

ISDE 2003

by Derek Steahly

I wanted to start off by thanking some people, the OMRA, JAFMAR Racing, Jeff Dunham, Troy Williver, Cascade Endurance Center, CDS, Oregon_DSR, Bamfords, Dan Jordan, and NW Tour & Trail, thank you for your support in helping me get to the Six Days. I would also like to thank Jim Bechard of the Motorcycle Riders

Association here in Medford. I also thank my sponsors: Steahly Off Road, Gresham KTM (Steve and Rick are the best around), TM Designworks (the best chain guides and sliders made), Moose, Scott goggles, IronMan Sprockets (not a sign of wear after 1,000 hard miles in the sand), ARC Levers, and Arai helmets.

This years ISDE was a great experience. No gold this year but I am happy with getting another ISDE medal. This year's Six Days was not the hardest as far as the riding went; however, it was one of the toughest rides mentally. The hot weather took its toll on everyone. It took me two days



of near heat exhaustion to realize I had to drink water until I thought I was going to throw up every night just so I

wouldn't get sick from the heat the next day. In addition to the two gallons of water we had to drink every night were the three to four camel backs of Gatorade/water mix we drank while riding. By the end I never wanted to drink Gatorade or water again. Also the ratio of road to trail was not very good. The ride was about 80 percent road and 20 percent off road (sand, and trail). Our speed averages were over 30 miles an hour for the day including sitting at check points and waiting in line at special tests which meant our riding speeds averaged around 40 miles an hour. Not only did the race present challenges but so did the week before while setting up our bikes.

For once the US container was the first to arrive instead of the last, it was waiting for us when we arrived so we had several days to work on our bikes instead of several hours. The biggest problem was



jetting for sea level with the Brazilian gas which was mad of 50% gas, 40% alcohol, and 10% water. I don't really know what the actual combination was but it was the worst gas any of our bikes had ever seen. No one could get their bikes rich enough to stop the pinging. One US rider burned a hole in his piston in three laps around the practice track which was about a tenth of a mile long! About five US team riders seized their motors before we even had to impound.



Finally after going up twenty sizes on the main, ten sizes on the pilot, a richer needle raised to the bottom clip, and a richer slide my bike would make it about eight laps on the practice track before it got hot and started to ping a little bit. I would have been more comfortable going even richer than my 195 on the main jet but there wasn't a bigger one to be found. The KTM parts truck had sold every main jet they had bigger than a 190. Another problem was keeping the fine sugary sand from sucking through the air filter and destroying the motor. My plan was to surround my air box with panty hose so as

little sand as possible would be let in. Next I sliced the rim off of one of my KTM air filters and doubled it up with my other air filter that had already been covered with a filter skin. This filter, filter skin, filter combination proved to be good because my bike held together all week, no extra cc's from sand boring.

Day one was a mix of sand and dirt road (I guess that could be said of all of the days). The day started out with a quick loop on some dirt roads to get to the first special test. It was a nice sand test with lots of ups and downs and a good mix of sweeper and tight corners. The nice part lasted for the



first day then it turned in to a monster with sand whoops that could swallow a VW bug whole. Then we made straight for the beach for a five mile section. Riding down the beach like you see in the crusty movies was a blast. My first crash of the six days happened in this section. I was racing along the soft sand trail just off of the beach where the sand



was wet and hard. I looked over to the beach and saw that some riders had ridden on the harder packed sand for an easier ride. To get there you had to jump down a five foot bank. As I went off of the bank at 30 miles an hour I jumped with my front wheel a little to low and it dug into the sand when I landed. Over the bars I went with the bike landing on top of me and the rear wheel hitting me on the head. My trophy Six Days helmet received a trophy sized gouge and tire scuff marks. I quickly got up before any other riders could see the

embarrassing scene of me stuck underneath my bike. The rest of the day went pretty smoothly and no more crashes or any route points.

Day two was going to be one of the hottest days of the six days, one of the pit crews had a thermometer that read 106 degrees. And that was in a cool area. Temperatures for the week were about 85 degrees on the beach to about 110 inland, all in the tropics 4 degrees south of the equator. The day started with a thirty mile road ride to the first check with a tight time schedule. Riders were flying down the roads with no regard to safety. We were passing semi trucks on the right hand side, flying down the shoulder of the road at 70 miles an hour, and passing cars on blind corners. This might not be too much of a problem here in the states where the roads are smooth, but in Brazil the roads are not very nice. There are pot holes that could swallow a school bus, drivers that are just down right crazy, they drive with either no knowledge or no care that traffic laws exist, and then there are the animals; cows, donkeys, chickens, dogs, and pigs, that run out in front of you with no warning.



Luckily I made to the first check alive. The next section was a fast dirt road winding into the mountains. Towards the top the road turned really rough and rocky and the pace slowed. Soon the road was just a rocky trail winding through the hills. This was the toughest trail section of the race. The single track wound through rocks and boulders that could smash pipes and foot pegs along with legs and feet. The pace was so slow that the five mile section seemed like twenty. It was so hot that people had to stop and take there helmets of to cool down. One rider from Great Britain suffered a so called heart attack and died in this section. Many people believed it was probably heat stroke. The evening after was very somber and many riders didn't know if they wanted to start the next day because of it. After the rocks we rode through banana trees at the top of the mountain ridge. It was cooler in there and looked very jungle like. Then we dropped off of the ridge on an old donkey trail that porters once used to pack the bananas off of the mountain. The trail was very steep with a gnarly switch back with huge rocks every 100 feet of so. Finally after thinking I was going to die from the heat we rode into the next check point. After leaving the check we rode a few miles of pavement and took a turn onto a gravel road that led out into a valley past the mountains. This area must have been hotter than Death Valley in the middle of summer. The faster you rode the hotter it got. It felt like

riding in a sauna. After twenty miles or so we started to climb back into the mountains where the banana plantations made it about thirty degrees cooler. Then we rode into a town up in the mountains where there was a special test. It was on a hill side using the yards several homes as part of the test. A helicopter hovered over the test videoing the racers (this was a common sight at many of the tests and along the beach). After a good



road ride we again made are way up into the mountains and dropped onto another torturous trail that wound down the hill side. The trail was another old donkey trail that was a huge rut that was about eight feet deep and wide enough for a bike at the bottom. This went through some banana plantations and had some very tricky switch backs, more that once I almost ended up tumbling over the bars down through the banana trees while trying to negotiate one of them. After this section the went to a special test and then to a check point at the start of the special test I looked at my watch to see how much time I was going to have to get to the check and noticed that it was going to be tight. I rode the test as fast as I could and headed straight for the check. The area that the test was on and the land in between the test and the check was all grass land with lots of little mounds hidden in the grass, the dirt was hard as concrete and very dusty, as I was racing to make it to the check on time I came up behind another rider that was slowing me down and would not move out of my way. I then decided to go around him in the grass. This was a very bad idea because as I was passing him in fifth gear I hit some of the hidden mounds. My back end swapped three or four times before I high sided and hit the concrete like ground. I laid there for several seconds wondering how I survived and then picked my bike up and looked at my watch only to realize that if only I hadn't crashed I would have made the check on time. I dropped my first two route points of the week.

Day three was the same course as day two and started out well enough for me but in the second special test, a nice hard pack test (the same one I had crashed near the day before), I got my foot caught in a rut. My foot stuck and twisted my led around backwards. POP! I heard the cartilage in my knee tear and there was a numbing pain that shot through my leg. My knee was tight and felt like there was a rock jammed in my joint. As I rode I could feel my knee pop and get a little looser every once in a while. At the next check I took some Bextra which helped a little, but those down hills were still hard to ride with a hurt knee. I ended up dropping a ton of route points for the day which put back onto bronze. The rest of the week I would just be riding to finish.

Day four and five were a welcome change from the heat and gnarly single track of days two and three. Right out of parc ferme we jumped directly onto the beach and rode to the first test. It was a fast sand test with fast sweeping corners and some rolling jumps. The sand was hard on the bikes and by the end of the sand test they were running lean from being hot. The exhaust pipes on all of the two strokes turned blue and purple from being so hot. Next we rode some awesome sections through the dunes. Huge rolling dunes that made for some good fifth gear pinned sand riding.



Care had to be taken when riding over the back side of the dunes, I found this out over the first dune where I was riding fifth gear pinned and rode over the top and then flew off of a eight foot drop off into the soft sand where I immediately was stopped by the impact. I luckily wasn't hurt and I could see craters made by other riders that made the same mistake. After the dunes we rode a five mile section of sand whoops. This was hard on my knee and I was glad when it was over. Then we had to cross several streams and then a deep mud hole where spectators were helping guide riders so the wouldn't get stuck. We then rode some pavement to the next check and special test. The test was

another sand test right on the beach with tight corners. It was hard to keep the bike on top of the sand with all of the tight corners. We then took another trip out onto the dunes and back onto the beach with a few road sections to the next check. The next check to check section consisted of three straight sections and three corners; a ten mile straight followed by a 90 degree corner and another ten mile straight and then do it again. We were given close to an hour for this section and it took thirty minutes. It was a thirty mile section so our speed average was sixty. We then rode some fast dirt roads with banked corners and jumped back onto the dunes back to parc ferme.

Finally day six arrived and all I had to do to finish was ride nine miles of road to the final moto. The supermoto consisted of some hard pack flat dirt sections and some asphalt sections at the local auto race track. When the gate dropped in my 250cc moto I was lined up on the far outside and got a mid pack start. In some of the other motos riders had fallen in the first right hander on the pavement. Then the course did some



zig zags from asphalt to dirt and back a couple of times and then down the back straight on the asphalt through the chicane and out on to a short dirt straight and then a fast asphalt sweeper to a hairpin, then around in the infield for the dirt section with lots of flat corners. I ran mid pack until a fall in the dirt section left me towards the back. The dust was horrible so I decided to just back of and finish the six days with some wheelies down the straights. I finished on bronze but I was happy to finish. Some days I really didn't want to go torture my self in the heat and dust. Some of the fast roads were just down right scary and I feared for my life

about half of the time. The other half I feared that my bike would blow up in the sand. I was glad that it was over and I was glad that I finished even if it was on bronze. I am looking forward to riding another Six Days. Hopefully it will be cool and wet.





THE END



