



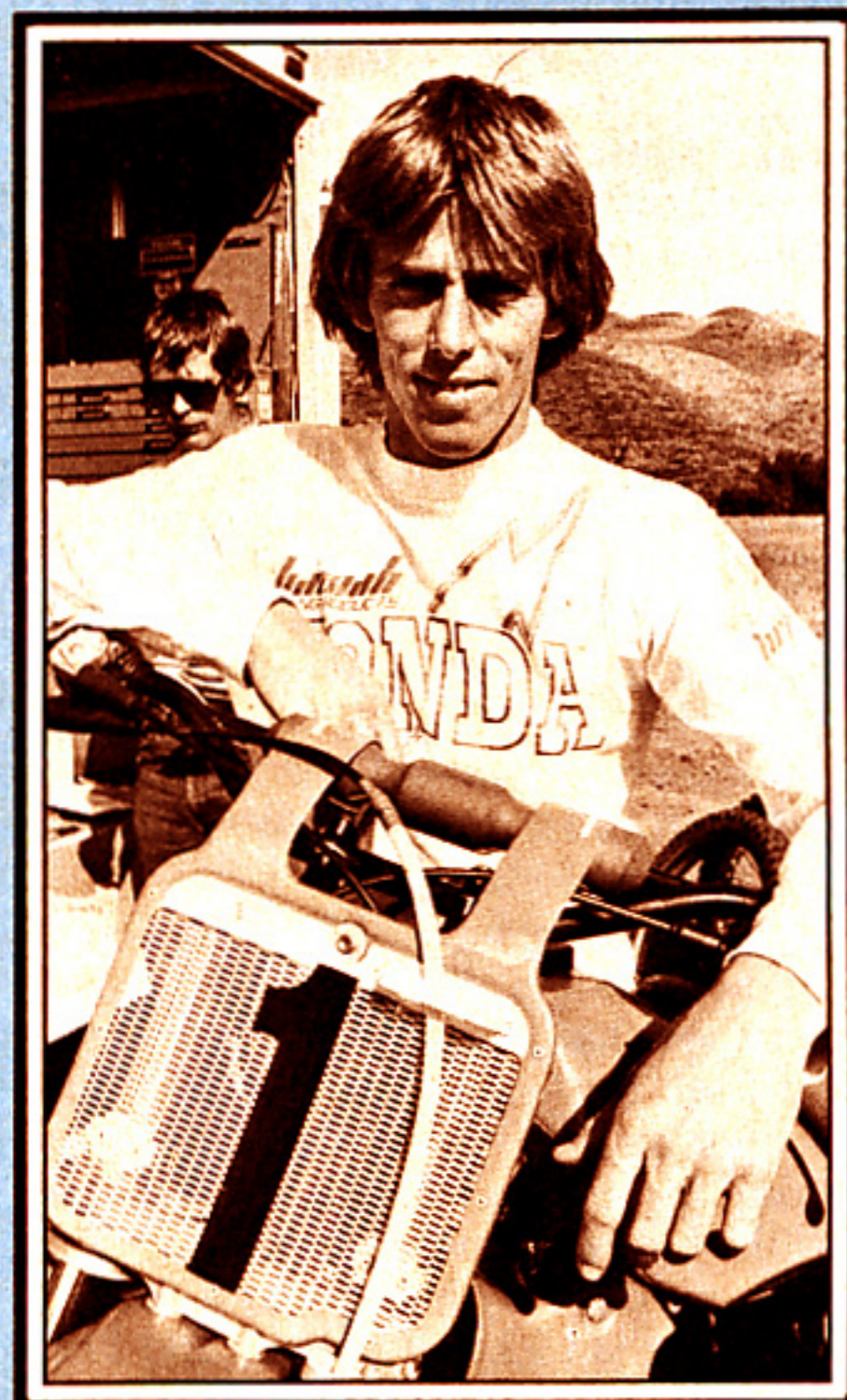
LIKE A HURRICANE

NO EXCUSES!

Bob Hannah talks about racing,
Team Yamaha, Team Honda,
& his comeback

□ Bob Hannah hates excuses. He doesn't use them and detests people who avail themselves of what he considers a crutch. "Once you get in the habit of making excuses, it sticks," believes the Hurricane, or, as his friends still call him, "Buckwheat" Bob Hannah.

Hannah has come full circle from a seven-year career with Yamaha, a career that saw the Lancaster, California, youth emerge as first among his peers in the sport of motocross. A freak water-skiing accident forced a year's retirement from racing for him while at the peak of his talents. When Hannah returned to racing, many doubted whether he could pick up where he had left off, as the winningest rider in American motocross history. In what would have been considered a remarkable comeback for just about anyone other than Bob Hannah, he encountered several frustrating seasons of being unable to regain the position of dominance he



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had held over the sport before his injury. Speculation was that there were just too many fast guys for any one rider to dominate as Bob had in the late '70s.

In an attempt to win all three National classes in 1982, Yamaha entered Hannah into the 125 class, with Broc Glover in the 250s and Mike Bell in the 500s. Yamaha's bid for a triple-header turned sour, and instead of winning, it ended up with nary a National title to its name. Bob still had a year to go on his Yamaha contract, but wanted out. He felt he wasn't getting 100-percent support from Yamaha, and a stormy personal relationship with the management wasn't helping any. They came to a mutual agreement, and Bob left Yamaha to ride for Honda at a reputed sizable cut in pay.

Hannah signed a contract with heavy emphasis on bonuses for winning, and has flashed back on the scene to look like the Hurricane of old.

MXA: What has changed for you, now that you're at Team Honda?

Bob: Attitude. That and a good bike. Plus, I'm working real hard!

MXA: What does working "real hard" encompass?

Bob: Riding, and working up to seven days a week, if that's what it takes. Riding mostly. A motorcycle racer has to be able to ride a motorcycle. He doesn't need to be able to press 600 pounds. We're in a motorcycle-riding contest and that's what you need to do—ride motorcycles.

MXA: Do you feel you're still learning when you ride?

Bob: Sure. You can learn stuff from Amateurs. You never stop learning. I don't care if you're Roger DeCoster or Mark Barnett, you can still find ways to improve. Right now, I'm not riding so much to see how to ride, but more to become familiar with the bike. I want to know that bike like the back of my hand so when I do have to push—or ride over my head—I can. If you're not confident, you can't win. You have to know your bike, how far you can go, and even go over that if that's what it takes to win.



Photo by Paul Buckley

"Very few individuals are obsessed with anything. That's a heavy statement. . . to be obsessed with something. I'm obsessed with winning."

MXA: Do you feel you've been unfairly labeled a "wild" rider?

Bob: I am a wild rider. There are stages where everyone has to resort to wild riding sometimes. Mark Barnett is a smooth rider, but you start pushing him and he'll ride a little wild too. Someone who won't do that. . . well, he just doesn't want to win badly enough. In just about any race, you've got to go for it at least once or twice to win. You can't always be smooth and win the race. At Hangtown this year, I felt I wasn't riding particularly well. If I had wanted to look smooth, I could have ridden that way and gotten second or third. I'm not out there for looks. If I'm riding well one day, I might look smooth. If I'm not, I'll look a little wild. If I'm not riding smooth and still want to win, I look bad. We're not in a looks contest.

Magoo doesn't particularly care how you think he looks on the bike. He's there to win. His feet were coming off, his hands were coming off, but he still won at Hangtown, and that's what goes down on the paper—not that he looked smooth. Honda's report to Japan wouldn't be, "Yeah, he rode real smooth, but got tenth." That's not what he's paid for. He's paid to win, same

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as me. All the report to Japan will say is that Magoo and Hannah won that weekend, not that they had to ride like madmen to do it.

MXA: *What about your somewhat stormy breakup with Yamaha?*

Bob: I had a good career over there. They paid me real well. They backed me for a long time. It's just that the relationship deteriorated at the end. I think any relationship with a company can fall apart. After seven years, the relationship just kind of faded out. They thought I wasn't riding perfect, and I thought the bikes weren't perfect. Neither one of us was willing to say the other guy was right, so it was time for me to change, that was all.

Now that I'm at Honda, I couldn't have it any better. I don't have one complaint. I told Honda that for my own personal reasons, I would win races. I've got a point to prove—at least this year I do. I can't tell you what my attitude will be next year because I don't know. The point is, I know I can win, and everyone who said I couldn't is full of it. I'm currently in the process of proving them wrong. At the beginning of the year, I predicted that I was going to give them (the riders) a beating. I think they're starting to get the point. I must have ridden ten races this year, and I won seven or so. I'm satisfied with the results. Nobody can win them all. Not even Roger DeCoster could win them all.

MXA: *Speaking of DeCoster, how much of an influence has he been for you at Honda?*

Bob: A big influence. Everyone on

that team has a purpose over there. They have a trainer, Jeff Spencer, who does his share of helping the team. Dave Arnold does his share. Roger DeCoster does his share. I have a lot of respect for Roger because I'm one of the few riders left who has ever raced with him. I know how he rode and what his attitude was, and I know how his attitude to win is now.

Roger DeCoster was as good as they come. Not too many riders have the same attitude that Roger and I have. He told me, after racing with me, that at one time he kind of hated me. He worked at hating me, the way I work at hating the riders I race against now. We could talk about it now that we work for the same goals at Team Honda. He told me that he was *obsessed* with winning. Very few riders in the United States or the world are like that. You've got factory riders—not to mention names or anything—that jerk around and play games all during the week, and then on Sunday think they're there to race. They're not there to race—I don't really know what they're there to do, but it's not to win. Very few individuals are *obsessed* with anything. That's a heavy statement... to be obsessed with something. We're not talking about thinking you'd like to win while flying out to the races in the plane on Friday. We're talking about getting up on Monday morning, when you're hurting, and thinking you want to win so badly, you can taste it; that you want to beat those guys so badly, you'll train however long it takes to do it. You work at hating those guys next to you on the line. That's being obsessed with winning. I don't think too

many people have it, and you can sure tell the guys who don't.

MXA: *How do you feel toward the general public?*

Bob: I like the public as much as ever, and I'm pumped that they're still with me. I think they're behind me more than ever because I've got a lot of Honda fans that I never had, and the Yamaha guys that were behind me, excluding a few from the factory, are still with me, I believe. I really don't care all that much to be liked by my fellow riders, though. If they think I'm going to go there and shake hands and be buddy-buddy, then they've got the wrong guy. I mean, I go home and am buddies with my real friends. I don't care to make new ones at the track.

MXA: *Speaking of buddies, you were never known for getting along well with your old Yamaha teammates. Has that changed?*

Bob: When I was at Yamaha I didn't get along with them, and I don't get along with them now. The only difference is that now it's okay not to like them. When Ricky Burgett and Danny Turner were there in the beginning, I got along with them all right. I just never got along with Broc Glover and Mike Bell in the first place. I don't like them. That's not to say that both of them aren't excellent riders and worthy competitors. Yamaha would never have hired them if they weren't. But if they're in this business to make friends, they're in the wrong business. I'm not, and never have been.

MXA: *What was so different with Team Yamaha?*

Bob: That team is not a team, and never has been—especially when it comes to rider/mechanic relationships. Each rider and mechanic are their own separate team over at Yamaha.

Honda is a team effort. When Honda wins, even if it's not me, I'm pumped. And I think the other team members feel the same, as long as it was a Honda that won. As long as it wasn't a stinking Yamaha! Whenever Glover used to win, even when I was at Yamaha, I wasn't too pleased.

MXA: *How do you and David Bailey get along as teammates?*

Bob: No problems. Bailey wants to beat me, and I'm trying to beat him. I don't have that long to do it, and that's what I tell him—not to worry, he'll do it sooner or later. It's just a matter of weeks, or months, or days. He watches me like a hawk, what I do and why I do it, and one day he's going to know me better than I know myself, and I'm not going to have a chance. He's a good rider, and he tells it the way it

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is. He's pretty straightforward. A little crazy—he's about two cans short of a six-pack. You've got to keep your eye peeled on him when he gets that way because he's liable to be up to something. He gets teed off when I beat him, and that's good because if he was completely happy when I beat him, he'd be a loser. But he's a winner. He's got the background, the ability and the desire to kill me and everybody else. I hope it's not this year because I want this year!

MXA: *What irritates Bob Hannah?*

Bob: I don't like two-faced, backstabbing people who I can't trust. My best friend, Bevo, goes to the races and watches me ride. He knows me better than anyone else knows me. He knows what I like, what I think, when I train well, when I train lousy, and when I don't feel like winning, by just looking at me. When I ride poorly, he tells me, "Hannah, you rode like an old woman today." He doesn't say, "Yeah, you're two seconds faster than the pack." He doesn't bullcrap me. When I'm a jerk, he tells me. And when I do all right, he tells me that too. I want the guys I hang out with to tell me if there's something I do that they don't like. I don't want them to just think to themselves, "I wish he wouldn't do that." I want them to say, "Why don't you quit doing that before I knock your teeth out?"

MXA: *What's your attitude out on the track now? Is it still, "You ram me, I'll ram you"?*

Bob: Jimmy Weinert once told me, "Hannah, don't worry about what they're saying, as long as they're talking about you!" I still remember that. If you started something with him, you were starting something with the wrong boy. Same as me. You start it and I'll finish it. The press seems to work something up between me and Howerton, me and Weinert, or me and Ricky Johnson, and there's no big deal about it. Me and Ricky J—we're just out there racing, and sometimes we get belligerent about it, and it turns into a brawl. Then I'll hear rumors such as: "I hear you almost got in a fist fight," or: "You were ramming," or: "You were going to fight after the races." I've fought with boxing gloves, but never a fist fight out in the street, the pits, or anywhere else. I'm not saying I never will. If somebody starts one, I'm not going to run from anything. You start the fist fight and I'll try to finish it. Whether I can or not is a different story. But on the track, I'm pretty confident of who's going to finish it.

MXA: *How do you like your bikes to be set up?*

Bob: To have three horsepower more than anyone else's, everywhere in the powerband (*laughter*). Right now, I'm pleased with the powerband and how the bikes are running. The bikes are good enough to win on. Anyone who rides Hondas and says the bikes aren't good enough to win on should go back home to mother. The bikes are the best out there...excluding the works 125. The production bike is great, but the works Honda 125 isn't quite up to par with Barnett's or Ward's works bikes yet. I think they just ran out of development time before the season started. O'Mara's got his work cut out for him in the 125 class. Barnett and Ward are both the best there is. I don't envy O'Mara's having to beat those guys.

MXA: *How do you feel about the new format of having one overall champion?*

Bob: I don't look that far down the road. I look at each individual race as a race. I don't care how they run the series, how they score the points, or any of that stuff. The only things I worry about are my bike, my training, winning races, and pleasing Honda. That's all.

MXA: *What are your plans for the future?*

Bob: When the season's over this winter, I'll go hunting and fishing, and then I'll go to Bermuda for a month's rest. Until then, I don't have any time off. My goal this year is to win as many races as I can, and as many championships as possible, then sign a three-year contract with Honda, and quit after that. Those are my plans for the next three years.

MXA: *Do you see any sort of developmental role, such as DeCoster's at Honda, in the future?*

Bob: They've talked about it, but no, not really. I don't see it happening. I don't think I'd want it. I could change my mind in three years, but I don't want it now. I like one thing in the industry, and one thing only. That is, to win races. The only thing I get a big thrill out of now is winning races. I hope nothing cuts me short. It's a long season and I don't know how any of the riders make it through without getting hurt a few times.

You're a short-lived hero in this sport. You're a hero for a couple of weeks, and then you're gone, and they forget about you. That's why I say that if you're out to be a hero and prove something to the world, you're in the wrong sport. But if you're out to prove something to yourself, you may do that. □