

PROFILE: TOM GAIAN

TEAM HONDA'S SHORT-COURSE SPECIALIST

BY VALERIE AMARILLAS



Of all the top talent found within today's 3-wheeling community, there never seems to be enough said about those who race in the smaller, limited-displacement classes. Maybe it's because their bigger brothers in the open classes have stolen the show with their full-on suspension and horsepower. However, the amount of individual riding effort, talent, and skill that's required of the racers in the limited classes is in no way less demanding or challenging.

One individual who displays this kind of talent is 21-year-old Tom Gaian of Spring Valley, California. Tom has the required skill, and he continues to exert more than a fair share of time and effort toward his racing career. Since Tom began racing three years ago, he has not only ridden in, but has won within every major division of the 0-200cc class. Natural talent rarely goes unnoticed and Tom's case is no different. It was only two years after he had ridden in his first race that Tom was offered a ridership with Team Honda as one of their principal riders in the 0-200cc class.

Now, trying to catch up to someone who has a full-time job and an unending race schedule isn't easy. However, we did manage to catch Tom while he was taking some time off between races to nurse a broken collarbone.

3W: *How'd you hurt your shoulder, Tom, get off a little too hard?*

GAIAN: No—real hard! Just one of those things, I guess. A few months after I thought it was healed, I went to Michigan for a race. I got off real easy in a corner. It was a simple get off—the kind you can usually get right back on and take off. But it didn't work—I had re-broken my collarbone. This is the first bone I've ever broken—up until now I thought I was made out of rubber.

3W: *Most of the riders we have done profiles on recently have had some degree of experience racing short-course as well as long-distance events. The amount of experience has varied, but each rider seems to favor a particular style of race. How about you—any preference?*

GAIAN: I've ridden desert races but I don't care for them like I do the short-course race. I really don't like riding in the dust where you can't see where you're going. I just don't feel comfortable going that fast—because you really get up to some high speeds, and not being able to see more than two or three feet in front of you. I'm just not as comfortable in a desert race and really prefer racing the short-course races. Besides, I think when Wes McCoy of Honda picked me up he had just the

short-course racing in mind for me. Endurance-wise I know I can handle the desert, but all my effort has been toward short-course and I just really enjoy it.

3W: When did you start riding for Team Honda?

GAIAN: The first time I rode for Honda was about a year ago—last August at the SCORE Off-Road World Championships at Riverside. I had already entered and was planning on racing my mono-shock 90; the one Bob Dickson and Smitty helped co-sponsor for the race. I was all ready to race, but then Honda asked if I wanted to ride one of the ATCs they had built for the race. I sure wasn't going to turn down something like that!



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3W: How'd you do at Riverside?

GAIAN: I got a third in the 200cc class, and a friend who rode my machine got fifth place.

3W: Have you always ridden 3-wheelers or did you race motorcycles before you got into 3-wheelers?

GAIAN: The only motorcycle I had before I got my first 3-wheeler was a Suzuki 90 and I rode that just for fun. The first 3-wheeler I had I raced in the 132cc class. Then after I had that for awhile, I bought a little ATC 70 and messed around with that motor—hoppin' it up. Then I put some little flat-track tires on it. When I went out on the track the thing handled so well I could blow everybody off because it would corner so well. I stuck with that for awhile and raced the modified 70cc class and the 0-112cc class. Then I took out the little 70 motor and put in a 110cc engine that pumped up a little bit and raced it in the 132cc class for a time. Then I built a new race machine. Bob Dickson sponsored me for awhile with his mono-shock frame; that was the 3-wheeler I was going to race at Riverside.

3W: Just out of curiosity, why did the 70 handle so well; was it the way you set it up?

GAIAN: No, not really, it was just so small, short and low to the ground. It just maneuvered real well around corners, plus it was light and you could throw it around.

3W: Can you compare a 3-wheeler to a motorcycle?

GAIAN: No, I don't think you can. You ride them completely differently. I used to be able to ride a motorcycle fairly well—now I can't ride a motorcycle like I used to. I don't feel comfortable any more riding in the dirt; it feels like the bike is going to slide out from under me. I guess it's because I'm used to having that extra wheel.

3W: A look at your race record shows you've been successful ever since you started racing. Where did you develop your riding skill prior to racing?

GAIAN: When I got my first 3-wheeler and started riding there were open fields all around my neighborhood. The time I spent riding was all pretty much just in the fields around my house. Dean Sundahl lived down the street and we hung around together. I rode a lot with Dean and I just learned and picked things up by watching Dean and some of the other guys we rode with. You can't copy someone else—all you can do is watch how they handle themselves and then try and see what is comfortable for you. It takes a lot of practice. That's how I learned to ride.

3W: What prompted you to start racing?

GAIAN: Like I said, Dean Sundahl lived down the street, and, after a while when there got to be fewer and fewer places to ride around the neighborhood, Dean talked me into trying a short-course race. I tried it and found out that I was pretty good—it started from there.

3W: After you got that first taste of racing, was there any one person who helped to get your racing career off the ground?

GAIAN: Yeh, I did, and even though Dean got me interested in racing I'd have to say that I wouldn't be where I am right now if it wasn't for Smitty [Editor's note: Tom's referring to Steve Schmidt of Smitty's ATC]. In fact, he sold me my first 3-wheeler, but that was before he opened Smitty's ATC. After he opened his shop I started going to him for parts and equipment and we got to know each other pretty well. Then one day he asked me if I wanted a job in his shop washing parts. I took the job and it was shortly after I started working for him that I got into racing. Smitty helped me out with parts and started paying my entry fee at Southbay Speedway 117. From the time I started racing competitively, three years and more, until I started riding for Honda, he helped me out 100 percent. Like I said, I just don't think I would be where I am if it hadn't been for Smitty's help. He's been great to me!



"I could blow everybody off because it would corner so well."

3W: Tom, you've basically proven your ability in the 200cc class, why haven't you moved up to the 250 or open class?

GAIAN: I like racing in the 200 class, plus I like the four-stroke motor and the 250 is a two-stroke. I like riding a four-stroke; it has a whole different power band. It's a different kind of power; to me it's smoother.

3W: Do you feel there are advantages to the four-stroke?

GAIAN: I think a four-stroke comes out of a corner harder. Right when you give it the gas, it's there. I also feel it has more torque than the two-stroke. On top-end speeds the two-stroke might pull a four-stroke, but we're working on that. Another advantage is that the four-stroke is a 200cc motor, and the closest two-stroke in my class is a 175cc.

3W: All your efforts are in the short-course events, aren't all the tracks pretty much all the same?

GAIAN: No, not at all. There's a lot of difference in the courses. Some are smooth and have big sweeping turns like a TT track, some are fast and then there are the stadium courses with lots and lots of jumps, which takes a lot of endurance. Most of the popular tracks like Corona are well maintained and the course layout is changed occasionally so it's not always the same. I like to race fast tracks like Riverside—it's fast but with just enough rough to keep things interesting.

3W: Competitive 3-wheeler racing has been around for a while; what's your feeling on why it's become so popular?

GAIAN: I think it's just been in this last year that 3-wheeler racing has really become popular—ever since Honda came out with the 250. They've done a lot of promoting because of the success of the 250, plus there are a lot more magazines like yours and Dirt Wheels that are covering the races and keeping everybody informed about what's going on.

3W: What's your approach to keeping in shape for racing?

GAIAN: For me riding is the best way to keep in shape; and there's usually a race every weekend. Like during the Golden State Series, it was just about every weekend for a few months; or I'll drive up to Corona, Saddleback—there's usually a race at one of the tracks. I do as much riding as I can plus I jog every night to keep my wind up, and lift weights so I won't get as tired when I'm racing. I can tell when I haven't ridden for a week—my hands get sore and I feel sloppy.

3W: You mentioned weight lifting; why is strength so important?

GAIAN: You have to muscle the machine around—you just can't sit there. You have to push with your legs to get the rear end around. If you hit a rut you have to have tight control of the handlebars or it'll pitch you right off. You can't be sleeping; you have to concentrate all the time whether you're riding or racing.



"I just learned and picked things up by watching Dean and others."



"Some people think that the Honda factory does all the work... that's not true!"

3W: What about a riding style; do you have any particular style or riding technique?

GAIAN: Never really thought about it, but I guess I would have to say I don't ride my 3-wheeler—I drive it. The best way to explain it is that when I go off a jump and I'm in the air, I'm trying to find a place to put the front wheel instead of taking a jump, landing, and then thinking about what my next move will be. The minute I hit a jump I'm figuring out where I'm going to land and where or if I have to put the rear end in a particular spot so when I land I'm already set up for a corner.

3W: With a race every weekend plus your full-time job, how do you find time keeping your 3-wheeler race-ready?

GAIAN: It's like a second job: It takes 100 percent of effort and a lot of hours in the garage, but I do all the maintenance on my ATC. About the only thing I don't do is build the motors—Curtis Sparks does that. He's an excellent mechanic. Some people think that the Honda factory does all the work—you hear them say that it isn't fair racing against Honda riders, because the ATCs are factory prepared. But that's not true: It's up to each team member to do his own prep and maintenance. We're no different; we have to prepare, set-up, and maintain our racers just like everybody else. Believe me, it's not easy; it takes a lot of work!

3W: Do you think 3-wheeler racing will ever get as popular as motocross?

GAIAN: I hope so—I think it will. Right now, maybe not as big—but it'll get close. It's kind of up to the kids right now, the ones who will be racing in the future. When they want to start riding and their dad asks what they want—a motorcycle or a 3-wheeler—I think most kids will say a 3-wheeler. Then, again, with all the different magazines they can start seeing the competition and can pick who they might want to be like and can follow that person through the race coverage. I look at it that way. I think 3-wheeler racing can only get bigger.

3W: With regard to your racing effort, what do you hope to accomplish?

GAIAN: Nothing really—I just enjoy it—keeps you out of trouble. I can't say it's the fame, although that would be nice; it's just that I enjoy it!

3W: What's your biggest challenge in racing?

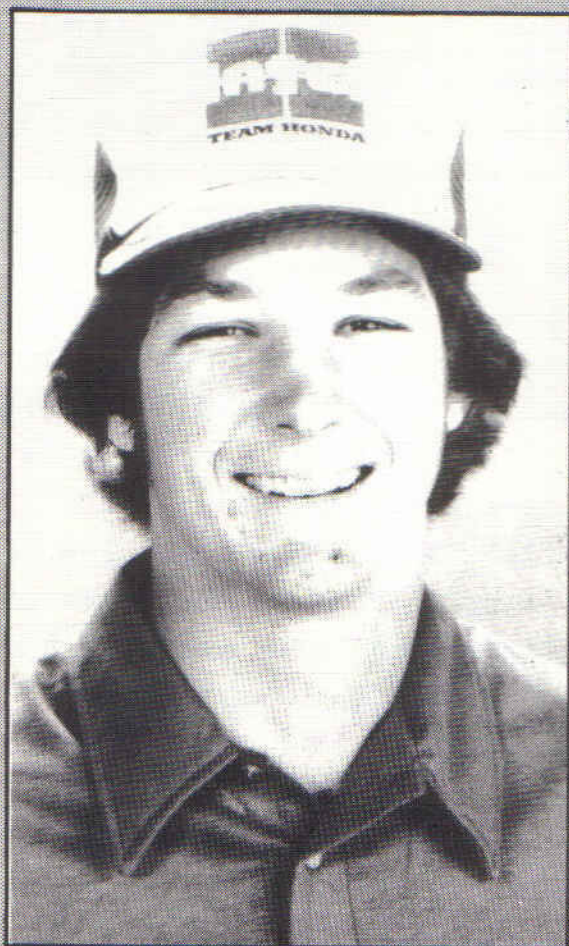
GAIAN: Winning!!

From humble beginnings in vacant lots around his Spring Valley home, Tommy Gaian has matured into one of America's premier ATV racers, — plying his trade from Speedway 117 in San Diego as a major privateer, to national and international races as a member of Team Honda.

Tom progressed quickly from the rank and file by placing first overall (132cc) in the Corona Raceway Colassas Championships in 1979, his first full year of racing. Tommy's second year of ATV racing was a banner year. Placing first overall in both 70cc and 115cc classes of the 1980 Southwest ATC National Championships and first overall in the Speedway 117 Coca Cola Series in the 115cc class.

Tommy continued to race as a privateer until his stylish riding and repeated wins caught the eye of American Honda. Team Honda picked Tom to ride their then new 200cc pro-link ATC in the Bridgestone/Score Off-Road Championships at Riverside Raceway where Tom finished 3rd, despite losing his seat on the first lap.

Since his first race for Team Honda, Tom has continued his winning way.



- 11/81 Baja Cross, Saddle Back Raceway
2nd in 200cc Class
- 2/82 AMA Supercross Championships,
Anaheim, CA, 1st. in 200cc Class
- 2/82 CMC/Petty Golden State Series
1st Overall 200cc Class
- 7/82 Saddleback Raceway -
2nd 200cc Class
- 8/82 Bridgestone/Score Off-Road World
Championships - 2nd. 200cc Class
- 8/82 Indian Dunes, Qualifer for San Jose
1st. 200cc Class
- 10/82 Saddleback Raceway - 3rd 200cc
Class
- 10/82 San Jose USA Championships -
3rd 125cc Class - 4th 200cc Class
- 11/82 San Diego Stadium Supercross
2nd 200cc Class
- 11/82 Saddleback Raceway -
1st 200cc Class
- 12/82 Iron-Horse Grand Prix
1st 200cc Class
- 1/83 Washington - Kingdom Supercross
Qualifer - 1st 200cc Class
- 2/83 Kingdom Supercross
2nd 200cc Class

CARLSBAD

Gaian, Sundahl sweep by Hart, Wright onto victory

By Lance Bryson
CARLSBAD, CA, FEB. 7

Tommy Gaian, along with Dean Sundahl, captured the fourth running of the three-wheel Continental Moto-sport Club/Preston Petty Golden State Series at Carlsbad today.

The ATV track at Carlsbad Raceway proved to be quite challenging as you could barzai it through the corners in a high flying, sideways style. The track was excellent.

The first race of the day was combination of the 0-200cc Modified and Stock. As the flag was dropped it was Honda's Gaian jumping out front followed by Marty Hart on a 3-B Lightning 175 Yamaha and Premier Yamaha's Chuck Hatzfield.

Gaian jumped out, in front at the drop of moto two; Hart quickly followed with Hatzfield and Tim Hoy in hot pursuit. Gaian seemed to have worked out the bugs with Hart only getting a view of his back the entire moto. This time Hart was having troubles. Something didn't sound right, and the way it was popping, it sounded as if the timing was off. Gaian kept the win for a 2-1 score and first overall with Hart second.



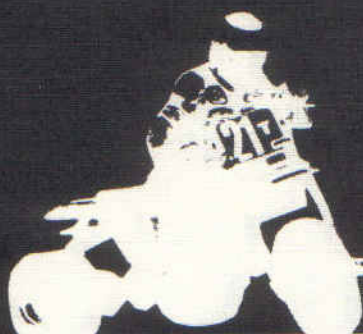
ATV NEWS



RESULTS

200cc MOD EXPERT

1. Tommy Gaian (Hon)
2. Marty Hart (Yam)
3. Tim Hoy (Hon)
4. Chuck Hatzfield (Yam)



ANAHEIM



Tommy Gaian was pleased, both with his 200cc win and the track. "You really had to concentrate over those stutter bumps. It was very easy to stall."

Tommy Gaian fights to maintain control while exiting the sand pit on his way to the 200cc win. (Mark Thomas photo.)

AMA Amateur Supercross Championship Series:

Gaian, Sundahl topple the "Big A"

By Lance Bryson
ANAHEIM, CA, JAN. 31

Team Honda's Dean Sundahl, along with team-mate Tommy Gaian, showed the crowd of 2,000 just what stadium racing was all about with 1-1 scores in the 0-200cc and 201-250cc classes, respectively, in the AMA Amateur Supercross Championship Series in Anaheim Stadium.

RESULTS 200cc

- | | |
|------------------------|-----|
| 1. Tommy Gaian | Hon |
| 2. Curtis Sparks | Hon |
| 3. Marty Hart | Yam |
| 4. Kevin Burke | Hon |



ROCKY CATALOG

Tommy Gaian

Rocky-supported Tommy Gaian, on his Nicholson-framed ATC-185S, shows the form that made him 1982 Golden State 0-200cc Expert Champ. A member of the Honda factory team, Tommy plays a vital role in the development of new products and ideas for Rocky.