

There is something to be said for an enduro that has been won on a Harley. Particularly when this unlikely circumstance has occurred twice. But then the Corduroy enduro is not your average off-road excursion.

For 32 years motorcyclists have risen to the challenge of this two-day, cross-country event aboard all manner of machines. The victory list includes such diverse brands as Ariel, NSU, BMW, Hodaka, KTM and Maico. In fact it has been won more often on a Penton than on any other motorcycle, the last of seven times in '77.

But perhaps the biggest surprise lies not in which bike has won, but which has not. Only once in 32 years has any member of the all-conquering Japanese big four laid claim to victory when, in '81, James Stevens took home the trophy on a Yamaha IT175. Honda, Kawasaki and Suzuki remain winless. And Husqvarna, the company that built its name upon enduro successes, is also noticeably absent from the victory list. At least it was until this year. But this was not the only first for 1985.

Tradition has a lot to do with this event. The British Empire Motor Club (Est. 1928) has organized and run the 'Cord' from the beginning. Some of those involved in the early years, perhaps now a little grey on the top and bulging in the middle, were still there helping in 1985. Competitors keep returning, past victors and entry list fillers alike.

Bill Sharpless, who captured his first of three wins in 1955, was on hand representing the CMA as referee, an unenviable task to be sure. Others, like Jeff Smith, '74's big winner, are still riding, only now in the veterans class.

About 10 per cent of the field signed up to compete for the veterans trophy. No doubt at least another 10 per cent could have qualified, if they had chosen to contest this class. This is not to say

MUD IN YOUR EYE AT THE CORD

By Max Burns



The infamous Cord bogs proved unnavigable in some sections.

that the enduro crowd is a pack of misplaced pensioners, but the average age is definitely higher than the youthful lot in motocross or road racing.

And the atmosphere is not as highly charged. The adrenaline-pumping tension of a moto or a peg-scraping sprint race is missing. An enduro is a long-term commitment, the length of the ride measured in hours, sometimes days. A blown

start is not the end of the race.

On the surface it appears simple: just follow the arrows through the woods and stay on time. But life is never that easy. The course, conditions and location of checkpoints are unknown. And when a bike sinks deep into the fifth mud hole in a row, and the engine dies, the rider must still think timing — to the second, as penalty points are assessed for being too slow and for being too fast. Us-

ually only the top riders have to worry about being too fast. Fall an hour or more behind, though, and you are no longer counted as finishing.

This year conditions were particularly grim in Haliburton, in the heart of Ontario's cottage country. About 20 British Empire Motor Club members spent nearly 10 weekends to lay out a course that high water levels and heavy rains turned into an oozing mud bath. One killer crossing at a beaver dam swallowed scores of riders on Saturday's outing. Gord Eastman's KTM mysteriously welded itself to the bottom of the swamp, leaving only its front wheel poking out above the waterline. Attempts to extricate his \$4,000 boat anchor on Saturday proved hopeless; the cables and come-along up-rooting trees but not the bike. The rescue operation was postponed when the frame showed signs of bending as darkness approached.

Competitors were walking out from some mud holes quicker than some who rode.

Of the 190 brave souls who started on Saturday, only 99 showed up for Sunday morning's repeat of the abuse. Some of the retirees strolled and limped about in a daze, occasionally uttering vague mumbles of disbelief.

"I've never been that far under water."

Some were forced to retire when they floundered or simply lost more than an hour's time. Others just gave up.

"How come you quit?"

"I wasn't having any fun at all."

Saturday was work. Yet somehow, Brian Mull managed to finish the day with only a one-minute penalty point at one checkpoint. At six other checks he was dead nuts on time. Two other riders, Frank Sutton and Blair Sharpless (referee Bill's son and overall winner in '83 and '84), scored only two penalty points each.

Fortunately for the non-miracle workers in the crowd, Sunday wasn't as tough.

CYCLESport

This was mostly a result of '85's biggest break with tradition. For the first time in the history of the Corduroy, the event was cut short. The judges who pre-rode the course in the morning decided that the sections that were to be repeated over Saturday's slime were impassable. About half of Sunday's ride was scrubbed.

This scrubbing didn't make it any cleaner, though. Grey skies and scattered showers kept the mud flowing.

Nor was it easy. A screw-up in timing had competitors screaming down public roads at near 160 km/h to make up for 10 minutes lost in the shuffle. Think timing.

The OPP, complete with shiny oxfords and shotguns, were apparently called in to rescue a lone motorcyclist who had been chased up a tree by an irate bear. The victim was unavailable for comment at press time, however.

And there was Harold's Horror, a mud bog of no small proportions waiting to entertain both riders and the sprinkle of spectators who hiked the mile or so back into the bush to witness the spectacle and wade in the muck.

Spectators at the Cord are a decided scarcity. An enduro does not cater to audiences. The nature of the event makes it very difficult for non-participants to get to good viewing points, and it is impossible to tell who is winning at any given time. In fact, even the combined forces of the CMA, the British Empire Motor Club and the ubiquitous computer weren't enough to announce with any certainty who ended up in what position some three hours after the finish.

Enduros are for the entrants. They are a test of physical stamina, rider skill, mental dexterity and one's current relationship with Lady Luck. Most of the time the rider rides alone. He is concerned with his time only. He cannot dial in an extra bit of throttle to beat a close competitor, assuming he knew who that someone was. He can only ride and think time. Constantly faced with new terrain and new



Checkpoints allowed a moment's respite from the struggle.



Nearly half of the riders dropped out after day one.

obstacles, his mind must remain on the clock, keeping track of every second. Hour after hour. Mud hole after mud hole. It is bloody tiring.

Still, many find time to smile and say hello as they blat past in the woods. The sight of a fellow earthling in the middle of Ontario nowhere is probably reassuring.

At the start/finish line, located in the driveway of the Chateau Woodland on Lake

brief pause at a river crossing to restart his waterlogged Can-Am washed out his chances of a third-straight victory, amused the crowd by doing doughnuts on a Suzuki JR50.

Word from the British Empire Motor Club eventually leaked out.

"Some American seems to have won this year."

That's Brian Mull on his Husky 250, finishing with a mere 6.0452 in penalty points. Fashionably late. He got trophies for first overall and first in expert middleweight. Second overall, first in the masters class and first Canadian was Craig Kennedy of St. Thomas, Ont., riding a Husky 400. Third overall and second in masters was Frank Sutton on a Husky 250, and fourth place and first in expert heavyweight was Rod Michalko on a 500 KTM, finishing a scant one second in total points ahead of his brother Steven, who placed fifth overall and first in senior mediumweight on his Husky 250. Mike Shinnors of the U.S. picked up the veterans trophy.

Paul Andratiss ended up in sixth place on his Husky 400, which, when combined with a first-place finish in the other CMA national enduro, the Beagle Bash earlier this year, gave him the enduro championship plaque for '85.

There were 81 official finishers of the '85 Cord, and each survivor received a cloth badge to commemorate this amazing feat, along with mandatory bruises, sore muscles and bent bike bits.

As the festivities wound down amid prize giving and 'special thanks' speeches, Gord Eastman and a crew of volunteers headed back into the bush armed with cables, a come-along, shovels and an axe to attempt once again to raise his sunken treasure from the depths of the beaver dam swamp. One tradition that can't be broken is that all bikes must be retrieved from the bush.

And considering some of the places these machines have ended up during the past 32 years, this is likely the most notable feature of the Corduroy enduro.