


bike

DECEMBER 1978 50p

A motorcyclist wearing a white helmet and black leather jacket is riding a silver and blue motorcycle on a paved road. The motorcycle has a large round headlight and two orange turn signals. The background shows a landscape with trees and hills under a blue sky.

**Speeding
in Scotland,
England,
France,
Italy
and America**

**XS1100 vs CBX1000
Giant Test**

bike

No. 69 DECEMBER '78

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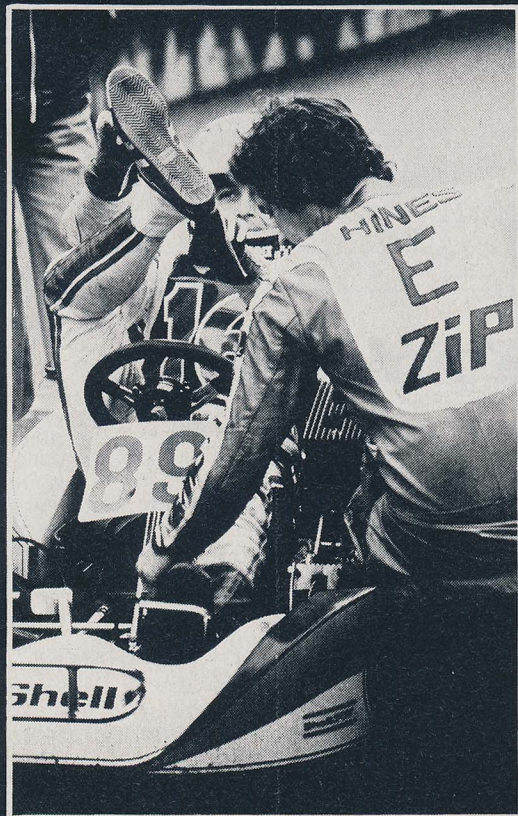
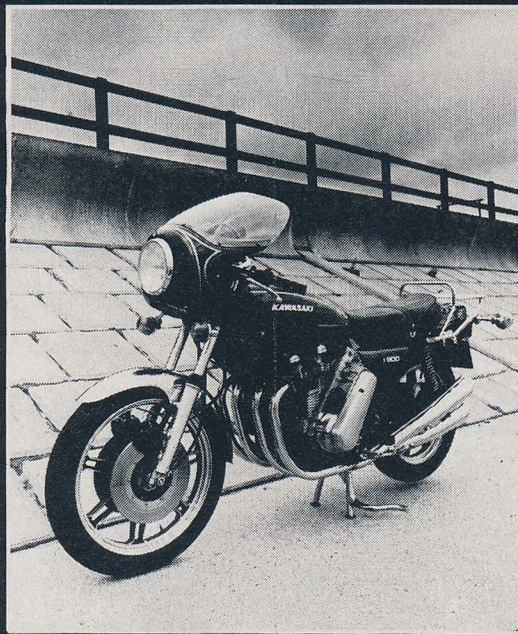
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'Bury me here. Wake me up next year . . .'

Thus spake a member of Team Bike, on his knees in the white dust. Nearby a litre bottle of Kronenbourg gently gurgled out its contents as it slipped from his grasp. In the distance fairs wailed, twins grumbled and a two stroke screamed as they were forced through the gears for the thousandth time. The smell of highly spiced sausages spluttering over charcoal braziers mingled with a whiff of hot oil and charred brake pads, sharply contrasting the natural fragrance of a Provencal night. It was four o'clock in the morning at Circuit Paul Ricard and he was quite literally in paradise. We all were.

This is the Bol d'Or. I defy any biker who can see, smell, hear and feel not to be reduced to sheer paralytic ecstasy by it.

This year, for the first time ever and amid much controversy, the Bol moved from its traditional venue among the tall pines and misty mornings of Le Mans in northern France to the hot and dusty hills north of Toulon on the French Riviera. The move filled many people with trepidation as Le Mans is one of the most beautiful, romance-filled circuits and the birthplace of 24 hour racing. Earlier this year — in April — the Autoclub de L'Ouest, traditional organisers of the Bol, staged the Vingt Quatre Heures du Mans. I was there and it was pure magic. I do hope it continues as two 24 hour races in France mean twice the pleasure. There is a difference, however. Le Mans is a leisurely afternoon's run from the appropriate French channel port. To get to Paul Ricard in a (very long) day would take a very fast bike, a wad of money for motorways and a cast iron bum. Two days is reasonable, but even then you can't afford to spend too much time drinking Pastic by the roadside. This is far from being a disadvantage because, as with any event, the more effort involved in getting there, the more enjoyable it is when you actually make it. For this reason and also because the more

time I spend in the saddle in foreign parts the better I like it, I chose a fairly unconventional route from Calais to the South of France, via Switzerland and Italy.

The whole thing started pretty badly. After spending a frenzied week getting bike, woman, camping gear and documents in more or less the right place at the right time and actually getting it together to teeter off in the direction of Dover, it started to pour with rain after half a mile. The ensuing struggle with my trusty Rivetts Alpine suit reminded me horribly of my last epic Continental trip, 90 per cent of which took place in rain and snow. We hadn't even left the South Circular, let alone the country. More was to come. Pulling into a petrol station in Dover to fill up with cheap English petrol the horn started sounding imperiously and independently of any digital action on my part. Closer inspection showed that the chrome plate snuffbox that Ducati fit as a horn/dip switch had given up under the strain of its two functions and melted: merde!

The inside of a ferry is a pretty intimidating place, especially for a bike. For a start the whole thing is made of steel, the surface of which is invariably covered with a vile-smelling mixture of oil and water. They do have an excellent system of stopping you falling off, however. It's called fear. Fear of being crushed to pulp by gargantuan 40 ton articulated trucks which noisily jockey for position, hissing and snorting two inches from your rear light. You are instructed to park near the side of the car deck by an aristocratic looking gent with gold stripes on his arm then, just as you dismount, a couple of oil-stained Irish or French giants will approach, grip the bike firmly and smash it against the steel bulkhead and start entwining it with rope. Do not panic; you are not going to the Isle of Man, these guys know what they are doing. As long as you stay there and point out any weak spots they will make a good job

of tying the bike down.

Calais is fairly confusing to the uninitiated. You trundle off the boat, through the very brief formalities of the customs shed and then find yourself in the middle of what looks like a massive derelict railway marshalling yard with only a sign saying 'Drive on the Right' to enlighten you. The hot set up is to follow the thick black tyre marks of the heavy trucks which lead you to a tiny road over a level crossing. This happens to be the main exit/entrance of the great channel port. Suddenly you're in France and it's a great place to be for a biker. Groups of kids give you the reversed V sign as you pass by — it means keep on truckin', good luck and vive le revolution all in one hit. Deux chevaux drivers pull over into the ditch to let you pass, everybody flashes you if there's a radar trap coming up, the smell of good food wafts out of every open window at meal times and there's an open bar on every street corner. It had stopped raining.

The first day of any holiday is always a fairly harrowing experience and usually does your brain if not your body extensive damage. This is temporary but may become permanent if you continue to charge bug-eyed into the stream of oncoming yellow headlights on the 'wrong' side of the road, flashing past the diamond shaped signs that indicate 'priorite a droite'. It was therefore purely in the interests of self preservation that we found ourselves savouring a couple of glasses of vin rouge waiting for our steak frites to finish sizzling on a charcoal grill in a small cafe round the corner from a campsite only about one hundred miles from the coast.

Confidence was returning and it wasn't long before the tall trees on either side of the road were disappearing backwards at around the ton, the bike feeling totally in control even if I wasn't. I was a bit apprehensive because my machine is not exactly what one would describe as the ideal two-up long

MIDNIGHT COWBOYS

This year's Bol d'Or 24 hour race was at Paul Ricard circuit in the south of France. R. P. McMurphy led Team Bike's two wheeled lunatics to the scene.



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TEMPS

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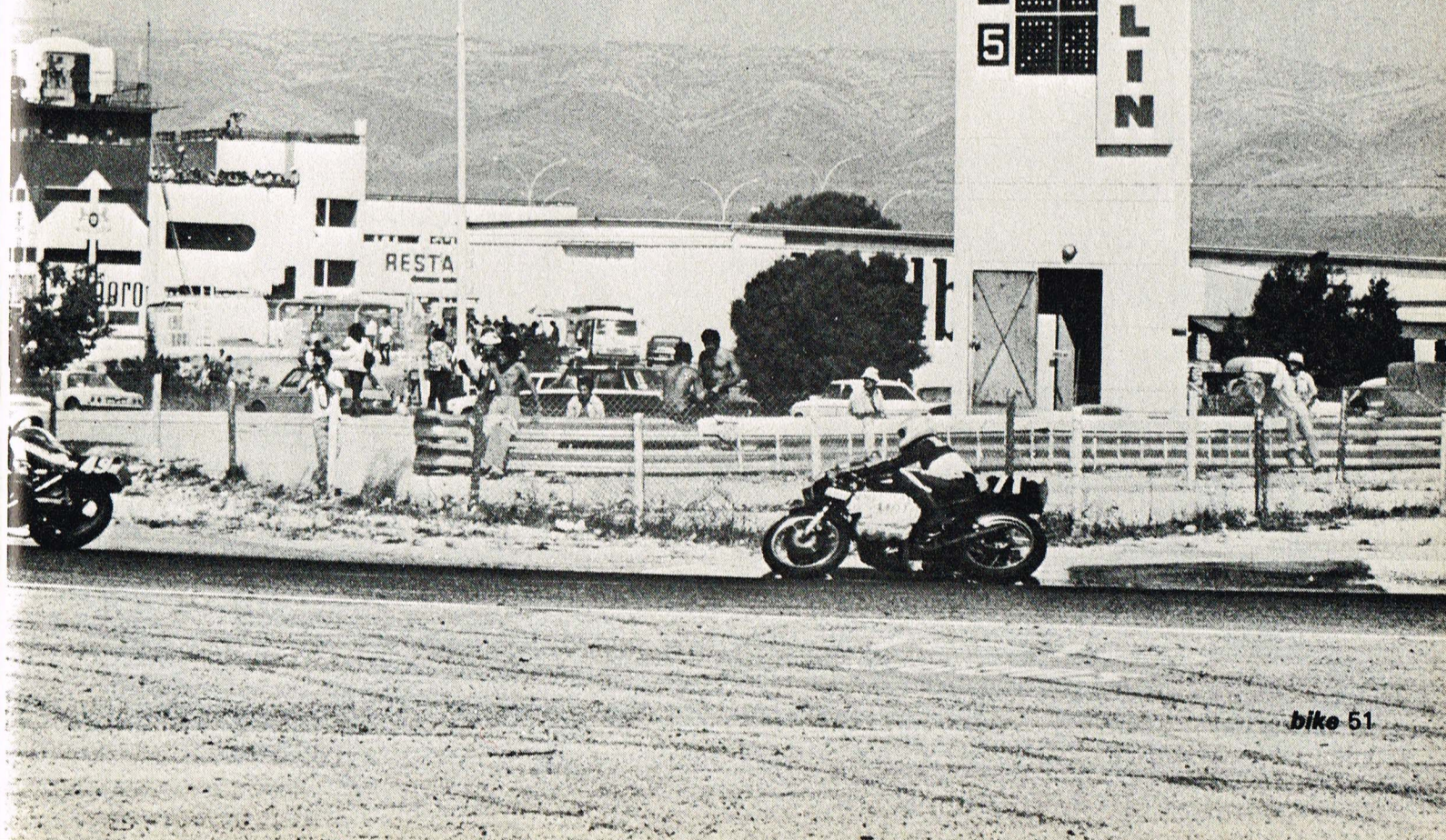
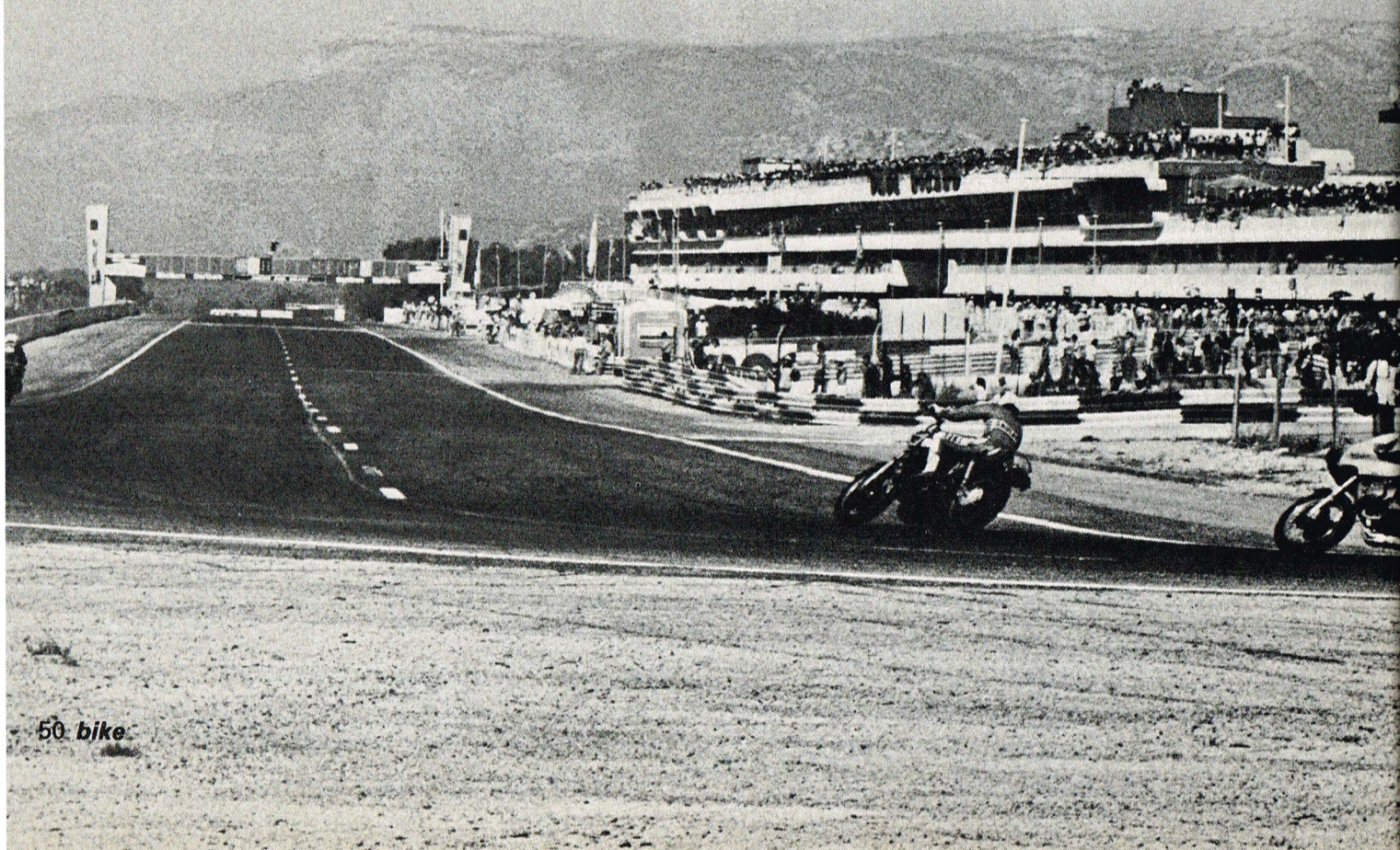
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distance tourer. In fact, if Dr Taglioni saw his beautiful thoroughbred Ducati 900 Desmo loaded as heavily as mine, he'd probably leap into the nearest grave and rotate therein at great speed. Can you imagine a 900 Desmo with a rack and panniers? I couldn't at first but after the attentions of a mate with a welding torch, of myself with a large hammer and a sprinkling of 6mm bolts and Nyloc nuts from CDS Screws, my trusty Krauser rack was fitted onto the back of the Desmo as though it had grown there. Even with the panniers fitted the line of the bike wasn't spoiled with the overall width at the back still being less than that across the clip-ons with bar end mirrors fitted.

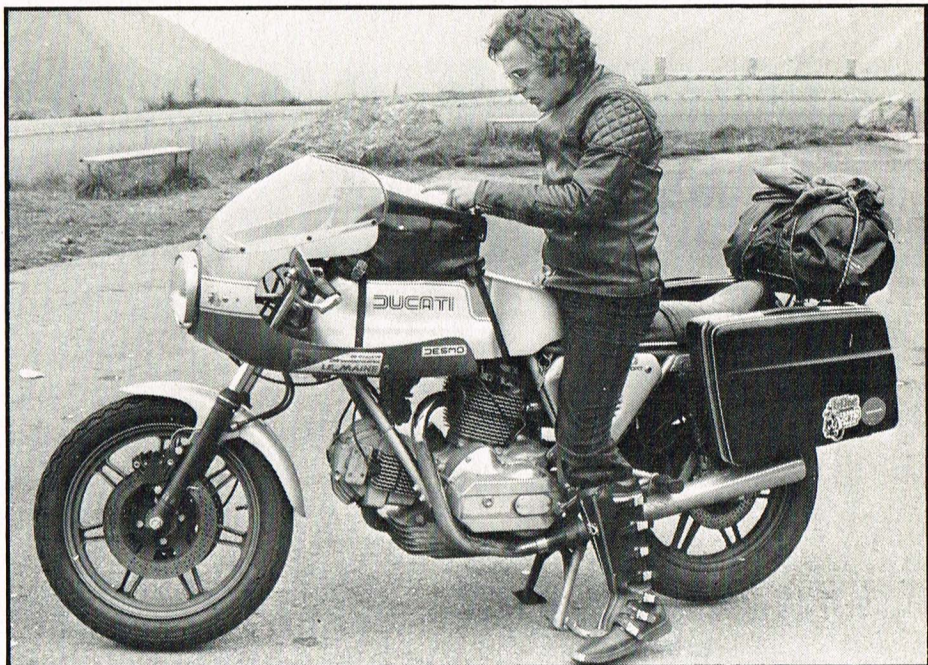
Incidentally, mirrors on both sides are very conducive to survival on the Continent. Messrs Ferrari, Maserati, Porsche et al do not produce slow motor cars and neither is France or Italy noted for a lack of enthusiasm in its drivers. Being overtaken by a car is rare, but the couple of times it happened to us it was done with great authority — the authority that comes from doing 130 and still having 40mph to come. It's as well to know about it before it happens.

Even with Krausers, a tank bag and a stuffer bag on the rack great care had to be taken in selecting what to take. It's amazing the amount of luggage that two people, particularly if one of them is a woman, can generate. It is one hell of a problem. On the one hand you are actually supposed to enjoy a holiday rather than just survive it, and creature comforts can make the difference. On the other, bulk and weight are the sworn enemies of good, enjoyable spirited biking.

Two discoveries mainly contributed to us avoiding wallowing about like a parody of a full dress Harley and yet having the capacity for loads of spare clothes and things like a stove and kettle for coffee the morning after the night before. The first, and undoubtedly most spectacular, was in the area of sleeping bags. Two normal square, fibre-filled bags will take up all the room available and not keep you warm either — a complete bummer. Our bags, Lightlines made by Mountain Equipment of Glossop, Derbyshire will, when in their carrying pouches, just about fit into the pocket of a Barbour suit! When released they almost explode into the thick soft luxury of the finest possible down. They are warm enough for all but the most desperate winter conditions and solved 50 per cent of our space problems in one hit.

The other amazing thing was the tent. My last one was stolen from the bike while parked outside a French brothel (it was the only place we could find to stay, honest). It was pretty big, heavy and took ages to erect (yes, I am talking about the tent, fool). I was therefore amazed to discover the progress made in small tent design in recent years. I've always managed to borrow a tent before, but I was let down just before this trip. In desperation I got in touch with Binley's Camping Centre of Victoria Street, Kettering, Northants. (0536) 81071. What an incredible outfit: not only do they have several bikers on the staff but they produce a tent especially for bikers, the Lowrider. This one was a bit too de luxe for me so they sorted out something from their massive stock of leading brands of camping equipment. It was a Hawley Goodall Swift 1. This packs up tiny, is light, a doddle to put up and strong enough to survive a drunken brawl on top of it. To cap it all, Binleys sell all their stuff at a healthy discount. Full marks.

We were very rapidly among the jagged,



Switzerland! It says here that we're in Switzerland. So what happened to France and Italy?

snow-capped peaks of the Alps and the advantages of riding a big V-twin with torque measured in mile/tons rather than ft/lb became very much apparent. It just thundered up the tortuous Susten pass as if it wasn't there and indulged in a rather unseemly race with a rainbearing cold front during which, on motorway, speeds in excess of 120mph were indicated. Needless to say we won. Switzerland is clean, tidy and spectacularly beautiful but it is also expensive, speed limit mad and not particularly friendly. I wouldn't fancy staying there for long but a ride across the Alps must rate as one of the greatest biking experiences of all time. Imagine if you can roads that are so high you look down on the clouds, hairpins so tight you get dizzy and scenery that makes you stop in stunned silence.

Italy is a very different proposition. For a start off every Italian is, in the nicest possible way, completely mad and this is pretty much reflected in the institutions of Italian life which tend not to make any sense at all. But what biking country, I could almost feel all the little bits that make Ducatis wake up and flex their muscles as we crossed the border at Ponte Tresa on the shores of the still, clear Lago di Lugano. The roads and countryside were so good that when we finally reached the Mediterranean after four days of pretty solid riding we set up the tent, dumped the luggage and went for a ride! Imagine thirty Ramsey hairpins laid end to end passing not through bare cold moorland but through lush pastures and fragrant woodlands with tiny whitewashed villages breaking up the greenery, all basking in the hot, clear sun. Imagine the lusty rise and fall of the engine note as you go all the way up the gears then all the way down every few hundred yards, paradise. This was truly Ducati country.

Laying on the beach stuffing pizzas and almost gargling with wine was excellent preparation for what was to come, the Bol.

A quick blast along the scenic Provencal motorway and we were again in hairpin country, the French variety being no less hairy than in Italy. Circuit Paul Ricard is pretty much in

the middle of nowhere, halfway between Marseilles and Toulon with some amazing small roads near the circuit; even the main road has mean curves testified by seven spectators killed in bike shunts during the week. This horrific statistic must be taken in the context of more than 100,000 loony bikers from all corners of the Continent charging backwards and forwards from the track to the off-licence.

When the French do something they do it in style, like it takes almost five minutes to ride from the main gate to the trackside, the place is so big. It's on a plain surrounded by low hills covered in the thorny bushes and stunted trees known as maquis. The track is edged with slightly more robust trees under which we camped along with what, in due course, appeared to be the entire population of France. The race started on Saturday afternoon and when we arrived on the preceding Thursday there was already a fair scattering of tents and a good crowd watching practice.

It was very pleasant, after a romantic but solitary trip to welcome friends who were arriving from far flung parts of Europe with such immaculate timing they might have come from the next town. They hadn't, as the pogrom of dead flies and horizontal streaks of oil on fairings and crankcases testified. Everyone was hot, sweaty and running on pure adrenalin, some having covered around a thousand miles in somewhat less than that number of minutes. It was going to be one hell of a weekend. About fifteen people turned up to form 'Team Bike' or, as the French referred to us "Les Anglais Fou" (the mad Englishmen) on a range of machinery that shows that you don't have to be a slick megabike owner to get into continental cruising. Most irritating was Tom Stewart, Bike ad rep. who tore his Yamaha RD400E from its packing crate barely two weeks before departure and wheeled it across France and back without even blowing a bulb.

V-twins were well represented with four Dukes and a beautifully custom sprayed Guzzi Spada, as were Suzuki with two water pumpers and a GS. The latter having been

MIDNIGHT COWBOYS

well ground in, not the valves you understand, but the centre stand, exhaust pipes, both sets of footrests and even the alternator cover. It must be the weight of all that Eurodesign luggage, ho hum. Last (usually) but not least (close) was an XS2 of uncertain vintage and even less certain mechanical integrity which nevertheless propelled its rider and passenger at considerable velocity if not accuracy of direction.

The English are creatures of habit and since even in the shade of pine trees it was hot and dusty, this meant thirst. This in turn meant only one thing to Team Bike, even in the depths of France. Beer. That available on the circuit was in small bottles at large cost so very soon a convoy of all available transport and containers was making a spirited and curvaceous descent to the nearest town, Le Beausset, which, spoken through British lips naturally became Le Boozy. Krauser panniers are advertised as having a capacity of 35 litres, but I could only fit 11 litre bottles in each of mine, perhaps not a bad thing since each bottle weighed more than two pounds. All was not lost however since my passenger had a capacious rucksack into which a further 12 bottles were persuaded. I can therefore confidently state that my Ducati has a capacity of 34,000cc — of Kronenbourg. Between us we bought 108 litres of beer (24 gallons), purely for medicinal reasons of course, you know how bad dehydration is for you.

The beauty of a 24 hour race, for the spectator, is that there is no way you can miss it or see all of it. Therefore, the paranoid crush of people at every bend which is a feature of short circuit racing does not exist, except at the start and particularly the end. Everybody wanders around in an extremely laid back state, taking in a few laps, a piece of the pit action perhaps, a glass of wine, a lay in the sun (both sorts) then back for a few more laps. Talking of laps, on the Friday night there was a six hour race — ending at midnight — for box stock bikes. This was very entertaining as there were quite a few XS1100s and CBXs which went like snot off a stick down the straights, but were truly scary on the bends. Although a CBX won, a Kawasaki Z650C was in the lead for a time and eventually came third not far behind the leader. Team Bike, carousing around our large camp fire were much impressed by this David and Goliath feat so decided to continue a precedent set at the 24 Heures du Mans and stage a production race of our own. Scrutineering required that each machine had a British number plate and had a certain amount of off road capability since access to the circuit was 'difficult'. The race was of necessity short, one lap, since a bunch of loonies charging around the hallowed tarmac of Paul Ricard on road bikes at 2am did arouse a certain amount of interest from blue uniformed 'officials' with guns and dogs, however no black flags were necessary and the competitors celebrated their achievement, noisily, till dawn.

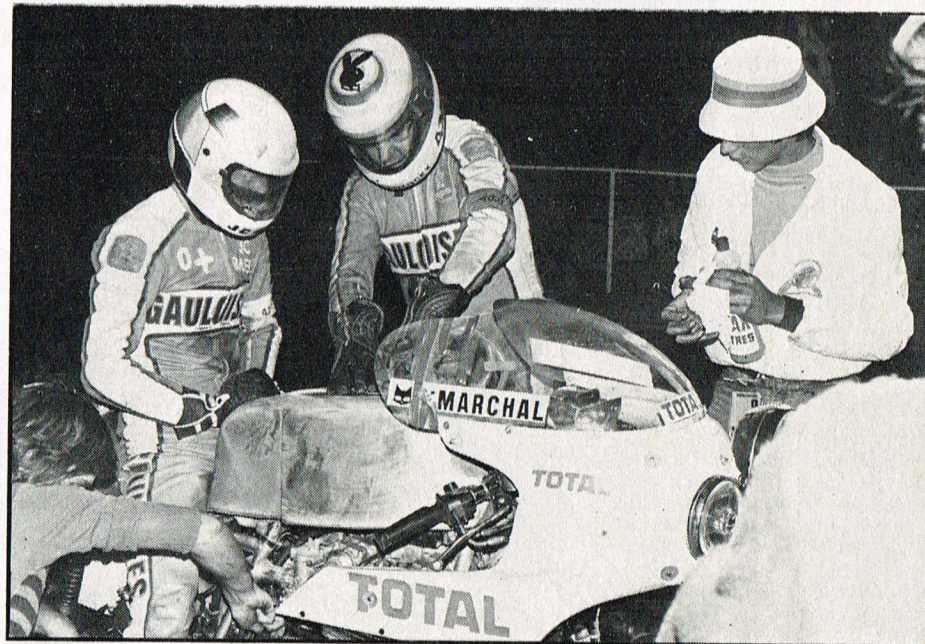
The Bol d'Or itself started in typical French manner, the riders furthest from the starter already having run across the track before he'd even looked at his watch, much less twitched his flag, the crowd almost wetting themselves as the Honda of favourites Leon/Chemarin faltered in getting away then popped an enormous wheelie. The start was

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Right: for some people 24-hour racing can become an unsupported strain. A member of Team Bike, overcome by the rigours of a strenuous programme of eating and drinking, flakes out rather early.

Below: Je Fume, Tu Fume, Nous Fumons. Gauloises Kawasaki in the pits at Paul Ricard during the night. Mechanics clean the screen, check the oil and stand around yawning.

Bottom: what it's all about. Les Anglais Fou display their penchant for good food and drink around a camp fire. Known for their Epicurean palates, discerning Team Bike was able once more to raise the standing of the British abroad.



MIDNIGHT COWBOYS

Continued from page 55

more akin to a ten lap sprint around Brands than the beginning of a couple of thousand miles of high speed motoring, with riders cutting each other up, smoking tyres and generally getting a move on. Pit action started on lap number one when some unfortunate pulled in with his Kawasaki firing on three. Mechanics pounced and started tearing the fairing off, they and the hundred or so like them wouldn't stop until the sun was well past its zenith the next day.

Almost immediately one of the most controversial bikes in the race took the lead, a full race Yamaha OW 31 ridden by the very slick Patrick Pons and Christian Sarron, backed by the highly professional Sonauto Gauloise team. The bike was so much faster than even the super trick Honda RCB of Leon/Chemarin that everybody went round muttering "It can't last". But it did, the strong Yamaha contingent of Team Bike were euphoric as were the French crowd, even I was happy as the Ducati of Estrosi/Boinet was huddling round in third place giving little away to the leaders yet sounding very relaxed. Rule number one in 24 hour races is that nothing stays the same for long and at around 7 o'clock the Ducati team manager could be seen playing with his calculator, then a board went out saying "allez +500" which presumably meant get a move on, use another 500 revs. The red and silver Duke, similar to Hailwood's Island machine, really started to go, Boinet picking up scuff marks on his knees he was leaning so much.

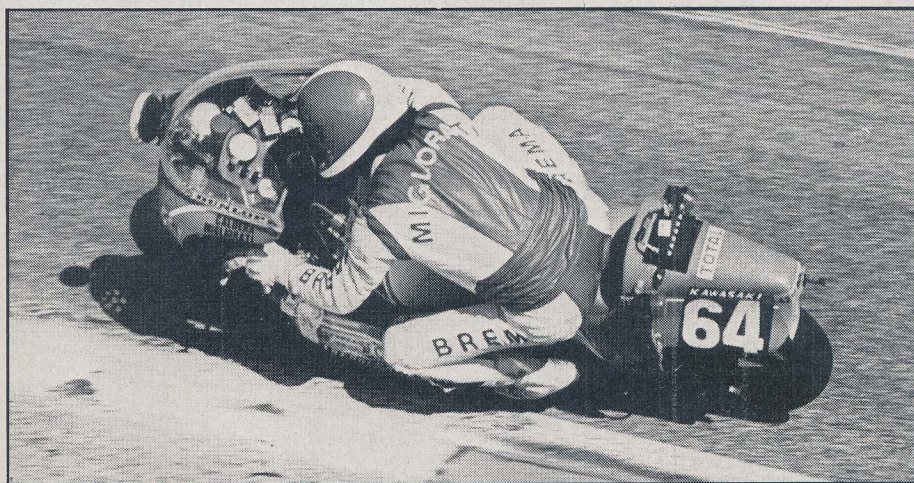
Just as the sky reddened in the setting sun, one of the midfield Hondas blew a gearbox seal on the Courbe de Signes, a sharp right hander at the end of the half mile straight. The next six machines went down in clouds of dust and glass fibre chips as they braked from 160mph. The Ducati made it, just, there was oil on the next bend too, down it went sliding for a hundred yards. Boinet, bleeding profusely, held down by three marshals and a doctor to stop him trying to push the bike to the pits. That is the spirit of the Bol, nothing matters except keeping going, fast.

When the velvet black night fell, the village really started boppin'. The village is half open

air pub, half restaurant and half racing and sporting motorcycle show. I know that makes 1½ and that's because it's more than anyone can deal with. Food of every kind beckons you with succulent aromas rising from a thousand charcoal grills; fine wines and gassy beers being consumed with no thought for the morning; stunning French beauties wander around in sprayed on leathers and open motocross boots, inserting large hot-dogs into their delicately pursed lips; Star Wars fairings or flash crash helmets can be bought at every other stand, as can alloy swinging arms, trick cylinder heads, even complete racing frame kits.

Midnight comes and goes, the Pons/Sarron Yam is still in front, now three laps ahead of the Leon/Chemarin Honda; the V6 Laverda is still going but has troubles and is in 35th place; a Guzzi and a couple of Kawasakis are having deep engine parts replaced in the pits; Dave Emde is keeping himself amused and the crowd amazed by doing hundred yard wheelies down the start finish straight. Team Bike is plucking juicy roast potatoes from the glowing embers of the fire, everybody has butter dripping off their chins, more than half the beer has gone.

Dawn breaks in technicolour glory, the pit road is stained with oil and petrol, the mechanics stare vacantly into the middle distance, their tools not quite as neatly laid out as the night before. Patrick Pons has had his leathers cleaned with switch cleaner, he looks immaculate but exhaustion make his handsome features a mask. They are six laps ahead. Suddenly it's all over, a broken main has chewed up the crankcases of the OW31 after more than 2500 kilometres of throttle to stop racing. Nobody says "I told you so". Leon/Chemarin take the lead followed by Luc/Rigal and Stan Woods/Charlie Williams — Honda rules. At nine am, 36 out of 73 bikes are still running; Team Bike drinks orange juice and eats aspirins; six hours to go. The sun gets unbearably hot; the stands along the start/finish straight fill up; it's still Honda first, second, third. Japanese mechanics in the Honda pit cease being inscrutable and start to pray. Mistakes are being made along the pit road: fountains of petrol spurt, red hot brake pads are dropped, but the crowd is getting noisier, the teams quieter. Three o'clock approaches, Hondas number one, two and three form up in that order and that does it — the crowd go wild and surge across the track, it's four minutes to three but who cares. Nobody gets to cross the finishing line, barred by a wall of ecstasy. Team Bike is right there, who cares if there's a thousand mile ride home, I'd walk to the Bol if I had to.



YAMAHA XS1100

Continued from page 35

office quoted £90 per year for a fully comprehensive policy for a 25-year-old, living outside London, with no accidents or conviction to his credit. It appears that any bike over 350cc receives the same treatment under the famous 'Rider' policy. Head Office comment was that if they got all the bad risks then they'd have to change their ideas.

This sums up the place that the CBX and XS11 occupy in everyday biking: outside. Neither should be considered by anyone with a normal income or normal biking needs. But that's not to say neither is a useful addition to motorcycling. We've always needed such

glamour bikes — Broughs, Vincents, Harleys. It's clear though that the Yamaha is for the long distance tourer. The sort who takes intergalactic holidays, eating a thousand miles a day and who can afford the fuel. For straight line comfort and effortless speeding, there's little to match it.

The CBX is different. It's unusual these days for its hellfire, uncompromising performance — and that's a welcome change. But it would soon be spoiled as a ride to work hack or for sustained long distance cruising. Luggage racks and panniers just aren't for this bike. It's built for the guy who loves going very fast — and who can afford another form of personal transport for daily commuting.

Perhaps the most worrying thought, particularly with the Yamaha, is that 130mph, 600lb motorcycles are available to all kinds of idiot riders so long as they can rake up the 15 per cent deposit. Can they also afford to keep such powerful machines in top rate mechani-

cal condition and shod with new tyres, chains and disc pads which tend to be consumed with alarming rapidity?

There are features on each worth noting for future models, however: the Yamaha's front forks with its smooth, stiction free action and adjustable spring preload; its shaft drive; its straight line stability (though this is at the cost of manoeuvrability). From the CBX there's its adherence to function as the major design criteria; the imaginative use of technology to overcome the physical barriers of a six cylinder bike; the tubeless tyres and adjustable rear dampers.

For most of us, either bike is beyond our finances so perhaps we should be content to regard them as the pinnacle of the art of building this kind of motorcycle. And to count our spare loot as we potter home, safely, in control, on our 500s and 750s . . . Bollocks! I can hear you shout. I know, I know! I want one too!