

An Evening With RICH THORWALDSON

In Two Parts



By Ron Schneiders

A few weeks ago Maureen Lee, Cycle News Columnist, wrote at some length about "Sporting Professionals," as she called them. These are individuals who ride sporting events, where trophies are at stake, and manage to get paid in cash as well. The description fits Richard Thorwaldson rather well. Since Rich is a leading contender for the Number 1 District 37 desert plate, I went over to his home to interview him for Cycle News.

Rich met me at the door of his fairly small home in Hawthorne, just a short ways from the ocean. I had spoken to him once or twice before at races, but he was always in his riding gear, which is to say fairly well disguised. He is slender but quite muscular and moves easily. You understand why he doesn't often get hurt when he falls; there's not much tension. His eyes are his most outstanding facial feature. They are fairly small, narrow and intense, the kind you associate with fighter pilots in World War II movies. A thin, auburn moustache doesn't hurt the image any.

We went into the living room and Rich introduced me to his wife Patricia,

who was sitting on the couch holding their 2-year-old daughter. I asked if that was their only child and he said yes, but another was due shortly. "We tried doing it the scientific way and if it's a boy, I guess we'll quit there. If it's not I don't know what we'll do. Adopt one I guess. I'm the last of the Thorwaldsons". He laughed as he said it, but you could tell he was really bothered by it. I refrained from asking what the scientific way of producing boys was.

"Hey, I'm being voted on tonight!" he said, as he went to get us some coffee.

"By whom?" I asked cautiously.

"The Checkers. I'm joining the Checkers."

"I thought there was quite a rigamarole involved in joining the Checkers," I said innocently.

Uncomfortably, he replied, "Well there is normally. You have to attend so many races and so many meetings." I got a distinct impression that there was not much rigamarole involved if you were Number One in the point standings.

"Why the switch?" I asked. Rich had been a long time Prosperator.

"Well, mainly because the Checkers are a real racing club. None of this stuff of running all kinds of events to send an ISDT team to Europe, and field meets and all that. All I want to do is race. I haven't got time for that." [Wonder what he'll do when he finds out the Checkers have an ISDT team too.]

"And the other other reason is the pits. I've lost three races in the pits this year. I come into the pits with a one-minute lead and leave one minute behind. When I come into the pits, all I want is gas. I don't want a drink, I don't want someone to smear my goggles, kill my engine, knock me off the bike or break my throttle cable!" He went on to explain that each of these things had happened. "The Checkers assess each member \$1.00 per race, whether the guy races or not and they use the money to hire a pit man. If he doesn't do the job right, at least you know he won't be back next week."

Rich appeared to have burst rather suddenly on the desert championship scene. He started the year as an unspectacular Number 117. I asked him where he had been beforehand.

"Well, I've always raced the desert. I used to ride with my father [Bill Thorwaldson, a notable racer himself] back 12 years ago."

"How old are you now?"

"Twenty-four. But when I got out of the Navy, I had started riding Class "C" TT. I raced TT from '66 to '69. Last year I had Number 26x but this year I suppose they'll stick a "1" in front of that, since I haven't been doing anything."

Going back a little, I asked him what he had done in the Navy.

"I was in Seabees."

"Seabees?!" I hadn't heard of the Seabees since the late 'forties, except on comic book covers where they always have this guy in light blue denim shirt and sailor cap charging his 'dozer into a hail of machine gun fire and using the blade to deflect the bullets.

"Yeah, well they revived the Seabees about the time I got in. I drove a dozer over in 'nam." He grinned like he knew what I was thinking. "I'd dig a hole, they'd build a bunker and then I'd push the dirt around it again." The picture of Rich Thorwaldson on a dozer was too much. I knew war stories could fill the remainder of the evening without much trouble so I backtracked hurriedly.

"Rich, do you do anything special in the way of training for the desert races?"

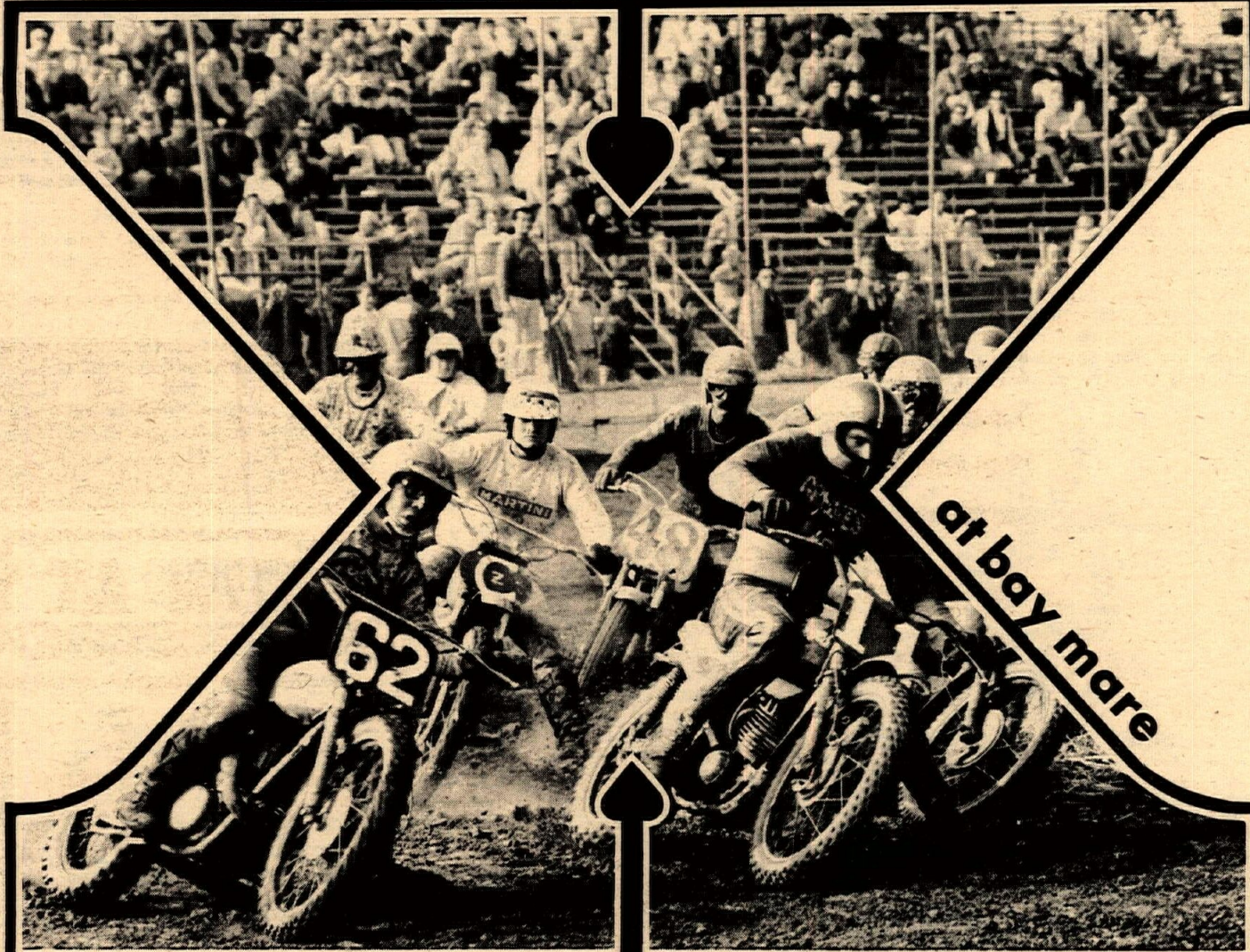
"You mean like exercises? No just ride twice a week. That's enough exercise. I do take some vitamins before each race."

"What kind?"

"Upjohn's Therapeutic Vitamins. They're a prescription item, primarily for old people. They take a couple of them each day. I take about 8 of them before the race, but none during the week. They help replace the lactic acid in your muscles that you lose while you're racing. In practical terms, you don't get sore. Since I've been taking the vitamins, I've never been sore on

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