

CANADA'S TOUGHEST ENDURO

59 Years and the Cord keeps getting better

By Jeff Morgan
Photos by Keith Hamilton



In the world of Canadian enduro few races are as well known as the Corduroy Enduro. More than a half century of history has ensured that this race will go down in Canadian history, if not the history of all off-road racing. Some of the best off-road racers in Canada and the US have made the trip to the Haliburton Highlands to test themselves against the rocks, roots, and water and now the Corduroy is becoming intercontinental.

World famous hard enduro rider and past Romaniacs winner Chris Birch made the trip up from his current home in South Africa to try his hand at the Cord. So, for the riders that entered the Cord, not only did they have to face the notoriously gruelling course, but they also had to face the fast New Zealander. An additional challenge for Pro class riders this year was the addition of a third day of racing with the new Friday Prologue. This consisted of a few special tests and an Enduro-cross test at the Gooderham Community Centre. This shorter day set up the Pro class for a tough weekend of racing and showed the Canadians just how fast Birch is.

The year 2012 was a much drier than typical year in Ontario setting things up for perfect conditions for the 59th running of the Cord. But,

in true Cord fashion, Mother Nature decided to give us a healthy dose of rain on both Friday and Saturday night, but we were fortunate enough not to get too much rain throughout the day. The exceptionally dry year served to allow the ground to hold the fresh water and offer up almost perfect conditions in the single track sections of the course.

In recent years the organizers have made a concerted effort to find and use as many new trails as possible to reduce the use of roads and beaten up old snowmobile trails. As a participant I can safely say that this extra effort is greatly appreciated; some of those old snowmobile trails are my least favourite parts of the course and they were kept to a minimum this year.

In the past the Corduroy has had a varied distance for the two day event with day two usually featuring an extra 30 km. This year the course was the same 145 km on both days and, instead of finishing at the Gooderham Community Centre, it finished at the final test at Sedgewick's. This gives the racers the option to ride back to the community centre or have a ride waiting for them at the final test and avoid the road section back to the centre.

With the pros one day into the Cord the rest of us got underway on Saturday, September 22. The trails were in quite good shape and the early tests were a bit on the slippery side when out in the open, but once they entered the shelter of the trees traction became excellent and conditions were almost ideal.

Saturday's course was quite similar to last year and featured a good selection of singletrack that was both fun and challenging. The new sections of trails that were featured on the first day of racing were well laid out and flowed well. The previous night's rain did add a certain challenge to the new sections as the newly uncovered roots were slick and the loose, loamy soil seemed to camouflage rocks and they were liable to bite back if you weren't careful.

The race began in earnest on the Saturday morning and the course led the usual way out of Gooderham to the Five Points trail, eventually leading us off into the wilderness to fend for ourselves. For a few unlucky souls, myself included, within the first few kilometres of trail a deep water hole claimed a series of victims. Fortunately I wasn't held up for too long while I cleaned the water out of the bike; for a few of the riders it wasn't as quick a fix.

Fortunately, for most, that was the most treacherous part of the transfer trails and it was out of the way. While most racers carried on, the pros and experts had the adventure of tackling a wet Green's Mountain.

This year's Corduroy would be a battle between Birch and Brian "Wojo" Wojnarowski with Birch carrying over an early lead from Friday. These two pros kept each other honest all day with Birch holding a slight lead in all the tests except for one. At the end of the day Birch held a narrow lead of just over 30 seconds on the hometown hero, Wojo.

With the momentum from the first two days, Birch was sitting in a good position to take the win in his first Corduroy. With Wojo pushing hard Birch could not afford to let up and this almost cost him the race when he pushed a bit too hard and bounced an engine case off of a rock punching a hole in it. Luckily for Birch there were a few helpful competitors on hand to help him fix the case.

With a newly patched case and no time lost, Birch went on to win day three and take the overall victory. Wojo put in a great ride and finished second on all three days. He should be very proud that he kept one of the best riders in the world honest and made him work for the victory. Rounding out the top three was Philippe Chaine of Quebec. Chaine worked hard and solidly took third place overall with three third place finishes.

With 59 years of the Corduroy in the books, you can be sure that next year there will be something special happening to mark the 60th year. If you are in the Ontario region, or are willing to travel to try your hand at the Cord, next year is the year to do it; you will not regret it. It is a challenging race and it takes its toll on your body and bike, but I wouldn't miss it for the world



(Opposite page main) Chris Birch may have been a celebrity at the Cord, but he is not the only hero. Rider like Brian Melik, Rome Haloftis, Lance Matthews, Gilles Bussiere, Alex Conti, Andrew Millson, Ben Roth Felecia Robichard and Joel Lepley are all heros.

Pro
Chris Birch
Brian Wojnarowski
Philippe Chaine

Intermediate
Alex Conti
Jeff Morgan
Luc McCaw

Expert
Brian Melik
Zach Lewis
Alexandre Goujon

Novice
Andrew Millson
Jeremy Quinn
Terry Shaubel

Vet Expert
Rome Haloftis
Denis Libersan
Craig Kennedy

Beginner
Ben Roth
Chase Hemstock
Johnathan Lichti

Super Vet
Lance Matthews
Kenneth Westfall
Wayne Brogan

Ladies
Felecia Robichard
Ainsley Farr
Fiona Robichard

Veteran
Gillees Bussiere
Denis Aumais
Brent Phifer

Masters
Joel Lepley
Ted Dirstein
Jeff Golden