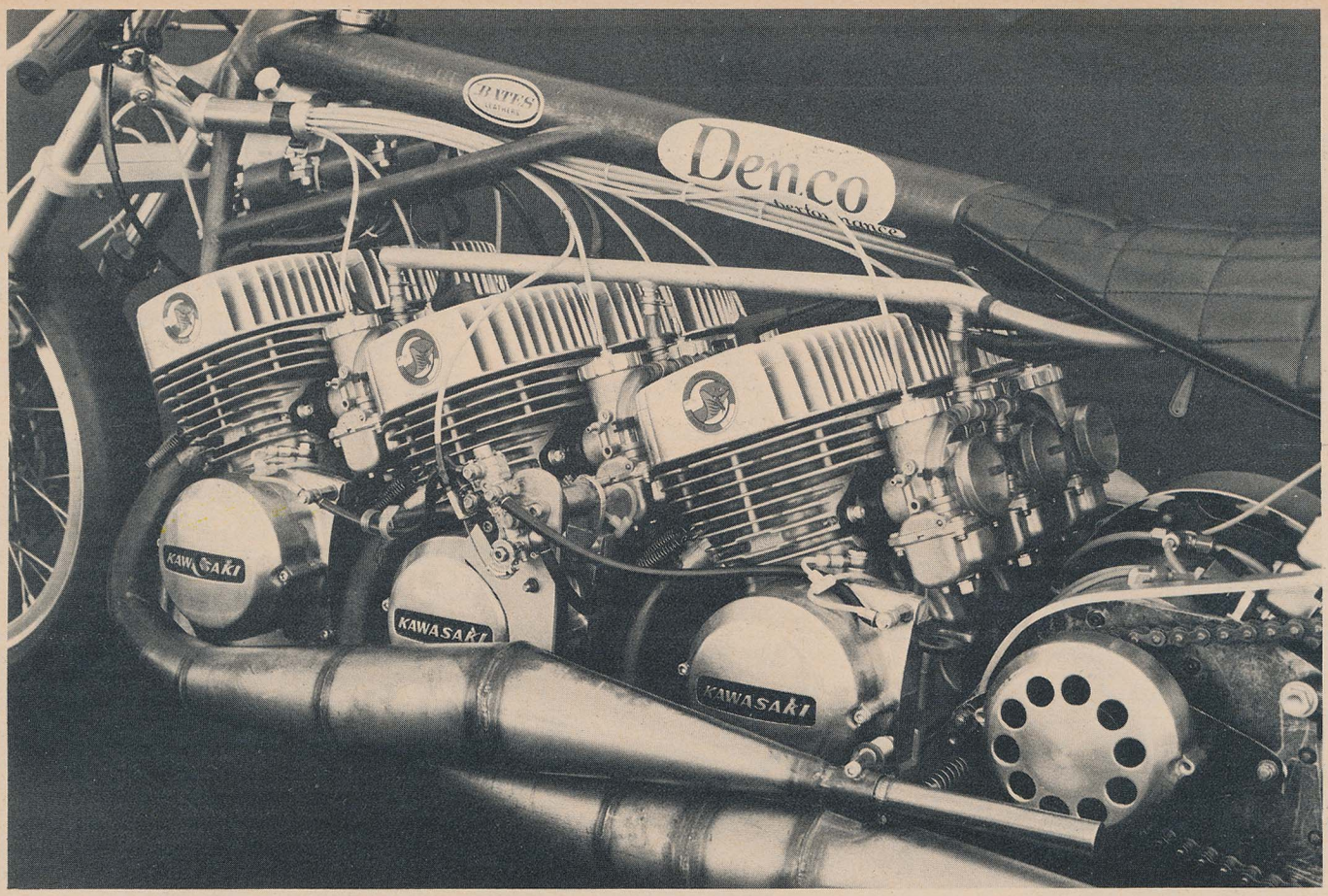


DOUBLE TIME EXPRESS

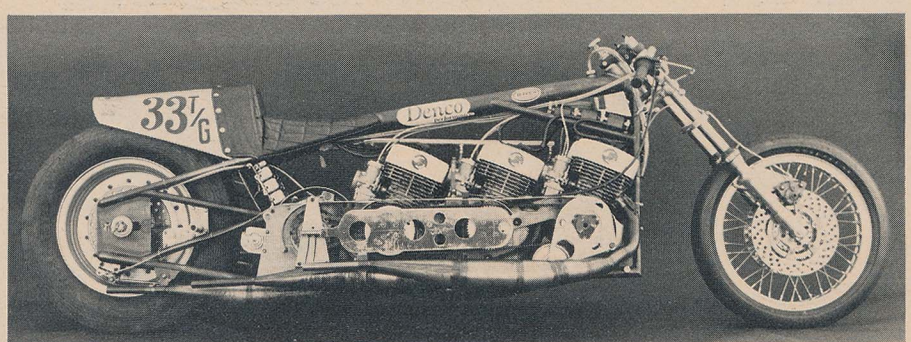
PHOTOGRAPHY: PAUL R. HALESWORTH

● The Byron Hines/Terry Vance double-engined Top Gas Honda started winning early in the summer of 1974 and didn't lose until the Fall of 1975. Along the way the bike set five AMDRA/NHRA ET records and five speed records; was the first, and continued until Fremont to be the only, gas bike to run in the eights at over 160 mph; qualified decently for several Top Fuel shows; and ran an 8.47 at Ontario during the SuperNationals. It has been during its career the definitive killer motorcycle, made so by Vance's riding, Hines' tuning and expensive technology generally reserved for the Top Fuel bikes.

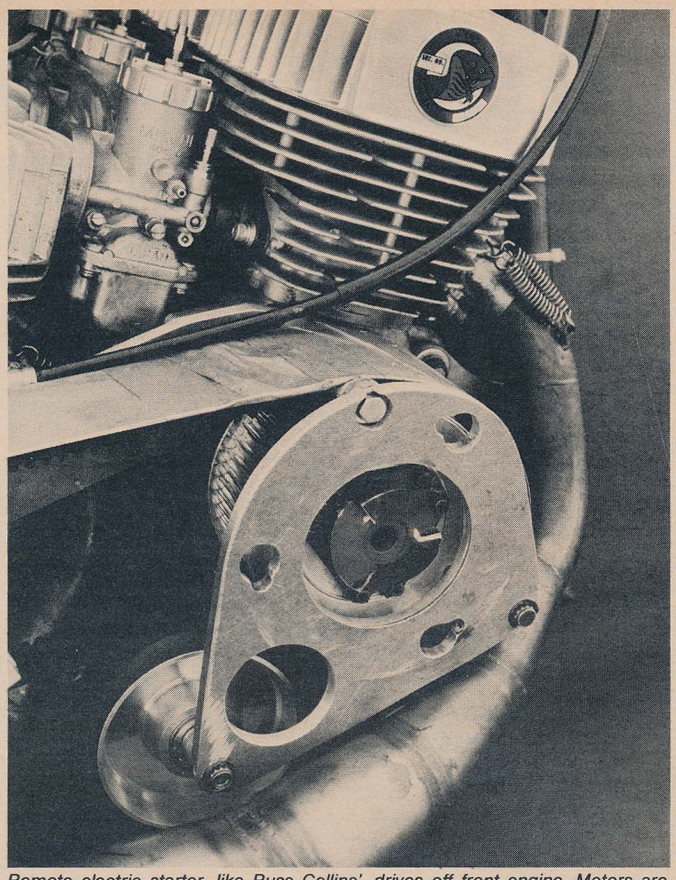
Its indisputable pre-eminence was shaken to the core by the appearance of the motorcycle you see here, sponsored by Denco Performance and constructed and ridden by one of drag racing's all-time greats, Boris Murray. The triple-engined Kawasaki's first meet was Fremont; its first full-power pass produced a terminal speed of 171 mph. The Vance-Hines Honda got snuffed by a broken magneto drive belt early in the meet, and Boris went on to win Top Gas with record numbers of 8.60—169.84 mph, causing Vance and Hines, for the first time in eighteen months, to feel a bit of a draft.

Dennis Dean, Denco Performance's owner, speaks Japanese, majored in acoustics at the Okinawa School of Technology and once owned three TV stores in Fremont. Seventeen percent of all AMDRA records are held by Denco-equipped motorcycles; thirty percent of the new records set at the Fremont meet were established by Denco motorcycles. Dean's business, founded almost entirely upon what he knows about two-strokes in general and Kawasakis in particular, thrives. He has sold more than 15,000 sets of racing exhaust systems and around 2000 competition engines (a full-race version of which costs $1685 exchange). About a year ago he decided that the time had come to build a serious, all-out, state-of-the-art, spare-no-expense maximum expression. Murray was a pivotal part of the concept. Now Denco's shop foreman, Boris was critically important because of what he knew about riding and because of what he knew about chassis manufacture and drive line technology. Boris' own double-engined Triumph double, which at different times had held both ends of the Top Fuel record, was renowned for its handling—as were a lot of single-engined Sportsters for which Murray had built frames in the early Seventies. Boris also built the frame for Danny Johnson's double-engined Sportster, so he was demonstrably capable of solving difficult problems.

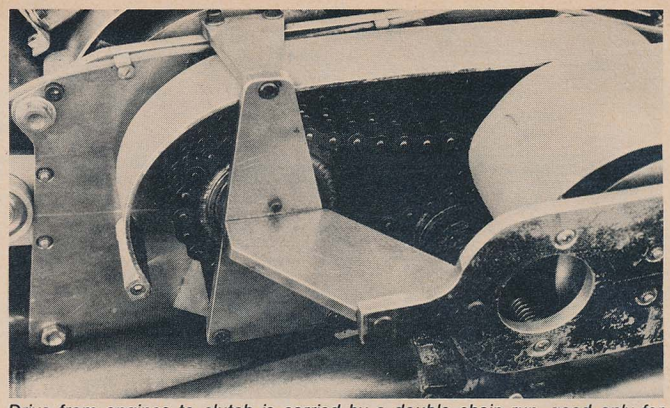
Dean had three primary objectives in mind when he decided to go ahead with the Denco Maximum Meanie: he wanted the bike to be rolling proof of Denco's expertise, he wanted to get exposure for his company and he wanted to race against the big boys. Denco mostly builds parts and engines for the Kawasaki H2 750; therefore H2 engines were almost automatically selected. But because of drag racing's requirement for displacement and torque, three engines had to be used—which dropped Murray and Dean smack into the middle of the kinds



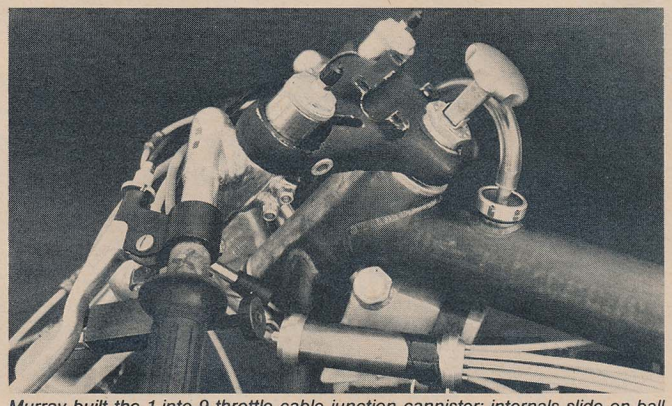
Dean knows about Kawasaki engines; Murray knows about everything else. Result? The Top Gas record.



Remote electric starter, like Russ Collins', drives off front engine. Motors are linked with UniRoyal HTD 8mm belts and have been trouble-free thus far.



Drive from engines to clutch is carried by a double chain run, good only for 5 or 6 passes. The chain will be discarded before the 1976 season begins.



Murray built the 1-into-9 throttle cable junction cannister; internals slide on ball bearings. Bar-mounted hydraulic valve controls two-speed transmission.

of drive line problems that were already keeping Russ Collins awake and sweating night after night. The engines themselves, despite Boris's well-grounded skepticism about their ability to produce satisfactory torque, presented no real problem. With 2mm overbores they displace 792cc each and use components that have been well-tested: Denco-Venolia forged pistons, Dennis's own porting theories, .032-in. rings, Denco-Mikuni 38mm carburetors, expansion chambers and ignition components out of the Denco kit, and stock rods and cranks. The engines' peak power comes in at 9500 rpm; their operating range lies between 7000 and 11,000 rpm.

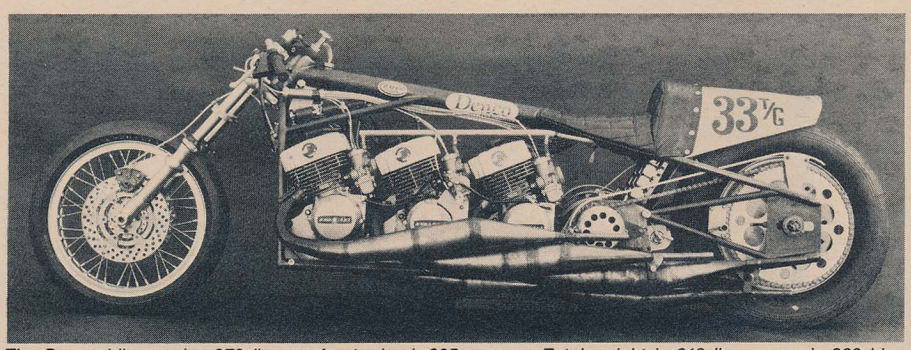
Once Boris had laid out the engine/transmission package and fabricated the carrying plates, the chassis (with a 77-in. wheelbase) presented no real problem. Provisions were made during the construction of the rear frame section for a taller (28-in.) and wider (10-in.) tire, which may be necessary when the bike is finally switched to fuel. Other than its inboard Crower clutch (so located for a more conventional riding position) and air/hydraulic gear change mechanism, the Triple Triple is straightforward and as conventional as these things ever get. The clutch was lightened 3lb. 9oz. and set for a 6500 rpm "creep speed;" the B&J transmission, selected because Dean and Murray felt that it was tougher than Lenco motorcycle two-speeders, is shifted by a finger-operated valve on the left handlebar. Air/oil pressure is stored in an accumulator at 300 psi. The handlebar valve releases the pressure, which then pressurizes the transmission's clutch and achieves high gear.

As Boris describes it, the bike is easy to ride. The rear brake is operated from the left handlebar. After a tire-warming burn-out the bike is staged and loaded against the locked-on rear brake. Since the clutch is not manually operated, all Boris has to do is release the brake, turn on the gas and hit the high-gear button about half-way down the track.

At Fremont, once the clutch had been properly adjusted, everything went extraordinarily well. Not true at the Irwindale meet a week later. After making a quarter-mile smoke-run initially, Boris and Dennis lightened up the clutch until the Triple was making haze-free runs and posting 8.6 ETs. The morning before eliminations the big Kawasaki made yet another dial-in run, that one in the 8.5-sec. bracket. Qualified number one for Top Gas eliminations, the bike lost in the first round—when the breather line for the fuel tank was pinched shut by the left-right-left action of the front fork as Boris staged the bike.

But you can bet that the Murray/Denco Kawasaki won't lose many races because of quirks. There are several areas that will be improved between the '75 season and the '76 season—the drive between the engines and the clutch being high on the list. When the Triple makes its new-season debut—probably at Daytona in March—it'll be painted, polished, refined and running on fuel. When that happens, its 8.5s and 8.6s will truly seem numbers from the distant past.

—Cook Neilson



The Denco bike carries 278 lbs. on front wheel, 335 on rear. Total weight is 613 lbs; power is 360 bhp.

Dennis Dean had been reassuring Boris Murray that their multi-engined two-stroke Kawasaki "would work just fine." Murray wasn't altogether convinced—until the bike won Top Gas its first time out, and set new AMDRA/NHRA records in the process.