

bike

DECEMBER 1981 80p USA \$2.75



COUPE D'ENDURANCE

Kawasaki wins, Team Bike pipped at post

Teeny Giants Test: Kawasaki AR80 Yamaha DT/RD125s Vespa P125X Being There: Z1000J Getting There: Tiger Trail

1 ENDURANCE

Honda wins, Kawasaki waits

FOR THE FRENCH, THE BOL D'OR 24 HOUR RACE IS AS IMPORTANT (MAYBE MORE) AS THE WHOLE SEASON'S WORLD ENDURANCE CHAMPIONSHIP. THIS YEAR IT'S BEEN A SEMI-OFFICIAL KAWASAKI TEAM SETTING THE PACE BUT THE WORKS HONDAS WERE DETERMINED TO STOP THE ROT AT PAUL RICARD. OUR MAN AT THE TRACKSIDE, MAC MACDIARMID, REPORTS. PHOTOGRAPHY KEL EDGE.

I RAISED MY LEADEN HEAD from the bar and raised open an eye to greet an embryo Mediterranean. The action was like jacking-up a beer truck . . . probably the one we'd emptied last night. Hazy recollections of where I was and why I was there began to percolate through the ragged remains of my memory, and were slowly focussed by the aural purgatory of forty-odd four-cylinder decibel chambers being flogged mercilessly on the track outside. 'Come back from the Bol with a story or stay in the South of France,' Calderwood had said. It seemed like no contest, but mundane considerations like earning a living required my return to Blythly and the role of journalist. Besides, they don't sell Boddington's in France.

Shambling groggily into the pits I encountered faces showing every minute of 14 hours' hard, hot, oily graft. Saturday's healthy suntans now looked as grey and wan as Friday's porridge, their owners struggling to remain alert or even awake in the face of paralysing fatigue. Overalls that had started the race in pristine condition now assumed the hue of Malcolm's underwear. Team managers alternately pored wearily over fuel consumption and tyre change charts or barked testily at torpid mechanics. Pit stops were conducted with a half-instinctive rhythm born of endless repetition, machine problems responded to with robotic efficiency; in this state of tiredness actually thinking about what you're doing is far too difficult.

At least the intrusive horde of curious onlookers had thinned out as sleep caught up with them and pitstops ceased to resemble the spring sales: hyped-up riders can do without 1g braking through slaloms made up of half-pissed Herberts struggling with cameras and double vision.

Yes, Team *Bike* Tourers, while you were revelling in the Gallic ambience of this particular corner of southern France, suitably reinforced by the booze at the International Ricard Centre (lose points if you weren't), yours truly was practising self-denial in an effort later to acquaint those not so fortunate with what actually happened. Those of you who'd discovered that the more three

Francs-a-litre wine you drank, the more money you saved, may also be interested to learn what, in your catatonia, you missed.

With these noble ideas in mind I'd been dispatched to pursue, irritate and generally get under the feet of the works-assisted Kawasaki entrants at this year's Bol d'Or.

'Bonjour, Monsieur Rosset, je m'appelle "Mac", du *Bike Magazine*,' I'd introduced myself to the boss man of Performance,



the Kawasaki France endurance race shop, in the worst French accent since Inspector Clouseau was a garcon. 'Oh, merde, un autre bleeding' *Ecurie Bikers*', he'd replied, vanishing into a colossal race transporter like free gin into a tart. Eventually enticed from this sanctuary by promises of Britain's accepting French Mutton if only they'd take Mrs Thatcher in part-exchange, and convinced of the enormous international prestige of this magazine, he'd agreed to co-operate.

Most of you will be aware that, as usual, *Bike* backed the wrong horse, Honda in the persons of Sarron and Jaubert running out winners of this particular race. However, after some years playing second fiddle to Honda and, latterly, Suzuki, Kool-Kvas-Kawasaki-Performance (to give them their full title) finally recaptured the halcyon days of Godier-Genoud this season. Already, and with the British round still to go, they had all but secured 1st and 2nd places, and the manufacturer's award, in the '81 Coupe d'Endurance. The Bol d'Or, however, plays no part in this World Championship. Like

the Isle of Man TT, it stands inimitably alone.

To describe the Bol as merely French is to describe lung cancer as mildly irritating; it is so French that words cannot describe its singular mix of carnival and competition. In terms of audience appeal and participation there is no British equivalent, unless you've shared a sleeping bag with Hot Gossip for a fortnight.

The Bol was first contested in 1922 at Vaujours, France, when Zind Motosacoche won at an underwhelming 32.4mph. But, since there was but one rider to a machine, and since his 780 miles in 24 hours is probably more than you've ever done on your Jap time-machine, perhaps you shouldn't mock. After an interruption during the Second

Below: It was Dominique (Brother of Christian) Sarron's first 24 hour race victory.

World War, when BMW would otherwise have been in with a shout, and British teams were having logistical problems in competing, the race resumed in 1947 until public interest waned and the event folded after 1960. With the new machinery and commercial vigour of the Japanese factories, the Bol was resurrected at Montlhery in 1969, moving to Le Mans in 1971 and in 1978 to the Circuit Paul Ricard, its present venue.

In many respects, the career of the legendary Jean-Claude Chemarin is also that of the Bol since 1970. This unassuming Frenchman, whose shy off-duty mien belies his élan on the track, began his racing career, 250 Ossa mounted, in 1970. That same year, in only his fifth race, at which stage even Team *Bike* were thru' penny-biting around obscure circuits in novice jackets, he was coolly wrapping-up the 500cc class and coming 11th overall at the Bol d'Or, aboard a T500-based Suzuki. The following year the French Army made him an offer he couldn't refuse, but Honda France stepped in with a more lucrative contract on his demob in

1972; racing for money appealed rather more than being shot at for a pittance.

By the time Honda's machinery became fully competitive in 1976, Chemarin and his partner, the late Christian Leon, were well-nigh invincible. Four consecutive European Endurance titles is a staggering display of machine and rider reliability in a field where the odds are all against finishing, let alone winning, a particular race. During that same period the duo won every one of the six most prestigious 24-hour races — four Bol d'Ors and two 24 heures du Mans — a gross of hours of unsurpassed brilliance. Not since Agostini and MV ruled the roost, under far less demanding and competitive circumstances, has there been such a monopoly in road racing.

Last year, however, the season in which he tragically lost his partner, Leon, proved a traumatic turning point and Chemarin could manage only 8th place in the new 'World' Championship which replaced, but remained essentially the same as, the 'European' version. In callous compliance with the doctrine that you're only as good as your last race, Honda team manager Guillou — with

Right: Jean-Claude Chemarin aboard the works-assisted Kawasaki. Below: Just after the start and all the works teams are going for glory in the televised first hour; note the Elf on the inside line of the blue Suzuki and white/green Kawa.

which are financed, prepared and raced directly by the giant Honda France, with close factory interest, Kawasaki's race programme is contracted out to a private race-shop, Performance, which this year received factory backing only in the form of a limited number of engines and spares.

Performance in turn lent out two engines to a Cherbourg motorcycle dealer, Eurac, owned by an expatriate Briton, Chris

Above all it lacks the rancour evident in certain quarters of the Honda camp. 'Honda enters, Honda wins' is as much an intimidating burden for those involved as it is a morale-boosting sales slogan.

If the teams have differing personalities, so, too, do riders. Superficially Chemarin and the American Mike Baldwin of Honda France have much in common. Both are retiring, introspective

(though he and Dave Aldana had won the 8 hour Japanese round at Suzuka) while Chemarin's Ambre-Solaire approach needs no justification but his own. It may also be that Baldwin's record owes something to his mercurial but fallible partner, Aldana, whose fuse is definitely not of the slow-burning variety.

Whether or not there is one definitive 'type' of endurance racer, judging by the dizzying



whom Chemarin had never enjoyed the most amicable of relationships — delivered him the French equivalent of the order of the boot. Fortunately for race fans Kawasaki were at this stage redoubling their endurance effort and shrewdly snapped-up this cast-off has been, whose first act in green leathers was to show that Kawa rule while Honda suck when he breezed the '81 24 heures du Mans (*The Man at Le Mans — Bike*, July '81). For much of the rest of the season Honda have been offered the same rear view of the Kawas.

Unlike the works Hondas,

Waterman. Although the factory are ready with technical advice, and the effort is aided by experience gained in American Superbike racing, the unlimited resources and superiority-at-any-price atmosphere in which Honda appears to bask in smug satisfaction is noticeably absent.

No doubt the corollary of less factory support and involvement is less factory aggravation and expectation of winning, and the pressure that goes with it. Certainly the Performance team is slick, trick, capable and a far cry from the worthy but hopeless attempts of British entrants.

men who, at the track, rarely expend energy or word unnecessarily, and seem able to relax instantly when out of the saddle. Yet while Baldwin's physical preparation — skiing, cycling, rowing — implies all the dedication to be expected of a compatriot of Kenny Roberts, Chemarin's 'plenty of sleep, preferably in the sun' is unquestionably French.

Despite the general American conviction that method, industry and the Republican Party can achieve just about any damn thing, Baldwin had, at this stage, yet to finish a 24-hour race

profusion of mechanical wizardry along the pit lane, no-one believes the same can be true of the machines. What they lack in engine sophistication, compared to their GP counterparts, they more than make up for elsewhere: you could wheel enough Moto-Martins down here to make any red-blooded biker burst into flames and yet they'd turn no more heads than an ex-GPO Bantam.

For 1981 check out those anti-dive forks, either modified hydraulic RG500 (Suzuki and Eurac), mechanical — from Ballington's GP500 — (Kawa) or 'our own design, and no we don't want to tell you about it' (Honda). All in addition of course, to air-assisted springing, adjustable damping on compression and rebound, adjustable rake and QD wheels with a very large Q. The also-rans who couldn't run to such technology had to struggle through with the latest Marzocchis. Rear suspensions and the bits in between were, needless to say, equally, er... innovative.

Unopposed winner of the year's Titanium Tea-Cup award, however, is the Elf. In short, the

Below: The unlikely Elf/RSC Honda creation ridden and developed by Christian Leliard and Walter Villa was first unveiled to a largely disbelieving and critical audience two years ago but this time it was as quick as it was radical. Villa's time served as development rider and world champion aboard the mid-'70s Harley-Davidson two-strokes would appear to have been carried on though the bike owes little to conventional bike wisdom and more to F1 car technology. Most obvious features are the underslung fuel tank to lower the centre of gravity, and an over-the-top (what else) exhaust system. Single-sided, single-shock, box-section swinging arms are employed at each end, paired up front in

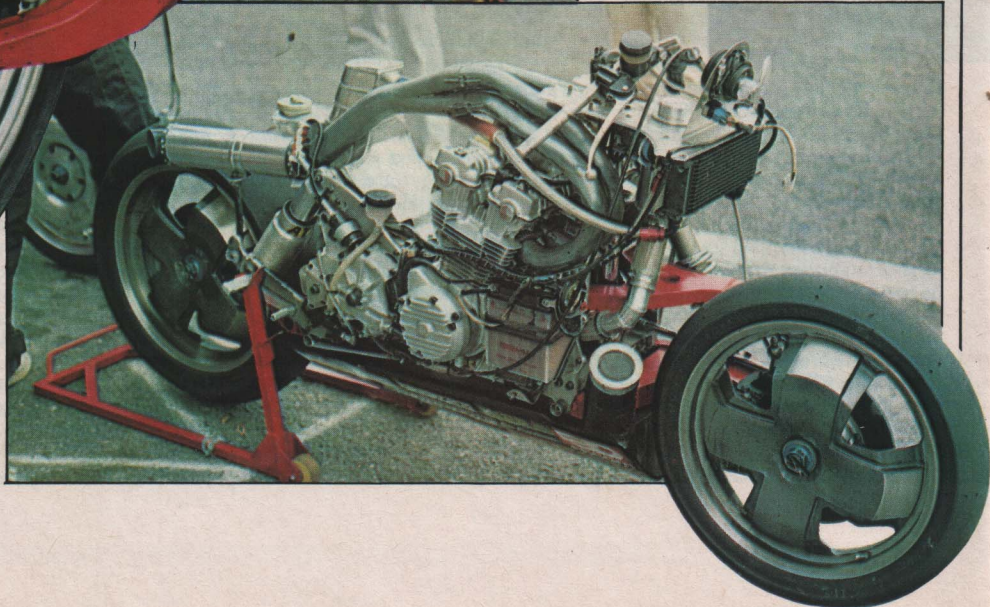
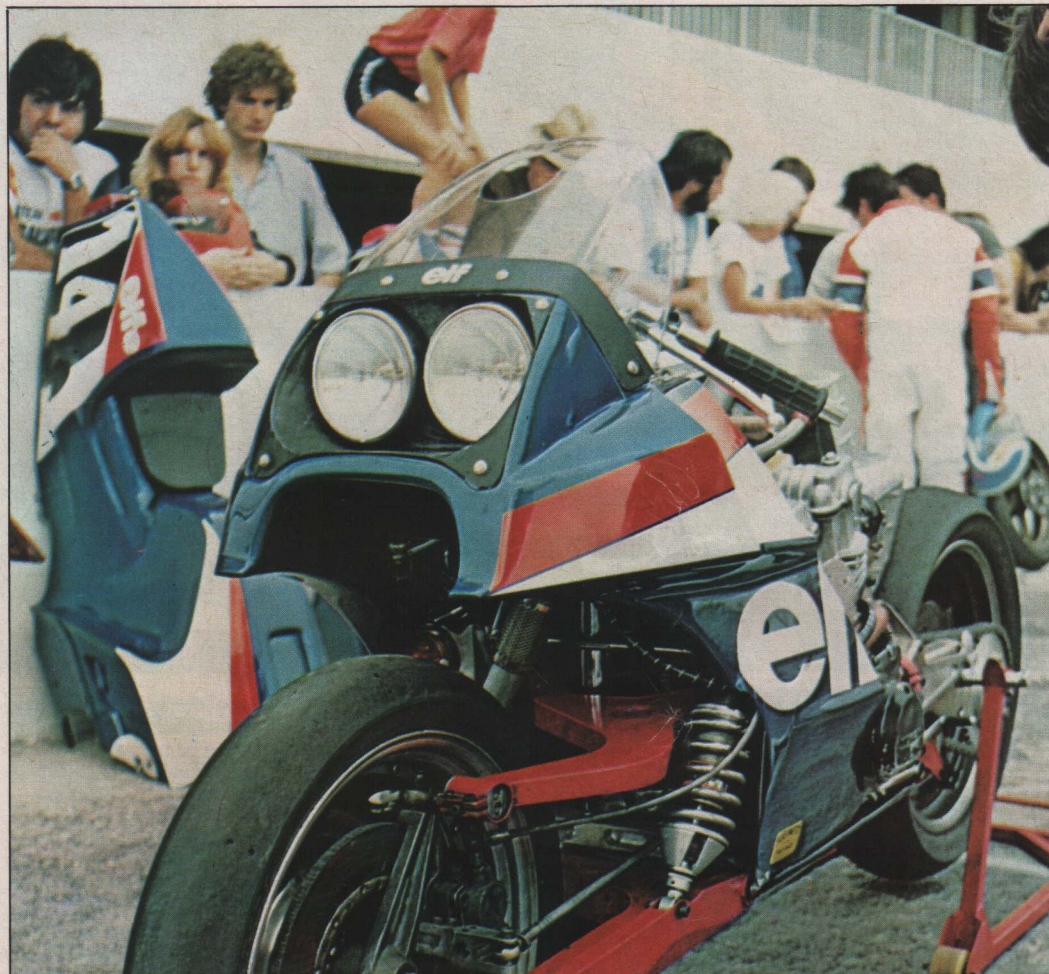
a parallelogram configuration and incorporating anti-dive geometry and hub-centre steering. The intricately machined wheels are dished to accommodate a single laminated carbon-fibre disc rotor in the same plane as the tyre centrelines to eliminate twisting motions under braking. The wheels are carried on stub axles, permitting quicker changes.

The Elf spent more time in the pits than on the track, unfortunately, and retired in the tenth hour. Disc problems and broken stub axles were the major weaknesses but not before it'd shown its potential in occupying the leaderboard for the first half-hour.

Elf is to conventional endurance machines what Royce Creasey is to Barbara Cartland, and to my untutored eye quite as indescribable.

Both Performance Kawas, and the Eurac, used Z1000J-based engines but for the first time in their big-bore, 1150cc form, in the 'prototype' class which, at the Bol, neatly sidesteps one-litre, TT F1 regulations. With special cams, crank, big valves and Keihin carbs bored to 35mm, this device churns out a claimed 149bhp and was spoken of in reverent awe by its riders. Due to the tortuous flame-path imposed by lumpy, 11.5:1 compression pistons, twin plug ignition per cylinder is used and mechanics could sometimes be caught praying that they don't foul and require changing in mid-race.

Surprisingly, the private Eurac used a variation of Kawasaki's Uni-trak rear suspension, with a vertical Koni strut behind the motor, while Performance opted for a single Swiss RTZ shock on the right of a massive but otherwise conventional box-section arm. Everywhere the bikes bristle with trick parts and



Centre mono pic: Some of the 'runners' who provide much of the entertainment once you look past the works teams: Bernie Toleman aboard the Moto Catford Suzuki leads. His race lasted a tantalising 23 hours before clutch slip slowed the bike dramatically.

details, every one designed to make the machine better to race or to work on, or more crash resistant.

For instance, despite Kawasaki marketing what are generally regarded as the finest steering dampers in the business, even these, on the Performance bikes, were exquisite one-off fabrications machined from solid. And how does a system where both wheels can be changed, the bike refuelled and topped up with oil in 42 furious seconds grab you? One day I'll be able to change a fuse that quick.

But the only true arbiter of this technology is the clock: how do they go? Final practice placed the Roche/Lafond Kawasaki up front with a lap at 2 minutes 7.46 seconds, 164.099kph, just four seconds off the GP record. The Press Office proudly announced that 'the Ton (Imperial version) is done'.

Chemarin/Huguet claimed third place behind Fau/Frutschi but ahead of Baldwin/Aldana and Sarron/Jaubert respectively, all RSC1062 Honda mounted. Suzuki's Hubin/Moineau led the TT F1 runners, limited to 1000cc,

and were in 6th place overall. Significantly, Honda-engined machines, led by Fau/Frutschi at 265.8kph (166.1mph) were the quickest through the Mistral straight speed trap, the Kawas being some 3-4kph down, while the fastest round the one timed bend was, humble amid all this factory finery, a Ducati Pantah 600.

Of course no-one is so naive as to suppose that grid positions count for very much in a 2000-plus mile race, and a certain amount of bluff and counter-bluff takes place between rival teams more concerned with gearing, tyre compounds, setting up suspension and jetting and wondering just how the hell you keep an engine you've never raced before in one piece. Certainly no-one seems very anxious about what the other guy is doing, and anyone with the time for such curiosity probably isn't doing his job properly.

Saturday, September 19 1981: race day. Team *Bike* stirs, readying themselves for the big effort, and discover that stale red wine and Colgate don't exactly complement each other. It's to be hoped the entrants are more

organised than we are, and we adjourn to the beach to nurse the raw bundles of exposed nerve-ends between our ears: Monsieur Rosset can definitely do without my journalistic mind this morning (although if anyone finds it, I'd be glad of it back).

At 2.50pm 72 riders lined up, tense and immobile, across the start-finish straight from their machines for the Le Mans start. The beetling crowd, previously festive and raucous was similarly hushed and still. Mike Baldwin looks as if he'd rather be elsewhere, but insisted with feeling that 'Man, I f---ing want to win this mother'. He later remarked that even if the crank broke he'd push in (he was wearing running shorts under his leathers for this purpose) and tell 'em to fix it. Failure sits uneasily on these shoulders and, if determination wins races, they'd be raising the Stars and Stripes.

Ten endless minutes later the flag dropped and riders dashed, ungainly in leathers, to start their machines and weave and wheelie in an intricate crescendo of ear-shattering technology towards the flat-out Verrerie curve and out of sight. My pulse was still racing as the leaders reappeared around the Virage du Pont; 'Kawa, Honda, Kawa, Suzuki . . .' I reeled off before realising that with perhaps 600 laps to go all you'd gain from such counting was a stiff neck and conversation like a computer.

By the time of the first pit-stop, after 45 minutes, the field had sorted itself into some sort of order behind the Fau/Frutschi Honda, with the first 15 runners on the same lap and all the fancied pairs in contention. Baldwin, true to his insistence on a softly-softly approach was lying a circumspect eighth. Poor Jock Copeland's race had ended with a crash after three laps, denying Mick Hunt even a ride, when he'd been bundled off protesting to receive first aid. In what was to set the pattern of the race, two other riders fell on his oil spillage. With two hours gone Fau/Frutschi were sidelined with a wrecked engine following a cam-chain breakage.

Simultaneously, Honda's troubles deepened as Aldana stopped to go on reserve, losing second spot in the process; accusations of riding too hard met him before he'd even stepped off the bike. The ensuing confrontation echoed through the pits.

If tempers were already frayed in the Honda camp, Serge Rossett was permitting himself his first cautious smile in three days, his machines lying first and third, improving to first and second by 7pm. However the leader, Lafond, then hit trouble: a

generator failure plunged him into blackness at 160-per on the long Mistral Straight. Undeterred, he kept it wound on, pitting even before he was missed. The trouble, a sheared five-centime cotterpin wrecking the alternator, was diagnosed and made good and co-rider Roche was on his way in under five minutes.

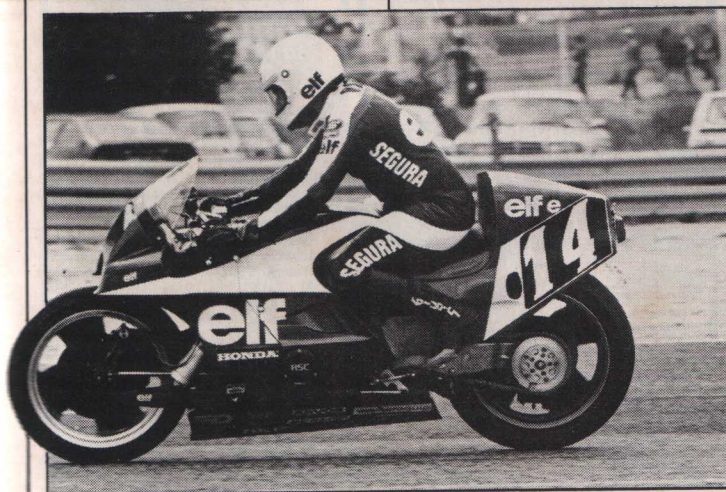
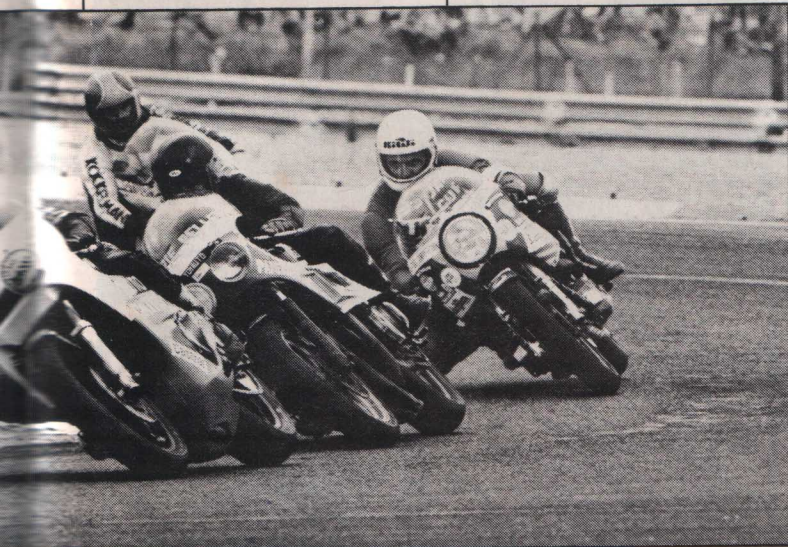
Shortly afterwards a new bank of carbs was fitted to cure a misfire, but the trouble worsened and proved to be yet another trashed alternator stator. No sooner was this rectified than Roche went missing. Terse, unofficial reports of his pushing-in after a crash filtered through, and an epidemic of anxious pacing swept through the Performance camp. You could practically smell the adrenalin.

After a 30-minute push the tiny Roche appeared wearing only his underpants and a glistening veil of sweat, his face contorted with fatigue. Beside himself with anger at having come off on oil when there had been no flags, his injuries were attended to while his mechanics replaced, kicked, shoved and hammered the bike into some sort of order, and Lafond wheeled on his way in just six minutes, at 9.25pm.

At last, reassured by Chemarin's clockwork progress in first place, the crew wound down to a deserved respite before the next scheduled stop at 10pm. But almost at once, unbelievably, troubled glances from the track-side lap scorer indicated that Chemarin had failed to come through. News arrived of his having fallen at the Chicane — as unthinkable as being burgled by Santa. Physically and emotionally shattered, no-one spoke as they identified with the killing two-and-a-half-mile push which faced him, for it was inconceivable that, somehow, *The Man* wouldn't make it. Thirty five minutes later, to everyone's astonishment, he drove in, cool as Ricard over ice, having jury-rigged a broken clutch lever. The whine of pneumatic wrenches ruptured the night air as fairing, footrests, clip-ons and controls were torn off and replaced; Huguet sped off ten minutes later, by now in 19th place.

Kawasaki's misery was complete when Roche/Lafond went out with a broken piston. Meanwhile, the Baldwin/Aldana Honda had creamed into the lead, ahead of team-mates Sarron and Jaubert, all riding with respect for a track slick with oil: 'every so often you just slide' commented Marty Lunde, as if it were no more unnerving than stepping in dog shit on the pavement.

As Saturday gave way to Sunday, so the frantic afternoon and evening activity gave way to a



ENDURANCE

1

more measured, economical approach. Crews and riders were too worn out to be temperamental, too aware of their tired fallibility to rush pit stops. The former four or five second blur of rider-change and refuelling took a leisurely seven or eight seconds. Even the pit scrutineers become less tyrannical, and the boisterous revelry of 45,000 carefree souls in the Village seemed a world away.

However, while the front runners circulated in unchanged formation, Chemarin was charging hard, chasing the stiletto beam of his lights three or four seconds per lap faster than the rest of the field. Watched from the Chicane, he drove through the gears noticeably harder, taking his tyres to the very edge of the track apron on the exit. Chemarin/Huguet were up to 8th place. Meanwhile, the unfancied Eurac Kawa of Bethod/Monin had also climbed

steadily to 5th; but the 30 minutes they had lost by breaking a chain and running out of fuel proved decisive. Following a 7.15am crash, Aldana anticipated another set-to with his manager, and saw the Eurac move into 2nd and Chemarin briefly into 5th before a cambox gasket popped out, giving him an oil-bath crutch and losing him two places.

By this stage 44 of the 72 starters had 'abandoned', many of them crashing out on oil-spill, but the majority committing mechanical suicide. Heroic exploits featuring injured push-ins and major rebuilds were legion, although the valiant crew of the lone RD350LC Yamaha sensibly called it a day after 18 hours, splitting the crankcase to find it full of anodised cornflakes.

There seems to be some sort of law that dictates that if a machine lasts for 18 hours it will also go the distance. If nothing else, teams

who have flogged their gonads off for that long will make damn sure they make the trip. But for the leaders this was still a race, not merely a question of endurance, and the whole Kawasaki effort was now being thrown behind the Eurac.

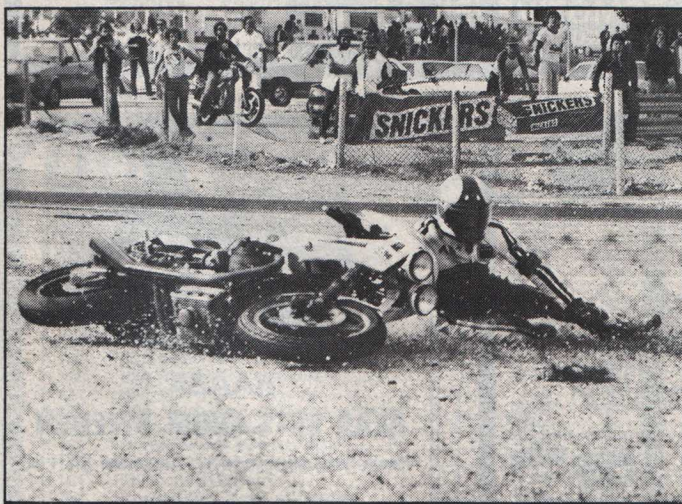
Sarron and Jaubert, enjoying an eight-lap lead over their nearest rivals, Berthod/Monin, could afford to nurse their engines and were lapping, at 2.17, a consistent two seconds slower than they and the still ambitious Chemarin/Huguet and Baldwin/Aldana pairings.

Although the chasers drew away from the leaders on the straights, this rate of gain couldn't even halve their advantage by the finish. Buoyed up by this margin, and the confidence born of a virtually trouble-free race, the leaders entered the final hour holding all the aces while in the Eurac camp everyone willed the

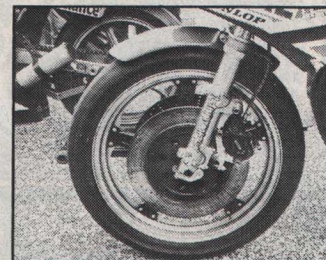
1150 motor to survive.

And so it finished, 23 hours, 57 minutes and 2,215 miles after the start, Honda taking the laurels while Performance reflected in bitter disappointment at what might have been. Eurac's Chris Waterman, abetted by an unlikely pit crew comprising a lorry driver, confectioner and make-up salesman (no, he used Michelin, not Avon) surveyed an empty wallet, 12 knackered tyres and a pit full of scrap, and declared this, his highest placing, well worth the effort. And so to Donington and a face-off with Team Bike . . . ■

Below: The Krajka-Guzzi effort ended after eight laps while (bottom) after 23 hours 57 minutes, a mass demo by French environmentalists stops the race, to the delight of the Eurac Kawasaki (right).



Right: The works RSC Hondas use a mechanical anti-dive system which is similar to what's on their '82 road bikes. The torque action of the caliper on the disc rotor is used to move a valve altering compression damping (see the spring and lever beneath the caliper). Note also the quick-release hinge for the wheel spindle and revolving mudguard stays — it's all for speed in changing a wheel. Honda use a Comstar on the front but opt for a Dymag cast magnesium rear wheel.

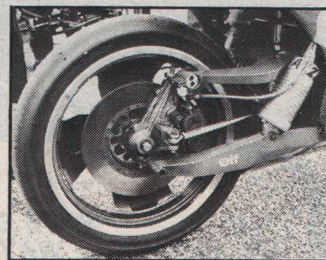


The works Suzukis have an anti-dive system operated by the front brake — not reckoned to be as good as Honda's. Calipers are Lockheed but floating discs are Suzuki's own. There's no spindle q-release though mudguard stays are revolving.



The Elf is different . . . of course. Caliper is a double tandem piston type from the aircraft world as is the thick carbon-fibre disc rotor. It's set into the dished wheel along the centre line.

Steering isn't a hub-centre type but is similar to cars with a kingpin arrangement and an adjustable amount of dive. Shock absorber is air sprung.



For non-works racers, the set up seems to be Brembo shelf parts though these aren't the latest Gold Line series. Note how the pads are prepared for quick changing; unclip the spring over the bleed nipple, pull out the U-bolt, pull the pads out by the looped wire. It's slower getting new ones back in though.

