
Honoring and Preserving the Sports History of Chautauqua County



Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame

15 West Third Street - Jamestown, NY 14701

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The following article by Kim Chapin featuring CSHOF inductee **Chuck Boehler** appeared in the October 16, 1967 issue of **Sports Illustrated** magazine.

'PLEASE DON'T DIE NOW, BABY'

THAT WAS THE RIDERS' PLEA AS NEARLY 200 MOTORCYCLE RACERS PURSUED ONE OF THE NATION'S TOUGHEST SPORTS CHAMPIONSHIPS UP THE STEEPS, DOWN THE HAIRY SLOPES AND THROUGH THE MIRE AROUND JAMESTOWN, NEW YORK



The way Chuck Boehler, the sadist in charge of fun and games for the Chautauqua Lake Cyclists, laid out the course was simplicity itself. Diabolical, perhaps, but simple. First, he scouted 20 large plots of land surrounding a dozen small communities and one nudist camp in three counties and two states near Jamestown, N.Y. Then he and two other Chautauqua club members took their enduro motorcycles and rode through the stands of maple and elm and pine that still abound in western New York, into stream beds and up the sides of substantial hills, along camping trails, forgotten logging trails and even, for one section, on the old corduroy road that was part of the stagecoach run to Buffalo.



Charles P. Boehler

Finally Boehler found stagnant water with stuff beneath that quickly turned to mucky ooze when a motorcycle chewed into it. Boehler and the others prowled happily for three months until they had devised a highly irregular loop of 100 miles, eliminating only those sections where they couldn't get at least one of the trio's bikes through. One section up a sheer embankment was tossed out when Boehler got a letter from a frustrated rider who had suffered last year and wrote: "I don't mind the expense or the traveling or anything else, but I refuse to engage in a weight-lifting exhibition up there."

Roughly 40 miles of the course was over more or less virgin terrain, and of the other 60, listed as "roads," well, about half of that was passable to normal human beings only in Land-Rovers, Jeeps or tractors.

To get everybody through this tangle-wood in last Sunday's national endurance race, 6,000 route markers were slapped on telephone poles, trees, bushes—anything that would hold them—in the belief that they would give some guidance to the riders and in the added hope that a competitor wouldn't yank one or two off a tree and thereby send the following riders off into still deeper wilderness.

Early in the race three riders missed the second turn sign. Two realized their error and got back on the more or less beaten path. The third, however, continued blithely into the little hamlet of Busti and quite possibly hasn't realized his error yet. Such, in essence, is a run for the American Motorcycle Association endurance championship.

On Sunday 186 riders started and 33 finished, and every one of them was as oblivious to such rites of autumn as the World Series and college and professional football as he was later to the rain that compounded Boehler's nightmare. They all churned through picturesque spots like Nelson's Farm, which resembles the setting for Steve McQueen's motorcycle ride in *The Great Escape* until you see the camouflaged logs in the field, infinitely more difficult to negotiate than barbed wire; the Mud Hole, which needs no explanation, as the rider on the right found out; Sturdevant Woods, which ends in a 50-foot slide down a shale embankment onto U.S. 60, where the mad procession startled families on Sunday-afternoon drives; and Cub Gulf, where a rider nearly drowned two years ago when his bike tipped over and pinned him in a water hole.

Jim Parker of Jamestown, who was a gung-ho racer until successive broken legs during the 1965 and 1966 seasons got him thinking ("My left knee doesn't work like other people's") and was a spectator at Sunday's run, said: "You've got to pick and bull. You pick your way in the easy going and when it gets rough you just rev and bull your way through any way you can."

An enduro run is scored roughly like a sports car rally. Riders leave at intervals with 1,000 points in hand and attempt to complete the course at a prescribed average speed—at Jamestown, 20 miles per hour. Points were subtracted for being early or late at 12 checkpoints.

Enduros attract a variety of talent and machines, bikes especially made for them and street motorcycles modified for the woods. And the riders wear every conceivable form of garb: sweat shirts and blue jeans, baseball catchers' shin guards, football shoulder pads, Barbour suits, which look like Army fatigues except that they have a hundred pockets to carry things such as spare shift and clutch levers and spark plugs, chain link repair kits and assorted screwdrivers and wrenches.

But whether they are full-time enduro riders, like Bob Fusan of Glenshaw, Pa., who won at Jamestown, or Bill Baird of Sterling, Ill., who has all but clinched his seventh national title, or first-timers, the kick is still in the roar and jar of hard competition. Dave Berg of the Chautauqua club, who helped Boehler lay out the course, said, "I've tried nearly everything and this is it—the man and the machine and the clock."



At the Mud Hole, only 15 miles into the course, the toll was heavy. After shoving and pulling and occasionally riding his bike through 200 yards of muck, George Westley stopped, shook his muddied head and asked quietly, "How do you get back?" He was through.

Bill Gillis actually came by with a hint of a smile. He hit water and a great cloud of steam joined the clots of mud flying from his rear wheel, which was slowly sinking into the ooze. "Don't die now, baby, don't die now," he mumbled. Then he saw a spectator doubled over with laughter off to the side and said, "You really know how to hurt a guy."

A minute later William Bailey hit the hole and stalled. Bailey sagged off his machine. "Mamma told me not to do this," he said.

Mamma was so right. At Cub Gulf, part of which follows a ravine, bikes did unintentional wheelies (reared up on the back wheels while the riders hung on and prayed), and at another section one man hit a hidden rock and was launched into a reverse somersault. Luckily, he and the bike chose to land at different locations. The nudists would have loved it if they had been around to observe but, sensibly enough, they had already packed it in for the season.

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CSHOF NOTES:



Dave Berg, the friend of Chuck Boehler who is mentioned in the article, is the husband of CSHOF inductee Neoma Berg (left). Small world, isn't it!

<https://www.chautauquasportshalloffame.org/neomaberg.php>

For more information about Chuck Boehler:

<https://www.chautauquasportshalloffame.org/chuckboehler.php>



A CSHOF Director for more than 30 years, Dr. Charles E. Sinatra has beautifully restored one of Chuck Boehler's motorcycles and gifted it to the CSHOF. The award-winning Greeves, plus much more Boehler memorabilia, donated by his widow Coralyn Boehler, is on display at our museum. You are cordially invited to stop by Monday-Friday, 12-3.

WWW.CHAUTAUQUASPORTSHALLOFFAME.ORG