

BACK IN THE SPOTLIGHT AGAIN

Story & photos by Jim Gianatsis

The New MARTY TRIPES

MARTY TRIPES has come a long way. Not too far perhaps, in the way of age—after all this time he's still only 21 years old—but a long way when it comes to maturity. The kind of maturity that allowed Marty Tripes to finally make a firm commitment with his life. The commitment he made was to be the best professional motocross racer he possibly could be.

It was quite a change from the Marty Tripes of old. He had been a spoiled kid guided by a father, George Tripes, who tended to think in terms of how much money they could secure from the factories at the time. The kid, Marty Tripes, was shuffled from one factory team to the next and then finally sank from the top of the motocross heap where he had been one of the fastest riders in America.

The first time we talked with Marty was during the winter of 1973. We were on the balcony of his motel room at Daytona Beach. He was about to make his debut on the factory Honda at the Daytona Supercross. He had just completed running the Florida Winter-AMA Series on a CZ, and was sharing his motel room with a CZ teammate—a kid named Tony DiStefano.

"When I think back, I can't believe how much has gone by. It's amazing. Now, for me, it took so long to become 21. It seemed I was 16 years old forever, but now that I'm 21 it seems it all went by so quickly.

"My father did a lot for me back then. He got me started in racing and he found me my sponsors. Without him I couldn't have gotten to where I am now. But you can only do so much, and it was pretty hard for my father to let go of me when it was time to. I was at the stage where I

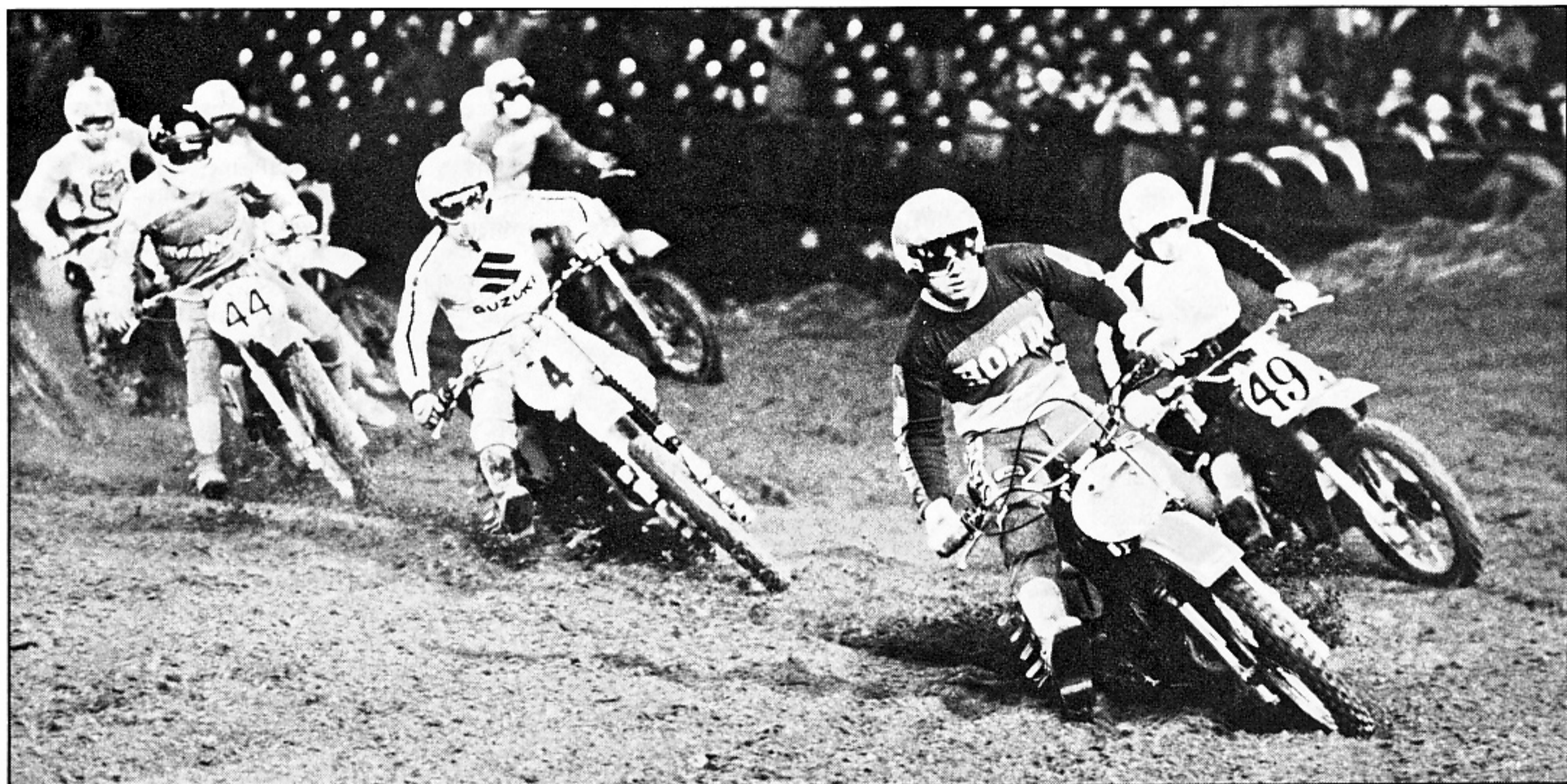


had to start doing things on my own the way I wanted to do them. He kept trying to push. It wasn't just him, but a lot of other people as well. I had a lot of bad advice and as it ended up I went through a lot of companies."

That's an understatement for Marty, because for a period of six years, starting in 1972, he rode for nearly every manufacturer in America. His biggest mistake came during the summer of 1974 when he made the switch from Husqvarna to Can-Am. It was a move that cost him the 250cc National Championship that year

and it was probably the biggest sellout in motocross history.

At the time he was racing under a semi-support program with Husqvarna. They were providing him with nearly everything except a salary. Going into the final 250cc race that year at New Orleans, Marty was in third place in the point standings behind Can-Am's Gary Jones and Jimmy Ellis. But Marty had built up such momentum at the previous few races that he was almost certain to win at New Orleans. He would then overtake Jones' and Ellis' slim points



Marty leads Danny LaPorte (4) in their Qualifier at Atlanta Stadium. Marty won the heat.



leads and win the Championship. Can-Am knew this and made Marty an offer that was hard to refuse, just days before the final race.

"I was a damn fool to leave Husky. I should never have done that. It cost me the National Championship. Can-Am called me up just before New Orleans and asked me to ride for them. At the time Husky wasn't doing too much for me, but it was a good bike and it had gotten me to where I was in good position to pull off the win at New Orleans.

"I said I wanted to ride for Can-Am, but not until the Series was over. They didn't want that. They wanted that Number One plate bad, no matter who got it. I called my father and at that stage all we could think about was the money part of Can-Am's offer. I won't tell you what the payoff was, but I'll tell you this; it wasn't worth it even if it had been \$50,000, because I made the wrong choice and it cost me the Championship.

At New Orleans, the bike Can-Am provided Marty for the final race didn't handle as well as his Husky. That put him out of contention for the win, and then a seized engine put him out of the race and left him third in the standings behind Jones and Ellis.

"I just listened to too many people. At the time I wasn't getting along with companies and my dad, right then, should have said to stick with Husky. Instead of taking the money, take the National Championship. But he told me to go for the money and that proved to be the wrong choice. I should have known better myself, but I was still a kid and

that's years in the past now.

I didn't have a professional attitude and racing, for me, was just pleasure. I never was serious about racing until 1978."

You'd have thought that George Tripes would have given his son a little better guidance after the Husky/Can-Am incident. But within weeks Marty was fired from Can-Am for refusing to wear their team uniform in the Trans-AMA Series that fall. It seemed Marty had a more lucrative contact with Wheels Of Man to wear their special color-coordinated motocross gear. Since that time Wheels Of Man has faded from the motocross scene, while Can-Am certainly hasn't. It was obviously another wrong move.

"When I first began racing, I rode CZ locally, then went to Rickman. Those were my privateer days. I did really well on the Rickman at Carlsbad CMC races and that's what got me my first factory ride with Yamaha back in 1972. I had just turned 16 and won the first Superbowl of Motocross for them. After that I didn't do too much and we had our first disagreement.

"The disagreement came during the end of the Trans-AMA Series in the fall of 1972. Yamaha's Pete Shick wanted me to race the Support class for the last two races since he said I wasn't doing well enough for the International class. I didn't agree so I left Yamaha. CZ gave me some bikes to race at the final Trans-AMA races. By the end of the year, though, Honda was after me and they got me to sign a contract for 1973.



"Going Strong" on the Honda: Marty pulled off back-to-back wins in the Atlanta and Daytona Supercross events.



"I rode for Honda in 1973 and then was fired at the end of the year. The only good thing I won for them was the Superbowl. The bikes weren't so good back then and I was having a lot of problems with the mechanics. My bikes weren't finishing and I tried to get my own mechanic hired. I even paid to fly him out to Unadilla for the Inter-Am race. The Honda mechanic worked on the bike the first moto and it ran badly, then broke. For the second moto I got my mechanic to work on the bike and in additional protest, I put Champion stickers over the Honda logo on the gas tank. It was childish. I got a bad start in the final moto, but I worked all the way up to second spot and nearly passed Mikkola for the win. That didn't go over so good with Honda, though, and more or less set me up for being fired at the end of the season.

"1974 was the year I rode partially for Husky then sold out to Can-Am. Then for 1975 I think I rode for Rickman again, then went to Bultaco for 1976. I rode Bultaco for half the year, then I had had it. I quit. It was time for me to get away to find out who I was.

"So I moved away from home in San Diego and up to my sister's in Las Vegas. I worked for my sister at Overton Beach Resort for half a year. I didn't see any of my old friends during that time. It allowed me to think over what I really wanted to do with my life. I finally realized I wanted to get back to racing, but this time seriously.

"Somehow Harley-Davidson found out where I was and gave me a call. I told them what I wanted to do—which is the same thing I'm doing with Honda now—except Harley-Davidson didn't have the bike I needed to do the job. I wanted to be with Harley-Davidson this year and I thought we had an agreement that as long as they would be in motocross I would be on their team. I wanted to work with Harley-Davidson and help them develop their bike the best I could. They had started late in the game and it would take them time to catch up with Honda and Yamaha, but I felt we were bringing the bike along little by little.

"I think Harley-Davidson came into motocross with the idea that it would be nothing; that they could easily dominate like they do in flat track. Well it isn't that easy and I don't think they realize that. We would break a lot and I'd come in off the track saying the bike is just too dangerous, I don't want to ride it. I'd say it needed more work, but they'd look at me like it was my fault the bike wasn't winning. So they hired other people because they thought I wasn't doing the job. They laid off all the riders at the end of the year. I don't want to mention any names, but they hired a new rider at the beginning of the year, he rode the bike in one race and then handed it back saying 'that's it, no more.' Now that I've proven myself with Honda, I can sit back and let Harley-Davidson try and figure out whose fault it was that the bikes weren't winning."

After his false start with Harley, it was up to Marty Tripes to once again find another sponsor and try to convince them that he was a new, changed rider despite what his performance with Harley had shown.

"At the first of this year I began phoning around to the factories to see if they were interested in me. One company really was, but they had already hired their riders for the '78 season and didn't have it in their budget to put me on even a semi-support program.

"One of my last resorts was to call Honda. I didn't expect anything at all because I knew they had a sort of policy that once you left them, you would never be able to come back. I called Honda and talked to Team Manager Terry Mulligan. He was somewhat interested, but couldn't do anything because the hiring was up to the Japanese in charge of American Honda's racing program, Tanaka and Takishi. They were over in Hawaii and Japan at the time for meetings. I had to wait three weeks with nothing happening. When they got back to the States, Willie Takishi contacted me and I went down to Honda to talk to him.

"I had dealt with Takishi back in 1973 when I was with Honda and he knew I could do the job, but the question in his mind was, *would I do it? Was I serious?* He said a lot of big name riders were calling at the same time looking for rides. He couldn't believe what was going on. But he put his neck on the line by giving me a chance despite the fact that there were a lot of people at Honda who didn't want me back. Also, there was better-name talent looking for a ride.

"He believed the promises I made to him when I went to visit him. I promised to lose weight, which I was already doing, along with training and riding during the week. Our initial agreement was that I would go up to the Seattle Supercross

without a contract, on a stock Honda, just to see what my attitude was and how serious I was. The week before that I rode one of the CMC Golden State Series races and won the 250cc class. He saw the write-up in *Cycle News* and it seemed to really impress him. So before Seattle he called me back over to Honda and had a contract waiting for me, ready to sign. I didn't expect this at all and was really happy.

"Takishi said he expected me to live

up to my promises and so far this year, I think I have. It gives me great pleasure to look back at the people who said I'd never be any good again.

"Right now, I'm trying to impress upon the people that there is a new Marty Tripes—a very professional rider who trains and doesn't drink a lot, who is out to win, and who wants to promote the sport and American Honda." He also wants to promote Marty Tripes, Professional Racer. ●



The nearly invincible CR250M and two of the men who make it that way: Marty (left) and tuner Merle Anderson.



Practicing in the Houston Astrodome, Marty pursues Team Honda's other new rider, Steve Wise.