

Andrews again!



By A.R. Flatbush

MT. MORRIS, PA, SEPT. 26.

What turned out to be a real nail-biter, Team Kawasaki's Fred Andrews kept his title hopes alive with a dramatic win at High Point Raceway over Suzuki's Steve Hatch, Yamaha's Barry Hawk and series leader Rodney Smith. It was do-or-die time for Andrews, who also won the last round in Millfield, Ohio, as Andrews had to win the last three rounds to snatch GNCC title from Smith. Conversely, Smith only has to get a second (if Andrews wins the last three) in one of the remaining events to mathematically eliminate Andrews. So High Point was the first of what could be three great battles.

As if a battle of the titans wasn't enough, the weather would shuffle the deck further with an unseasonable warm spell that intensified the drought gripping the Northeast. Despite repeated watering by the Racer Productions crew, dust and silt wreaked havoc on airfilters and the riders, and exposed roots made things even more difficult.

Andrews fought bike problems from

the get-go, as well as Suzuki teammates Hatch and Smith, throughout the race. Mixed with an unusually long pit stop, Andrews seemingly put himself out of contention, however the Team Green strategy paid off, and Andrews overcame a minute deficit to win by 24 seconds. More importantly, Andrews kept his title hopes alive for at least one more round. Andrews' strategy was simple - pin it. Coming into the scoring barrels at the end of the fourth lap, his KX250's airfilter was so clogged that the bike would barely run, and he lost second place to Smith. While the Suzuki duo pitted for gas, Andrews could only watch as his crew removed the seat and swapped filters. Down by a minute, Andrews pinned it again and moved from fourth into the lead in one amazing lap. He held on for what seemed a miraculous win to everyone, except Andrews.

"I had a side bet with Reid (Nordin,

Kawasaki team manager)," Andrews said. "He told me that if I won two races that he'd give me a diesel-powered four-wheel-drive Mule from Kawasaki. Now I'm getting one. I don't even want the money, I got a Mule!"

Andrews grabbed the holeshot on the 19-rider Pro row, followed by Hatch, Joel Dengler, Smith and Robbie Jenks, while local favorite Hawk was midpack. Andrews stretched his advantage on the motocross and grasstrack sections before heading into the woods on the first 9.5-mile lap. Dropping into the creek section, though, his KX250 was already sputtering from ingesting dust.

"The first lap I got away from everybody," Andrews said, "But I must've got some dirt in the carb or something. I stopped and the Suzuki guys just started smiling. They gave Rodney the sign that I was out, so I figured I better make it back to the pits, rather than being a quitter. It would only run in first gear - if I shifted, it would start missing. So I rode in first as long as I could. Then I just said 'The heck with it, I'm shifting.' Then it started running again.

"On the second lap it started doing it again, so I stopped and pulled my Filterskin," Andrews said. This gave Hatch the lead, followed by Hawk and Smith. Andrews dropped to eighth but wicked it back up and passed Shane Watts, who was only riding to "rehabilitate" his knee, RM125-mounted Paul Edmondson, Josh McLevy and Dengler. Andrews turned in a blistering time on his third lap and zapped Hawk for third. Then he set his sights on the two Suzukis. Andrews reeled and passed Smith before the end of the fourth lap only to lose it when his bike started choking again. Meanwhile, Hatch was cruising with a 21-second lead.

Hatch pitted for fuel and goggles on lap five and further cut his pace to baby the bike. His lap time dropped from a

23:22 to a 23:55 on that lap, while Andrews' pit dropped his time to a 24:09. Hatch was watching his pit board (the mechanics ride to various points on the track on dual-sports), though, and knew Andrews was coming.

"I was just riding smart and trying to save the bike. It actually quit on the second lap, and I had the guys pull the Filterskin and got it going again. Mike (Webb) and Shane (Nalley) were telling me to baby it, so I was. I wasn't hitting any of the berms, just hugging the inside.

"It was a Catch 22 - my right hand wanted to twist it back, but my airfilter didn't want it to go there. I could've gone a lot faster, I know, but my bike wouldn't have been there at the end. I was hoping they'd let me floor it for a couple of laps then go ahead and change filters and race with Freddy. I was just babying it and cruising."

Smith, who had gone through the scoring barrels in second place on each of the first four laps, had some drama of his own on the fourth lap. "I got tangled up with a lapper on a steep hill," Smith said, "and getting going again just took the energy right out of me. I had nothing left for the end of the race. The more I tried to replenish the energy level with fluids, the more nauseous I got. I was just hanging on the best I could."

Although he tried to keep it quiet to put on his best race face, Smith had been fighting a bronchial infection all week, and the dust wouldn't help matters any. Then he tweaked his back the day before the race and spent much of that evening at a chiropractor. Still, he toughed it out.

Smith held second until Hawk passed him on the fifth lap, which got Hawk's fan club really cooking.

"I got a pretty good holeshot, for me, being on the four-stroke," Hawk said. "I got off about eighth into the woods, and racing the quad yesterday (see 'Briefly...') helped me on the first lap. I could jump in harder and get by guys that were being tentative. I knew what was coming, and got Watts, Edmondson and a couple of other guys. I caught up to the leaders - I could see Steve and Rodney, but Freddy was flying. He passed me twice and was just gone. I



(Above) Fred Andrews (3) jumps out to the early lead at the GNCC Series round at High Point in Pennsylvania.

(Left) Andrews kept his slim hopes alive of winning the GNCC title with a do-or-die win.

knew I wouldn't be able to stay with him. About the fifth lap I started getting cramps in my legs. They'd come and go. Then I got by Rodney. I started getting pitboards saying I was catching Steve, but then I got off, and my legs really cramped. I couldn't even push the kick-start lever down, it hurt so bad. I got going and was just glad to make the podium. Now we'll work on getting a second and, hopefully, a first before this year is over. I'm not racing the quad at the next round, and we'll see how my energy level does."

Andrews reeled off an incredible 22:21 on the fifth lap and zapped both Smith and Hatch for the lead.

"I was having so much fun out there," Andrews said. "I work hard at home and that pays off. When you come out here and feel like a million bucks, that keeps you in a job. I felt like I could do no wrong today. I'd get on the gas and my KX was going straight as an arrow. It was jumping and cornering just great, and I was having a blast. I knew that I had those guys beat."

"Those Dunlops kept me hooked up, and my pit crew did a hell of a job. They got me in and out of there in good time. I felt like I was making time in the open spots. I didn't want it to be over, I was having so much fun. I felt totally comfortable and was just letting it go."

Letting it fly is more like it.

"We were coming up on a lapper," Hatch said. "And I jumped to the right to get out of the dust. Freddy just jumped right into the dust and was gone. I take my hat off to Fred and Kawasaki - they did a great job today. I also take my hat off to Shane, who's been doing a heck of a job. My bike ran great, and I've been on the podium every time since the first four races."

Andrews backed off a bit on the last lap and took the win by 24 seconds over Hatch. His rear knobby looked like a paddle tire, as every other row of knobs was ripped from the carcass.

The tough course took its toll on other racers, too. On the podium, Andrews pointed to a huge dent in Hatch's pipe. "When did you get that?" Freddy joked, "When I kicked you?"

Actually, a stump creased it on the fifth lap and added to Hatch's worries.



(Above left) Series leader Rodney Smith is in cruise mode and stands a good chance of winning his second GNCC title. He finished fourth at High Point.

(Above right) Steve Hatch pulls in for a fill-up en route to a second-place finish.

(Right) Barry Hawk Jr. rode well, finishing third overall. The multi-time GNCC Quad champ will concentrate solely on the motorcycle class next year.



Watts also fell victim to a smashed expansion chamber - on the first lap. A stump flattened his pipe so bad that it was pulled away from the cylinder. He replaced it and rode for three more laps before calling it a day. It was a smart move, as he could've damaged his tender knee just as easily as his pipe. That's not a good way to ride yourself back into shape.

Paul Edmondson, the mud specialist and former world enduro champ, ran as high as sixth before crashing in the woods and detuning himself. He pulled out on the fifth lap. He was running fourteenth at the time. The race also took its toll on defending Hare Scrambles champ and points leader Doug Blackwell, who retired on the second lap.

And what of Jimmy Jarrett, Andrews' teammate? Fighting a respiratory infection for a week, Jarrett was set

to tough it out and hopefully help his teammate at High Point. He fell in the first turn and got off dead last, then fell again in the woods. Invisible in the dust, Jarrett was run over by several 250cc A riders before being pulled off of the course by Frank Keegan, and Reid Nordin sent him to the hospital for observation. Other up-and-comers fared better. Jason Raines charged from outside the top 10 to finish a credible fifth ahead of Joel Dengler.

Scott Plessinger came out of semi-retirement to ride a new 2000 KTM 250 and finished seventh overall.

"It went pretty good," Scott said. "I got off about 12th and made a few mistakes, falling over once. I set a good, steady pace all day long and started picking people off, then my filter clogged up so I had to get one from Watts. On the last two laps, my hands started blistering up pretty badly, because I haven't ridden in about three months. It was rough out there. The roots were sticking out of the ground about a foot and a half, and I couldn't hang on anymore."

Aussie Ian Cunningham moved steadily up from a horrible start to grab eighth by the halfway mark and hang onto it until the finish. Robbie Jenks, who started fifth, miscued in the woods and dropped out of the top 10 on the first lap. He and Aussie Jason Cater traded ninth and tenth a few times, with Jenks riding smart in the waning laps to take ninth by three minutes over the Honda XR400 rider, who was mistaken for Scott Summers by some spectators in the woods.

Smith was so drained after the three-hour tour of Pennsylvania woods that he laid motionless in the boxvan for almost an hour. He had almost tasted that second title only to have it snatched away by the super-aggressive Andrews. He had, however, made a mark of his own. With the best nine scores of 13 counting toward the Pro title, Rodney had replaced a fifth with a fourth, to go with his four firsts, three seconds and a third. That's a heck of a turnaround from his DNF at the opening round.



Andrews, on the other hand, has had two DNFs. He has to win the next two rounds, in Ohio and Indiana, to erase a sixth and a fourth. And Hatch and Hawk are hungrier than ever.

While the 250cc motocross national has had more winners (seven, to the GNCC's four), it sure has nothing on the cross country series for sheer drama. Will Andrews keep the streak alive at the next round?

Joking with the Suzuki guys after the race, Andrews said, "I've got my Mule, so I can slow down now."

Don't believe it.

CN

High Point Raceway
Mount Morris, Pennsylvania
Results: September 26, 1999

O/A: 1. Fred Andrews (Kaw); 2. Steve Hatch (Suz); 3. Barry Hawk Jr. (Yam); 4. Rodney Smith (Suz); 5. Jason Raines (Kaw); 6. Chuck Woodford (Kaw); 7. Joel Dengler (Suz); 8. Scott Plessinger (KTM); 9. Ian Cunningham (Hon); 10. Robbie Jenks (Yam); 11. Rod Stuckey (Kaw); 12. Jason Cater (Hon); 13. Richard Lafferty (KTM); 14. Gene Onail (Kaw); 15. Joshua McLevy (KTM); 16. Shawn Reed (Hus); 17. Aaron Kopp (Suz); 18. Tim Shephard (Yam); 19. Harvey Whitaker (Kaw); 20. Darius Lattea (Yam).
AMA GRAND NATIONAL CROSS COUNTRY CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES POINT STANDINGS (After 11 of 13 rounds): 1. Rodney Smith (172/4 wins); 2. Fred Andrews (165/2); 3. Steve Hatch (158); 4. Barry Hawk Jr. (136); 5. Robbie Jenks (107); 6. Paul Edmondson (106); 7. Michael Lafferty (102); 8. Jason Raines (99); 9. Shane Watts (99/4); 10. Joel Dengler (96); 11. Doug Blackwell (91); 12. Chuck Woodford (89); 13. Jim Jarrett (83); 14. Randy Hawkins (73); 15. Steve McSwain (68); 16. Scott McLaughlin (43); 17. (TIE) Blair Bersano/Scott Summers (37/1); 19. Richard Lafferty (34); 20. Brian Keegan (31).

Upcoming Rounds:
Round 12 - Uhrichsville, OH
Round 13 - Crawfordsville, IN

Briefly...

While there isn't actually ink on the contract yet, **Paul Edmondson** is leaving Suzuki for a Team Green Kawasaki ride. He'll test before deciding whether to ride the KX250 and KX125. Upon hearing that, **Shane Nalley** (Hatch's mechanic) joked, "I've spent time with the KX125 (tuning Mike Kiedrowski's championship bike). Take the 250." It's uncertain whether Eddie's mechanic, **Marshall Plumb**, will move to Kawasaki with him. Paul will join **Fred Andrews** for sure, and (unofficially) **Jimmy Jarret**.

Speaking of **Mike Kiedrowski**, he's set to replace Paul Edmondson at Suzuki Off-Road, aboard the new DR-Z400 four-stroke. "When I left Honda of Troy and came to Suzuki (when Kiedrowski retired)," Nalley said, "I told him he should try the GNCCs. He said that if Suzuki made something like the Yamaha YZ400, he'd do it." Now it looks like it's coming true. The kick-start DR-Z is said to be lighter than the Honda XR400 and Yamaha WRF. **Rodney Smith** and **Steve Hatch** will be the MX Kied's teammates, with one of them possibly campaigning an RM125.

Scott Summers is set to ride the new aluminum-framed, liquid-cooled XR650R next year. Since his hip and leg took longer to heal than expected, Summers recently had work done on his damaged brake finger. Doctors

transferred a "redundant" tendon from another finger to back the damaged tendon. He has been training hard for his return and just received his medical release to start riding again. Summers may even make the last round of the series, but not on the 650. A 280 is more likely.

Barry Hawk has re-signed with Yamaha, only he'll ride a YZ250 two-stroke in 2000. He talked with Kawasaki about Edmondson's ride and even had the incentive of working on Kawasaki's new KX250-based quad project, but he decided to stay with Yamaha. The seven-time consecutive GNCC Quad Pro champ will hang up his tether switch for 2000 and devote all his racing energies to two-wheelers.

Hawk's teammate **Randy Hawkins** didn't attend High Point, as he rode the National enduro in Texas. Hawkins is set to campaign the YZ400F next year. As for SCR Yamaha's plans for 2000, **Tim Shephard** was undecided, other than they'll probably "scale back" from the current five-rider team.

Shane Watts hasn't finalized his plans for next year, either, but it looks like he'll stay with KTM for another year and go for the GNCC title.

Brothers **Ben, Eric** and **Torsten Bostrom** are set to ride one of the last two rounds of the GNCCs. Probably the final at Crawfordsville.