

# Little League on Wheels

Take a winding track crammed into a half-acre, imagine something designed between the Enduro 500 and the Tour de France, throw in a little Kentucky Derby, and you come up with BMX racing.

BMX stands for Bicycle Moto Cross, and it's about racing stubby little bikes around a track that looks like a proving ground for four wheel-drive trucks. But beyond simple appearances, BMX racing has become a phenomena that has created its own world. BMX racing supports a separate bicycle industry, attracts an international following and has an organization with Olympic ambitions.

It's a sport some folks take seriously.

According to Emerald Valley BMX President Scott Snook, there are between 300 to 400 people in Eugene who take BMX seriously and belong to the organization.

"It's a family-based activity," Snook says.

The April 11 race in Eugene drew 69 racers between the ages of 5 and 19. In true Little League fashion, the parents became fans, cheering and yelling exhortations from the sidelines.

"The hardest thing about it is for the parents to stay out of it," says Jim Wilson, the father of a 10-year-old racer. With BMX bicycle prices ranging between \$500 and \$1,100, one may wonder why parents wouldn't run away from it.

But according to Snook, parents often become involved to the point of wanting more BMX equipment than the kids. "The parents get hooked," Snook says.

Harry Hurlburt, the designer of Eugene's BMX track, has a bit different perspective on BMX racing. "It's like owning a race horse," he says.

But this is not merely some form of Little League on wheels. BMX attracts racers from both genders and has plenty of room for the post-adolescents and parents envious of their children's action. The older BMXers have formed a club of their own, called the Antique Cruisers.

Local BMX clubs, like Eugene's, hold races based on a layered system of age groups and skill levels. Racers must survive qualifying races, called "motos," before entering the final races, called "mains."

Each age includes three skill levels: novice, intermediate and expert. Motos are held for every skill level of each age, and the winners advance to the mains.

The cream of the BMX crop get a chance at regional and national tournaments. At this stage a system of points takes over from the skill level struggle. The pros compete for numbered plates that go on their bikes. The more points a racer earns at tournaments, the lower the plate number, with number one being the natural goal. The lower the plate number, the greater the skill, and the greater the chance of finding BMX glory at the big national tournaments.

Dedicated BMXers, "point chasers" in BMX vernacular, spend whole weeks on the road attending regional tournament races in Portland, Corvallis and Roseburg.

A real honor comes when a BMX bicycle company spots a promising racer and hires the racer to ride the company's product at the nationals. Vice Percell, 11, of Eugene is a "factory rep," which means that the ELF BMX bicycle company in Eugene pays his traveling costs when he competes at the nationals. Percell won nine nationals for this honor.

According to Snook, Percell's success is no surprise. "This track produces national-caliber riders," he says.

The American Bicycle Association, BMX's umbrella organization, holds most national tournaments in the birth place of BMX, the southwest. The loyal and obsessed speak in awe of places like Stockton, Bakersfield and Oklahoma City, places most people have other names for. But to BMXers, the national tournaments at these places breed legend. At the nationals there's a chance to see more than a thousand racers competing in hundreds of motos, and the opportunity to meet and mingle with an inexhaustible



Photo by Michael With-Im

Adult spectators cheer the the young racers on at the BMX race track near Alton Baker Park and the corner of Autzen Stadium's parking lot.

number of other BMX devotees.

Eugene will host the Lumberjack National Tournament on July 25-26. The regional Governors' Cup will be held this June.

BMX has reached that level of maturity where fads, movements and sports create whole languages of their own.

"The scrud who got the hole shot biffed right after he got major air. Luckily, he wore good leathers, but he taced his back wheel."

The translation to this comes out meaning that one of the

smaller BMXers took the lead at the beginning of the race, hopped his bike into the air while going over one of the giant washboard ruts, and crashed soon after. He didn't get injured though, thanks to the padded motorcycle suit and helmet he wore. But the crash did bend his back wheel, making it look like a taco.

BMX definitely has established a firm hold in Eugene. The main appeal has to do with BMX's family appeal. BMX has a "something the whole family

can get involved with" feel to it. "It's a good family sport," Wilson says.

Snook cites the quality of the young people who BMX attracts, characterizing them as clean, decent kids.

The pride of Emerald Valley BMX is the racing track, located in a corner of Autzen Stadium's parking lot, directly across from Gate 4. The track sports the classic features that produce the BMX version of thrills and chills.

Especially important are the

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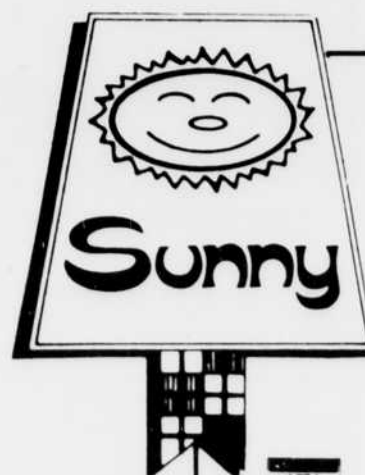
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