

An Evening With

By Ron Schneiders

RICH THORWALDSON

[Continued from last week]

[For those who are not aware of how the money system works, the top riders are under contract to various agencies such as the distributors, dealers or factories. The contract usually requires that they show up for the races every week with a bike that will finish. They cannot get on any other brand of bike during the year and they must produce wins or good finishes on a fairly regular basis. They must also serve in a consulting-engineering process. For this they usually get enough money to defray their racing expenses. These are generalized contract terms; individual riders of course, will have somewhat different terms. No rider that I know of is making enough to enable him to quit working.]

Rich was quite amused by the suggestion that he [or other riders] might get the pinks to their motorcycles at the end of the year. "I wouldn't want the pink to a motorcycle that I've raced all year," he said. He was anything but amused by the suggestion that "professionals" would endanger other riders simply because there was money involved. "Racers go as hard as they can in every race, whether they're going for big money or a three-dollar trophy. You

"The rule was made so that a rider wouldn't have to ride every race of the year in order to be in contention, but it hasn't worked because the best score is 20 wins in 20 maximum point runs, so you have to come as close to that as possible." I asked how many races he had missed this year and he could only remember three. "And those weren't maximum point events," he said. He failed to finish four races that he started. Two flat tires, one engine problem and one truck accounted for those. Now he has to do well in at least two of the remaining six events this year to erase the two 7ths.

Naturally I [and the Cycle News readers, I hope] was curious about Rich's plans for the future. Would he continue with Rickman? Was he going to continue to race desert, or perhaps switch to motocross? Rich was very uncertain. He currently has three offers for the coming year but they are to some extent contingent upon his winning the Number One plate. I asked what the determining factor in his selection would be, and he indicated that money was the most important. His wife chimed in, saying "Rich can win on anything!" Rich appreciated the loyalty, but said that wasn't quite true, "You have to have a basically sound machine. Kawasaki has offered \$1,000,000 in contingency money and they had to dip down quite a ways to give away \$20,000." points standing. Rich has sixteen wins, two 3rds and two 7ths for his twenty rides, as of now.

Did Rich like the Rickman, would

he like to continue with them?

"Yes, I like the Rickman very much and Steens has been quite good to me," Rich said. So I asked the obvious question: Did he want enough money so that he wouldn't have to work? Rich didn't answer directly, but he said, "Well, I'd work anyway. A person has to do something with his time." At another point in our conversation he had said, with some awe, "Gene [Romero] told me he made \$60,000 this year. That's the first time that's ever happened."

I asked Rich what kind of racing he liked best and his reply was that TT was more fun, from a pure racing standpoint, but he liked the overall scene — the family and campfire bit — of the desert better. He indicated that the ride he obtained would determine the events that he rode in the coming year.

To conclude my interview, I asked Rich whom he considered to be his toughest competition. The answer came quickly, "J.N. Roberts. But he doesn't ride often enough to win Number One. After that, I guess Larry Bergquist and Whitey [Martino]."

How about Tom Poteet?

"Tom is really good, but I have the horsepower over him."

Someplace along in our conversation, Rich made two comments that I remember, without being able to remember the exact context. He said, "Whitey and I used to be good friends, even rode down Baja together, before I started going for Number One. Now he doesn't even speak to me." And "Jack Morgan doesn't even pit with us anymore."

I'm not sure I envy Rich Thorwaldson. It might be a very lonely

place in the world that he's headed for and whatever money he gets probably won't be that much compensation.



The professional difference: In the Barstow-Vegas race, Thorwaldson rode one section with a flat tire, ended his Rickman, bloodied his face, bent his bars and destroyed all the fiberglass on his bike. Troubles held him to 3rd overall! 1500 sportsmen didn't finish.



Rich relaxes with his wife, Patricia and a cold drink after his win in the Huntington Beach European scrambles this summer. Photo by Dick Wright

know this is true," he challenged. He's right; I do.

I asked Rich what his chances were for the Number One plate. "Well, half-way through the SoCal race they looked pretty good. I got by Poteet going up a sandwash. I just out-horsepowered him" he grinned, "and I got by Bergquist so I knew I had it made. I was really just stroking it. Then I came around the corner and there was that truck. I just hit him straight on and went up over the hood. I keep thinking about what would have happened if he had had one of those fancy hood ornaments." Rich's bike was badly damaged, but he, fortunately, was almost unhurt. "Now I've got just a few races to improve my point standing."

I asked if he knew how he stood and he said it was very difficult to know exactly because of the AMA schedule that calls for a rider's best twenty rides to be counted in his

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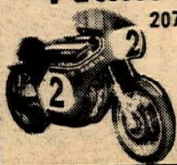
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