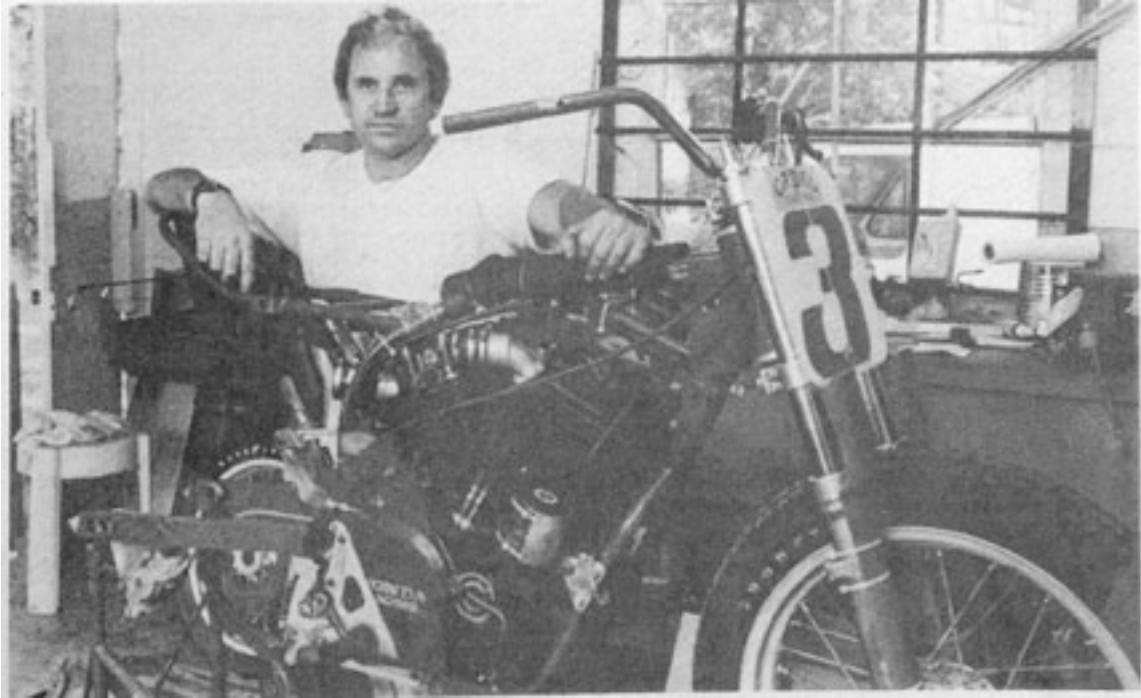


Johnny Goad has the fastest dirt bike in the world!



Johnny Goad hangs dry-wall for a living, but he lives to race his motorcycles. Now, after 28 years of dirt tracking, he's out front and "got those factory boys on the run!"

Last week he was in his motorcycle shop on Route 40 getting his two Honda 760s ready for California races. When the bikes have been completely overhauled and every part examined, he'll load them in his van and head west, where he'll meet up with his driver, Ricky Graham.

Thanks to Graham's skill, Goad was lovingly working on the "fastest dirt bike in the world" ...for the moment, that is. This Spring, Graham, who Goad calls a Top Gun, won a Grand National Championship at Syracuse, NY and a world record for the fastest mile from a stand still. Graham averaged 108 miles per hour and reached speeds around 1309 miles an hour. "It's stuff like that makes you feel pretty good," Goad said.

While Graham's job is to watch out for the other 17 guys trying to get in front of him, Goad's job is to watch out for "those five cent parts." He held up a small thumb size valve that had failed at one race: "If it hadn't been for this little gas valve getting turned off, we'd be in the points lead and in the bonus money," Goad said. "That's what keeps you out of the winner's circle, those little five cent parts."

Taking care of details is life or death, literally, for motorcycle racers, continued Goad. And that's where he and his driver put their focus, and it is paying off. Unlike the factory bikes that have millions behind them, "privateers" like Goad operate from their garages and vans and are always one accident away from being wiped out.

“You can’t buy a motorcycle like this,” said Goad as he pulled the exhaust system off the bike being overhauled. He and Sara Irby, who lives in North Carolina, are co-owners of the two bikes, each of which cost about \$22,000. All of his experience goes into keeping the huge Honda 103 horsepower engines from blowing up on the track, a disaster that will cost \$8,000 to fix—“you can’t afford much of that,” he said.

“People here don’t realize how deep I am into racing,” said Goad, who had started racing when he was 21. He raced for Richmond Harley Davidson, but after ten years on top of the motorcycle, he began to get more satisfaction out of building the bike and watching a younger man do the racing. “I used to like to go fast but now it scares me,” admitted Goad, who is 49. He finds that his experience as a driver helps him understand how the bike is performing. “When the driver brings the bike in, I already know what it’s doing.”

Goad said he feels like the owner of a great race horse and has finally found a jockey with the skill and dedication necessary to keep it in the winner’s circle. In dirt tracking, you have to “be in the top five to get the big money...and it’s the guy who makes “the least mistakes who is going to be up front when it’s all over.”

Life to be fully lived must be kept at the edge of “going into the wall.” Goad would say. And to find that edge, he drives 100,000 miles a year for races that test his powers as a mechanic and his driver’s nerve. “The only way to race this motorcycle is to want it more than anything else in life...more than living itself!” he added.

And you could see what he was driving at. What would life be like without the roar of the crowd and the bikes going sideways at 130 miles per hour, without the sweet victory of being number one or the bitter disappointment of being out of the race? It’s better than hanging dry-wall all year, Goad would say.