

STEVE LEIVAN ~ 2014 Race Report

Event: Ozark 100 Miler - Round 3 Hillbilly GP - Mansfield, MO - November 29

Bike: KTM 250 XC

Result: 5th Overall

About seven or eight years ago, a few of us from Missouri had an idea for a special little dirt bike race that would be a true test of man and machine. It seems like over time, races have gotten easier, bikes have gotten better, and racers have gotten softer. There are fewer and fewer of "us" that want a true challenge and fewer and fewer places to get it.

So some of us created this 100 mile, three moto race, that has started to gain a reputation as one of those tough races that will test you, or break you. It's up to you which one it does. I am no longer involved with what has become the Ozark 100 Miler, other than just as a competitor. This year the race drew lots of pre-race attention and attracted some top name riders and it is now getting the exposure that it deserves.

Conditions and weather could not have been better this year (66 degrees on Thanksgiving weekend?!) and that, no doubt helped with the great turn out. The loop is 25 miles long and there is no practice, which means lots of leaves covering the rocky trail, which only adds to the challenge. Moto 1 is two laps of the course (50 miles) - Moto 2 is a single lap - and Moto 3 is set aside for the combined top 25 finishers of the first two motos. Moto 3 is 8.3 miles and had five sections that were "separators". The night loop would be run three times and there was no outside assistance allowed (unless you cried).

With 24 Pro riders, the field was stacked and good starts would be key. In the first moto, I got to the woods in sixth position and hung with the top five guys for a couple miles but I wasn't comfortable in the leaves and gradually found myself riding alone. Cody Schafer caught up to me about eight miles in and I let him around, but then he stalled and I took over the navigation duties again. I ended lap one in seventh position but lost a couple spots during the gas stop and started lap two in ninth place.

I almost feel like the second lap was sketchier. The leaves were gone but the rocks remained and just because I could see the rocks I was hitting, didn't make them any less dangerous. There were many mistakes made on my part and I crashed two or three times trying to over-ride the course. I was happy to end the moto in tenth and try to regroup.

I started the second moto in fourth place and soon had Nick Fahringer breathing down my neck.

Despite my best efforts to spectacularly wad myself up, I only managed to run off the track and give Nick a "freebie" (although he did say he was entertained). A couple miles later Drew Higgins caught me and passed me in a rocky creek only to swap violently about three seconds later and let me breeze back by him. I only made him stay back there for a little while and then I gave him some room to pass.

The rest of the moto was pretty decent but I had pressure from three guys the whole way. Jase Martin got around me about mile 19 and I tried to stay close to him and create an opportunity. That opportunity came in the last corner when I pulled off a sweet outside-in pass to finish seventh.

That brought us to the night moto, the segment when it all really matters and everything changes. After the 75 mile grind, everyone is feeling some fatigue, but that has to be pushed aside and entering the right frame of mind is important. I've been pretty good in the night portion before, so if it's possible, I was looking forward to it.

Another good start had me sixth entering the woods. When we got to Area 208 (about three miles in) Higgins got hung up and I rode the wall of the ravine to get around him. The rest of that section was tough but I kept clawing my way forward and when I got the the "regular trail", I glanced back and didn't see any lights, so I made a bit of a push to get away.

"The Wall" was next and I went right up it. When I got to "Somethin' Special" I was greeted with lots of screaming spectators and I was able to make a fairly smooth run all the way to the top. The second lap I got hung up at the very top of 208 and had to push the last 30 feet, but it could have been far worse. I temporarily got hung up on "The Wall" but that too could have been worse.

"Somethin' Special" was kind of a cluster the second time around as there seemed to be four or five guys still trying to get up it the first time. This took away any line I wanted to use but I had also caught Zach Ingram who was fighting his way up the right side. I went the same way he did I spent lots of energy pushing and shoving my way to the top. But I made it.

With one lap to go my thought process was "just one more time through everything"and then my headlight went out. I still had a helmet light so I could ride quickly through the grass track and then I pitted for an additional helmet light (courtesy of Nate at BulletProof Designs) to get me through the final lap.

This time VW, got me and I had to lift my bike through some boulders. About the time I recovered, 208 was waiting for me. I got all the way to the top again and then went sideways and had to push the final few feet. I cruised the next section and got my heart rate back down. There

was lapper in my preferred line at "The Wall" but I chose to go up the right side and made it smoothly.

All that was left was "Somethin' Special" and I caught Ingram there again. He was on the right so I went to the left. I had to get off my bike to get it straightened up for a clean shot and once I got my balance, I went for it. I went up the tough part pretty smoothly and passed Ingram for fourth, in the process. But it wasn't over. There was a rider laying in the narrow trail at the exit of the section and I got tangled up with him. Then Ingram got tangled up with both of us. It was a total cluster and fairly stressful. Ingram got free first and I rode my ass off in the last grass track to reel him in. Although I got close, he beat me by three seconds.

My solid night round ride, moved me into fifth overall for the event. With the talent (and youth) that was on hand this year, I can't be anything except very satisfied with the result. I use a famous line all the time - "Adversity introduces a man to himself". This race will introduce you.

A special thanks to everyone who helped me out this weekend. This race is a grind on everyone and I appreciate all those that were a part of it. That goes for the well-wishers and the crowds that gathered at the ignorant sections along the way.

Results: 1. Baylor KTM 2. Blythe KTM 3. Fahringer HUS 4. Ingram KTM 5. LEIVAN KTM

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