

A Classic Motocross Tale From The Early Years - For Racers Of A Certain Age

I very first remember riding what must have been a Taco Minibike at the Pomona Fair right about the time I learned to ride a two wheeler. They would let a few of us go in circles at the same time, all I remember is lapping everybody and completely loving it! I begged to do it another time and had to be carried away in tears because I either wanted to keep doing it or really I think I just wanted to start my factory racing career right there and leave with one. I can still picture the scene vividly looking at the bikes disappear over my dads shoulder as he whisked me away and scolded me for being a spoiled brat. I actually had my first goal. Obtain a motorcycle!

My next motorized experience came in the North Woods of WI while on a family vacation we came upon a little ATC70 rental place. This time we were with my Mom and I was able to get my fill. My bro couldn't even turn the things cause he didn't have the lean figured out. They handled just like my Gma 3 wheel bicycle and I had the things wired and was doing donuts and sliding all the corners in no time until the operators had to tell me to settle down! Still, even then I knew I was riding a couch, I needed a motorcycle!

I started jumping my Ross 3 Speed bicycle over a piece of plywood laid over a parking curb behind the Safeway in Brentwood, CA, We made a little oval track and really dug the air-time. I was in 3rd grade and it was 1970.....I remember it like it was yesterday because that was the day I discovered what I call Adrenaline Sports. It was only a couple of weeks later that I discovered the name of my new passion, it was called Motocross and Popular Cycling Magazine and Modern Cycle and then finally the original premiere of On Any Sunday would tell me all about it.

I progressed to modifying my Schwinn StingRay frame with custom state of the art frame mods and Heavy Duty Ashtabula Cranks and Goose Necks. Webco Frames, Redline Forks, MotoMags. It took 3 or 4 years of constant nagging to finally get a Honda MR50, we really should have got the XR75 but it was too big for my bro, and a little intimidating to me as well, since I had never actually ridden a motorcycle; other than the one time I crashed a rich neighborhood kids CT70 almost completely through his wooden fence into the pool next door after I lied and told him I knew how to ride.

We'd keep the inaugural year MR50 at my dads house in Glendora and we'd ride laps around the house or get him to take us to Claude Osteen's MC park, or he'd drop me off at the local Honda Dealer in Glendora - George Dye Honda that had a little track behind it, I remember getting arm pump from doing laps for the first time. Around that time I watched Marty Tripes win the very first Superbowl of Motocross, then I saw him do it again, then I saw Jaroslav Falta do it. The MX bug was really starting to take hold, and I really wanted an XR75!

When my mom told me we were moving to Orange County I was really bummed about leaving all my BMX and Skateboard friends (I lived a few miles from DogTown and was starting to skate pools and schools in West LA with what would become the pioneers of the sport - but that's a whole nother story) Well, when my mom told me that Saddleback Park was going to be close to our new house, I perked up a bit. When she showed me a letter a few days later from the

owner of Saddleback; Vic Wilson (I think) responding to her letter offering to personally pick me up to go ride at Saddleback, I started packing, and scheming how I could get an XR75!!

It took me all of about 3 weeks to meet some kid in my new neighborhood who had one for sale, the only problem was that it was in pieces, which worked to my advantage because I sold the idea to my mom that it would be a good summer project. She took one look at the crates of parts and figured it would be a good way to keep me out of trouble for a while, what she didn't know was the kid had an older brother that could put that sucker back together in a night and show me how to do it at the same time. Not only that they had raced before and had some connections with some of the faster riders and hop up shops of the day ie Steve Shippy, Jeff Ward and J.W.R.P., Harry's Cycle Sales.

Fast forward through all the cool tracks we found/made within riding distance of our house smack in the middle of Newport, and it didn't take long before I needed to race. My first race was at Escape Country we raced on the "Marty Smith" track (before they had the hydraulic starting gate) I don't remember what place I got but I remember my custom plastic gas tank was falling off and we had to wire it on for the 2nd and 3rd moto.....yeah 3rd moto. I also remembered I trophied and that I felt that I could of smoked those guys if I had a more competitive bike...I'd pass half the pack when they'd let off for the corners only to be passed back in the next straight, dang, now I needed a 2 stroke!!

My next bike was a 100cc sleeved down CR125 I got from Harry's Cycle Sales in Orange, CA ported, high comp. head, CH down pipe with Boge Shocks. The thing was the bomb, only thing was that it WAS a bomb, buzz bomb (taught me how to ride a 2 stroke though, that's for sure). 1978 and the new YZ100E was the bike to have. I got one and got a Terry Cable kit for my forks and sent my shock to White Bros. to have a Luft Reservoir put on the thing, that and Boysen Reeds and I was good to go for both the stock and modified class! For the first time I was on a level playing field with my competitors - well at least in the stock class.

About my 4th or 5th race we showed up at Escape Country for a regular weekend race and it happens to be the 1978 NMA World Mini Grand Prix, I think I got something like 5th and 6th or maybe 7th and 8th (have to go look at the trophies if I could ever find them) in stock and modified respectively on my stocker, there was some FAST competition and everyone seemed to be on a race team or have a sponsor. Jeff Ward smoked everybody on a highly modified XR75 that year (it was his last mini race).

My first "race series" wasn't much later, it was the Western Region Qualifiers for the NMA Grand Nat. Championship in Ponca City, OK. Something like 7 races all over CA. and I think they took the top 5 or whatever from each class. I remember when I looked at the sign up sheet at the first race I saw all the same guys I had just gotten smoked by at the World Minis and thought oh shit!! Well they didn't smoke me so bad this time, in fact I ended up with the overall in both stock and modified against some Harrys Cycle Sales riders, I remember thinking that I had a shot at the overall in my region if I stayed consistent. Which is exactly what I did and I ended up qualifying first in points in both the stock and modified class on my stock bike.

Little did I know that the NMA Western Region was the fastest region in the country and I was on my way and didn't even know it! Well a race or so earlier it became apparent to my mom that she needed to find a way to get me to Ponca City OK and figure out how to navigate this whole mini racer parent thing. lol Yeah right, I ran the "race team" by myself at 14-15 yo. To this day I have never had to have someone else work on my bike or take it to a shop other than the one time my friends older bro put together my first XR75 while I watched. I remember having Jeff Wards dad Jack at J.W.R.P. and Harry from Harrys Cycle Sales walk me through my first piston and valve job over the phone.

Luckily for me my single mom was pretty hot back then and we didn't seem to have a problem getting advice or help getting my bike to OK. It sure didn't hurt that she became good friends with Mouse McCoys mom Pat and Louie Franco's dad Vito as well as the NMA promoters Jack Denis and Ron Hen(d)rickson? I remember Mouse McCoys dad, Mike watching me change a knobby in our Motel 6 and explaining how it would go easier if I understood the drop center - Not doing it for me but explaining it to me. I just wish he noticed I was spooning a 5.10 onto my 100!! I didn't figure out until weeks later why I felt so damn underpowered all weekend with the same guys I usually felt equal too!

I had some unreal mentors and connections right off the bat, heck Ed S. from Factory Yam was even chasing after my mom; unfortunately I was just a tad off in the speed dept. I followed a classic route On Any Sunday, Superbowl of MX, Every So Cal SX and Nat., All Carlsbad USGPs from 1976 on. Taco Minibike, MR50 Elsinore, XR75, CR100 Elsinore, YZ100E.....more to follow - TBC