

Townsend quickest in hillclimb finals

Motorcycle hillclimbers, like jumbo jets and the Leaning Tower of Pisa, live in seeming defiance of the laws of gravity and physics. To the uninitiated, one glance up the 500-foot long, 420-foot rise hill that dominates the Valley Springs Farm landscape outside Valley Springs, Wisconsin, would be enough to declare any two-wheeled assault on the summit foolhardy.

But the finalists in the second annual AMA National Amateur Hillclimb Championships knew better. By the time Labor Day weekend was out, the question was not whether the hill could be climbed but how fast.

Valley Springs Farm is a trout hatchery which owner-promoter Larry Gerdes deemed perfect for hillclimbing, and with help from Gil Goehrs of Bay City, Wisconsin, District 16 hillclimb steward, the National came to dairy country. With it came 271 riders qualified

through a series of 13 AMA regional climbs across the country.

The hill was covered with plastic to protect it from pre-weekend rains, and a slippery starting area hampered the competitors a bit at the beginning of the competition on Sunday. But by Monday all manner of climbing equipment, including a couple of bikes actually ridden to the event by contestants, were zapping the crest.

The Gerdes clan fared especially well, as Larry's sons Brad and Dean won the 0-100cc and 101-125cc classes respectively. Both rode Suzukis.

The near-legendary Kinzer name, renowned in hillclimbing ranks, also appeared in the results of the Amateur National. Willard Kinzer of Allen, Kentucky, father of former National Pro Champ Terry and pro contender Jerry, claimed the runnerup spot in the open class on a Honda, a big jump

from his seventh-place finish in the 370cc class a year ago.

Also back for a return engagement was 1976 open class winner Gary Waddell of Omaha, Nebraska, whose 8.57-second clocking was tops overall at the inaugural Amateur National a year ago at Everett, Pennsylvania. Waddell successfully defended his class championship, but his first-run 11.392 time fell well short of the 11.092 clocking by Yamaha-mounted Joey Townsend, the Hurricane, West Virginia, rider who won the 371-500cc class and was fastest through the lights at weekend's end.

George "Quick Draw" McGraw of Plattsmouth, Nebraska, saw his 1976 Valley Springs hill record of 11.923 broken no fewer than six times. Nonetheless, McGraw claimed the 251-370 cc class championship on a Bultaco in 12.170 seconds.



Photo by Hugh Fleming

Hillclimber Mike Jones of Dallas, Texas, gets airborne over one of the steps on the Valley Springs Farm hill used for the 1977 AMA National Amateur Hillclimb. Jones placed seventh in the open class, riding a Triumph.