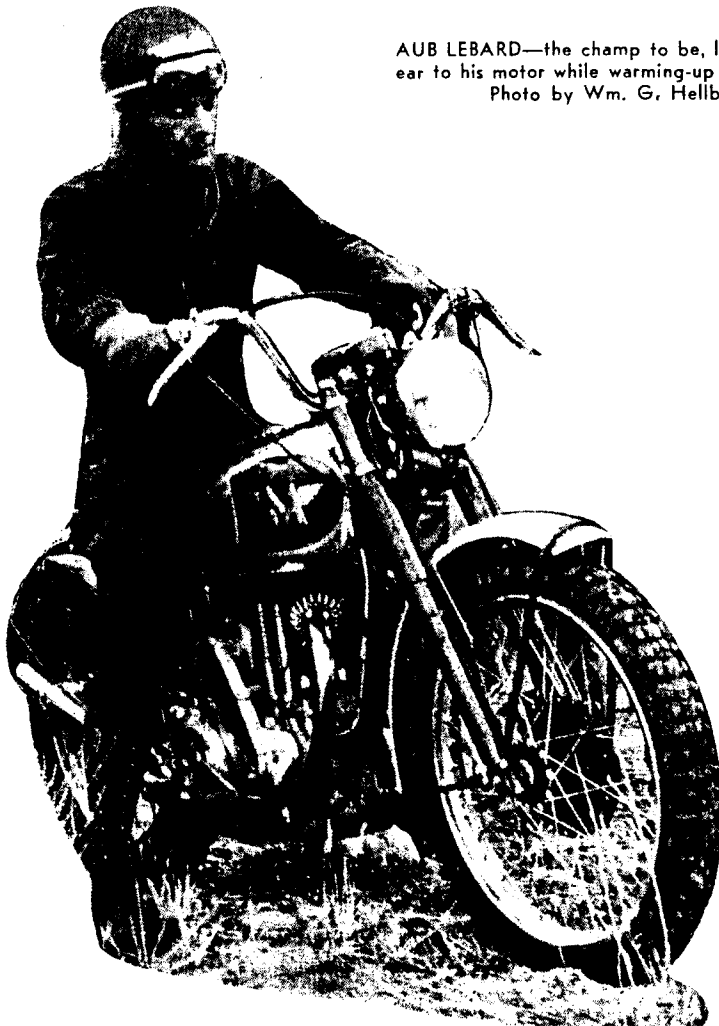




# THE BIG BEAR NATIONAL

## TAKEN BY AUB LeBARD



AUB LeBARD—the champ to be, lends a skilled ear to his motor while warming-up for the start.  
Photo by Wm. G. Hellborn

ANOTHER Big Bear Classic has blasted its inimitable niche in the history of world motorcycle competition and this editor is again called upon to haul out and polish his best adjectives in describing it.

It is truly something that can't be overdone and such expressions as Super-Colossal, Ultra-Terrific, Awe-Inspiring are in this instance merely utterances born of restrained enthusiasm.

We are happy to be able to convey to you, by pictures, a small part of the thrills of the great event, but unfortunately the magnitude of the affair could be captured only in part by the many photographers, movie camera men excepted. We will therefore have to appeal to your imagination in describing the occasion.

The great day had an early start for the Brokaws' as well as for the several thousands of others attending the event. Our alarm cut loose at 4:00 a.m. the morning of Jan. 9 and we shook the sleep from our eyes as we crawled into warm clothing and prepared a hasty breakfast. Experience had taught us a real respect for night and early morning desert temperatures in spite of such tropical names as Palmdale.

An hour from our Whittier home found us joining the migration to Palmdale on the Mint Canyon highway across the San Gabriel mountains. It must have been a startling parade to those travelers not understanding the occasion. It was an endless procession of motorcycles interspersed among trucks and trailers bearing machines well prepared for the con-



# CHAMPIONSHIP ON A MATCHLESS

AWAITING THE STARTING BOMB, two rows, well over 300 machines, and Rinin' to Go. Photo by Chet Phebus.

By PAUL BROKAW

test. Here and there was seen a hardy contestant, identified by his crash helmet, riding to the start. For the greater part the machines were hauled and it was interesting to see the brands mixed promiscuously, American and English machines lashed together in the same trailer, with the respective owners in the car enjoying the happy comradery of the day.

That is as it should be, and when Motorcycling as a whole assumes that sensible, wholesome attitude, then we can consider the sport as "grown up" and really going places.

We hadn't climbed far over the mountains until the anticipated snows were encountered, with ice patches appearing on the pavement. The peaks above us were concealed in angry black clouds, spelling a severe storm and a bad time for the contestants. There was even a greater surprise in store for us. On clearing the pass, the desert floor appeared in a vast panorama before us. This first glimpse of the desert is always a breath-taking sight, to we prairie people at least, and this time even those of long time residence in the area were startled by what they saw. The desert was covered with snow! Southern California people are pretty well hardened to the capricious moods of mother nature. Earthquakes can crack their plaster; freezes can destroy their fruit; smog can inflame their eyes and sinus;

the angry moods of the Pacific can pulverize crafts and shore installations; but snow in the desert!—that is an impossibility—but there it was.

We jokingly remarked that the Three-Pointers had sure spread the lime extravagantly, but to the "Hares" who had been out before daybreak, re-marking in bitter cold, the snow obliterated lime trail, it was no joke.

At Palmdale we fell in line with the caravan wending its way into the desert to the scene of the start. A mile away from the "take-off" we picked up the drone of distant motors, a weird and ominous sound in the desert country usu-

ally dedicated to solitude, with seldom a more boisterous disturbance than a rabbit scurrying through the mesquite.

It wasn't so today, and as early as we were, hundreds of automobiles and motors had already arrived on the scene completely upending the tranquility of the isolated area.

Above the din of the motors darting hither and thither, came the voice of Rolly Harper giving last minute instructions over the P.A. system. It was cold and even the heavy-clad contestants were shivering. Here and there were fires, with spectators out-maneuvering each other in

*(Continued on Next Page)*



GANGWAY, you coyotes, we are on our way to Big Bear. Photo by Stan Troutman.

an effort to expose the more frigid areas of their anatomy to the comforting heat.

A snow-covered countryside is of course old stuff to we mid-westerners, but green Joshua trees were definitely foreign to our winter landscapes. To the Californians, the cold white stuff belonged only on mountain peaks and not among their Joshua trees, so we both thrilled to our own peculiar appraisal of the phenomenon.

Our visiting among the riders and spectators was soon interrupted by the resounding explosion of an aerial bomb signaling the line-up of riders.

Quickly a double row of motorcycles was aligned abreast in a third of a mile spread, and facing the steep slope of the mountainside. It was 8:30 a.m. and in 15 minutes the final warning bomb would sound, and at 9:00 a.m. the starting bomb would send over 300 determined contestants on their way into one of motorcycling's greatest adventures. The anticipation electrified the very atmosphere.

At 8:45 the final warning bomb burst and a sizable number of the line-up blasted into the slop. Above the roar of the motors the frenzied voice of announcer Harper was heard pleading: "Stop them, stop them, it's only the warning bomb." The course-side spectators responded and with no little effort stopped the eager beavers.

With order restored, the great attendance was asked to stand in a few minutes of silent respect to the memory of the late Royal Carroll who had given so much of himself in the development of this fine sporting event. For a few minutes the tranquility of the desert was restored.

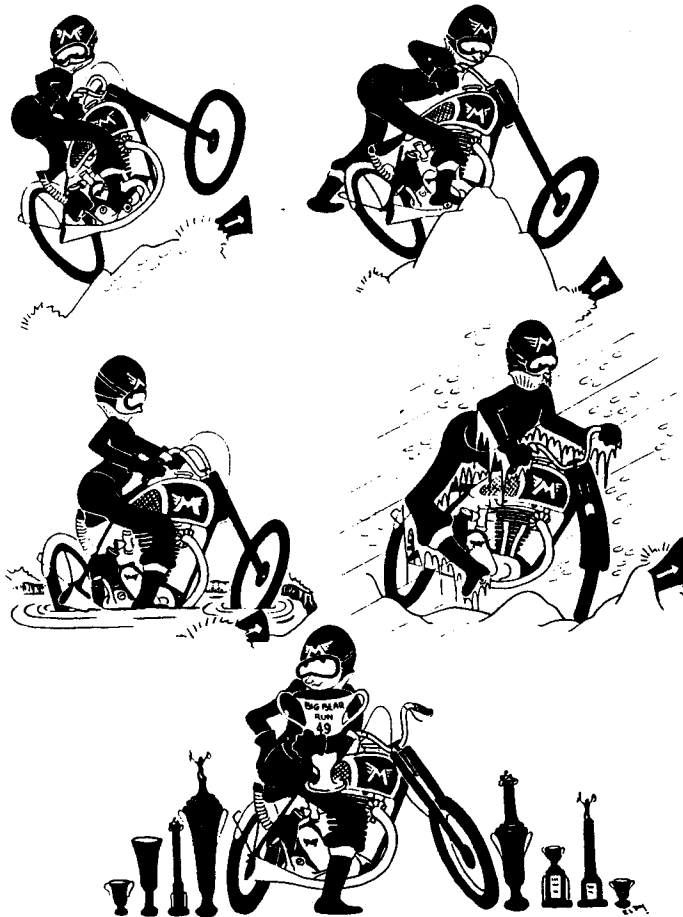
Quickly the frenzied activity was resumed and this editor grabbed his camera and commenced a slipping, sliding, puffing climb up the long slope in hopes of capturing on film the long, colorful line-up. I settled myself midway to the top on a promontory in the fork of a dry run that didn't seem too vulnerable to the horde that was soon to wrestle its way by me.

The riders were warming their motors and the voluminous grumble of the exhausts rolled up the mountainside, running pleasant chills up and down the spectator's spines.

At approximately 9:30 a.m. the starting bomb was released and with it probably the greatest commotion in the area since the upheavals that threw up the mountains themselves. The mass of angry motors bellowing with the

power rent the desert air, as the long double row of machines blasted up the mountainside with all the erratic maneuvers of a horde of jackrabbits fleeing a grass fire.

It wasn't alone a contest in which each of the riders was endeavoring to outdistance the rest, it was no less, individual contests against the multiple hazards of the rugged terrain. Up and up the machines came, slipping, sliding, front wheels airborne much of the time, and with each rear wheel streaming a plume of dirt and snow into the air. Hundreds of machines recklessly dodg-



THE MAKING OF A CHAMP  
Recorded by the Pen of R. I. DAY

ing each other, hundreds of Joshua trees and a maze of dry washes half concealed in the mesquite and sage brush. Higher and higher the mechanical storm rolled until the lofty ridge was reached, where each machine seemed to momentarily poise, silhouetted against the black storm clouds, and then to drop from sight into new hazards left to the spectators' imaginations.

Another Big Bear Classic had been projected on its reckless way, and what a staggering sight it had been. The smoke of the opening battle drifted away and the mountainside was seen to be liberally dotted with the mechanical casualties of the first assault. The mountainside that a few minutes before had shimmered in the white blanket of snow was

now a crazy interwoven pattern of black furrows routed out by the hundreds of spinning wheels. The spectators just looked at each other bewilderingly and summed it up with a convincing "Whew!"

Had the contest ended at the mountain ridge, it would have been a classic; but it was only the start and, due to the inaccessibility of the gruelling course, the balance was almost entirely denied the spectators. By later questioning of the riders we were able to reconstruct the contest. Beyond our sight, over the ridge the riders dropped into a narrow, hazardous wash and then followed intricate and punishing miles including river crossings with treacherous, slick, rocky bottoms and filled with icy water; dry river beds of bottomless sand or densely strewn rocks; meandering desert trails or loose dirt and sand and finally glare ice and growing snow storm. Through it all the air was increasingly bitter cold and frost-nipped faces, hands and feet were shared by all.

At approximately 60 arduous and eventful miles from the start, Cliff Stoner, a near-exhausted "Hare," with his face blue and frosted from the cold, was overtaken while marking with arrows the previously limed but now snow-obliterated course. The individual making the catch was the slightly built but astonishingly wiry and sturdy Aub LeBard, mounted on Matchless. LeBard had a second line starter and an achievement in forging the front had been a mighty one.

Stoner, no little crestfallen at being overtaken, said "Well, this ends it," and with numb and frosted fingers he began checking in the rivals on the back of a course marker.

Thus, due to a historic making first snow in the desert, no rider was destined to reach Big Bear. It was just as we for but a few miles beyond, the Highway Patrol stood ready to stop the contest in order to safeguard the very lives of the contestants. The trails ahead were positively impassable. Eight inches of snow had been added during the run, a reported three feet that had fallen the night before. A few hours later the official report was nearly six feet of snow on the level in the Big Bear area.

This isn't the first time in the eventful history of the Big Bear that the event ended short of the goal nor is it likely to be the last time. If it were necessary, it is a contest of the highest caliber and the 1949 event definitely taken its place among the great ones.

Stories of the individual adventures are rolling in, and will continue to do so for weeks to come. Fortunately, no serious injuries are reported among the many mechanical and physical casualties of the contest. Frostbite, bumps, bruises and sprains are rampant, with mechanical failures too varied and numerous to mention.

As always, many humorous anecdotes originate from the contest. For instance, the tale of the unhappy rider encountered with his hopelessly warped mount on its side, blocked up with stones, while he jumped with all his might on the engine, in hopes of springing the pretzel-like frame and forks back into rideable alignment—or the tale of the rider standing nonchalantly over the burning remains of his wrecked machine, warming his frosty hands, and later thumbing a ride from a fellow contestant, leaving the charred remains of his bike to tantalize the desert buzzards.

### THE TROPHY WINNERS

- 1—Aub LeBard ..... Matchless
- 2—Del Kuhn ..... A.J.S.
- 3—Gene Criswell ..... A.J.S.
- 4—Nick Nicholson ..... A.J.S.
- 5—Wes Drennan ..... Matchless
- 6—Burt Raush ..... A.J.S.
- 7—Walt Harper ..... B.S.A.
- 8—Mickey Bradburn ..... A.J.S.
- 9—Ray Tanner ..... Harley
- 10—Bob Walker ..... Velocette
- 11—Eddie Enochs ..... Matchless
- 12—Paul Sperlich ..... A.J.S.
- 13—Jim Sommerville ..... A.J.S.
- 14—Mason Page ..... A.J.S.
- 15—Chuck Parkyn ..... Matchless
- 16—Art Phillips ..... B.S.A.
- 17—Ted Evans ..... Ariel
- 18—Carey Loftin ..... A.J.S.
- 19—Gordon Smiley ..... Harley
- 20—Vern Loveland ..... Velocette
- 21—Doug. Slayton ..... Matchless
- 22—Art Hulet ..... Triumph
- 23—Harley Kimball ..... Harley
- 24—Ernie Craff ..... B.S.A.
- 25—Jack Seeley, Jr. .... Harley
- 26—Ruben Jackson ..... A.J.S.
- 27—Ed Haade ..... Velocette
- 28—Al Davidson ..... Matchless
- 29—Bob Spicer ..... Matchless
- 30—Max Bubeck ..... Indian VT
- 31—Fred Ford ..... Indian VT
- 32—Don Alfred ..... Harley (J.D.)
- 33—Dutch Sterner ..... A.J.S.
- 34—Bert Asbury ..... Velocette
- 35—Walt Moore ..... A.J.S.
- 36—R. M. Thomas ..... B.S.A.
- 37—Don Bishop ..... Matchless
- 38—Geo. Schwartz ..... Matchless
- 39—Willie Forkner ..... A.J.S.
- 40—Fred Phelps ..... Matchless

(See box score on page 10)

**Top to Bottom**  
**TROUBLE APLENTY** was caused by the rock-strewn creek beds and embankments. Photo by Phebus.

**PICK A COURSE** and hope for good judgment. Photo by "B-B"

**THEY WENT THAT-A-WAY**, calculates Kenny Milne, as he applies a bit of body English in the loose dirt. Photo by Phebus.

