

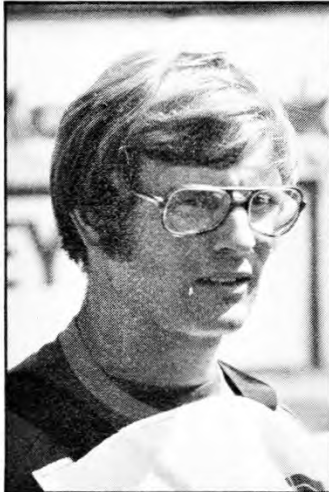
**CZECH
ODYSSEY**

52 ISDT
IND

Tom Penton, The Top American

Why He Did Well And Why The Others Didn't.

By Brad Zimmerman



PHOTOGRAPHY: BRAD ZIMMERMAN

The number of Gold Medals awarded at the ISDT each year is in direct proportion to the toughness of the event. For instance, the Golds were numerous in Austria last year, and easy to earn compared to many other years. The exact opposite was true in Czechoslovakia. In order to get a Gold Medal, you had to have experience, luck and a considerable amount of preplanning. There were only two Gold Medals awarded to the 33 American entries this year as opposed to 29 received in Austria. Dick Burselson, who at one time dropped to Silver due to being late at a few time checks, regained his Gold by going fast in the final motocross test on Day 6. Tom Penton earned the other Gold on a 250 Penton and was never late to any checkpoint. He also scored the highest among Americans in what's been labeled by many of the riders as the toughest ISDT in history.

We talked with Tom the weekend after Czecho to learn his feelings on the event. According to him, a lot of the results are firmed-up long before anyone boards the plane for Europe.

"For Six Days you've got to be in good shape," he explained. "Before the event, I went up to Maine for about two months and did a lot of running, bicycling and mountain climbing to get into shape. My mental outlook was also good for the ISDT. Towards the summer I got a little burned-out on riding motorcycles, which is something that happens to a lot of us. Due to that time

spent in Maine without a bike, I was really pumped to get back and go riding. That made a big difference."

If you read the ISDT article in this issue, you already know that Day 5, the Rain Day, eliminated a lot of riders. In retrospect, Tom analyzed Day 5 for us and explained why many riders didn't finish, or holed out.

"First of all to stay on time during Day 5 you had to avoid physically pushing your bike at all. You didn't have time to waste falling down a lot and there was basically zero time to do any maintenance work and still keep up the fast trail pace. When I finished Day 5 my chain had stretched so far that I thought it would be dragging on the ground at any minute. Mentally, I was prepared for the rain. I knew the terrain, a type of clay soil that you find in parts of Ohio and in sections of New England. With the course about 90 percent trail, and the fact that the terrain changes drastically when it's wet, I knew before the start in the morning that Day 5 would be 'the day.' It had a tight schedule and lots of difficult sections.

"A problem that stopped a lot of guys was a bottleneck that developed on one of the uphill. When I got there before the big-bore machines, I went right up the hill. As a matter of fact, I don't remember the exact location of this killer hill that everyone was talking about. Apparently, after I got through, the combination of more rain, ruts and the bottleneck of riders who couldn't

make it over the top took a big toll.

"Another thing that probably was an important factor in my getting a Gold rather than a Silver is that I never hesitate to let air out of my tires. I don't believe the stories that less air pressure leads to a greater chance of a flat tire. In the last four years of riding I haven't run more than 10 pounds of air in my tires. At Czecho when it got wet, I went down in pressure to about 7½ pounds in the front and 6½ pounds in the rear. I also had a new rear tire on the back at the start of the day, and the front tire was only a day old.

"The American riders also weren't prepared for the cold of Day 5. All week the ride had been warm. Most of us figured that if it rained, it would be a warm rain. It didn't turn out that way, and it caught most of us by surprise. When it's cold, the body doesn't function as quickly, responses are slowed and basically a rider feels sluggish and not quite ready to perform. I had put on a nylon windbreaker and gloves, but it wasn't enough to keep me comfortable and riding efficiently.

"As far as the motorcycle goes, Day 5 was very destructive. The clay mud was bad, and then you encountered a rocky granite and sand combination that ruined a lot of chains and got into your airbox if it wasn't sealed exactly right. In order for you to stay on time during Day 5, everything had to click perfectly. The smallest problem would immediately

continued on page 79

the Czech organizers were still playing mind games with riders just as they had done all week long. The course broke down statistically to 68 miles on a "B" schedule, tight sections with 17 route and time checks. Due to both mental and physical fatigue a lot of competitors dropped points. Only 101 riders started Day Six, the survivors from Friday's massacre. As if he didn't have enough troubles breaking a foot the day before in the mud, Carl Cranke got off again and this time cracked a shoulder. Kevon LaVoie lost 10 minutes, Bob Popiel dropped 17 minutes, while Billy Uhl and Mike Rosso each fell 21 minutes off the pace. For Dick Burleson the tension was enormous before that final day's start. By dropping 10 minutes on Day Five he had fallen to Silver status. His only chance of regaining a Gold rested in the final motocross test in which he had to finish within 50 seconds of the class leader.

In that midday motocross test riders were paired in their engine class groups, instead of riding individually as they had all week. The most impressive U.S. ride was put on by Tom Penton who led the 250 field for the initial two laps, and finished, in third position pulling wheelies all during the last lap. Penton's highest-placing American finale not only pumped the American spectators but drew applause from enthusiasts of every country.

Billy Uhl also won a lot of admiration by merely riding the final special test. He had suffered all week from severe tendonitis in his hands and wrists so painful that he had trouble holding a glass or fork at dinner. In the final motocross test he rode not because he had to—the Bronze was automatic—but because "When I got there the Germans who had taken care of us all week had their cameras out. They wanted a picture of me riding so I went around for two laps. Then I couldn't hold onto the handlebars any longer and had to stop." He finished the Six Days on a Bronze, probably the hardest-earned medal of the entire American team.

When it came time for the open class Burleson was quietly concentrating on that Gold. The start was flagged, he came through the first turn in mid-pack but within sight of class leader Jiri Stodulka on a Jawa. When the checkered fell 30 minutes later, Burleson had squeaked his way back to a Gold by finishing 48.54 seconds behind Stodulka, barely more than a second's margin above a Silver.

In the final tally the Czechs won the Trophy Team competition free and clear leading from start to finish

and always running the show. Strange, however, was the East German situation. Going into Day Six they led the Czechs by 1700 points, finally breaking into the lead of the Silver Vase standings. But on that final day the East German team suspiciously amassed 1740 route points, while the Czech Vase riders cleaned the day. In the end the Czechs had won both the Vase and the Trophy competition. In the U.S. Manufacturer's competition the Cycle East/Husky team, even with the retirement of Greg Davis, had bested the Penton A team which lost Frank Gallo.

In the tally of individual scores both Tom Penton (highest-placing American—fifth in the 250 class) and Dick Burleson had earned Gold Medals. Silver Medals were awarded to Jack Penton, Gary Younkings, Rod Bush, Carl Cranke and Mike Rosso. Completing the 52nd ISDT with a Bronze were Ted Leimbach, Kevin LaVoie, Mark Deyo, Bob Popiel and Billy Uhl. The final tally: 37 American starters, 12 finishers. Starting numbers which ranged from 1 all the way down to 369 had dwindled to a mere 99 finishers on Day Six.

Before the start of the ISDT in a meeting for all the U.S. riders Al Eames had explained what he felt would happen. "The Czechs are going to play games with you, both physically with tough tight trails and mentally due to fast schedules and numerous checkpoints. At times you'll think you're late, gas it, crash and hurt yourself, then slow down and lose your Gold. That's exactly what they're counting on. Be prepared for some psyching because the Czechs are going to play with your brain. This Trial will probably end up being half mental and half physical. None of it means a thing unless you finish the sixth day."

Only the best riders made it that far. Worthy of special mention is Erwin Schmider on his 125 Zundapp who was the lowest scoring, highest placing individual in the ISDT. Edward Hau also on a 125 Zundapp would have taken the overall win but a rule infraction on Day Two garnered him enough points to knock him out of top contention.

Going home on the plane Al Eames summed up the U.S. results with "anyone who won a medal this year really worked for it, deserves all the credit he gets and should be extremely proud. There was nothing easy about Czecho, it was possibly the most difficult event ever. A guy who finished the ISDT this year can consider himself a bona fide Six Day rider who knows the meaning of punishment, fatigue, mental exhaustion and success." **M**

PENTON

continued from page 56

drop you off trail pace into Silver."

We also talked to Tom about the special test scores he produced, and apparently, he takes a different approach than most riders when attacking the test sections.

"Those portions are very safe now. Most of them are grass tracks and there isn't that constant possibility of getting seriously hurt if you make a mistake. It's hard to do an endo in an ISDT special test. Generally when you fall, it's a slide-out in a corner. To get a good special test score you've got to push yourself hard but not to the point where you're sliding-out in corners or making big mistakes that take up time. A lot of guys practice for the ISDT special test by going out and riding a lot of motocross. This might work for some riders, but they've got to remember that the Six Days special tests are on grass tracks and it's totally different. There are no berms, no bulldozer-made whoop-dee-dooos, and there isn't much practice before you're timed.

So what comprises a good Six Days rider? In Tom's opinion, the motocrosser still has an advantage.

"I feel that a hotshoe in motocross who has the ability to handle and understand his motorcycle would make a good Six Days rider. You've got to learn how to feel out the bike, keep it together, know how it works and why. There are so many guys who can go fast, but even in motocross manage to break their motorcycle. They have to learn that quite often when a rear wheel, for instance, breaks, it's possible that it wasn't the wheel's fault, but the rider's for not treating the wheel properly when riding. The rider should take most of the punishment of the trail if he expects his machine to last. You must shift properly each and every time, save the engine and suspension, work with the motorcycle.

"Six Days is probably one of the neatest forms of motorcycle racing. I was especially impressed with the organization of the event in Czechoslovakia. It was very well run because the organizers anticipated almost all the problems that could have arisen, and eliminated them beforehand. The rider problems often stemmed from a lack of physical conditioning, knowledge of the motorcycle, and as always, bad racing luck. But like you hear every year coming home on the airplane, 'there's always next year.' In 1978 it's going to be in Sweden, very unlike Czecho in terrain, food and atmosphere, and once again, it will be an entirely new ball game. I've already begun my planning." **M**