



# SPORTS

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

TUESDAY JULY 3, 2001

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## Track 2000 plays host to national BMX event

By **MURRAY TOWNSEND**  
Special to *The Champion*

The riders fidget atop their bikes in the starting gate, making last minute mental and physical preparations for the biggest race of the day.

Finally, they're ready to go, and all of them suddenly become very still.

But, it's all for not, as they are informed there will be a five-minute delay. There are audible groans and hands fly up in the air, but there's nothing they can do. They wind themselves up until they're ready to explode, and now they're going to have to do it all over again in a couple of minutes.

Miltonian Bob Rowley, Canada's top professional BMX racer, is in the starting grid for the final race of the top class at the Maple Leaf Nationals at Track 2000. It's the second day of the event, and Rowley was the winner the first day. Racers must compete each day in motos, which lead to the quarterfinals and semi-finals, leaving only the top racers for the main event.

On the ground, near the finish line is Track 2000 President, Mark Brancier, who is keeping a watchful eye, and ear, on proceedings in a tent near the finish line.

It's no small matter to get a national series bike event. There are only 26 of them each year, almost all of them in the United States. Track 2000 last hosted one in 1996.

### Event packs them in

There are 535 racers that have traveled to Milton, from California to Florida to Pennsylvania and everywhere else in between. They're here from Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia. And there are riders from Denmark and Australia. There are males and females from four years of age up to the over 50 class. The different classes of race ensure people are entered against competitors of their own skill level.

The event has been a great success, according to Brancier, as they wrap up the final races on Sunday afternoon. The reaction of the competitors has been nothing but positive.

"They love it, they think it's great," says Brancier, adding that the visitors, "love the friendliness of the area."

The camping facilities are first-rate and the track is being praised as one of the best they race on anywhere.

It was no small feat getting the track into shape, especially when it had poured rain recently, leaving 12 inches of mud in some places.

Brancier says the fact they were able to get the track back in shape is a credit to the 120 volunteers. Brancier also enthused about the sponsorship they've received, which is critical to run an event of this magnitude.

Mattamy Homes was a main sponsor, and when they ran into trouble with the rain, they brought in their tractors to help free of charge. The Town of Milton also contributed to the success of the event, which among other things meant providing bleachers and picnic tables. Cardinal Foods donated hamburgers and buns, and



Photos by GRAHAM PAINE

Vanessa Pearce catches a nap between races while (at right) Bob Rowley heads toward the finish line during the recent Maple Leaf Nationals at Milton's BMX Track 2000.

Coca Cola gave them a purchasing break so they could make a profit and put it back into the track.

The races go one after the other, starting them even before the previous one has finished. What looks like chaos is actually quite organized as the racers are called by race number on a loud speaker to line up on the ramp leading up to the starting gate. Maybe a dozen races are lined up at any one time, with the only delays usually coming from a fallen rider on the track.

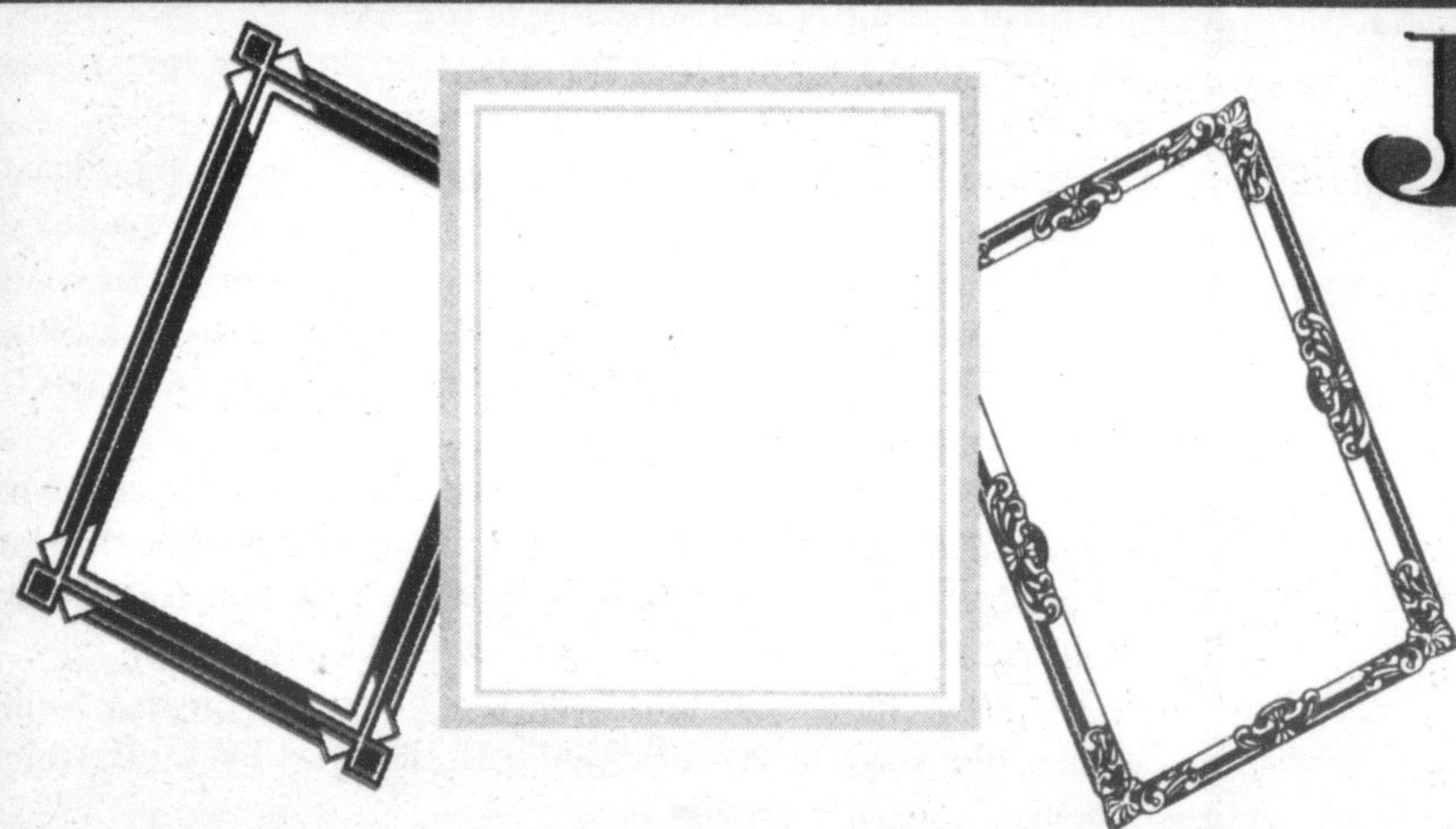
Finally, Rowley's race is ready to go. The gate drops, and they're off. He's in first place leading to the first jump. The racers fly over it and around the track. As they come around the final couple of turns, he's neck and neck for first place.

Then something happens and Rowley is nowhere to be seen. Apparently he has fallen or gone off the track. As the racers cross the finish line, he picks himself up and cruises the rest of the way, finishing last.

"That's BMX racing for you," comments Brancier. "You never know what's going to happen."

A few minutes later around the other side of the track, Rowley is sitting on his bike explaining calmly to a group of people what happened. He doesn't appear too upset, no doubt partly because he had won the day before.

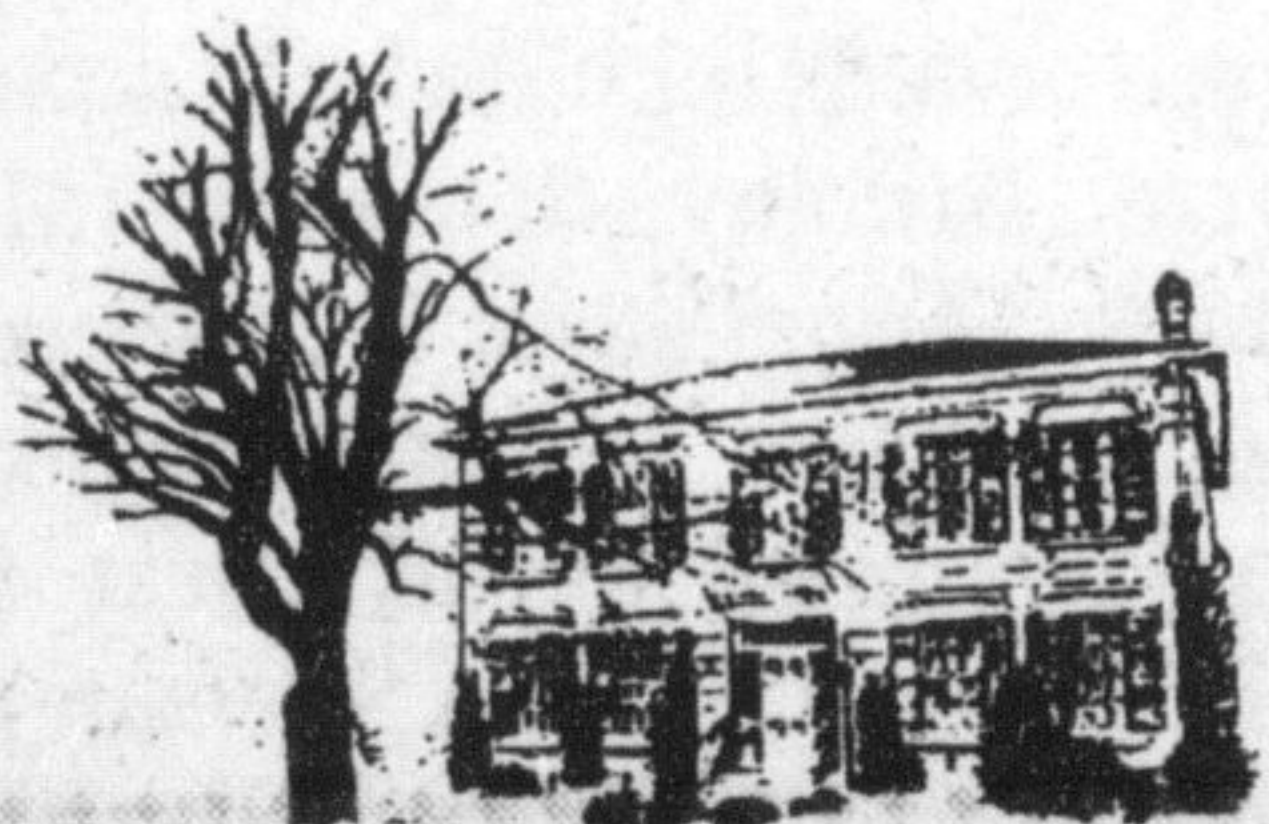
• see ROWLEY on page 14



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