

**can-am**



May 6, 2006

## ***Backgrounder***

### **The Legend of Can-Am**

In order to achieve legendary status, a product must have a history of tremendous success. That is certainly true in the case of Can-Am™, which burst upon the U.S. Motocross Championships in the early 1970s, dominating the series, including the top three podium spots in 1974.

And behind any dominant product must be a team of passionate, hard-working individuals, all striving to be number one. That too is true with Can-Am, whose engineering team exuded passion, desire and innovation in its drive to the top of the sport.

In **1972**, under the direction of Gary Robison, a highly qualified racing and manufacturing expert, and Jeff Smith, a distinguished Motocross World Champion, Bombardier\* entered the first Can-Am prototype motorcycles into local motocross competitions. These competitions were meant to test the prototypes under strenuous, real world racing conditions with the hope of developing bikes superior to the competition, and it worked.



**Motocross legend Jeff Smith racing an early 125 MX unbranded prototype in a local race.**

In **May 1973**, the first Can-Am production models were released – the MX (motocross bike) and the T'NT (Track aNd Trail – enduro bike), with 125cc and 175cc versions of each. In its first season of competition, the Can-Am 175 MX carried Bob Fisher, Eric Nielsen and Jeff Smith to gold, silver and bronze in the International Six Days Trial (ISDT), an enduro-style race featuring top racers from all over Europe and North America.

That same year Robert Barker on a Can-Am motorcycle set the 125cc land speed record at Bonneville at 136.537 mph – a record that still holds to this day. With the first 250 MX-1 prototypes, Gary Jones, Marty Tripes and Jimmy Ellis led the Can-Am racing team to an historic sweep in the **1974** AMA 250cc National Motocross Series. The feat earned Can-Am the coveted #1, #2 and #3 plates, as well as a legion of die-hard fans. On the international scene, Billy Uhl ruled the ISDT series with seven gold medals.



Gary Jones #1, Marty Tripes #2, Jimmy Ellis #3 and the 1974 Can-Am R&D team

To add to this already impressive record, in 1975 Jimmy Ellis swept all three rounds of the Yamaha<sup>†</sup> Super Series of Motocross and then wrapped up the 1975 AMA Supercross Series by winning the Superbowl of Motocross at the Los Angeles Coliseum. Later in the fall, Ellis claimed the ten-race Trans-AMA 250cc Support Class Championship. Fellow Can-Am riders Mike Runyard and Buck Murphy finished second and fourth, respectively.

A factor that undeniably contributed to this extraordinary rise to racing fame was the team's focus on innovation. Rotax™ air-cooled, two-stroke engines used oil injection (instead of premix) and rotary valve induction (versus traditional piston-port) for precise intake timing. Furthermore, the chassis was constructed from MIG-welded chromoly steel, a backbone oil tank and a unique steering head adjustment, which could vary the caster angle. These pioneering technologies no doubt left a mark on the history of motorcycle development.

However, soon after the Can-Am introduction, the Bombardier corporation shifted its priority from recreational products towards diversification into the transit equipment industry and then, several years later, into aircraft manufacturing. As a result, investments in the young Can-Am division were reduced substantially.

In **1976**, onboard his factory works 250 MX-2, Ellis finished second overall in the Winter-AMA Series and took third overall in the AMA Supercross Series. The following year, Can-Am introduced the black 250 MX-3, which had an incredible top-end – almost too much power. Ellis won AMA 250cc National Series Round 2 in Nashville and the Houston Supercross. It was the last time Ellis raced the Can-Am colors, having received “an offer he couldn’t refuse” from Honda<sup>‡</sup>.

The orange MX-4 series debuted in **1978**, with two new engines sitting two inches lower in the new frame – a 250 and a 370 with case reed valve induction producing an astounding 42 hp. The 370 MX-4 was affectionately dubbed the “orange monster”.

Can-Am added a Winter-AMA Series title in **1979**, with Kippy Pierce behind the bars. In **1981**, a four-stroke motorcycle attempted the grueling ISDT challenge for the first time. It was a Can-Am bike equipped with Rotax’s first four-stroke engine. This air-cooled four-valve engine later powered the 1982 Sonic 500, one of the last motorcycle models produced in Bombardier’s home town of Valcourt, Québec, Canada.

In **1983**, Bombardier licensed the brand and outsourced development and production of the Can-Am motorcycles to Armstrong / CCM of Lancashire, U.K.

In **1983-84**, the completely redesigned Can-Am ASE (Air-cooled/Single shock/Enduro) series was launched. In addition to a line of trials bikes, Can-Am introduced the exotic 250 Road Racer, with twin 125cc in-line rotary-valve liquid-cooled engines and independent crankshafts, adjustable Marzocchi<sup>‡</sup> forks and DeCarbon<sup>‡</sup> rising-rate rear suspension, magnesium wheels and Brembo<sup>‡</sup> disc brakes.

**1987** was the last model year for Can-Am.

Can-Am was always more than just the championship it claimed in 1974. It was passion...dedication...a desire to resist the ordinary and strive for greatness...

Today, that inspiration, that drive, that winning spirit has been reborn to deliver the ultimate connection between man and machine. BRP launches its 2007 Can-Am ATV line-up.

Can-Am is back. To reignite the passion. To make every ride a thrill. To bring the challenge back to the ride. The new Can-Am promises to overshadow its legendary past. And with a dedicated team of engineers and designers, innovation and inspiration are always ready to strike.

Its time has come. Back.

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