

No engines needed

Bicycle motocross — Fast and fast growing sport for kids

By Mike Eliasohn

J.R. Newell's bicycle is worth \$400.

J.R. Newell is seven years old. The Owosso youngster is one of an increasing number of participants in a sport called bicycle motocross — BMX for short.

The bikes do not have motors. The "moto" part of the name comes from the motorcycle sport of motocross, after which BMX is patterned.

In both, the riders race over a short dirt course with

jumps, hills and turns, the difference being that in BMX, the course is much shorter and leg power is used instead of engine power.

In both, special machines are used. The BMX machines, with the exception of the cruiser class for older riders, use 20-inch wheels. The bicycles usually use wide knobby tires, have one speed, and are light but strong, normally 25 pounds or less.

Because of the extensive use of lightweight components, the bikes are not

lightweight in price. The cheapest BMX bike runs about \$150 and wouldn't be very competitive. The most expensive cost several hundred dollars.

That's not the kind of bread most kids carry around in their jeans, so by necessity, BMX is a family sport, even if not all members of the family participate directly.

Girls can race, either against each other or in the regular classes with the boys, but BMX remains a largely male sport.

The minimum age for the

sport is five. Until the last few years, riders stopped participating by their late teens, when they got too large for their small bikes.

That problem has been solved by the invention of cruiser bikes, which use 26-inch wheels and are somewhat akin to the old "balloon tire bombers" that were the standard kids' bike before the advent of 10-speeds and 20-inch banana seat bikes.

With the cruisers, even parents can get into the action.

J.R. NEWELL — J.R. sounds classier than Jeff — was one of several hundred riders competing on a recent week end at the Great Lakes National BMX event on a track near Lansing.

It was possibly the largest and certainly the most prestigious BMX event ever held in Michigan and attracted participants from as far away as California. (The Golden State is where BMX originated about 10 years ago.)

According to J.R.'s father, Bob, an ex-motorcycle racer, getting involved in the sport was a joint decision. They went to a few races last year, liked what they saw and "both decided to try it."

The father has invested about \$600 so far, and figures the minimum to get started would be about half that. (In addition to the bike, there is also the cost of protective clothing and safety helmet.)

The Newells — Mrs. Newell also goes along — usually travel with a group of families from Owosso involved in the sport. It's possible to go somewhere every week end, and the Newells have gone as far as Elkhart, Ind. BMX can be a year-round sport if one chooses as races are held indoors during winter. As for why families get involved, Bob Newell explained, "The kids really

love it. That's really the situation."

In his first year of competition, J.R. has done very well. It takes five wins in the novice class in his age group to move up to the expert class and he has already accomplished that.

JEFF FOSHAG, 16, of Monroe, has also done very well in his first full year of competition, collecting nine trophies in 11 races.

A lot of his friends were involved in the sport, which got him interested, so he bought a used bike, raced once last year, liked it and decided to get involved heavily this year.

His parents gave him a \$120 frame for Christmas and he has been doing various odd jobs (and getting advances on his allowance) to earn money for components, which he constantly upgrades. He figures he now has between \$400 and \$500 invested in his 21-pound machine.

After Jeff got involved, brother Robert, 11, got interested, and after that their parents, so now the entire family goes to races almost every week end.

So far they have been to such places as Detroit, Woodhaven, Birch Run, Petoskey and Elkhart, Ind. "We've been to every one," said their father, Walter, who exhibited as much enthusiasm for the sport as did his two sons.

A FEW PERSONAL PRECAUTIONARY NOTES:

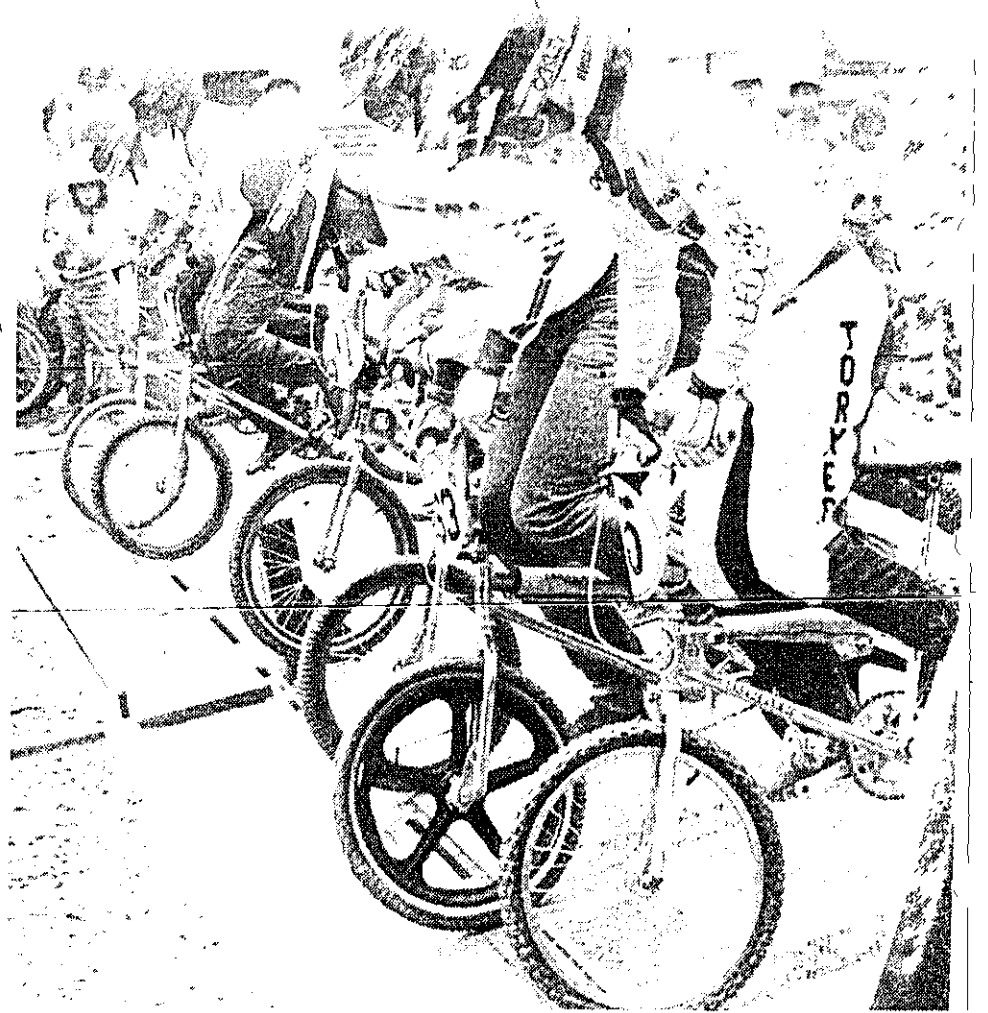
BMX racers wear safety helmets, protective clothing, there is safety padding on the bicycle and the cycles are extra strong so that they won't break, plus there are medical personnel at the events in case of injury.

Would-be BMX racers, after reading this, should not try such riding on standard bicycles. Something could break, for instance, the handlebars, resulting in serious injury to the rider. Standard bikes can be strengthened to take the stress, but the result is an already heavy bike being made heavier.

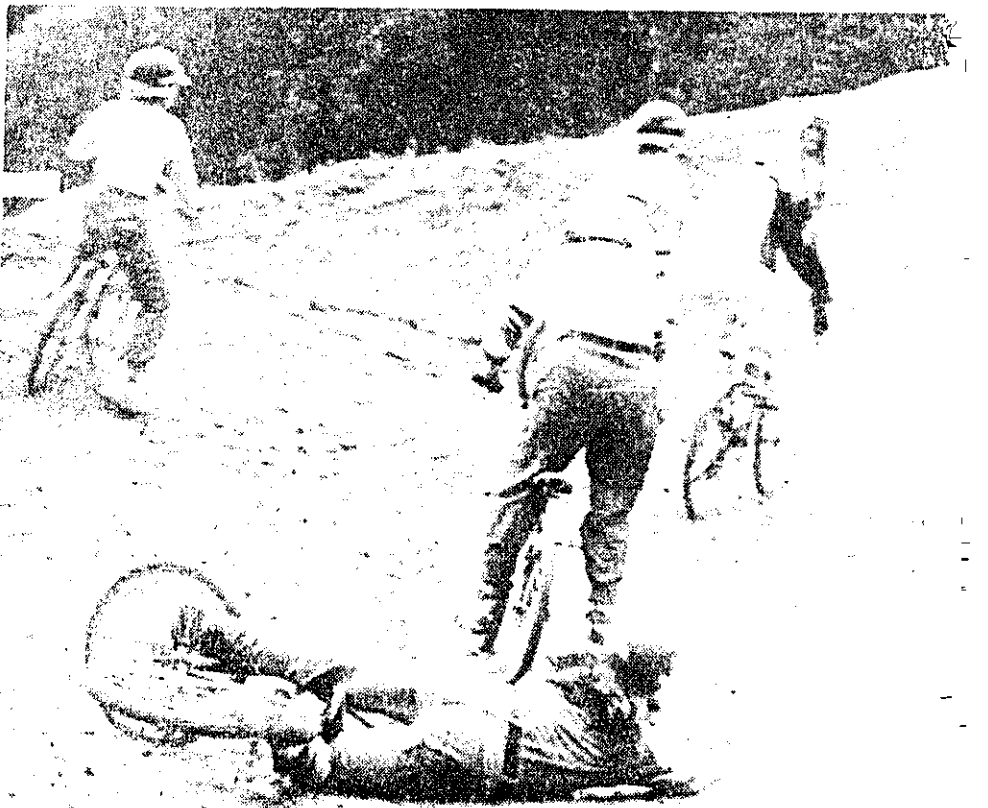
There are many inexpensive bikes sold that look like motocross bikes, but aren't, as they don't have the necessary strengthened frame, wheels, handlebars, etc., so shouldn't be used for BMX riding.

The nearest BMX track is Baja Acres, southwest of Millington.

Anyone who would like more information about the sport can call me at the Chronicle in the evening. M.R.E.



THEY'RE OFF — A starting gate that drops down ensures an equal start for all racers. A maximum of eight riders race per heat, which consists of one lap of the track.



SPLISH, SPLASH — The slick track made staying upright on the banked turns difficult, as this female rider found out. Injuries can happen, one circumstance being when a rider goes down in a pack and is run over by others.

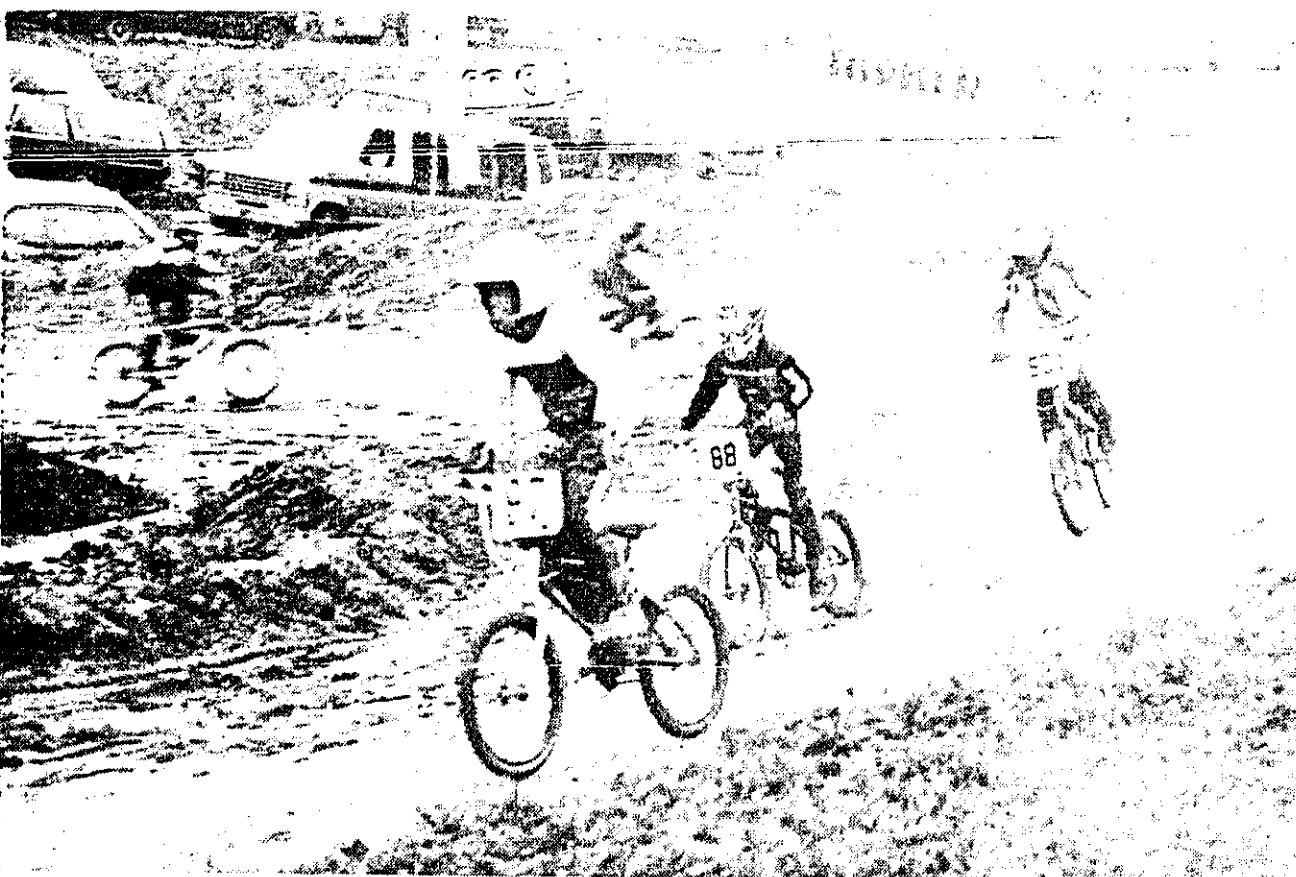
Getting soaked

Are you a tub person or a shower person? Taking a shower uses about 10 gallons of water, while a bath uses 20 gallons. To save on water bills, take showers instead of baths.

And if you prefer baths, after bathing let the water stand in the tub until it cools. The heat from the tub is sufficient to warm a small house on a chilly summer or fall evening.



BMX RACERS spend most of their time standing on the pedals, as opposed to sitting down.



CONDITIONS for the Great Lakes bicycle motocross event at the Jack Pine track north of Lansing were very muddy, which slowed speeds and made negotiating banked turns like this one tricky.



OVER THE HILL — Under dry conditions with faster speeds, these racers would have been flying off this hill instead of riding over it. BMX racers can get several feet off the ground.

Two area winners at state fair

Two area residents were winners in competition at the now ended Michigan State Fair in Detroit.

Janice Spitz of 5711 Jackson Road, Cass City, bested 15 other entries for her

bushel basket display of home grown vegetables in open class. Tom Cook of Ubyly won first place for his electrical entry in the 15-19 age group in industrial arts competition.

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