

Joe Scalzo's

City of Speed and elsewhere

Dick

It was a popular slogan, a sage bit of wisdom, the pro forma you heard shouted from Daytona to Ascot: “Never trust anybody with one cylinder following the other!” Everybody knew that the Harley guys with their dinosaur KRers were the bad guys, even themselves. Especially themselves. And by the middle of the last century Harley’s squad of antique, mythologized, all-conquering, 800-pound gorilla KRers, was possibly its strongest ever, made up of Leonard, Resweber, Rayborn, Markel, White, Murguia, Reiman, Roeder, Sehl, Lawwill, Nix, and assorted other bullies.



There was no captain, and intramural free-for-all battling was expected. Therefore the built-in threat of being crashed by one of your own teammates was a grim fact every Harley

guy had to live with. Mount up every guy, sic ‘em on themselves, last Milwaukee Vibrator on his wheel wins – so went the all-conquering Harley credo.

Yet whenever the Harley guys; who were the winners of something like 137 victories out of 212 tournaments - plus wearing the No. 1 plates for 13 out of 14 seasons - whenever they glanced west from Milwaukee to northern California and Richmond they felt panic because Richmond was the home of the one nemesis they couldn’t control, the nemesis who was the last one they wanted to be chasing as a Grand National was winding down or to have chasing and stalking them.

This of course was “Buggs,” or “Bugg Mann,” or plain old Dick Mann. Among other Harley dirty tricks they double-teamed him, triple-teamed him, threw at him Harley’s own sanctioning body, the American Motorcycle Association, and even tried high-siding him. Nothing worked – Buggs and his underdog bobtail BSA Gold Star and frequently-banned Matchless G50 continued defeating them with Grand National rides that afterward would be remembered as epic.



Take 1961's 50-mile Grand National at Springfield, a National so potent that whomever won it got to be No. 1 on the strength of that victory alone. Trying to extend a five-in-a-row win streak, Harley went to its two fastest boys, Mooch and Bad Bart, and their gorilla KR's.

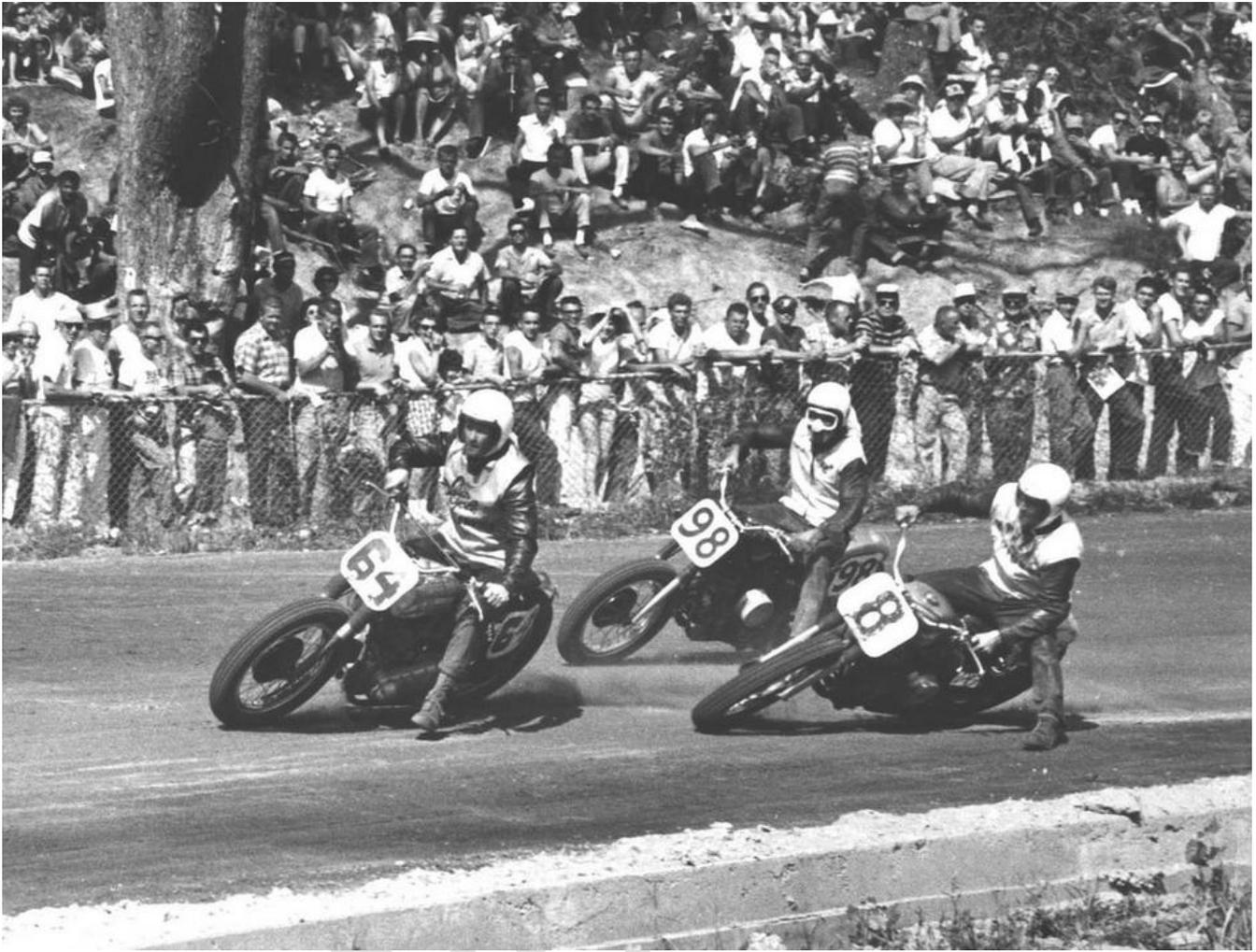
Springfield's mile surface glazed over into the usual spent rubber and oil, then slicked off into ice. Mooch and Bart continued setting a madhouse pace anyway. But just behind them rode Bugg Mann, stubbornly aiming his underpowered Gold Star at their exhausts, only keeping them in sight by slipstreaming along in their drafts. No other hard-thumping Gold Star was even close. And Bugg delayed coming at the pair of flathead KR's ahead of him until the very last lap, almost nailing Mooch for the win and dead-heating Bart for runner-up.

The final outcome: Bugg had come close to wiping out Harley's two best sons while traveling most of Springfield's 50 laps experiencing the pleasures of steering with a flat front tire!

He entered Grand National action after first preparing himself by going out with a bunch of talented scramblers on the unpaved canyon roads, legend in their time, of the San Francisco Bay area beyond Oakland. And by the end of the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s nobody better knew how to solve all the puzzles of motorcycle racing than Bugg.

He was his own tuner, a gifted rebel doing everything. This meant choosing the right gear ratio and picking the proper rubber; selecting the proper main jet, and setting the ignition spark; massaging the suspension and the rake and trail; finessing the wheelbase; heat-treating the inadequate rubber – Goodyears, Pirellis, Dunlop K70s – in the sun above a garage.

Bugg covered all the bases. Take, for example, what he did upon arriving at a dirt track National. To obtain what the texture of the daytime surface was going to be like in the crucial late laps, he first looked over the sort of watering truck being used; how old or new it was; or how much or little water it was sprinkling; plus eye-balling the type of road-grading tractors.



And not even the Harley guys or anybody else could match his versatility record of winning all five Grand National disciplines. Juggling the responsibilities of racer and mechanical guru, nobody had discovered more ways to make a flat-tracker, TT steeplechaser, or road-racer run fast. Bugg hated authority, and knew more about the AMA rules book than the AMA itself did, and one time he removed the engine of his G50 and installed it in the naked chassis of his Gold Star, afterward challenging the AMA to name the hodgepodge illegal, It couldn't.

He raced and won on four-strokes and two-strokes, gifting Honda with its first Grand National win at Daytona and scoring Yamaha's first quarter Grand National victory at Nelson Ledges, Bugg Mann, in fact, never met the flat track or road bike he didn't like except the season Harley-Davidson flim-flamed him by convincing him he was frittering away his talents on other merchandise instead of saddling up on a Harley. Not that Bugg remained a member of the Harley plantation for very long. He thought battling Milwaukee was too much fun.



In addition, Bugg Mann was the only member of the AMA tour to forsake Grand National and give his aching joints a rest cooling it in paradise. Quitting the mainland, he opened his very own Honolulu cycle dealership to begin inhaling healthy tradewinds instead of possibly poisoning himself gagging on a dirt track's calcium chloride.

But Bugg misjudged the dangerous effect that going cold turkey on Grand National would have on his flat-tracking soul. Six months in the sedentary world's paradise was torture compared to aches and pains earned in honor, fighting handlebar-to-handle bar with the Harley guys.

Everybody in Grand National but the Harley guys found Bugg's underdog and independent modus operandi inspiring and moving. They also deplored the other part of his routine, which was racing's most enduring riddle. Here was Bugg, most decathlon of all Grand National emissaries. Yet paradoxically here also was Bugg, maybe the most crash prone and self-destructive AMA warrior of all time, owner of a long drawn out case history of battered muscles and pulped bones, who regularly wrecked and screwed himself out of winning what he most wanted, the No.1 plate.

Frequently enough Bugg took over the lead in the point standings, then committed his usual act of self-annihilation. In 1962 it happened out in the sticks on some Podunk half-mile where he shattered his throttle mitt against a guard rail. It was a mess; there were no surgeons in the sticks, and Bugg had had to visit two or three medics before finding one who'd work on

the mitt at all. In the meantime Harley and Bad Bart took command of the standings lead and won No. 1 as usual.

If ever he was to become No. 1, Bugg Mann realized he'd better do something quickly. Age 34, which was packing lots of mileage for a soldier of Grand National, he knew he couldn't continue campaigning forever; a pet Bugg theory held that the more experienced you became the more safety conscious and slower you also became.

Nineteen sixty- three began badly at Daytona, when the AMA banned his wolf-in-sheep's clothing Matchless G50. But then Bad Bart got caught up in a long string of into-the-fence jobs, while at the same time the remainder of the Milwaukee squad were also carrying on their routine assaults on one another.



All this helped Buggs and his Gold Star and Matchless earn No. 1 – the first non-Vibrator combatants ever to do so. Of course just because it involved Buggs it had to be a near thing. To

clinch matters at Ascot Park's penultimate National he'd had to race and win half-dead from injury as usual.

Perhaps Bugg Mann had nailed the one weakness among Milwaukee's men. Being accustomed to easy domination, and maybe having to suck it up and fight battles to the bitter end was one skill they'd never been forced to learn. Certainly Bugg had been wrong about age slowing him down. In 1971, aged 41, he became the oldest and greatest combatant ever to do so by winning No. 1 for a second time.

