

The 1948 Big Bear



PACIFIC COAST CHAMPIONSHIP WON BY DUTCH STERNER - A. J. S.

*Only 90 of 375 Starters Finish World's
Most Famous 158 Mile Hare & Hounds Chase*

By PAUL BROKAW

BIG BEAR, CALIF., Jan. 4.—Today the writer thrilled to the most startling sports spectacle he has experienced in a quarter century's following of motorized competition throughout the United States. This statement is not born of a lack of spectator background at major events, and certainly is not an effort to foist on the patient reader the "Barnum" contention that shows are forever bigger, better, and more thrilling. The outstanding character of motorcycle events throughout the country in the post-war period would easily support such a contention, however. But who, may I ask, has ever before seen 375 capable operators of high powered vehicles cutting loose as a group, each with full abandon and determination to arrive first at a goal some 158 miles away, with virtually every obstacle of nature impeding his passage? This in few words describes the 1948 Annual Pacific Coast Championship Dash to Big Bear Lake.

The assembly for the start of this astonishing contest was at the village of Newhall, California, nestled in the San Gabriel mountains near Los Angeles. Our arrival there for the start, early this morning, found an immense gathering of automobiles, trucks, motorcycles, competitors, mechanics, officials, and spec-

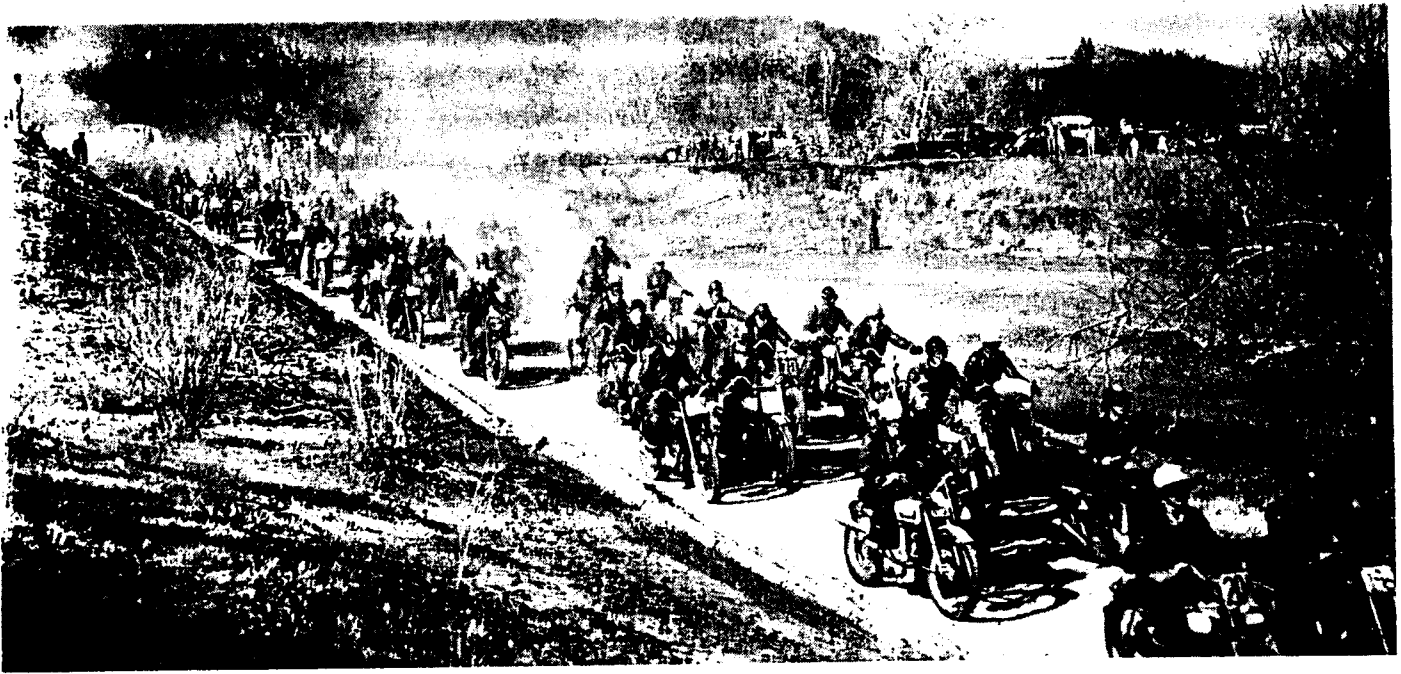
sion over acres of ground adjacent to the town. The bellow of motors, accompanied by shouts of everyone endeavoring to be heard over the din, was overridden by the cries of the announcer on the mobile P.A. system, whipping the contestants into an organized assembly for the start. As impossible as the task seemed, it was accomplished in a surprisingly short time. Riders in greater part were eager to cooperate, realizing that every minute of delay increased the possibility of having to negotiate miles of hazardous ice and snow packed mountain trails in darkness. No one knew where the actual start was to be made except the officials who were ordering the machines into a four-abreast column, arranged in the order of their entry numbers.

At 10:00 A.M., led by a Highway Patrol car, the pack withdrew in a mile long procession, skirting the village and on to the highway. The fairly endless numbers of automobiles and motorcycles of the spectators fell in tow like kids on bicycles tagging a parade. The procession was orderly, at least to the extent that wisely, no one attempted to pass the patrol car. But back in the ranks, for a rider to hesitate a moment meant having several "Sooners" zoom by him to move up for a more advantageous position for the start. The slow speed took a toll of some machines as cold running spark plugs, installed in anticipation of miles of low

made it necessary for the unfortunate riders to withdraw for a hasty cleaning or change of plugs where spares had thoughtfully been brought.

At some distance from the village the lead car was seen to swing through an open gate, leading the competitors onto a mountain fire-trail, and in a flash the starting flag dropped and the dash was on!

Followed then the startling spectacle before briefly described, and words are entirely inadequate in doing it justice. It was nothing less than a seething, rumbling volcano suddenly exploding into violent eruption. From our viewpoint, a quarter mile away across the small valley, the fire-trail was seen to crawl its way up the steep mountain side, winding out of sight into the morning mists enveloping the higher altitudes. But "crawl" was certainly not the word to describe the movement of the mass of machines over that trail. The boiling dust raised by the hundreds of spinning wheels, progressed up and up, reminding me of the furious burning of a coil of dynamite fuse. And dynamite it was, with some probable 15,000 horsepower straining under the grades, with the exhaust roars swelling across the valley. It was not just the sonorous sound of a flight of aircraft overhead, with relatively matched exhaust notes, rather it was the angry, discordant bellow of singles, twins,



IT WAS A MOMENT BEFORE THE START when cameraman Bob Magill snapped this picture of around 75 (count them) at the tail end of the starting field of 375. A second later the flag dropped and it was "Full bore to Big Bear or Bust."

and four-strokes, fast turning engines and faster turning engines. It fairly boiled the air of the valley and tingled the pines of the spectators. The feelings of the competitors, embroiled as they were in the mad procession, can be easily imagined. As one rider later put it, "I couldn't see anything from the dust and smoke, and the din was such that I couldn't even hear my own exhaust. But you couldn't change your mind, or your course, any more than you could when riding a log through a rapids. I just turned it on and despaired for my life!"

With the unearthly racket fading into the distance, leaving the smoke and dust still broiling over the trail, the spell was broken and the watching crowd dashed to their vehicles, eager to contact the riders miles away where the course paralleled the highway for a stretch. The conversations following the start were given to expressions of amazement at the sight just witnessed, and were tense with conjecture: Had all the riders gotten away safely? It hardly seemed possible that such good fortune was to be the share of the contestants. Later we learned that one motor did go over the

steep mountain side, the rider escaping with superficial bruises but his machine well wrecked. There were other spills of lesser consequence, and one unidentified careening side-car outfit left several sprawled and magnificently disgusted solo riders in its wake; the net result being that side-hacks will likely be barred next year.

With a fast highway to our advantage, we arrived at the next observation point ahead of the contest, and well we should have, as an easy rolling pavement was farthest removed from the diet being dished out the riders. At this point let me quote from the riders' "Pre-contest" instruction sheet: "Now we will say you have started on the run. After a few miles of THIS and THAT, you will be again on a FIRE-TRAIL, about 37 miles of it, and then a FEW FEET of pavement. Next some SAND, not too much, just enough to get you warmed up, now a good dirt road, then CROSS COUNTRY, more dirt road with a few WASHES thrown in for good measure, suddenly more SAND, then a respite as you get a LITTLE pavement." End quote. And that is a very general, and

very, very mild description you may be assured.

At the observation point a sizable crowd had already assembled, all straining their eyes across the mountain wastelands in eager anticipation of the first tell-tale cloud of dust. Finally some one shouted, "They're coming!" and then, excitedly, "It's a Single!" And a single it was, specifically an A.J.S. with its lusty exhaust beating an ear piercing staccato, and Dutch Sterner crouched low over the tank. Some one cried, "My gosh, look at him come, I bet he is doing a hundred!" But Dutch later confirmed that it was **only** (modest lad) 85 per, that being the little job's top, which proved adequate except in one instance, which will be told later in the story.

Sterner slackened his speed as he rolled through the crowd lining the roadway and, cheering him on, and with a brief flash of his infectious smile, he disappeared into the hills, riding a dust cloud, with the little "Ajay" bellowing under full bore. The ardor of even the most avid twin cylinder fans weakened to confessions that the exhaust of those singles

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AUB LeBARD, the third place winner, heads across country. Photo by Chet Phebus



DUTCH STERNER had his rough moments too. Photo by R. M. Decker



THE COURSE OFFERED VARIETY. (Left) An unidentified rider threads his way through the rocks. Note the tenseness of the spectators. Photo by Chet Phebus. (Right) John Gale leads an unidentified rider through a creek crossing. Photo by Bob Magill.

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 sure made sweet and loud music. Minutes rolled by and other riders loved in sight, and we hastily moved on to Valyermo, the first gas check.

Let us see what our riders' instruction sheet has to say about this check: "At Valyermo, the first gas check, fill up and play safe for what is coming! Bertha Smith, the owner, will have two pumps working fast, and she can serve you sandwiches and drinks without waiting. This will give you back your pep and strength. Now up the hill and back on the course with lots of ROUGH ROADS, BACK and FORTIL, UP and

DOWN, and pretty soon ACROSS COUNTRY with a few WASHES thrown in, and suddenly you are coming into Miller's Corner for gas check number two." End quote.

Those were the carefully laid out plans, but as the old saying goes (somewhat at least) "there is many a slip twixt the lip and the lip," and when Trail-b'lazer Royal Carroll, riding well ahead of the pack, encountered a closed and locked gate blocking the course, things became disheartening. And even more so when the owner of the land refused to open it in spite of permission previously granted. There was nothing left except to hastily

find and mark another trail skirting the fenced land, and that meant miles of liming. A desperate situation, and had it happened to a less cool head than Carroll's it might well have ruined a year-long planned event. Royal rose to the emergency, but in his desperate haste to not be overtaken by the pack, which were already on their way, he kicked wrong rudder on a bad stretch and spun in with his machine firmly pinning him down. Carroll fortunately was unhurt, although it took him some time to extricate himself from the tangle. There remained nothing now, except to direct the

(Continued on Page 23)



A VERY EXCLUSIVE AWARD (left) awaited Larry Parks on his arrival at Big Bear. The donor: Betty Garrett (Mrs. Larry Parks). You will recognize both as popular... in the yacht cap), that is

FINISHERS IN THE 1948 BIG BEAR

PROMOTED BY THE THREE-POINT MOTORCYCLE CLUB OF HOLLYWOOD

CHAMPION—DUTCH STERNER—A.J.S.

Place	Rider	Motor	Place	Rider	Motor	Place	Rider	Motor
1	Dutch Sterner	A.J.S.	31	E. J. Graff	B.S.A.	61	Bill Eppard	B.S.A.
2	Swede Belin	H-D 68	32	Sid Levy	Ariel	62	John O'Leary	Velocette
3	Aub LeBard	Matchless	33	Howard Barnes	Enfield	63	Robert Peyfar	H-D 45
4	Carey Loftin	A.J.S.	34	Roger Smith	Indian	64	Art Colhan	Indian
5	Don Fera	H-D 80	35	Walter Henryson	Triumph	65	James Campbell	Jawa
6	Nick Nicholson	Velocette	36	Bert Estabrook	Triumph	66	Leo Walter	Indian
7	Don Bochkey	H-D 61	37	Chuck Youngberg	Velocette	67	Doug Wilson	H-D 45
8	Bob Moffitt	Matchless	38	Walter Harper	B.S.A.	68	Doug Slayton	H-D 45
9	Jack Seeley	H-D 45	39	Chester Foster	Matchless	69	Clayton Reed	H-D
10	Earl Flanders	H-D 74	40	George Gunther	H-D 45	70	Mason Page	H-D 61
11	Ray Tanner	H-D 74	41	Bill Slayton	Triumph	71	Mel Brimhall	Triumph
12	C. K. Adams	A.J.S.	42	Chuck Backman	H-D 61	72	Burt Rausch	Indian
13	Royal Carroll, Jr.	H-D 45	43	W. M. Pace	Ariel	73	Willie Forkner	H-D
14	Howard Weakley	H-D 61	44	Gene McAfee	Triumph	74	Jesse Turner	B.S.A.
15	Ernie McAfee	Velocette	45	Jack Dodds	Velocette	75	W. H. Young	H-D
16	Ernie Roccio	A.J.S.	46	Harry Pelton, Jr.	Matchless	76	Cliff Campoy	H-D 45
17	Guy Louis, Jr.	Matchless	47	Fred Ford	Indian	77	Dick Hoffinhead	Triumph
18	Harley Kimble	Norton	48	Don Mead	Triumph	78	John Gale	H-D
19	Ralph Gordon	H-D 61	49	Chan Robinson	H-D 61	79	Nick Razo	H-D 61
20	Roy Proenneke	H-D 61	50	Tex Martin	H-D 45	80	Dick Cesmat	B.S.A.
21	Jimmy Braithwaite	Triumph	51	M. R. Overholt	Matchless	81	Leonard Eatherton	B.S.A.
22	H. M. Neal	Ariel	52	Ruben Jackson	H-D 61	82	J. McLaughlin	H-D
23	Glen McGill	Indian	53	Wm. Eggleston	Matchless	83	G. Davidson	Triumph
24	Sam Mann	H-D 74	54	Robert Ingels	A.J.S.	84	J. Schattinger	Norton
25	Buster Boyd	H-D 45	55	Keith Frey	H-D	85	D. Hagen	B.S.A.
26	Eddie Jones	A.J.S.	56	George Harlan	H-D	86	W. McGuern	Matchless
27	Hazen Bair	A.J.S.	57	Chester Hanchett	H-D	87	Wm. Holbrook	H-D 45
28	Roy Schackelford	A.J.S.	58	Robert Steffan	H-D 45	88	J. Trumble	H-D 74
29	R. E. Adams	H-D 45	59	Bobby Barnes	Velocette 21	89	J. Goldberg	Matchless
30	Robert Stopher	H-D 61	60	Mike Calabrese	H-D 74	90	Larry Apor	H-D

NUMBERS OF MOTORCYCLES OF EACH MAKE STARTING AND FINISHING

	A.J.S.	ARIEL	B.S.A.	CALTHORPE	BARNETT	HARLEY	INDIAN	JAWA
START	18	19	19	1	1	165	50	1
FINISH	8	3	7	0	0	38	6	1
	MATCHLESS	MUSTANG	NORTON	RUDGE	ENFIELD	TRIUMPH	VELOCETTE	VINCENT
START	18	3	5	1	3	33	22	1
FINISH	9	0	2	0	1	9	6	0

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Webb's Service
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Chuck's M/C Shop
Magnera Motors
Eddie Ryan
Pace Motors
Arey's Garage

BIG BEAR

(Continued from Page 10)

riders into Miller's Corner via pavement for the balance of the section.

On this paved stretch, Sterner lost much of his lead to the superior speed of Swede Belin's Harley. Belin is one of the most highly regarded and daring riders in cross-country events of the West, and rides a special bit of equipment that well matches his personal skill. This is a stroked Harley OHV of exceptional power and speed, equipped with the longer front forks as used on the Harley XA shaft driven military jobs, and a 5.50x18 high traction, industrial type rear tire. This unusual combination gives a full seven inches clearance, a very desirable feature in cross-country contests.

At Miller's Corner the Harley fans were elated at the unexpected improvement in Belin's position, but not so the English boosters.

Swede chanced his remaining supply of gas and didn't stop to fuel at Miller's, thereby gaining additional precious minutes on Sterner, who made the stop. Some miles further, on a long stretch of good gravel, Belin took the lead from Sterner, and then followed a see-saw battle between the two that was an epic.

Still another tale came from Miller's Corner: A heavy- high-powered military type airplane had been having great sport following the progress of the event, flying back and forth, hedge-hopping and at

times but little above the heads of the riders. It was again proven that whether driving, riding, or flying, it is a pretty sound policy to look where you are going as our frolicsome aviators proved when, in the course of one of their close ground operations, they proceeded to fly through a highline. Fortunately the heavy ship made short and clean work of the wires and the craft stayed in the air, but the mishap did shut off the power to the gas pumps at Miller's. While this didn't affect the outcome of the run as the leaders were gassed up and on their way, it did look mighty inconvenient for the rest of the field. Frank Cooper, A.J.S.-Matchless distributor for California, immediately brought his truck into action, shuttling gas by cans from a station several miles away, serving the riders one and all with the compliments of Cooper Motors. So the run was rescued for the second time during the day.

Now let's take another look at our riders' instruction sheet: "Miller's Corner will gas you up for the last tough part of the run. You can get cats and drinks here for the pep and strength you will be needing. Take off through the BRUSH, and CROSS-COUNTRY you go (NO ROAD), finally a WAGON TRAIL, then a good dirt road, suddenly a wide RIVER CROSSING, up the bank and back on the road again; soon you will be getting near SNOW (PLENTY OF IT) as you get HIGHER and HIGHER up. (Note: Big Bear

is over 6,000 foot altitude.) You will come out near the East end of the Lake with 4½ miles of pavement to the finish." End quote.

Merely clues to the rigors of the route were given in these modest instructions, this being well proven by the adventurous tales later to be told by the 90 riders who finished, with even more emphasis on the difficulties by the 285 or more who fell by the wayside. Some were out from sheer exhaustion, some from hard spills (although happily not a single serious injury resulted in the entire event), others were out from broken transmissions, burned out brakes, blown tires, engine failures, split gas tanks, broken handle-bars and frames, warped forks, etc. Yes, indeed, it was rough and tough; but let us get on to Big Bear and the startling finish!

At Big Bear, the resort town was pack jammed with many hundreds of anxiously waiting spectators, mechanics, dealers, and riders' wives and girl friends. Let us not forget the ladies, as far into the night some were still anxiously pacing the muddy street leading to the finish, with terrifying thoughts racing through their minds as neither their man nor word of him came through. It was rough, believe me, and it is hoped that next year some communication system can be set up to avoid the honest anguish many of the girls felt.

At the time we arrived all cars were

(Continued on Next Page)

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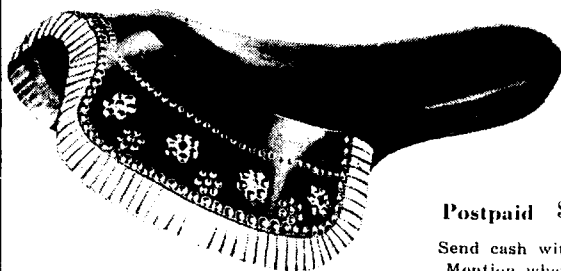
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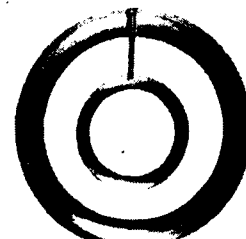
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BIG BEAR*(Continued from Previous Page)*

strained for a far-away exhaust heralding the approach of the "First Man to Big Bear in 1948." The story of Swede Belin taking the lead after Miller's Corner had already come through on the grape-vine, and the universal respect for his unusual riding capabilities held the crowd in full anticipation of his winning. Soon the waiting ears were greeted by a far-away exhaust and some one shouted, "It's A LIMEY!" Limey it was, with Dutch Sterner streaking up the final 4½ miles of ice-spotted pavement to be greeted by the back-pounding of the cheering throng, and the flashing press cameras. It was a tired, and mud-splattered rider that had realized the ambition that (5 hours and 10 minutes before) had belonged to near four hundred riders. Disappointed though the "Milwaukee Brand" boosters were, there was no mistaking the admiration of all. A new champion had been crowned and no one attempted to diminish the valor of the feat.

Some seven minutes later Swede Belin stormed into the check, fully realizing his defeat but taking it without alibi like the fine sportsman he is. In another eight minutes the third place winner arrived, Aub LeBard on a Matchless, followed in three minutes by Carey Loftin, noted Hollywood stunt man, on an A.J.S. One by one they rolled in, at short intervals and long intervals, each greeted by rousing cheers as every rider who finishes

the Big Bear has earned and is awarded the greatest respect. They were a drenched, cold, mud-coated and exhausted bunch of lads, but each took a new lease on life with the thoughts of a hot shower, dry clothes and a hot meal.

Were we to attempt to relate even a few of the worthy and thrilling tales of the individual riders, this entire issue would be filled with many deserving ones still untold. A word must be said of the admirable performance of the popular movie star Larry Parks, who finished the entire course with his B.S.A., although arriving after the official closing of the Big Bear check. His plucky performance won him a lasting respect among the motorcyclists of California, and well should it from the motorcyclists of the world. Keenan Wynn, also of movie fame, turned in a splendid performance after being badly delayed at the start with spark plug troubles. Keenan didn't finish the run, but not through lack of determination to see it out. When he arrived at the next to last check in the dark, and disqualified because of time, the officials flatly refused him the privilege of continuing on through the dangerous mountain trail to the finish. He gave in, but only after a heated argument. Wynn is a very good and enthusiastic motorcyclist and his mount in the Big Bear an A.J.S.

One last tale and we will go into the statistics of the run. This one deals with Bill Rantz Jr. who had the misfortune of losing the battery from his machine

on the icy mountain trail some 15 miles out of Big Bear. Overtaken by nightfall and without lights or ignition, he chose to cover the final distance on foot rather than risking freezing in the bitterly cold night. Starting his trek at 6:30 P.M., he stumbled into the town at 5:30 A.M. the next morning, drenched to the hide from frequent falls in slush pockets unseen in the darkness, frost nipped and thoroughly exhausted. To Bill went the Hard Luck Trophy, and no one disputed his right of ownership.

Now for the results: The official start shows 375 machines but for the purpose of calculations we are taking 359 which were fully and clearly identified as to make on the starter's records. Many late starters were believed to have boosted the total to around 400. All of the official 90 finishers were checked out at the start however. Now how to present the results. The usual and popular way of doing so still seems, for rough example: "Such and such brand again demonstrated its superiority by finishing 28 out of a possible 30 places." That can or cannot be an accurate representation, particularly so if there were 28 machines of "Such and Such" brand competing, and only two of "Blank" brand. In this instance we will abandon that popular representation in favor of a percentage comparison, with the Finishers figured against the Starters. This will, in recognition of the popular controversy that prevails throughout the country, be grouped into the general classes of

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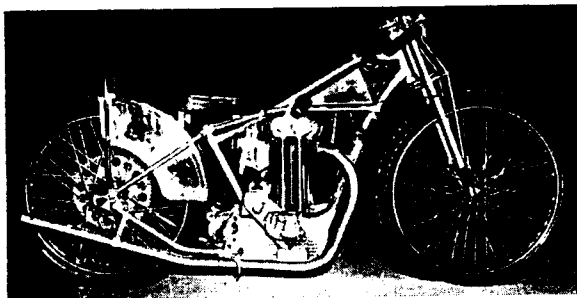
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American versus Foreign brands. And an interesting comparison it makes: Besides winning the championship, the foreign produced motorcycles finished 32.39% of their starters, compared with the American brands finishing 20.46% of theirs.

The significance of the victory for the foreign produced jobs cannot be diminished. Once again it is proven that when a two-wheeled vehicle has to be ridden, excessive weight cannot fail to present a handicap. Also not to be ignored is the fact that once again it has been proven that a lighter weight machine can be engineered and built to provide full mechanical stamina even under the most rigorous conditions. This year's Big Bear has certainly established itself as a paramount test of men and machines. These

deductions are not born of prejudice, but rather weighing the facts as we see them. You are invited to study the results on an accompanying page and to make your own cold calculations in the matter.

In closing we salute: Dutch Sterner, the Champion, in adding the Big Bear to his previous winning of the Cactus Derby, and the Little Bear Run; and the other 89 riders who performed the stalwart feat of finishing the run; and all who had the courage to tackle the start and put forth their best. Also our hearty compliments to Royal Carrol (the Trail-Blazer), and the Three-Point Motorcycle Club for a great event well conducted, and one that we believe should be honored as a National. Incidentally, the riders presented Royal with a fine watch,

engraved with their expression of appreciation for the trojan task he performed in the 1948 Big Bear.

LETTERS

(Continued from Page 6)

I've ridden a Harley 74 for the past four years, but two weeks ago traded it off for a B.S.A. Model A-7. This little machine has a beautiful finish, and handles so securely that it gives me the impression that you could almost turn it around in the road at 30. Needless to say I am enjoying it and looking forward to many happy miles.

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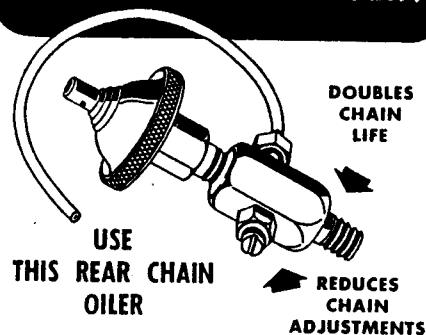


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