

HISTORY IS MADE

With proper management, the Mint 400 has the potential to be the most exciting, most demanding, richest in payback — in short, the best off-road race in the world. It is a shame the race always misses its potential.

Consider. Las Vegas is simply a more exciting place for racers and spectators to be than is the middle of the Baja peninsula. Four hundred miles ridden completely during the day is long, but not too long. Just about right to see who the best rider is. And with the cars also involved, many sponsors want to sink money into the race. A lot of money.

That's the potential. But things go wrong. Yes, Las Vegas is exciting. Everyone enjoys that. Yes, most of the riders finish during the day. And yes, the best riders, ultimately, do win. But the cars (even though it is they who, admittedly, attract the money from sponsors) cause problems.

Car drivers are jealous. It is as simple as that. They get upset when bikes beat them overall. Ever since 1968 when Gunnar Lindstrom and J. N. Roberts won overall in the Mint, the car drivers have desperately tried to win. And they've failed. So this year they gave the bikes a different course. And along with a different, more difficult course came other differences as well. Like no guaranteed purse. Instead, 60 percent of the entry as payback.

Result. Overall winners of the advertised \$100,000 Mint 400, Rolf Tibblin and Jack Johnson, won \$2700. *Between themselves.* Add some contingency money in there, and the trip still undoubtedly cost them both money. If they were not connected with a factory somehow, the race would not have been worth the trouble.

Car people demanding to win raises other problems. When cars and bikes race on the same course, the only answer — for the cars — is to have a course with outrageous speeds. In Baja, the cars are capable of well over 100 mph. But the rougher the course, the more the bikes win by. In this year's Mint, with separate courses, the answer to the car people's problem was simple:

by Don Phillipson



Champagne after the checker. Rolf Tibblin, ignoring his bandages, holds the victory bottle; Jack Johnson, in his bicentennial jersey, stands in the winners' circle for the second year in a row; and the Husqvarna rests quietly after ten hours and 59 minutes of work.



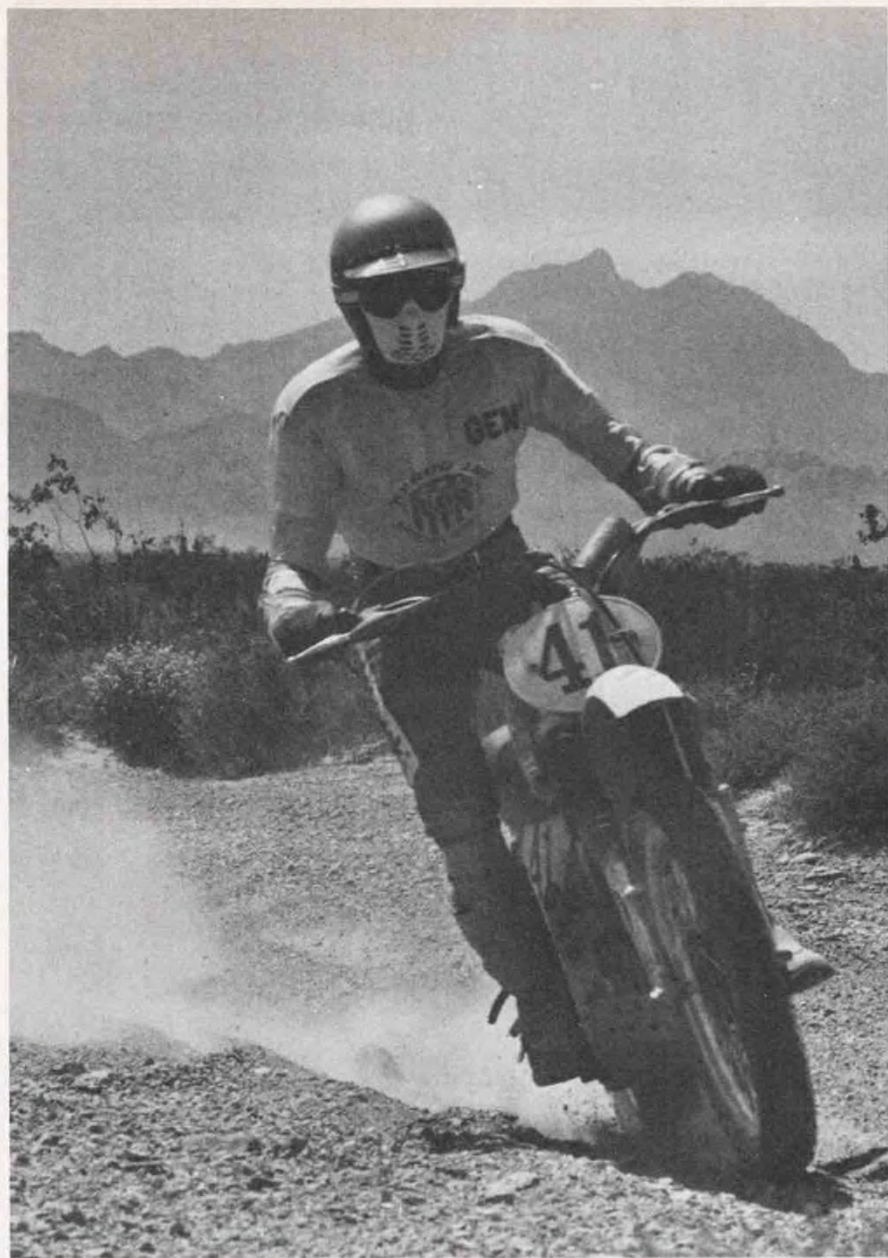
A. C. Bakken, after six hours of racing. A. C. was originally teamed with Mitch Mayes, but Mitch broke both collarbones pre-running the course. A. C. then teamed with Roeseler; they took second overall.

For the first time in the history of the Mint 400, motorcycles and cars ran on separate courses. For the first time in the history of the Mint 400, a car won the overall. Coincidence?

MINT 400

make the bike course rough, the car course fast. Compare the times at the end and the bikes will lose. Even though the courses were different, it'll sound good to the press and the fans.

Of course, even biker opinions varied on the subject. Larry Roeseler said after the race, "It was great. That's how a course should be — really tough. That way some berserk guy can't come out, hold it wide



Gene Cannady turned in one of the most impressive rides of the day. Starting at number 41 (one rider every 15 seconds), he came into the first check 32 miles out sixth overall physically and first overall by time. That means he passed 35 of the best desert riders in the world in under an hour.

open and hope to win."

Others predicted that no 125 would even finish. This wasn't too far from the case. Only two teams went the full 400 miles.

Other riders, not the absolute best, but still rated Expert in district competition, had different feelings. "I felt like a squid pre-running the course. It's rougher than a district Hare and Hound and four times as long." "We didn't want to switch every 50 miles, but we had to. No way can I race over that course for 100 miles at a time." These



Jack Johnson about 30 miles from winning the Mint 400. Jack also had pre-race problems with a partner, but no matter. He won overall for the second year in a row.



Al Baker, one of the favorites in this race, attempted to follow his Baja 1000 win with a victory in the Mint. Problems, both physical and mechanical, slowed his effort and prevented a to-the-wire race.

comments from the average Expert, that is, those who are supposed to make up the bulk of the competitors.

But no one complained as the race drew nearer. "Sure it's rough but I'm in shape." So 97 bikes lined up, the first one taking off at 7:30, Sunday, April 25. Every 15 seconds another would go. With a tight course, almost everyone was expecting the first 50 miles to resemble a mass start desert event. It did. Dust so thick it took all your concentration to pass. Just a couple of miles out, in the part of the course that was not pre-ridden by everyone because it had not been laid out, almost 20 riders lost the course. Minor havoc. Ride back or cut across country? Most rode back.

THE RACE

Thirty-two miles out, the first alternate gas check, and Jones/Binckley are physically in the lead. Four more low numbers come through, those who started first by time. Then Number 41, Gene Cannady, comes through sixth overall. He started nine minutes behind Number 5 and is seconds behind him now. Unbelievable. Baker takes over the Honda for a 50-mile stretch. Knapp, Roeseler and Tibblin all come into the pits seconds apart. Already the favorites have found each other and are dicing.

Cark Cranke was one of the lost ones, but is now very much on course, trying to make up time. Another of the 125cc favorites, Dick Miller and Mike Bell, are chasing the Cranke and Jensen team. Bell takes



Rolf Tibblin rides to his third Mint 400 win. He is the only man to have three overall wins: '72 with Bob Grossi, '73 with Mitch Mayes.



Opposite: Jack Johnson shows his Husqvarna's pucker power in the Mint 400.

over, but toward the end of the first loop bends the swingarm beyond repair.

Down the highway (the course organizers did a fine job for the spectators, the third check is a mile from the first check by the skinny part of the loop), the leaders are already coming back. Jones/Binckley are still leading physically and Jack Johnson has moved into second. By time it still looks like Baker has the lead, as he comes into this pit just behind A. C. Bakken. Quick gas and a change of riders and the start/finish pit is the next stop, 30 miles away.

Watching the riders from the freeway is amazing. Johnson is just off the highway on a twisty fireroad. We're doing 60 and barely keeping up. He passes under the highway and cuts across the valley, leaving us to watch only his dust. We stop at the last alternate check before the start/finish pit and find out that 30 riders have already dropped out, less than 80 miles of racing. Yeah, this is a rough one.

Less than 200 miles into the race



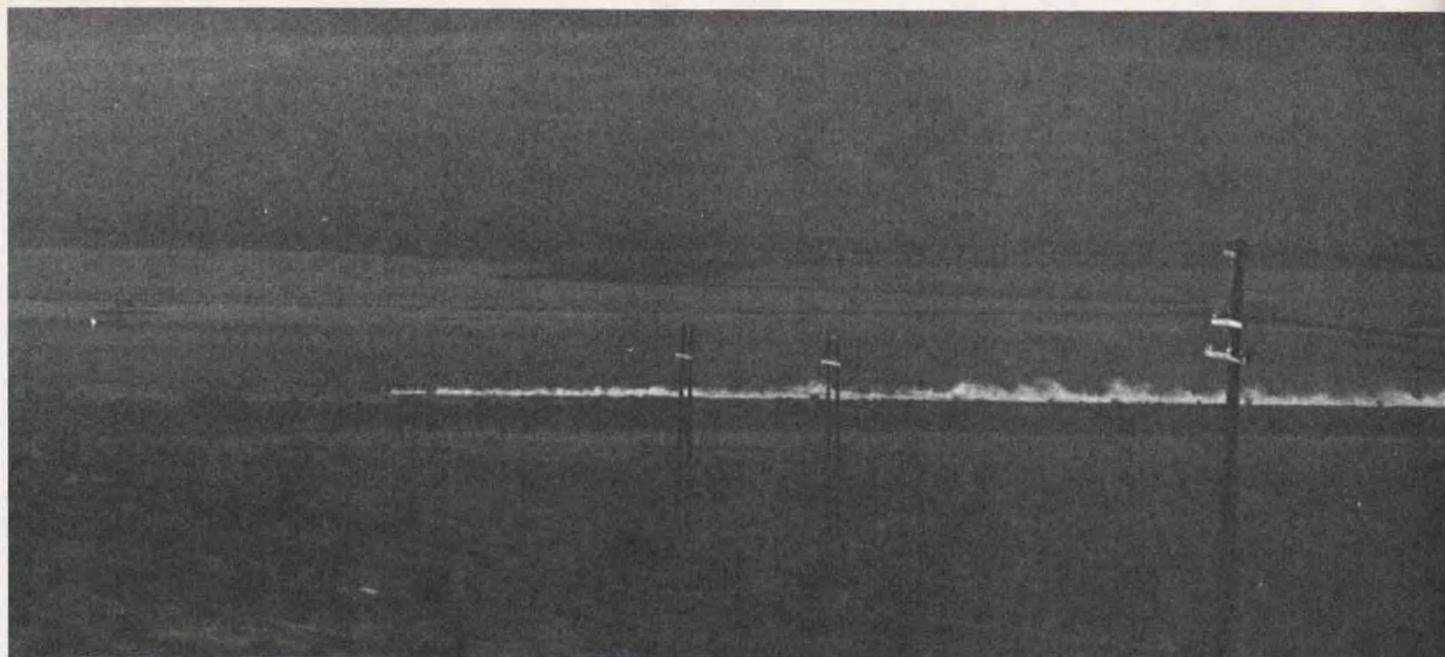
and there are still 29 riders within an hour (physically) of the leader, which is now Tibblin/Johnson. Twenty-nine riders who are good for at least 200 miles of absolute-all-out racing.

A few more hours go by. In terms of the race, one loop, two riders, 50 miles each.

Three hundred miles into the race. It's a three-way race for first now. Tibblin/Johnson are in the lead both physically and by time. Five minutes physically, and five minutes, 45 seconds on time. Roeseler and Bakken are next. But

Larry Roeseler at 7:35 Sunday morning, 15 seconds before his start. Roeseler was one of the few who liked the course: "It had to be rough so the best rider would win." Most people didn't see it that way.





Much of the course paralleled the freeway. Here we watched Jack Johnson across the valley, about 15 miles from the finish. Just a 70-mile-an-hour streak of dust in the sunset.



Pit action must be quick but thorough. Here, Gene Cannady gives the bike to Baker, while Bill Bell gasses it and Mike Bell adjusts and lubes the chain.



Al Baker was in some pain on the fourth loop.

because Baker and Cannady are only two minutes behind Roeseler and Bakken, they are, by time, in second — though physically in third. Another 100 miles to go, and what amounts to seconds between the three leaders. A flat tire, a crash, a fouled plug, will change everything.

Three hundred miles and the endurance of the leaders is showing. Fourth place doesn't come by until 29 minutes after Tibblin. It's Art Knapp and Bill Putman. First Senior, over 38 years old.

Fourth loop, close to 350 miles into the race. Four-thirty-three in the afternoon. Tibblin comes by. Thirteen miles later Roeseler pulls in. At this stage, 13 minutes is almost too much to make up, especially

considering the way both Tibblin and Johnson have been riding. It may just be a battle for second place.

Waiting in the pits, word comes in that Cannady has been stopped in a sandwash. Forty-one minutes later Gene comes in. "Threw a chain. Had some problems fixing it."

That isn't the only problem for the Honda team. Baker has cramps. His insides feel like they are on fire, as though they are going to drop out. Gene decides that if Al will ride the next 50 miles, he will take the last 30 miles to the finish. Baker can hardly stand, but he gets on the bike anyway. Yeah, this is a rough one.

Toward the finish Johnson's dust can be seen across the valley. The sun is already going down. We cut



Art Knapp started racing at 39 and a few years later earned a District 37 Number One plate. For the Mint he entered the Senior (over 38) class and finished fifth overall, first Senior.



around the last mountain. Johnson follows the course through it. Bakken's dust can be seen several miles back. No problem now, unless it's the bike.

Standing at the finish line, Rolf Tibblin patiently waits. He is wrapped in bandages. "How did that happen?" Long uphill fireroad, very fast, very silty, hidden rock, over the bars sixth gear. Lost a few minutes but not the lead.

Johnson appears at the end of the long pavement straightaway and tucks in for the finish. Jack Johnson and Rolf Tibblin, First Overall. Second in a row for Jack, third time for Rolf.

Nine minutes, plus some seconds, later comes A. C. Bakken. Larry Roeseler has been waiting for his partner. They shake hands,

congratulate each other.

And the long wait for the rest of the finishers. Thirty-three minutes later Cannady finishes. An hour and 15 minutes behind the overall winner, fourth place Jones/Binckley comes in. Endurance tells.

Only 20 bikes finish all four loops. Five others finish with three loops. Tibblin has already been taken to the hospital for X-rays. We find out later that Baker has a ruptured bladder. He rode his last 50-mile stretch standing up.

And first overall split \$2700 plus some contingencies. Second overall, \$1700 plus some contingencies. Yes, the \$100,000 Mint 400 *could be* the best off-road race in the world. But as it stands now, it's just an excellent example of how to win without winning.

An excited, almost hysterical crowd of thousands had to be forcibly restrained from tearing off Johnson's clothes as he took the checker, proving that the Mint 400 is what racing glamor is all about.

RESULTS

Pos.	No.	Names	Bike	Time	Pos. in class
1	24	Johnson/ Tibblin	HUS	10:59:57	1 Open
2	21	Roeseler/ Bakken	HUS	11:09:21	2 Open
3	41	Cannady/ Baker	HON	11:42:42	3 Open
4	5	Jones/ Binckley	YAM	12:15:02	4 Open
5	15	Putman/ Knapp	HUS	12:41:90	1 Sen
6	48	Bonty/ Kyger	YAM	12:51:69	1:250
7	28	Switzer/ Knudsen	YAM	13:02:72	2:250
8	59	Durham/ Ahern	PEN	13:18:82	3:250
9	43	Kirker/ Harden	HUS	13:20:29	4:250
10	1	Anglin/ Arbogast	HUS	13:24:48	5:250
11	23	Cranke/ Jensen	PEN	13:30:91	1:175
12	30	Lee/ Subirth	YAM	13:33:27	6:250
13	73	Vick/ Usery	HUS	14:16:19	2 Sen
14	88	Gaetz/ Reider	YAM	14:52:02	3 Sen
15	27	Loomis/ Guio	HUS	14:53:25	4 Sen
16	86	Ewing/ Sloan	YAM	14:53:56	5 Sen
17	91	Nickell/ Stevens	HUS	14:57:23	7:250
18	34	Conrad/ Thomas	YAM	14:59:86	5 Open
19	71	Gaskill/ Bolton	C-A	15:35:50	2:175
20	44	Coulter/ Hatfield	PEN	15:41:65	8:250
(the last five finishers completed only three of the four loops)					
21	10	McCall/ Hansen	YAM	10:27:87	6:500
22	60	Fuentes/ Bennett	HUS	10:43:01	7 Open
23	49	Welch/ Davis	C-A	11:53:49	3:175
24	70	Mahoney/ Mahoney	PUC	13:13:37	4:175
25	8	Maxwell/ Kiohr	PEN	15:20:92	5:175