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# An American Team Just Began the World's Most Punishing Motorcycle Race

A century-old race tests riders' mental and physical fortitude for six days straight.



By Eric Tegler Oct 11, 2016

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Corrinne Foster

This week, more than 600 riders will line-up for one the world's oldest and most grueling motorcycle races: the International Six Days Enduro in Navarra, Spain. For nearly an entire week, competitors will ride across courses that test their mental and physical stamina as international teams compete for first prize.

Although an American team has never gone gold, the country isn't without its superstars, like motorcross competitor Ryan Sipes, who was named the "fastest individual" at ISDE 2015. "It's probably the biggest thing I've ever won," Sipes says. "No American had ever done it."

But only after hearing the ISDE's borderline torturous rules do you begin to understand the weight of Sipes' accomplishment.

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Ryan Sipes at ISDE 2015

Corrinne Foster

For more than 100 years, the routine has remained largely the same. For six to eight hours each day, ISDE riders take on a succession of off-road tests, setting off from one starting point in groups. The tests are a combination of typical motocross tracks, difficult wooded paths, extended mud-hole traverses, grass tracks laid like road racing courses, and lots of others.

The fastest riders take the green flag at 8 a.m. and complete the day's challenges by about 4 p.m. Each test lasts about 45 minutes followed by a 15 minute break when riders can grab a bite to eat or work on their bikes (team mechanics can only help by handing them tools—they can't do actual work). At the end of the day, riders have one last 15-minute period to perform necessary maintenance—changing tires, cleaning/replacing filters, checking spokes, or changing oil—before their motorcycles are impounded for the night. Rest, rise, and repeat for five more days.

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**"I LOOKED AT IT LIKE TRYING TO WIN A SERIES CHAMPIONSHIP WHERE THERE ARE DIFFERENT ROUNDS EXCEPT IT WAS SIX DAYS IN A ROW INSTEAD OF MONTHS."**



The mental and physical challenge of riding test after test for six days cannot be overstated, Sipes says. He rode cautiously for the first two days in 2015. It was his first ISDE and measuring his pace was the biggest challenge, one shared by all ISDE riders:

"I'd go fast and make a mistake, then I'd go too slow...but I got better consecutively and on day four I killed it," Sipes says, having won four of his six events that day. "I looked at it like trying to win a series championship where there are different rounds except it was six days in a row instead of months."



Despite Sipes best efforts, Australia won the World Trophy last year with a total time of 21 hours and 9 minutes, and sadly, Sipes won't be returning with the US team this year, having suffered a concussion and broken arm in a domestic off-road enduro race just last week. He'll be replaced by Layne Michaels who joins Thad Duvall, Taylor Robert, and Kailub Russell for the U.S. The loss of Ryan Sipes will hurt the U.S. team's chances but it remains one of the favorites along with Australia and France.

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Although crushed that he won't compete, Sipes offers sound advice for his teammates who'll race this week.



U.S. camp at ISDE 2016

Jake Miller / FIM

"One bad test doesn't mean your week's done. You get to start all over in the next hour in the next test. Every rider is making mistakes. You can't look at the race as a whole. You have to look at it as individual little races."

Good advice. They're going to need it.

Update: They won.



Jake Miller / FIM

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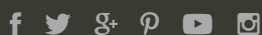
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