

# Cycle

MARCH 1979 • \$1.00

**TOURING:  
THE GREAT  
ASPENCADE  
EXPLOSION**

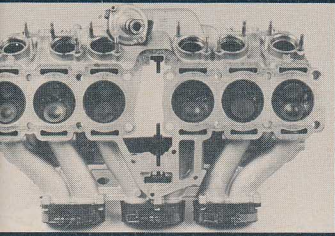
**6-CYLINDER KAWASAKI  
KZ1300 ... ZZAAAPP!**

**1-CYLINDER HONDA  
XR500 ... THUMP!**



**CAN-AM 250  
QUALIFIER  
YAMAHA  
IT400F**





p.38



p.116



p.156



p.146

## Road Tests

- 38 **Kawasaki KZ1300-Six**  
*If God is in his heaven, this ought to be the last, final, ultimate, end of the line, top of the heap big bike statement.*
- 116 **Honda XR500**  
*This is more than a big bore XL250, more than a four-valve Yamaha TT500. It is new, heavyish, torquey and great good fun.*
- 146 **Can-Am 250 Qualifier**  
*For about \$100 more than the cost of a PE250 or IT250, the Can-Am gives you international quality components, an MX4 chassis, surprise-free handling and a good chance to win.*
- 156 **Yamaha IT400F**  
*Now this here is a handful. The biggest IT has been evolving for three years, and has now reached the KTM level of excellence.*

## Features

- 70 **Aspencade!**  
*Every year the touring riders get together in Ruidoso, New Mexico, and have a quiet riot. This year Associate Editor Bill Stermer joined them with notepad, camera, and CBX.*
- 129 **Honda MT125R and Other Terrors**  
*The updated version of Honda's little 125cc air-cooled roadracer (Eeek! That was the powerband) is more ferocious—and more expensive—than ever. By Phil Schilling.*

## Technical

- 172 **King of the Boomers**  
*Udo Gietl's BMW Superbike Production Racer came within a whisker of winning the Championship. What was in there, how come, who did it and how did it work? By Kevin Cameron*

## Departments

- 8 Editorial / *Worse Than We Thought* / Cook Neilson
- 10 Letters / *Rocky!*
- 12 Pipeline / *Racing, Anyone?* / Jim Greening
- 14 25 Years Ago / *Daytona's Roots* / Bill Stermer
- 16 The Duct Tapes / *Push Rod* / Ed Hertfelder
- 20 Newsline / *1914: A Goodyear to Remember* / Allyn Fleming
- 50 Book Review / *Motocourse* / Phil Schilling
- 176 Classified Ads / *Goods and services new and used*
- 180 Readers Information / *How to find what you saw and liked*

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*This Month's Cover.* They may look different, but there's a lot in common between the XR500 Honda Single and the steaming Kawasaki 1300. They're both big for their age, powerful, technically interesting, and capable performers. Another capable performer, Robin Riggs, who built a studio in our shop just for Cycle's March cover, then took the shots.

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# ASPENCADE!

● WHERE ELSE COULD YOU SEE THEM ALL together? Where else could you see a Honda Gold Wing with a Subaru engine and radiator? Or a Harley-Davidson Sportster with a Gold Wing engine and drive train? And dogs in travel trunks, dogs in trailers, dogs in sidecars? Chromed bullets, chromed eagles, chromed railings, chromed horns? No-where but Aspencade.

And where else could you see so many touring riders? They, like their machines, came fully dressed in club uniforms, in vests festooned with patches and pins from every organized event they had ever attended, in full leathers or in tee shirts. Some were carefully styled, others fully casual. Some wore clothing color-matched to their custom-painted bikes. And the beauty of the event was simple: whether you had changed everything on your motorcycle, or just the engine oil, you were welcome at Aspencade.

Aspencade? Isn't that something to do with skiing in Colorado? Nope. The Aspencade Motorcyclist Convention is held in Ruidoso, New Mexico. This annual (usually) event, which registered 3200 riders and 2200 motorcycles in 1978, is the largest event of its kind in the U.S.

Aspencade 1978 was held at the Chaparral Motor Hotel just outside Ruidoso. Now you might not call the Chaparral parking lot big, but if someone plowed it up and planted beans there he could feed the entire population of the state of Maine. Or somebody could raise naugas and upholster all the couches in Cleveland with naugahyde. Imagine acres of motorcycles. Imagine that each and every one has been prepared with the attention to detail of a boot camp private readying his foot locker for his first heavy inspection. Take a look down the rows and rows of full dressers. Virtually every kind of fairing and virtually every kind of saddlebag adorns virtually every brand of bike. But astonishing as a great overview is, the real

treat of Aspencade lies in the subtle—and not so subtle—intricacies which have turned these “one of thousands” machines into “one in a million.”

These machines are not merely pack animals for their riders—Aspencade is years beyond the “motorcycle as transportation” school of thought, passes also the “motorcycle as a means of self-expression,” and leaps into the “motorcycle as theater” philosophy. The “transportation” idea involves basic machines with make-do accessories. The second group rides basic machines which sport standard accessories and little personal touches in paint and detailing. The third involves a flair for the dramatic. These machines would not be fabricated unless their fabricators knew that somewhere up the road an audience would be assembled to appreciate their handiwork.

Theatrical touches abound at Aspencade. Hand-tooled and custom-dyed leather seats with matching snap-off tank covers, fairing tonneaus, and backrests decorate many Texas Gold Wings. For no reason but theater would someone build a blue metal-flaked trike powered by a V8 which sports a chromed air cleaner and valve covers. The “more is better” people have brought their full dressers with sidecars, trailers, travel trunks, fairings, CB and AM/FM radios, custom seats, backrests, footboards and saddlebags—all attached to the same motorcycle. Nowhere in our two-wheeled world is there anything that's as big and outlandish and as much fun as Aspencade.

Before reaching its present form, Aspencade was for horses—and people too, of course. Formed from the words “aspen” and “cavalcade,” the original idea in the 1950s and '60s brought horsemen together for a ride up into the fall mountains to see the aspen turn. A parade was added. High school bands joined in, followed by beauty queens and other trappings of municipal boosterism. In 1971 Til

Thompson invited his touring friends to the festival. To his delight about 300 attended that year.

Later an article appeared in *Road Rider* Magazine, calling Aspencade a few yuks short of being a good time. Letters blattered in from other festival-goers who were offended by the article. Those riders were adamant. “Aspencade was terrific!” Roger Hull, *Road Rider's* decrepit and wizened editor (and a good friend of ours), is as anxious as anyone to find a good excuse to go riding and crack open a beer. He rounded up his entire staff and both of them went to the 1972 Aspencade to investigate. Roger saw, and it was good.

Aspencade grew considerably in 1973 and continued growing for several more years. The festival was not held in 1976 because some Ruidoso officials feared that outlaw bikers would arrive en masse to disrupt the events. In 1977 and '78 it was business as usual—without the appearance of street meanies.

The 1978 issue of Aspencade began on a bright Tuesday in October and lasted until noon the following Sunday. Touring riders and their rigs descended on Ruidoso like so many multi-colored, heavy-metal snowflakes. Campgrounds, cabins, lodges, and motel rooms filled throughout the county.

All during the festival two photographers clicked away under a huge parachute which dominated the parking lot. Dresser after dresser, individual after couple parked, posed and paraded off, thus assured of immortality in the yearbook.

Daily episodes of Hot-Dog-It-for-Dough were held in the parking lot. Contestants won two dollars if they could coast beneath a string-suspended hot dog and take a bite of it. Riders tried it. Passengers tried it. The big surprise was that the brilliant yellow mustard which coated each dog was as hot as a Texas summer.

Another daily event was the blind sidecar race. Once a course was laid out,

Everybody was there. And everything that could be stuck, bungied, glued, screwed, set upon, bolted to, towed behind or otherwise attached to a motorcycle was there too. Story and photos by Bill Stermer.





When is a dresser more than a dresser? When it has custom leather upholstery (left), or a dash complete with a country music tape and a statuette of the south end of a horse facing north.

ected by a pane of glass.

But that's only part of the story. Back upstairs, The Kid grabbed a shotgun and went to a lace-curtained window; from there he nailed the sheriff who was hurrying across the street from the hotel. He fell in the gravel roadway. William Bonney then stepped out onto the balcony and pumped a second blast into the sheriff's body. Nearly a century later, 100 Honda Gold Wings serenely puttered over the spot where the sheriff had died with such violence.

Thursday night the Trade Show opened in the convention center. Several major motorcycle companies and many accessory manufacturers displayed their wares inside the huge building. Also, awards were presented to winners in some of the motorcycle judging categories for such things as "Best Campsite" and "Long Distance Couple."

Friday morning the Mystery Ghost Town tour left under cold, leaden skies. And the class judging continued as the now-familiar activities proceeded with no less gusto than before. The slow race was held again, with contestants attempting to be *last* across the finish line. Here was as much a test of clutch riding as motorcycle riding as contestants feathered their throttles, wig-wagged their front ends like a half-dozen dogs shaking a half-dozen cats, and often wound up sideways.

On Saturday, parade day at Aspen-

## ASPENCADE!

side-hack jockeys were invited to try their skills at negotiating the pylons blindfolded with only their hack passenger's voice to guide them. The team which completed the course in the shortest time, without knocking over a pylon, would be the winner. For an hour a day the Chaparral's lot was a frenzy of "Left, left, left, now right . . . RIGHT!" as wobbly hacks piloted by teeth-gritting riders scattered pylons and spectators like ten-pins. Applause greeted each skillful team which managed to bluster through the maze without smushing a pylon or T-boning a spectator.

One highlight was Thursday's police-escorted tour to old Lincoln. Riders drew up in two columns and, herded in by the

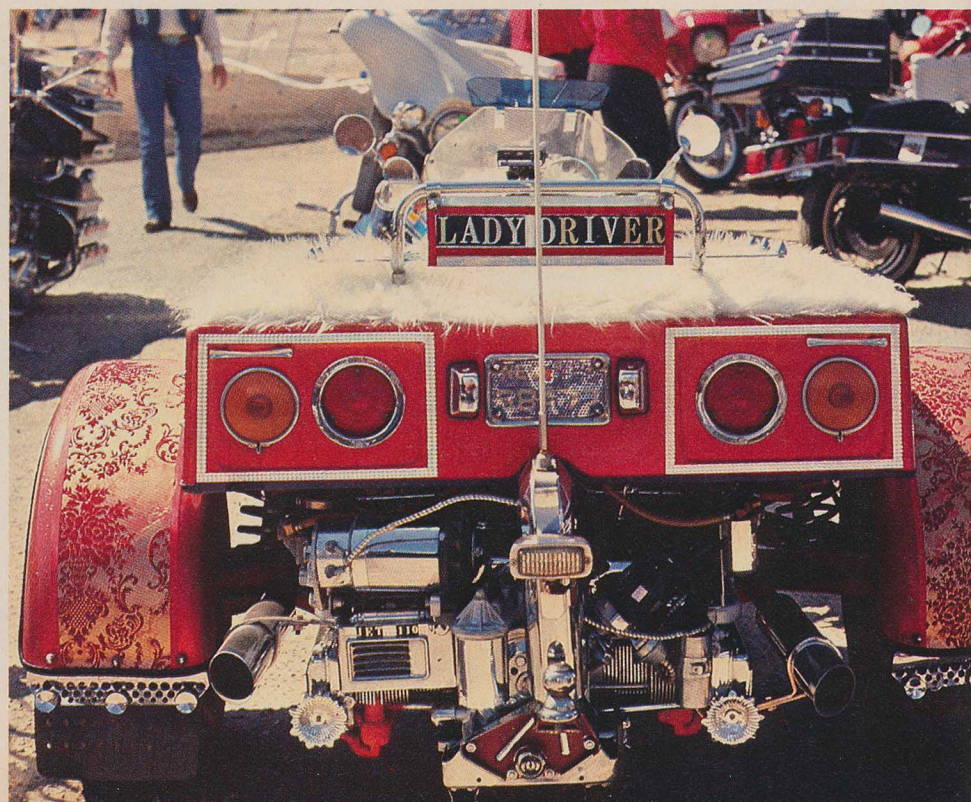
officers, formed a metal snake which wound its way to the town.

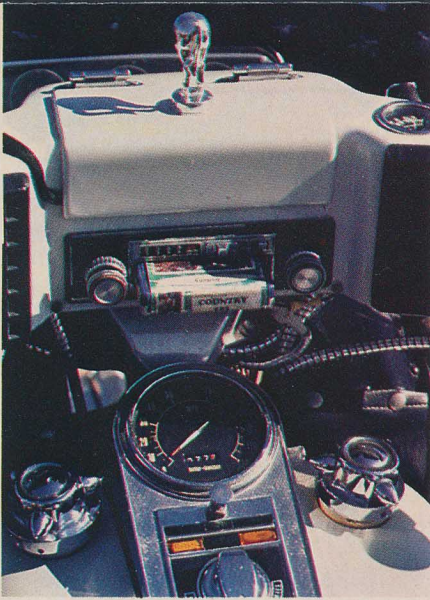
Lincoln is a holdover from the old wild West days, with an emphasis on *wild*. The Lincoln County War, a cattle/sheep range war, was fought here, and one of the participants was none other than William Bonney—Billy the Kid. Four museums are housed in this tiny burg, with another scheduled to open soon.

A personal highlight on the tour was the upstairs courtroom where young Bonney was incarcerated in 1881. Here The Kid overpowered his guard, snatched his gun, and shot the deputy twice on the stairway. The lawman struggled down the steps and into the yard where he died. The two bullet holes in the adobe wall, though enlarged by the pocket knives of generations of school children, are now pro-



While Beano represented the canines, this three-wheeled fluff-box with heart-shaped mirrors was for "motorcycle as theater" riders.





## Touring the CBX: Sure she's fast, but can she cook?

● *CBX.* Three simple letters which spell nothing. Nothing, that is, except to people who know motorcycles. CBX stands for the quickest, trickiest, highest total performance package of a motorcycle to ever wheelie, scream, spring and whirr down streets and by-ways.

At first I wondered why Honda chose to designate the first big Japanese six-cylinder as CBX instead of "The Six". And why no last name? We know of XS Elevens, GS750s, and KZ400s, but no one refers to a "CBX 1050". After a short acquaintance with the CBX, it was obvious; it has no last name for the same reason Godzilla has none. No one who has met either need ever again ask, "Godzilla who?"

For my 2200-mile round trip to Ruidoso, New Mexico for Aspencade, I took only a tank bag, duffel bag and a CBX. Travelling light is this bike's forte.

Stepping through Los Angeles and heading east on Interstate 10, impressions began to flow. It's a relatively smooth bike. Not as dead-smooth as a Gold Wing or as rumbly-smooth as an XS Eleven, but smooth the way a busy engine can be . . . whirring. It sounds like it should be vibrating, but it's not.

Some motorcycles feel like a conglomeration of parts, their front ends flopping around to the boogie-oogie-oogie while their rears do the hustle. But the CBX feels more like a unit, more of a piece, than any bike in my recent experience. Despite its 600 pounds, the suspension keeps its ride from being sloppy or blubbery, yet it stops short of harsh-

ness. Tautness and preciseness characterize the whole machine.

Visually, the machine will set your heart to pounding nearly as much as an episode of Charlie's Angels. From the front, that wide, silvery engine bulges like a flexed muscle. Once aboard, looking out over the broad, flat expanse of gas tank is like peering down the hood of a car. Wide as the tank is, the engine's finny opulence protrudes well beyond it. Viewed from above, the CBX is especially impressive. Besides the aforementioned tank and engine, those huge chromed twin mufflers jut out from the sides like the steering thrusters of a moon-bound Saturn V.

Is the CBX a comfortable machine for touring? The CBX was not engineered to adapt easily to long distances and saddlebags and a fairing. Nor was it intended to powder-puff you for 500 miles in a dozen hours. Consequently, the CBX is not as comfortable a machine as those designed for long-distance riding. The seat becomes hard inside 100 miles. The footpegs, set high for more ground clearance, cause you to bring the knees up and curve your spine a tad, which is also not comfortable. The two-piece handlebars are just great, however. Besides looking solid and black and beautiful, they are low enough to cant your body into the wind.

Pity the poor passenger. The higher rear pegs force (his/her) knees far out around the rider in splayed grasshopper fashion. Before considering one for two—  
(Continued on next page)

cade, riders began assembling for the big event, and Ruidoso's main street grew a hedge of people along each side. Under warm, blue skies the parade began as, three columns abreast, motorcycles, trikes, sidecars, families, dogs, everyone and everything that is Aspencade, rolled through town. The spectators busily tried to make Kodak rich. When the bikes passed the bands began, and the high school cheerleaders, the pee-wee football teams, beauty queens, clowns—and clouds. Just as the parade finished, a brief shower passed over Ruidoso, soaking some of the spectators. Here was a fitting reminder that things bright and beautiful, things enjoyable and magical, things like the mood of friendliness and cooperation that is Aspencade do not, unfortunately, last all year. ●



Where but Aspencade could you see the "more is better" folks like this blind sidecar race participant (left), highway cruisers (right), and this Harley Sportster with a Gold Wing engine?



## Touring the CBX *Continued*

up riding, go with your passenger and test ride it together; that's providing you can bedazzle your Honda salesman.

The touring rider who would be happiest with the CBX fits a narrow spectrum of the touring market. He is a fast, capable rider who prefers weekend trips through the mountains at speed. He travels one-up and light, holding his equipment to perhaps a small quarter-fairing for the front and a soft-pack for the rear. These practical items are not likely to blur the marvelous focus of this performance machine. All those cylinders and valves run a fair amount of gasoline through the engine. The CBX averaged 34-35 mpg, and that's only slightly worse than a loaded BMW cruising at 80 mph.

In all the prodding, poking, head-scratching and gawking the CBX inspired as it ran to and from Ruidoso, the two most frequently asked questions were: "How big is the engine?" and "Why didn't they put a shaft on it?" With a bore and stroke of 64.5 x 53.4mm, the CBX displaces 1047ccs. There are several reasons chain drive was used instead of a shaft: money, weight and performance. First of all, a drive shaft with a huge rear-end differential is more expensive than two sprockets and a chain. Second, a shaft-drive system would boost the 600-pound CBX up another 60 or 70 pounds. Third, because gears are less efficient than sprocket and chains, a shaft-drive motorcycle loses more power between the gearbox and the rear wheel than a chain-driven motorcycle. And finally, the shaft-drive system and its attendant weight creates the kind of handling complications that Honda would not accept in the CBX.

The chain behaved itself like a perfect

gentleman on the Aspencade Run. I simply oiled the big #630 roller chain once each day, in the evening while it was still warm from running. It was adjusted at the beginning of the trip, then checked each evening for proper tension. And for several evenings, though I'd run consecutive 500-mile days at a cruising speed of 80, the slack did not reach the one-inch time-to-adjust point. Finally, after 1700 miles of high-speed rolling, the rear wheel had to be adjusted back a few millimeters.

People ask why the CBX is so good. Well, it isn't so good simply because it has six cylinders. And it's not good simply because it's the quickest standard production land vehicle ever to run down a quarter-mile. It's good because all its systems and components function so well together.

The CBX is like the gentle giant, a character we see in the movies who is mountainous and strong, yet who stoops down to help children and flowers. Then the bad guys come to town and taunt him. He pitches them through the saloon window two at a time, bangs their heads together and hangs them up by their suspenders from the nearest chandelier. Both giants can be led to live easy, gentle lives. But at challenge time, neither backs down and neither comes out anywhere but on top.

The bike received a ton of attention everywhere it went. Many station attendants and bikers said it was the first CBX they had seen. But the most astonishing thing about its gee-whizability is that people who obviously know nothing about motorcycles knew there was something special about this one. A little girl, perhaps four years old, bounded out of a car in Arizona and bee-lined for the restaurant door. Until she saw the

CBX. She stopped. And really looked at it. When her parents caught up she pointed to it. And in Tucson there was the pair of blue-haired senior citizens who, hurrying past, slowed, did a double-take, damn-near touched it, said something and went on. In high school I was advised to take up the guitar as a way of meeting people. Today, forget the guitar. Get a CBX.

Some say, "Nobody ought to own a motorcycle that's so big and heavy and goes so fast. It's not safe." Others look smug and ask, "Who needs a CBX?" If this were a factual, realistic world we could easily reply, "Nobody needs one!" But if CBXs don't make sense, then how do we justify opera windows on cars, flashing turn signal lights on fenders, crushed puppy-skin interiors, jogging suits, and screens on which big-as-life football players come crashing through our living room walls?

Motorcycling isn't a logical "need" activity. And even something as utilitarian as an automobile is more than wheels. If need governed our choices, all of us would still be riding around in black-only Model T Fords. Henry Ford almost went broke in the 1920s before recognizing that most of us buy things for reasons far beyond need. How dare anyone ask, "Who needs a CBX?" when he has closets full of decorative peacock clothing, a car with sheep-in-wolves' trappings, a four-wheel-drive macho pickup and "Racing Team" on his cap?

The CBX is real. Unlike the papier-mâché macho and plaster-of-paris elegance and vapor-thin sexiness of status-symbol pretenders, the CBX implies nothing it can't deliver . . . in spades, hearts, diamonds and clubs.

—Bill Stermer

## ASPENCADE!

