

**Great Getaways: 27-Page Touring Section**  
**Five Full Tests: Suzuki GS 750, SWM 250GS,**  
**Kawasaki KZ1300, Honda XR185 and XL185**

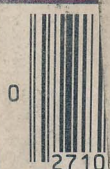
# **CYCLE WORLD**

APRIL 1979

**\$1.00** UK 60p

America's  
Leading  
Motorcycle  
Enthusiasts'  
Publication

**Kawasaki's 1300 Six**  
**Bigger Means Better**  
**For Touring Riders**



0  
2710  
6  
L 9488 HANDBEVL - B JUL 81



# CYCLE WORLD

**Allan Girdler**  
Editor

**John Ulrich**  
Executive Editor  
**Steve Kimball**  
Managing Editor

**Ron Griewe**  
Test Editor

**Henry N. Manney III**  
Editor at Large

**Jean Crabb**  
Editorial Secretary

**Paul W. Zeek**  
Art Director

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Steve Bauer**  
**Bill Neale**  
**B. R. Nicholls**  
**Carlo Perelli**  
**Doug Roy**

## EXECUTIVE STAFF

**Richard A. Bartkus**  
Publisher

**Robert J. Krefting**  
Group Publisher

**Brian Van Mols**  
Associate Publisher  
& Advertising Director

**Francis Pandolfi**  
General Manager

**Richard W. Adamson**  
Business Manager

**Leon Rosenfield**  
Circulation Marketing Director

**James P. Hamilton**  
Western Manager  
Advertising Marketing Services

**Lou Johnson**  
Production Director

## ADVERTISING

**Jim Hansen**  
Western Advertising Manager

**Jim Frahm**  
Western Advertising Manager  
1499 Monrovia Avenue  
Newport Beach, California 92663  
Telephone 714-646-4451  
Teletype 910-596-1366

**Dottie Silin**  
Advertising Coordinator

**Dick Barron**  
Midwestern Advertising Manager  
100 Renaissance Center, Suite 1465  
Detroit, Michigan 48243  
Telephone 313-259-8008

**Joe McNeill**  
Chicago Advertising Manager  
333 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1330  
Chicago, Illinois 60601  
Telephone 312-280-0341

**Dennis Murphy**  
Eastern Advertising Manager  
1515 Broadway, Fifth floor  
New York, New York 10036  
Telephone 212-975-7405  
Telex 125604

## CYCLE WORLD TESTS

- 35 KAWASAKI KZ1300/*Enormous Bulk and Steamroller Power Combined Into A New Kind of Motorcycle: The Luxury Superbike.*  
46 SWM 250GS/*A Serious ISDT Bike From Italy.*  
54 SUZUKI GS750EN/*The Competition Has Had Three Years to Catch Up, But the GS Is Still the Best 750.*  
62 HONDA XR/XL185/*Two Lightweight Four-Strokes That Would Be Good Bikes Even If They Weren't Four-Strokes.*

## TOURING FEATURE

- 107 THE FRENCH QUARTER CONNECTION/*A Sense of Adventure, a Honda 400 and a Search for Cheap Chicory Coffee.*  
118 TAKING IT WITH YOU/*Motorcycle Camping Techniques for Touring Riders.*  
128 EVALUATION: CRAVEN CLASSIC SADDLEBAGS.  
132 EVALUATION: SILHOUETTE FAIRING.  
138 PROTECTING YOUR REAR/*Assorted Cushions to Keep Derrieres From Facing the Harsh Realities of Travel.*  
149 EVALUATION: VETTER ACCESSORIES /*Windjammer Fairing; Vetter Saddlebags.*  
165 EVALUATION: TAKE ALONG CYCLE COVER.

## TECHNICAL

- 73 BEYOND TELEDRAULICS/*When (and If) Telescopic Forks Reach the End of Their, er, Travel, What Comes Next? The Solutions May Be Waiting For the Problem.*

## FEATURES

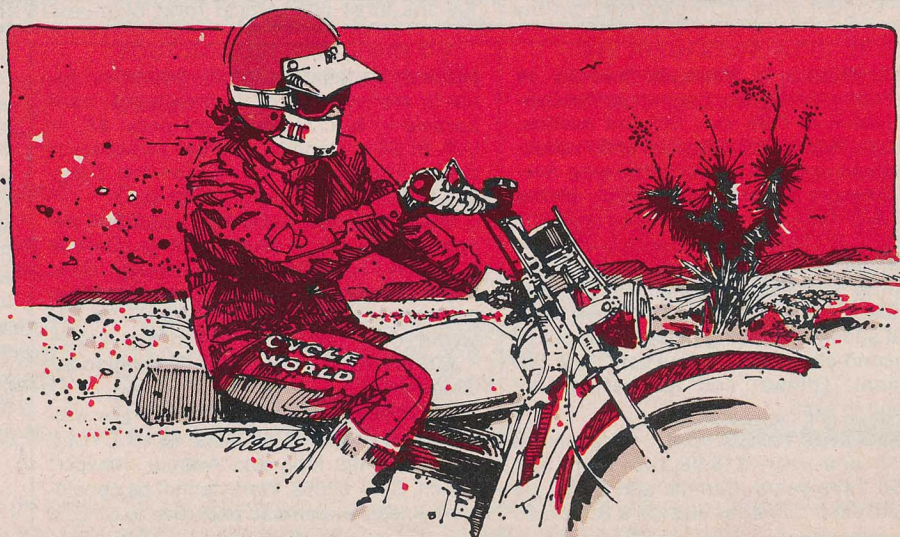
- 83 THE PROFESSIONAL/*Kenny Roberts Is Cool, Analytical, Confident, Friendly, and a Mean Bastard . . . A Real World Champion.*  
92 YAMAHA IT250/400 LONG RANGE TEST/*One Year With Two Unbreakable ITs.*  
160 BETTER RIDING THROUGH CHEMISTRY/*A Collection of Chemicals Our Motorcycles Know and Love.*

## DEPARTMENTS

- 4 Up Front 8 Letters 23 Book News  
31 Roundup 173 Race Watch  
174 Service 193 New Ideas

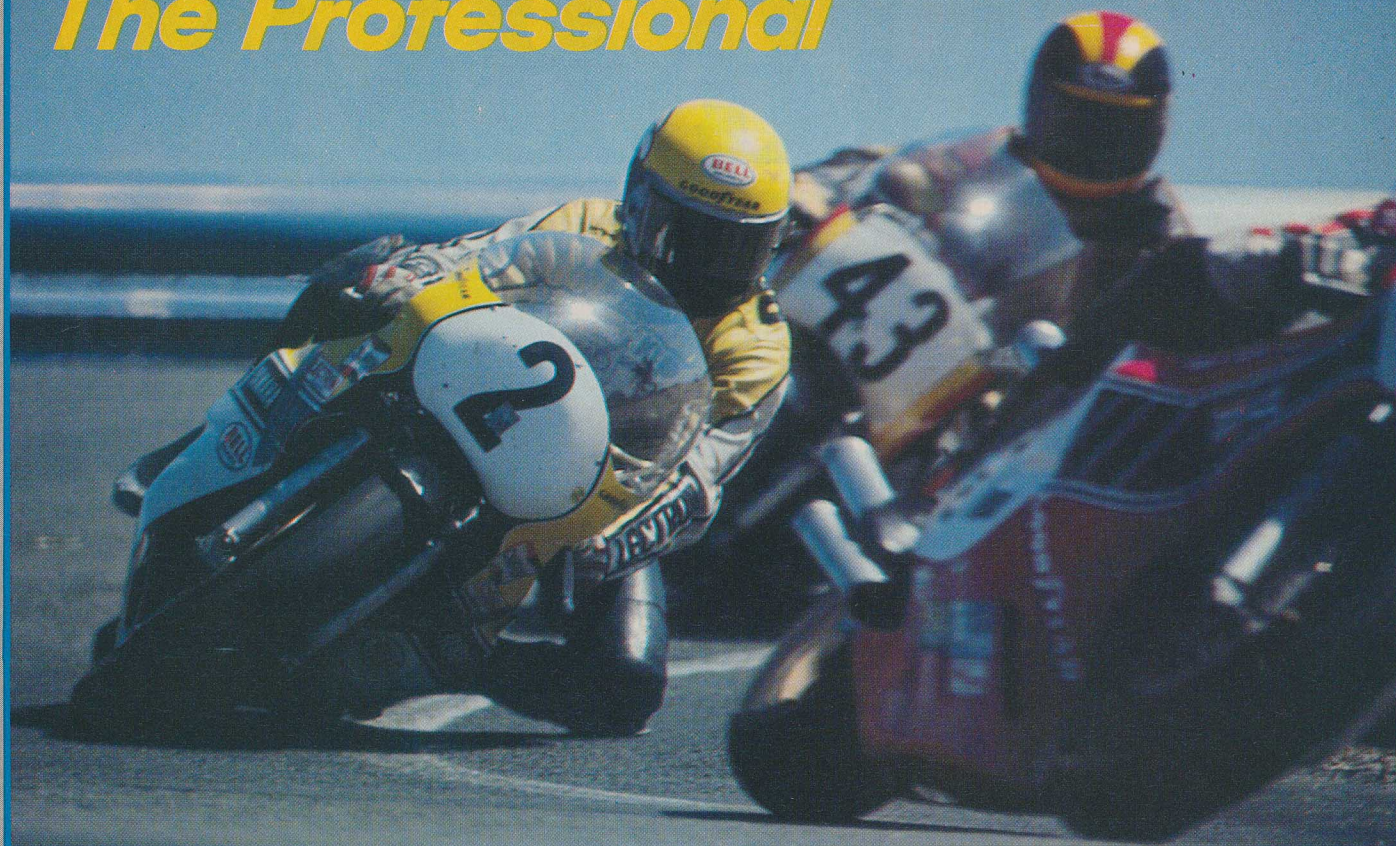
## COVER

KAWASAKI KZ1300 DRESSED FOR THE OPEN ROAD/*photographed by Mark Katayama*





# The Professional



by Barry Coleman

**B**ecoming the world champion was an episode in the life of Kenny Roberts. It was no ambition of his to joust with the Europeans, to gird himself about and vanquish their champion on their turf. He isn't a romantic man. He went because Harleys bite better on dirt than the best-prepared Yamahas and he was wasting his time chasing round behind them. But notice the hidden assumption. It wasn't Roberts who couldn't beat the Americans; it was Yamaha who couldn't beat the Harleys. No one questioned it. Roberts felt the same way about the Europeans. There wasn't one of them he hadn't beaten. He felt, as a fundamental of policy, that he would beat them again. The variables would be provided by Europe itself and Yamaha's ability to build a 500cc road racer.

Forced as it was, there was nothing hasty about Roberts's departure for Europe, but it did bear all the marks of a bad decision. Not for Roberts, because he had nothing to lose in Europe and nothing to win in America, but for Yamaha. Japanese motorcycle manufacturers tend to have a touching, blinding faith in the machinery they build to win world championships. Yamaha probably thought it was okay to send Roberts to Europe because they believed in their new YZR, and thought that

he would be able to ride it; and if not, there was always Johnny Cecotto. It was a bad decision, and how bad was underlined by the fact that the factory made only one YZR available to Roberts through Yamaha International. Two is the sensible minimum, even for an outfit as lean as that of Roberts and Carruthers.

Yamaha has been racing long enough to know the basics. A world championship contender needs two bikes for two equally good reasons. First, because damage inflicted at a critical moment during practice may mean sitting out a race and throwing away a championship; second, because invaluable practice sessions are frittered away while the rider waits for wheel changes, suspension settings, carburetion adjustments, and all the other exertions of finesse that get a bike across the line first. But Roberts only had one bike. Perhaps the factory didn't expect it to matter, since they saw, with their customary mathematical clarity, what the odds were. At any rate, their attitude seemed to suggest that they had given very little thought to the question of what they were asking of Kenny Roberts, whether it was reasonable, or even decent.

At the beginning of 1978, a lot of people should have considered Kenny Roberts a lot more carefully than apparently they

did. No one seriously doubted his ability, though many did doubt its usefulness in Europe, first time out. And it is undoubtedly true that Roberts's ability alone would not have won him the world championship. What did win it for him was character. His, that of his opponents, and that of European road racing.

In many ways, Kenny Roberts makes a very poor hero. His ability is close to miraculous, and his achievement in winning the world championship made him not only the most accomplished motorcyclist ever, but one of the world's truly outstanding sportsmen. But people have ridden slower, achieved less, and seemed more marvelous. Some great performers make poor heroes because they have minor personalities, because they are at a loss to explain themselves. Kenny Roberts, on the other hand has a big league personality and he never ceases to describe and explain, and he does it with a seasoned flair for the nicely-timed, nicely-turned expression. Some performers are poor heroes because they are cool, obsessed, aloof. That's not Roberts. He's warm, easy, communicative.

Roberts is a poor hero because heroism is no part of his business. He de-mystifies riding a motorcycle fast in order to ride it faster. He avoids festooning himself with >

**Kenny Roberts Is Cool, Analytical, Confident, Friendly, and a Mean Bastard . . . A Real World Champion**



myth and sporting fancy because, in every sense, he needs to see where he's going. His business is very concrete. He needs to know all he can about his surroundings and how they relate to him. Whether, for example, he is faster, his bike is faster, or his tires grip better; or which combination of all three. His business is very concrete indeed. Not only does he stand to lose if his judgment starts to mist up; he stands to get hurt. For all these reasons, Kenny Roberts's view of himself is sharp, simple, clear. The realities of American racing, good advice, timely experience and his own common sense made him that way. In Europe, meanwhile, things had taken a different turn.

In Europe, when Roberts arrived, personality, rather than character, and rather even than ability, dominated road racing. There was a seedy corruption, a kind of overblown pomposity about it that produced both illusions and fatal weaknesses. Roberts didn't directly concern himself with that. He just rode his motorcycle. He rode it faster, rode it better, and knew what he was doing. Only Pat Hennen was able to match the clarity of his approach and between them they dominated the early part of the season. Ability apart, Roberts won in Europe for two reasons. First because his character was far better adapted to his work than that of his opponents; second, because Europe attempted to see him in its own terms, fed him through its personality process and came up not merely with a blank, but with a distortion. Life was in fact easier for Roberts because he was so thoroughly misunderstood.

Europe is a wonderful place for making up stories; there's a rich tradition. For example, a few years ago, a British journalist with a sense of humor penned a good-natured satire and illustrated it with droll cartoons. One day, the story ran, an Australian sheep farmer was out in the bush when, sitting in the middle of nowhere, he came upon a small, sandy-haired child. Upon inquiry, it turned out that the child had come from space. Furthermore, he possessed the traditional powers: he could do anything. This, of course, gave the farmer much food for thought. What could he best do with the cosmic prodigy? He took him home and began to think it over. Finally, after deep pondering, he decided. The farmer had always had a feeling that motorcycle racing would be a lot of fun, so why not set the kid at that? Australia, however, was hardly the place for it. So off they went to where the action was: to California. As the kid grew, he became really, really good, as you'd expect. He won a lot of races. And he had a nice name. What the farmer called him was Lenny Robot.

Last year, in Amsterdam, a small, blond-haired boy rode a bicycle round the corner of a building, and standing on his pedals as he straightened up, accelerated down a brief concrete strip. He went for a left between two motorhomes, missed the turn,

crossed up the bicycle, and slammed sideways into the rear of the second vehicle. The bicycle fell on top of him. Briefly, he considered his position; he picked up the bicycle and rode it away.

Kenny Roberts explains himself in terms of his small, tough son. "I was like that," he says. "Just like that. As a matter of fact, I was a mean bastard. Really mean. That's all there is to it."

Europe was expecting something of the sort, Britain in particular. When Kenny Roberts first appeared there, with the Transatlantic Trophy match race team in 1974, he won three races, came second in the other three, and set new lap records on all three circuits. To do that, you have to be some kind of bastard. At the time, Roberts was the AMA Number One, a dirt track racer. It became known that he had ridden in fewer than 30 road races, and that made it serious. What it meant was that certainly reputations, and probably institutions, could be kicked into the guardrail by some little sod who wasn't even a proper road racer. The British were impressed by Kenny Roberts but they didn't take kindly to what he implied. And right away, they began to make up stories.

America prepared Roberts for Europe, just as it prepared him for two AMA titles, but not, as the Europeans were to believe, because in some peculiar American way it had made him mean. All sorts of people are mean. Asked, Roberts describes himself as "normal," and he says he always has been.

---

### **Life was in fact easier for Roberts because he was so thoroughly misunderstood.**

---

As a kid he was a normal cowboy, he wore a cowboy hat and sometimes rode his horse to school though mainly he rode a normal bicycle like everyone else. He was small though, and because he was a cowboy, it seemed that he would become a jockey. Evenings and weekends he helped a farmer train Tennessee walking horses, schooldays he fought, didn't learn much, slid rulers up the girls' butts and did all the normal kind of stuff. He says he was a ruffian. When he got involved with motorcycles, of which he was initially afraid, he used them to conduct water skiing sessions by towing the victims along the canal; and then he began racing them, two years before leaving the school he was supposed to have been going to. Just the normal stuff.

Kenny Roberts had a hard upbringing. Of course he describes it as normal, and so it was in the sense that he understood it perfectly and it did nothing but make him tough and straightforward. There were some plain ethics and plain remedies in the Roberts household. Kenny, for example, fought with his older brother and his mother grew tired of it. "She would send us

out in the yard with straps and make us fight," he recalled, as well he might. "And then, when we had finished, she would strap both of us." You don't do what Kenny Roberts does without having some forceful influences behind you. When he gets out on the track with a view to riding faster than anyone else and the pace gets to the point where he starts to slide his tires through the fast bends and begins to race on what he calls the "aggressive" line, he is every inch a mean bastard. And back in his motorhome, he is, as he says, ordinary. Sort of.

When Kenny appeared in 1974, the European press gave very little thought to the critical question of what kind of man he was. But, in Britain in particular, they quickly formed an impression that had a lot to do with convenient American stereotypes and nothing to do with the real American traditions of which Roberts was a part. To his ultimate advantage, he was entirely misunderstood. The question of character not only decided the 500cc world championship that Kenny Roberts won in 1978; to some extent it decided it in advance. What Roberts had been in 1974 and what he had become in 1978 were marvelously unrelated to what most Europeans, from press to public to leading competitors, had constructed during those long winter evenings. Lenny Robot was the least of their misapprehensions. They could probably have dealt much better with a robot than with what actually turned up with Farmer Carruthers at the start of the season.

The impact of Roberts on Europe, and of Europe on Roberts, can only be seen against the background of what was there when he arrived. It wasn't just a question of the quality of the racing. For years, mythology of all kinds, a lot of unclear thinking, and a lot of unstraight talking had confused not only the issues but the participants. An uncritical press had made it worse. There was, to take what turned out to be a supremely relevant example, the question of Barry Sheene's starting. Sheene, in winning two consecutive world championships, had consistently asserted that his factory machines were little or no different from those of the privateers. He had made a lot of mediocre starts over the last couple of years, and in coming steadily through the field in race after race had somehow impressed upon Europe the superiority of his skills and the ordinariness of his bikes as being part and parcel of the same thing.

Roberts, from another theater of racing, was not like the Europeans. But what set him apart was not his accent; it was simply, and decisively, that he saw them much more clearly than they saw him. He knew, for example, that factories do not send senior riders after world championships on ordinary bikes; and he knew that riders going for world championships on ordinary bikes, should they start badly, which they try most earnestly to avoid, do not >





catch up. He also knew who could, and who could not, start a motorcycle. In short, he knew, though he said nothing, that Europe was suffering from bullshit. When Sheene had to race against Roberts, he started like lightning.

The second coming of Roberts was worse, from the public relations point of view, than the first. The European press had decided in the first place what kind of man he was and the flying drubbings he dished out annually had done nothing to change their mind: he was a cool, secretive man who messed things up for deserving Europeans. It went back to his first appearance, when Roberts had said modest and reasonable things about his riding to which the murderous efficiency of his performances had apparently given the lie. Roberts seemed to be hiding something, if it was only a still greater excess of natural ability. He was too brash, too confident, arrogant maybe, yes, arrogant, and probably (all being well) he was a flash in the pan. In 1978, it was much the same, not only because of what they saw as his personality but because Europe believes a lot of sanctimonious things about what you have to do, be, and say, to count yourself among the greats of road racing, and Roberts was a dirt tracker.

There was barely suppressed panic among those who had most to lose, most clearly expressed by Barry Sheene. Sheene's column in *Motor Cycle News* was his platform and he began to explain Roberts to Europe in familiar terms. Well, said Sheene, Kenny is really quite a good rider, but he isn't a threat. You see, Kenny's problem is that he doesn't know the circuits, he doesn't know the ropes (the holy mysteries) of the grands prix, he won't like the travel, the changes of food, the changes of currency, the changes of language, and

he will find the competition much hotter than he did when he popped over for the occasional 750 race. Maybe in a couple of years, when he has served his apprenticeship, he will be more of a problem. But right now, the pressure is all on him. After all, look what happened to Steve Baker.

More generally, there was a mild social apprehension about how Roberts would fit into the cosmopolitan but relatively cozy grand prix paddock community. Steve Baker had certainly assimilated nicely, pleasant and unobtrusive, but Roberts, it had occurred to some people, was not the same sort of man as Baker. Broadly speaking, Roberts was expected to be aloof, isolated, insanely dedicated and as hostile after hours as he would no doubt be on the track.

There were all sorts of other questions. Would the new works Yamahas be faster than the 1977 models that had sunk Baker and would they be as fast as the new Suzukis? If they were, would Roberts be able to ride them hard enough? Would Cecotto ride faster? Would Pat Hennen give Roberts more trouble than Sheene? Was Roberts crazy to ride in three classes? They were the kind of questions to which road racing gives short and simple answers. The season began.

The first few races were relatively reassuring. Roberts won at Daytona, which was all right because Daytona was in America, wasn't even part of the world 750 series and he was supposed to have won it years ago. Even Venezuela wasn't too bad. It was a grand prix, but it wasn't in Europe and it was a strange, indeed a stupid place to hold such a race. True, Roberts won the 250 race and held world championship points and true his 500 fried after a couple of laps but Sheene won the big race and everything was in order. The match races

came and went, and Imola, and Paul Ricard, and they too were fairly comforting. Pat Hennen and Johnny Cecotto kept Roberts in line. See? You can't just come over to Europe and start throwing your weight about. Maybe it wouldn't be so bad after all.

The fatal misapprehension of Kenny Roberts was fully blown at the match races. Pat Hennen scored more points and there was considerable excitement over Roberts' evident vulnerability. The strain, it seemed, as predicted by Sheene, was telling. Interest in what Roberts had to say was characteristically minimal. He would, no doubt, have been misunderstood in any case, but what he said pointed all too clearly to what he was about to do. "Could you have beaten Pat?" he was asked after the second race at Mallory. "No," he replied.

"Why not?"

"Because he was going too fast."

Kenny Roberts walks across the paddock with his arms hitched up a little at the armpits and swinging mildly in time to the walk as if his leathers were a touch too tight. He's always walked like that, ever since he was a cowboy. It's true, it looks a little like a gunfighter's walk, but faster, more cheerful. People have various ways of approaching their motorcycles. Some of the Italians slope moodily over; Sheene's is an intense, slightly hurried affair. Roberts, like Agostini (though much less beautifully), lends to his arrival a sense of occasion: he looks as if he's going to win. For the spectator, it's good value. If, on the other hand, you have something Roberts wants, like the world championship, it can't be very reassuring to walk behind him as he makes his way to the grid. Worse, maybe, because he smiles amiably all the way to his bike.

When Kenny arrives for one of the social functions spawned by racing, he usually wears the uniform provided by his sponsor. His hair is tidy, he looks neat, and he stands politely about waiting to fall into conversation with someone. He has an amused, slightly unreliable look in his blue eyes (as if only he is aware that the main speaker's suspenders are sawn half-through but everyone will know it when his pants fall down) until he begins to talk about racing. Kenny Roberts can get pretty loud. His voice, in any case, like his appearance, has a firm, if not sharp edge, and when the time comes to raise it, he raises it. But when he begins to talk about his racing, his work, his voice softens, and his eyes harden, just a shade. He will concentrate, and talk, for hours, and what he says is often very vivid, and very complex.

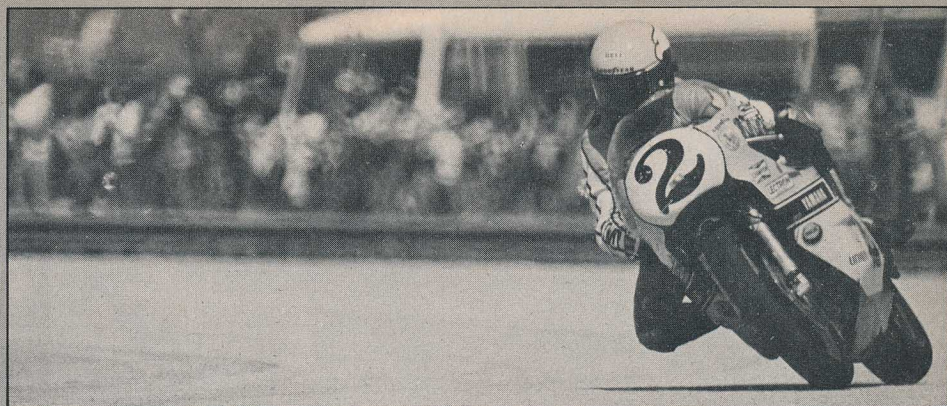
When he rides his motorcycle, when he does his work, it seems that the process intensifies. Photographs show his eyes, narrowed, expressing nothing. Eyes are for seeing, and used to the limits of their purpose, carry no messages. And there are presumably no voices inside the Roberts helmet; just fast and silent calculation.

*continued on page 167*



continued from page 88

he Spanish Grand Prix, at Jarama, near Madrid, in April, was the first European round and Roberts began at once to do what he had come to do. He led the 500cc race in Spain until his throttles began to stick, and in the end he came second. He led the 250cc race until his tires began to ball up and in the end he came second in that too. The results in Spain were certainly interesting, both because Roberts had found that his YZR Yamaha was as fast as the works Suzukis of Sheene and Hennen and because he had found that he could ride it fast very much sooner than he had expected to. He already knew how to ride the 750s and 250s. The 500s were another matter. Of course, he could get on it and ride it fast; he knew that. But world championships are won in a narrow realm well beyond what we would think of as fast. Roberts had to find out, above all else, how much throttle would produce how much drift in a variety of situations. After Jarama, with its violently quick succession of bends, give or take a little, he knew. He was surprised, and encouraged. Spain emphasized that technology, not ability, was going to be his problem. And character, the element that decided the title, was going to be a problem for the



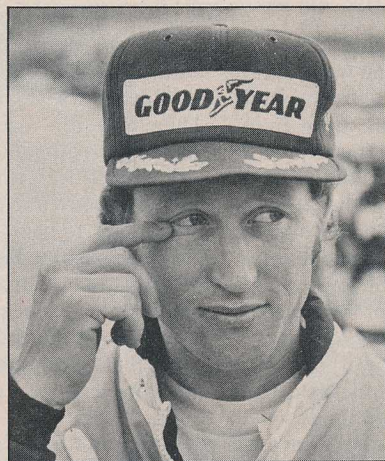
others.

Something significant happened before Kenny Roberts took part in his first European grand prix: he was refused an entry. There are a number of possible explanations for what at first sight appears to be an outburst of conventional and entirely characteristic stupidity. It may be (though you will doubt it) that the organizers had never heard of Kenny Roberts. (They said that whoever he was, he had no world championship points from the previous year and wasn't entitled to ride.) More likely is that they knew perfectly well who he was, that they didn't like the sound of him, and that they wanted to assert their authority over him, to put him down,

before it was too late. That is the sort of thing that happens to European riders all the time. It tends to make them, slightly but markedly, nervous and abject. In that frame of mind, two things happen to them. First, they don't ride as well as they should. Second, they are the usually silent, mostly willing victims of one of the most appalling sporting scandals of all time.

Kenny Roberts hadn't been in Europe long before he realized in full what confronted grand prix riders. Because they need points, they ride in the FIM's races. The races attract anything up to 130,000 spectators, who will pay say \$12 each. The riders are usually paid the FIM minimum. Several times last year Kenny Roberts rode >

# Roberts on Roberts



**O**n why he went to Europe last year, and what it took for him to go this year:

"There was some confusion last year on why I was going and who was doing what. I went last year because they said I couldn't do it. The Japanese at Yamaha knew I was good, although they wouldn't commit to a full racing program. They just sort of said, 'Well, you ride for America and we'll see how you do.' Obviously I had to prove that I could ride a road racer with Barry Sheene and the rest of those who were dominating it at the time. I had to do that to make the sort of money that you have to make when you're Number One. I couldn't demand that much last year because nobody knew I was going to be Number One. So I had to go over there and show everyone that I could ride a road racer. Now I don't have to

do that. I already proved that I can do it. Now I'm gonna get paid what Number One should be paid. I think that to go and compete for a world championship a guy should be able to make half a million dollars without a whole lot of trouble, and more if he does good. It's worth that for the risk and everything else.

"I don't really know how much money I made last year yet. About \$400,000 I would imagine, somewhere around that. I figure Number One should be paid a lot higher than everyone else. You always want more, but I'm sort of satisfied with the money I'm getting (for 1979). I wouldn't be doing it if I wasn't."

**O**n points of disagreement with Yamaha—besides money—that had to be resolved before signing the contract:

"Last year we competed against Yamaha. We were a factory effort but we were competing against the Japanese factory effort. We had no team orders when we really needed them. I wanted to make it clear who was the main effort so if we came into a spot like we did last year I could have some help from Yamaha and not have to race against them."

**O**n what will be different about 1979: "We're gonna drop the Formula 750, and there won't be any 250. I'll be able to be a little more relaxed. I know most of the circuits now. I know what it takes to get there. I know what it takes after I'm there. I'll have a little more time. Last year I raced every weekend after Daytona until a month after Laguna Seca and that's probably more races than I've ever done in a >



for \$200 and very rarely did he ride in a grand prix for much more. "I hate this," he said at once. "But it isn't so bad for me, because I'm being paid by Yamaha. But what about the privateers? It's disgusting. These organizers are bastards."

Roberts hadn't declared himself at the time of the Spanish rebuff, but the collective unconscious instinct of Spain, of Europe, was right. By the end of the season he was talking lawyers, and the European riders had begun to look to him for encouragement, if not leadership. He is a very straightforward man. He did not react to the refusal of his entry by the Spanish organizers as a European might. He went out on their track and set a new lap record on it; four months later, he had won their world championship.

Spain saw Kenny take to the social life of the paddock. Socially, there are two kinds of riders, the ones who live in the paddock in trailers, and those who live in fancy hotels and commute to the paddock in fancy cars. Roberts, with his rather grand motorhome, which he drove all over Europe ("It wasn't far," he would say of a 2000 mi., six-country journey) was a paddock-dweller. One of the lads, just the normal stuff. While his team worked on his machinery, Roberts was off to meet his workmates.



They didn't know what to make of it. Europe knew that Kenny Roberts was a cool, spikey operator. The little guy from the fancy motorhome, on the other hand, had an easy, friendly manner and a sur-

**What set him apart was not his accent; it was simply, and decisively, that he saw them much more clearly than they saw him.**

season. It was a little bit tiring although everywhere I went was new and wasn't very far to drive. And I had the wife and kids there so it wasn't like I was away from home for seven months. But this year just doing the 500cc races, I'll be able to have five or six weeks off during the season, which helps to mentally prepare yourself for the best effort at each GP. Last year I'd finish a 500 GP and Barry Sheene would take off and not race for two or three weeks while I'd be out running three 750 races.

"It is really difficult to put out 100 percent each race when you have to run three classes. I did it because that's what we set out to do. This year I don't have to do that."

**O**n start money for the World Championship:

"They didn't offer any for me last year, maybe \$200 for a half-ass race in 500 GP racing. This year I have not figured out what I'm gonna get yet. I'm not sure what it is. \$4500, five grand, something like that to start a GP. Or maybe more. I don't know. I know it's not a whole bunch of money. I don't really want to say how much."

**O**n racing in America in 1979:

"I'd like to do a few more American races than I did last year. Hopefully we will come to some agreements to be able to run Sears Point because I have an off date on that one. I'd like to ride a 500 at Sears Point. That's what I'm planning to do if that comes about."

**O**n the competition for the World Championship:

"I'm always worried about getting beat. There're a few people that can go fast given the right stuff. At the end of the year last year Wil Hartog was going good. A consistent guy like Sheene is going to be pretty hard to beat. If Virginio Ferrari gets his stuff to where it runs the whole race as fast as it ran at Nürburgring, he's gonna be tough to beat. Sheene is the most consistent, and I think he's gonna be the most consistent again next year. He's gonna run the same everywhere and get thirds, seconds, maybe win one or two and get fourths and fifths. I'm gonna probably run a little stronger at most of the racetracks and it'll probably end up being just like last year—pretty close to the same at the end. Because you get 15 points for a win, 12 for second, and 10 for third, and there's just not enough break for a winner to make out. If the bike breaks down twice or three times like mine did you're right back to being even with whoever's running fifth and sixth."

**O**n being the best in the world:

"It would be very stupid for me to say that I'm the best rider in the world and then someone comes out and beats me. There are a lot of reasons why you don't win sometimes. If I act like Barry Sheene and say that Barry Sheene is no good and that he can't ride, then the first time he beats me I've got to make an excuse because a month earlier I said that he was no threat at all. It would be very foolish for me

prisingly innocent-looking grin. The initial explanation was simple: he was psyching people out, all this calling across the paddock, asking people how they were doin'. It didn't fool the old hands. They'd seen it all before. Psyching tactics. But everyone? 125 riders; 50 riders; psyching out the whole paddock? Wasn't that overdoing it, even for an American?

The truth soon dawned, and the truth, for some, was awful. Kenny Roberts was just plain friendly. Normal. What it meant was that Roberts, far from being perplexed by his strange new environment, was at his ease in it, enjoying it. Far from feeling the predicted pressure of being away from home, being in foreign countries with all their peculiar little differences, Roberts thought it was fun. By the end of the season he was feeling awkward about not being able to do the ordinary things like golf and tennis at the ordinary times but in the meantime he didn't give a damn about the food, and the travel and the currencies, and all the stuff that was supposed to bring him down. He was, as he said, ordinary. Just an ordinary friendly American in the ordinary American tradition. "The trouble with me," he remarked, on noticing how much time he spent shooting the breeze, "is that I like everyone."

But that wasn't trouble. Composed. >

to say it because I've never met anybody yet that couldn't be beat. I'm gonna get beat. It's just gonna take someone that puts together the right program. But I work harder at beating everyone else at this time then they do about beating me. Last year they didn't seem very worried about me beating them and all I worried about was beating them. They may be worried about me now, but I'm not gonna stop worrying about beating them. I'm not going to say that I'm the best guy in the world and all I have to do is have equal equipment to beat them. I've got to have a lot of things to beat them. I've got to be in shape. I've got to run 100 percent to the last lap and I know this. And I'm gonna get better next year. I know I'm gonna have to work my butt off to get the championship again next year."

**O**n shooting down a helium-filled Michelin balloon with a rifle:

"I shot the Michelin blimp down at Loudon, New Hampshire after I won the race in 1977. It was just a joke. They deserved it. We won the race, and they had a blimp. A little target practice. I was shooting at a bird, and the bird flew in front of the blimp, so something hit it. It was something you do after you win a race. It was the right thing to do at the time."

"I almost ran over a Michelin man in the pits in Europe. Almost run over him once, but found out it was a girl inside and changed my mind. But they're trying very hard. They turned out to be really pretty good people."

—John Ulrich



amiable and at home in a multi-lingual, multi-cultural, multi-everything traveling circus, he was twice as dangerous as the Lenny Robot Europe had been expecting.

While Roberts was settling down, the defending champion was becoming more and more disconcerted. In terms of his ability, Kenny Roberts is not by any means ordinary but he should not have won the 500cc world championship in 1978: Barry Sheene should have won it. Sheene, however, having mis-read Roberts in the first place, compounded his error. Had he said in his column that he would wear Roberts down because Goodyear knew next-to-nothing about racing motorcycles in Europe and nothing at all about what would happen to the best of their tires when Roberts put them on a 500, and had he pointed out that, of all the mind-bogglingly stupid things, Roberts had only one YZR500, he would have been on to something. Something, furthermore, with which Roberts would have been forced to agree. Then, for good measure, he could have added the difficulties of learning a dozen new tracks in a few laps of training apiece. Those were Roberts's real problems, and they almost overcame him.

Roberts didn't have to race directly against Sheene until the Dutch TT in June. Hennen and Cecotto were consistently beating Sheene, and Roberts, in winning in Austria, France and Italy, left him a long way behind. Sheene felt called upon to explain himself, but he didn't favor the terms used by Roberts. It was never a question, according to Sheene, of other people going faster.

Sheene said he was ill, suffering from something nasty he had collected in Vene-

### **Roberts, like Agostini, lends to his arrival a sense of occasion.**

zuela. Paddock skeptics with a medical bent pointed out that two or three hundred other people had been to Venezuela and come home unscathed. The virus may have affected Sheene's temper as well as his stamina (the virus allowed him to come third, but not to win) since he began to be short with journalists, refusing to speak to some and falling out with others who ventured opinions different from his own. He began a long and obviously debilitating campaign against those elements of the media that refused to get in line. His problem lay largely with the non-specialist media. The enthusiast press continued to repeat his point of view without question or comment. The result was that most enthusiasts in Britain and Europe were offered a strong impression of Sheene as a suffering, if not wronged, hero while their impression of Roberts as a clinical hatchetman was undisturbed. Meanwhile, Sheene apparently continued to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, Roberts apart. The Yamahas, he said, were 20 mph faster than his Suzuki; his Michelin tires weren't as good as Roberts's magic Good-

Yamaha racing manager Ken Clark briefs King Kenny on strategy.



years and anyway, he wasn't feeling well. The paddock wits did nothing to calm him down. That's right, they said, Sheene's got a virus. But it doesn't come from Venezuela. It comes from California, and it's carried by Goodyear tires. Far from home as he was, it wasn't Kenny Roberts who was going to pieces.

Roberts was inclined to view all this with detachment. He saw no reason to comment on Sheene's psychological readiness, but he remembered that Barry had written him off at the beginning of the season. "That was a dumb thing to do," he opined. "It's okay saying I'm no good, but if I'm no good and I beat him, what does that make him?" He saw it as a matter of ill-judged tactics, and it had no discernible effect on him. "In Camel-Pro, we just don't have that kind of crap. We go out there on our motorcycles and race them. The winner is the one who comes in first and that's that. And we don't have anything to say about it, except maybe to wish we'd damn well gone faster."

After the Dutch TT Roberts led the 250cc class as well as the 500, and wasn't far behind Cecotto in the 750 running. (The F750 championship was run at different venues, at different times.) It seemed that he might win three world championships at one sitting, his first. After Holland, however, things began to fly apart.

The 250 was the first to go, in Belgium. The start at Francorchamps is downhill into a left-and-right kink followed by a sharp climb. The losing end of the field was halfway up the hill when Roberts finally stopped running and started riding. He looked a bit silly, and it's fair to assume he was angry. At the end of the lap, he pulled in. He handed his bike to Trevor Tilbury, vaulted the pit wall, and strode into the paddock. It's traditional in Europe to remonstrate when mechanical failure costs you a world championship, to look at the bike, to look under, to slice the air with anguished gestures, to be seen, to be agrieved. Roberts didn't give the bike a second glance. Over a cup of tea, he thought about the 500. Emotionally, intel-

lectually, the racer Roberts is very spare, very efficient indeed.

Roberts didn't like most of what he encountered in European racing, and said so. Belgium encapsulated not only what he didn't like, but how he dealt with it. Kenny Roberts doesn't race a motorcycle because racing is death-defying; he races because he is good at it. He wishes very much that it were not inclined to hurt, let alone to kill. Some Europeans, some British in particular, cherish brutal, if not sadistic assumptions about the nature of road racing. To reasoned propositions to improve safety they will eventually say: "Next, you will want the circuit lined with foam rubber." They imply softness, cowardice. Kenny Roberts at this point will say: "Listen. I don't want the circuit lined in foam rubber. I want the circuit lined in cotton wool, and if I could race on a soft rubber surface instead of a hard road, I'd want that too." Though arguing is popular in motorcycle racing, no one has yet called Roberts a coward.

Francorchamps is a circuit made up of public roads and is the fastest in the world, with a lap record of 137.15 mph. Roberts didn't like it; not because of the speed, or even because of the houses, walls, trees, and telegraph poles snuggling so intimately up to the trackside. He didn't like it because of the surface. Roberts rides with his brain rather than his backside, but he needs precise, reliable and predictable feedback from his tires. He likes to slide them, but he likes to know how far they are sliding, and why. A public road surface, dosed as it is with fuel, oil, and rubber, is too well, and too patchily, lubricated. Roberts won't slide his tires on such a

### **The truth soon dawned, and the truth, for some, was awful.**

surface and that puts him back on a traction level with the Europeans, who won't slide them at all.

Belgium had the common background of the grands prix. The facilities were bad, the paddock dangerously small and crowded, the organizers were unhelpful and Roberts, like everyone else, was being ripped off. But he had to race on the track. First, it rained during practice, then both his 500 and his 250 seized, and he only got in a couple of laps on each. (It shows probably better than anything he did all season how good he is that he qualified fifth-fastest, using Cecotto's spare bike.) Then, it rained during the race.

Belgium represented in frightening measure everything that might reasonably have stopped Roberts. Wil Hartog (who became Barry Sheene's teammate after Pat Hennen's crash at the Isle of Man) won in Belgium. Kenny Roberts came second, ahead of Barry Sheene. It was an astonishing performance. Roberts wasn't prepared to follow Hartog through puddles on roads of that kind at 170 mph, so he eased off a

*continued on page 189*



# The Professional

continued from page 170

little, to maybe 166 or so. But he beat Sheene, who was not only the world champion, but the lap record holder. Hartog was on intermediate tires; Roberts was on dry-issue slicks.

Roberts led the 500cc series fairly comfortably from Sheene when he set off for the two Scandinavian rounds, and led it by the skin of his teeth when he came back. The twin evils of a heavy tire-testing schedule and having only one bike, which had menaced the project from the outset, caught Roberts squarely in Sweden and began, finally, to work him over. Riding too fast on a new tire, trying to slide it hard enough to retain a useful impression from one practice session to the next put Roberts in the hospital. Still concussed, he finished seventh in the race while Sheene, shadowed by Hartog, won. Since Hennen's crash, Sheene had become the statistical problem. He and Roberts faced each other on the points table, but they rarely met on the track. They both broke down in Finland, and they arrived in England with three points separating them.

Composure was critical to the two remaining rounds. Roberts narrowly led the championship but Sheene was riding at home. In media terms, he was very much at home. In a radio interview the day before the race he condemned the entire sport, complaining that it was "full of hypocrites," and said that the press would hound him into taking up a career as a Formula One car driver. He said of the race that now he was not expected to win.

**Roberts didn't like most of what he encountered in European racing, and said so.**

the pressure was all on Roberts. Kenny, meanwhile, said nothing except that he was pleased to be back on a real race track and glad to have, at last, a second bike to ease the pressure during practice periods. Silverstone was to produce a special test of self-possession and it was Sheene, at home, and not Roberts, the stranger, who was to fail it.

The British Grand Prix was a mess. Roberts won, after fearsome rain had caused a mid-race tire change. Sheene rode faster after the change to rain tires, but Carruthers changed Roberts's wheels much faster. Sheene was third, behind Steve Manship, a British rider who had chosen to start on intermediate tires and was able to stay out on the track.

Amid confusion, there were disgraceful scenes on the victory rostrum. The presenter was among those who wasn't sure what had happened and chose the middle of the American anthem to ask Sheene for his version. While the Star Spangled Banner played and Roberts, who takes the matter of being his country's representa-



## CYCLE-SOUND

### The Road Never Sounded So Good

Specifically designed for the Vetter Windicator and Windjammer fairings, this Cycle-Sound unit boasts 5-inch air suspension speakers — the largest built-in speakers available for motorcycles.

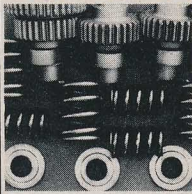
And coupled with its unique dash-mount, waterproof housing, Vetter Cycle-Sound perfectly matches the leading AM/FM stereo, 8-track, cassette or CB units.

Cycle-Sound. Just one of many Vetter accessories designed to make your road-riding experience . . . even better.

See your local dealer, or send \$1 for our new catalog: 1150 Laurel Lane, San Luis Obispo, CA 93401



## HORSEPOWER TO WIN



Cams — Racing Valve Springs Sportster — Honda — Kawasaki Z1 etc.

### RAVESI RACING CAMS

Wyman Road Billerica, Mass. 01821 Tel: 617-663-3733 Send 50c for Catalog

## ROAD RAGERS — CAFE RAGERS

RD350/400, Honda, Kaw, Suz & others

Road Race/Cafe fairings, seats, tanks, pipes, tires, RR boots & gloves, Special tools & hardware, racing brakes and many other hard to find items.



New 1979 Catalog \$1.00

Racers Supply, Dept. CW 6959 Van Nuys Blvd., VN, CA. 91405

## JOIN THE LEADERS IN COLORFUL

# Lewis Leathers

FROM  
**D. LEWIS LTD**

## SUPER COLOR CATALOG

Save money! Top quality motor cycle and high speed clothing with carriage paid dollar prices clearly marked.



D. Lewis, the world's largest mail order motor cycle clothing specialists offer you fine quality at dollar saving prices. Huge stock ensures rapid delivery. Buy direct from the most famous suppliers of them all. Send \$1.00 for your copy of "The Colourful World of Lewis Leathers". A must for all motor cycle sports. 14 day express service on Lewis Leathers CUSTOM MADE racing clothing and motor cycle jackets and jeans. Huge range of exciting colours now available. Top stars and riders all over the world ride in Lewis Leathers.

To: D. LEWIS LTD. (Dept. CW), 120/122 Great Portland Street, London, W1A 2DL, England.  
Please send new catalogue by return. I enclose \$1.00.  
Name .....  
Address .....



# STOP LOOK and BUY!



**STOP** by your nearest dealer and see our complete line of accessories, from sprockets to footpegs. **LOOK** and examine them closely. For years we at CIRCLE INDUSTRIES have maintained a high standard of quality in all we manufacture. Each product is tested under rigid specifications, assuring it's the best available. Now we skin package them showing exactly what you're getting, and marked clearly for easy identification. So next time you're buying motorcycle accessories — seek out our new bright blue and black CIRCLE INDUSTRIES packages. **STOP, LOOK and BUY the BEST!**

Our new '77 catalog with specs' and prices on our sprockets and many other products is now available for \$1. Send for your copy today!



17901 ARENTH AVE./DEPT. CW  
 CITY OF INDUSTRY, CA. 91748  
 PHONE (213) 965-1622

## The Professional

tive seriously, held his trophy aloft. Sheene declared to a striking musical accompaniment that he had been told that Steve Manship or Marco Lucchinelli had won, but that it definitely wasn't Roberts. The anthem was faded out. As Roberts left the rostrum, he said he would be in his motor-home and when they had figured out who had won, he would be grateful if they would let him know.

The crowd, which was robbed of a spectacle both by the weather and by indecisive management, was hostile to Roberts, whom they saw as the culprit rather than as another victim (he took the points, but he had wanted the race stopped). But then, British enthusiasts have been led to believe all manner of things about Kenny Roberts. He didn't care to be booed, but he was unaffected. "No, I don't like it," he said, "But for years I have been an outsider in America. They never liked me racing Yamahas on the dirt against all those Harleys, and they used to boo me once in a while. They used to throw beer cans at me at Louisville. When you've been to Louisville to race against the Harleys, you can take a little booing." It had never occurred to Europe that Kenny Roberts had been an outsider all his professional life, just as it had never registered that he had done more traveling per year in the States than he would do in Europe in two seasons. Roberts's reaction to hostile crowds was again in stark contrast to Sheene's attitude. Sheene, in his public pronouncements, seemed mesmerized by what he called "the knockers." In fact, there was little or

**It had never occurred to Europe that Kenny Roberts had been an outsider all his professional life.**

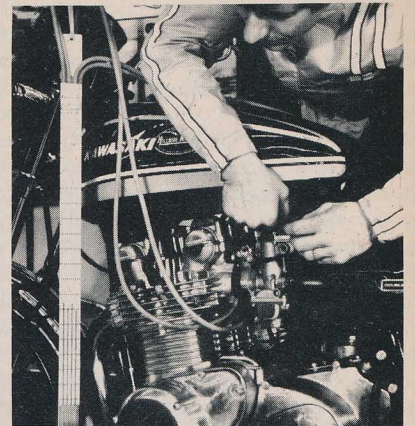
no evidence of his being knocked and crowds everywhere were warmly receptive whenever he rode, win or lose. None of the things that Sheene actually pointed to as the cause of his downfall were substantial. The one solid problem he had was Kenny Roberts, and Kenny Roberts was none of the things Sheene had said he would be.

At the final round, at the Nurburgring, in Germany, two weeks after Silverstone, Roberts still hadn't gone to pieces. He faced learning 14 miles of the world's most infamously dangerous racing circuit and he broke the lap record in unofficial practice and came third in the race by forcing himself to go slowly on an over-jetted bike. Sheene came fourth. Roberts was the world champion. At the presentation that evening, the first people he thanked were the privateers, for putting up with so much to make the racing possible. He wouldn't, he said, be thanking the organizers, because they got enough thanks as it was.

In winning the 500cc world championship, having twice been AMA champion,

## CARBSTIX

MERCURY CARB SYNCHRONIZER



The most accurate and convenient to use carb-synchronizer available.

**1995** (patented) with the adapters supplied the CARB STIX can be used on all of the following:

- Kawasaki—all four strokes
- Honda—all fours and 360, 200 twins
- BMW—all 16's, 17's and S Models
- Yamaha—XS750, 650, 500, 360
- Suzuki—GT-750, 550, 380
- Moto Guzzi—Laverda—Benelli

Satisfaction guaranteed or your money back.  
 SEND CASH, CHECK OR MONEY ORDER TO:  
**PASER INSTRUMENTATION, INC.**  
 4913 W. Avalon Dr., Phoenix, Arizona 85031 D  
 or call 602-272-5444  
 Dealer inquiries invited

**SUPER**  
**Starr**  
**FRAME MOUNT**



COMPLETE \$219.95

- Mounting Bracket
- All Fiberglass
- Windshield
- Running Lights
- Turn Signals
- Pocket Covers w/Pouch
- Pocket Liner
- Lighter
- Black, White, Silver
- Polyurethane Paint
- Decals
- 9-pin Wiring Harness

Optional: Same windshields as below for Lee's Starr, same price

REPLACEMENT WINDSHIELDS FOR WINDJAMMER FAIRINGS®

Standard Size	24.95
Standard Size w/Snap Vents	29.95
Extra Tall Size 2"	27.95
Extra Tall Size w/Snap Vents	34.95
Hand Savers	29.95
Lower Wind & Rain Guards	13.95

**LEE'S**



master charge  
 BANKAMERICARD

P.O. BOX 5882, TUCSON, ARIZONA 85703  
 WRITE OR CALL (602) 294-5875



Kenny Roberts became perhaps the first real world champion. His ability to ride a motorcycle, finally, defies analysis. Roberts, who has an analytical turn of mind as well as a lot of patience, will try to explain it, to describe it, certainly to de-mystify it, every way he knows how. How he balances, how he slides, how he accelerates, how he brakes, how he uses line. In the end, he often tails off, slightly confused. Because in the end, he doesn't quite understand it either. What he says, what he said an hour after he'd won the world title, is that he's just an ordinary rider.

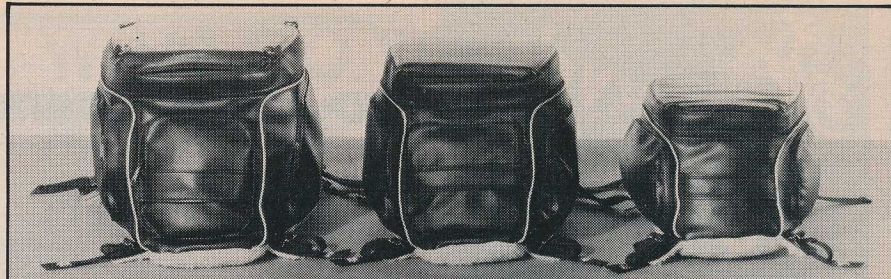
What we know is that he rides a motorcycle faster and harder than anyone else in the world. Further, he knows precisely when and where to do it, and when to ease off. We can measure his ability in terms of the world championship he shouldn't have won. Racing a kind of motorcycle he had never seen before, using tires that were new to him, on tracks he had never seen, with inadequate practice time, with no spare machine and no previous experience of a strange and complicated way of life, he took the title from a man with three factory bikes and almost 10 years' experience of grand prix racing. It was the work, by and large, of a mean bastard.

It was also the work of a man determined to be normal. Being what he calls normal is more for Kenny Roberts than a statement about how he happens to be. It's a professional priority. Since in many ways it isn't true, it's a device, a psychological ploy. At the end of the day, it's a way of beating people.

**What Roberts did last year, he will probably do again this year, because his character won't change and his skill will develop rather than diminish.**

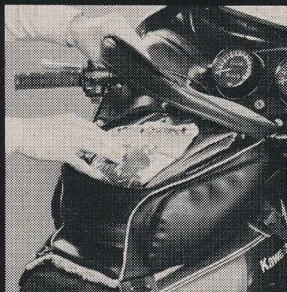
Not that it's a deception. Roberts, given the nagging fact that he is the best in the world at what he happens to do, is indeed a straightforward and unaffected man. But neither is it an accident. There are a lot of other ways to be, and well Roberts knows it; but mental and emotional sleight of hand, self delusion, don't help a world class motorcyclist for long. It isn't puritanism; it's policy. Kenny Roberts doesn't have to worry about keeping his feet on the ground. It's nothing to do with what Grandma had to tell him. What he has to keep on the ground are his wheels.

What Roberts did last year, he will probably do again this year, because his character won't change and his skill will develop rather than diminish. Last year was an episode; this year will be another. And what he did to the Europeans, he would probably do, given machinery, to the Americans. Perhaps because he's normal. And perhaps because he's a mean bastard. Really mean. And perhaps that's all there is to it. ☐



## TANK BAG

### A Great Place To Keep The Goods



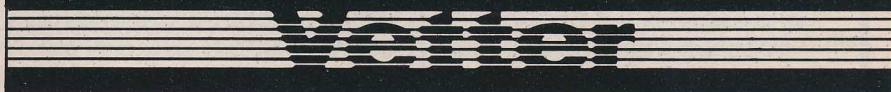
The more you use a Vetter Tank Bag, the more handy it becomes.

Our Tank Bag disconnects quickly for carrying, is designed for easy tip-back during gas filling, and features a synthetic fleece-lined bottom to protect your cycle's finish.

It has zippered pouches (separate compartments for clean & dirty clothes), a transparent map pocket, and it's available in 18-, 24- or 36-liter sizes.

Tank Bag. Just one of many Vetter accessories designed to make your road-riding experience . . . even better.

See your local dealer, or send \$1 for our new catalog: 1150 Laurel Lane, San Luis Obispo, CA 93401



## Performance Starts Here

On or off the road your bike will be running at peak performance with the best cycle lubricants and cleaners made by:



RADIATOR SPECIALTY CO., CHARLOTTE, N. C. 28237