

TESTS: Honda GL1000, Yamaha TT175
Can-Am's Qualifier, MX-3 And T'NT
Making Your Dirt Bike Fit You

INSIDE
THE SUPERBOWL,
POCONO, INDIAN MILE
AND OHIO

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BLOOMINGTON IND

BOX 1295

J-A BUFFALDE

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CYCLE WORLD

Allan Girdler
Editor

Roger Morrison
Art Director

D. Randy Riggs
Senior Editor

Tony Swan
Associate Editor

Len Vucci
Technical Editor

Henry N. Manney
Editor at Large

Peter C. Vamvas
Assistant Art Director

Sally Tatom
Copy Editor

Jean Crabb
Editorial Secretary

Jeanette Parker
Readers Service

CONTRIBUTORS

Bill Neale
B. R. Nicholls
Carlo Perelli
Volker Rauch
John Waaser

EXECUTIVE STAFF

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Publisher

Robert J. Krefling
Group Publisher

Richard W. Adamson
Business Manager

Bruce A. Miller
Circulation Marketing Director

John Schug
Western Manager
Advertising Marketing Services

Dave Black
Production Director

ADVERTISING

Brian Van Mols
Associate Publisher
& Advertising Director

Jim Hansen
Western Advertising Manager
1499 Monrovia Ave.
Newport Beach, CA 92663
Telephone 714-646-4451
Teletype 910-596-1353

Dottie Silin
Advertising Coordinator

Jim Frahm
Midwestern Advertising Manager
30100 Telegraph Rd., Suite 226
Birmingham, MI 48010
Telephone 313-646-7080
Teletype 810-232-5119

Joe McNeill
Chicago Advertising Manager
333 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1330
Chicago, IL 60601
Telephone 312-726-9880

Dennis Murphy
Eastern Advertising Manager
383 Madison Ave.
New York, NY 10017
Telephone 212-975-7405
Teletype 710-581-5061

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CAN-AM MX-3 Photographed by Mike Brown
CAN-AM GROUP Photographed by Dave Gooley



Illustration by Bill Neale

BAITING THE BULLDOG

Not Even Traditional English Weather Can Stop the American Road Race Team

Story and photos by B.R. Nicholls

With the odds stacked against them, the American team fought their way to a tremendous victory in the seventh of the annual match races against the British in the three-meet Easter series. The young American eagles showed determination more often associated with the British bulldog, once again proving as they did in 1975 that if they have to the Yankees can race in the rain.

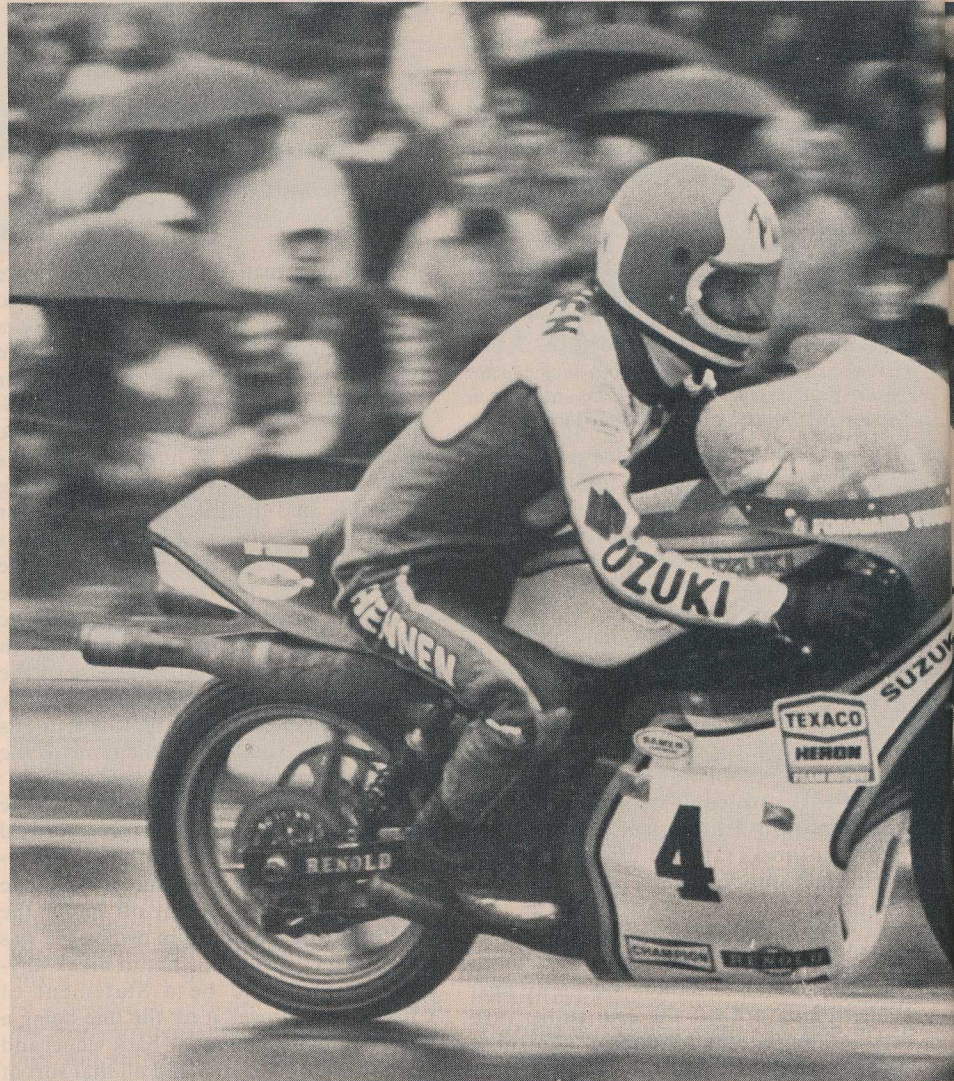
The Stars and Stripes team consisted of Kenny Roberts as captain leading Pat Hennen, Gary Scott, Dave Emde, Skip Aksland, Steve Baker, Dave Aldana and Ron Pierce, with Kevin Stafford as reserve. Odd man on the team was Pat Hennen, mounted on a British works team Texaco Heron Suzuki. All the others rode on Yamahas.

Pierce and Stafford were replacement riders following the tragedies arising out of the Imola meeting preceding Easter when Pat Evans died following a race crash and Randy Cleek was one of six who were killed in an automobile accident after the meeting.

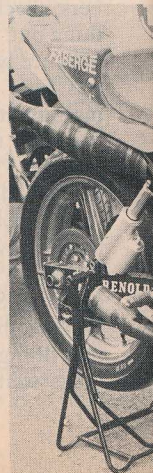
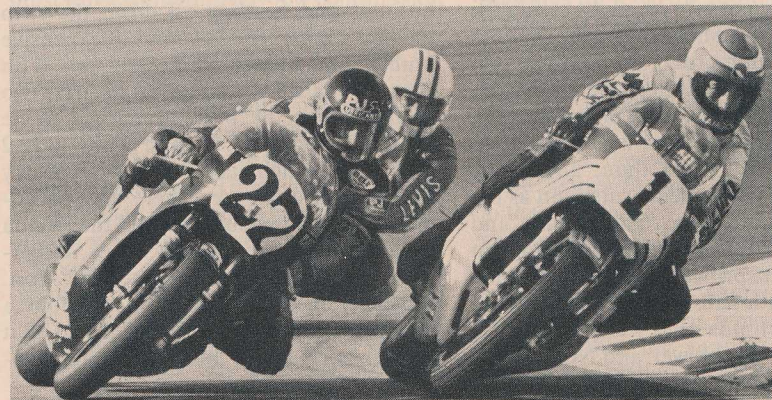
The match series followed the usual pattern of two races each at Brands Hatch, Mallory Park and Oulton Park, in that order.

A record crowd turned up at Brands, unaware of the drama taking place behind the scenes as machinery for four of the Americans was "lost in transit" by TWA. The bikes should have arrived in London on Wednesday, but when efforts were made to collect them, Team Manager Gavin Trippe was told they had been unloaded by mistake in New York. In fact they had arrived but had been lost in the cargo shed. Frantic efforts located them on Thursday but there was no way they could be cleared through customs until 8 a.m. Friday morning . . . race day. The official promised he would be there to effect clearance at the appointed hour but nothing happened until 10 o'clock when he arrived all apologetic as he had overslept. This is not the sort of publication that prints the ensuing conversation that took place. In the interests of road safety, we will not

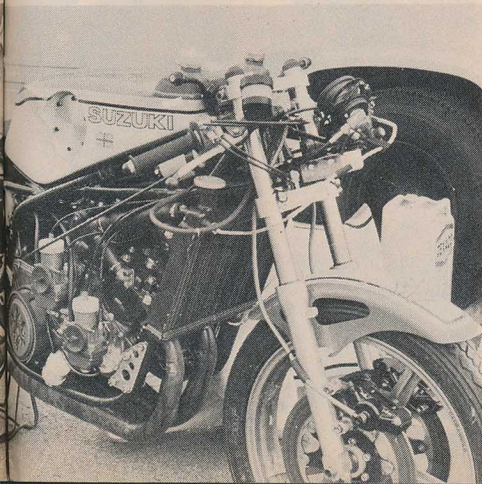
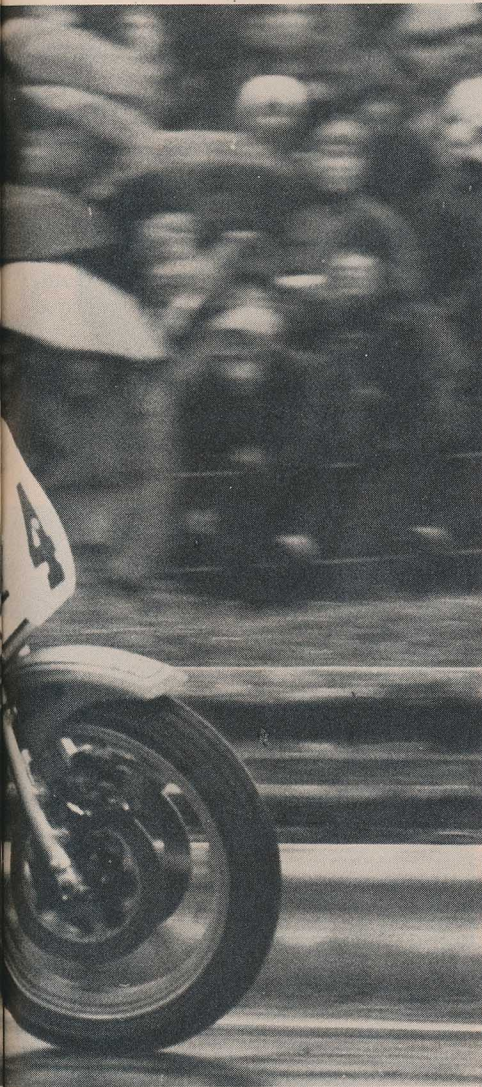
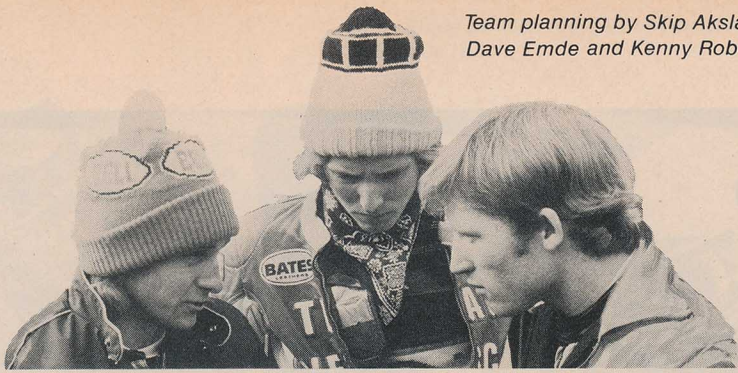
Skip Aksland takes Steve Parrish on the outside at Brands Hatch.



Top points man for the series was Pat Hennen. The English were surprised at how well the Yanks did in the wet.



Team planning by Skip Aksland, Dave Emde and Kenny Roberts.



disclose the driving methods that got the bikes to Brands in dense traffic so they could be prepared for racing. Practice facilities were pathetic—only 15 minutes were allowed until Roberts gave the ultimatum “more time or no racing” and more time was allotted. Even so, Emde and Aksland got no more than four laps at racing speeds.

Brands has never been a happy hunting ground for the American team and things looked grim at the start of the first race as Aldana never came under starters orders before joining the race. Last minute adjustments delayed him and his effort in joining and finishing the race met with disqualification.

Although Aldana was missing, 16 riders started as the British reserve rider Roger Marshall, Yamaha, went unnoticed by officials but not by Trippe. “Oh you’ve noticed have you?” said the non-riding British captain, Percy Tait, as Trippe put out the board to bring Marshall in.

By that time Roberts was already in the lead with Baker behind him and at the end of the second lap Hennen made it a Yankee 1-2-3 with Phil Read, Kawasaki, out of retirement for the weekend 4th for the British team. Barry Sheene, Suzuki, had made a bad start but scythed through the field to take 3rd from Hennen on the fourth lap, though still some seven seconds down on Roberts. By the eighth lap Sheene had passed Baker and Hennen had been pushed back to 6th by the British Kawasaki teammates Mick Grant and Barry Ditchburn. All eyes were then on Sheene and Roberts as they battled it out at the front of the field with Sheene taking the lead on the eleventh lap. Half a lap later, Roberts was back in front and held on to win although both he and Sheene were credited with the same time and speed for the 13 laps. In his hectic dash through the field, Sheene collected a new lap record at 98.21 mph, knocking 1.8 seconds off the figure previously held by Baker who saw his race record speed of 94.51 raised to 95.76 mph by Roberts and Sheene. Baker took 3rd ahead of Hennen, and Aksland had al-

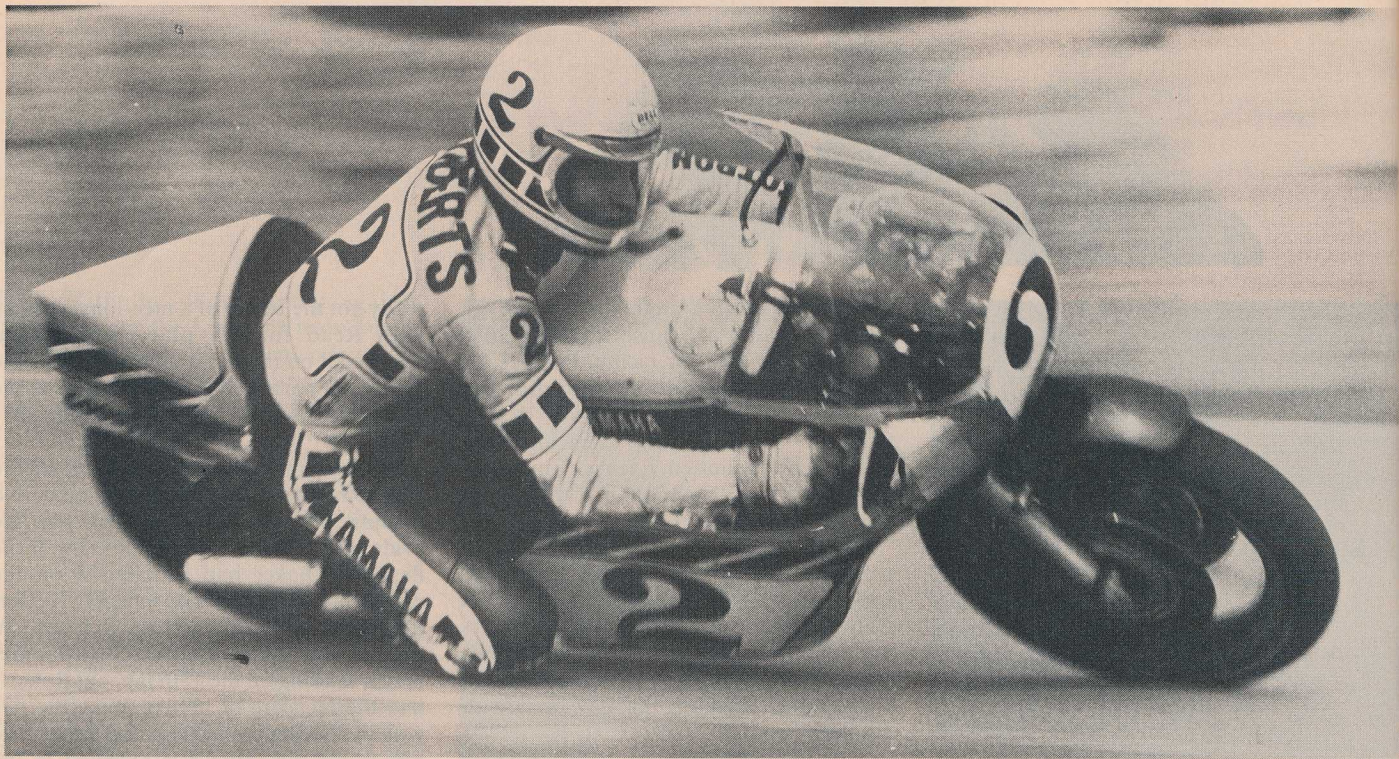
ready got the better of a race-long struggle with Read for 7th place when Read dropped it on the run in to the finish of the last lap. It narrowed the British lead at the end of the race to a mere three points, 68-65.

In the second race, Roberts again led the way home by putting the fastest lap in and beating Sheene. Skip Aksland was the pride of the Yankees as he took 3rd at the flag after Baker had dropped it on the eighth lap at the Druids hairpin. He was quickly up again, though, and finished 5th. Sheene was again the best British rider briefly leading on the 12th lap, but Roberts had the measure of him to finish the day with maximum points and a big smile. The reason for the smile was reflected in the score line of 134 points to both teams. “It’s great being level,” said Kenny. “We always seem to be in arrears after Brands but now we have a great chance.” How right he was.

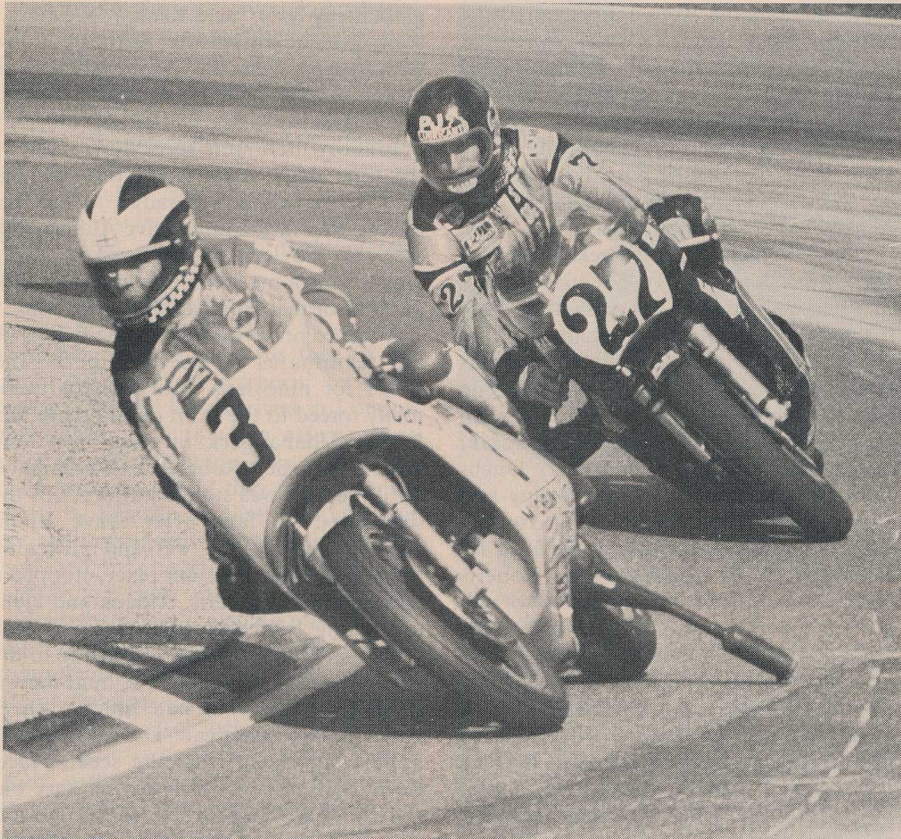
The weather had been cold at Brands but at least it was dry. On Sunday morning at Mallory there were snow flurries but by the time practice started it was fine but cold. It was a fool’s paradise as the first race started in the rain. Dave Aldana shot off into the lead, determined to make amends for a mere three points at Brands because of machine handling problems.

It was to prove no flash in the pan as he led teammates Hennen, Roberts and Baker for nine laps until Roberts eventually forced to the front on the tenth lap. It was Aldana back in front next time around but then Roberts took command until the race was stopped after 18 of the scheduled 22 laps after Dave Emde crashed. But on the wet and glistening track only Sheene, in 4th place, stopped a massacre with Roberts, Aldana and Hennen taking 1-2-3 with Baker 5th and Aksland 6th. With 77 points in the bag to the 49 of the British team, the huge crowd standing in the rain had little to cheer about unless American. Dave Emde was unhurt but rested from the second race. Kevin Stafford slid off in the first race but started in the second as did Gary Scott who had crashed at Brands. Scott had >

Suzuki’s latest RG700A, as raced by Barry Sheene.



Kenny Roberts, on his way to winning both heats at Mallory Park.



Despite the broken exhaust pipe dangling from his Kawasaki, Phil Read leads Steve Aksland at Brands Hatch.

Dave Aldana had his best day at Mallory Park, in the rain.



Dave Emde vs Ron Pierce both on Yamaha at Brands Hatch.



engine trouble but Stafford pressed on, though well downfield in the second leg. Once again only Sheene in 3rd place stopped a Yankee 1-2-3-4-5.

Roberts was again the winner with Hennen, having his best ride of the series, 2nd, Sheene 3rd followed by Baker, Aldana and Aksland. In winning the second race by 78 to 57 the American team with its supporters set off for Oulton Park in high spirits



and great confidence with a 49-point lead under their belt.

The British, meanwhile, were crying in their beer and bemoaning the apparent inability of their team's ability to show any fire in the sort of conditions that should have suited them. Even when the sun was shining during practice at Mallory, Roberts was heard urging his team on with the order, "If it rains you don't pull in, even if it snows just keep going until the flag is out!" In the cold and the wet of Mallory the young eagles kept going as if the track was dry. Kenny Roberts had set a magnificent example with four maximums from four rides. There seemed little chance of any other rider beating him at Oulton but his luck ran out when leading the first race and his engine packed up on lap six. By then Sheene had pulled up to 3rd after another poor start which was a feature of his Easter riding. With Kenny out, Steve Baker took the lead and was chased hard by Sheene. Hennen was having a lonely ride in 3rd place ahead of Grant with Skip Aksland 5th. Sheene could not get past Baker until half way around on the last lap when he gave the crowd its biggest thrill of the weekend when he dived inside on one corner and held on to the flag. In his pursuit of the leaders Sheene knocked an incredible 3.4 seconds off the lap record to set a new speed of 103.75 mph. Aldana lost valuable points grass-tracking half way through the race. Phil Read came back into the reckoning with a 7th place behind Ditchburn and the British took the race 75 to 58. It reduced the American lead to 37 points. It seemed enough to ensure victory in the series until Roberts, in his customary 1st position, crashed without injury two laps from the end. By that time Aksland had already flipped it and Kenny retired. So had Sheene, Smart and Read for the Limeys. At the end of the day the United States team won by 410 points to 379. It was a well merited win brought about by tremendous team spirit in the paddock and a refusal to be beaten by anyone on the track—even a teammate.

To some it seemed crazy seeing two

Yanks dicing at the head of the field but with a man like Sheene around it was essential to get as far ahead as possible.

Certainly team spirit played a great part in the victory. Average age of the Yankee team was 23. Old man of the group was Ron Pierce at 27 and it seemed almost unbelievable that Dave Aldana, 25, was on the team at the innovation of the races back in 1971.

The British team, on the other hand, had an average age of 29 and will have to be shaken up somewhat to stand a chance of winning next year. The simple truth of the matter is that America now has some brilliant youngsters, Britain has not, and based on the 1977 showing, the United States can look forward to reducing the 5-2 overall lead in the series that the British at present enjoy.

The only cloud on the horizon of the series that attracted record crowds in 1977 was the possibility of a big money meeting on the continent that would be convenient for riders moving from Imola to Paul Ricard in France two weeks later. To have the chance of some time in the sun on the Riviera and to probably earn more money with just one meeting rather than hassle three rides in four days and chase around England in the cold is the sort of tempting bait that could make a rider forget the costly honor of riding for his country. ☐

Results

Team scores	U.S.A.	G.B.
Brands Hatch.....	134.....	134
Mallory Park.....	289.....	240
Oulton Park.....	410.....	379

United States

Pat Hennen	83
Steve Baker	82
Kenny Roberts	64
Skip Aksland	58
Dave Aldana	48
Ron Pierce	27
Dave Emde	22
Gary Scott	15
Kevin Stafford	11

Great Britain

Barry Sheene	78
Mick Grant	70
Barry Ditchburn	56
Steve Parrish	42
Roger Marshall	34
Dave Potter	31
Paul Smart	27
Phil Read	22
John Williams	19