1974 750 Triumph in a Trackmaster frame. The four Dempseys are big enough to make six regular people so the Triumph is a natural choice. It's also a good Baja bike as proved by four second place finishes over the years. Gene took the first stint, but didn't get very far. An accessory oil filter they had decided to try restricted oil flow and the Triumph seized up hard. Gene threw the filter away and set about freeing the engine, but it



Todd Martella limped into Punta Final on a rim after rocks had devoured his tire.

wouldn't budge. Finally some Mexican spectators suggested he pour oil through the spark plug holes, and sure enough, the engine broke loose and started immediately. Five miles down the road a pet-cock broke and gas drenched Gene's leg. More spectators helped him reattach the spigot with bubble gum, glue and silver tape. Then the rear tank mount broke. Their spare tank was almost 400 miles away in El Arco; via messages left at the next radio check, Gene dispatched his support airplane to fly to El Arco and bring the tank to L.A. Bay where brother Wally was waiting and could help install it. By now Gene was down an hour and Wally was still 300 miles away with the new tank. It was dusk when the Triumph thundered into L.A. Bay and dark when Wally left. Fighting the course's toughest stretch in complete darkness took Wally nearly 4 hours. Sam took over at El Arco and had clear sailing except for getting lost at the beach turnoff to La Purisima and having a tremendous 50-mile duel with Todd Martella's Suzuki on the road to La Purisima. The Dempsey's finish was good for 14th overall, cars included.

Third—Todd Martella and John Watkins are fast becoming top contenders in Baja with strong finishes in the last four events, including a win at the Ensenada 300. They rode a self-sponsored Suzuki 400 with an extended swing arm, Akront rims, fat spokes, Koni shocks and a home-wound stator producing enough wattage to light two 55-watt quartz bulbs. Disaster first struck 190 miles out when Martella got a rear flat near the dreaded three-sister hills past Puertecitos. Luckily he was using a horizontal-bead Barum Six Day tire designed to be rideable when flat, and he was able to continue for 60 miles until Baja rocks shredded even the tough Barum. It was only a few miles to Punta Final where a new wheel waited, but tire shreds were tangling with the sprocket and the bike was stuck. By chance some spectators happened to have a hacksaw blade and Martella cut away the mangled rubber and hobbled into Punta Final at 2 p.m. on the battered Akront rim. Watkins pulled away with a new rear wheel 19 minutes later. At El Arco, 460 miles out, Martella was back aboard and promptly lost 5th gear. At Villa Constitucion, with 130 miles to go, 4th gear blew. Then the bike wouldn't stay in any gear without holding the shift lever in tension by hand. Soon 3rd gear was wasted and Martella panicked because he knew the Bornhurst/Isherwood Honda was just a few minutes behind. Second gear crumbled a half-mile from the end. While passing under the finishing banner after 22 hours, 51 minutes, 17 seconds, after 875 miles, after approximately seven million revs, the transmission seized, right there at the finish line. A pick-up truck had to carry it to impound.

Fourth—Bruce Bornhurst (age 17), his father Larry (age 45) and Bill Isherwood

CYCLE PROJECT BIKE: **BAJA 1000 RACER** BY JESS THOMAS

● There wasn't time to enter our own staff team in the Thousand, so as a smaller side effort we decided to assist someone who was entered. Bill Isherwood, who was the other half of our team for the 500 and the inspiration behind the story in the September '73 issue, was teamed with Bruce Bornhurst. From experience gained during pre-run trips in weeks prior to the race, the motorcycle entrants got together and decided that the new course was so rough that three riders should be allowed to share the torture. As the third rider, the aforementioned pair drafted Bruce's dad, Larry Bornhurst, who acknowledged his 45th birthday during the 1000 and still holds the solo record from Tijuana to La Paz in just over 25 hours on a stock 350cc

250 shocks and a spare set of wheels were resting on our shop floor. He eventually became so enthused that he came along on the last pre-run trip and volunteered to man the support team for the race—and all on his own time and buck.

On paper it looked as if we could build a competitive bike within the two weeks of spare time, nights, and weekends we had. The single big problem was generator capacity to support the 250 watts of lighting and ignition power required. The only tested and therefore reasonably foolproof system we had access to was the alternator Isherwood hand-wired for the SL 350. All this was transpiring, mind you, before it was known whether or not the engine mounting lugs on the 350 engine were the



Kawasaki Bighorn. Larry's job as technician for the Mt. Wilson Observatory gives him ready access to rough riding areas and the exercise keeps him lean and hard.

Originally, Isherwood had planned to use the SL 350 we had built for the 500. But for Bruce, who is a 17-year-old motocrosser, desert racer, and high school student, the 340-pound twin was a real handful. The only other bike around with which I had enough experience to even consider was the Champion-framed XL 250 Special that was the basis for the story in the Feb. '73 issue. But it was a 250, and these guys were out to finish ahead of Parnelli Jones *et al.* A call to Honda's Carl Hailey produced a lot of interest and soon a new XL 350 engine, a pair of CR

same as those on the 250.

The engine fell into the Champion frame like it had eyes. A temporary exhaust pipe was fabricated from pieces hacksawed from the standard XL 350 pipe and the three-gallon Vesco desert tank was made to fit more securely. Isherwood's 270-pound mass presented quite a problem. The forks bottomed quite easily when the bike was being ridden in the plowed field next to our shop. A call to Webco produced a pair of progressively-wound S & W fork springs to fit our standard XL 250 forks, an aluminum rock shield to fit under the frame at the front of the engine, and a 46-tooth rear sprocket to go with the 15-tooth front one. The fork springs are called 18/26 True Progressives.

The numbers mean that the 19.5 inch long springs have rates of 18 pounds-per-inch in their first inch of compression and then the rate progressively increases to a maximum of 26 pounds-per-inch in the last inch of compression. Isherwood weighs 270 and Bruce Bornhurst weighs 140. The suspension had to be acceptable for both. A pre-load of 1.5 inches on the springs allowed Isherwood to ride without bottoming the forks too often and Bornhurst to ride without the forks being unbearably stiff. A set of different-length spacers was made in case the race conditions overly fatigued either rider. Naturally the rock shield, which was made for the stock XL 250 frame, wouldn't fit the Champion frame. I cut off the standard mounts, drilled slots in the shield to match the frame location, and put the shield on with three hose clamps.

One of the first things we had to do was abandon any idea of using the standard XL 350 rear chain. It is number 530 ($\frac{5}{8} \times \frac{3}{8}$ -inch) chain, the same size as used on most large street bikes. The Champion frame was made for the XL 250 engine which uses number 520 ($\frac{5}{8} \times \frac{1}{4}$ -inch) chain. The extra chain width would have been enough to rub on the frame tubes so we opted for the XL 250 chain and sprockets. The thinner XL 250 countershaft sprocket was spaced over toward the engine another $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch by simply putting washers between the sprocket and its retaining plate. The chain itself was the standard kind that comes on the CZ motorcrossers. It is the toughest and most durable off-road chain there is.

The standard XL 350 gearing is set so that the bike can't possibly over-rev in high gear. If the engine would turn 8000 rpm in fifth, the speed would be 89 mph. After our bike was fully equipped, it would just peak at 8000 rpm with an overall ratio of 7.19:1 in fifth. Our rear tire was a Barum 4.00/4.50 \times 18 Special Six Days model S23. It's rather heavy but it gives superlative stability at high speeds on the pavement sections and still provides good cornering traction on the soft, sandy stretches. The larger diameter of the Barum gave the bike a top speed of 87.5 mph. As it turned out, it would have been a better compromise to lower the top speed to about 84 mph and have a little more torque available in low gear.

Honda's CR 250 shocks are $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch longer than the stock ones, and when they were combined with the S&W fork springs, the height of our overstuffed and re-covered seat was a leg-stretching 34 inches with the bike at rest. But with Isherwood riding on a rough road, the suspension levels and steering geometry were back to normal.

During the pre-run, our hastily lashed-up downswept straight pipe got bashed a few times. It was obvious that an upswept one was mandatory. With time eva-

porating at an alarming rate, we called Chuck Smith at Torque Engineering. In three hours on the Saturday the bike was to leave for Mexico, Smith made a pipe that snaked back under the carburetor and through the frame in front of the right shock absorber. Since open exhausts are allowed by the Mexican Government during the race, we discarded the muffler that Torque Eng. had built for the pipe. The pipe will be available for both the Champion and stock Honda frames through Webco shortly.

With the engine and chassis compatibly coupled, the electrics had to be tucked into what spaces were left. The standard 80-watt alternator/magneto was removed from the XL 350 engine and an adapter plate was made to hold the modified SL 350 stator. Then the SL 350 rotor was chucked in the lathe so that its taper could be machined to match the end of the XL 350 crankshaft. After a battery box was fabricated and mounted, the entire electrical system from the SL 350 we ran in the 500 was grafted in. The resistor, voltage regulator, and rectifier were shock-mounted to the frame behind the battery and the D.C. coil placed in the air stream under the tank. All of the light-mounting hardware fit without alteration and the electrics were done.

The only modifications to the engine, other than substituting the D.C. ignition system, were to install a set of S&W valve springs and collars and the exhaust system already mentioned. The stock air cleaner was used without its plastic cover. To cope with the combined long, full-throttle stretches and rocky slow sections, I chose Champion R-57G spark plugs. The gold palladium electrode requires less voltage to fire than the nickel alloy variety and the plugs will perform well over a much wider heat range.

To make the machine a little more crash-proof, Uni plastic levers and a Preston Petty SuperFender were installed, and the standard XL 350 chain guide was adapted to the Champion swingarm.

The completed bike weighed 309 pounds—or 31 pounds less than the SL 350 we ran in the 500. No modifications were required to the machine after it was completed. The engine ran faultlessly for the entire 1000 miles. Bruce Bornhurst hit a rock that bent the chain guide and derailed the chain at 90 miles. It required 35 minutes to repair. The left-side axle mount on the swingarm broke while Larry Bornhurst was riding, and he had to slow way down getting to the pits at San Ignacio. Bill Isherwood chucked a dangling top headlight and rode without further hassle into La Paz. All things being equal, those guys would have finished in second place if they had ridden without any trouble. I figure it was a heroic effort to have finished at all—and fourth overall ain't bad.

(normal age, but size 52), had each entered Baja twice before and never finished. This year they rode a *Cycle Magazine* project XL-350 Honda in a Champion frame built by Technical Editor Jess Thomas and not only finished, but missed third place by just 13 minutes. Bruce started and ran strong for 90 miles until a rock banged the chain guide and left the chain in a tangle around the axle. He wrestled with the mess long enough to realize the shock would have to come off, but unfortunately it was secured with red Loctite, the kind that will cement a railroad train to its tracks with half a drop. Bruce spent most of his time hooking tiny wrenches together to get enough leverage to turn the bolt. Finally, after 20 minutes, it budged. He restrung the chain and zipped to Punta Final where his father took over for a 281-mile turn to San Ignacio. But the swing arm bushings were shot and the bike wouldn't go in a straight line. Seven miles out of L.A. Bay Larry began having further trouble going straight. The back end was flopping all over the trail, but he hung on, trying to dodge rocks but hitting them anyway, aiming straight but ending up off the road. For 170 miles the bike was barely controllable. At San Ignacio Larry's pit crew found out why—the swing arm tab which supports the axle had broken off, leaving the axle secured on only one side. No one knows why that side didn't break too. Bill Isherwood had a quick cure: remove the snail adjuster blocks and slide the axle into the inch of remaining slot on the swing arm tab. The job was done in 34 minutes and Isherwood was on his way to La Paz, 342 miles away. Due to a personal foul-up Isherwood was riding at night with 14-year-old prescription lenses in his glasses. The good ones were 133 miles distant in La Purisima. Isherwood's vision problems doubled when pockets of heat and cold fogged his goggles and tripled when he had to throw away his top light because the rivets in its bracket loosened up. Then, between La Purisima and Villa Constitucion, a giant gang of Mexican kids threw rocks and handfuls of mud as he passed. He remembered the race slogan "For The Children" at the same time he thought of strangulation. Isherwood's final battle was again with his eyes as the morning sunrise etched itself into his retinas. He arrived at the finish in time to follow the pick-up carrying Martella's belly-up Suzuki to impound.

Fifth—Dr. Leonard Scott, 47, and his 37-year-old wife, Susie, have entered two previous 1000s and two 500s. This year they chose to ride an XL-250 Honda prepared by Mike Burke. Their ride was trouble-free, which in a way was unfortunate. They had signed a spark plug contingency with Champion and left the start with several spare Champion plugs, expecting the stock NGK to need replace-

(Continued on page 77)

BAJA 1000 Continued from page 63
ment somewhere along the way. It didn't. So when they arrived in La Paz as the first 250, Champion could not pay them the \$500 contingency prize. Susie has some solace in setting the fastest time on the 130-mile pavement stretch to La Paz—1 hour, 52 minutes, one full minute faster than Mitch Mayes, who rode at night and in the fog.

Sixth—Fred and John Solheim came all the way from Colorado with friend Steve Croquette to bounce down the peninsula in 29½ hours on a 450 Husky. Besides several seizures, they lost speed by not having prerun, a time-eater second only to mechanical failure.

Seventh—Baja 500 heroines Mary McGee and Lynn Wilson returned to ride the 1000 with Steve Bridge, who took the place of Lynn's son at the last minute. The trio rode a Can-Am 175 supplied by Bombardier of Canada and prepared by Don McGee, Mary's husband. Trouble hit Mary 100 years from the start when the bike wouldn't run more than 50 mph. A hundred miles out it wouldn't run on the bottom end either, and soon it quit altogether. Mary worked on the bike for 2 hours, 40 minutes before it would hobble 6 miles to San Felipe. There an ex-Harley mechanic speculated that the problem might be the fuel filter. Maybe he was right, for the bike came to life without it. The cure was short lived—20 miles—and Mary headed back to San Felipe, slipping the clutch to maintain 5 mph. But soon the bike cured itself and she turned around and started racing again. By Puertecitos all the rear spokes were loose and had to be tightened. She then got a flat rear tire at the first of the three sister hills, by now strewn with broken cars. Mary is strong, but not strong enough to peel a six-ply Goodyear off a rim, so she rode on the flat some 50 miles to Punta Final. Here a car pit crew bent two of her steel tire irons, their tire irons, their screwdrivers, punctured her spare tube, punctured a second spare tube, patched it and finally sent her on her way after a 2½ hour delay. Steve Bridge took over and breezed into San Ignacio at 6:43 a.m. without a hitch. Lynn Wilson wasn't even dressed to ride, having lost hope hours before. Trying to make up time on the now good-running Can-Am, Lynn unloaded and banged her nose hard enough to start it bleeding. It wouldn't stop for 20 minutes and when she arrived at the next check covered with blood and still forged on, the Mexicans shook their heads in disbelief. Lynn got a flat rear tire 60 miles from La Paz, filled it with instant flat fix which worked for 40 miles and ended up riding the last 20 miles to the finish on a flat.

First, 125 class—no tale matches that of Dick Miller and Preston Petty, winners of the 125 class on their Miller-built CR-125 Honda Elsinore MX bike. The plan was to have Petty ride to L.A. Bay and
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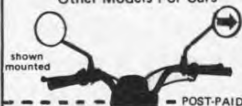
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Miller to La Paz, and that's how they preran, but Petty's airplane with all his riding gear inside was grounded by fog on the morning of the race and couldn't reach Ensenada. So Miller learned he would be starting, and racing, on a course he hadn't prerun, just a few minutes before keytime. Petty would wait for the fog to lift and fly to Puertecitos. But Miller was so fast getting to Puertecitos that Petty didn't even have his leathers on, so Miller kept going. Petty flew to Punta Final, took over, and nearly killed the engine twice while clutching away. The reason is that Miller had geared the little Honda for 85 mph, and there was no low end. All was well until Petty reached the first killer hill out of L.A. Bay. The bike wouldn't begin to pull the grade without vicious clutch-slipping, which resulted in a melted clutch half-way up. Petty went back down but didn't have a phillips screwdriver, so he couldn't remove the clutch cover. He settled down to watch the stars and have a couple beers with a car pit crew (who didn't have a phillips screwdriver either!). But soon they decided to try wrenching off the case cover screws with a giant Vise-Grips. It worked. Petty cleaned out all the ground-up, charred pieces of fiber, adjusted the clutch to the limit of the adjuster's travel and got half-way up the hill before frying the clutch again. At that point four very tipsy Mexicans who had been drinking since sundown insisted on pushing him up the hill, which they did, while laughing, babbling and making sounds like a motorcycle engine. Two and a half hours were down so far. A sign at the top of killer hill said "Mag 7 pits two miles." Mag 7 is the professional pitting group to which Petty and Miller had subscribed for \$165. The terrain was flat and Petty limped in—anything over 25-mph and the clutch would slip. Petty wanted to quit, but Mag 7 wouldn't let him. They dismantled his clutch and determined a couple of new plates would space the springs into sufficient tension for a slipless grip. The pit crew had a small drill motor with a fly cutter, and one of the Mag 7 members donated (without his wife knowing) the side of his camper for sheet metal. Petty picked a spot adjacent to the kitchen window and spun off a couple of discs, shaped them into clutch plates with a tin snips and spaced out the Elsinore clutch. Another 3 hours down. Petty didn't even try to ride up killer hill No. 2. He lost another ½ hour pushing over the top and at 3 a.m. rolled into San Ignacio where Dick Miller was sleeping. Next to his bed in a back pack was a new clutch. Miller woke up Honda service rep Fred Germain, who installed the new clutch and asked a lot of questions about the odd looking plates in the old one. Miller took off and arrived in La Paz about 6 hours off the time the Honda might have had with a torquey engine and the right gear ratio.

CYCLE

What about some of the big names who never made it?

Steve Hurd, racing again for the first time since a near-fatal crash in the Mint 400, set the fastest time on the pavement and then lost the Motoplat ignition on his 400 Husky. Hurd twice won the 125 class in previous 1000s.

Bill Silverthorn, the 500 winner two years ago, was leading the whole race for 150 miles before his tricked-up Honda XL-350 suffered piston failure just beyond San Felipe.

Ron Bishop's Suzuki galled a big-end bearing outside of L.A. Bay after his co-riders James Jasper and Dick Hansen had pushed it into third. Bishop was just a protest away from winning the 1000 last year. He has ridden every 500 and 1000 held in Baja.

Gene Cannady continued the tradition established in the ISDT and ripped the gears out of his 450 Kawasaki. Up to that point he'd tied one of the fastest times and clocked the second fastest speeds at two other checks.

Mike Patrick, 1000 winner in 1970, lost a main bearing on his 350 Yamaha twin shortly after the start.

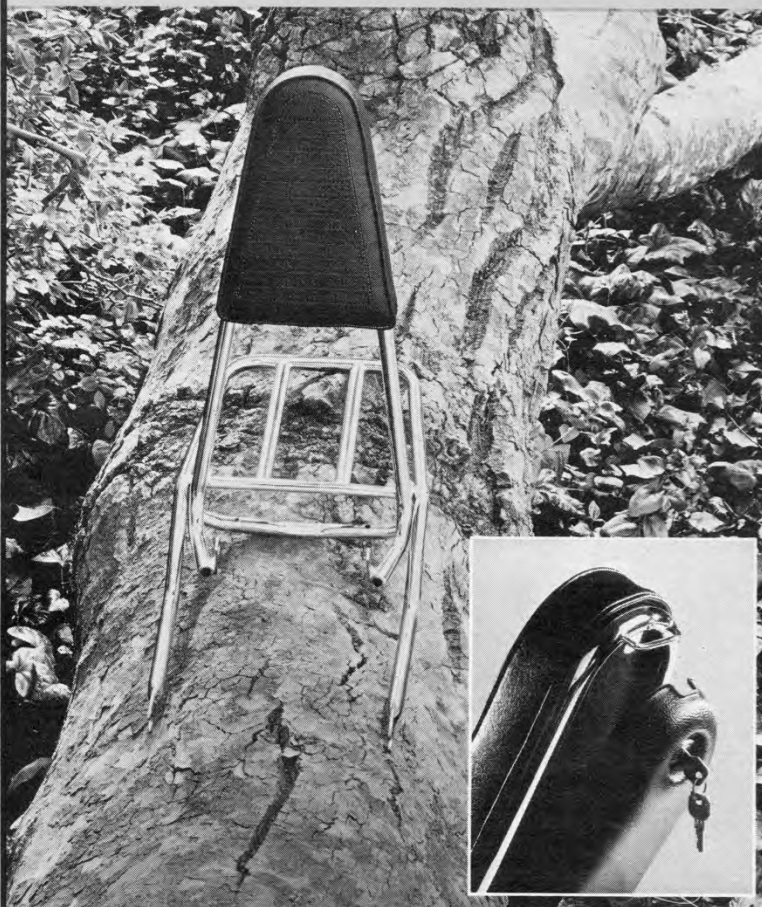
Howard Utsey, most recent 500 winner, dropped out at San Ignacio after he and Mickey Quade had led for 385 miles. The bike simply slowed down on a pavement section, stopped, and wouldn't restart. A post-mortem revealed that something about the 32 to 1 mixture of oil and gas had gummed the ring, causing a loss of compression. Regardless of the reason, Utsey's trouble occurred 6 miles from a complete Husky pit where he could have replaced the piston, or even swapped engines, with plenty of time to take second place. An experienced Baja rider like Utsey knows an hour lost is nothing. Why did he stop?

Then there's the tale of Don and Ed Watkins, who entered an SL-70 Honda minicycle. Ed spent over 16 hours going 360 miles to L.A. Bay. "I just rode and didn't think about how far it was. I pushed and paddled a lot," said Watkins, who also had to fix a flat along the way. His brother took over and broke the frame near the big killer hill. One of Bill Stroppe's pits welded wrenches to the broken tubes and Don went on, finally reaching the pavement stretch to La Paz after 17 hours in the saddle. Some Mexicans aimed him to the *left*, and he believed them since he'd never pruned, but 140 miles later he discovered he was heading in the opposite direction from La Paz and had gone to Mulege. So he back-tracked, found the right road, tried to find the people who'd steered him wrong (it's a good thing he didn't) and finally arrived at La Paz 4 hours *after* the 48-hour finishing deadline. So the Watkins Brothers got nothing—no trophy, no money, not even a listing on the results.

Baja never lets up. Not even after the end.

FEBRUARY 1974

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