

Calendar

Speed at the Beach

La Playa Motocross Grand Prix

Armando Carrasco is talking about sand. "It's amazing," he says. "It's hilarious." And: "It's really weird."

Those words don't spring to everyone's lips when sand is their subject.

"It's amazing that the dune sand is way different from the regular beach sand," says Carrasco, speaking of Rosarito Beach, where periodically Carrasco's company, Too Much Fun Productions, sponsors a motocross. In fact, he says of the beach and the dunes, "It's not the same sand."

Motocross is a motorcycle race that by definition takes place on natural terrain. Usually, dirt is the medium. Even if you haven't been to such a race, you have probably seen one on TV

while flipping channels. Often, it's raining and the bikes are mired in mud. Carrasco's motocross is in the sand dunes 50 yards from shore.

"No other motocross is next to a beach that we're aware of," he says, "except one, and it's in Holland. They make a huge race there, with thousands of riders."

At least one thing can be said for the venue: it makes for soft landings. "On sand, a guy going 40 miles an hour can tumble off, stand up, shake off, and continue riding."

Ideally, a motocross course is irregular. It includes hills, jumps, and turns, both right and left. The day before each of his motocrosses, Carrasco goes out to the dunes and studies the kind of course that the wind has made. "The wind is the builder of the course," he says.

Using stakes and ribbons, Carrasco marks the jumps, following the dunes' contours. "Maybe something that used to be a jump gets all rounded. And something else that used to be rounded has a nice sharp edge. It could now be the perfect jump."

And then he prays that the wind doesn't change direction overnight?

"It doesn't change much from day to day, although, from week to week, yes, it does."

Still, the course does change — during the race. "Every time the bikes run over what used to be a flat area, they create a bunch of whoop-dee-dooos." Whoop-dee-dooos? "They're dips. You know: up and down, up and down. And the whoops get deeper and deeper as long as the race goes on."

On dirt courses, the bikers use



Quad racer

what are called knobbies for tires; on sand, many of them use paddle tires. "They dig a lot better in the sand."

The race is divided into classes from "Pro" to "Peewee." The "Peewee" class is for kids and doesn't take place in the dunes. "For the kids I built a little dirt track inside the dunes — it's only about half a mile around." The kids' bikes are too small to negotiate the sand. "They could not move hardly at all. It would be really rough for them to turn around. They'd just tumble over."

When are kids old enough for the sand?

"It's not by age; it's by size of motorcycle. Peewees ride bikes that are under 80ccs. Once they're able to ride a 125cc or a 250cc bike, they move up. We have a kid who's 14 years old racing on the sand track."

What age is the youngest in the Pee Wee class?

"We've got a kid who's five years old, and he's leading in points right now."

The racers wear protective clothing — bright, beautifully colored. "Full-face helmet, gloves, chest protector, kidney belts, boots with knee protectors."

But the kids — they're growing. It must be expensive to keep buying them new outfits. "Well, yeah. It's not a cheap sport. A motorcycle for a kid ranges from \$1000 to \$2000. And you don't want to know, probably, but the big bikes range from \$4000 to \$7000 or \$8000. The other day, one local rider told me that just the frame of his bike cost ten grand. No motor, no tires, nothing else but the frame."

The locals are also the source of Carrasco's knowledge about the sand. The contrast between the dune sand and the beach sand is "a phenomenon that, I have heard, occurs only here in Baja and somewhere in Japan. What happens is, the wind brings the sand over to the dunes from I-don't-know-where. At least, that's what the local guys say." This I-don't-know-where — is it nearby? "No. And the wind can

blow as hard as you can imagine, and the two kinds of sand don't mix. It's hilarious. And the dune sand is not that salty, either. It's really weird. But you gotta see it to understand."

— Jeanne Schinto

La Playa Motocross Grand Prix
Sunday, December 1,
10:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.
Cantamar Sand Dunes
Rosarito Beach
Directions: From U.S. Hwy 5 or 805, cross to Tijuana, take the Rosarito-Ensenada toll road (cuota), pass Rosarito Beach, cross toll gates, and exit at Cantamar. Turn left (south) and within a mile and a half, sand dunes will be on right (beach side).

Cost: Riders in Pro class, \$50; amateurs, \$30. **Spectators:** \$5 per car for parking; \$2 per person; 12 and under, free
Info: 011-52 (661) 612-2525 or www.toomuchfun.com.mx

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