

1996

Time waits no^{for}one

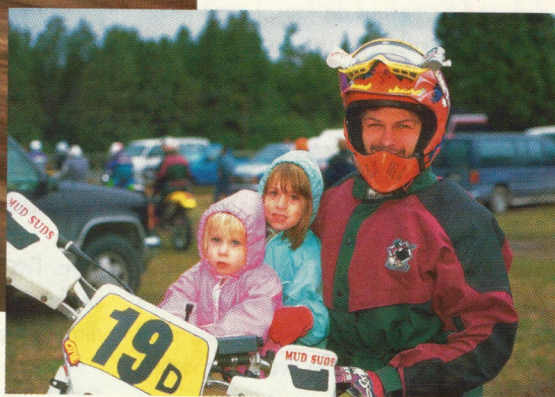


Does a photographer sit in the woods? He does if he's trying to cover the **Canadian national enduro series**. Hugh McLean shakes the mud off his lenses and tries to explain why there's never enough **time** to shoot an enduro.



THEY'RE OUT THERE SOMEWHERE. Barrelling through the trees, guided by little black arrows on fluorescent backgrounds. You can hear the bark of two-strokes on and off the throttle, echoing in the forest like the baying of hounds on the trail of phantom foxes. There is no other sound except the rain dripping off the trees on to the rocks.

It's Day 2 of the Corduroy Enduro, the second round of the CMA national enduro championship. I'm waiting at the top of the Green Mountain loop for the master class to come by. If it weren't so cloudy and miserable, the view would be terrific. The recently retired competitor Blair Sharpless, who won this event more times than anyone, pre-ran the trail, verifying markers and



checkpoints. He showed me the way to this promising photo location, blasting out of sight up a steep single track into the trees. A 20-minute climb on foot brought me to this vantage point. Now I wait.

Green Mountain is considered too difficult for all but the masters and experts. The trail demands skill and respect just to walk it. I think this is where American Matt Spigelmyer, winner of the masters class at the opening round at La Tuque, Quebec, fouled a plug in his KTM when they rode this loop earlier in the opposite direction. Fellow Yank Kevin Hines and Canadian champ Craig Kennedy are struggling for the lead in the Corduroy.

Suddenly the bark is closer and more strident. Someone is climbing the hill. A bike pops out of the woods, mud-spattered and

dripping; it's there, and then it's gone within a couple of seconds. I have no idea who it was. Hines is next on his CRE. I recognize his big lime-green number plate in time to get off a shot. Hines is the first master through, so Kennedy should be along soon on his Honda. There he goes, but I don't recognize him in time to get a good shot. I wait. Nothing, for what seems like many minutes. Just the barking phantoms out there in the woods.

Spigelmyer, Quebec rider Allan Lachapelle and Joel Stronach from Ontario haven't come by yet and I don't know how long I should wait. Finally, I give up on this location; there's too much ground to cover and not enough time. Time is everything at an enduro.

Halfway down the back side of Green

The turning point in Craig Kennedy's run at the enduro title came at the Great Pine in the Ganaraska Forest (main photo), where he won and chief rival Matt Spigelmyer (with Kennedy at far left) slipped to fourth. Kevin Hines, above, takes a water crossing at the two-day Corduroy Enduro. Quebec rider Allan Lachapelle, fourth in the series, poses with his daughters on his Honda.



Mountain, I arrive at one nasty-looking water-hole. Of all the water-holes on this slimy switchback trail, this is the ugliest, with greasy, tree-lined edges; there's nowhere to go but right through the middle.

It takes me a five-minute detour through the woods to get around the bog. The trail is slick and hazardous on foot; I can't imagine riding it. Fifty metres down the trail, Spigelmyer catches me. I hop on to a rock and try to capture him as he flashes by. Someone else is coming, I can hear it. Then I hear the rider curse and the engine die, followed by frantic kicking and more cursing. Somebody has drowned his bike. Joel Stronach slows to offer assistance, unwanted, then comes past my spot, his Honda a blur. The rain has settled into a steady drizzle as Allan Lachapelle, the drowning victim, recovers and passes me on the trail. Then I'm alone in the woods again, without even the sound of bikes any more. Just the rain.

It's a long, muddy slog out to the next checkpoint and back to the car. By the time I get back to the start area, the masters have packed up and are ready for the trophy presentation at the local Legion Hall. I catch up with Hines, Kennedy, and Spigelmyer celebrating over a beer; they have finished first through third respectively and are grinning ear to ear. Hines excels in these conditions, as does Kennedy, who thrives when the trails turn to junk. "I learned to ride in conditions like these," he tells me later. These guys have been enjoying themselves. The tougher it gets, the more fun they claim to

have. I'm wondering if I got a single usable photograph in the dim light and drizzle.

Great Pine woods

Three weeks later, the competitors are in a cow pasture on the edge of the Ganaraska Forest, south of Peterborough, Ont., preparing for the Great Pine Enduro. Riders grouse about the rain cloud that appears to be following them as they prepare route sheets and perform last-minute tweaks to machines.

Riders start three or four to a minute. The masters get start times in the middle of the field, far enough back from the first riders so the trail is cleared, but not so far back that it deteriorates badly. The top guys are spread across the middle of the pack from Minute 17 to Minute 27. Theoretically, I can expect them to come through any given



check at 17 to 27 minutes after the key time at that check. And within 10 minutes of each other, if they are on time.

I wander around the field trying to get a feel for this sport where time predominates. The organizers try to make the course tough enough to make everyone late. The rider who manages the smallest time penalty wins. Everyone has computers and clocks and odometers and watches and route sheets to keep from being late—or early. And while you're reading the route sheet and watching the computer and listening to the beep of



At far left, Joel Stronach prepares to launch before the special test at the Terra Nova



Enduro. Matt Spigelmyer (main photo) slips through the mud on his KTM at the Corduroy, which was hosted by the Steel City Riders, including Jim Kelly and Larry Bastedo, above. Inset at left, Anthony Martin on his way to second place at the Great Pine Enduro.

the timepiece in your ear, don't forget to watch for rocks and trees and arrows marking the route over unknown trails.

My job is to find the riders out in the forest, at the right time. Armed with a photocopied map showing the gas stops, I leave after the last of the masters has started. Not far up the road from the first gas stop is a checkpoint where the riders come out of a long, tight woods section. The trail doubles back on itself at the check, offering two chances for photos of each rider—if I'm quick enough. The check crew is set up and waiting; I walk up the trail a few metres and wait too. It's almost half an hour before we hear the first howls from deep in the woods. A bike pops into view, then disappears back into the trees. In less than five minutes, the bike reappears on the trail in front of me and charges into the checkpoint. Recognizing bikes early enough is still

difficult, and I manage to miss Kennedy again when he comes in. I crash through the trees and get into position for a grab shot as Craig charges away from the check.

This is frustrating. There's little warning before the bikes pop out of the trees for a couple of seconds and vanish. Even if you're ready, you can still miss the shot. I give up and head for the next gas stop. I know I don't have a good shot of Kennedy yet.

Hurrying along, I run into Blair Sharpless, who convinces me to concentrate on the special-test section for pictures. He leads me down sandy access roads to a checkpoint deep in the woods with a ridge rising up behind it. This is the start checkpoint for the special test. The finish is up the road about 100 metres. It will take riders about 12 minutes to ride the loop, which should give me time to shoot a rider going in and coming out. If I hustle.



Lachapelle, top, flies at the Great Pine; Kennedy, above, nails down the enduro title at the Terra Nova.

The check crew here has a tarp strung in the trees, a bonfire going and food and drink to ward off the damp. They've been set up for over an hour and don't know for sure when to expect the first rider. No one ever knows for certain what is going on until it's over. The riders have no way of knowing how well they are doing in relation to other competitors. You just try to stay on time and hope no one else can.

With 20 years of enduro experience, Kennedy is one of the best. He arrives at the check and blasts on to the trail. I hop a log to get into position as he loops behind the check and manage a couple of shots before he climbs the ridge and disappears. I hustle down the road to the end of the special test. I get there in time and wait for Kennedy when he comes down out of the trees. It is my last shot at him on this event, and I still don't know how well I've done. Spigelmyer and Lachapelle have come and gone and I think I have photos of Joel Stronach and Clarke Peters, so I call it quits. Not that I have any choice. There is no time left. The Great Pine will be soon be over.

Back at the cow pasture, Kennedy has been declared the winner, putting himself into a tie for the series lead with Spigelmyer, who was pushed down to fourth today behind the local Oshawa riders Anthony Martin and Randy Griffith.

Terra Nova time

Back into the woods I go for the final and deciding national round. The gang assem-

bles at a trailer park in Primrose, Ont., for the start of the Terra Nova Enduro. Joel Stronach and Allan Lachapelle have outside chances at the title, but it would require disastrous rides for both Kennedy and Spigelmyer for either to win.

The second check is at the bottom of a steep, wet, leaf-covered downhill section. At least it's not raining. I climb halfway up the slope and try to find safe footing. It's a good vantage point to watch different techniques. Masters pause at the top then hustle down at an impressive clip. Brakes on but not locked, feet up, in control. Novices slide down with wheels locked, feet dragging, on the edge of disaster. The top five go by as expected; I'm ready when Martin comes down, but I miss Griffith on his Honda. The riders are still catching me by surprise. They appear at the top of the hill silhouetted against the sky for a moment, then plunge down the trail, out of range in seconds.

Another photographer, Ed Gatner, who is shooting for *Performance Racing News*, has joined me on this expedition. He has stationed himself closer to the bottom of the hill. It is his first time shooting an enduro and he has to be completely baffled.

Stronach passes a novice by climbing up the side of the hill well off the trail. This convinces me that standing too close to the single track is not a good idea. Five minutes later a rider fails at an attempted pass and plants his bike where I'd been standing.

Spigelmyer is late—very late. When he finally comes through it's obvious something

has gone wrong. He's dropped 12 minutes in this first section.

Ed and I hurry off to the first gas stop to catch up with what is going on. If they are on time, riders have a chance at gas stops to do minor repairs or eat a banana. The gas crews get a photocopy of a hand-drawn map and instructions to each stop, and this is what I'm using to find my way. There's time for a few questions before the riders disappear back on to the trails. A fouled plug cost Spigelmyer so much time. Kennedy is having a good ride and no troubles, but Martin and Stronach are breathing down his neck. Griffith and Lachapelle are also having good rides at this point. But it's still early.

I think I'm beginning to find a pattern in the flow. We leave as riders start pulling out. There is a special test ahead and I want to be there in good time. The section star-

just off a good side road and does a quick loop back to the check area before winding away through a young pine forest. We can shoot the start and the downhill turn back into the woods.

The first rider through overshoots the turn, almost running Ed down as he carves a new line back into the trees. Special tests are about speed. The times set here will be used to settle any ties on overall scores. When Lachapelle comes by, he squares the corner, sending a roost of mud and grass flying toward Ed's new position. Ed doesn't look too pleased. Kennedy is charging hard at the turn; so are all the top guys. This could be important. But Spigelmyer still hasn't shown up by the time we decide to leave for one last location before the end.

Following the map to the next gas stop in the car, we follow an increasingly marginal dirt road. I start to worry a little when we pass the "unmaintained road, use at own risk" sign. We come upon a rider stranded without gas and offer a tow. He latches on to the door frame and we proceed cautiously along the deteriorating track. Fortunately another rider returns with gas, so I can stop worrying about dragging my hitchhiker off his bike.

We're trying to find a watercrossing, somewhere after the gas stop. We get to the checkpoint, but before we can start down the trail Griffith comes barrelling out of the woods. Not far behind is Kennedy, really flying through the trees. He is followed soon after by Lachapelle. Ed and I give up after Martin goes by. Even if we can find the watercrossing, the fast guys are already gone. We're too late.

By the time we can get close to the top riders again, the Terra Nova Enduro is over and the championship decided. Craig Kennedy is the victor, earning the CMA No. 1 for the third time. Matt Spigelmyer failed to finish because of mechanical problems, but has enough points to finish second in the championship. Joel Stronach's consistent finishes, including third place at the Terra Nova, give him third in the points standings. Anthony Martin earns second today, which pulls him to fifth overall, just behind Allan Lachapelle.

As the light fades away and the riders pack up for the last time, I wonder if, after all the running and chasing and waiting, I have come even close to capturing an enduro in photographs. All I know for sure is that it felt as if I was always late.

At least that part sounds about right. **CC**

Craig Kennedy makes some mistakes. But not too many

Craig Kennedy of St. Thomas, Ont., says he's "kind of embarrassed" to admit that he's been riding enduros for 20 years, during which time he's won "only three" national titles.

But experience is crucial for an enduro competitor, and Kennedy makes the most of his. "There's quite a few faster guys out there than me," he admits, but speed alone isn't enough. "It's so complicated. When you ride through the woods it's a series of errors really. Whoever makes the least number of mistakes will win. You're seeing the trail or an obstacle for the first time, and of course if you had a chance to ride it a second time you'd probably do better. But you don't."

Kennedy is at his best in what he calls technically demanding conditions. "If it's rained for a week, or it's raining during the enduro, other guys get really depressed. I just don't care. It doesn't bother me, and I've always done well in the rain."



Kennedy rides an "enduro legal" Honda CR250 with assistance from Machine Racing, Kimpex-Action, Dunlop and Honda Canada. The suspension on Kennedy's CR250 has been extensively modified, he says, but the engine is stock except for some additional flywheel weight; taller gearing also helps mellow the throttle response.

He spends more time working on his bike than he does riding it, Kennedy says. "You can't have a single problem and win," but it's important to know how to keep going if you do face a mechanical failure. At the first round in La Tuque, Que., Kennedy bent his chain guide, which caused problems with the chain and sprockets and eventually the shifter shaft and cases. But he hammered out a repair using a rock and eventually finished in fifth place, earning points that kept his title chances alive.

There's little glamour to enduro riding, Kennedy acknowledges. There are few if any spectators, and it may not be the most exciting form of motorcycle sport to watch. "But when you're on a trail and you encounter a big log or something for the first time, you on the bike are quite excited."

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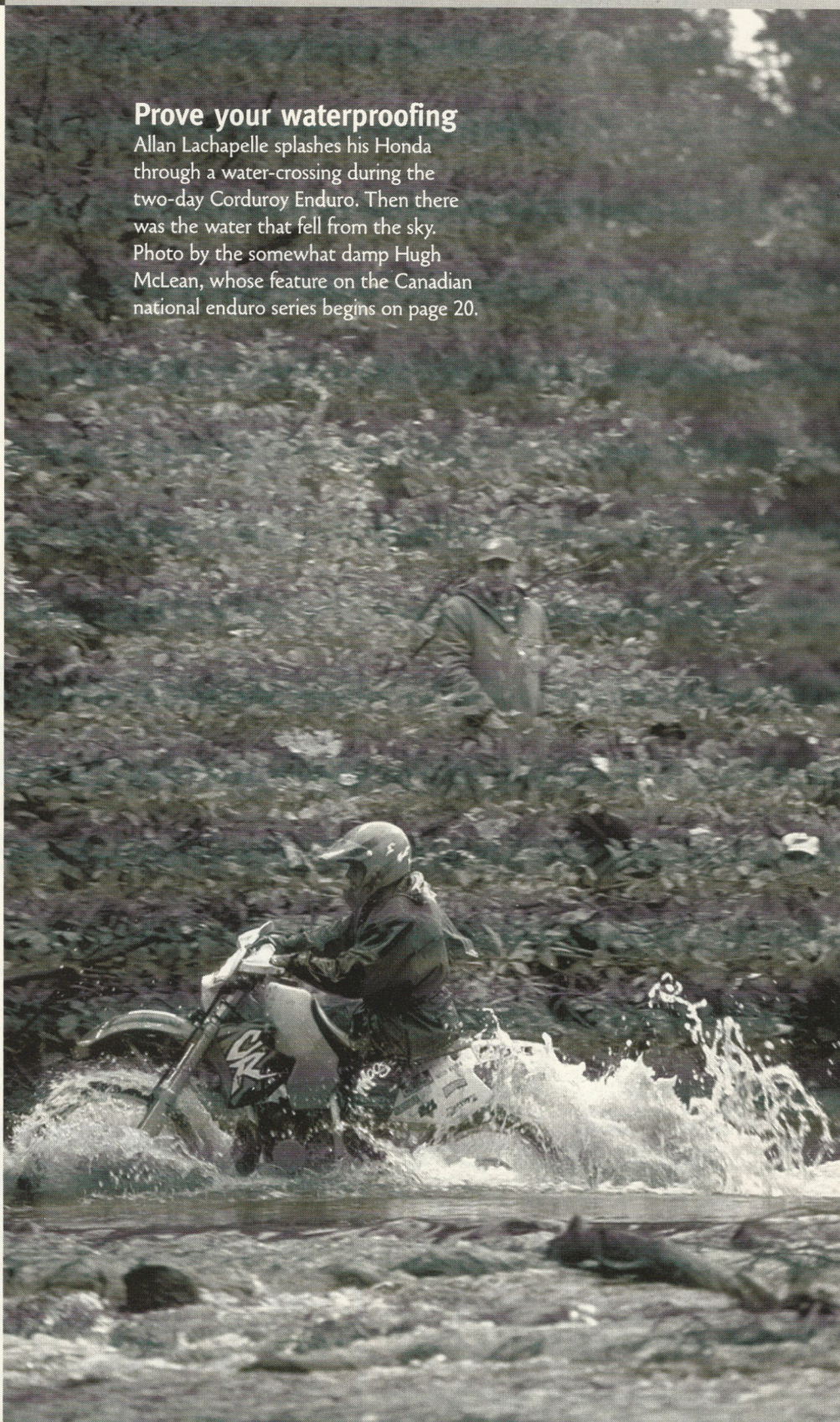
Cover

Looming large on the horizon is the VTR1000F FireStorm, photographed at Honda's Tochigi test track by Koichi Ohtani. Alan Cathcart reports on the new V-twin starting on page 14. Inset photo of Joel Stronach at the Great Pine Enduro by Hugh McLean. More woods work begins on page 20.

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Prove your waterproofing

Allan Lachapelle splashes his Honda through a water-crossing during the two-day Corduroy Enduro. Then there was the water that fell from the sky. Photo by the somewhat damp Hugh McLean, whose feature on the Canadian national enduro series begins on page 20.



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