

Sierra Blanca Motorcycle Race

By Rici Guild

On Friday, February 7, four members of OCC's Motorcycle team crossed the border from California into Mexico to prepare for the Sierra Blanca 200K Enduro.

The race is through 130 miles of some of the roughest terrain known to man. The start is about 15 miles outside

of Ensenada, Mexico in the Sierra mountains. The course takes riders through steep, rocky mountains and beautiful pasture land, much like that of Waimea on the Big Island.

The four riders, Matt Kresser, Brant Ackerman, Kevin Olds, and Walter Guild were supported by an unbeatable

pit crew made up of Mia Kresser, Chrissy Benham, Sara Ackerman, Belle Ames, Carrie Stehower, and Mark Sandvold. A race of this magnitude requires tremendous logistical support and these people did an outstanding job of keeping the riders racing.

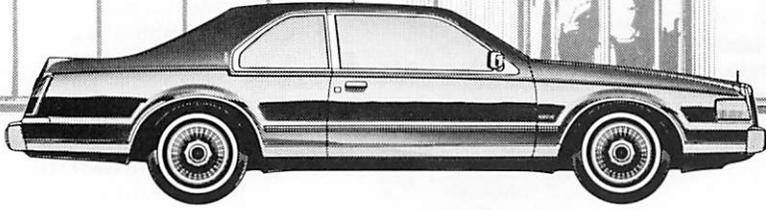
The team had a big dinner the night before the race at the finest restaurant in Ensenada and ate like kings, spending about five U.S. dollars for filet mignon and lobster.

About midnight that night it started to rain and by the time the riders awoke at 5 a.m. it was evident that the water was going to be a real problem. The riders put on long underwear, double socks, multiple jerseys, and heavy racing jackets to prepare for what was about to become one of the longest and most trying days these racers had experienced.

On the 20-mile drive to the impound and starting area, it became obvious just how bad the conditions really were.

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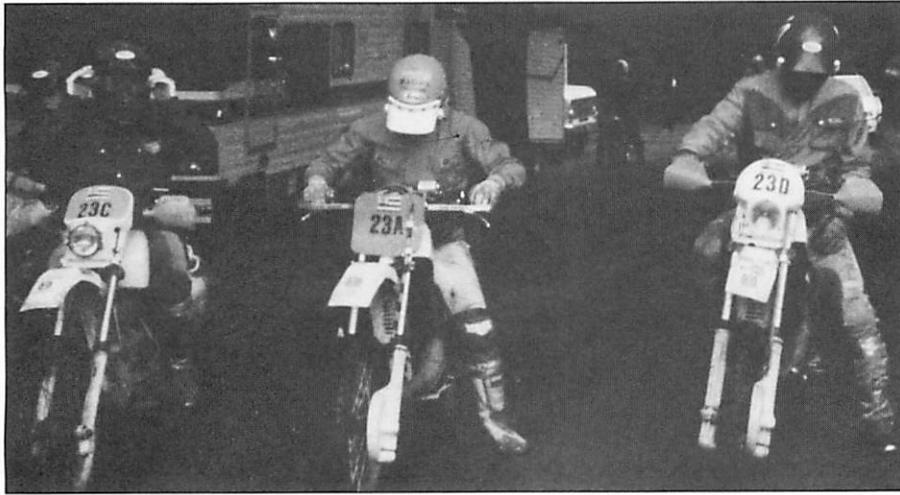


Mark Sandvold helps Matt Kresser change the front tire on his motorcycle.

Every stream was raging and the roads were barely above water.

The temperature outside the heated van was estimated to be around 40 degrees and the same thought was in all four of the riders' heads: "What would the other three do to me if I slashed my tires before the start?" Since the four were entered as an OCC team, all would have to ride in order to be eligible for overall team honors.

High in the mountains, some of this



Kevin Olds, Matt Kresser and Walter Guild starting the race.

country's best riders were assembled to compete in what now has the reputation as one of the toughest events of its kind. Teams from as far away as Colorado had driven up to 24 hours straight in order to participate in the event. Malcolm Smith was there as a sponsor and rider with four teams of his own.

As the field assembled at the starting line, it was obvious that the men and machines entered in the race were all top quality. In an Enduro race, four riders leave the starting line every minute and must ride the entire race at a preset average speed.

As the first competitors began the race, Team OCC made their last adjustments to their computer mileage and timing devices. In Enduro racing you come upon unknown checks throughout the course and are penalized one point for every minute you are late. The rider with the least amount of points at the end is the winner. The team that has *all four members finish* with the lowest number of points wins the team honors.

Outrigger was to begin the race on minute 23 which means 88 riders would go through the course before them. In muddy conditions this becomes very critical as there is a tendency for bottlenecks to form in difficult places along the course. This did happen a few times but our riders got around without too much trouble.

About 10 minutes into the race Kevin pulled over with a broken gear shifting lever. All riders carry an assortment of parts and tools with them ranging from spare tire tubes to spark plugs. Kevin happened to be carrying a spare shifting lever, so he made the repair and caught

back up to the other three.

After the first couple of checkpoints it became clear that everyone would have to ride as fast as they could in order to try and stay up on their minute. As the four worked their way through the mountains in freezing rain and deep mud, their equipment began to show signs of wear and tear.

At about 2½ hours into the race Kevin had the first major problem. The deep mud and long hot running of the motor had taken its toll. Kevin's clutch burned out and he had to pull over and take the motor apart right on the side of the trail.

He was able to repair the bike, but just enough to get back to the pit area, about 25 miles away. This put him about two hours late and forced him to drop out of the race.

About this time, major problem number two had begun. Brant Ackerman had been caught with insufficient clothing and was beginning to get severe cramps due to dehydration and the cold temperatures. Brant's rear brake began to fail at the same time.

When he rode in to the pit area about 40 minutes late, he looked as though he



Team OCC makes adjustments to computer timing mileage devices.

had seen a ghost. The last 20 miles had been goat trails traversing the side of cliffs with "ti leaf sliding" conditions, and without brakes, Brant had had enough.

Matt Kresser had been the first one into the lunch break about 10 minutes behind the team's minute. He had ridden the last 40 miles with a flat front tire, and had to change it before starting the second half. He got this accomplished and pulled out about five minutes behind schedule.

Walter had come into lunch shortly after Matt with just enough time to clean his goggles, gas up, lube his chain, check his radiator, get something to drink, and dive on his bike to pull out about one minute late.

As he pulled into the second checkpoint, he realized that problem number three had just struck him. The official at the first check after lunch had not put his time card back in his pocket. From that point on, he asked the checkers to write his time and number down, hoping it could be pieced together at the end of the race.

Shortly thereafter, Matt came up and passed Walter and the two began to work their way through the dwindling pack.

As Matt and Walter pushed on, they had no idea of the fate of their partners. As the two worked their way past burned out bikes and bodies, they knew that this was a race where survival was the ultimate success. Out of 140 starting riders, only 36 riders finished the race. Two riders from the Outrigger Canoe Club were among that group.

Matt finished sixth in the Open Class (A) division, and 28th overall. Walter finished, but at the time of this article it was not known if the finish counted. The fact that Matt and Walter finished at all is satisfaction in itself. It is the kind of race you can *NEVER* forget. Next year, Team OCC would again like to participate, with more people if they are interested. Just look for the guys with mud in their hair and grease under their fingernails, to give you more details.

The riders would like to thank Dave Rochlen of Surfline Hawaii and Ken Cullers of Fiberglass Hawaii for helping them get back and forth to the mainland.

Next up . . . the MAUNA KEA 200 in May, and OCC's attempt to retain its first place overall team crown. Let's see you there!!