

Motocross racing

Dallas youth involved in up-and-coming sport

By JANE RENN
Staff Writer

When you think of motocross, you may envision helmeted young men on dirt bikes jumping over little hills. What you won't know, unless involved in motocross, is that hours of practice

and intense concentration are behind the two 15-minute heats comprising a motocross race.

A Dallas teenager, who recently won second place at a Berwick Super Cross track, spoke about his three-year racing career.

"First, I got a bike just to play around on, just to ride

around the back fields," said Jamie Opalicki, 18. "And then people started saying, 'Are you gonna race, are you gonna race?' So we went and saw a few (races), and then I thought I liked it."

Opalicki, progressed from riding back fields at age 12 to racing at 15. Now, he has a

sponsor who pays his entry fees at races and the upkeep on his racing bike.

He races nearly every weekend, traveling to Englishtown, N.J. Hanover, Pa.; Binghamton, N.Y.; or to Evansville, Berwick.

The Clifford and Evansville tracks are the closest ones to

this area, Opalicki said. Although those two tracks are nearby when compared to a five-hour drive to New Jersey, they're not exactly around the corner.

"It costs a lot of money to sponsor a track," said Opalicki. "I don't think anyone around here really wants to invest the

time and the money to do it." It also costs a lot of money to participate.

Riders wear a helmet (about \$100); chest protector (price varies, according to style and amount of protection); thick, partially steel-plated knee-high boots (about \$150); and special "leathers" with padded hips and knees to absorb falls and the heat of the engine. They may also wear a kidney belt to protect the lower back.

Add to that a few thousand dollars for the motorcycle and a small trailer to help transport it from track to track.

"That's why a sponsor is so important, because everything costs so much," Opalicki said.

Expense and lack of a local track don't stop area motocross riders, however.

"When it comes to motocross, Dallas has a lot of people who are really good motocross racers," Opalicki explained. "If you went to a motocross race, you'd probably hear Dallas over the loudspeakers when the winners and early finishers are announced. In fact, that goes for the whole Wyoming Valley."

But the glories of race day are only a small part of the sport.

Opalicki practices "whenever I get the free time," and rides daily until dark after his shift at a local Acme.

Roaring around a dirt track five times with 39 other bikers, skidding around corners, with rocks and dirt flying (the spray is called "roost"), doing double or triple jumps sometimes in pouring rain does require endurance and skill in maneuvering the light-weight bikes.

In fact, Opalicki, likened the sport's falls to jumping off a pick-up truck going down the road at 40 miles per hour.

Does he fall a lot?

"Not a lot anymore," he said.

(See MOTO, page 14)

Motocross riders are different breed

Page through a few of the colorful motocross magazines available in the area and you'll see action shots of mud-splattered riders flying high off the ground, close-ups of bike parts and words like "rad" (radical, which Jamie Opalicki, of Dallas, used to describe the smaller bikes, the 125s, as opposed to 250s or 500s). You'll also read articles on new bikes coming out, and, you'll see plenty of eye-catching advertisements of everything from gloves and goggles to pistons and clutch plates.

You'll also see pretty girls sporting the racing outfits and standing next to some macho equipment.

That seems to be the greatest portion of female coverage as far as motocross goes. You probably would never even see a book entitled "Motocross Wives," since most of the pros seem to be too young and too dedicated to be married. (A 29-year old was described as an old-timer.)

Along with all that, readers get race results and articles on "How to Master Double Jumps" and such. There are also fan magazine-type stories asking prominent riders about important facts such as: hobbies

(golfing, wind surfing and jet skiing seem to be popular); favorite food (Wendy's chicken sandwich, said one 20-year old); and favorite singer or group, as well as competition records and favorite tracks. Pets of the stars included mostly cats and dogs with a rabbit or snake here and there.

There were also pictures of the stars' homes — big and beautiful and mostly in California. Gives riders something to aspire to, right?

One star rider gave advice on how to leave the starting gate. "Feather the clutch lever to control traction and front wheel height."

You can get tips on how to keep mud and water from dripping through the gap between helmet and visor, keeping water out of the exhaust pipe when washing your bike (put a balloon over it), and on using old window screen to assist radiator guards in keeping mud out of radiators.

Looking into these motocross magazines, which offer a mixture of hard consumer information and fan-mag fluff, you can glimpse a subculture which many of us never dream existed.

— JANE RENN



'Thumbs up'

Jamie Opalicki, of Dallas, makes motocross racing look easy as he displays the "thumbs up" sign while performing a rather daring jump. Opalicki, who has been racing for three years now, participates in a motocross race almost every weekend during the summer months.

Dallas Post/Jane Renn

Weather favors hunters on first day

Favorable weather conditions and a good population of buck were two reasons why the first day of antler deer (buck) season was such a huge success.

Lee Harshbarger, federal aid supervisor for the Northeast Region of the Pennsylvania Game Commission, says game protector estimates indicate 980 buck were killed on the first day

of the two-week season in Luzerne County alone, and 6,295 were accounted for in the 13-county region serviced by the Dallas Game Commission.

"We estimate there were about one million deer throughout Pennsylvania and that is higher than in years past," Harshbarger said. "The last several winters have been rela-

tively mild and there were good feeding conditions for the deer. Some years we do lose carryover deer because of the harsh weather."

Harshbarger also said that ideal hunting conditions and the number of hunters out were contributing factors for the increase in bucks killed so far this year.

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