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America's newest National Championship

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ON THE COVER: Ron Lawson, Troy Welty, Shaun Wynn, Jim Buntin and Chuck Dempsy wring out the 1991 Open-classes at El Mirage dry lake. Photo by Chris Hultner, cover design by DeWest, and color separations by Valley Film.

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# RETURN OF THE SUPERBIKERS

*Same race—different world*

**R**emember the Superbikers? Everyone loved it. Spectators loved it for the action. ABC loved it for the ratings. Television viewers loved it for the living-room thrills. Racers loved it for the money. Plus it gave riders a chance to race against a whole new set of competitors. It might be hard to believe, but professional motocross can get a little boring at the top. You race against the same riders week in and week out—rarely is there a change in the cast of characters.



The Superbikers was different. Top motocrossers, road racers, dirttrackers, even speedway riders were matched against each other on a course that, theoretically at least, was supposed to be a little of everything. It was, truly, one of the great races of all time.

Now Superbikers is gone, a victim of internal broadcasting politics, but it's not forgotten, at least not in France. This year

marked the second running of the *Guidon d'Or Superbiker*, or "The Superbiker's Golden Handlebar." The race is the stepchild of French promoter Philip Vassard. "Crowd attendance comes second," he explains. "The Carole circuit has hardly any facilities for spectators. We could have chosen a bigger circuit with better accommodations, but Carole is very good for TV coverage and it's close to Paris."

Finding a track with elements of motocross and road racing actually was the easy part. The biggest attraction of the old Superbikers was seeing the champions themselves, side by side. If the riders didn't show up, there would be no show. "Last year, only a few people believed Eddie Lawson would come to Paris," Vassard remembers. "He

**Above: Frenchman Stephane Peterhansel proved that enduro riders can hold their own against the road race and MX superstars.**

◀ **World Road Race Champ Wayne Rainey was the fastest man on the Carole circuit. Maybe all those years on dirttracks weren't a waste after all.**

**RESULTS:  
GUIDON D'OR  
SUPERBIKERS  
Paris, France**

**SATURDAY**

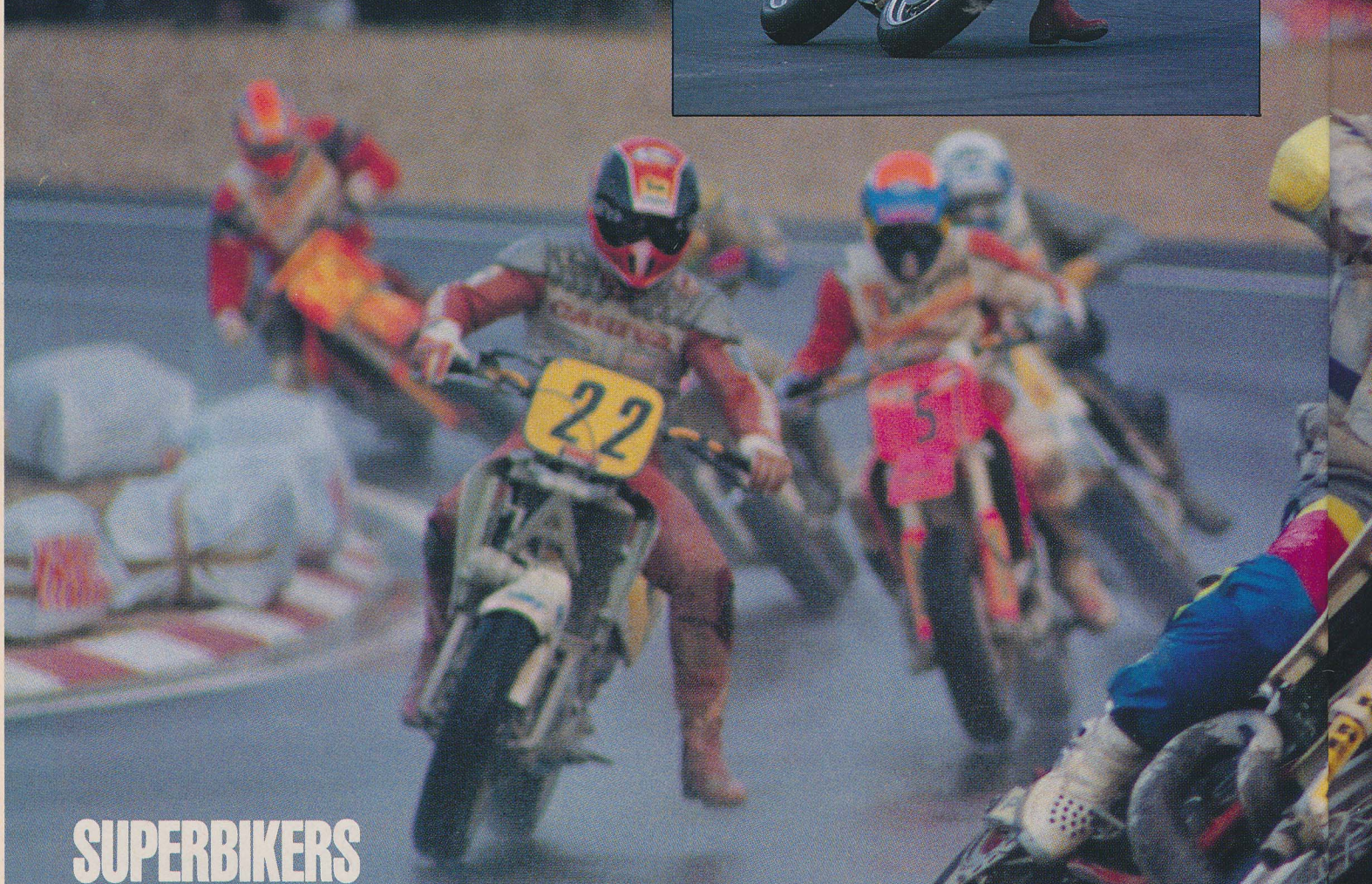
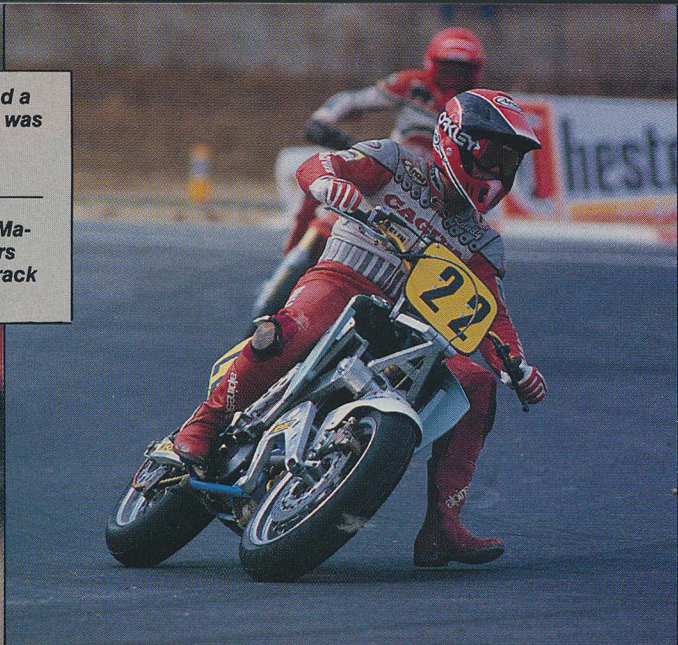
1. Eddie Lawson . . . . Yam
2. Wayne Rainey . . . . Yam
3. S. Peterhansel . . . . Yam
4. Broc Glover . . . . . Hon
5. Laurent Pidoux . . . . Hus

**SUNDAY**

1. Wayne Rainey . . . . Yam
2. S. Peterhansel . . . . Yam
3. Eddie Lawson . . . . Yam
4. Broc Glover . . . . . Hon
5. Gilles Salvador . . . . KTM
6. Wayne Gardner . . . . Hon
7. Laurent Pidoux . . . . Hus
8. Eric Delannoy . . . . Hon
9. Serge David . . . . . Hon
10. Louis Ristori . . . . . Hon

*American road racer Randy Mamola had a two-wheel-drive Husky. The drive train was irrelevant, though; he rarely had both wheels on the ground. ▶*

*Gilles Salvador leads American Randy Mamola and World MX Champ Eric Geboers through a tricky "S" section. Did the track favor road racers? Absolutely. ▼*



# SUPERBIKERS

did. This year, doubts were even greater. Our total budget is about \$1 million, and three-quarters of that goes to start money."

The champions showed, all right, but there clearly was more interest evidenced from road racers than from motocrossers. Sonauto, the French Yamaha importer, came to Carole with no less than five liquid-cooled Yamaha YZ500s: one was for 500 World Road Race Champion Wayne Rainey, another was for former Road Race Champ Eddie Lawson. Stephane Peterhansel also was on a Sonauto Yamaha—he's the man who won the 1988 and 1989 ISDE. Wayne Gardner, yet another former World Road Race Champion, was riding the HRC Honda 500 that Eddie Lawson won the race on last year.

The only motocrossers of note were Eric Geboers, Broc Glover (both on Hondas) and Georges Jobe (on a Yamaha).

The weird stuff came out, too. French Superbikers Champion Stephane Chambon had a Ducati 851 mounted in a Husqvarna chassis. It was supposed to have 120hp and weigh less than 242 pounds. Stranger still was Randy Mamola's two-wheel-drive Savage 2x2, powered by a Husqvarna 510 engine. "This feels really strange," Mamola reported. "It takes time to understand exactly what is happening under me—you can ride a bike to its potential only if you understand it 100 percent. One weekend isn't enough to get used to the different approach in steering." No one gave Mamola much of

a chance on the underpowered four-stroke, unless it rained.

It rained, but Mamola's effort still was for nothing—he had an ignition failure early in the race. Saturday was the first event of the two-race weekend, and Rainey clearly was the man to beat. He got the holeshot and was making easy money, pulling away from everyone, until the fifth lap. He stalled



*French Superbikers Champion Stéphane Chambon showed up with two different bikes—one was powered by a Ducati V-Twin, the other by a Husky four-stroke motor. Some people just gotta be different . . .*

the YZ, and by the time he could get it restarted Lawson and Peterhansel got by. Eventually, Rainey passed Peterhansel for second, but Lawson's lead was too big.

The main event was Sunday, and when Frenchman Peterhansel jumped into the lead, the partisan crowd went crazy. Rainey and Peterhansel then proceeded to drive them crazy with a wheel-to-wheel battle that

never let up. With three laps to go, Rainey took over the lead, but he still couldn't shake the enduro rider. They finished with less than a bike length between them.

What about the motocrossers? Broc Glover was a quiet fourth behind Lawson. Geboers had a collision with Chambon at the very start of the race and both riders destroyed their bikes. Jobe dropped out only

a few laps later.

Was it a true Superbikers race? Absolutely. When you have two American dirttrackers-turned-road racers dicing with an enduro rider and a motocrosser in the top four, then the race has to be considered a battle of champions. It is a shame that this kind of racing no longer happens in the United States—but at least it still happens. □