



*Snowmobile Racing Association*

**NATIONAL GUARD**

# 2012 CROSS COUNTRY TOUR PROGRAM



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# BUNKE

## RACING GROOMS THE WAY IN CROSS-COUNTRY

Launched last season by veteran cross-country rider Gabe Bunke and new team partner Bob Menne, the team is coming at racing sponsorship from a new direction. Like cross-country itself, Bunke Racing is relying on grassroots marketing ideas and exposure to make the team work from a financial standpoint. The team is also fostering growth by being the hub for the Polaris brand at USCC races. Read on as we sit down and talk with Bunke about why he started the team, what makes it tick and what the goals are for the team in 2012.



### BUNKE RACING IS RE-THINKING THE WHOLE SNOWMOBILE RACING TEAM CONCEPT.

#### **You've started a team. Why?**

**Gabe Bunke:** There are a couple of reasons. One is it's a way for me try and get more people into the sport on Polaris snowmobiles. And it's a way for us as racers to work together and learn from each other and try to advance our own personal abilities and knowledge. That was my original intent behind starting my own team. From a marketing standpoint I've found it's easier to sell yourself as a team than an individual. It creates more visibility and better PR for them to sponsor a team vs. an individual.

#### **What can you offer a sponsor?**

**Bunke:** There are a lot of things we're trying to make work. Everybody just thinks we put a sticker on a snowmobile and the trailer and go out and race. That's

what sponsors think. We're trying to get past that and do more like representing the team at shows such as Haydays. In the Spring we do the Fargo show when the manufacturers come to town for their Sneak Peek, we help Polaris show customers the sleds. The Internet is a big thing too, we're trying to get more involved there doing YouTube and Facebook promos and just trying to promote their products. I'm not that savvy about the online things, but we have people inside the team who handle that stuff.

#### **What advantages does a cross-country team have vs. another genre of the sport?**

**Bunke:** What I would like to see is more people getting involved in the team aspect

of cross-country just for all the benefits that I've talked about already. I don't want to see it grow into big corporate teams like you see in snocross. I don't think that's good for the sport. It's a good show, but it's not good for the sport. It's too expensive and it drives out the little guys. If we had two or three semis from each manufacturer, superteams like they have in snocross, pretty soon we would need regional cross-country races because none of the little guys would show up anymore.

#### **You're more of a hands-on team owner, you ride in the races but you also have a managerial role. Does that make things difficult?**

**Bunke:** Yeah, I've found that's the case. I'm new at this and we're learning as we



go, but I want to stay on top of things and I have a vision on how I want things to run. I don't want anything negative to happen because it's my name that's on the team. When you're racing on your own all you have to worry about is yourself. Now with multiple enduro sleds, multiple cross-country sleds, multiple riders, the coordination part is hard. The communication part is where I struggle. I see what I want to do but it's hard for me to get everyone going in the right

direction. And we don't always all share the same view on things either, but that's the way it goes I guess.

**Regarding being a team owner vs. a racer, do you see one as more fulfilling than the other?**

**Bunke:** Right now the more fulfilling part of the team thing is being successful as a group and not so much as an individual. But I'm still in good enough shape to race and there are a lot of things that I haven't

accomplished yet. Some of them are goals I've had for a really long time. I guess it's not the end of the world if you don't get there, but I still have a drive to accomplish them.

**You've finished second in a handful of I-500s, if you stepped away would it be the same if one of your riders won it instead of you?**

**Bunke:** Maybe. Like Bobby Menne IV, he's capable of winning; we wouldn't be letting him run Pro if we didn't think so. I think it would be great. Thinking about it right now, I would probably be satisfied, but then again maybe not.

**Would you rather work with younger riders on your team to build toward the future?**

**Bunke:** Yeah, but I'm so much tied to just younger riders. If I can find some experienced riders who are looking to cross over from snocross I'd be willing to work with anyone. The people I'd like to work with are people that aren't involved with the sport yet and that I see have a ton of potential. Bobby sparked my interest because of how he rode when he was on Arctic Cat. I saw potential that no one was taking advantage of, and they were kind of sitting the weeds with a lot of talent but not a lot of backing. The whole thing was unexplored territory for me, but we went forward with it and it worked out good.



**Can a cross-country rider be developed? Or do you need a gift to ride?**

**Bunke:** Absolutely. Pretty much anybody with enough drive and athleticism can compete in the Semi-Pro class. But the Pro class has gotten so competitive and so fast that I think you need what I like to call a "fast twitch." Your reaction and your hand/eye coordination have to be a little bit faster than average. You have to be able to understand and move with the snowmobile. I don't think it's a gift, I just think some people have it and some people don't. You can cross over from other forms of racing if you have the fast twitch. Without the fast twitch you could probably be Top 10 rider, but it's going to be tough to win.

**There have been studies done on racing drivers that show their level of anxiety is lower while they are competing and they process things faster, so basically things move slower for them.**

**Bunke:** That's how I've explained it to people. Fans will come up to me after the Soo or after we're done at a cross-country race and they're just blown away at how fast we go. Basically I've told a lot of people that it's almost like everything just starts to slow down. You get into a groove and everything

just falls into place, you feel the snowmobile doing what it's doing as it's doing it. When you're on it and fast you're a step ahead of everything. It's not every weekend that it happens, but when you get into that groove you can really fly and everything's clicking. That's when you win races.

**What would you like to see change in snowmobile racing?**

**Bunke:** Factory support is a big one. We're starting to see a little more of that, so I guess I can't complain too much. Cross-country has been really dependent of factory support to be successful and when the factories pulled out and went different directions that's when cross-country seemed to have died. I think we can capitalize on some of the new technology we have. Chad Colby with the USCC has done a really nice job with the radio stuff and the Internet

race broadcasts and I think we need to expand on that. We can get a lot more people involved if we have live video feeds and things like that and our support will continue to grow. Right now snocross is so big because of TV, but I think the Internet is going to surpass it within 10 years. I hear so many young people saying they don't even own a TV anymore because they can watch all their shows and read all the news online.

**What are you looking forward to in 2012?**

**Bunke:** I haven't thought too far ahead, I'm just trying to figure out how I'm going to make the season work right now. As far as goals, it's the same every year – we have to win races and win championships and we have to be good representatives for our sponsors. That's what Polaris and everyone else expects of us.



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