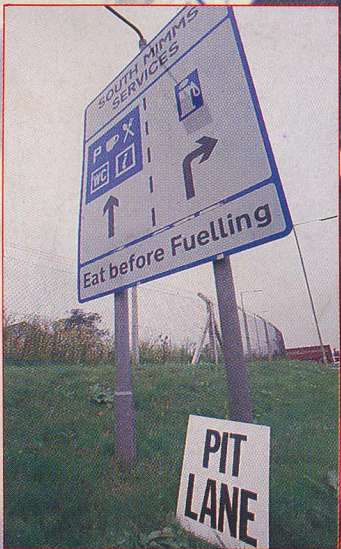
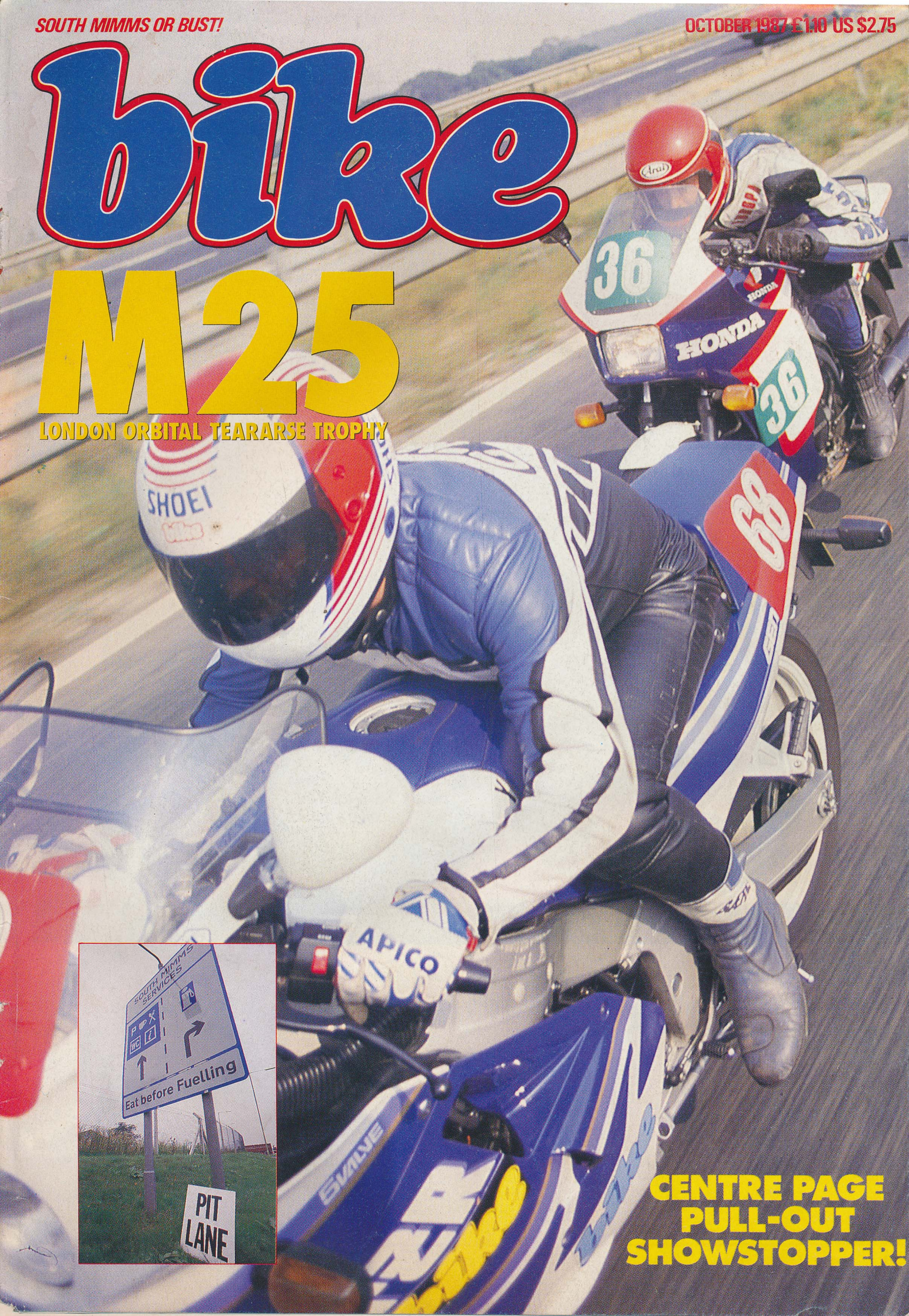


bike

M25

LONDON ORBITAL TEARARSE TROPHY

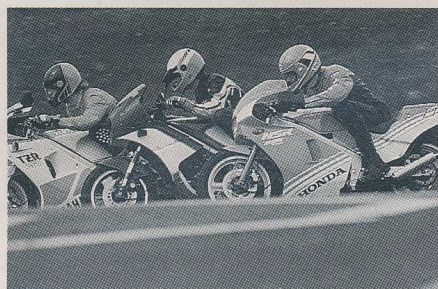


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SHOWSTOPPER!**

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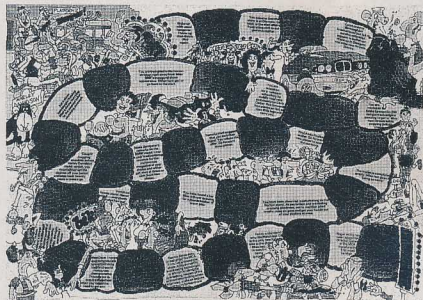


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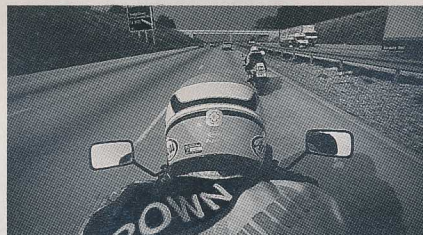
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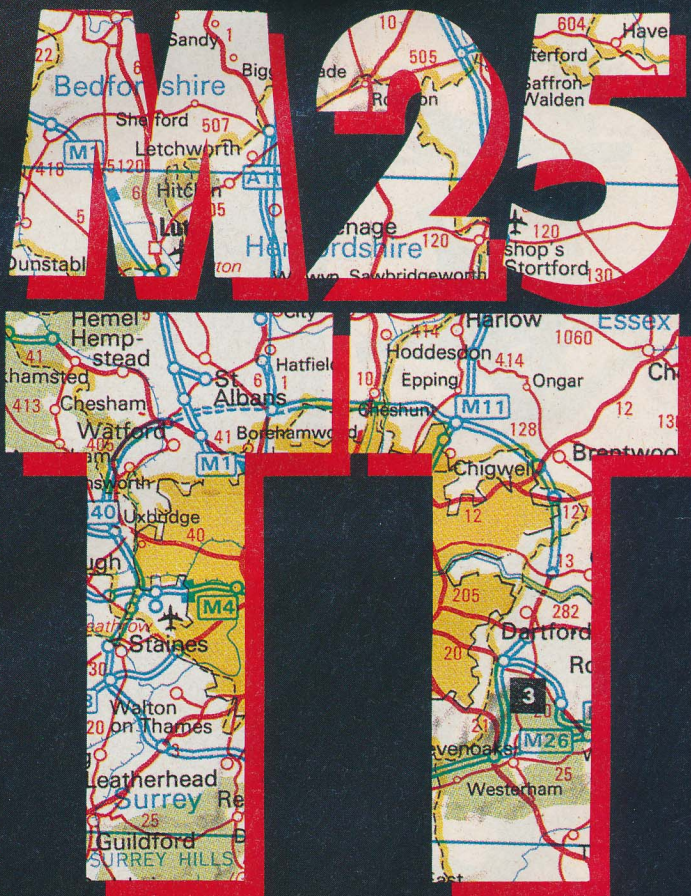
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Editor: Roger Willis. Assistant Editor: Roland Brown. Staff Writer: Patrick Devereux. Art Editor: Gillian Lockhart. Art Assistant: Jane Bark. Contributing Editors: Mac McDiarmid, Michael Scott. Photography: Colin Schiller, Tony Sleep, David Goldman, Patrick Gosling. Illustration: Paul Sample, Ian Shaw. Ad Manager: Adrian Marriott. Ad Rep: Nick Hulme. Classified Ad Sales: Carl Watkins. Ad Design: Tom Tully. Ad/Ed Administration: Maddie McGowan, John Storey. Ad Supremo: Trevor Pfeiffer. Managing Editor: Jim Lindsay. Publisher: Mark Revell. Editorial and Advertisement Offices: 2 St Johns Place, St Johns Square, London EC1M 4DE. Telephone: 01-608 1511 (both departments and Fax). Telex: 32157. Classified Ad enquiries: 0733 238855. Postal Subscriptions: UK £17 per year. Overseas surface mail (including Eire) £19.50 per year. Airmail Europe £25.50 per year. Other airmail rates on request. All from Bike Subscriptions Dept, Competition House, Farndon Road, Market Harborough, Leics. Marketing Dept: Bushfield House, Orton Centre, Peterborough PE2 0UW. Circulation Dept: EMAP Frontline, Lincoln Court, Lincoln Road, Peterborough PE1 2RP. Published on the 15th of each month by: EMAP National Publications Ltd. Typesetting: Text Generation Ltd, 21 Russell St, London WC2. Repro: Plan Four Colour Ltd, 37-40 Compton Street, London EC1. Printed: Nene River Press, Oundle Road, Peterborough. ©EMAP 1987.





LONDON ORBITAL TEARASE TROPHY

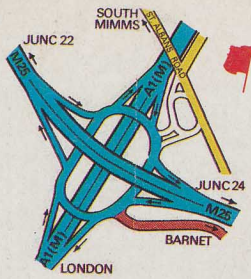
One of motorcycling's greatest road racing events takes place in the Home Counties - every day

Legendary stretches of sporting tarmac are few and far between, and even then they can only pull a huge volume of spectators for certain special events, like the Isle Of Man's

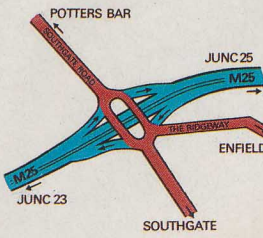
mountain circuit during the first week of June and Circuit Paul Ricard for the Bol d'Or weekend in September. But one of the world's freshest tracks upstages them all. It attracts a massive and eager crowd, every day, all year ▶

PHOTOGRAPHY DAVID GOLDMAN

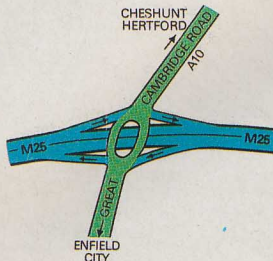
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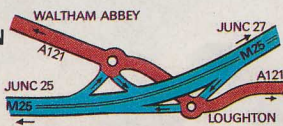
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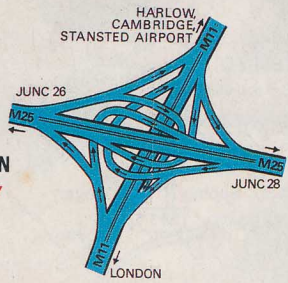
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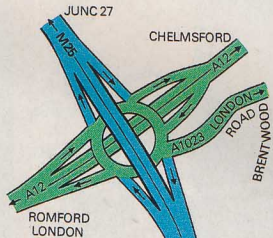
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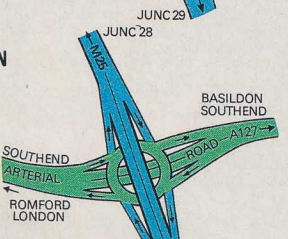
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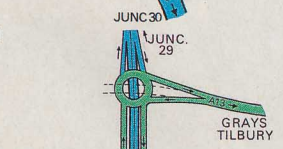
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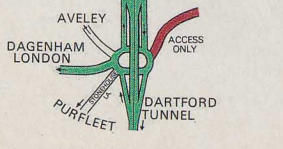
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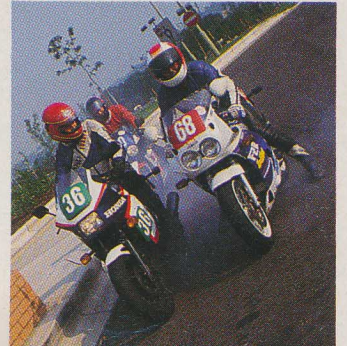
round, come rain or shine. The only difference is its special seating arrangements for this throng. They're reclining in cars, acting as erratic mobile chicanes as they wander on and off the racing line with a murderously random nonchalance.

Yes, this is the really big one, all 121 unforgiving miles and 31 junctions of red-line craziness, masquerading as the M25 London Orbital Motorway. While it was obviously conceived solely for sporting purposes, having been built twenty years too late and about three lanes too narrow to have any possible pretension towards easing traffic flow round Britain's capital city, there seems to have been some confusion between the M25's designers, probably due to ACU advice.

The Dartford junction between the racetrack and the A296 is called 'Junction One', situated a mile or so south of the Dartford tunnel and its toll booths. The latter were clearly built as a clever way of collecting competitors' entry fees — and it's surprising that the ACU haven't installed similar facilities at other tracks — but though this location was probably intended for the start/finish straight, the pit lane facilities were later constructed near South Mimms, at Junction 23 some 82 blistering miles further round the course.

So, South Mimms, where the M25 intersects with the A1(M), has become established as a new mecca for British road race enthusiasts. The pit layout is quite unique. Instead of letting riders hook straight in off the track with

only a siren to warn people of a bike's impending arrival, competitors have to circulate a complicated slowing-down loop, known as a 'roundabout', featuring several sets of traffic lights, before negotiating a tight right-hander and a quite



Warming your rear slick is essential to getting off the line quick, especially if you're planning on not paying for the petrol...



The sides of the motorway are a wildlife haven. Here, an FZR Genesis-mounted lepidoptrist surrenders his race position to a lesser foe to chase an interesting specimen to its lair



South Mimms is a self-service pit operation so bring your own crew for a fast turn-around

radical hairpin. Carrying straight on at the right-hander takes you into the extensive paddock, which has almost luxurious restaurant facilities. Nevertheless, Trust House Forte still can't match the fried breakfast in Donington's paddock caff. Shame.

Refuelling is also a unique process when compared to other International circuits, although it's a lot quicker and easier than the archaic arrangements in the Isle Of Man. Riders are faced with a

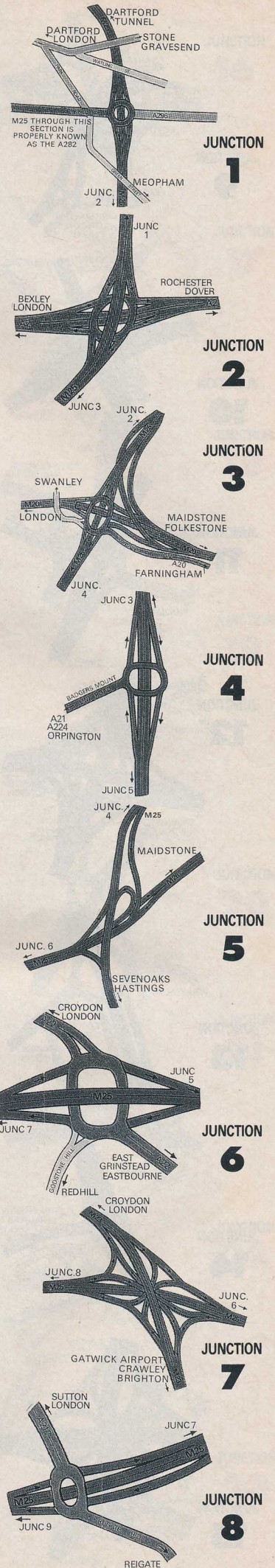
choice of pump lanes, under a canopy. Quite rightly considering this is the country's premier race venue, Britain's biggest oil company BP appear to be the main sponsor here. Competitors can choose a selection of octane ratings and types of fuel, including four-star unleaded for the swift but ecologically correct in our midst. Unfortunately, 'Avgas' isn't available but it's interesting to note that diesel is.

Perhaps this is because Honda has warned BP in

advance about requirements for their next year's Grand Prix bikes. Who knows? The only real problem is having to dismount and sprint over to the pit marshals' hut to pay for the petrol.

The beauty of the M25 TT is that it fits everywhere in the racing calendar — prospective competitors can just turn up and enter on the day and that can be whatever day takes their fancy. All pit and marshalling operations function round the clock, 365 days a year. Entry requirements are purely that one must hold a DVLC National Competition Licence (novice permits aren't valid) and possess a motorcycle with a 120 mile-plus tank range. Although scrutineering is by no means automatic, entrants should ensure that their machine preparation is up to scratch, because travelling marshals have the right to carry out an inspection at any time.

Control of the course rests with different teams of marshals on a geographical basis. These are known as 'Forces' in M25 TT slang. There are large numbers of travelling marshals in distinctive white-and-orange course cars and some on motorcycles of a similar hue. Occasionally, they have fixed positions parked on bridges over the track. When a competitor sees a marshal, this is the equivalent of being shown a yellow warning flag at any other race meeting. Riders shouldn't overtake or at least they shouldn't overtake any spectators dawdling along at 70mph. All marshals have the right to 'black flag' a competitor off the track for scrutineering purposes or ▶



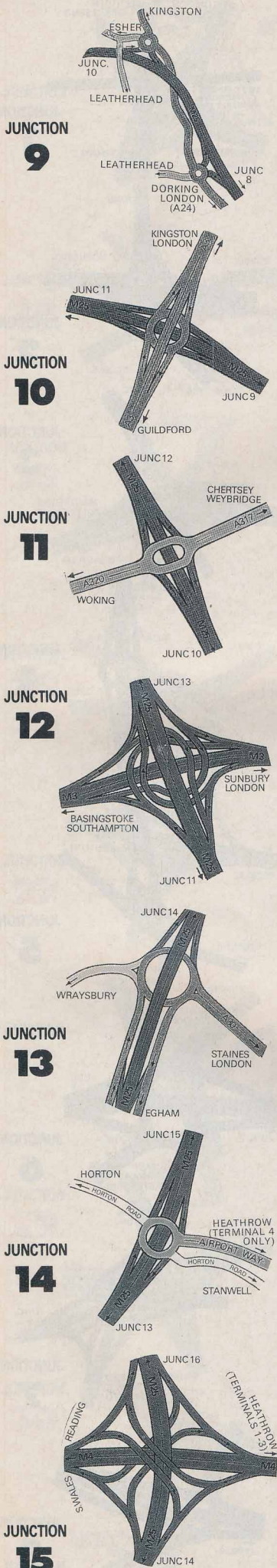
A whole range of bikes are capable of the magic one hour lap but suicidal bravery counts for more than horses...



Clear runs down the outside lane with the rev counter wound towards oblivion are a rare luxury during the Teararse Trophy



For multi-lap TT events, efficient communications via endurance-style pit boards are a must



failure to obey a 'yellow flag'. They indicate this by illuminating a blue flashing light on the course car's roof and/or sounding a siren of variable pitch. Obedience to a marshal's 'black flagging' is only obligatory when the competitor's racebike doesn't have a performance advantage over the course vehicle.

Just as with the timing lights at the bottom of the hill outside the Highlander pub on the Island and the radar at the fast end of Paul Ricard's Mistral straight, facilities are available for giving M25 TT racers the accolade of being recorded for posterity as the fastest through any particular section of the course. The marshals carry out these duties using radar or pursuit methods. The rider is usually stopped and congratulated by a marshal and then issued with a provisional certificate of valour shortly afterwards. This is called a 'summons'. Eventually, the competitor's splendid effort is confirmed at a meeting with the Clerk Of The Course (who is appointed by the Lord Chancellor rather than the Auto Cycle Union) and awards are made. Although this is usually only a modest three-point trophy, the really quick boys can earn up to a whole year of relaxation on the bus or train.

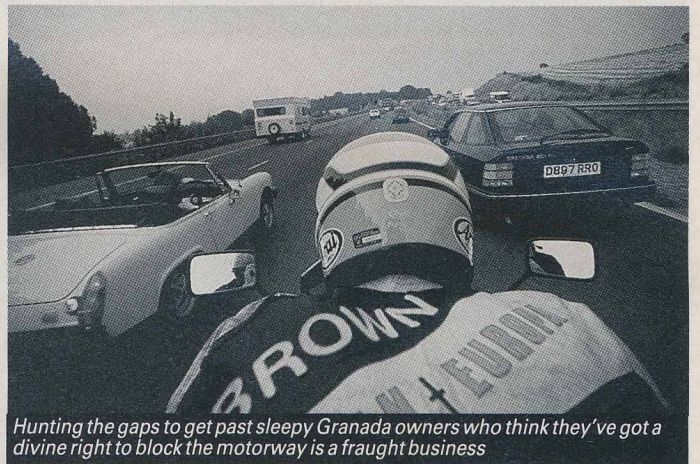
Riders who want to get up near the front of the M25 Teararse Trophy starting grid are well advised to use untimed practice sessions to learn the course. Any wop called Agostini or paddy called Dunlop can wobble his way round a mere 37¾ miles of

gentle Manx tarmac to earn an easy place in the history books but going quick on the M25's much longer course demands considerably more expertise and concentration. Track conditions are extremely variable and can change almost instantly. Who cares about a bit of fog on Snaefell affecting visibility along the Mountain Mile after you've seen a real pea-souper and its resultant multiple pile-ups on the M25's southern section anywhere between Junction 5 at Dunton Green and Junction 9 at Leatherhead.

And picking the racing line through the turns of the most technical Grand Prix circuit you can think of is dead simple compared with hacking through the M25's notorious obstacles, the most famous of which is called the 'Tail-back'. These can actually occur at any part of the course but there's almost always one stretching for miles on the approach to the Dartford tunnel, often beginning as

early as between Junction 28 and 29 on a really bad day. You can recognise a tail-back easily, because all three lanes are blocked by seemingly endless stationary queues of spectators' cars. Speed can be maintained by taking to the hard shoulder (although this tends to annoy the travelling marshals) or hacking along with a nervous precision between the cars. Regular M25 TT competitors soon learn to keep the brakes covered and a sharp eye out for the tail-back's most dangerous element. He is usually a sales representative from Romford who suddenly opens his car door to stealthily dump the contents of his ashtray onto the track. Fag ends on the racing line aren't the problem: T-boning a Sierra door while concentrating on a particularly quick lap time certainly is.

The other problem with tail-backs, particularly the frequent ones in airport territory around Junction 7 for Gatwick and Junctions 12



Hunting the gaps to get past sleepy Granada owners who think they've got a divine right to block the motorway is a fraught business



Get your fuel calculations wrong and it's a long push in. South Mimms is the only service area on the whole loop



Nearly back to the chequered flag and letting the screen eat the flies...

through to 16 where a number of motorways interchanges (M3, M4 and M40) coincide with Heathrow, is that they are never quite stationary and, as the cars intermittently shuffle forward, the lightning' lane changer, thinking a swift move from being stuck in one lane to being stuck in another is somehow magically going to stop him from missing his plane, can set your racing career back a long way, like forever.

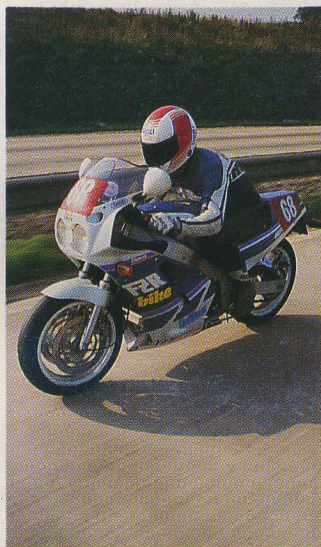
Another major problem is 'Contra-flow', where anti-clockwise spectators are

allowed onto your side of the track, separated only by a puny line of orange plastic cones. This cuts down the width of available racing tarmac and often causes a tailback as well, but one with barely enough room between the cars to maintain race speeds and live.

The travelling marshals seem to be labouring under some illusion, by the way, that the permanent outright lap record is 1hr 43mins and a few seconds, an average speed of 70mph, but one new competitor recently reported a first practice lap of 1hr 25mins



Even small bike owners can live out their track fantasies with the L-plates chucked away



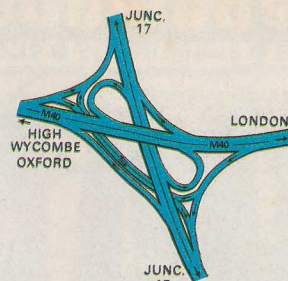
Even Team Fat Bastard can sometimes focus his eyes long enough to go fast



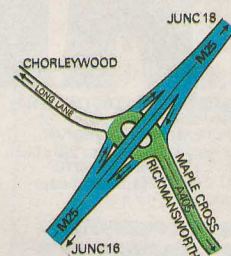
Trust House Forte sells special victory lemonade for the younger competitors

(85.4mph) on his proddy class Yam FZ600, despite a tailback at the tunnel, a disorganised fumble for loose change to pay the toll and getting back to the South Mimms pits with only a few drops of gas left. Real TT aces regularly report 1hr 5mins but, of course, getting up on the rostrum to spray the champers should mean cracking the hour barrier. The problem with this, though, apart from the risk of the black flag from admiring marshals eager for a champion's autograph, is that like any other International event, the M25 TT is televised with remotely-controlled cameras on most sections of the motorway, and the marshals even use helicopters to film the stars. . . . Life is not a bed of roses for a top professional Tearse Trophy veteran.

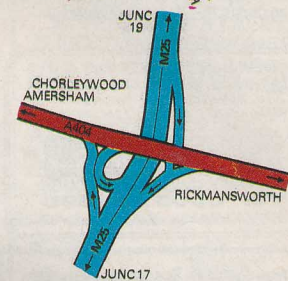
Finally, we have to say that, personally, the staff of this magazine would never consider racing round the M25 and we would never ever encourage any of our perfectly sensible readers to do it either. After all, racing on the highway, is ahem, illegal isn't it? But if it is, can anybody explain why the government built us a race track round London? ■



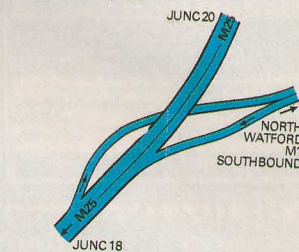
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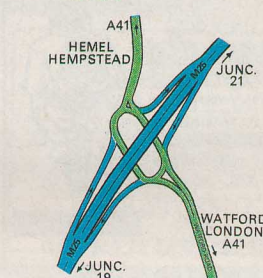
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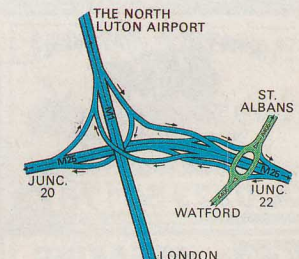
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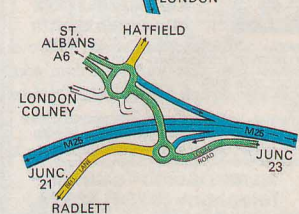
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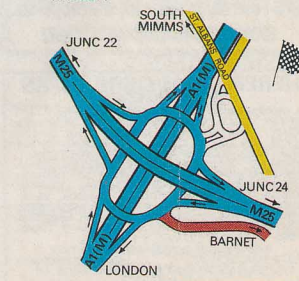
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