

TESTS: Harley-Davidson FLH Classic, Yamaha IT175, Honda FT500 Ascot, Suzuki GS550M, Honda Motocompo, MR30 Pocket Racer

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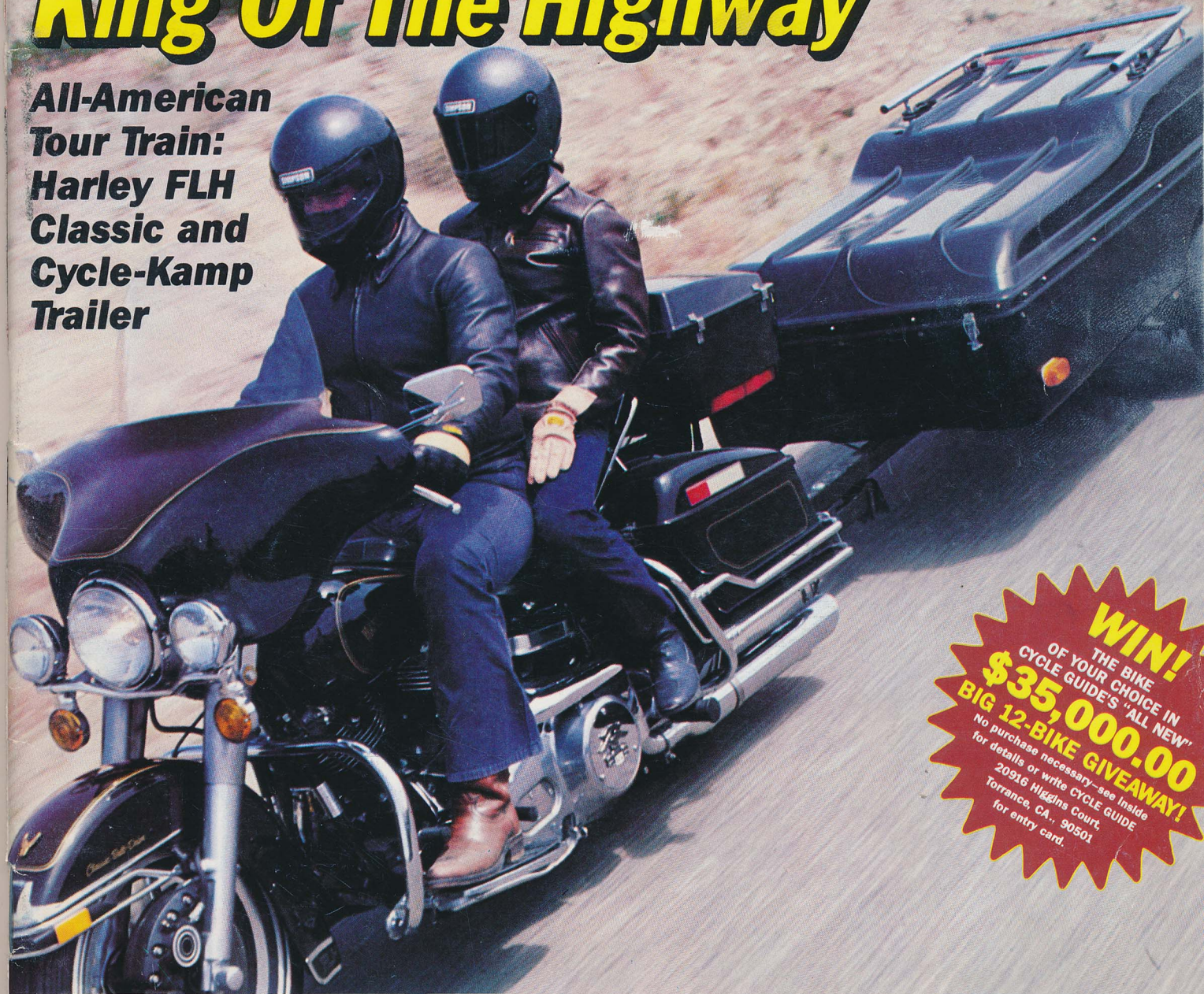
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QUOTE:

"Harley's FLH Classic is nothing less than tradition on wheels. It might have been born in a shower of sparks between some great hammer and anvil at the dawn of the Motorcycle Age."

—Pg. 18

ON THE COVER:

Chris Eastman captured the All-American Tour Train challenging the notion that you can get away from it all by taking it all with you. It's turn-key touring, with one hitch. But don't underrate the rig; it's a real sleeper.

CYCLE
GUIDE



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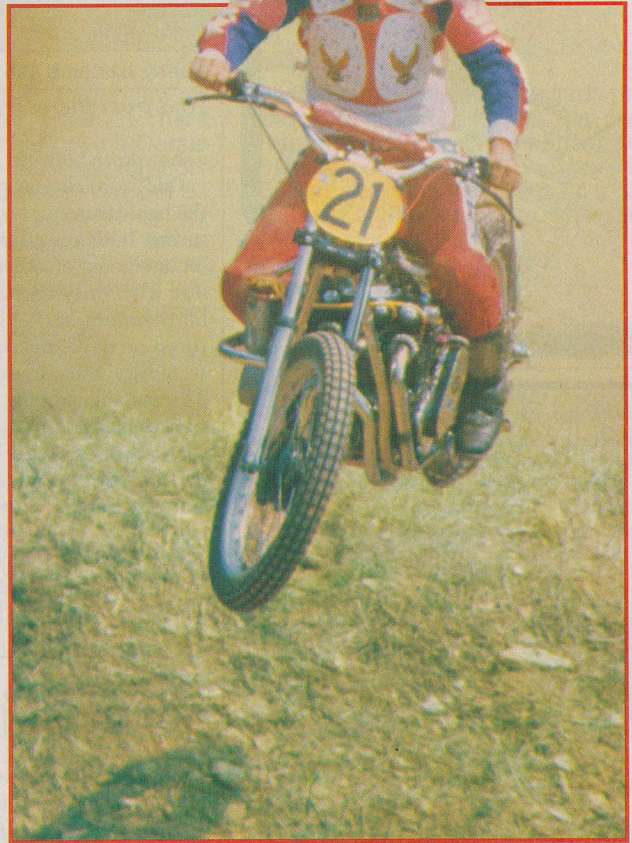
SPORT LINES

Cycle Guide's True Tales of Race Courses, Dark Horses and Machines at Speed

EDITED BY DAIN GINGERELLI

Storming The Hill

Motorcycling's own Rough Riders.



PHOTOGRAPHY © 1982 RICH CHENET

Abiding by the hillclimbing rule: one hand on the bar

Crossing the finish line the hard way.

Finding the action on a hillside jump

Kicking up the dust with that good ol' mountain dew.

• It happens quickly, almost viciously. A single bike is staged on the start pad at the bottom of the hill, ready for a timed run to the crest. The rider revs the engine to the red zone, waiting for the starter to drop the flag. When he receives the go-signal, he dumps the clutch. The bike's rear tire, wrapped in case-hardened chain, spins in the dirt, fiercely throwing lumps of earth rearward.

The tire hooks up suddenly, catapulting bike and rider in the general direction of the top of the hill. With luck, both tires will maintain their contact with the slope during the



Wheel-standing up a jump

When the nitro excites the chain.

ride up. As John Williams, five-time professional AMA National 500cc hillclimb champion puts it, "It's like being shot from a cannon when that rear tire hooks up."

The ride—if successful—ends seconds later. There's not much time for mistakes in hillclimbing, for like dragracing, it's a race against the clock. But there's another element involved in hillclimbing that's not as prevalent in most other forms of motorcycle competition: gravity. Since the entire run is uphill, it takes a lot of horsepower to make a quick climb. Hillclimbing, in its purest form, is

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Danny Halcomb and his Triumph crest the hilltop finish line in style

And from there, it's nothing but downhill all the way home.

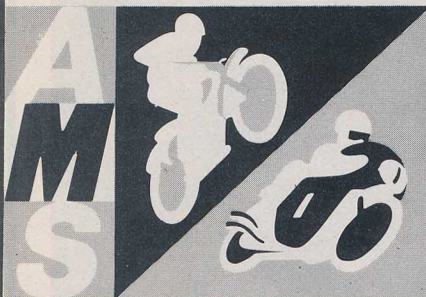
a showdown between gravity and horsepower.

Oddly, hillclimbing isn't considered one of the big-league sports of American motorcycle racing. It shares all the drama and technical requirements of other forms of competition, but with only regional popularity in the northeastern states, hillclimbing hasn't matured as have motocross and flattracking. Ironically, though, during the Twenties and Thirties, hillclimbing was on a par with flat-track racing as America's favorite motorcycle sport. But as flattracking continued to grow in popularity, eventually attracting the attention of the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company—now the primary sponsor of the AMA Grand National tour—hillclimbing remained secluded in the northeast section of America, where it is still considered Big Time.

What has evolved is the Pro Hillclimb Series: eight to 10 National events a year to determine champions in two classes, 500cc and 750cc. Each racer at a National makes two attempts on the hill during a meet. The rider with the quickest first-round time sits out the second heat, riding the bubble until either his time is bettered, or all bikes have run. The winner gets 15 points, while second place takes home 14, and so on down to one point for 15th place.

The bikes used are as brutal as the sport itself. Basically there are only two technical rules for hillclimb bikes. First, they must meet class displacement limits of either 500cc or 750cc. Second, the engines cannot use "true" fuel injection. As stated in the pro-hillclimber's rule book, "true" fuel injection

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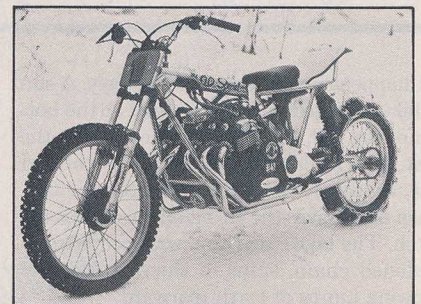
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STP Six-Pac to Go

• Hillclimbers are nonconformists. Just look at their machinery and you quickly understand that. But while many climbers base their bikes on twin-cylinder BSA or Triumph engines, Canadian John Williams prefers to use multi-cylinder powerplants. And with good results: For several years his Honda 500 four was King-of-the-Hill in the 500cc class. This year he hopes to be top man in the 750cc class—with a Benelli 750 Six.

Williams' new STP Special Six should squeeze out more than 300 horsepower, he predicts, using six Hilborn injector nozzles along with Norris cams and a gaggle of Yoshimura speed parts. Williams claims the engine will rev past 13,000 rpm and easily should top 100 miles per hour on a climb. The fuel? Why, the hillclimber's favorite: 100-proof nitro.

The 43-year-old Williams eagerly looks forward to conquering the hill with his 80-inch-wheelbased Benelli, and anticipates winning the 750cc championship—or fly trying.
—Dain Gingerelli



Williams STP Special

A dragbike with an inclination.



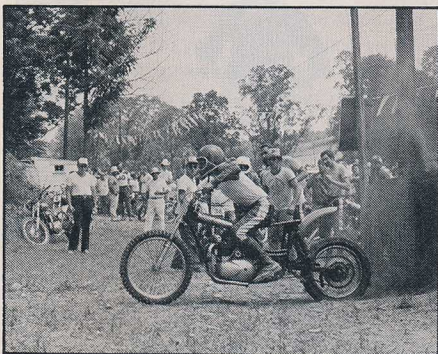
Side-valve Harleys find new life

By any other name, they're antiques.

constitutes squirting the fuel directly into the cylinder. However, fuel injection sprayed through an intake manifold is legal, so many bikes use gear-driven Hilborn injection systems.

The remainder of the motorcycle's design is open to the builder. Consequently, some interesting machinery shows up at an AMA hill-climb. Wheelbases tend to stretch more than six feet long, posing the common problem: where to position the engine? Too far forward and there isn't adequate drive-wheel traction; too close to the rear lets the front end get airborne, which, obviously, can lead to disastrous results on the ride to the top. One feature is almost standard, though: Practically all hill-climbers have the rear tire wrapped with chain for optimum traction.

And all pro hillclimbers share the same greed for horsepower. While engine performance tricks are as varied as promises at a political convention, just about all the top racers can agree on one thing: They all burn nitro fuel. The volatile mixture stirs up enough boom in those Triumph, BSA and Honda cylinders to propel these rocketman bikes to speeds of 80 to 100 miles per hour. And considering that this happens on dirt, uphill,



A rider prepares for hook-up

Like being shot from a cannon.

Continued



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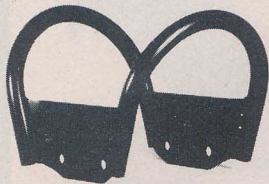
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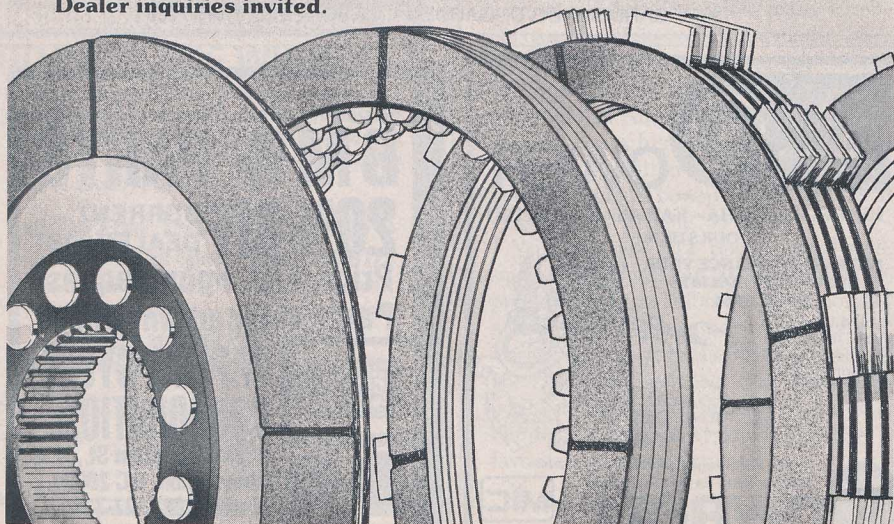
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Long-time hillclimber Earl Bowlby

Hoping more pros will follow.

and in less than 10 seconds, it's awesome, indeed.

The race is more than just a smooth climb up a slope, too. Most sanctioning clubs do a little hill "grooming," just to make things interesting. The favorite obstacle is a jump dug into the hillside, giving the ride a little "action," as former 750cc champ Earl Bowlby puts it. Williams says of the four-jump hill in Allentown, Pennsylvania: "After one jump you don't hit the ground for 40 feet." And at 80 miles per hour, a rider had better know which direction is *up* when he lands. Not surprisingly, this kind of riding calls for body English the likes of which even Kenny Roberts couldn't understand. "You *ride* these things," says Williams, "rather than just sit on the bike like a bump on a log."

The ride includes some interesting scenery, too. It's mostly dirt, but, "There's no horizon to deal with when climbing," states Williams. "It's like riding on a streetbike and just looking down at the pavement."

To score points, the rider must cross the finish line at the summit in control of his bike.



John Williams gets airborne

Finding action in the jumps.



Chain-encased rear tire

The key to a successful climb.

The official rule book describes "in control" as having one or both hands on the handlebar. It doesn't state how firmly they have to be holding on, either.

If hillclimbing sounds a little wild, well, that's because it is. There's a bit of motocross in it, plenty of fancy body-to-bike control, and enough off-the-line acceleration to rip King Kong's arms off when that hundred-proof nitro explodes. It's a sport that will take any rider to the top—if he's prepared to pay the price.

—Dain Gingerelli

Wanted: Pro Hillclimbers

• There are only 40 or so members in the Pro Hillclimbers Association. That's the extent of professional hillclimbing in America. These men are the elite of hillclimbing, but if nothing is done to bolster the ranks, they also are a breed doomed to extinction.

Bill Amick of the AMA, a fan of the sport as well as its overseer, confesses, "There just is no feeder system between the amateurs and pros." The AMA has an amateur program, but it is far less intense than the pro racing, and it doesn't provide a real link to the pro ranks.

What's needed is a transition class from amateur to pro. Earl Bowlby, a pro hillclimber since 1966, reflects the views of several future-conscious pros: "We need a novice or beginner class for the amateurs wanting to turn pro. The 500 class would be good. A first-year rider could race in it for a year to get a taste of what pro racing is all about."

A transition class, open to first-year pros only, as Bowlby suggests, would serve to get the new riders' feet wet, allowing them a place to compete without intimidation from the more experienced riders. Until that happens, hillclimbing always will be looking up to other forms of pro racing—or become extinct when this batch of riders wears out.

—Dain Gingerelli

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