



Champion
Spark Plug



WORLD
CHAMPIONSHIP



LAOLINA BRCA RACING
MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA



Reg who?

Graham Sanderson talks to a bloke from East Ham who also happens to be the American Superbike champ.

'BRANDS WAS real zilch meeting. There were guys taking it too easy on Tee-Zee 350s looking as if they were out for a joy-ride. Only a couple of guys were showing any real aggression. If they were racing against our novices back home in the States they'd find the competition really fierce,' said Reg Pridmore as he perched eagerly on the edge of a fireside chair. He continued, 'I don't race to finish second. It doesn't matter who's in the race or how good they are, I'm racing to win. I don't get worried about racing against great riders. Anyone can be beaten.'

Are these the idle boastings of an obnoxious Yankee cowboy racer? Or just the two-bit thoughts of another also-ran relying on sensationalism to put himself in the limelight? No siree. They are a couple of considered opinions from an *Englishman* whose Stateside racing ability has made him the number one in American 'production' racing during the past two seasons. With racing experience on both sides of the Atlantic, the American Motorcycle Association's Superbike champion is well qualified to assess road racing in Britain and the States and he's not too complimentary about the state of the art on this side of the water.

I spoke to him at the Dagenham home of his in-laws a few days after he'd viewed the New Year road races at Brands Hatch. Even considering that this meeting is little more than a close season practice session for most riders, Pridmore was adamant that they would be eaten up by American competition. He says it's all down to the Americans' competitive instinct — get to the top whatever the consequences.

But how does America's top 'production' racer see the future of production racing in this country? Since *Bike* has become involved with the Avon Roadrunner series for the coming season we were particularly interested in Pridmore's opinions. And quite revolutionary they are, too. From his experience of the evolution of Stateside Superbike racing Pridmore forecasts a similar development in British-style production racing which would create interest among promoters, riders and spectators alike, in a way it has never done before. It would mean highly sophisticated 110bhp 150mph machines which look and handle like stock bikes but which sound and perform like pukka GP racers.

'There are three things which attract people to race meetings. Sound, speed and action. The trouble with Box Stock racing (production racing which permits few modifications from standard) is that the machines are quiet, they're nowhere near as quick as Grand Prix bikes and there's not much close dicing because the guys on the better handling bikes will cruise away to win.

'If the British production championships are won by the same guy riding say, a Moto Guzzi which goes round bends like it was on rails, the whole thing will become a big bore. And no-one goes racing to watch a funeral procession.'

You'll have twigged by now that Superbike racing bears little relation to production racing as we know it. Stock frames, petrol tanks and seat base must be retained and fairings can only be used if fitted as standard equipment. But Superbikes are open to so much modification and improvement that their characters are totally transformed while keeping stock looks. A couple of limitations on performance are that standard carburetors and exhaust systems must be used, but even these may be modified. This tuning, which makes 150mph top speeds not uncommon, means that other changes have to be made in the name of safety. Brakes usually come in for major revision and racing slicks are fitted to the wide, up to WM8 width, rims. American Superbikes — Moto Guzzi and Ducati vee-twins, BMWs, Kawasaki and Honda fours — are laying down as much power as Yamaha TZ750 GP racers. The big difference is that the TZ was designed to race and the Superbikes were not, which places a heavy burden on the rider.

'Superbikes are really just 1000cc GP racers. I was timed at 160mph at Pocono last year on the Racecrafters Kay-Zee 1000. At that kinda speed it's impossible to lift your hands off the bars. Before you could get hold of the clutch or brake lever the wind pressure would force your fingers back. The main problem with Superbikes is that we ask them to do things which they were not designed for. They are as powerful as Tee-Zee 750s but weigh a couple of hundred pounds more and are much higher.

'A good Tee-Zee will handle itself but you have to be really careful with a Superbike. It's

no good zapping the throttle open coming out of a turn; it'll just throw you off. The front wheel spends most of the race in the air, anyway. The Guzzis and Ducatis handle real good but with bikes like the Kawasaki 1000 you have to work hard to make them handle. Mine used to handle like a rubber band.'

The permitted modifications and the total commitment of riders, tuners and sponsors who contest the Superbike 'dollar scene' has led to some of the most exciting racing in the AMA calendar. At Daytona 1976 Pridmore circulated in perilously close company with Gary Fisher and Steve McLaughlin, all three riding BMWs, and at the finish McLaughlin only won by a wheel.

The highly competitive edge of Superbike racing was really demonstrated in one particularly hair-raising incident on the Californian Sear's Point track last year. Pridmore and McLaughlin were wrestling for the best line in a corner in such close company that Pridmore's elbow got locked around the handlebars on McLaughlin's machine at over 100mph. Fortunately the impending catastrophe didn't materialise although McLaughlin, who really caused the incident, took to the grass.

It's exactly this type of near-miss that's been such a hit with the bloodthirsty American racegoer since Superbike racing began in 1972. And its popularity hasn't gone unnoticed by the AMA, American motorcycle sport's governing body. It's likely that Superbikes will get even more status.

'It's getting harder to win and this year could be even tougher. Last year no-one got into the winner's enclosure more than twice.' The only race to be given more prize money at Daytona this month is the Superbike event which carries 8,000 dollars.

Pridmore is particularly excited about AMA plans to include Superbike racing in the 500,000 dollar Camel Pro Series for the coveted AMA No. 1 plate. It is likely that some of the seven Superbike meetings would count towards the AMA championship, although how many AMA points would be collected by a Superbike victor is undecided. This would mean that riders of the calibre of Kenny Roberts, Skip Aksland, Jay Springsteen would be encouraged on to Super-

Reg who?

bikes to top up their AMA points tally if their usual road race, steeplechase and flat track circuit failed to yield enough points. Pridmore says there are plans for Gene Romero, a former AMA No. 1, to ride a Don Vesco tuned Yamaha XS1100 shaftie while Pridmore and his sponsors Racecrafters, Californian tuning specialists, are toying with the idea of fettling a Honda CBX1000 six.

Pridmore's belief in and enthusiasm for Superbike racing even prompted him to suggest that British promoters should bring over a team of Superbike racers in much the same way as the Transatlantic series is run. He wants to ride against TZ750s and promises more than a few surprises. The sight of unfaired stock looking bikes keeping up with rocket-ship Yamahas would make quite a spectacle and I only hope some British race promoter will take up Pridmore's suggestion. His address: 5718 Hollister Avenue, Goleta, California, CA 93017 USA.

Pridmore has sure come a long way since his first road race victory aboard a 500 Triumph special at a rain-soaked Silverstone in the early sixties. He recalls with some bitterness his assessment of British life, which seemed so stifled and undergirded. It failed to give him the opportunities he needed to become successful. 'Looking back I guess I must have had an awful lot of ambition. I wanted to have a few more things in life than just a roof over my head.

'The taxing system was really bad and it's gotten worse. I understand a single man has to pay about a third of his income to the government. Doesn't that bug you?'

He worked as a messenger boy for Lloyds of London, for a roller shutter company and even went into plumbing for a time. Working all the hours God sent and taking home £15 a week wasn't Pridmore's idea of the good life. Not even his three years as a welder for Greeves, the most rewarding job he had in Britain, could keep him in this country. So back in '64 he shipped himself, his wife Sheila and the family car to the States in search of the American Dream. They drove across to the West Coast where the hardworking boy from East Ham began to make his mark.

The Pridmores and their son Jason, 8, live in a plush bungalow complete with swimming pool, in Santa Barbara, California, just five minutes from the Pacific and twenty from snow-capped mountains. And that's a far cry from the 120 dollar a month single bedroomed apartment which was their first American home. Success in racing and as a businessman (Pridmore runs a bike business specialising in customising BMWs) has meant that he can indulge himself in the luxuries the British way of life couldn't have given him. He owns a 20 foot powerboat, runs several motorcycles including a Royal Enfield Constellation, and he can afford to pay someone else to restore his vintage vehicles, among them a Packard and a Ford truck from 1934. Before long a biplane could find its way into Pridmore's hands.

At a youthful looking 38 and with a chubby 170lb hanging from his 5ft 9in frame, Pridmore doesn't exactly fit into the conventional mould of a jockey-sized road racer. He speaks quietly but confidently using American expressions embroidered in a tone which betrays his English origin. To an American he will always be an Englishman, but the American influence is noticeable to a Briton. While his life in America

has honed Pridmore's competitive edge, his attitude and manner remain truly British. He is an uncharacteristically patient person for the American race scene and says he's not greedy. He earns about 2,000 dollars per race from his sponsors, plus prize money and bonuses. Add that to his income from the business and it's pretty obvious that there's no need to be greedy. He could hassle for more but it's just not his nature.

It was the Americans' love for the British which Pridmore exploited to reach the heights he has attained. After pumping gas he worked for a local Honda dealer and rode a 250cc Greeves Silverstone for the American importer. 'That bike picked me up and high sided me so badly I fractured my skull, broke my ribs, smashed just about everything.' The spill, the worst in Pridmore's race career, kept him out of racing for a year.

But it wasn't long before the 'English scratcher' was attracting attention from one of the American bike press and more enthusiastic four-bike race sponsorship followed from one of California's best known dealer's Galbraithes who assisted Pridmore between 1967 and 1970. He launched an all out effort to get known by campaigning three Norton-engined racers, including a sidecar, all decked out in an impressive red livery.

Pridmore has won the American Motorcycle Federation's 500cc championship on a Manx Norton, practised, but didn't race, a Manx framed 500cc Kawasaki triple in the '69 TT, and finished 'about 31st' in the sidecar TT of '71 piloting a Rob North-framed Commando powered outfit. But Pridmore is perhaps best known for his exploits on that most unlikely of racers, the BMW R90S he raced for American BMW importers Butler and Smith until just after Daytona last year. The width between the rocker covers was shortened by 1½ inches to improve ground clearance, standard flywheels were lightened from 10lb to 2¼lb, and titanium

engine parts were supplied by the factory in Germany. To top it all Pridmore was forced to adopt a different riding style.

'You know Paul Smart? I had to ride the Bee-Emm in his style, hanging off the bike. I even used Johnson's baby powder on the bike seat and my leathers so I could slide around the bike more easily.

'Smoothness of operation was the important thing with the Bee-Emm. You couldn't drop the clutch and abuse the gears the same way you can with the Racecrafters Kay-Zee. The cylinders were really just a good pair of crash bars. When the rocker boxes began to scrape (they were already chamfered) I knew I'd reached the limit.'

But last year's offer to ride the Racecrafters Kawasaki posed fewer problems than you'd think and Pridmore found the change from the 8,500 rpm to the 14,000 rpm KZ an easy one to make.

'We've hiked everything out of the way but I can still ground the bolts which hold in the engine.' But besides all the 'space technology' which Pridmore's tuner, Pierre des Roches, uses on the machine, one of the most amazing mods was literally chopping off the entire front end of the frame at the steering head and re-welding it to the rest of the chassis. Pridmore makes the astonishing claim that the wheels on the standard machine are slightly offset, which you'd be inclined to notice at 160mph. That's why the surgery was vital.

Yet Pridmore's versatility as a rider faces a stiffer test when he launches a serious attack on this year's sidecar TT with a Rob North framed TZ750 Yamaha tuned by Don Vesco. He also plans to tackle the first sidecar AMA championship this season.

'I really like sidecars, they are great fun to slide around. You've got some really good sidecar racers over here and I'll be pleased to finish in the first twenty on the Island. I'll try.' You bet he will.

