

JOHN RICE INTERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

John R. Rice, age 32, is currently the No. 1 sports motorcycle racer in Southern California. He earned his title in 1967 by outclassing more than 1800 of the top motorcycle racers in the U. S. aboard a 450cc Honda owned and sponsored by Long Beach Honda. With his District 37 or Southern California Championship, he can easily be acclaimed the No. 1 sports racer in the United States today since the competition, Number of races and 12-month racing season in Southern California overshadows motorcycle racing in any other part of the United States.

TOM: John, how long have you been racing?

JOHN: About 11 years now.

TOM: Is this your first championship?

JOHN: Well, this is the first time in all my years of racing that I have won the overall No. 1 title. But I have won other Championships such as:

1. Mexico City Championship in Mexico in 1966
2. Arizona State Championship in 1962
3. Calif. State Scramble Championship in 1961

and several others.

TOM: Why did it take so many years for you to win the No. 1 title.

JOHN: Well, Tom, there's a lot of competition and experience involved. Each year you learn a little more and go a little faster. Then, too, equipment, or the racing machine is as important as the rider and in 1967 I had the best I've ever ridden with my 450cc Honda from Long Beach Honda.

TOM: John, can you explain the difference between sports racing and professional racing when it comes to motorcycles.

JOHN: Well, Tom, the big difference is MONEY. In sporting events we race for trophies and sport only and in professional motorcycle racing they race for money, not very much, but as we say CASH instead of gold.

TOM: The gold meaning your trophies?

JOHN: Yes.

TOM: How many trophies do you have John?

JOHN: Several hundred, I would say over 300.

TOM: Are you racing this year John?

JOHN: Yes, every week. Next Sunday I'll be racing my new 350cc Honda at Perris, Calif., T.T. track near Riverside.

TOM: What is a T.T. track?

JOHN: A T.T. track is short for tourist trophy, an English-type of race on a graded dirt track with left and right-hand turns and at least one jump.

TOM: Is this easier or harder than professional racing?

JOHN: Well, Tom, there are professional T.T. races also and many of the professional riders compete in our sports races. But I would say overall sports racing is tougher racing than professional racing.

TOM: Why?

JOHN: Well, first of all you have so many more riders and more competition and secondly, most of the tracks are rough and poorly surfaced, so it places much more wear and tear on both the rider and the machine.

TOM: How about speed John? Which is faster and about how fast do you have to ride to win a race?

JOHN: Well, professional racing is faster. The tracks are smooth and the machines are built primarily for top speeds. Where in Sports racing we worry primarily about durability on the rougher tracks. Still we must have speed and on some of the faster sporting tracks we hit over 100 m.p.h. in the long straight aways.

TOM: Since you brought your Honda racer with you John, let's look at it for a minute. What's the difference between your No. 1 racer here and Long Beach Honda's new 350cc street scrambler we're showing the folks tonight?

JOHN: Well Tom, as you can see, the frame, wheels and engine are identical. About all I've changed to make a racer out of this machine is to remove all the lighting equipment, which we don't need. Then the handlebars for more leverage in the tight corners, I've also changed to a slightly bigger gas tank for the longer races and a different and harder seat which I prefer. And finally, I've extended the front forks for better sliding and control in the tight corners.

TOM: What do you mean better sliding?

JOHN: When you come down a straight away at full speed, you try and maintain your speed as far into the corner as possible. Then you have to lock up the brakes and start sliding. But it must be a controlled slide so you're pointed in the right direction when you get through the turn.

TOM: Sounds spectacular.

JOHN: Well, it's great fun and plenty of excitement. Why don't you join us some Sunday?

TOM: I'll do that John. But what do you do all week when you're not racing.

JOHN: I'm a mechanic at Long Beach Honda's main store at 5105 Atlantic in North Long Beach.

TOM: So you do your own tuning and mechanical work on the racing machine.

JOHN: Yes. Most of it anyway, although we do have a special racing team and department at Long Beach Honda.

TOM: Then you work on other racing machines also.

JOHN: Oh yes. We tune and setup racing machines for many of the local races.

TOM: For someone new to motorcycle racing and anxious to give it a try, say like myself John, what would you recommend or maybe I should ask, how would I get started? What's the first step?

JOHN: Just come on down to Long Beach Honda Tom, and we'll set you right up. The racing machine you'll need, the tuning and schedule of races. In fact, I'll be happy to take care of you myself along with a few lessons

in racing free.

TOM: John, you're not only a champion racer, but sounds like you'd make a champion salesman too, not only for your sponsor Long Beach Honda but the fine sport of motorcycling. Thanks for being with us.