

This past summer, our friend Brian Chapman announced his new fitness program—Motocross racing. We think it's a midlife crisis, and Brian doesn't care, because when you have a midlife crisis, you don't care, we know this.

Instead of a gym membership, he had purchased a 2006 Yamaha YZ450S dirt bike that we must admit looked almost showroom when we

finally saw it. Which was after a couple of months of hearing tales of his practice sessions at ACP for the upcoming season. First we had to ask what's ACP? and where is it that you have disappeared to every Saturday and most Sundays?

ACP is Arizona Cycle Park, south of Buckeye, and to be exact he gave us directions to come see him ride. Take I-10 west of Phoenix to Exit #138,

then Highway 85 south for 14 miles. "When you pass the prison, exit, turn right and then right, so you drive past the prison going north. At the end of the road turn left where the sign is. I ride from 6am until 11am," he said. It was late summer, so we understood the early hours before the sun turned the desert into a frying pan. But 6am, an hour out of Phoenix—really?

Early to rise, we actually beat Brian to the track that next Saturday morning and were blessed by a freak of nature, light overcast clouds. When we pulled up to the gate, the gatekeeper said, "you forgot your bike" and waved us in free of charge to spectate. What had appeared flatlands with large motorcycle berms in the turns of the track turned out to be a giant pit with a National track and a Vet-X track, large jumps built in to each. There were only a few dozen racers on hand at this early hour and none on track yet, so cameras in hand we walked back to the gate to ask where we could shoot photos without getting in trouble. The gatekeeper, it turns out, is Beverly, co-owner of the track with her husband (who we never did meet). She said we could go inside the fencing and about anywhere along the track we'd like, with only the warning to never ever walk with our backs to the

riders. Makes sense, see what's coming at you, seems simple—until you get out there and realize you can only walk one direction or cross the track in between riders. Oh, and don't get hit, and no crash shots, she had said.

Brian had arrived while we were looking around, unloaded his bike and prepped to go for a few warm-up laps. A few riders were on track, so we headed down into the pit for the first time, figuring out where the best photos may be. Brian did about seven laps (he rides the Vet-X track) and went back up the hill to the pits. We followed, realizing we might get as much of a workout climbing as he did riding. Not actually true. He was dressed to sweat, and we had on shorts, T-shirt and tennis shoes.

Ride number two came after about 15 minutes of rest, refueling and checking the chain tension. He was much more aggressive, and we were impressed the old guy could ride and hit jumps pretty hard. Meanwhile, we were getting winded changing locations each lap, looking for just the right corner, elevation or jump to shoot. In 12 or 15 laps, who's counting? It was back to the pits this time for a long break and then a leisurely walk around the park, and thankfully the pit area is flat.

This being a practice-only day, there were no concessions open. There were dozens of motor homes and toy haulers with families picnicking in midmorning. And spectator stands above the National track, which we noted had consider-

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ably longer straights, larger jumps and greater elevation changes than the Vet-X track. Also much faster riders.

It was a good show, even during practice, and considering we don't have the nerve to climb on a YZ450 and get airborne—no negative comment about the Vet-X track. And no comment at all that might provoke a challenge from Brian to get on his bike. Climbing hills with bags of camera lenses is just fine.

Ride number three, and we have a plan. Brian has seen some photos, so he knows what works. Seventeen laps (he's counting this time), and we are out in the far corner shooting wide angles. On lap number 18, we switch to video, simply to test a camera, and when Brian comes through the corner he grabs a little throttle, thinking he can make a rooster tail. Well, the bike grabs instead of spinning the tire, lifts the front tire a touch and goes hard left, high siding him off to the right side, with the bike of course pummeling him on the ground. End of practice. The bike wouldn't restart after lying on the ground overflowing the carburetor, so he got towed back to the pits by a quad. The crash video later would be Brian's favorite item of the day, posting it on Facebook so friends could give him a hard time.

We walked over to Beverly at the gate to ask some questions about the track. She said she first went to ACP in the 1970s, when it was in Phoenix at 16th Street, down in the river bed. As Phoenix grew around it, as with so many motorsports tracks, it was driven out.

We asked how the pit came to be here in the middle of the desert, and she explained that when Highway 85 to Gila Bend was widened from two to four lanes, the road bed had to be raised above the floodplain, and the pit is left from the dirt removed to create that road bed. After the road project was complete, a friend who had worked on the project suggested that she and her husband look at the property, as it would sell cheap. They decided it was a perfect location for a motocross track. Obstacles that hinder general development around it include not only the "who wants to live next to the prison" thought, which is obvious enough. But to the north and west the land is monsoon floodplain. Also to the north are power lines and then mountain range. ACP would appear to be safe from urban encroachment for many years to come.

Arizona Cycle Park offers motocross racing classes for all ages and skill levels. Besides motocross, several times a year ACP turns to Sand Drag Racing with the Buckeye Drags for Trucks, Quads, Buggy's, Jeeps, Bikes and UTVS.

The season is on, so visit [www.arizonacycle-park.com](http://www.arizonacycle-park.com) for more information and schedules. ■

