



RICH CHENET

DAYTONA 83

Come to Daytona Speed Week. Everything is on display: the fastest riders, newest bikes, latest technologies, deepest spenders, and strongest corporate egos. This year's biggest winners: Roberts and Yamaha; Spencer and Honda.

By Phil Schilling and Mark Homchick

The Ego-Battle

□ The Daytona 200 victory was, again, made in Japan. It was also something else: a grudge race. This 200, which had Honda and Yamaha squaring off once more, transcended the friendly competition usually seen by Western eyes. In normal competition, the Japanese smile benignly, knowingly, sometimes glowingly; friendly expressions are worn as comfortably as an old hat. Competitive tension is sunk deep behind the eyes, hidden from view as surely as an upset stomach. But this year at Daytona, everyone's lips were pulled back a little further, to the point where smiles opened to bared teeth.

Honda planned on making Daytona its personal corporate celebration, and spent



DAVE HAWKINS



DAVE HAWKINS

DAYTONA 83

The Ego-Battle

accordingly, as befits the richest, most powerful company in motorcycling. Honda's arsenal: factory three-cylinder two-strokes ridden by Freddie Spencer and Ron Haslam, and two FWS one-liter four-strokes, Mike Baldwin and Steve Wise in the saddles. During the last 12 months in America, Honda spent with such incandescent enthusiasm and determination, the smoke and fire from the Honda campsite all but obscured

"I'd sure like to win this damn thing."

—Kenny Roberts, Yamaha.

the fact that Graeme Crosby won last year's Daytona 200 on an old factory 750 Yamaha. Gee, hadn't Freddie Spencer won in 1982 on the FWS? Oh yeah, he hadn't, had he?

To this Daytona celebration came Yamaha, smarting, overshadowed, ready to play—no, ready to *be*—the spoiler. Yamaha had its corporate reasons. Kenny Roberts, the racing centerpiece for Yamaha, had announced 1983 would mark his



DAVE HAWKINS

last racing season. He had won Daytona *once*—1978—out of so many tries polite company no longer keeps track. He'd have one last chance, and Roberts wanted something special to take on the Honda armada. Not another 500, please, not something that a guy would have to beat the hell out of to stay with the FWS Hondas at the risk of chewing down the tires. That was 1982, and he had already been around on that dance ticket. Hey, give a guy a chance with the right bike and he could hand you Honda's butt, one cheek after the other.

Here was the right stuff—four square-four Yamahas based on the old 500 OW-60 racers, displacing about 680cc. Two for Roberts and two for Eddie Lawson, Yamaha's man for the post-Roberts future.

Riders may propose, but companies dispose. Such single-purpose racers, built for Daytona and maybe Laguna, built and raced right on the eve of the all-important 500 World Championship series, dangerously spreading precious talent as thin as a dragonfly's wing, had to be pondered over, committed



DAVE HAWKINS

over, green-lighted, and finally authorized by The Powers That Be in Hamamatsu. Big Japanese companies hardly permit a handful of sport-loving race-shop employees to put together four specials for Daytona for good old Kenny and new-boy Eddie. It's not that simple.

Somewhere, we may assume, a meeting took place in a conference room with gray carpet, oak tables, off-white chairs and couches, and a window across one wall offering a twelfth-story view of industrial Hamamatsu. Here

"How good are the Yamahas, Mike?"

Baldwin: "Fast."

some gentlemen in white coats met with some gentlemen in dark blue suits. Here Yamaha disposed. The company, having had a bellyful of Honda sales successes here and Honda triumphs there and Honda celebrations everywhere, decided to get Honda at Daytona, in America, the most important marketplace in the world—or fall on their titanium swords trying.

Racers have egos, large ones. But let no one forget that mild-mannered gentlemen wearing dark blue suits, men whose blood runs a constantly cool 98 degrees, who never sweat no matter what the ambient temperature, the corporate lords in Hamamatsu, Tokyo, New York or London, likewise have egos, colossal egos.

Yes, the race was in Daytona; the ego-battle was, however, global.

Yamaha was prepared to discard the old ways to get results. At one time, using outside—European—suppliers for crucial parts would have been forbidden, or just not done. This year

The Yamaha freight train of Roberts and Lawson moved like a jet express. Sole survivor of Honda's official team was Steve Wise in third.



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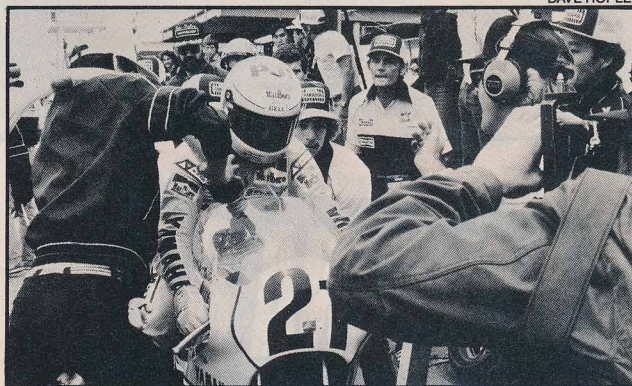
DAYTONA 83

The Ego-Battle

Ohlins has been working with Yamaha on the single-shock units, and the Ohlins stickers were in clear view. By midweek, the works Yamahas sported quick-change Brembo magnesium calipers with four live pucks. The larger, more complex Honda team long ago delegated suspension to Showa and carburetion to Keihin; with stickers come hardware and technicians.

The force behind the factory riders—their talent, equipment, technical resources, private track time, etc.—shows up in qualifying. The field quickly separates into the factory gazelles and the privateer goats. Except for Wes Cooley's aluminum-framed four-stroke 1025cc Kawasaki, which ran 2:07s, every one of the factory bikes qualified at 2:04 or less, with Kenny Roberts on the pole by virtue of a record-breaking sub-two: 1:59.75—116.34 mph. To his immediate right was Lawson, 2:00.04; Freddie Spencer, 2:00.06; Ron Haslam, 2:01.91; Mike Baldwin, 2:03.38. Back in the middle of the second row came the first two private entries, Dave Aldana and Nick Richichi, both on TZ750s, both in the 2:08s, both excellent riders and both with lap speeds *eight* mph slower than the pole-sitter.

No one plans running 200 miles in a two-flat pace. All riders program a finishing pace, and in case you're a factory guy, you hope your finishing pace (like 2:06s) is the same thing as the winning pace. Two hundred miles is one hell of a long way—about one hour, 50 minutes at a winning clip of 110 mph. Most guys don't ride street bikes for two straight hours in one sitting, let alone *race* that long. At 110 mph, anything, but anything, can happen. Even the best riders in the world probably couldn't concentrate hard enough, long enough to do 200 miles in very



DAVE HOPLEY

"They said they could make it faster. They said they got faster cylinders for this thing, but it just chews up the tires. That's okay . . . It's fast enough."

—Eddie Lawson

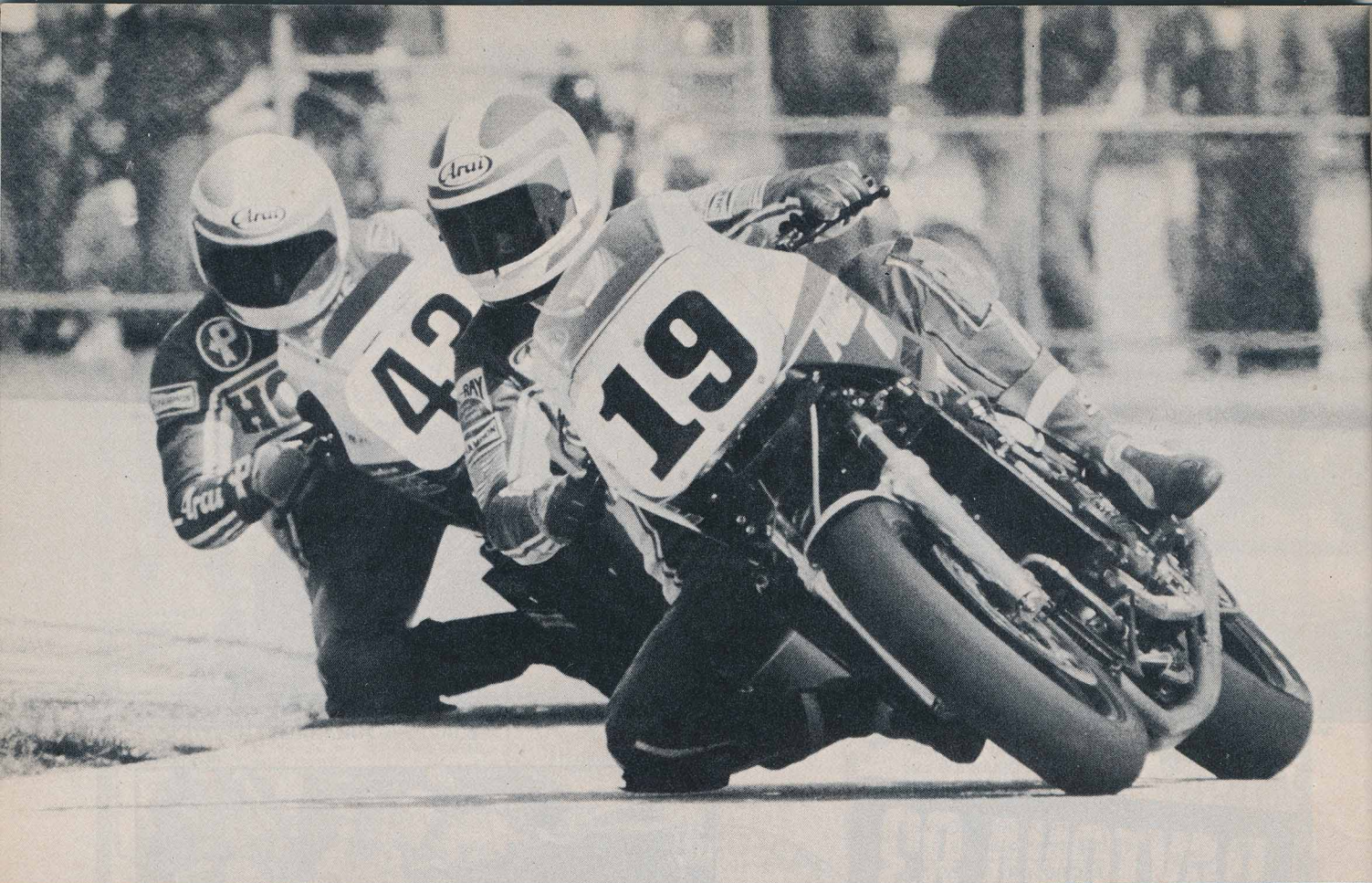
low twos, and neither the motorcycles nor tires could stand the abuse.

Tires are a constant worry, no matter which company builds them. A balancing act goes on with the same imponderables: How hard can you ride? Oh, *that* hard. Well, how long will the tires last if you do? Back to pace. Dunlop complicated things for Michelin and Goodyear because the Yamahas ran very special Dunlops, exact durability unknown. With no evidence of quick-change rear ends, Yamaha gambled on the tires lasting. Honda had the capability of quick-changing the FWS rear tires; that offered the possibility of running harder, on

"The celebration ain't over. It's gonna go on for months."

—Ken Clark, Yamaha

shorter-range tires than Yamaha's Dunlops, but this was only an advantage *if* the FWS bikes of Baldwin and Wise could run hard enough to more than make up the time lost in tire changing. Two-zip-threes or zip-fours—the FWS limit—wouldn't be hard enough. The works Honda two-strokes



DAVE HAWKINS

DAYTONA 83

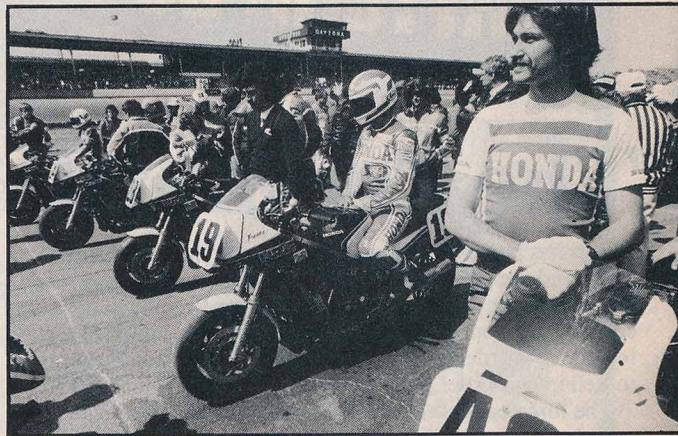
The Ego-Battle

probably couldn't cut it either, providing the Yamaha/Dunlop combination worked perfectly for 200 miles.

Carefully prepared pace-programs work only as long as no interruptions occur. No sooner had the Formula One race begun and Mike Baldwin sprinted out to a 2.3-second lead on the FWS Honda than the Yamaha program seemed to go haywire. Roberts pulled into the pits, suspecting a blistered rear tire. All eyes were on KR's rear tire; the keenest eyes were Roberts'; he wanted to see for himself. It wasn't a blister though. Roberts had gotten into some oil let loose when Wes Cooley's Kawasaki blew its internals and spit off Wes. In Roberts' pit Dunlop's Peter Ingley read the situation. Advice? "Get out of here!"

On the same lap, Spencer pulled in. The visor on his Arai helmet had come adrift when the right-side pivot screw fell out. Thus, both Roberts and Spencer were off their schedules, and they had to scramble to get even with the leader.

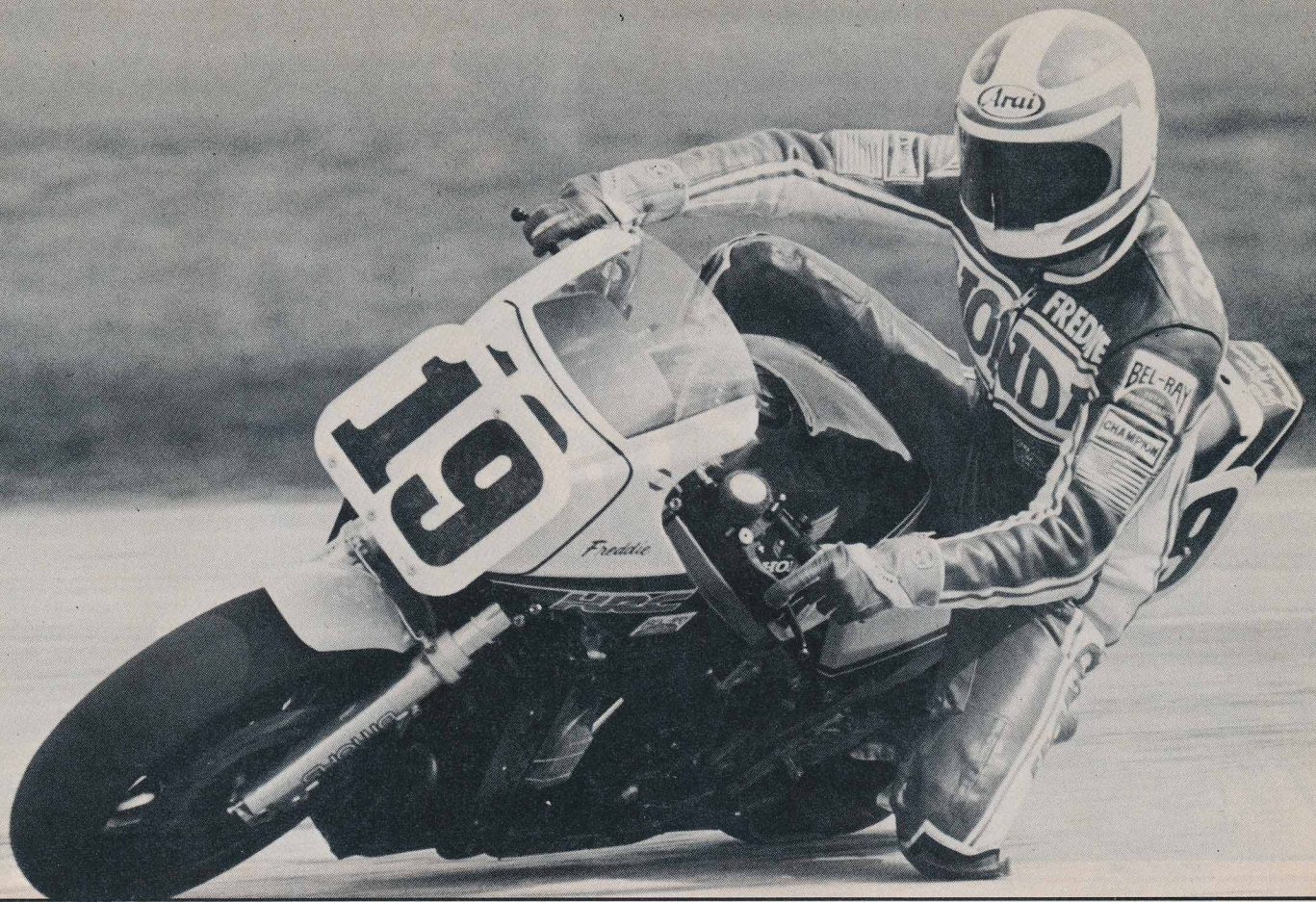
Meanwhile, Lawson had taken leave of Mike Baldwin. Two-0-threes were it for Baldwin's FWS, which would soon expire with sprag-clutch problems anyway. While everyone watched Roberts and Spencer, the stopwatches covering Lawson revealed something interesting. Lawson, momentarily possessing



For Honda the Superbike race was all important, and Honda was committed to win. Interceptors filled the front row, the leaderboard and the winners' circle.

an unassailable lead, slowed for about four laps, down to 2:08s; he dropped to 2:03 as Kenny and Freddie caught up. Lawson, Spencer, Roberts: the battle was joined.

Wrong—Roberts and Lawson were cruising, but Freddie was riding the wheels off the NS-factory bike. The Yamaha superiority was obvious—blatant—second through fourth gears. Spencer was the only reason the Honda was even there. Off the infield, onto the banking 100 yards out, it was goodbye, Freddie, see ya next lap back in the infield. Top speed? Maybe



PATRICK BEHAR



about even; acceleration was the big difference.

It would be easy to think of the big OWs as FWS-type two-strokes with nice, even hydraulic power allowing the bikes to drone off corners. Easy on tires. Not quite so. The big Yamahas have a real power burst in their curves; it's audible off corners and certainly obvious to the riders.

Spencer's NS gave up when its transmission went awry. With that the Honda Formula One effort collapsed. Ron Haslam had already gone earlier, a victim of a fractured big end or a refueling overfill—the bike didn't restart after a fuel stop. With Baldwin's FWS stopped, Steve Wise, riding a steady race on the second FWS, bore the Honda flag alone, some distance from the leaders.

"Honda has gone racing with an unlimited budget, and has now exceeded it."

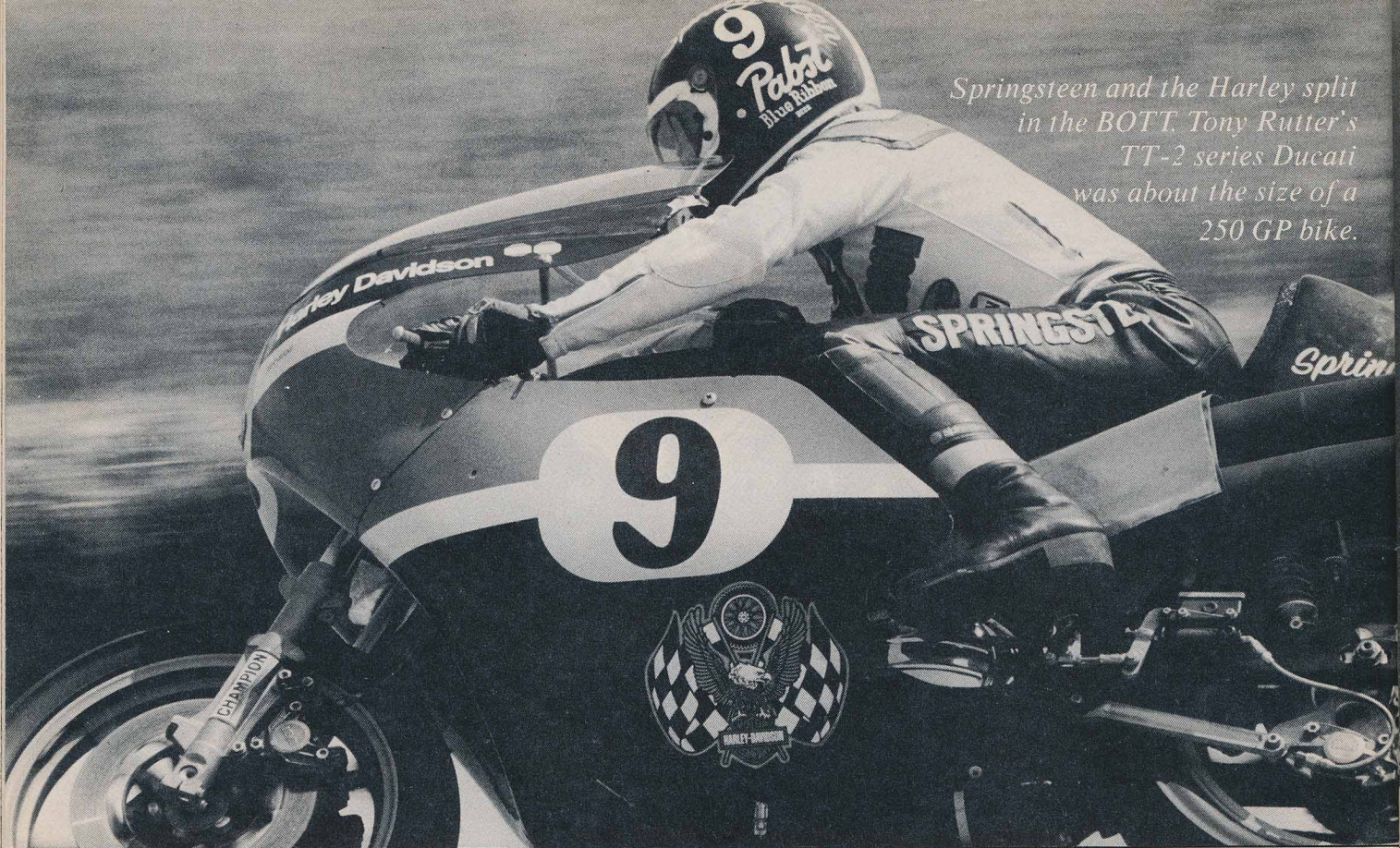
—Unattributed

Daytona is never over till it's over. Lawson limped into the pits. Tire problem? Beginning of the end? No! The rear tire had a puncture. There followed a frantic 60-second tire change. Lawson went back out, far behind Roberts, but in a secure second nonetheless. With Wise relegated to third and the Yamahas running first and second and with Lawson on a fresh rear tire, Yamaha looked as invincible as anyone can look before the checkered flag drops at Daytona. So what if Roberts needed a fresh rear to make the 200 miles? He was twice-covered—first, by his margin; second, by Lawson.

That smooth, forceful authority with which both Roberts and Lawson ride belied the condition of the tires. Officially, everything was wonderful, and no one could really argue with that. The tires lasted; they withstood the strongest, fastest motorcycles ever seen at Daytona; they endured the pace meted out by the best riders; and they struck that balance between traction and durability and survivability better than anything else. Yet it's still too soon to claim the tires have caught up to the motorcycles; the tires are closer than they've



DAVE HOPLEY



Springsteen and the Harley split in the BOTT. Tony Rutter's TT-2 series Ducati was about the size of a 250 GP bike.

DAVE HAWKINS

DAYTONA 83

The Ego-Battle

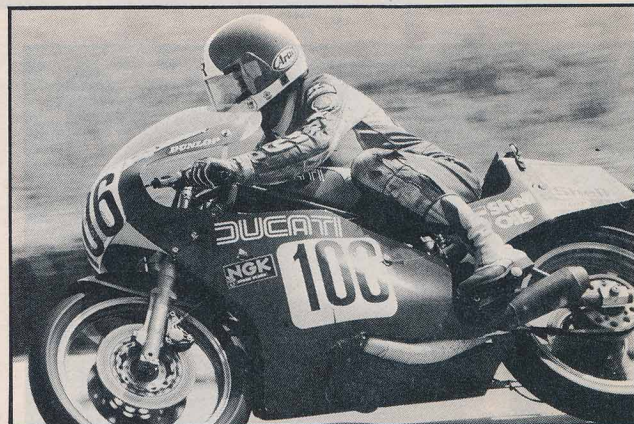
been in years, though they're still not even.

As the 200 miles approached history, Roberts and Lawson were two cautious guys running 2:08s, totally conscious of the condition of their tires. Traction could and would disappear in one split second, requiring the rider to catch things in the next split second. Almost everyone missed these little slip-catch episodes except Roberts and Lawson.

"The Harley has more than 100 horsepower. The 750 Pantah isn't big enough. Or the old 1000. You can't make a Ducati big enough."

—Reno Leoni, Ducati

Behind that short, small, far-distant yellow freight train came Steve Wise, and behind the Honda FWS was Steve Gervais, a Canadian TZ750 rider, putting in a wonderfully consistent showing. Privateers, you see, can still place between fourth and tenth on a 2:08 to 2:12 pace. Dave Aldana rode home fifth on Paul Dahmen's TZ750 after Thad Wolff's Suzuki broke a piston on the 48th lap (of 52). Wolff's Team Escargot 1982 Formula One Suzuki, with its Yoshimura



"Well, it looks like I got smoked."

—Jimmy Adamo, Ducati

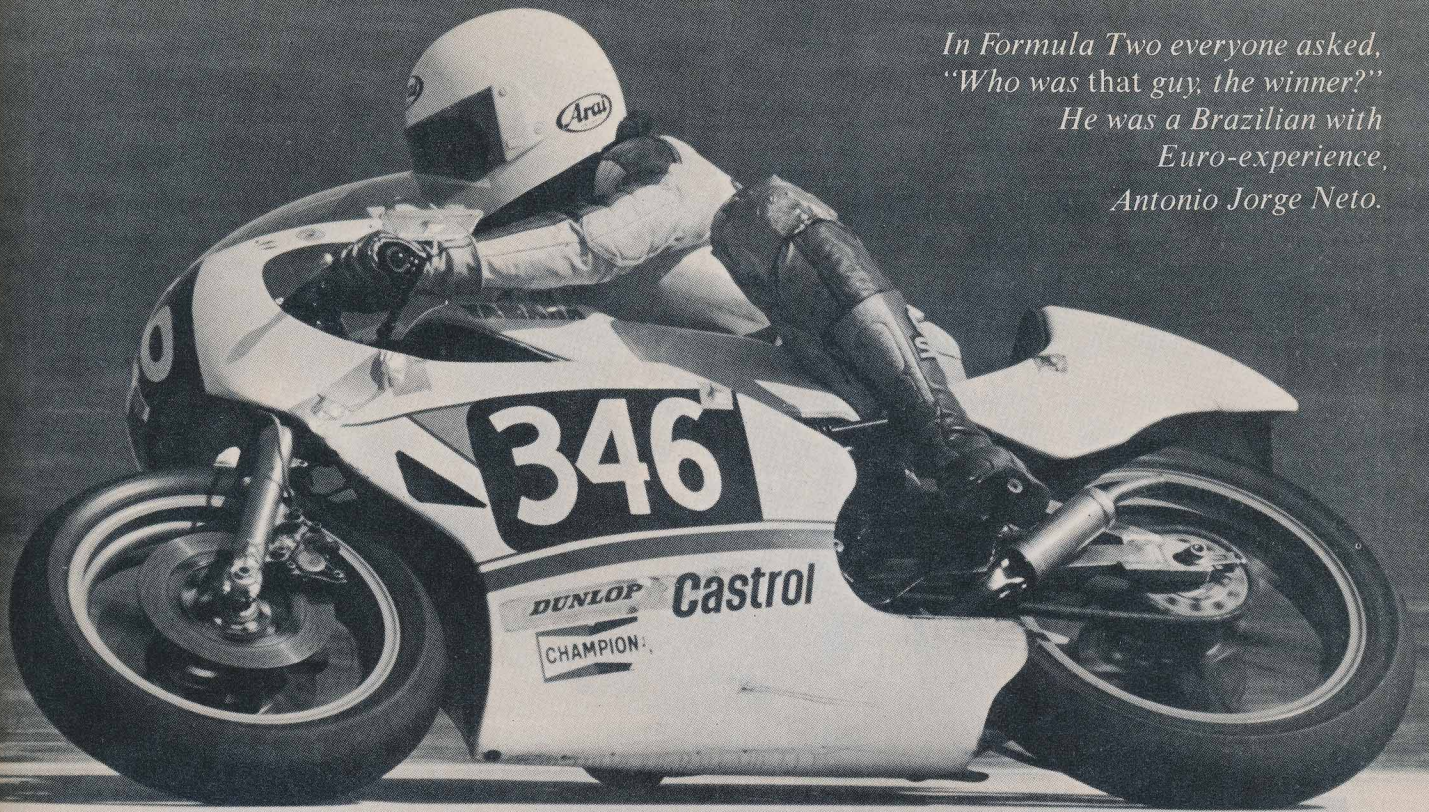
1025cc power, sucked a rock off the starting grid, although nothing happened until Thad was 15 miles from finishing. TW got the heartbreak award; he wanted, and had, fourth... almost.

At the front, Roberts scored the most popular win in memory. The crowd responded to his effort with an enthusiasm unprecedented, damn near strange, for an American audience. The Yamaha contingent was jubilant.

And somewhere, back in Hamamatsu, or Tokyo maybe, you have to figure a telephone rang in a twelfth-story office with gray carpets and off-white furniture. And some gentleman, wearing a dark blue suit, answered the phone and found he had reason to smile.

It was Honda's turn to celebrate on Friday. The Superbike contest was a rout, as predicted. The only question was how much slower in lap times the 750s would be than the old 1025 Superbikes. Mike Baldwin and his factory Interceptor Superbike took the pole with a 2:08.06; this compared to the quickest Superbike 1025-Superbike lap in

*In Formula Two everyone asked,
"Who was that guy, the winner?"
He was a Brazilian with
Euro-experience,
Antonio Jorge Neto.*



PATRICK BEHAR

qualification last year, Freddie Spencer's 2:04.56.

Honda's factory Interceptors, the subject of a technical analysis in our May issue, had Baldwin, Spencer and Wise in the saddles. In their hands, these bikes qualified 1.0 to 3.5 seconds quicker than the best of the kit bikes supplied to the official support team riders. Fred Merkel (2:11.58) and Dave Aldana (2:11.65) led that group, ahead of Wayne Rainey's Kawasaki 750 (2:11.75) and Jimmy Adamo's astonishingly quick Ducati (2:11.76). Qualifying behind the big twin were Honda support teammates Roberto Pietri and Sam McDonald, followed by Wes Cooley, now with Kawasaki, and John Bettencourt, the last of the Honda support group.

A scriptwriter couldn't have produced a better race for Honda. Baldwin and Spencer split from the field before the end of the first lap, and they continued to pull away in that order until the end. In the closing phase, Baldwin fought a leaking gas cap. His Honda had a mandatory stock fuel cap but, like everything else on the factory 750s, it too was trick. The cap, retained by hinge and Velcro, opened to reveal a small quick-fill orifice. The spring in the quick-fill broke, allowing the fuel to come past the cap, onto Mike. Spencer nosed ahead to win.

Not according to script was Steve Wise's travail. His factory Honda went from launch to abort to park in a matter of yards when a chain adjuster failed, letting the rear axle get loose and pulling the chain off. Never mind, though; Honda had plenty in reserve. The most experienced of the support team, Dave Aldana, also proved to be the quickest around the track. Wayne Rainey hitched up with Aldana, who was a short space ahead of his Honda teammates. Rainey had to ride the infield much harder than Aldana because Dave's Honda was much stronger on the banking, and this difference kept Aldana third, and Rainey fourth. The other factory Kawasaki never figured in the race—Wes Cooley retired with a failed clutch.

Hardest-charger of the Honda support group was Fred Merkel, locked together with Roberto Pietri for fifth until the Honda twosome went down in turn one while passing a slower rider. In that tumble two-fifths of the support team



DAVE HOPLEY

departed. They joined Sam McDonald, an early retiree; his Honda rattled to a stop with a broken valve. John Bettencourt, riding carefully—last year's leg injury still not fully healed—finished fifth. Jimmy Adamo's Ducati burned through its short fuse and went pop, but Joey Mills' Italian twin lasted, good for sixth.

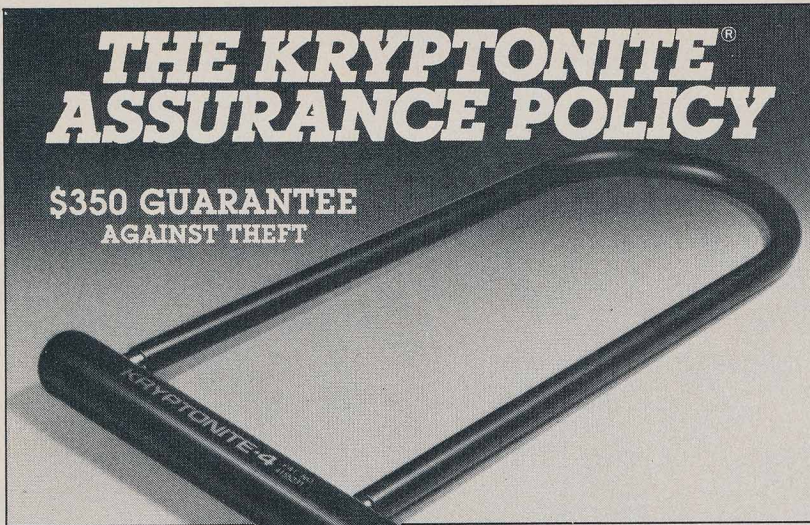
Kawasaki's problems might be summarized as not enough, not soon enough. Time is likely to cure that problem; Kawasaki should not be counted out of the 1983 Superbike year. Honda, on the other hand, may have the problem of too much, all at once. The factory team seems to make the support team superfluous, and vice versa. In any support program, there are the inevitable worries about who gets what parts when and why—and how special are they? While the Honda camp wasn't immune to these political sensitivities, things will be easier for the balance of the year, if for no other reason than that everyone won't be garaged together.

The Battle of the Twins race offered a variety

(Continued on page 124)

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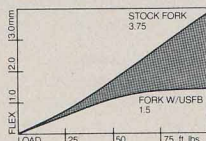
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Ego-Battle Continued from page 113

of equipment, including two machines not seen at Daytona before. First, the Ducati 600TT2 machines, notable for their semi-birdcage frames. The quickest of the lot was a very special 600 *cum* 750TT2, brought over from England with Tony Rutter up. Second, Harley-Davidson jumped into the fray with a modified XR-1000 engine in one of the old KR chassis with early (and effective) 1970s streamlining. The motorcycle produced 106-107 bhp at 7000-7200 rpm and 85 pounds-feet torque at 5700 rpm on Harley's dyno. That should have put the motorcycle in a class by itself, though Harley-Davidson's insurance policy included Jay Springsteen at the controls. Anyone who remembered how well Springsteen rode the twin-cylinder 250 Harley-Davidson two-strokes years ago and knew how well Springsteen controls *anything*, from roller skates to Hula Hoops, looked forward to the Battle of the Twins.

This pavement stuff is only a collateral program at Milwaukee. Nevertheless, Dick O'Brien's racing department can get impressive short-term results that surpass anything a privateer could do. Ask Reno Leoni, whose Ducatis, ridden by Jimmy Adamo, ruled the BOTT class last year. There's probably no such thing as a 107-horsepower Ducati.

Springsteen was gone, start to finish. Adamo trailed in second, without threatening. Rutter's little 600/750TT2 nailed down third. Some thought Springer's Harley didn't handle too well; it slid and stayed loose in the corners. That had more to do with Springsteen's riding style than Harley's presumed suspension deficiencies. Springer rides loose, and he rides fast.

There was a lesson in this. Race-goers witnessed the first front-line American professional racer to ride in the Battle of the Twins. Something similar happened to Superbikes in 1978, when the simple addition of Freddie Spencer increased the average riding talent in the Superbike class by a factor of two. Springer's and Harley-Davidson's appearances will likewise redefine the meaning of *fast* in the Battle of the Twins. Backmarkers who dislike such progress should prepare to enter the vintage concours next year. ■

