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JANUARY 1986

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bike

**AT LAST!
THE
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SEASON
SPECIAL**

**Silly bikes
silly stories silly pictures**

(including terrifically
silly **Moped Mayhem** race reports!)

MESSAGGIO DA MILANO

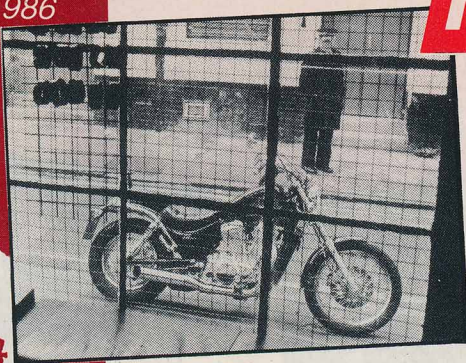
For once, the Italian show was worth going to. New generations of wop screamers, plonkers and chuggers take on the Nips

KINGMAKERS

How Kel Carruthers and Erv Kanemoto keep pushing those damn Yanks to the top of the pile

CLONE ZONE

A goodly ogle of the Harris answer to Yamaha's factory Genesis chassis. Stavros Parrish is probably going to race it, too, if he can find time between Truck GPs



THE 1985 BIKE MAGAZINE AWARDS

Forget Oscars, Humphreys, Grammys and Egberts, as we make prestigious presentations to the fairest — and the foulest — in the land

BARK AND BITE

Two versions of Frankenstein's monster's dog lurking down in the depths of funny farming territory. A Norton-engined Gilera crosser faces off against the only Honda 400/4 in a Yam DT chassis (fortunately)

ANYTHING GOES

The bike, you sweet young boys, not the contact pages. Suzuki's cryptopog, the Intruder, goes mincing round leather bars

ROADTESTS

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

Suzuki RG500s as Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee. One's the Gamma road bike and the other's a full-blown Skoal Bandits GP tool. Both the same? I don't think so . . .

ARABIAN NIGHTS

If Paris-Dakar posing pedestals are nicer to look at than ride, why bother getting cold and wet? Dashing desert doobries from Honda, Cagiva and BMW. (We've heard some dodgy excuses for not riding testbikes in winter and leering at photographer's models but this is ridiculous . . .)



MOPED MAYHEM

Hold the front page an' quite a lot more inside, too, 'cos this is the not-so-awful truth in all its gory detail

ON-LINE

To be perused at the reader's own risk . . .

LIFE IN THE PIT LANE

Scotty tells it like it might be

FOULKES OFF

Still telling tales out of skool

AGONY COLUMN

Letters pray (Let us pray? geddit? Jesus, I wish the pub was open)

STAFF BIKES

We don't really believe he bought it

LAST PAGE

Till next month, anyway

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Editorial and advertisement offices: 2 St. John's Place, St. John's Square, London EC1M 4QX; telephone 01-608 1511 (both departments). Telex 32157. Postal subscriptions: UK & Eire £15 a year, Overseas surface mail £16 a year. Airmail Europe £23 a year.

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THE KINGMAKERS

Yamaha's Kel Carruthers and Honda's Erv Kanemoto are two of the most important figures in grand prix road racing. Michael Scott meets the men who steered Messrs Lawson and Spencer to their world championships

Kel Carruthers is a 47-year-old Australian, small, grey and balding, friendly and forthright, with exacting technical standards, a twinkle in his eye, a nice line in debunking myths, and a deceptively casual approach that only years of experience can bring. He also has a racing pedigree as long as your arm.

First of all, he was a rider, a TT and Daytona winner, and the last-ever 250 world champion on a four-stroke (Benelli Four, 1969). In 1974, he retired but stayed with Yamaha, managing the US racing team. That meant Kenny Roberts, AMA No. 1 plates, and three more world championships.

Roberts went, Carruthers stayed. And when Eddie Lawson won the championship in 1984, it was with Carruthers in support. Call him a King-Maker and he laughs, and answers in his rasping Australian-American drawl. "All I do is make the motorbike run at the different racetracks the same as it runs on the test bench in Japan. Theoretically, that's the best it can go. I don't mess with them, or tune them up in any special way. It's up to the rider to make it go faster than the rest."

He is at liberty to make porting and other experiments, and sometimes does. But whether they will be adopted for the race bikes is a Japanese decision. "Last year I got a lathe and mill in the back of the van. Before, I had never missed it, but now I use it all the time."

"Yamaha have enough faith in me that I can suggest modifications, then it will be me who does the metalwork. But 90 per cent of the stuff I say should be changed is on the drawing board already. Yamaha's job is to improve things that you or I think are perfectly all right. And they do a good job."

Although nominally an employee of Agostini's Marlboro Team, Carruthers is in fact Yamaha's man in Europe. "Doesn't matter who the sponsor is... I go with the bikes. Engineers from Japan often come over for a couple of races, but I am their continuity man, and also the guy who translates what the riders want." He sometimes pretends the job is little more than that of a maintenance engineer. If so, it would still keep him busy.

warm-up, to bed in the front tyre, and check there's no oil or water leaks, or anything like that.

"It's also harder now to get the thing tuned right. Setting the carbs takes more time than before. We have a barometer on the wall — but none of that stuff really works. It's only good for the records. The demands of a track make more

he has retired. "An awful lot of guys haven't been around to retire.

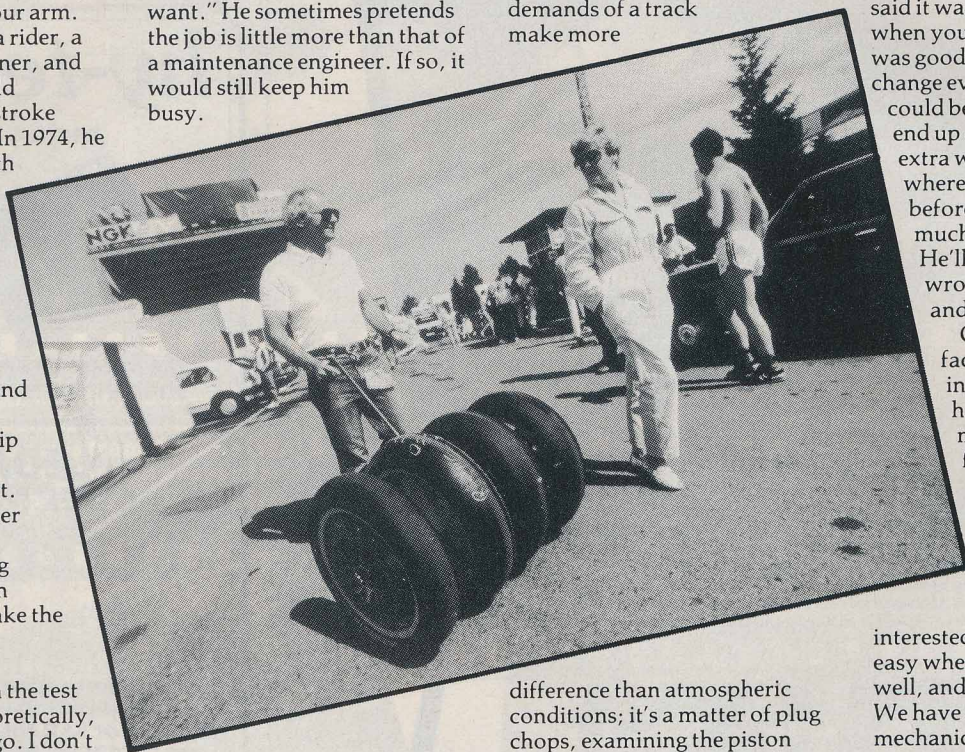
"Kenny was a pain in the arse to work for. He worked you to death. He would invariably say his bike was a load of garbage even if it was only just short of perfect. I think his theory was if he said it was real bad, maybe you'd work harder than if he said it was about right. Even when you got it so he'd say it was good, he'd still want to change everything, to see if it could be made better. You'd end up doing a whole lot of extra work, just to end up where you'd been two days before. Eddie Lawson is much more easily satisfied. He'll tell you what's wrong, and you fix it, and he says 'okay'."

Carruthers enjoys the facilities of a big team inasmuch as he doesn't have to worry any more about hotels, ferries and keeping accounts. "But it's made it all politically more complicated. I have to pay attention to keeping all the mechanics

interested, which isn't all that easy when one rider is doing well, and the other one isn't. We have four Italian mechanics, and four motorcycles — one per mechanic, and two each per rider. They stay with these machines all year.

"I go to a lot of trouble to prevent competition between the mechanics. It doesn't worry me if the riders aren't talking, but I want all the mechanics to be friendly, and help one another, so the guys working on Roche's bikes are happy when Eddie wins the race. I try and make sure every one of the mechanics has done at least one job on Eddie's race bike."

It is the rider who decides which of his pair of bikes he will race. "Unless we are doing comparative testing, we keep both bikes the same. Then if something goes wrong with the race bike, we can get the back-up bike ready to go in 30



"The more advanced the bikes get, the more things you have to do to keep them good. It gets harder, not easier — even though we have virtually no trouble with the Yamahas. Just keeping a check on everything, after the bike comes in at the end of final practice running perfectly, you still have to work for a long, long time."

Crankshafts run for 800km — a race, and two GP practices. "They would go twice that distance if you were prepared to have one quit on you somewhere along the line. We normally don't let pistons run for more than 500km. We replace them before the last official practice, then afterwards we lift the heads to check them. Then we normally do two laps in the morning

difference than atmospheric conditions; it's a matter of plug chops, examining the piston crowns, listening to what the rider says, and listening to the exhaust."

Gearing is another thing that must be reappraised track for track in the same way; "But tyres and the back suspension are the things that are never right. You're fooling with them all the time. When a rider says the tyres are good, he means 'as good as we're gonna get them.' The back suspension — we use an Ohlins damper, and one of their men's there with us all the time — is at the stage where you can fine-tune the thing to such a degree that you'll never stop working on it. The front is nothing like as critical."

It is not surprising that Carruthers rates Kenny Roberts highest of all the riders he has known, though he's glad





One of the ironies of Kanemoto's life is that his expertise with two-stroke engines has put him into a position where he rarely gets to lay spanner on motorcycle. GP life nowadays is taken up with acting as medium between rider and mechanic — as in the top pic, where he's helping sort out problems with Spencer's 250 — or standing by pit lane collecting data

minutes or less."

Carruthers has forthright opinions on experiments with motorcycle design, which he believes are incompatible with winning races. "The good and the bad thing about motorcycles is that they are self-governing, technically. You have to lean them over to ride them. So if it's too short, it doesn't steer. If it's too long, it doesn't steer. And leaning it

over severely restricts the width of the tyres you can put on it. Motorcycle design hasn't changed much in my 20 years of racing because it *can't* change.

"A factory cannot afford to mess around with any different design. I mean, this Elf thing is all pretty nice, but it's not going to come out and start winning GPs. If they spent the same amount of money developing a conventional GP bike, they'd

probably win races in their first year.

"Maybe Yamaha or Honda have something similar rushing round their test tracks. But if somebody were to give me a whole bunch of money to build a motorcycle, it would be almost exactly the same as the ones now, because that's what's going to win next year."

His features are familiar to race fans all over the world — the hatchet-face hovering at Freddie Spencer's shoulder. The same people will certainly have heard his name — Erv Kanemoto.

The connection between face and name, however, may be a little slower. For Erv is a modest man, to the point of shyness. He shrinks from the limelight,

happy to be the backroom boy, and avoiding personal publicity.

He seldom gives interviews. It's not his job to be a star. Anyway, he's busy most all of the time. If he's not in with Freddie, he's in the workshop tent with the HRC mechanics, a sheaf of data in hand, a long checklist in the other, and the tent-flap zippered up tight.

This conversation took several months to happen. It was worth waiting for. And entirely characteristic of his modesty that, when it was all over, he said: "You'll have to doctor all that up a bit. I'm not very good at this sort of thing.

"I was born in Yukon, but I grew up in the Santa Fe area. My grandparents were Japanese, but I am American.

"My whole life I've been around some sort of competition. My father was in go-kart and boat racing, and I was interested in the engines right for as long as I can remember."

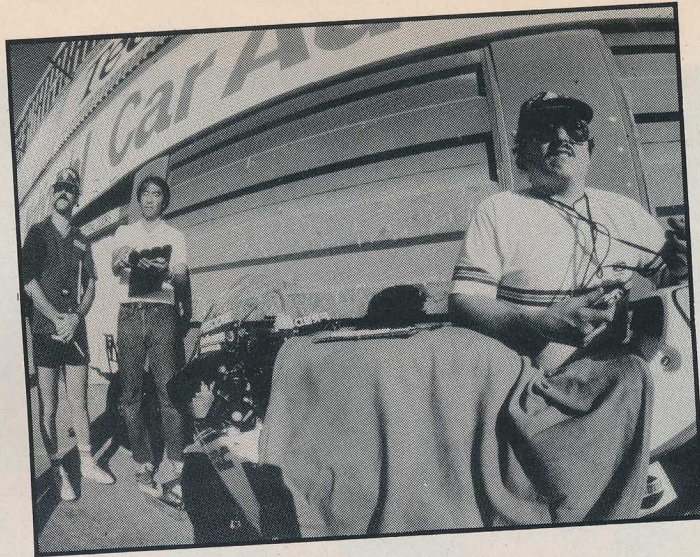
Erv skipped college, going straight from high school into a job — testing armoured personnel carriers round a half-mile banked oval! "Just so that I could have enough money to buy engines. I'd save up enough to buy a case of ten McCullochs, then do various modifications, then bench-test. Even if a modification doesn't work, it's all data.

"I was testing various tuning ideas, mainly to do with porting and breathing. It was later that I got really technical, and read the engineering papers and so on. I found out that half the tests done elsewhere confirmed what I had learned myself.

"That was sorta satisfying. Though these other tests had been done prior to my own, they showed that I was . . . not necessarily on the right track, but that my tests were valid."

Erv, who can ride a motorcycle but seldom does so, moved to bike racing from karts in 1968, and played a leading role in the golden years of US road racing, working with Gary Nixon from 1973 until 1978. "He was the first real professional I had met in racing. He's still a good friend."

Then Erv encountered the phenomenon that was to take him right to the top. "The first time I saw Freddie race I knew that he was really something special." Their first full year together was 1979, and they've been a double act ever since, except for an exploratory GP year with Barry Sheene in 1982 ("Barry really has a good understanding of motorcycles.").



Always in the background, Kanemoto waits for his rider to flash past the pits again while NSR500 spannerman George Vukmanovich is on tiptoes behind his stopwatch

Today, three world championships later, he and Spencer make the most formidable team that anyone in racing can remember for a long time; perhaps even more fearsome than Kenny Roberts and Kel Carruthers, from whom Freddie and Erv lifted the title in 1983. Surprisingly, he is a little frustrated.

"My job right now is far from what I prefer. My title is Team Manager. But I kinda feel like it is more co-ordinating everything: Freddie's wishes, Honda's feelings, the tyre people, any problems, and trying to co-ordinate them all so we have the best combination, and the bike is working at close to 100 per cent of its potential.

"I like working with engines. Like ten years ago, when you were actually carrying out everything — diagnosis, cure, and new development. But there's very little engine development involved these days." That all takes place back at HRC's Tokyo headquarters, and Erv is only peripherally involved. "We'll try and explain a particular problem, and a possible solution. At the factory they have all the resources, and so many ideas.

"For example, I wouldn't get involved now with modifying porting. Unless there is a real disaster. Then I might have to make some modifications at the track." His eyes light up at the thought.

"We know the power the bike should develop, and the handling capability of the machine. What we try to do is make it perform at its best. We just set the carburettors, and get the best transmission and suspension settings. There is no time to do anything else during GP practice."

Of course, this is not as

simple as its sounds. "The bikes are so powerful now that not even the rider can really feel the difference of those last few per cent." Here is a chance for Erv to go on testing, collecting and collating his beloved data. "The only way is to time the bike over a particular section of track, and compare different combinations that way. Better still is to use a speed gun." There's still room for some good old-fashioned experience and intuition: "I get a lot from listening to the exhaust notes — not only of our bikes, but of the others as well. From the quality of the sound, and the way they respond to the throttle, you can get some understanding of the combinations they are using. There are a lot of different ways of achieving the same type of power."

This element of industrial espionage is one of the things Erv plainly does enjoy, and he talks with enthusiasm about speed-checking of the Yamahas in 1985. "I noticed in Austria that Taira's bike was quicker on top end, so he was obviously testing something. Then later we noticed that there was the same sort of difference between Eddie's bike and Roche's. Later, I saw the engine apart, or enough apart that I could see the different components . . . exhausts and cylinders."

Similarly, he preserves HRC's sometimes rather absurd love of secrecy, in spite of my protestations. "I could tell you something small, that by itself would be unimportant. But it could be the single piece of information that Yamaha or Suzuki are missing to complete a jigsaw. It's the unknown that worries you. We don't know how much they know about us.

"It's like when Freddie's father approached me back in 1978. I lent him some cylinders,

but I wouldn't sell them. I wouldn't let them out of my sight. They may not have been worth much in money terms, but those ports were my stock of experience and the sum of my experiments."

He won't say how much of the NSR's development is his. "The information that goes back after each race is for next year's machine. But this year some of it came early; Honda worked very hard. There's a tremendous difference between the machine from the first GP to the last."

No details are forthcoming, though he smiles at the game of keeping secrets. "This is a big team, with a sponsor, and there are so many different sides to every question — a PR side, a technical side, the rider's viewpoint . . . and so on. Just changing a port shape is a political act."

He likes Honda's engine philosophy. "Their approach is to make the power first, then they try and fill in the weak points. Then if you have to give a bit of top speed away to improve the power band, it's easier to go backwards. But it does make the NSR V4 a little difficult to ride to its maximum. That may be a bit mild. Let's say that it becomes real difficult."

Again we come back to Freddie, and his outstanding ability. "He's a genius on a motorcycle. Something special." His relationship with Spencer is very close. "Our basic personalities are pretty similar. It's easy when he explains a problem — if he can't pinpoint it, which in most cases he can, I can usually put my finger on it.

"There's not a whole lot of talking. I think it's because we've worked together long enough. I understand him completely, so he may say the first word, and I know exactly where we're headed. With technical things, there are a strictly limited number of possible problem areas. We know it can only be certain things. If we get stuck, I just go down the list."

What is his favourite racing bike? "The one I'm working on at the time. I'm looking at the immediate thing, next week, the next race."

At 42, Erv is becoming weary of GP racing, though he would like to stay as long as Freddie does. His one regret in giving his life to racing is that he never got the time to marry. What will he do when it's all over? "Oh, I'd like to open up a tuning shop back in the States. I guess I'll always be involved with racing." ■