

Making a life out of Motocross - Jim Holley Interview

By Denny "Budman" Kobza

I had the unique opportunity of sitting down for dinner with motocross legend Jim Holley before the SF Round of the 2009 Monster Energy Supercross Championship. He was a star back when I was racing motocross and getting the chance to talk with Jim was a real treat for me.

Holley was the first ever World Supercross Champion in 1985 and also captured two Ultracross Championships in 1988 and 89. Ultracross was the series promoted by Mickey Thompson that ran along with the off road trucks in stadiums around the country.

Holley's career started as a young man and he was guided to the sport by his father, National #23 flat track racer James (Al) Holley. Holley as a child followed Dad to the tracks in Southern California and he got to know some of the big names in the sport. Guys like David Aldana, John Hatley, Eddie Mulder, Terry Dorsch, etc. knew this little guy running around the pits. You could tell his passion for those days and for flat track racing; which I share, so hearing of all this was really cool.

Jim played some team sports as a lad and smiled ear to ear when describing a triple play he made while playing second base as a left handed youth.

Holley started mini bike riding at Indian Dunes at 11 years old back in 1972. Dad was Jim's mechanic by 1976 he was the 80cc Mini National Champion and he had etched out a good start to what would become a good career. Jim started on four strokes and when he took the 2 stroke plunge he found a bike that he really dug and he was winning often.



Jim at work on the YZ 490 Factory Yamaha

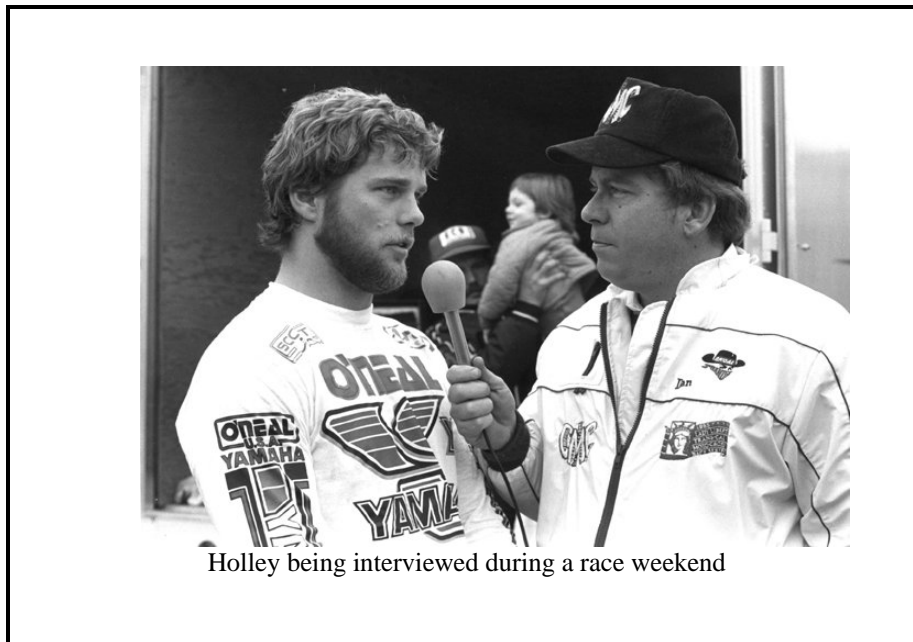


Holley smiling during the Yamaha's Race of Champions

He raced against some well known young guys like Wayne Rainey and Jeff Ward. Jim soon decided that if he was going to make money in the sport and create that career it would be on a MX bike and not a flat track like Dad. Success was quick and finding school a challenge he decided to take a ride with Yamaha, so he left school and went out to find out what the world was about. He moved out on his own at 17 years old and soon found himself traveling to places and living experiences that other young men of his age could not even conceive. By 1980 he was on the Mugen Honda Team Racing in the Nationals on a 125cc bike. There were not many outside sponsors back then so Jim would do the little extra stuff to help financially. He would get out to the races early and hang race sponsor banners along the track or other things to make an extra buck.

Life as a moto Racer:

He raced in Panama, Japan, Australia, So. Africa, Guatemala, Indonesia, Canada, Costa Rica, India and all over Europe honing his skills as a racer and growing into a well rounded young man. Once while in Spain, he found out that there was a topless beach and was of course excited as any young man would be. So he ventured out to check it out finding empty beaches and thought that all this European freedom was not as expected. He asked someone why no one was around and was told that the ladies would be out early in the day before work and he should come back then if he wanted to really get a taste of that culture.. he did and he did! That was just one little tidbit that Jim shared and thinking back to where I was at 17 I was quite intrigued by it for sure!



He mentioned that travel on planes was not very glamorous and the amount of smoke on the jets was quite overwhelming, but something he could not avoid...unlike today. The business side of the racing game was arduous, but the fun sure was there. In those days the bikes had steel handle bars, standard forks and drum brakes, unlike the high tech materials used on today's machines.

Those bikes were the beginning of motocross technology and the factories used them like today, as testing ground for their production machines.

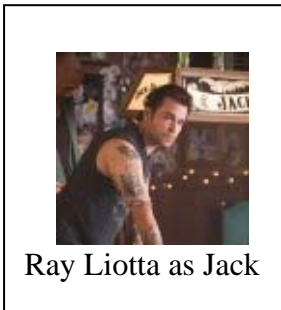
Motocross was an emerging sport and professional trainers were not involved so Jim worked side jobs that included hard physical activities as part of his training, although he did not consider it training! “Today the racers are real athletes dedicated to training and with the medical technology available they are totally prepared to give there physical and mental best at every race.”

Jim’s bond with Yamaha and many friends within the industry remains strong. He is now an announcer at the SX event broadcasting live on the internet. This keeps him in the eye of current racers and gives him the chance to see old friends along the way. Jim travels the entire SX circuit providing his comments live via the internet along with his partner Jason Weigandt. (More on the Feld Motor Sports broadcast below).

In fact a few joined us at the table and all had some cool stories. One was AMA official Robert Kelly who is in charge of providing and coordinating flagmen. These guys are the eyes of the racers where they cannot see. In SX you cannot see a lot, the tracks are narrow and once in the air the racers cannot make adjustments to their course so they depend on these guys to let them know when they need to be careful, because of havoc or hazards on the track. He had some good stories too! It was fun to watch him at work after hearing about them the following night.

Moto Stuntman

Jim made his way to Hollywood as a moto stuntman after racing and from the stories he has had some good times. Movies like “Italian Job” and “Wild Hogs” are just a few of those that are on his credit list. For Wild Hogs Jim was tasked with teaching Ray Liotta how to ride! The bad boy on the Harley in the film known as “Jack” had never really ridden a bike and the stunt coordinators chose Jim to teach him. Jim started Ray on a small dirt bike and slowly over the course of eight sessions got him on bigger bikes, eventually leaving the dirt to hit the roads in So Cal. Jim said that Ray had a few moments on the road where Jim was worried about his student, but Ray made it through and seemed to be very natural on a bike. When watching the film I had no idea that he had just learned to ride a few months earlier... he looked like a lifelong moto bad boy!



When Jim worked his moto magic on the “How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days”, he had just been injured in a crash, but he was committed to doing his job. Being a moto racer you know he had to be tough and the first day on the job he proved he still had it. Suffering from internal injuries Jim was OK on the bike, but lifting a leg to get on a bike was a task that put him in major pain. So what does he do?? He simply rode his scenes and when lunch rolled around.. he stayed on the bike for the entire time, so he would not have to try to get on again after resting. This made me chuckle as I could tell he was completely serious and no matter what a moto man carries on.

Racing today

I asked Jim about the racing today and what if anything he would like to see changed? Jim was quick to answer..”More Racing!” Jim went on to elaborate that he liked the old format a little better than the shortened race program we see today.

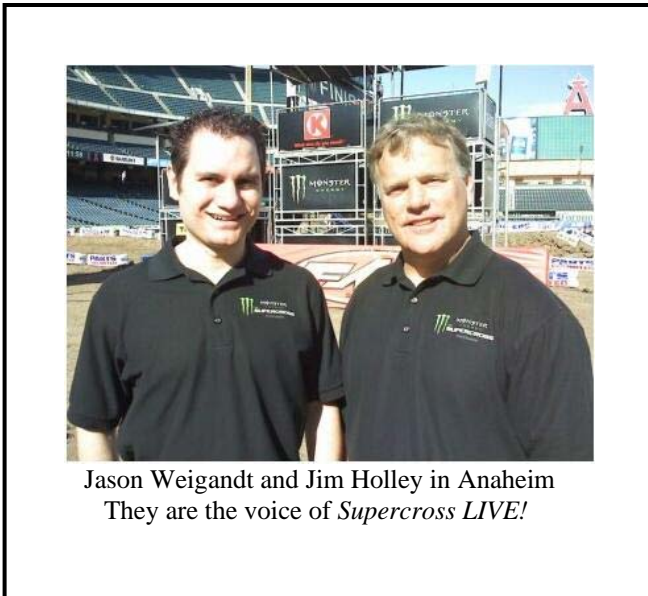
“The old format with the heats, semi’s, last chance qualifier gives the fans more opportunities for them to see the racers do their thing”. “It also gives the racers a better chance at making the show. Right now if you make a mistake you could miss the main event and not having the big guns in the race is not good for the series”

After watching the event myself the next night, I whole heartily agree!

Another thing Jim mentioned that was really good for the sport was the trackside medical staff. “Having medical professional on hand at every race is a benefit to all those that compete. Back in my time you could be an hour or more away from really good medical attention and in this sport the reality is you can get hurt and knowing that help is just moments away is a good thing for the racers mind”.

About Jim’s job as a broadcaster.

Jim returned to duties this year as the voice of Supercross on the Internet with *Supercross LIVE!* (www.SupercrossOnline.com).



Jim and Jason follow the 2009 Monster Energy® AMA Supercross, and FIM World Championship.

At every race the *Supercross LIVE!* audio webcast features a play by play live race call, a pre-race show and a post-race wrap up and then a call in show, where the fans can win prizes by answering trivia questions.

The show features many on-air industry guests and celebrities and gives the fan an in-depth-behind-the-scenes look at the series.

No doubt Jim has found a good life in the Motocross lifestyle and holds true to being as passionate about it today as he has always been.

THANKS JIM!

