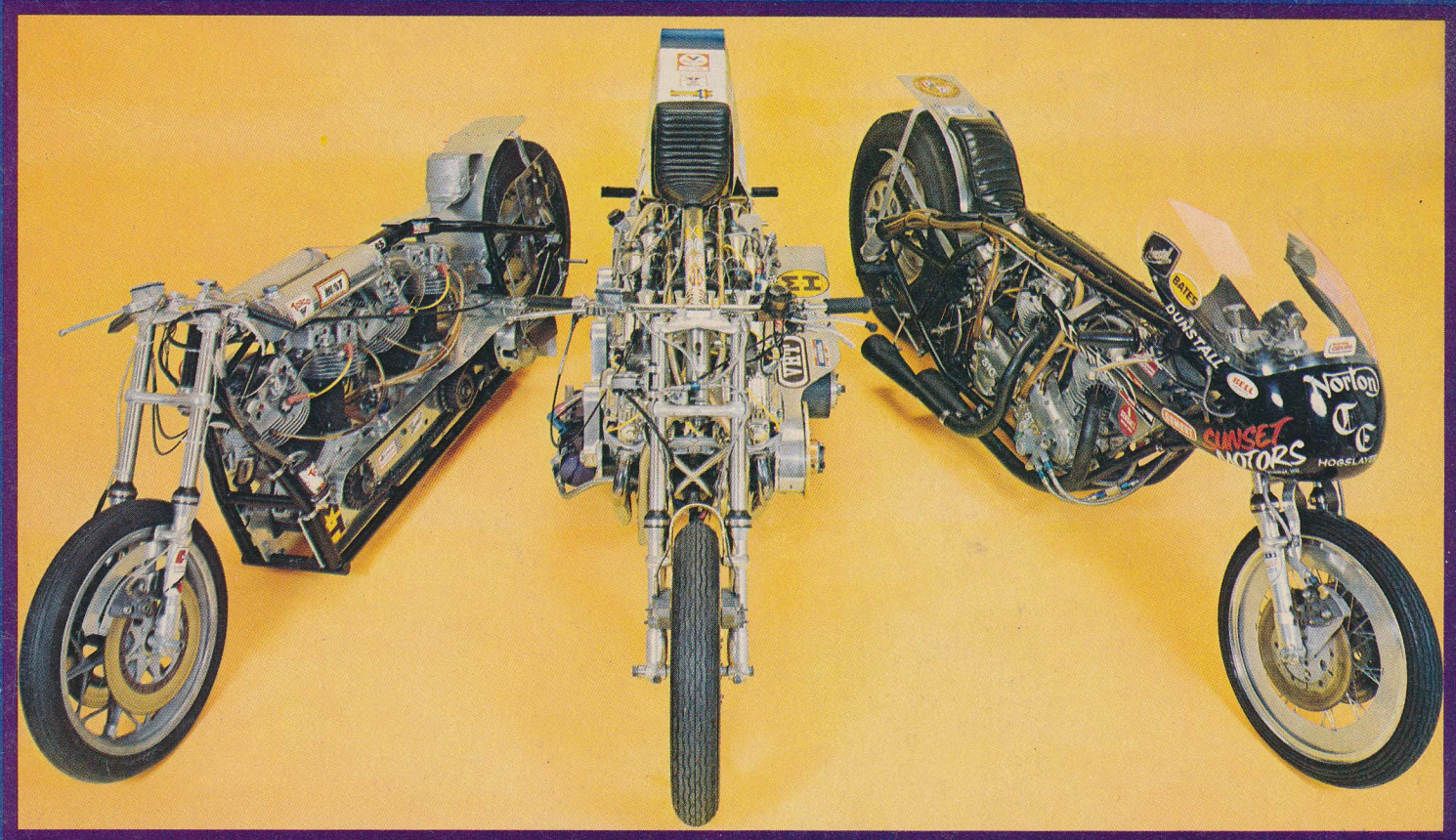


Cycle

FEBRUARY 1976 75 CENTS

AMERICA'S TOP FUEL DRAG RACING KINGPINS

RUSS COLLINS' HONDA (7.86 - 179 mph)
JOE SMITH'S HARLEY-DAVIDSON (8.02 - 183 mph)
T.C. CHRISTENSON'S NORTON (7.93 - 177 mph)



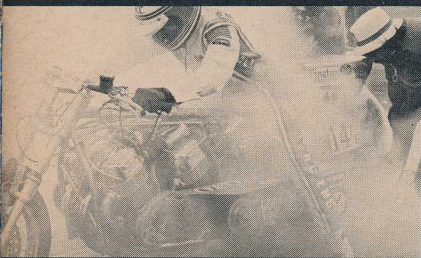
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3 Ways To Make It A Winner

180 mph Factory Road Racer

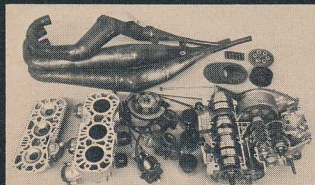
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This Month's Cover: Three bikes, seven engines, and 900 horsepower—that's the substance of the machinery Larry Willett was asked to photograph for *Cycle's* February cover. To assemble that much power any other way would have taken ten Honda GL-1000s, 12 Kawasaki Z-1s, 45 Suzuki 125 MXers or 90 Honda CB-125s.

Drags, The English Heartland

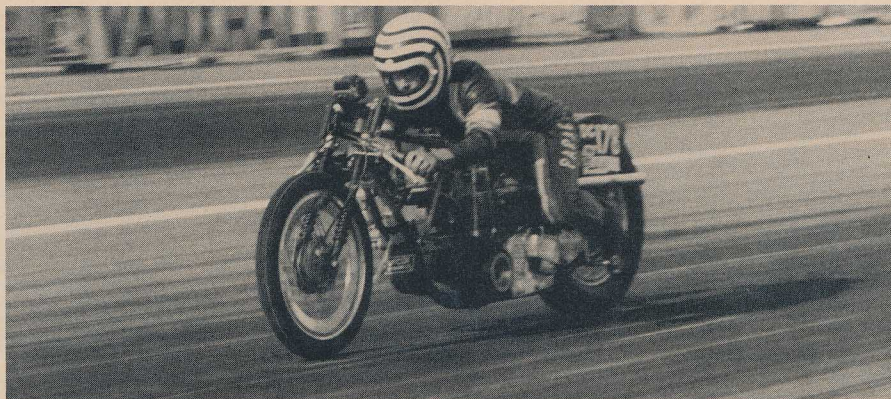
● Santa Pod, despite the exotic implication, is a drag strip located in the mid-English flatlands where the late afternoon wind invariably conveys a chilling message, and the cacophony of drag racing disperses over an unusually lightly-populated countryside. The "Welcome to Santa Pod" signs stand sentinel over a pig farm. The gateway opens to a badly deteriorated concrete road, of WWII military airfield origin, bisecting fields normally inhabited only by sheep.

Santa Pod's right-hand lane contains one large bump towards the finish line, and the left one culminates in a series of smaller humps that are disconcerting but safe if taken in straight lines. The deceleration area is rough.

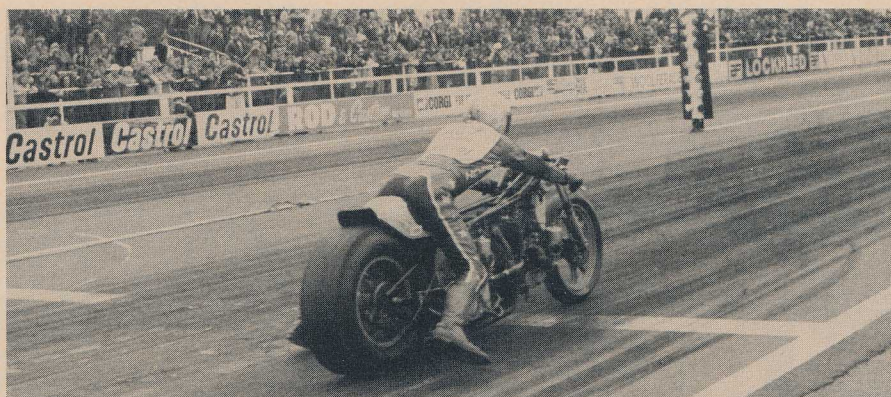
When T.C. Christenson, John Gregory and the "Hog Slayer" crew first set eyes on the 10-year-old strip, they naturally aimed their sights on the eights. The first test quarter produced a 9.02; the second an 8.6. Subsequent competition runs over two weekends tripped the clocks in 8.37, 8.47, 8.37, 8.41, 8.37, 8.56 and 8.62. Christenson won six times and lost once to Danny Johnson on Goliath. The British drag racing fans, crowding the Pod to see the Americans conquer, had never witnessed such a consistent string of sub-nines. In contrast, British-brewed eights had been rationed meagerly, the first coming in the June of '75. And of the three men credited with eights, two were (and are) reluctant to predict repeat performances.

Christenson's demonstration genuinely reflects the two long years Britain lags behind America, a country richer in drag racing competition, equipment, finance and expertise. The assessment is accurate, but says nothing for noble British endeavor, nor does it appreciate the battle waged against colossal adversity. Drag racing opportunities are severely restricted, with Santa Pod ranking as the country's sole permanent raceway. European mainland interest is minimal, though growing slowly in Sweden and in Holland, where they close narrow public roads for the action and boast of a Secretary of State for the Environment who's sympathetic towards the sport.

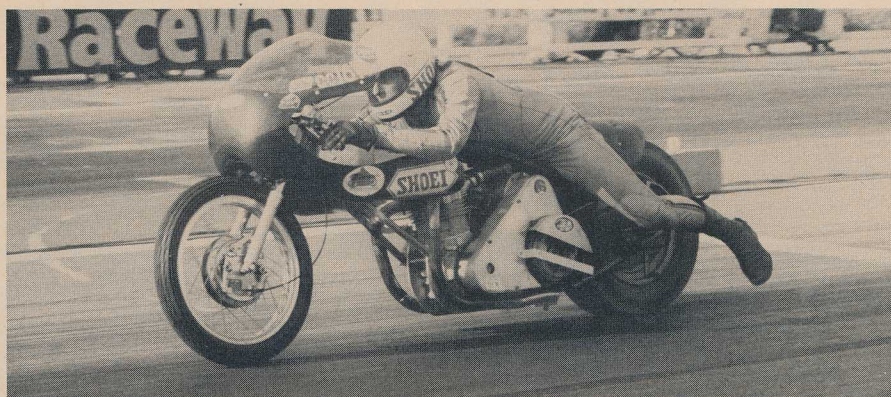
British winners do not roll in riches; \$100 goes to Top Bike at the Pod. Sponsorship is generally doled out in halfpenny pieces. The lucky recipients receive free helmets, maybe oil and chains, and possibly financial helping hands with engine re-builds. Monster-power, double-engine bikes are rarities, and getting them sorted a painfully long, time-consuming process. Few and far between aptly describes the special-component manufacturers.



Keith Parnell, using a 50-run-old Avon slick and a 750 Triumph engine, was first Britisher in the eights.



John Hobbs' double is current King of Europe with 8.3-sec ETs, 170 mph terminals and handling problems.



John Cliff's 803cc blown twin uses Puma cases and cylinder, a Weslake crank, and a 1500cc Shorrock blower.

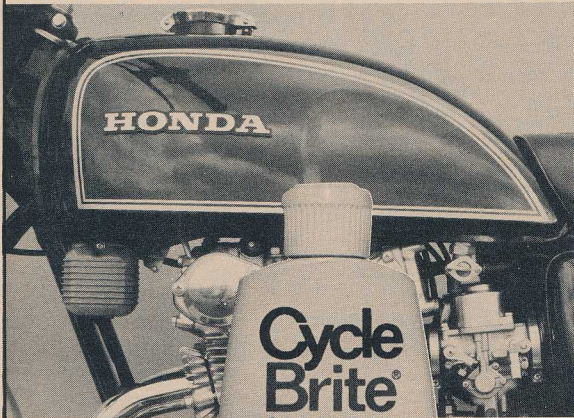
But British drag racing has come a long way in the last three years or so since Alf Hagon's V-twin JAP lorded over the English quarter and the Hagon workshop was the only source of special bits. Nowadays, the majority of bikes are good-lookers, professionally conceived and correctly engineered. The progress and the innovating are by any means impressive, and the times

turned by 750s are good by all standards.

Fast British times are achieved by twin cylinders, moderate power and monumental performance. As the extreme example, take the case of Mick Hand and his ten-year partnership with a Honda. September last, Mick shot a 9.75 sec/142 mph on his two-fifty twin, equipped with ancient CB72

(Continued on page 12)

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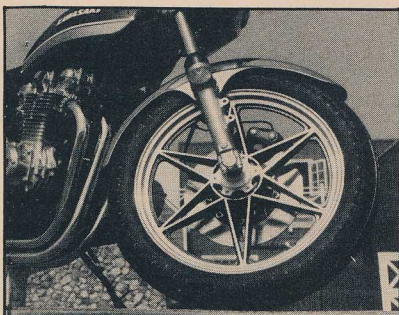
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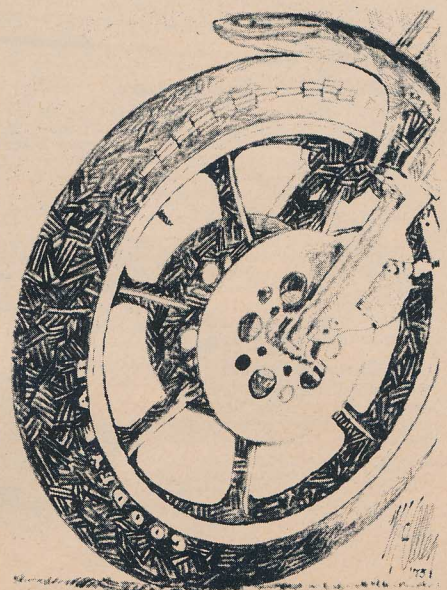
basics, 550cc blower, 80 per cent nitro content, and a crankshaft obtained from a wrecker's yard. Not bad?

Because "production" drag machines and engines are unheard-of luxuries, the novice's standard procedure is to find a 650cc Bonneville engine, a Norton gearbox, and a second-hand frame. If blessed with a wise head on novice shoulders, he's kept from attacking the engine with ill-founded tuner's zest. If he survives his initiation, he's then ready to graduate to "Standard British Drag Bike Mk.2": a 750cc big-bore conversion, two or three speed gearbox, and a medium-volume supercharge.

Being unaccustomed to abuse, the poor Triumph cylinder block lets loose in the critical area above the crankcase flange. Therefore an absolutely necessary addition is a hold-down kit, often consisting of a steel plate and bar structure bridging the head and barrel, and connected to two aluminum plates. One plate is bored to fit snugly around the drive side bearing boss, the other one under the timing side cover. Depending on bhp, nitro content and boost, the crankcases receive reinforcement through plates welded on at strategic points. However, as 50 per cent nitro produces a reasonably competitive tool at this development stage, recourse to welding trickery is not vital.

Norton castings conceal special internals, reducing gearbox ratios to three: two effective and one "engine saver" overdrive, engaged if the competitive pressure slackens in the opposite lane. Triumph crankshafts (preferably balanced), connecting rods, and sundry other stock pieces are good for putting the "SBDB Mk2" into the nines.

The "Big British Boomer" concept receives further refinement by the employment of a high percentage of special components. As an excellent basis, the British constructor may well go for Puma crankcases, exceptionally rugged casting in high grade aluminum, up to .875-inch thick in places. A companion piece could be Weslake's crankshaft, which is highly rated among the options. A genuine one-piece product, Made in England, it costs the drag exponent \$326



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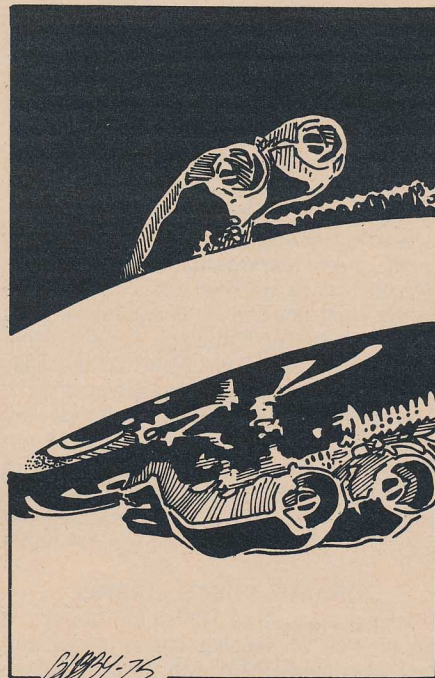
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or more. But bent British con rods, a source of expensive annoyance, sometimes send the drag men shopping abroad for top-quality steel rods, like the \$180-per-pair Carellos from America.

Aluminum barrels come from Weslake and Puma; Morgo produce steel barrels, and all are available for playing the capacity game. The 75mm Morgo gives 750cc, the 79mm Weslake raises it to 803cc with standard crank, and 879cc comes up from a "stroked" combination of Weslake crankshaft and Puma cylinders. Puma barrels and crankcases obviously go together, a particular attraction being the outside head-to-crankcase studs which really put the squeeze on the block. "BBB" equipment will almost certainly include a Shorrock supercharger and SU carburetor, a two-speed transmission and one type or another of slider clutch. It'll burn a mixture of 80-85 per cent nitromethane and get traction from an M&H slick, six inches wide.

Entirely in keeping with "SBDB" tradition, Keith Parnell fired Britain into the eights (8.93 on a five-year-old Triumph-based 750, complete with worn barrels and an over-age (50 runs!) 4-inch M&H. Appropriately the specification was, as drag machinery goes, all very non-exotic: 750 big-bore with "hold down," stock Triumph crankshafts and rods, and ordinary Hepolite pistons.

Counting heads in British drag competition cannot be attempted with accuracy, but there are probably fewer than 100 active racers in any year. Of these, between fifteen and twenty are deemed dedicated



sportsmen, contesting every meeting and achieving impossible feats of paddock improvisation. The drag racing community is tightly-knitted and open-handed: a foe on the strip is a comrade in distress off it.

Goodwill and camaraderie reflect in the manner new manufacturers come into the special-component field. Mostly owners of

mechanical engineering businesses, they pursue their drag-racing interest with fine disregard for large turnovers and big profits. Pete Davis, the Puma man, got into the drag engineering game via involvement with grass-trackers. John Clift, himself an 8.91 hotshot, builds frames for other aspiring eight-second men and conveniently omits labor charges. Sheer enthusiasm must account for two guys named Pete Miller and Ray Baskerville coming up with a two-speed instant-change box using epicyclic gears from automobile overdrive units. Also on the transmission side, George Bewley produces lightweight gearboxes in the Worcestershire town of Pershore. (One Bewley box went to America with Danny Johnson.) Intended for use with middle-power engines, the Bewley two-speeder has a full-power change facility by means of the low ratio dogs staying in engagement until high is finally home.

The portents point to a brighter British drag racing future, with more professionalism, more promotion, more recognition. Collectively, drag racing practitioners are on the road forward. For one individual, John Hobbs, it's a case of standing on the brink of great success. Hobbs and his 400 bhp double-Weslake "Hobbit" are the amalgamation of British ambitions. The fastest European, sponsored and promoted, and fairly regularly in the eights, he looks world-class and fit to trade Transatlantic trips with Christenson and Johnson. There's even talk of the AMDRA picking up the tab.

—Jim Greening