

# United States Motocross Grand Prix

**Once again the Americans got caught with their push-ups down.**

**By John Huetter**

●“Only firsts count now,” admitted Roger DeCoster, current and three-time World Motocross Champion, as he stood with the other GP riders to receive checks from AMA motocross referee, John “Light Brown” Lancione. It was three hours after the last checkered flag waved ending the U.S. Grand Prix. Roger was satisfied, if not completely relaxed. He still had a chance to earn an unprecedented fourth World Championship in a row. But, as he said, all that mattered from this point on was who could finish the most Grand Prix motos in first: he or his arch-rival

for the title, Heikki Mikkola, a fanatic Finn riding for the Husqvarna factory. Heikki could have wrapped up his first World Championship by winning Carlsbad, but he didn't. In fact, Roger improved his standings against Heikki, who began the season by winning the first three grand prix events outright. Now with three rounds left to go, it only matters who wins each one. No seconds, no thirds.

Under the new FIM scoring system for World Championships, only the best 12 finishes out of the 22 grand prix motos count toward the title. DeCoster came to



the U.S. with four wins and two seconds; Mikkola had seven wins and two seconds.

The two contenders for the highest position in 500cc motocross are almost painfully dissimilar. And it is likely that it will be the personalities as much as the pure riding skill that will determine who is the 500 World Champion this year. DeCoster: cool, calculating, experienced, and skilled. Mikkola: fierce, hungry, experienced, and also skilled.

"The factory maybe started too late making this year's bike. Now it is the best for most courses but at the beginning of

the season, maybe not," Roger believes. "Five times I have broken while I was leading a race. Five times." What Roger is suggesting is that had he not broken, he would be in the lead and cruising home. If he could have *stayed* in the lead for the full 40 minutes plus two laps of those five motos. Still, lack of machine reliability has hurt him so far this year.

Mikkola is more terse. "Bike is good. I am ready hundred per cent." As many grand prix riders have discovered, that can be a hard combination to beat: 360 works Husqvarna and the incredible strength,

speed, and dogged tenacity of Heikki Mikkola. This Finn can resume racing in a grand prix half a lap down after, say, a first turn pile-up and be running fourth by the end of the moto. He doesn't just pass other riders; he devours them.

Even DeCoster is intimidated by his strength. Mikkola knows that Roger has beaten everybody who has come against him; sometimes easily, sometimes narrowly, but won in the end. Roger's approach to motocross is more cerebral. DeCoster will find and use the best lines on a course, then continue to use them

PHOTOGRAPHY: DALE BOLLER, BILL DELANEY







Roger DeCoster's world championship 370cc works Suzuki features upside down front-mount gas/oil shocks with dual springs of differing weights. Nothing about the bike resembles Suzuki stockers.



Even more radical forward-mount shocks are seen on Heikki Mikkola's new 360cc Husky which has a reed valve, radial head, left-side shifting and less weight than the 400s available to the public.



Willi Bauer's works Maico looks like it needs to be restored. Wear comes from hard riding and battering truck rides around the GP circuit. Maico's racer closely resembles their production bikes.

with time-eroding regularity. Heikki might be all over the place on the front wheel but will somehow manage to keep upright—going fast. DeCoster hardly ever makes an error, and it may be that when Roger's RN Suzukis are running spot on, he is plainly *the* fastest.

It looked like either of them could win the U.S. Grand Prix. If you ventured that the Dutchman, Gerrit Wolsink, was due for an overall victory—and would very likely win the U.S. round—most people would respond, "Who's that?"

"That's my problem," smiles Gerrit. "My style is not too spectacular and nobody sees where my positions are." It's true that unless you are following the racing at a grand prix or, last year, one of the American Trans-AMA events very attentively, Gerrit is almost invisible on a motocross track. He is smooth, controlled, unruffled, almost placid in the way he guides his 400 Suzuki (last year, his 400 Maico) around even the roughest circuit. Gerrit graduated from dental school in Holland over a year ago but delayed going into practice as a dentist in order to race World Championship motocross. In the American social ethic, it would be unthinkable to give up dental practice to ride motorcycles. But in Central Europe, it is thought to be a very reasonable thing for a 26-year-old young man to do, particularly if he has a factory ride. Besides, there's much more social status, prestige, and money attached to being a Grand Prix factory rider than being a dentist.

Gerrit did take home maximum points from the U.S. GP, whether anybody had heard of him or not, just like he pulled a shocker by winning the first 500 GP of last season. He had nearly won the German 500 GP; would have, except that German Adolf Weil's illegal start was not disallowed. He was in position to win the British GP just the week before when his suspension did him in. Wolsink was really due for a win.

He favors the stock TM-400 engine in his first year with Suzuki. He has lowered the compression ratio, fitted a slightly smaller Mikuni carburetor to match and that's about it. There is a works expansion chamber attached to it, of course. Gerrit even started out with a stock TM-400 frame, then cut and lowered it and re-worked the suspension to suit himself. He

***DeCoster passed  
Mikkola to close  
the GP point gap as  
thousands gestured  
their approval.***





*Wolsink leaped  
the unleapable  
12-foot drop  
on the last lap  
to save a win.*

claims to be quite pleased with the bike. There's little doubt that the TM-400 engine gives him enough power.

Brad Lackey set fast time in qualifying for start position. "Fast time" is important as a psych-out device in addition to getting your first choice of spots at the start gate. Brad has been doing well in grand prix events most of the season, especially as he has gotten used to his new Husqvarna ride. Huskys, even one-off factory Huskys, are very different motocross bikes to ride and Brad fell off a lot at the beginning of the season. He stopped doing that and subsequently worked his way up to tenth in the World Championship standings, including some impressive placings in the top five. He has twice before set fast time at a GP. Brad is very close-mouthed about his racing and would never admit it, but he wanted very much to do well in the U.S. 500 Grand Prix. Since he'd been the only American rider in any of the 500 World Championship rounds so far this year, there was good reason to believe he'd be first among the larger American entry in the U.S. round. In the first 45-minute moto, he was.

Thirty-seven racers assembled behind the steel start gate with a generous representation from the host country. Americans making their only 500 GP appearance of the season included National 500 Champ, Pierre Karsmakers, semi-privateer John DeSoto, U.S. Husky riders Marty Tripes and Gary Semics, Bryar Holcomb for Bultaco and Rex Staten as Honda's token entry.

Also lined up behind everybody else was Jim Pomeroy, normally riding for GP points in the 250 Class, now mounted on a 360 prepared by a local Bultaco shop. Jim was not allowed to race for prize money or first-American honors. F.I.M. regulations prohibited this because Jim is contesting the 250 class world championship. He didn't let that keep him from working up to eighth from the second row before his carb fell off in the first moto, or finishing fifth and first American in the second moto, just behind Pierre Karsmakers, who was first overall AMA motocross licensee in the U.S. 500 Grand Prix.

The first turn at Carlsbad is barely 100 meters (the FIM minimum) from the start gate. It is also a 180-degree left-hander that is narrow, with room for maybe six bikes abreast. American Gary Semics led





Gerrit Wolsink, a 26-year-old dentist from the Netherlands, won the USGP overall on a Suzuki.



Heikki Mikkola of Finland and his 360 Husky are the hottest items on the GP circuit this year.



Brad Lackey, Husqvarna, is still the fastest native American in the international MX scene.



DeCoster clearly had the most endurance and was fastest until a broken front hub slowed him.



Tim Hart zaps a berm in a dry section. The two-mile course was half wet clay, half dry dirt.

into it and out of it, getting an incredibly good holeshot. Behind him everybody fought for the one or two good lines. About eight of the riders, almost all of Team Yamaha including Karsmakers, tangled and crashed into the damp adobe dirt. Both DeCoster and Mikkola avoided the pile up but lost positions avoiding the flying bikes and bodies.

Semics' lead lasted about two laps, then Gerrit Wolsink motored by from second as spectators frantically searched their programs to see who was leading.

A surprising John Banks and an even more surprising Bryar Holcomb were running third and fourth during the opening laps. They were both, it turned out, on the sick list and retired by the halfway point. It was hard to tell if Banks' pre-race pallor was due to sickness or British weather, but he talked about having chicken pox recently and still had a touch of flu. Bryar had a blue hole in the bottom of a swollen foot and thought he had blood poisoning from the puncture wound. Banks didn't come out of the pits for the second moto. Neither did Holcomb. John was later looking for someone to buy his works CCM 498cc four-stroke motocrosser. Bryar just looked unhappy.

Wolsink built up a lead of 8-10 seconds and looked uncatchable, riding quickly and smoothly, until DeCoster got out of the pack and broke clear into second place. What became obvious after 20 minutes of the first moto was who *really* raced. The hometown holeshot artist, the 15-minute moto specialists, the riders putting in an obligatory ride for their sponsor all seemed to drop out of sight as the more possessed GP works riders got down to serious breadwinning business.

Brad Lackey worked his way determinedly up to third behind Wolsink and DeCoster, as high as he had finished in any grand prix this year. Behind him were Adolf Weil, Jaak Van Velthoven, Heikki Mikkola, Bengt Aberg, Ake Jonsson and, providing another surprise, American wunderkind Marty Tripes. The signs from Marty's pit proclaimed, "Go, Porky!" and the naturally talented California teenager



displayed his uncanny, but sporadic, strength and agility. He passed Lackey and Adolf Weil, who were engaged in very tight nose-to-tail racing on the next-to-last lap. Then he ran over his own ankle on the last lap and didn't finish the moto.

DeCoster whittled away at Gerrit's once-comfortable lead, passed the Dutchman and built up a gap of equal proportion in his favor. Both works Suzuki engines stayed on song but Gerrit could not engage second, third, or fourth gears on the first, and sometimes second, try. This accounted, in part, for the ease with which Roger eventually passed Wolsink to get under the checkered flag first.

Heikki Mikkola's mechanic, Pella Persson, was experimenting with some new two-ply and three-ply rear knobby tires—very light—to further reduce unsprung weight and give improved track "feel." Heikki had run on the two-ply tire in setting second fastest qualifying time and liked the way it felt in practice. The course was still damp and fairly soft in the gray, humid morning. But Pella knew that the track would dry out and get much harder, even during the first moto. He had raced in Southern California before. His recommendation was to change to at least the prototype three-ply tire, maybe even the standard four-ply Trelleborg. Heikki said no. Heikki's tire went flat with two laps to go in the first moto.

Both he and Van Velthoven had gotten by Lackey, but when the tire went, big Jaak slipped into third place and Brad closed to within striking distance in the last laps.

Lackey took the checkered as first American in the moto but only made about four laps on the 360 Husqvarna in the second race before both wheels started coming apart, ending any hope of a first overall American placing and the lucrative contingency fund that went with that position. He had required two novacaine injections for the pain in his right ankle before the race.

Current 500 National Motocross Champion, Pierre Karsmakers: a Dutchman by birth, a Californian by residence, is a controversial figure in international motocross. The initial furor surrounding Karsmakers was touched off when Pierre took out an AMA motocross competition license last year and then proceeded to waltz off with the National Championship in the 500cc class by soundly trouncing all the U.S.A. riders.

Many of his former cohorts on the international circuit considered him a cherry-picker for abandoning the more serious, hard-fought Continental competition in favor of easier American events. Many Americans felt the same way. Through it all, he remains a good, constantly improving, Yamaha factory contract rider. Pierre continues to demonstrate that he's a lot better than many of the Europeans thought and a lot better than most of the Americans are.

The second moto was Gerrit Wolsink's show from the crowded first turn to the high drama of the finish. His gearbox was fixed and he used it efficiently to stay ahead of DeCoster, then Karsmakers, who had quickly passed Roger and even closed some on Gerrit. The first three were circulating very fast, virtually in a race of their own. Wolsink was unruffled and intense: Pierre, not seeming to go fast, up on the pegs most of the time; Roger hunched over the bars and typically very, very stylish.

#### Moto 1

Rider	Country	Brand	Points
1. Roger DeCoster	Belgium	SUZ	15
2. Gerrit Wolsink	Netherlands	SUZ	12
3. Jaak Van Velthoven	Belgium	YAM	10
4. Heikki Mikkola	Finland	HUS	8
5. Brad Lackey	Calif.	HUS	6
6. Pierre Karsmakers	Calif.	YAM	5
7. Adolf Weil	W. Germany	MAI	4
8. Bengt Aberg	Sweden	BUL	3
9. Ake Jonsson	Sweden	YAM	2
10. Jim Weinert	Calif.	KAW	1

#### Moto 2

Rider	Country	Brand	Points
1. Gerrit Wolsink	Netherlands	SUZ	15
2. Heikki Mikkola	Finland	HUS	12
3. Roger DeCoster	Belgium	SUZ	10
4. Pierre Karsmakers	Calif.	YAM	8
5. Jaak Van Velthoven	Belgium	YAM	6
6. Adolf Weil	W. Germany	MAI	5
7. Jim Weinert	Calif.	KAW	4
8. Marty Trippes	Calif.	HUS	3
9. Willi Bauer	W. Germany	MAI	2
10. Bengt Aberg	Sweden	BUL	1

Wolsink, DeCoster and Mikkola were the first three overall based on points from both motos.

Jim Pomeroy placed fifth in the second moto, but since he competes in the 250cc GP circuit, he was ineligible to collect points at Carlsbad.

Back a distance, Jim Weinert and Jim Pomeroy scrapped for a while over fourth with the decision going to Pomeroy. Heikki Mikkola finally got untracked and came up to add to the front-running action. It's not certain whether Heikki ignores other riders as he cuts a path through the pack, or stalks them, waiting for the precise moment to swat them out of the way like an annoyance that has been keeping him from doing something he badly wants to do, like win. Heikki went by Pomeroy and a fading Weinert, who both still maintained good position. (Pomeroy would finish fifth but would be bumped from the results since he is an FIM 250cc class rider, and this was a 500cc Grand Prix.)

Mikkola was in luck. Roger's riding style changed radically and careful scrutiny of man and machine revealed the reason for his rear-wheel landings and slow approaches to corners. The front wheel was coming apart. DeCoster could not use the stopping techniques necessary to improve his position coming into corners because he couldn't use the front brake. Still, Roger felt that Pierre, running in second, was blocking him.

Finally, Karsmakers decided he couldn't race at front-running competitive speeds with a faulty gearbox and pulled over to let Roger by. But Mikkola had worked up to within a few bike-lengths of the Suzuki's rear tire and he shot past on the inside too, relegating Pierre to fourth at the finish. Mikkola's aggressive charge and a right-running Husky carried

him past DeCoster, who was hanging on, trying to finish the moto before the front wheel collapsed.

Wolsink was tiring a little; everybody was after nearly 90 minutes of World Championship motocross. He still seemed to have a sufficient cushion with two laps to go to hold onto the lead and his first GP win of the season. Mikkola had other plans and most of them were put into effect on the last lap of the Grand Prix. He closed to within less than a bike length of Wolsink inside of a minute. Gerrit kept closing the gate in corners, keeping the strong Finn from getting a wheel completely under him. Just before the finish line on the Carlsbad course is a 12-foot dropoff that is near-vertical. At the base is a high-bermed lefthander followed by a slippery right-hand runout into the dirt bank where the man with the checkered flag stands.

Wolsink was halfway down the dropoff as Mikkola's front wheel left the lip. They hit bottom almost together but Heikki had the inside line, enabling him to keep the throttle on, hit the berm faster, come off it faster and, he had to be thinking, cut off Wolsink by aiming straight at the opposite bank forcing Gerrit into a dead-end, nowhere line.

But Gerrit turned inside Mikkola where there was no berm. Whatever gear the Suzuki was in (he thought it was third) was the one he used to scream into the dirt bank full on, the throttle completely to the stop. He slammed the bike into the bank while the flagman waved and jumped back as both man and machine cartwheeled across the finish line. When Gerrit separated from his tumbling bike, the advantage over Mikkola looked to be the space of a front wheel and a gas tank. DeCoster came across third.

Gerrit Wolsink sat ignored, sipping Gatorade on the bumper of his rental car, after his first grand prix win of 1974. He was hungry and eating a sandwich hurt his bleeding tongue. He had bitten it when he cracked his chin on the handlebars at the finish line. There has not been a more dramatic finish to a grand prix event this year, nor one so close that counted for as much as this U.S. round. Yet only Chesny Nilsson sat with Gerrit, offering him a cold, wet towel in the still-muggy July heat. DeCoster was the one who was mobbed, at the other end of the pits.

Gerrit only smiles reflectively when accused of being a racing intellectual. (He is also the organizing force behind and president of the Grand Prix Riders Association.) He rubs his painful chin and he knows that he can win Grands Prix.

Mikkola sits hot and unhappy in his pits. He is aware of the opportunity now lost, even though he has retained a narrow 10-point lead in the World Championship standings. The second place finish did him little good. He already has all the seconds he can use. Only firsts count now. ●

elapsed times indicated, Bakken was underrating his opponent.

After the 30 mile route down into Valle de Trinidad both riders posted exactly the same time—38.00 minutes. So only 1.2 seconds still separated the two. Into checkpoint seven, the last checking station before the finish, Bakken gained only minutely and had 58.8 seconds on Robinson after that 70 mile stretch. Heading for the finish Robinson clouted a rock, which threw him off the road and slowed him ever so slightly less than two miles from Ensenada. On the final 35 miles of the road Bakken went 1.2 seconds quicker than Robinson, giving him exactly a one minute lead over the unexpected and near-flawless ride by the privateer team.

In the not-so-close 250 race the sure winners on the Penton team blew their 14-minute lead over the factory Elsinore when Bob Messer unloaded WFO. He bent the handlebars and forks and broke the light in addition to hurting his hand and foot. The two teams were close on time at check seven but Holladay unreeled the Honda into a four-minutes-quicker final section to get the class win 3.07 minutes ahead of the Penton.

The 125cc race was a runaway victory for the factory Husky. Nilsson and Quade finished 31.07 minutes ahead of second place, a privateer on another Husky. Surprisingly all four of the 125 Huskies that started finished, two of them Claes Nilsson-prepared.

Both the Mayes/Bakken and Sterner/Robinson teams beat out the first four wheeler in an impressive overall victory for motorcycles. The margin was a solid 4½ minutes. Ironically, the first five overall finishers are motorcycle champions. First car (third overall) was piloted by Bobby Ferro, winner of the famous 200 mile Check Chase Hare & Hound a few years back on a Triumph twin. The second car (fifth overall) was piloted by Malcolm Smith, winner of Baja on a bike and ISDT multi-Gold medalist, and his motorcycle racer-dentist neighbor Bud Feldcamp. Third (seventh) was the team of Mike Patrick and Phil Bowers, winner of both the Mint 400 (overall) and Baja 1000 on a motorcycle. They were all in single seat buggies.

Sadly, a tragic accident involving Parnelli Jones and Bill Stroppe in their infamous Bronco led to their early retirement. A dizzy American spectator fatally met head-on with Parnelli as the former rode, knowingly, backwards on the course from the first check on a motorcycle. The accident was so violent that Stroppe withdrew their entry on the spot. Had they continued at the pace they were maintaining (approximately 80 mph) Parnelli probably would have taken overall honors handily. It was a rotten break for the man everyone acknowledges as the fastest racer in Baja, regardless of vehicle.

OCTOBER 1974

The very basis of Baja racing is the ability of anybody, sponsored or not, to go down and lock horns with the world's best off-road racers—whether on two or four wheels. A rider doesn't need any professional license, special permission, approved vehicle, trick engine, secret tires, million dollar pits, magnesium equipment or any other heavenly approval to go race seriously or for fun. It's not an environment that rewards or even tolerates folly, but it's a home for any competent motorcycle dirt racer.

The chances of privateers winning are still slim—Husky, i.e. Claes Nilsson, has the handle on winning the big Baja races. Of the 19 Open class finishers 11 were on Huskies. The first eight places went to 400 Huskies. All of the three class winners were factory sponsored machines. But all the second place finishers were privateers, two from the same Competition Cycle motorcycle dealer. Because of Yamaha's great contingency award program (first Yamaha finisher in each class gets \$500) the third place 125 and 250 and the eleventh place open bike finishers divided up \$1500. In the case of the 125 and 250 Yamaha finishers they took home more winnings than the second place riders.

Al Baker and Steve Holladay on the other hand were quite well compensated for their effort. They won a total of \$2118 (prize and contingency monies) and this amount was matched by their sponsor American Honda. They took home the second biggest total winnings of any of the motorcycle crowd, \$4236.

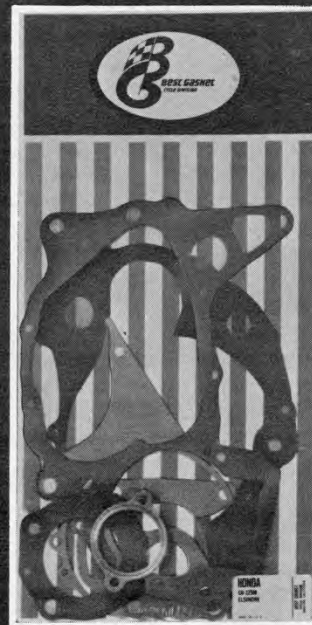
The race, the SCORE Baja International, was probably the best-run, smoothest and most controlled of any of the big Baja races in years. It was a tremendous success for Mickey Thompson and the SCORE affiliates. If they decide to run the Baja 1000 in place of the bungling Mexican politicians it could easily draw 500 entrants and the biggest purse ever in off-road racing—maybe a quarter of a million dollars counting contingency awards. The success of this race has been like a transfusion to a dying patient. Baja is back.

#### BAJA INTERNACIONAL

Overall Winner—Mitch Mayes/A.C. Bakken—Husky 400

Rider Team	Bike	Time	SCORE Purse	Cont. Money
Class # 20—0-125cc 19 Entries—13 Finishers				
Nilsson/Quade	Husky 125	8h59.99m	\$1120	\$1325
Jasper/Padilla	Husky 125	9h31.06m	635	225
Kirker/Roeseller	Yam 123	9h31.30m	392	525
Holbert/Holbert	Pent. 125	9h39.65m	327	---
Ward/Ward	Husky 125	10h10.25m	242	---
Eddy	Yam 125	10h36.75m	84	---
Class # 21—126-250cc 13 Entries—11 Finishers				
Baker/Holladay	Honda 250	8h32.87m	\$ 893	\$1225
Adent/Messer	Pent. 250	8h35.94m	558	150
Bilkey/McCallister	Yam 250	8h54.28m	357	525
Bartlett/Bartlett	Pent. 250	9h14.49m	301	---
Lujean/Ley	Honda 250	9h21.97m	123	---
Class # 22—251cc-Open 29 Entries—19 Finishers				
Mayes/Bakken	Husky 400	8h07.41m	\$2030	\$2825
Robinson/Sterner	Husky 400	8h08.41m	964	225
Utsey/Grossi	Husky 400	8h22.17m	600	25
Ussery/Vick	Husky 400	8h56.27m	451	---
Laca/Mason	Husky 400	8h56.49m	375	---
Bishop/Hansen	Husky 400	8h56.68m	330	---
Harper/Hodges	Husky 400	9h02.12m	223	---
Shipley/Shipley	Husky 400	9h30.49m	102	---

## ALL GASKETS ARE NOT CREATED EQUAL!



Honda Elsinore 125 & 250

We're not called *Best Gasket* for nothing. It happens to be a fact that for over 40 years we have made perhaps the world's finest gaskets. In a motorcycle engine that means something. High temperatures, powerful compression and tall rpm stress factors quickly wear out ordinary motorcycle gaskets...while *Best Gaskets* keep going strong.

All *Best Gasket* kits come complete with every gasket for the entire engine and fit most popular bikes.

No, all gaskets are not created equal. Some are better than others...and then there's the *Best*.



C-1074

CIRCLE NO. 49 ON READER SERVICE PAGE.