

Joe Murray was caught relaxing with friends and Fisher teammates an hour before the start of the National Off-Road Championships held near Santa Barbara, California on September 29. Clicking off a quick motor-drive series, a photographer asked Murray if he could name the shots the "winner's portrait." Instead of answering, Joe rolled his eyes and said to his friends, "There's no pressure on me, is there?"

In 1984 Murray rolled through the opposition the way his female counterpart Jacquie Phelan still does. His championship was the jewel in a string of victories that is not likely to be repeated in men's off-road racing. But in 1985 Murray was human, and his competition was more fierce.

The championship course had been chosen early in the year but during the summer a grass fire swept over the hills, leaving them blackened and barren and smelling strongly of ashes: an apocalyptic scene straight out of a war movie. In keeping with recent trends, this was the shortest course yet used for the NORBA championships. The three-mile loop had two major climbs and rough descents on roads that were dusty to begin with and not improved by the race.

A short course requires more laps, in this case 10 each for the veterans' and senior men's classes, and five for the women. Because of the preliminary sport and veterans' races, as the day went on the steep corners that required hard braking became increasingly rutted and rippled, with moguls building up like obstacles on a ski slope. These conditions dealt a severe disadvantage to anyone caught near the back of the field at the beginning of the race — dust from leading riders obscured the roughest turns.

As an incentive for a fast pace, every other lap of the championship race had a prime, and winners of more than one prime were to be rewarded with extra bonuses. A rider who took all of the primes would come away \$500 richer.

Since the first prime was on the first lap, there was little strategy involved at the start, and the mob charged off with enthusiasm bordering on insanity. A brief pileup just after the start served to stretch the field immediately, and the leaders pressed their advantage. The fast pace and a cloud of dust accompanying the pack made it a challenge for any rider to move up once he had lost position.

Ned Overend's luck ran out early, and he flatted at the start of the second lap. Although he conducted repairs quickly and got back into the race, he was effec-



A pair of repeaters play starring roles at the 1985 NORBA Championships.

by Charles R. Kelly

THE JACQUIE AND JOE SHOW

David Epperson

tively eliminated since the murderous pace showed no signs of letting up. Joe Petersen of SunTour faded as soon as he had taken the first-lap prime, and his teammate Roy Rivers moved to the front, shadowed by George Theobald of Team Fisher. Murray was nearly half-a-minute down at this point. Max Jones of Ritchey was eliminated on the second lap when he broke his chain, leaving Rivers as the only rider in the field with any realistic hope of holding off Murray.

Rivers rode his heart out trying to move away from Murray and put him away, but Joe Murray just can't be dropped in the hills. Finally, on the eighth lap, Murray made the move everyone expected; but what no one expected was the strength he showed in making it. On the steepest hill, he simply ran right past an exhausted Rivers. In three miles, Murray took two-and-a-half minutes out of his nearest competitor and coasted home two minutes ahead of Rivers. Although Schwinn's Overend and Gavin Chilcott of Team Stumpjumper had both lost any chance to win early in the going, they came back to take third and fifth places respectively.

Asked after the race how he viewed his strategy, Murray responded, "I thought they were going out a little too fast. I envisioned how long it was going to be, and I just kept my pace. I didn't want to go any

NORBA National Championships

September 29, 1985

Men, 30 miles

1. Joe Murray, Team Fisher	2:25:29
2. Roy Rivers, SunTour/WTB	2:27:35
3. Gavin Chilcott, Team Stumpjumper	2:30:43
4. Casey Kunselman, SunTour/WTB	2:32:42
5. Ned Overend, Schwinn	2:33:49
6. George Theobald, Team Fisher	2:34:20
7. John Loomis, Ross Indians	2:34:29
8. Todd DeAngelis, SunTour/WTB	2:37:19
9. Kye Sharp, Schwinn	2:39:38
10. Joe Petersen, SunTour/WTB	2:41:58

Women, 15 miles

1. Jacquie Phelan, SunTour/WTB	1:24:27
2. Mary Lee Atkins, Schwinn	1:32:22
3. Cindy Whitehead, Ross Indians	1:33:18
4. Beverly Lynch, Unattached	1:35:31

faster. It takes experience to pace yourself in this kind of racing."

Commenting on Rivers, Murray said, "The first five laps he looked really strong, and I thought I'd never catch him. But the last four laps I knew I could catch him because he was looking tired. On the steep hill, the toughest part of the course, he was slowing down a lot. I made the most time on that hill."

Rivers was philosophical, and apparently satisfied with his performance. "I had a lot of fun, and I almost died at the end, but I'm glad to be here. I tried to pace myself to be consistent and have something left at the end. Joe may attribute his win to experience or pacing, but I attribute it to muscle power."

In the women's division the search goes on for any rider who can challenge SunTour's Jacquie Phelan's dominance of the sport. Although Beverly Lynch pushed hard and took the first prime, Phelan had a considerably easier time than Murray in repeating as champion, riding away from the rest of the women early in the five-lap race as is her usual "strategy." If anyone is likely to give her a struggle, it may be second-place rider Mary Lee Atkins (Schwinn) of Durango, Colorado. The talent gap in the women's ranks is still considerable though, as Phelan continually attacked on the climbs and established an eight-minute lead over 15 miles. Third woman was Cindy Whitehead (Ross), with Lynch finishing fourth.

Although disappointed in his efforts at the nationals, Overend brightened considerably after the race, when he and Ms. Phelan were awarded *Winning's* Super Prestige Trophy, based on performances at selected events over the duration of the season. ■