

Spotlight

BY DAVID J. CIESLAK
PHOTO BY MICHAEL WOODALL /DUANE HATTON



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Gary Wells

Champion Motorcycle Racer

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T 14 YEARS OLD, GARY WELLS WAS PERCHED ATOP A giant ramp, revving the engine of his new motorcycle. Sitting between Wells and the rest of his life: a dozen junker cars that he needed to clear before reaching safe harbor on the other side. With 18,000 eyes on him, the wide-eyed teenager successfully made the first of many extreme jumps that earned him worldwide popularity and a spot alongside the renowned Evel Knievel. Now 53, the part-time Valley resident and Sonoran Desert adventurer tells *PHOENIX* magazine that his career as a champion motorcyclist is far from over. And he's certainly not shy about his disdain for competitors or his desire to lure tourists to his new RV park in Mexico, aptly named *El Gringo Loco* - Spanish for "The Crazy White Guy."

How did it feel working with the legendary Evel Knievel?

There was no 'working' with Evel. He was totally inferior. The man could not ride a motorcycle. He crashed every time he got on, and his kid does the same thing. He's a stuntman; I'm a world champion, a world-class motorcycle rider. I've beaten the best in the world. The jumping was just a way to showcase my talent.

Did you ever feel like Knievel's celebrity shadow was tough to escape?

No, I'm the best in the world, and I can whoop anybody out there. [Knievel's] just a guy who said a lot and did very little. I'm a guy who said a lot and did even more.

What drew you to such a hazardous job?

It's not hazardous for me. It's hazardous for the guys who are crippled or dead. Crashing is something anyone can do, but racing is what I do. I know nothing but motorsports.

If you could choose a different career path, what would it be?

I would stick to racing. It was worth 50 cents when I started it. Now it's nothing to become a millionaire.

What goes through your mind during the most dangerous jumps?

It's just concentration. It doesn't matter if it's 30-car jumps or jumping a ditch in the desert. It's not a game. I value my life as much as anyone else - probably more.

When you violently crashed during a 1980 jump at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas, did you think it was over for Gary Wells?

The actual landing was a fraction of a second and it was over. What I did do, and it saved my life, was I rolled off the bike and gave me less impact. Otherwise I would have been decapitated. I would have been a headless motorcycle rider laying there on the ground.

When will you stop making jumps?

I have no idea. I was the youngest to ever do it and I plan on being the oldest.

What's the idea behind your new business in Mexico?

I really want to show people the Sonoran Desert. There's 40 miles of virgin beach and it's absolutely spectacular. You can check it out at garywells.com. Come on down and hang out with *El Gringo Loco* - the Crazy White Guy - and enjoy the happiness of the beach.

— Interviewed by David J. Cieslak