

THUMPER REVIVAL

The heady days of the sixties when the sounds of big British singles reverberated around the countryside have long gone. But the four-strokes haven't. They now race in something called the Haynes Four Stroke Motocross Championship.

AND while European and Japanese makes may have replaced those famous British marques, the enthusiasm for these big thumpers remains as high as ever. This year the Haynes series is over 19 rounds, and to date the organisers have never had anything less than full fields.

But the series has yet to reach its full potential. From humble beginnings back in the seventies, the four-stroke racing revival looks set to develop still further. Already both Honda and Suzuki have hinted at involvement next year, which means Kawasaki won't be left out. But, of course, Yamaha has already stolen a march on its Japanese rivals in the shape of Vic Allan's much modified TT600.

At 39 Vic is one of the "more experienced" riders in the championship, which attracts regular competitors in the 17 to 45-year-old age group. And, interestingly, it is these older racers who are doing most of the winning. As we



went to press KTM's Dave Tomasik (31) was heading the series with Steve How, the 32-year-old Armstrong pilot, second and Allan third.

So what's the attraction of racing a big, heavy four-stroke? "It's a bit of fun, really," says three-time British champion Vic Allan. "I do it because I enjoy riding four-strokes."

However, he fears the championship is too long, and the growing Japanese interest will change its character. "There are too many rounds and if it gets too commercial it will just become another series."

Allan sees four-stroke racing as having a healthy future. "But we've got to watch now it progresses. In some ways four stroke race development has gone backwards since the early '70s. Then my works BSA 500 weighed 210 pounds. My

Left: Super Veteran Vic Allan get a little training in on his Yamaha 600.



Picking up the spoils last year, Dave Tomasik wears the Haynes Championship winner's garland. Also pictured (from left) Jackie Watson and Jeff Clews, of Haynes, and KTM importer Badger Goss.

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Yamaha now weighs about 280. If someone has a bike now that weighs 240 pounds they call it light!"

To get today's bike down to the weight of those old works Beezas will require more lightweight engines such as that in the Husqvarna, or extensive use of some very exotic and pricey alloys. And that immediately takes the cost of what is already quite an expensive form of racing even higher. How much progress can thumper racing afford?

"Four-stroke racing is expensive," says Allan. "If you're lucky you'll use the same piston all year. But things do happen and the harder you go the more chance you have of breaking something."

Should the Haynes series get commercial, Allan can see it forcing many riders out. "There are perhaps four or five really good riders then it tapers off. But what you find is that these other riders enjoy the Haynes series because it is an opportunity for them to ride against better riders and study them close up."

Allan's suggestion is to run a six round British four-stroke championship for the 20 or so dedicated riders who want to chase such a title, but retain the present Haynes format for those who prefer the more amateur approach; that is, those for whom the enjoyment of competing comes

before the thought of financial reward.

On the other side sits Lorna Wilds, who with her husband, Jim, has been a driving force in the Haynes series since its inception back in 1977. Like Allan, her involvement stems from a love of big four-stroke singles. "I like the noise of them, and also the people who ride them. They're a breed on their own," says Lorna.

With the rounds this year spread through the country, Lorna sees the four-stroke message spreading. "It's proving very popular in the Midlands and in the north, she says," and we're probably getting at least 1000 people to each meeting."

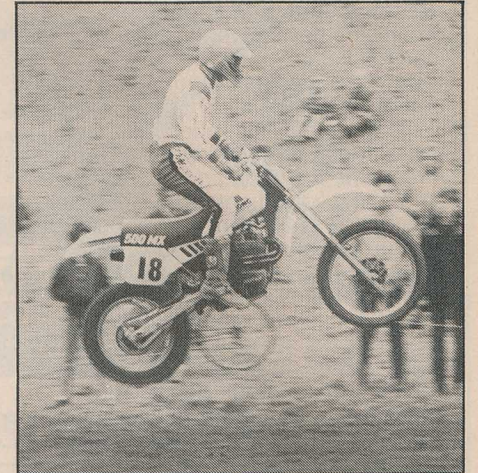
And if riders such as Vic Allan believe 19 rounds are too many then he'd better prepare himself for a surprise. With the current upsurge in interest has come applications for still more rounds. "We have no problems getting venues," says Lorna, "and we always have a full 40 on the starting grid. In fact we've had as many as 54 riders so that we've had to run heats."

For series sponsor the Haynes Publishing Group, involvement in the series came about almost by accident. According to the firm's executive editorial director Jeff Clews: "The opportunity for us to become involved occurred when Ralph Venables telephoned me to say that Motor Cycle News had withdrawn from the series and he was anxious to find someone else who might be interested."

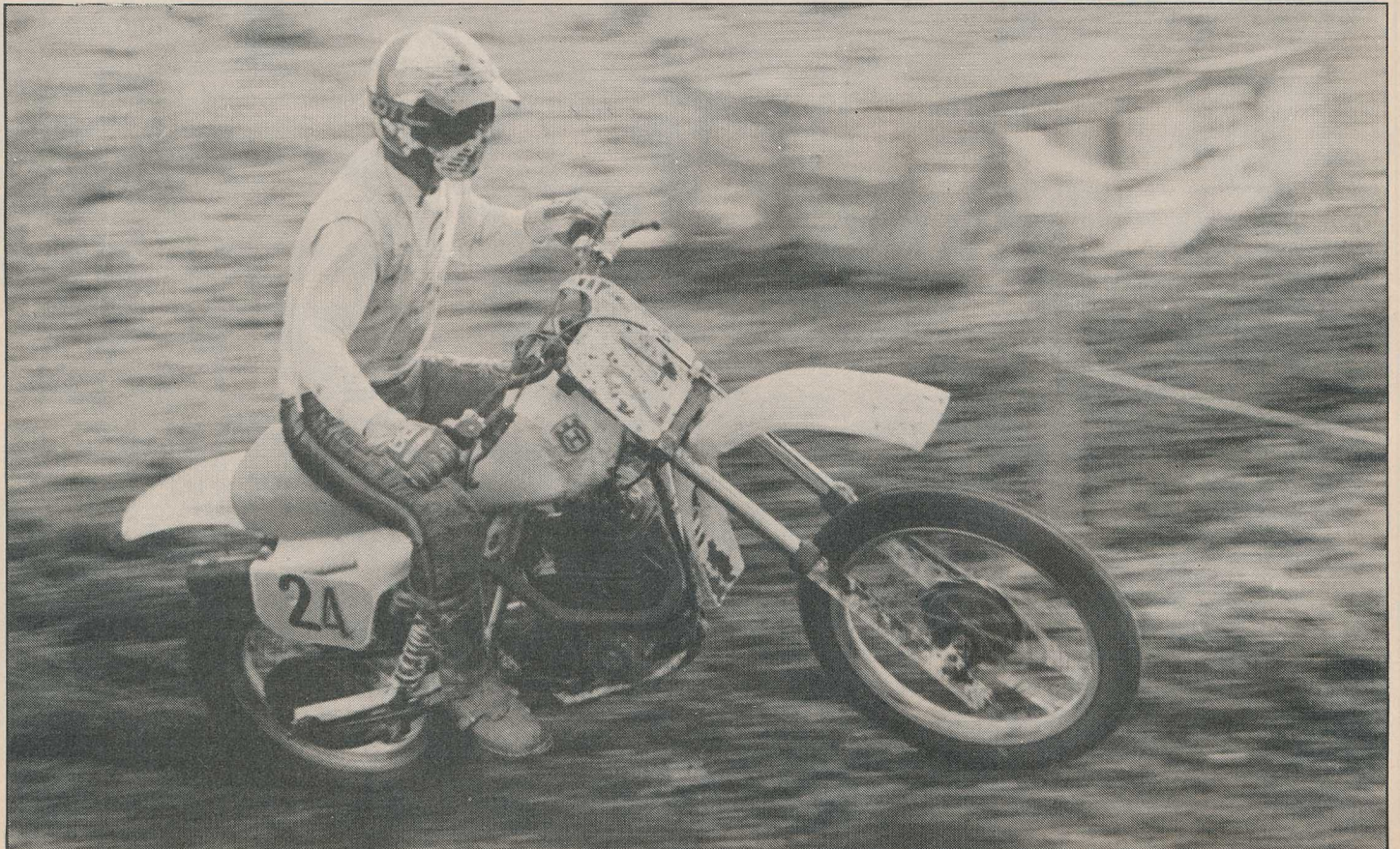
"It was fortuitous that our chairman, John Haynes, happened to agree that we ought to put something back into the sport in appreciation of the support we received from motorcyclists," recalls Clews.

"The series has received our regular support ever since, but at the beginning of 1984 we considerably increased the amount of sponsorship money because it was becoming obvious that the championship was growing from strength to strength and beginning to attract works-supported riders."

Whatever way you view four-stroke racing it's a spectacle which can't be ignored. At present it retains something of a sixties charm; a close knit group moving from track to track, each weekend luring a few more converts into its ranks. Technology and commercialism will no doubt force it into the eighties, but it is to be hoped its heritage and character will not be lost in the rush.



Championship contender Steve How leaps his big Armstrong. How and Tomasik are disputing the series lead.



Husky mounted Ken Hanson is a former Haynes winner.