

THOMAS, CIPALA 'BIG TIME' WINNERS

By: Bud Northrup - Fort Benton, Montana - May 30, 2004

John and Mindy Halter hosted the 'Big Time' Hill Climb at their Halter Motor Sports Ranch near Fort Benton, Montana. The format was quite interesting. The 30 top NAHA pros were automatically entered in the Sunday pro races, with an additional 30 added from the Saturday qualifier climbs to provide 60 entrants in the final climbs. Different hills were run for the Qualifiers and the Finals. NAHA has 2 pro classes – a 700cc and 701cc and up class – and nearly anything goes as far as machinery goes – if it has 2 wheels, run it! There were twin engine machines, snowmobile engine powered machines, and a Harley with a 2500cc powerplant running nitro. And some with rear wheels 12 inches or more wide. Many bikes you'll unfortunately never see at an AMA sanctioned hill climb!

The NAHA hills are always incredibly difficult – some yielding the top to only a precious few. And the clubs have mountains to work with, so can move their climbing hills for every event. It was my first NAHA experience and I was very impressed with the riders, the machines, the hills and especially the professionalism, friendliness and operations of the promoters – the Halters. They gave out \$20,000 in prize money, and incredible drawing prizes – including THREE 50cc Hondas!

In addition to the Qualifying climbs, there was also an amateur climb on a third 'trophy' hill, and an Pro Open exhibition run on Saturday, and on Sunday, Youth and Senior (40+ and 50+) classes were run at halftime between the pro classes.

Legendary riders from the west, such as Dusty Beers, the Kimballs, Petersons, Whitlocks and others we normally only read about their exploits at such places as Billings and the Widomaker were a real thrill to watch. But when the dust was settled, it was two Midwestern riders who walked away with the first place money. Wisconsin's Todd Cipala took the 700cc Pro win on his KX500 with Indiana's Jeff Thomas claiming second on his Yamaha 650 twin. Thomas then returned with a 800cc nitro burning Yamaha Twin to claim the win in the Open Pro class, plus the 'Top Rider' award.

On Saturday, AMA Pro Champion David Watson flexed his muscles by winning the 700cc Qualifier with a very good 10.662 second time on his first ride. Amateur Ernie Beckwith was his closest challenger with a good 10.785 second run for the second place cash. In the Open Class Qualifier, Matt Coleman took the first place cash with an excellent 10.516 second run in the second round, overtaking Todd Cipala who had carded a 10.568 second time on his beautiful Harley to take the first round lead.

Also, on Saturday, they ran an all-pro shootout. Hillclimbing legend Dusty Beer showed his skills well with an outstanding 10.017 second first round ride, with Robie Peterson a shade behind him on his big and bad Harley with a 10.106 second run. Both riders crashed on their second rides, but their first round efforts held up for the top two spots.

In the 700cc Main event on Sunday, Cipala found himself down in the pack somewhat after the first round riding, posting an 'average' 12.895 second time on his KX500. But in the second round, he flew over the top in 10.709 seconds to take the win. Jeff Thomas was also average on his first ride on his Yamaha twin, turning in a 12.964 second time, but in second round action,

he blasted the nitro burning Yamaha over in 10.716 seconds, only 7/1,000's off Cipala's time, and the only other rider in the class to break into the 10's.

In Open Main action, however, Thomas wasted no time at all, sailing his AMA Pro 800cc Yamaha twin over the top on his first ride in 10.438 seconds – then sat back to see if anyone could catch him. No one did. Robie Peterson came close on his big Harley, however, blasting over the top in 10.452 seconds – just 14/1,000's off the Thomas fast time – GREAT RACING!.

It was, all in all, and incredible experience and I send my congratulations to the Halters for a job very well done. I'm looking forward to my next NAHA experience.

RESULTS – SATURDAY, May 29:

0-700CC Qualifier: 1.David Watson, 2.Ernie Beckwith, 3.Troy McDowell, 4.Dustin Quast, 5.Corey Erhardt.

701cc-OPEN Qualifier: 1.Matt Coleman, 2.Todd Cipala, 3.Kurt Koester, 4.Jerimi Stratton, 5.Brandon Whitlock.

Pro Shootout: 1.Dusty Beer, 2.Robbie Peterson, 3.Mel Kimball, 4.Travis Whitlock, 5.Brian Helton.

RESULTS – SUNDAY, MAY 30:

SENIOR (40+): 1.Dave Johnson, 2.Kevin Downs, 3.Rick Stauffer, 4.Kenny 'Mad Dog' Long, 5.LeRoy Ebeling.

SUPER SENIOR (50 +): 1. Lefty Frueh, 2.Brad Barner, 3.Victor Kim, 4.Jim Meyer.

0-700CC MAIN: 1. Todd Cipala, 2.Jeff Thomas, 3.Dusty Beer, 4.Eric Cherry, 5.Jason Smith.

701-OPEN MAIN: 1.Jeff Thomas, 2.Robbie Peterson, 3.Brian Helton, 4.Brian Osborn, 5.Travis Whitlock.

FAST TIME: JEFF THOMAS, 800cc YAMAHA TWIN, 10.438 SECONDS



Jeff Thomas, posing with his nitro-fueled Yamaha, gave a dominating performance



John Halter launches his Harley off the first stage of the pro hill



Todd Cipala, winner of the 0-700cc Pro main event

