

WHEN THE RAINS CAME

Second in class and dealing
with the deluge

Photos by Kato



► This story is courtesy Steve Leivan, an OMA regular 30-39 A racer and Missouri cross country champion. Steve is hard core off-road and his race report from the Waukon, Iowa round pretty much captures the essence of the total grueler. Massive flooding and tornadoes highlighted the trip and transformed the normal Gusse event into a pure survival run.

Steve Leivan, a 15-time Missouri State Hare Scrambles Champion (14 in a row!) gets the credit as our roving racer/reporter for the OMA Iowa round. Mother nature hurled moisture, tornadoes and raging rivers into the face of the racers. Steve's report does the event justice.



Team Suzuki's Paul Whibley pretty much destroyed the troops. Whibs is on a roll and mud appears to be a plus to the New Zealander.

STEVE LEIVAN 2008 RACE REPORT

EVENT: Round 4 OMA Nationals; Waukon, IA

RACE BIKE: Yamaha WR250F

RESULT: 2nd +30 "A"

PRE RACE: I have heard that adversity introduces a man to himself. Well, over the last eight days I feel like I have been "introduced" and I am now on a first name basis with this adversity thing. In the process of throwing away a win at the MHSC round at Eugene in the last turn, I tore up my rotator cuff in my right shoulder. I took it super easy all week and tried to do what therapy I could to get better. I had already obligated myself to go to the OMA in Iowa

and the other guys that I talked into riding the series were planning on going, so I felt like I needed to be there. Riding was probably not the smartest thing to do, but sometimes I don't make the smartest decisions.

I thought that if the race were held under "perfect conditions" I would be all right. When we finally got to the track, I was quite obvious that it would be far from perfect. It had rained during the ATV race and it was now a "full on" mud race. Then it started dumping again and the wind blew and it got dark. I ate some supper and went to bed by 7 p.m. and listened to it rain for the next 14 hours. The closest town got nine inches and was evacuated.

Bill Gusse doesn't cancel races and

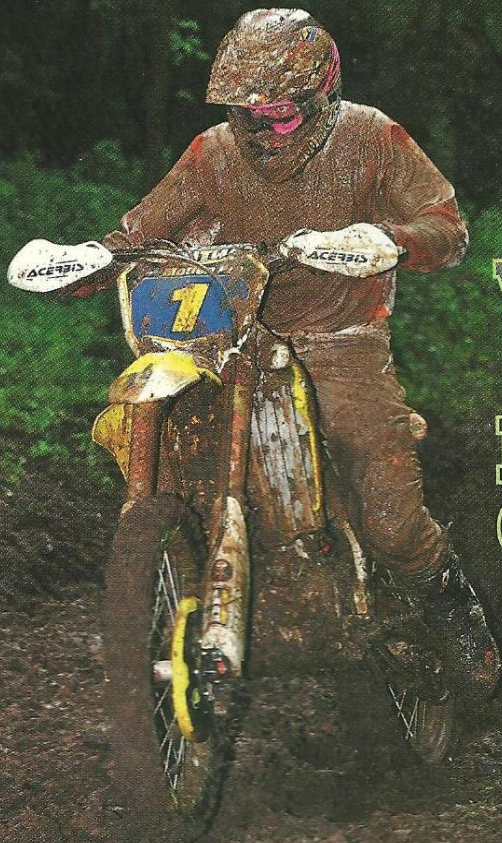
he didn't cancel this one. The turnout was a little on the light side but he knew how much time and money the riders had invested to be there so he was going to give us a race. The light turnout no doubt helped me in the end since my day was full of problems. My plan of riding conservative and staying out of trouble turned into a day of dealing with "what the heck is gonna happen next." One thing for sure is that it was an experience.

RACE: I was maybe eighth or tenth through the first couple of turns. I pretty much pinned it through the grass track stuff and tried to avoid the roost from the guys ahead of me and eventually I got up to second, behind one of the Open "A" guys but leading the +30 class. That didn't last long, though, since I hit a slick log and fell, allowing five or six guys to go past.

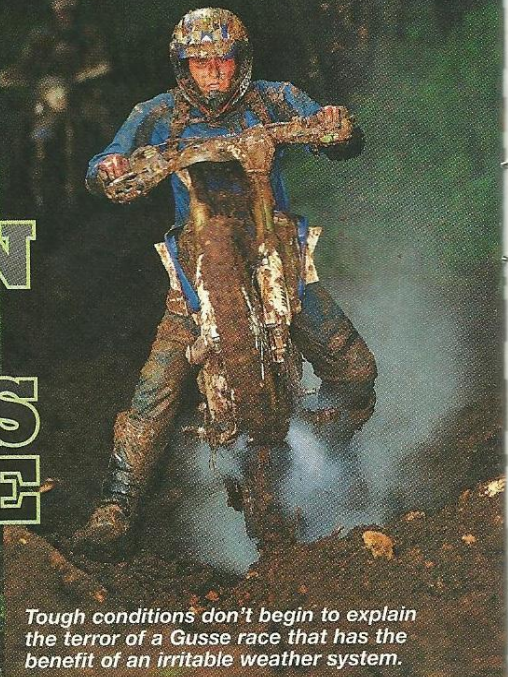
After half a lap we came through the pit area and I had already made a shambles of my goggles, so I stopped for a fresh pair. Garretson was leading our class and I was right behind him when I stopped, so he got away from me a little. I caught back up to him and was just content to follow him and the other guys in the early stages. Just before I got to the pit area the second time, a fitting on the side of the cylinder head came loose and created a massive exhaust leak (and I lost a good bit of power). I was probably in the pits for six or eight minutes while Dad "McGyver-ed" an air hose chuck and some wire into the hole. I was way behind by now, but still going.

The next lap was fine until I nearly hit a big buck deer (many points and in velvet) that ran across the trail in front of me. I kept plugging along—sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly, and sometimes semi-stuck or completely stuck. But for the most part I was "going." Then I got wadded up in a five-strand barbed wire fence that was hidden in the grass while I attempted to go around a guy that was stuck in the only line through there. Almost the only time I carry a fanny pack is in a mud race, since I have found that things like this are likely to happen. Thankfully I had a pair of cutters in my pack and I cut and pulled and cut and pulled until I finally got most of the wire cut out and I could continue on my merry way. I probably spent another six or eight minutes there.

I think I got stuck two more times that were pretty major and required lift-



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Tough conditions don't begin to explain the terror of a Gusse race that has the benefit of an irritable weather system.

Jimmy Jarrett parked his RM250 two-stroke in favor of the big 450. JJ rode strong, but was on a different scoring zone from his teammate, who crossed the line six and half minutes earlier.

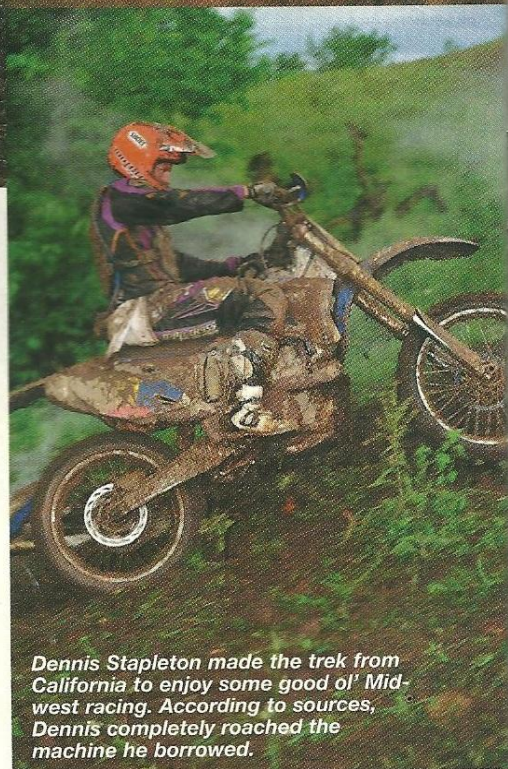
ing and flipping the bike end over end to get out. During both instances I also had to negotiate several big slick logs on off-camber hillsides to get back to where I had started. Each time my second attempt was successful and I wished that I had been able to do it that good on my first try. I had one lap to go and was just looking forward to getting the day over with no more trouble. That didn't happen.

There were only a couple of creek crossings, and by the end of the race they were pretty gnarly. I rode up to one and it looked far more vicious than the previous laps. As I tried to ride across the current grabbed my bike and started to shift it downstream. I jumped off and while I was falling over (and still holding on to the bars) when the bike pivoted in my hands and headed down the "river" pulling me behind it. It was all I could do to hang on to it in the waist-deep water and the current was way too strong for me to

"muscle" the bike to the bank.

After it drug me 30 or 40 feet, I could see a bunch of logs that had been washed into the creek and I knew that if I got swept into them I was in trouble. I bailed out and let the bike go. At that point, my bike wasn't all that important to me, but getting out of that creek was. I got to the bank and watched the bike get jammed under a big log. All that was above water was the end of the throttle-side handlebar. I got a hold of it and held a tree with my other arm, completely stretched out. I couldn't begin to move it but I could sort of hold it.

A guy on a Suzuki rode up (sorry, I didn't catch his name) and ran over to help. We both held on but couldn't move it. Then Marty Michels got there and tried to help pull. Then Aaron Branham. Then a guy on a Kawasaki (sorry, no name again). Even with five of us we could not get the bike out. We couldn't lift it up since the log was



Dennis Stapleton made the trek from California to enjoy some good ol' Midwest racing. According to sources, Dennis completely roached the machine he borrowed.

jammed in it and the current was brutal. Finally Kenworthy and Dennis Stapleton got there and between the seven of us we were able to yank the bike out.

My bike had been under water for probably five minutes and I figured that

we were lucky that no one got hurt. I was happy to still have my bike but happier to be safe. Obviously, no one crossed the creek after what happened to me and I don't even know how all those guys behind me got back but I know it wasn't on the marked trail, which is a good thing since there would have been more "almost" lost bikes—or entirely lost.

Somehow through all of that drama, I still finished second in the class. I'll take that and be happy about it.

POST RACE: I rode out with Kenworthy on his bike and then got to go back out with Gusse to get my scooter. The creeks were still rising and I had to talk the crazy old SOB out of crossing it on his ATV in one place and going a different route. We finally got to the bike but getting back was brutal. I walked and pushed until I wanted to puke and then the landowner took over for me while Gusse made fun of me and reminded the landowner and his buddies that I was the "15-time" Missouri champ, over and over again.

NOTES: I have spent the last two days completely disassembling my bike. It was basically pulled from the bottom of a raging river so it has dirt and sand and rocks and water and grass and sticks and seaweed in every place where that stuff can get. Today I split the engine cases apart and cleaned all of that stuff up. The suspension and chassis is next. So to my sponsors who are reading this: I may very well be calling you for parts.

My other travel partners had good days. Tanner Kenworthy almost missed the start of his race since he was busy eating powdered donuts. He got there just in time, though, and managed to finish second even though he "crashed a lot." His dad, Shannon, was able to muscle through a "broken leg" that he suffered in the first turn and somehow win the +40 B class. He tends to exaggerate things "just slightly" so I am thinking his broken leg might have just been pain from a shaving incident. Kole "I am sooo tired of mud races" Henslee found a way to have fun and got second in the "A" Lites. He only got "really stuck a good 12 times" this trip which is far better than the 50 times in Tennessee. They all did well and were so tired that I got to drive the first 500 miles back home.

Thanks again for all of your support!

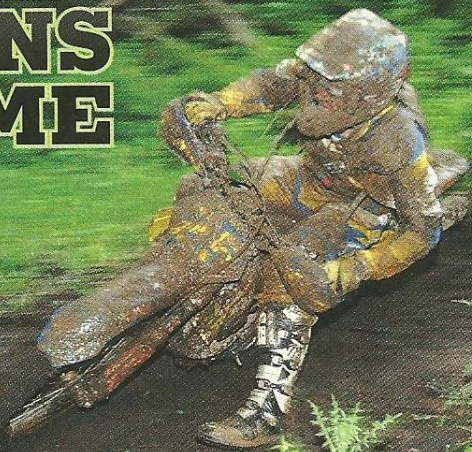


Continuing his assault on podium finishes, Brian Garrahan slithered his way to a third overall. Unfortunately, he was 15 minutes off the pace of Whibley.

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WHEN THE RAINS CAME



Nick Fahringer is getting mentioned a lot. His strong results in the both the National Enduro Series and the OMA have given the Husaberg rider new status in the off-road world.



Leivan snagged a second in class even though he lost his bike in a river.



Bill Gusse has a reputation as a kind-hearted soul with a penchant for poking fresh wounds, peeling off not yet healed scabs, and laying out some of the toughest 'old school' off-road races in the States.



Cooper Bailey was the first Honda in, grabbing fifth overall for the day.

BILL GUSSE ON TRACK CONDITIONS

This year's promoters have been challenged with weather patterns and fuel prices that have been put them to the test. When you're in a region where mudslides, tornadoes, torrential rains are hammering all around you, the only thing that runs through your mind as a promoter is, maybe Al Gore has a point? But with all that's invested, land leasing, insurance, many other expenses and racers who have invested in an average ten-hour drive at four dollars a gallon...the only thing you can do is make the best of it.

The big rumor was that Pros would boycott. Well, Bill has a saying; it only takes two racers, a clipboard, and a pen to put on a race. Bill got commitments from Garrahan, Whibs and Bonneur, so he was going racing! And that would end the boycott talk.

With a week's worth of work, three miles of virgin cut trail, the estimated nine-mile track would have to be cut back to a few miles. A few racers were hopeful Bill would be extra kind to them this day and put the creek crossing on the cutting room floor... but no chance. His deranged sense of entertainment has been questioned for years...

As the main event would kick off, a sense of false hope raged as the sun was shining down on greater Waukon. The rain would follow the green flag and bring torrential downpours during the event, turning an already flooded creek into a raging white water rafting waterway. As the current grew stronger each lap, racers began asking themselves, was that plaque worth it?

However, the Professional racers could not ask that question; they race to the checkers no matter what. Paul Whibley would come into the scoring section and bring awareness to the score crew, "Tonya, Tonya, the creek is coming out of its banks, we can't cross it again!" Tonya, being the official score crew, would reply "Go!" not hearing a word he said. And off he would go. Jarrett would find himself 20 yards downstream on the last lap, and thankfully the race would be called on time with only one bike washed downstream. Steve Leivan would be the unlucky one. But the upside...he was a part of flooding history! □