

**IT'S ALIVE!**

By Clyde Bolton p. 27

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By Loyd McIntosh

# Motocross is What Makes Me Tick

**I**t's the second Sunday in February, and 19-year-old motocross racer Alex McWilliams is zipping around the track at Millcreek Motocross Park in Pell City on his favorite green Kawasaki KX 65. The six foot, 175 pound teenager with longish, curly brown hair, stuffed inside a gleaming blue helmet, is slinging his crotch rocket 30 feet in the air and leaving a plume of brown dust and smoke in his wake while riding with a few buddies.

After weeks of brutal winter weather, the day couldn't be more perfect – crystal clear, blue skies and temperature around 70 degrees – for some much-needed practice. Alex and his friends work the far side of Millcreek track, built in the backwoods of St. Clair County by his family a decade ago.

From the main set of bleachers, it is possible to actually hear yourself think or even carry on a conversation. But when they're on the near side, catching air just a few feet away with only a chain-link fence dividing the riders from the spectators, you can physically feel the noise rattling your ribcage like a dad gum wind chime – in an awesome way, of course. Watching this take place it's easy to see how this kid from Leeds could find himself addicted to the sport. "Motocross is what makes me tick. If I didn't ride I wouldn't know what to do with myself," says Alex.

Since he was five years old, Alex has crisscrossed the country competing in motocross, a sport combining pure speed, eye-popping acrobatics and aggressive attitudes – an adrenalin junkie's dream. Alex will be one of over 700 amateur motocross racers competing at Millcreek March 9-12 in the Southern Nationals, one of the premiere motocross events in the country and a preliminary event for the National Amateur Motocross Championships on the Loretta Lynn Ranch in Nashville this summer.

Currently racing in the expert class, – similar to AAA status in minor league baseball – in the American Motocross Association, Alex is in the processes of transitioning to life as a professional motocross racer. Alex, like most motocross racers, begins racing in the novice class (Single A), then moving onto intermediate (AA), then on to expert. Alex, as an expert class racer, can compete in amateur and pro events and can even earn prize money as well. But what he hopes to gain most of all is experience at a high level.

He plans to spend 2011 racing for his team, Kawasaki Team Green, deepening his relationship with his sponsors – Jacksonville Power Sports, Fly Helmets, Alpine Star apparel, FMF, Factory Connection and several others – and picking up new sponsors with the goal of launching his pro career full-tilt in 2012. With his star on the rise, it's amazing to realize the talented racer's dreams were al-

most shattered at an incredibly young age.

Alex's introduction to motocross came from an unlikely source



Alex McWilliams



“...one day I woke up and I could see the lines better, see the track differently and, even though I was going faster than I was before, it felt like I was going slower.”





## ■ Motocross is What Makes Me Tick *(Continued)*

– the Leeza Gibbons Show. Four-years old at the time, he happened to see an episode featuring a young motocross racer. It was love at first sight for the future amateur champion. “I was like ‘Mom, I know what I want to do. I want to ride motocross,’” says Alex.

The senior McWilliams presented Alex with his first bike for Christmas, a PW Yamaha 50. “Dad said he didn't even know they made motorcycles for children that small,” Alex says.

Alex was a natural and began competing regionally at the age of five, earning a spot at the Loretta Lynn Championships at the age of six; one of only 42 racers in his class from around the nation. At an age when most kids are still learning where the bathrooms are at their elementary school, Alex was on his way to being one of the nation's top amateur junior motocross racers.

All of his goals would be altered, however, at the age of seven when he suffered an accident while practicing for the Winter Nationals. Alex was growing quickly and, as a consequence, his bones were more brittle than the average child. The accident crushed his leg, breaking his foot, ankle, tibia, and fibula, along with his wrist. Ten years later, Alex still remembers the discussions his parents had with his surgeon, John Killian, while recovering at Children's Hospital.

“The doctor came in and, it's kind of clichéd but the doctor said ‘I don't know if we save his leg.’ When I woke up I had staples in my leg and rubber bands in the staples holding in the muscles. They cut my leg open to let my muscles air out and have room to breathe,” says Alex.

The rehabilitation was long and painful. He spent about

four months recuperating in a hospital bed in his house, followed by more time in a wheelchair and a cast up to his hip before he was ready to walk again. Through it all, however, Alex says he couldn't wait to get back on his motorcycle and ride.

“During the whole thing I was like ‘Mom, please don't sell my motorcycles. Don't sell my motorcycles,’” he added. “She would try to get me to watch golf videos. But, then some friends of mine who ride would come over with video tapes of the race recorded last Saturday night and we'd watch those instead. I guess it's just in my blood.”

It was almost a year before Alex would begin riding again. The recovery kept Alex out of the big time, as he failed to make the main gate at Winter Nationals for about five years. He says the inactivity during that time caused him to gain a significant amount of weight and he struggled to regain the competitive edge he had before the accident. By the age of 15, however, Alex made the jump from novice to intermediate class and admits he really wasn't ready for the challenge.

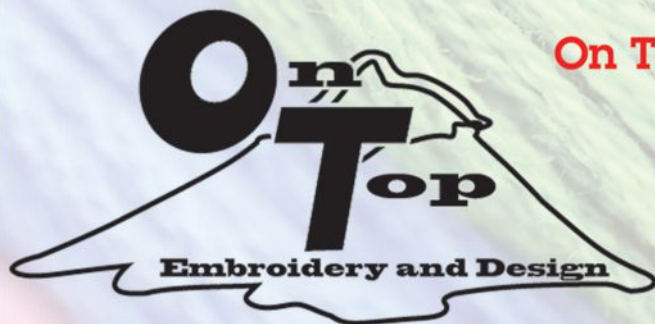
“I was kind of young and I got thrown to the wolves for a few years,” he says. “I didn't do that well and didn't make nationals for a few more years.”

Since that time, though, Alex has turned it around. His parents allowed him to withdraw from Leeds High School to be homeschooled on a more flexible timeframe around his competition schedule. He also began a fitness regimen with a personal trainer, helping him drop the weight and become more fit and toned in the process. It was that point, he says, that everything began to fall into place.

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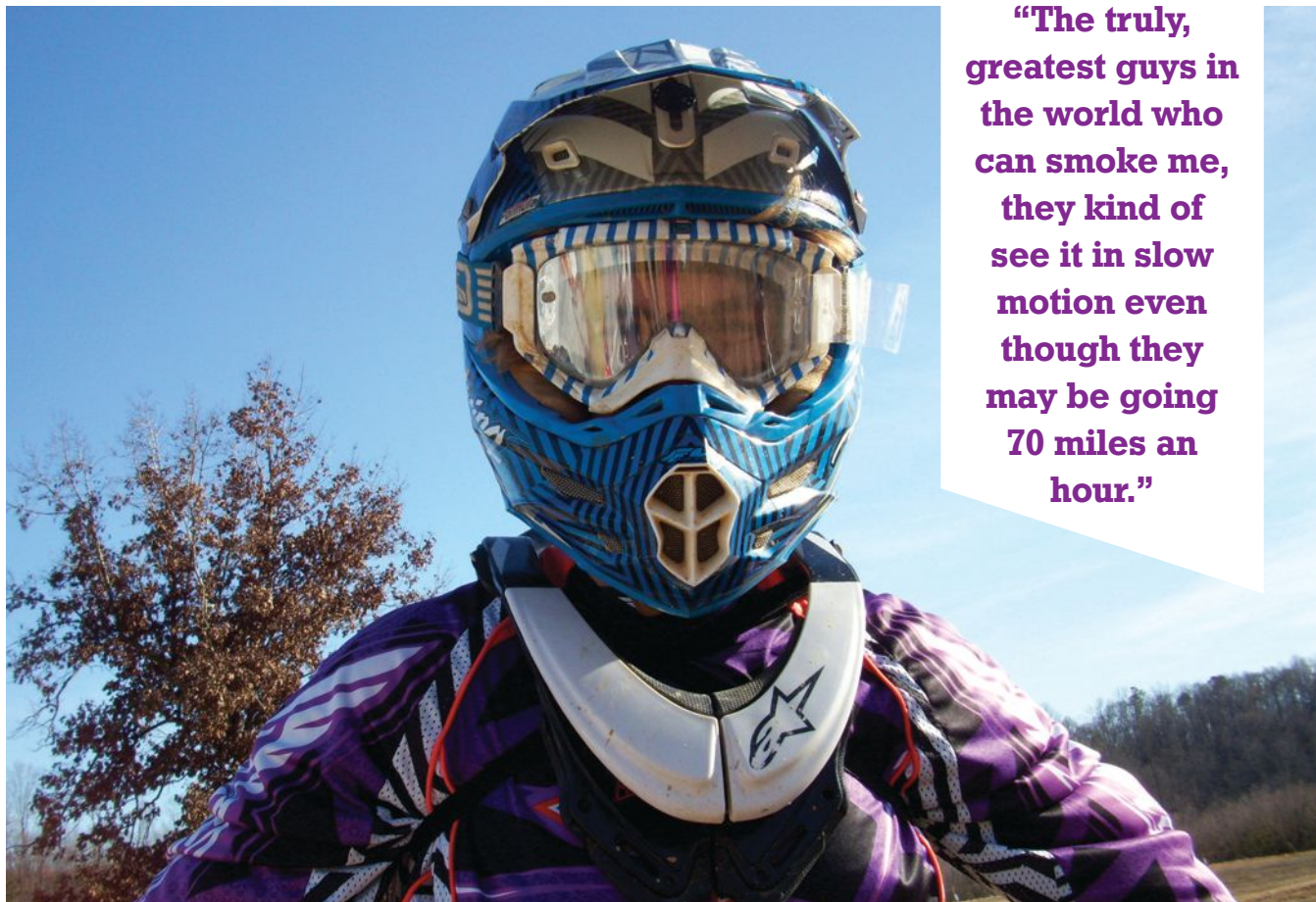
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**“The truly, greatest guys in the world who can smoke me, they kind of see it in slow motion even though they may be going 70 miles an hour.”**

“I just kind of kind of woke up one day and it clicked for me. I was like ‘I’m tired of getting beat,’” Alex explains. “It’s not like I just twisted the throttle and went faster, because you have to have some skill to be good. But one day I woke up and I could see the lines better, see the track differently and, even though I was going faster than I was before, it felt like I was going slower.”

“That’s the whole key to motocross,” Alex adds. “Everybody thinks you just hop on a bike and twist the throttle. But the truly, greatest guys in the world who can smoke me, they kind of see it in slow motion even though they may be going 70 miles an hour.”

With the competitive juices flowing and his edge regained, Alex has set himself some impressive goals for the next 12 months. After the Spring Classic at Millcreek, he plans to race in Loretta Lynn’s Amateur Nationals, followed by the last two or three outdoor pro national events. In between, he’ll compete in a handful of pro-am events in order to earn his pro license. Regardless of what the future holds for him, Alex says motocross has given him a sense of independence and self-determination for which he is thankful.

“Motocross has taught me a lot of life lessons. I know some of this sounds cliché, but when you get out there on a motorcycle, unlike a football team, you’re every position,” Alex says. “You’re the quarterback to get off the line, the wide receiver to make it happen, and the center to block and be aggressive. You’re a lone wolf out there; it’s just you and your motorcycle.”

Away from the track, Alex has his priorities in line. He is currently taking classes at Jefferson State Community College in Pell City focusing on marketing. He also finds time to dote on his girlfriend, a sweet Georgia peach named Emily. Fortunately for Alex, Emily’s father and brother are also motocross racers and so she is familiar with the lifestyle, traveling around the country to race on the weekends, even if she doesn’t exactly like seeing him on these two-wheeled contraptions.

“She gets nervous, but she’s been around the track and she knows how it is. She’s really patient if I need to go ride or go train,” Alex says. “I got her a Valentine’s card that says ‘There’s only one key to my heart and you fit so perfectly into it.’ I know it’s super cheesy.”

His personal life in a positive place and his motocross career on an upswing, Alex is a very blessed and thankful young man. He is particularly thankful to his parents for the support and encouragement, but most importantly for helping him develop his faith in God. Alex says his faith has, of course, strengthened over the years, but his understanding of the importance of having faith and trusting in God was made clear at an early age.

“Faith is very important. Honestly, when I broke my leg I was only seven years old and a lot hadn’t clicked with me in terms of God, but I saw my mom and my dad praying a lot,” says Alex. “Now, it’s like putting on a helmet. I don’t go on the track without praying. Every extra angel I can have on my shoulder is just a little better.” ■