

Foreword

It seems like only yesterday that I was riding the GP motocross circuits of the world on the YZR500 Yamaha and winning more often than not! Reading Colin MacKellar's account of the development of Yamaha's motocross and other off-road motorcycles brought back many fond memories of the days when the combination of Mikkola and Yamaha was the one to beat. Although I already had two world championship titles when I joined the company, the two that followed in 1977 and 1978 were especially pleasing, since my great rival Roger de Coster could do no better than second and third respectively.

When I signed that contract for a year's employment racing Yamaha motocross machines in December 1976, there had already been two false starts to my relationship with the company. At the end of the 1972 season, Yamaha were a week too late with the offer of a contract to ride the first monoshock machines. In the summer of 1975, I was asked if I would be prepared to ride for the company for the next year, but later Yamaha changed their minds and pulled out of the sport for a year. Perhaps it was a pity for both of us that we didn't get together sooner.

My relationship with Yamaha did not, however, get off to a good start on the racetrack. Racing for the first time on the YZR500 in a frozen Hechtel in Belgium, with a large contingent of big-shots from the European Yamaha HQ there to see me win, a bad case of 'Yamahop' from

the rear suspension threw me off when I landed from a jump and I badly dislocated my shoulder. Fortunately the rest of the year turned out to be more successful.

The secret to winning in the motocross sport lies not only with the need for a good machine but also a good team. That is what we had, with Lucien Tilkens, the father of the monoshock suspension, caring for the development of his child, Minoru Tanaka running the team efficiently and Heikki Pentilla taking good care of the bike. The fact that I only had machine trouble three times in three years says a lot for Heikki's ability as a mechanic.

This book contains a wealth of information on the development of the Yamaha YZ series of motocross machines. It is now clear to me how the YZR500 I first rode in Japan in December 1976 had come into existence and what part it played in the development of the YZs of the 1980s. When I have the opportunity to throw my leg over one of the latest YZ490s, I still have the feeling that it is related to the bike that took me to 27 GP race wins in three years. Yamaha created the off-road revolution and helped develop it into the important branch of the motorcycle industry it has become. This superb book tells us exactly how it all happened.

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