

Down to the wire in the woods

By Vance Cassidy

Money is not necessarily the best motivator, especially when motivating athletes. An admirable person is someone who gives it his or her all for personal satisfaction, the sense of accomplishment and the thought of doing something to the best of their ability.

When you're talking dedication and desire, you're talking the 1998 Canadian National Enduro Champion, Allan Lachapelle. Few people in the sport — or in any sport, for that matter — come close to Lachapelle when it comes to desire. He's all too willing to grind hours behind the wheel, to ride in the crappiest conditions in the sport's ugliest competition — the typical Canadian enduro. And there's no big paycheque at the end, no factory reps waving contracts in your face. Enduro is a closed group; the same hundred or so guys show up year in year out, more often than not whether it's raining, sweltering or freezing.

The Canadian championship consists of three events each autumn. The Corduroy is the longest running of them all and the one with the most character. It runs through the rocks, swamp and deciduous forest of the Canadian Shield over a two-day pe-

riod. What you end up with if all goes well is a coveted log, a varnished piece of natural wood that you place on your mantle and stand back and admire. All the while, your wife examines the VISA bill and shakes her head in dismay. It makes no sense, but what does as the millennium approaches?

This year, the Cord was epic. The conditions were ideal for woods riding and the traction was near perfect, dry with little dust; it doesn't get any better. The event went to an American. Kevin Hines trekked up north to ensure a win for Honda. The battle was hard fought, though, with compatriots Matt Speigelmeyer (KTM) and Allan Randt (KTM) giving Canadians Craig Kennedy and Lachapelle a run for their money.

A few weeks later, conditions were again ideal for the second round at the Terra Nova, the event that winds through the hills of Mulmur, dipping down into river valleys to cross the Boyne. The infamous Primrose section is the great equalizer; an expert/masters section, it's designed to test the strength of your bark busters and your mettle. Everyone loses time off the 36 kph average, the question is just how much. The win went to former Canadian Champion Craig Kennedy who just edged out Lachapelle and

Speigelmeyer for the overall.

The series finale is lodged firmly in the Ganaraska Forest. Home to many east-end enduro riders, the "Ganny" features one of the best trail systems in Southern Ontario. The annual Great Pine Enduro trail snakes through hardwood stands and rows of pine reforestation. This season, it hosted a three-way battle for the title among Lachapelle, Speigelmeyer and Kennedy.

For many in the field, it was déjà vu all over again as multiple Canadian champion Blair Sharpless soundly trounced the troops in his break from retirement. Blair has lost no speed in recent years and has an air of confidence that allows him to ride what most pundits feel is better than ever. Rumours still fly about a comeback. To voice your opinion on whether that's a good idea, Blair can be reached at www.goreallyfastinthewoods.com. Just joking.

With the Canadian championship at stake, Lachapelle hid his apprehension well prior to setting off. He had to better both of his adversaries to win the number one plate. As the day wore on, I gained some valuable insight into the affable Quebecer's character. Ahead of him, a rider rammed a tree during the last trail section just as

Lachapelle zeroed in from behind. The rider's bike blocked the trail, but Allan calmly and politely stopped, waited, then asked if the rider could please remove his bike from the path. The rider motioned for him to ride over the fallen machine rather than lose points and, perhaps, the championship. Lachapelle tore off down the trail and went on to win his title.

For the dedicated Lachapelle, it was a long time coming and a thoroughly well deserved title. This year's edition of the Canadian Enduro Championship was a real nail-biter with down to the wire drama and good competition. But in the end, one man showed the composure and the desire needed to get the job done. The points have all been scored. Now all that's left is to tabulate a season's worth of VISA bills.

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