

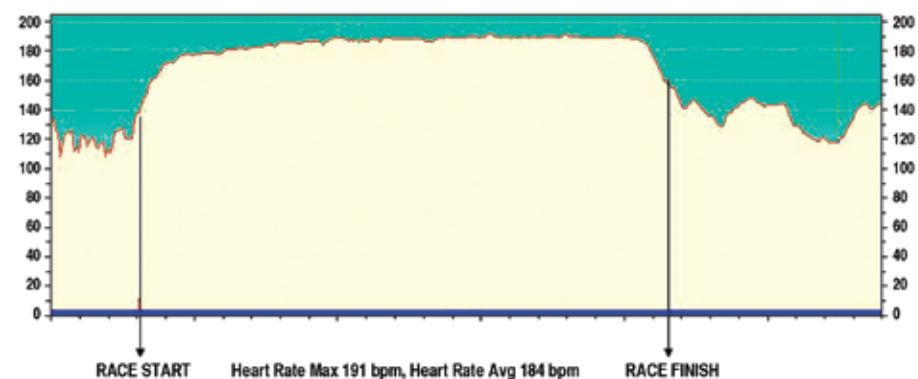
It's hard to draw a parallel between motorsports athletes and traditional stick and ball sports athletes. Most traditional sports post statistics on their athletes to represent their skills. For instance, baseball has ERAs, batting averages or on-base percentage. Football even has the combine that systematically evaluates and breaks down the make-up of each athlete. The NFL combine has tests that include the 40-yard dash, bench press, vertical leap and other measurements that dissect the players inch-by-inch.

In supercross, analysts don't comment about how high series champion Chad Reed can jump or how quick he navigates a left-hand turn. At first glance, the perception of supercross racers is daredevil-esque and the most energy being exerted would be simply the twisting of the throttle. Does the bike do all of the work?

Today, in the Google-everything era, the sport of supercross/motocross is the first result yielded when searching: "What is the world's most physically demanding sport?" The contents of the story go on to say how supercross/motocross is the world's second-most physically demanding sport behind soccer, however many involved with the sport of supercross would dispute this claim, believing it is the most physically demanding sport in the world.

While there may not be as many detailed statistics about a racer's strengths and weaknesses, the misconception that these guys are not fit needs to be erased. Deciding who are the most-fit or toughest athletes in the world or what sport is the most physically demanding are arguments that could be debated for years. Bo Jackson played baseball with a metal hip, Michael Jordan has more rings than fingers, Michael Phelps has won more medals, etc. There really is no right answer.

Dr. Steve Augustine, of Jacksonville Ortho-



pedic Institute and the Action Sports Medicine Foundation in Jacksonville, Fla., and his colleagues undertook a research study where they placed heart-rate monitors on the riders and monitored them throughout the races to see where supercross athletes compared to other athletes in terms of fitness.

The results showed that the bottom line is that these supercross athletes are in incredible shape. Heart rate is a measurement of the exercises intensity of an activity. The higher the heart rate, the higher the intensity and when he looked at the supercross racers, they were running their hearts at an average of 179-180 beats per minute. During a supercross race, the riders' heart-rate level is at 92% of their maximum heart rate.

As soon as the race starts, their heart rate runs up to that 92% from start to finish, which is approximately 20 minutes duration. This is put into perspective when compared to other sports. Most other sports gauge their competitors' heart rates at an average of 80% during an event. Supercross racers are actually running at higher heart rates than most sports, and the most impressive difference is that they are doing it at 20-minute intervals.

Hockey teams may be on the ice for a minute, football players exert themselves in short bursts that last only a few seconds.

"I wanted to give everyone the sound medical data to support that argument in our favor," said Augustine. "Anyone that is involved with the sport or who has ever raced knows how physically demanding it is, yet the average sports fan still believes that the motorcycle does all the work. This wide spread misconception is definitely not the case, as the results speak for themselves. This type of research validates our sport on a scientific level. It gives our sport the respect it deserves in terms of exercise intensity and the fitness demands required to compete in this sport."

(Below) Suzuki rider Mike Alessi puts in the work necessary to compete in what is arguably the world's toughest sport. Bad weather (like last year's San Francisco round, shown at right) can make his hard job even rougher.

# WORLD'S TOUGHEST SPORT



Photos: Right - Courtesy of the ALESSI family Far right - MICHAEL DEMAREE



Suzuki's Mike Alessi suffered a broken leg in the fall of 2008, and as a result, he focused on building his upper-body strength. In boot-camp-like fashion, Alessi hired a trainer and got jacked. Alessi takes us through his rigorous training program:

"My training routine changes every week, and I will start to back down on lifting weights because I hope to be riding my bike soon. I have been recovering from a broken leg, so I concentrated on building my upper-body strength. I wanted to get stronger, but you have to be careful because if you get too big, you will suffer from arm pump, and there is no way can you ride with arm pump at this level.

At the gym we do all kinds of different exercises, such as cow bells, sledge hammers, pulling

60 lbs sleds down the road, and standard weight lifting. I work with a very good trainer named Jim Hoskinson. He knows what I need to get back on the bike and keeps me focused. I feel good everyday when I leave the gym; it's a sense of accomplishment. Everyone at Ironworks (the gym) is very nice, everyone treats each other with respect and pushes everyone to do their best.

Also, another type of training I do is my road bike, which consists of 45 minutes to three hour-bikes rides. My endurance is very good and I feel strong. It may not be the most exciting thing to sit on a bike for three hours, but it is definitely something I have to do to be the best. I'll do whatever it takes to win, even if it takes three hour road-bike rides. Warm or cold, rain or shine, you'll see me out there peddling my heart out to make me stronger.

I'm itching to get back on the dirt bike and do some laps. My leg feels strong, and I have still some pain and swelling at times, but I have to work through it. What won't kill me will only make me stronger. I'll do whatever it takes to come out on top. I have a championship on my mind in '09: one goal, one vision and the number-one plate. I have the support and team I need to get me where I need to be. My family and everyone in my program is 100% dedicated to helping me win this up incoming year. As long as I stay focused, as well as everyone in our program, there should be no reason I can't run up front. In the past years I felt it should have been mine, and this year I am going for what has been mine. I am determined."