

TD1 A PERSONAL REMEMBRANCE

□ Innocent events sometimes punch through time into the past, leaving us fascinated, surrounding us with the vapors of forgotten feelings. On my way back from Daytona this spring I picked up a 1965 TD1-B Yamaha production road racer—the ancestor of the sophisticated TZ250 Yamahas which dominate 250 racing. I ran a B-model many years ago, and my friends all had them too. I've half-wished to find and restore such a machine, but it was no big thing or I'd have done it long ago, right?

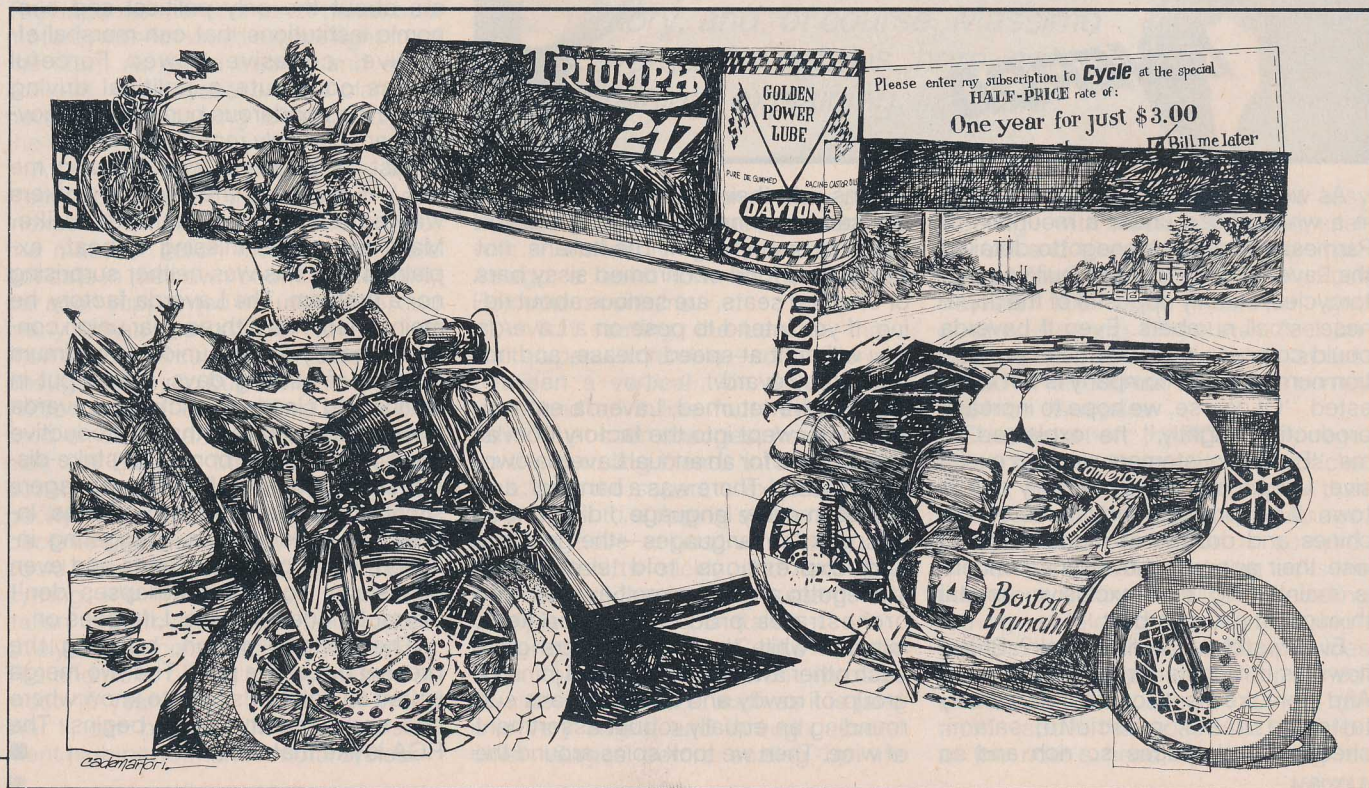
New England mud season greeted me at home, and the old Avons on the bike left wet grooves in the soggy lawn. It was a hard push to the shop, where I leaned the tattered machine against a bench still strewn with Daytona preparations. Then I carried in three sets of exhaust pipes and several moldy boxes of parts. One of the boxes broke, spreading pieces everywhere. Never mind—I'd deal with it later. My Daytona coverage beckoned from the typewriter inside the house, setting me firmly back in 1984 with its water cooling and radial tires and 180-mph speeds.

In the evening I told my wife, "I have to go up to the shop to check on a part." This is something I say often. With the wet earth threatening to suck my shoes off, I trudged toward the TD1—it was the real reason for the excursion. I turned on the shop lights and looked at the mess, then squatted down to pick up the pieces from the burst box. I began to recognize them. This little slotted brass slug is part of the throttle cable junction box. This is a remote-float Mikuni M-type carburetor—they didn't release the superior VM center-float carbs until late 1967, and then only to factory teams. M-types flooded under braking and, conversely, leaned out under accelera-

tion. Seizures. As I hunkered over the parts pile, I remembered all the schemes for preventing this, schemes we had hatched and coveted and later shared 17 years ago. What difference did it make now? This junk is obsolete. Mikuni would be embarrassed even at the mention of these zinc hazards to navigation.

All the same, my mind hurtled back through time. I stood up and looked over the other boxes of parts. I might as well spread this stuff out and go through it, I thought. An hour later I was still pawing through the mess, setting grimy pieces in little piles. Each part had a nature and a story, and I remembered them all. These linen-and-varnish-insulated magneto coils used to short across to the rotor, leaving little black spots and then quitting. The sand-cast, vertically split cases required a special Yamaha jack to separate them. These forks had what we had called "joke damping" and would blow the seals in two or three races. Replacing them was a machine-shop operation, requiring the drilling out of steel pegs, the pulling of a bushing, the

What's a 17-year-old race bike worth? Nothing—unless it's used to recapture a youthful enthusiasm. Then no price is too high.
By Kevin Cameron



making and fitting of oversized pegs or the use of Allen set-screws. Warm up the engine too fast and the cast-iron piston rings would break, in turn chipping the chrome off the cylinder walls above the exhaust ports. I remembered waiting at the parts counter with needs that didn't help the dealer one bit. Waking up in the van after an all-night 600-mile trip from Boston to Harewood Acres in southern Ontario, hearing the rumble of a Manx Norton started by an early-bird intent on having his oil hot before breakfast. Cold-water shaving in the van's side mirror. Standing stiff and hungry in the sign up line.

We left Boston after dinner on Friday nights, having loaded the van with bikes, parts and tools. Everyone put \$10 into the gas kitty. Somewhere on the way, maybe on the New York Thruway or 95 South to Virginia, we were transformed in the sweep and glare of interstate headlights. That morning we had been nameless big-city working stiffs, but now we were motorcycle racers. Perfect trip-timing would put us at sign-up with no time for a nap. The adrenaline rush that had sustained us through all the driving could continue unbroken right through Saturday practice. Pure energy, pure enthusiasm. It was fine.

This was the dying time for the lightweight racing four-stroke. The special Ducatis of Charlie Ingram, the Motobis of Amol Precision, the Sprint H-Ds of the national circuit all had to bow under the terrible pressure of the maturing two-stroke. Yamaha had found ways to stop the constant seizures of the TD1-A and had broadcast the message in hundreds of AMA-legal production racers, bringing this awful truth to every racetrack. The four-strokes were still very good—light, responsive and highly developed—but the Yamaha powerplant was steadily squeezing the life out of them all. The B-model was the turning point.

My friends with TD1s urged me to prepare my racing rivals properly; pull up in the four-stroke's draft, flick out to pass, sit up and pretend to adjust my goggles while riding one-handed.

Our Boston-area TD1 stars, Frank Camillieri and Andres Lascoutx, had other humiliations for their opponents. Frank would roll out of his

truck on practice morning, slide a kickstart lever on his bike, and start it *with his hand*. Lascoutx was always first onto the false grid and first out to practice. He won everything in 1966. In those days you could enter your 250 in the 350, 500 and open classes in club racing. Camillieri won them all one year, and the big-bike riders went out on strike; we won't race any more unless *he* is out of here. They compromised: Camillieri could ride, but would not be scored except in 250. After that, he would build up a big lead and stop out on the course, waiting for the big four-strokes to come toiling around. He would pull out after them from a standing start and catch and pass them down the straight. Or he would build up a half-minute lead and wait playfully a few feet short of the finish line on the last lap. When the smoking bored-out Triumphs and Nortons came wobbling into view, he would grin at them and push across the line—first.

Why so vindictive? Before the Yamahas came, you had to belong to a clique to win races—a clique centered around one of the specialty shops that did secret porting and could (most important of all) put needle bearings in your rocker arms. You couldn't just *buy* this work—that would be too crass. You had to *qualify* for it, and that meant spending hours, weeks and years hanging out at these shops, buying lunch and hoping in time to be accepted as one of the elect. Then they might take your money and put the all-important needle bearings in your rocker arms.

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At this point I had been standing in my shop, staring at the piles of parts, for quite some time. I was startled by my wife's voice: "How *is* that part, Kevin? Did you know it's dinner time?" Yes, it's not 1967 any more. I drifted back to the house.

I had surprised myself. I have never been able to understand the "vintage" or retro-fashion impulse. I'm not interested in repeating my own mistakes no matter what the style. But here I was, backsliding in the same way. Somewhere in that pile of parts was a catalyst, acting mutely

to send me back 17 years. Would I become foolish like those fellows in their perfect 1968 Camaros, antique Motown blowing out of the eight-tracks, while both their drivers' licenses and their hairlines say they are all 40 years old? Our lives are here in 1984, aren't they?

But I still have my pale-green Okuda-Kohi points checker. I could sit right down to worship my TD1 with it as I did back then—cross-legged at the right side of the engine, rocking the crank with a 12mm open-end, watching the needle, tapping on the points arm. I know these crank-mounted clutches—you have to service them after every fast start or they will slip next time. Save time by flopping the bike on its right side so the oil falls away from the clutch. Pull the cover, pull the clutch, compress it, pull the snap-ring, and you have hot, warped clutch plates in your hand. Slick. Also obsolete nonsense. Yamaha made those crank-speed clutches small because they had only one-third the torque to transmit. Seems like a neat idea until experience teaches that clutches must be sized not so much for the torque but for the heat of slippage.

Events floated into mind. We did a double weekend—Mosport up in Canada and Nelson's Ledges in Ohio, leaving after the Mosport final, tired zombies, humming through evening into dark with our eyelid hooks in place, changing drivers often and pouring much coffee. It seemed to take a long time getting to Buffalo, and when at last we saw the sign, "Bridge to USA Ahead," it didn't look right. It wasn't. This was Detroit, not Buffalo. Following the white line like robots, we had missed the turn, driving an extra 180 miles west. Rugged racers, stupid but tough. The famous Detroit riots began shortly after we had whistled through the empty early-morning tunnels and vacant interchanges.

The following week I had collected everyone's magneto rotors to have them re-magnetized. When I failed to return one rider's rotor on time, I found a poem on my bench.

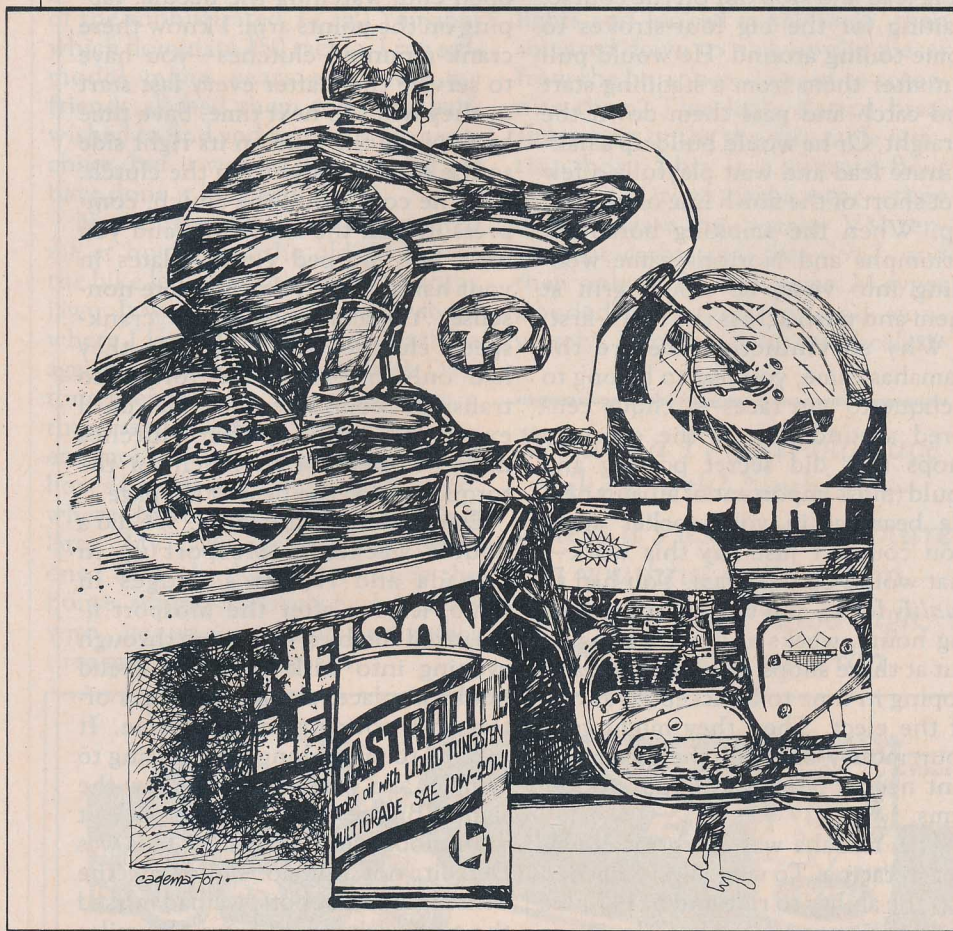
*Urban uproar, Black ghetto
I care only for my magnetto*

My TD1 never started well and I never figured it out, although in the process I learned to rebuild cranks, port cylinders, and do other fancy

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things that didn't help either. My worst start was at Mosport. No doubt my calves bulged in my \$100 Lewis leathers as I pressed forward against the locked front brake, looking at the starter's flag. Push-starts were still in vogue then. The flag was up! I lunged hard, heaving the 236-pound machine ahead, dropping the clutch on the third step. There was no answer from the motor. I heaved, clutched

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would have continued. There were fine moments. My best race centered around a lecture I gave myself. I had just fitted a set of 1967's latest tires, Dunlop Triangulars, and I engaged in this self-directed monologue: "I am a novice, my corner speeds are slow, but now I have these fine tires. At such speeds, on these tires, I am as safe as if at home in bed. Just snap open the throttle in turns and nothing will happen except I will go faster." In the event I followed a Ducati 250 into Gunnery Corner, a long right-hander, and I opened up. I closed on him quickly (the throttle is a great thing, isn't it?), and he, hearing the crack of my exhaust, tried to escape. Accelerating, he leaned over farther and farther, but I pulled up easily on my lovely tires. Presently his peg struck a long stream of red sparks from the tar and then dug in. He slid and tumbled off the course while I continued, elated and confused at the same time. Certainly my idea about the tires had been proven, which was nice. Overcoming fear is valuable. I had passed one of the highly touted Ducatis in a corner, and that was nice, too. There was also something else more valuable—I had felt that sudden elation and clarity of mind spoken of by mountain climbers, motor racers, soldiers in battle, that state of grace in which it seems you have become perfect and cannot possibly make any error, cannot be touched by events. I had for a moment become a perfectly relaxed passenger in the back of my own skull, looking out with calm detachment as my actions unfolded. It was a tremendous feeling. It was also a dangerous one, as any drunk on his way home from a party well knows.

I gave up racing at the end of that year, turning to working on other people's machines instead.

Now here is this old TD1-B in my shop, asking me to find the missing parts, to sandblast and paint, to renew bearings, to re-create. It has already paid me well for these services by turning my thoughts back to the big, gnarled roots of my enthusiasm for this sport, back to the silly romantic notions, the elations, the round-the-clock enthusiasms. I think it's a fair deal. ■

and heaved again. Riders streamed by me on both sides as I tried to keep from falling over my bike in my struggle. No reaction from the engine as I spun it over. Push! Now I was the last rider, for even the most recalcitrant Ducati had fired and left. I could hear the hollow EEEEEEEEEEEEEEE of my intakes as I searched unavailingly for that perfect throttle opening, the one that would bring the engine up with a shriek. At a faint pop-pop-pop I snatched the clutch in with hope, but the noise died away. My legs were very tired now, and I noticed a great

need for air. I began to worry about being ridden down by the riders coming around the circuit behind me. Lapped in 200 yards! How long had I been pushing? Long, I was sure. Turn one, where the track turns downhill—gravity will help me now. As I pushed out of sight around turn one, a ragged cheer went up from the few spectators there.

That was humiliating, but worse was to come. I sold that machine to a Vespa mechanic who saw instantly what I had overlooked—two different needles in the carburetors.

It wasn't all like that or I never