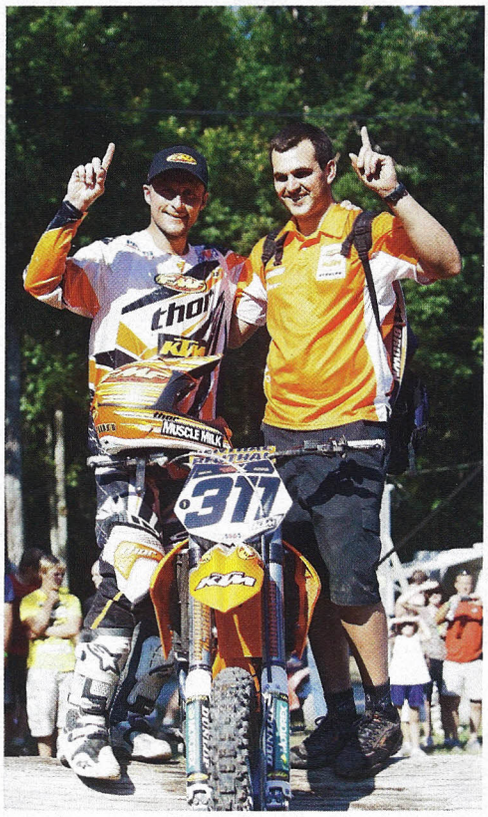
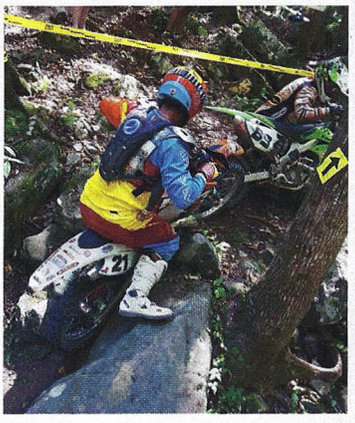
TOP STORY

HARD ENDURO HITS AMERICA

Inside The Kenda Tennessee Knockout Enduro





PHOTOS: Drew Ruiz

"It was just so hot in the trees, there was no air flowing anywhere. We were going so slow that I was totally overheating. It was tough. Halfway through that first lap, I was thinking to myself that there was no way I could keep going." These were the words of Mike Brown just minutes after he won the inaugural Monster Energy/Kenda Tennessee Knockout Enduro at the notorious Trials Training Center in Sequatchie, Tennessee.

The four-round format started with a day of amateur qualifying that led to a single timed lap on a very extreme "short" course to determine starting order for the 50 riders who would go into Knockout round one, a 10-mile "long" loop. From there, the top 25 riders completed another long loop, with the top 10 going to the final knockout: 10 laps on the difficult short course.

Tennessee native Brown outlasted a tough field that included AMA trials champion Cody Webb, GNCC hero Paul Whibley, Canadian tough-guy Bobby Prochnau and, of course, Taddy Blazusiak. The prerace favorite coming in to the event, Taddy was eliminated from competition during the first Knockout round when a minor crash forced him to pull out of the event. **"Everything started really good, I had fun riding the first loop but after that, it was just bad luck,"** Taddy admitted after the race. **"My front end washed out in the third corner during qualifying, and when I went down the bike fell on me and my foot popped out the injector! It was one of those things that you couldn't predict. I put it back into place, but it was still sucking air and bogging. I tried to ride for half the loop and was catching up, but then the bike bogged and I crashed. I figured that it was just a one-off event and I was here for fun, so I pulled out. It was fun, though. It was really dusty out there, but that's the way it is here. Overall the track, rocks and the place are just amazing."** Ever the sportsman, Taddy stuck around all afternoon to watch the race and cheer on his KTM teammates.

Given the worldwide popularity of hard enduro, the Kenda Tennessee Knockout Enduro was proof that with the right organization, a good format, a difficult course and support from the top riders such an event can successfully be held on American soil. The rocky terrain surrounding the Trials Training Center was on par with the difficulty level of most hard enduros, and almost as soon as the event was over, the riders, teams and spectators were buzzing about a future edition of the race. Nothing is set in stone, but stay tuned to **www.tennesseeknockoutenduro.com** for more info.