

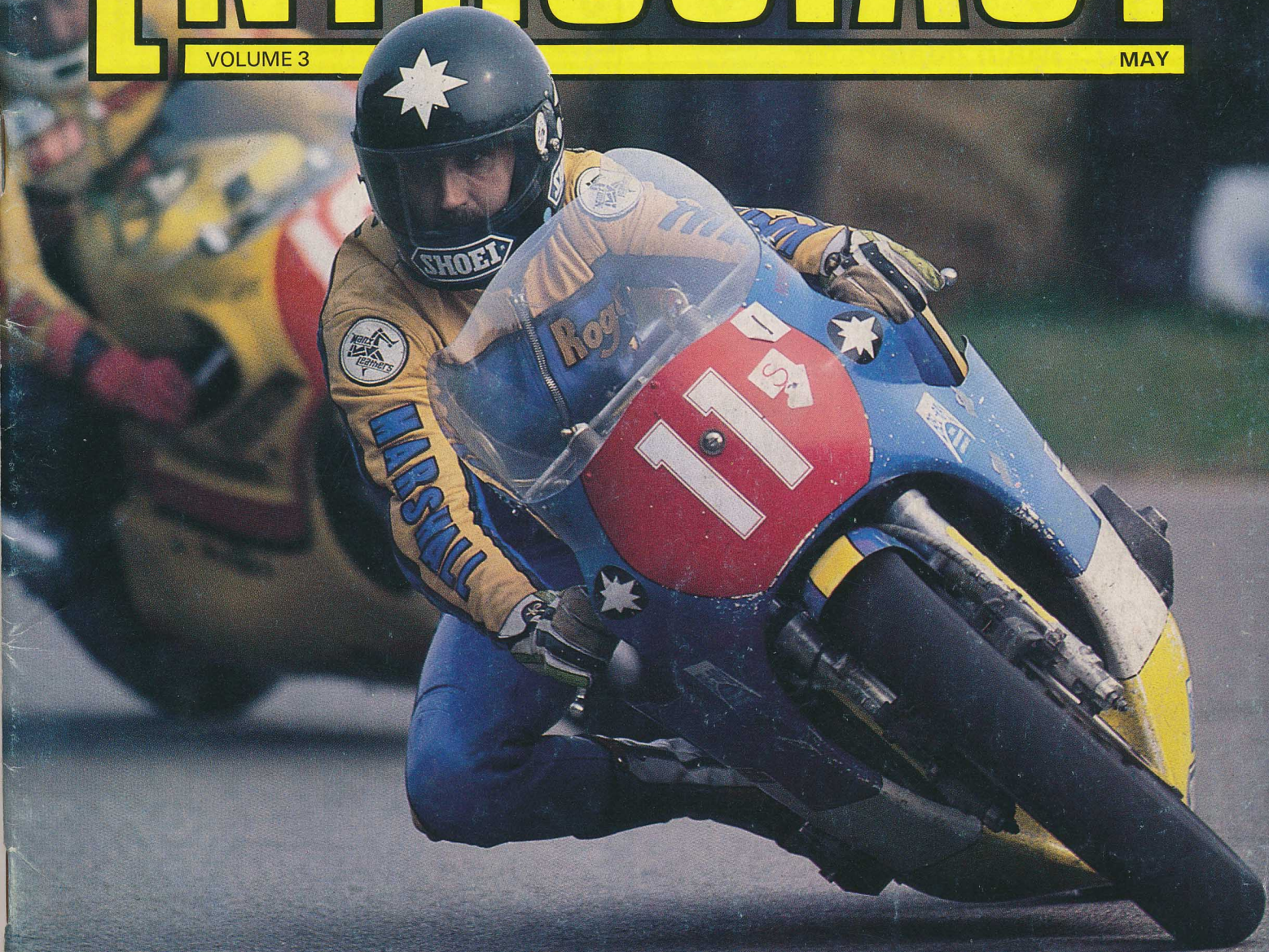
MOTORCYCLE

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# ENTHUSIAST

VOLUME 3

MAY



**British Bikes: Beesa pre-unit twins**

**Road tests: Kawasaki Z1100R**

**and Yamaha Trail Bikes**

**Personality profile:**

**Roger Marshall**

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# Roger Marshall

## The twinkle that became a star

When motorcycle racing fans gather at a meeting, whether it be at club level, national or international and talk about their favourite riders, it wouldn't be at all unusual for them to mention the name, Roger Marshall, known to many in the racing world as Roger the Dodger. This is the story of Roger's route to the top, from a virtual nobody to become one of Britain's most respected riders.

Roger was born at 2 in the morning on the 5th of April, 1951, in the town of Cleethorpes. Thus he was born under Aries, the sign of the Ram. Strangely enough, his initials are RAM. Talk about fate being on your side...

His interest in bikes began when he was about eight years old. His father owned an Ariel with a sidecar and Roger and his sister, Diane, would ride in the chair whilst his mother rode pillion. He read Motorcycle News and Motorcycle Weekly, of course, even taking them to school and reading them during the breaks. His teachers and most of his mates were rather surprised, after all, twelve year old kids in 1962 were supposed to read Victor and Beano, not concern themselves with bikes!

His father often took him to the

races at Cadwell, then, when he was around 14, Roger began to cycle the 26 miles there on his own. He hadn't yet ridden a motorbike but worshipped those who did. He collected the autographs of his favourite stars, Mike Hailwood, Phil Read and Bill Ivy, amongst others. However, the chap he really admired was a man in the village called Bob Strugnall, who rode a BSA Gold Flash. Roger would have given anything for a go on that!

Mr and Mrs Marshall were dead set against their son having a road bike. However, his interest was so obvious that they made a deal with him after he left school. They told him that if he could save enough out of his wages then he could have a bike. On the face of it, Roger was on a hiding to nothing and his parents knew it. He had hoped that his interest in bikes might get him a job with Freddie Frith, a local hero who owned FF Motorcycles in Grimsby. Roger got an interview and was offered the job but before he could take it the deal fell through. This was the first of many disappointments in Roger's career. His father managed to have him taken on as an apprentice electrician in Grimsby and from his mediocre wage of £3.15.0 (£3.75) he was determined to buy a bike.



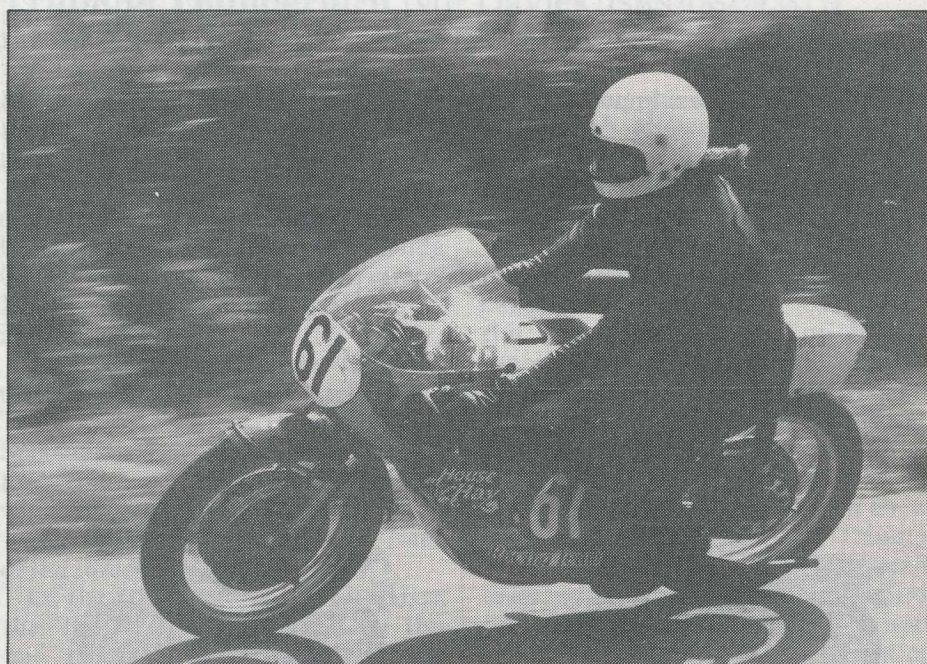
A youthful Roger with two friends at Cadwell Park

After he'd given his mother £1 board he saved every penny he could, even cycling to work and back to save the bus fare. Just before his sixteenth birthday he had £75 stashed away. To his credit, Roger's father gave in gracefully and helped his lad scour the local paper for something decent. Roger had his heart set on a Francis Barnett, which was the in thing at the time. However, his dad noticed an ad for a 250 BSA and persuaded Roger to take a look.

When they saw it Roger was horror stricken. The bike was a C10 Beesa complete with side-valve engine and sprung saddle. The speedo was set into the tank and the pillion seat was fixed onto the rear mudguard. He had visions of his mates taking one look at him on it and falling over laughing. Mr Marshall reckoned it could be knocked into better shape and so they asked the price. A tenner! Roger couldn't believe it. They snatched the chap's hand off. Roger had got his bike and still had cash left for tax and insurance.

They worked hard on the C10, putting on a dual seat and generally tidying it up. The tax disc was sent for and Roger waited patiently for his sixteenth birthday.

On the day, he arrived home from work, fixed the disc, climbed on, rode two miles down the road and managed to dump it into a ditch and wrap



Roger riding a 354cc Yamaha TR2B in 1972 sponsored by House of Hay



by David Huntington

it round a tree. He straightened it out as best he could and pushed it home. "Well," said his dad in what must be the understatement of a lifetime, "that didn't take you long, did it?"

Roger continued to graft as an apprentice sparks. The work interested him and he flew through his college tests. Although he reckons he was lucky to get the job, he thinks that if he had stayed he could have become one of the gaffers, but better things called . . .

The job meanwhile paid for a whole string of bikes over the next few years. He had the C10, then a 225 Single Francis Barnet, a 350 MAC Velocette and finally a 600cc Norton Dominator in red and chrome with a slimline Featherbed frame. This last machine was considered by many to be one of the best machines on the road at the time.

Over this period, Roger became more and more involved with road racing. There was a group of bikers in the Grimsby and Cleethorpes area who began going regularly to race meetings. It got to the stage where

they hardly ever missed a meeting and they finally ended up marshalling at Cadwell. Roger loved it, wind, rain or shine. Nothing to do except ride, watch and talk bikes, with a free packed lunch thrown in. Then the whole lot of them would have a mad race back to Grimsby. Some of the bunch were good riders too!

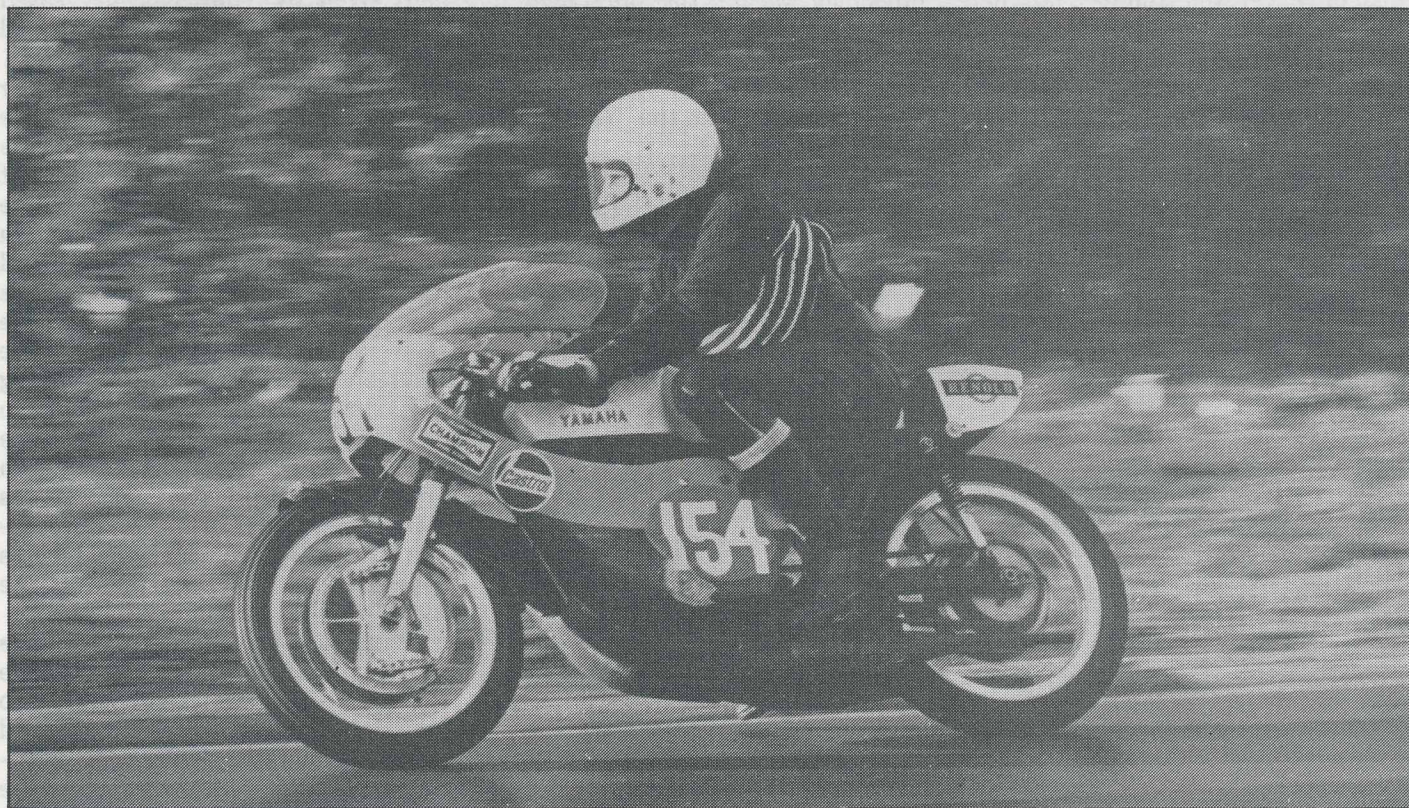
Roger fancied the idea of racing himself but on the wages he was getting at the time there was no chance of him going solo. However, there was a great deal of interest in sidecars in the Grimsby area. This was a much cheaper way of taking the plunge since the cost was split 50/50 between passenger and rider. Roger particularly remembers Mick and Len Parker who were very good.

In 1970 he teamed up with a lad from Cleethorpes called Jim Johnson and between them they bought an outfit for about £200, a 650 Triumph with a Grimsby-built frame. They used an Alloy Racing Equipment conversion to take the bike to 750 and enjoyed a fair amount of success in club racing. Because money was short

they concentrated on Cadwell and Snetterton and managed some thirds and fourths, with only one win, at Cadwell in July that year. However, even that was bitter-sweet, after taking the chequered flag they were waving at their mates and patting each other on the back when, just as they turned up the mountain, the complet back end of the sidecar fell out onto the track. The wheel, the swinging arm, the lot collapsed. This wasn't all that unusual for the the team, the outfit was so old that it used to crack up regularly. What a way to celebrate your first ever win!

At the end of that year, Roger decided he wanted a bash at solo racing. Money was still very tight, so he began to look for better paid work. Over the winter he travelled around the country to wherever work could be found and managed to save enough to buy a decent machine.

A lad called Colin Wray in Grimsby had just come to the end of his racing career as he'd broken his collar bone and decided he'd had enough. He sold Roger his bike, an ex-Derek Chatterton



Ex-Hailwood TR3 Yamaha ridden by Roger at Silverstone prior to Steve Machin racing it



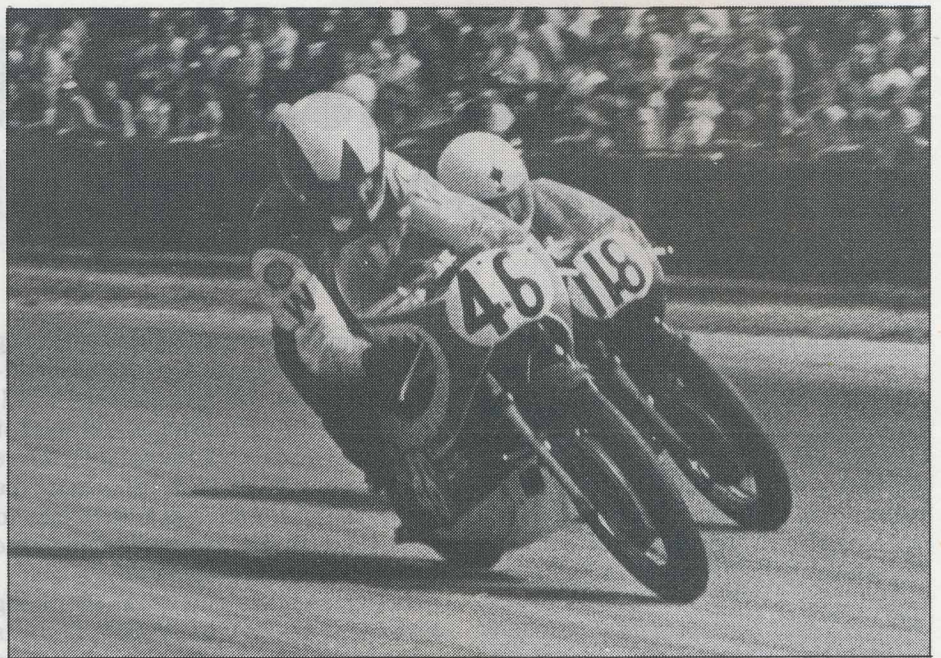
Yamaha TR2B for £630 and then with the money he had left, Roger bought himself a Thames van to carry the lot around.

His first solo race was probably the most disappointing thing that ever happened to Roger. He finished 16th in a club race at Cadwell, a circuit he knew like the back of his hand. When he'd bought the bike, Colin Wray had told him that the gearing was perfect for Cadwell. However, Roger couldn't even pull top gear on the back straight and he felt that he just wasn't riding the bike hard enough. He kept on trying but his highest placing at Cadwell was only twelfth. He'd begun to realise that the gearing was incorrect but decided to leave it as it was for his first race at Snetterton.

In the 350 race, Roger found himself dicing with Eddie Roberts, a real king-pin of club racing at the time. On the last lap he managed to snatch second place just behind Roberts. The next day he went back to Cadwell for a meeting, knowing exactly what to do.

Roger won the 350 race reasonably comfortably and then went on to meet Terry Haslam in the 1000. Terry on his Commando was the man to beat and after one hell of a battle, Roger managed to pip Terry at the line. This, he considers, was his first real win. For one thing, he actually got prize money, £10, which was worth ten pounds then, as well as a trophy. When he'd raced sidecars, he'd only ever won trophies, now here was the real thing.

Later that year Roger gained his first lap record, again at Cadwell. After a tremendous race with Mick



**John Williams (46) leading Roger at Silverstone in the 1973 350 event**

Brew riding a Metisse, he took the lap record down to 1 minute 10.6 seconds. Even today, twelve years later, this is a very creditable speed. The record is now down to around 1 minute 7 seconds odd but riders are still winning 350 races with the fastest lap at 1 minute 11 seconds.

After the race Roger went over to chat with Mick and to show him his boots, which had been worn down on one side. Mick's were exactly the same, the pace had been so hot. Roger still sees this as one of the most enjoyable races of his long career. He obviously wasn't the only one, for whenever he goes in the Racing 50 Club someone is sure to mention that battle.

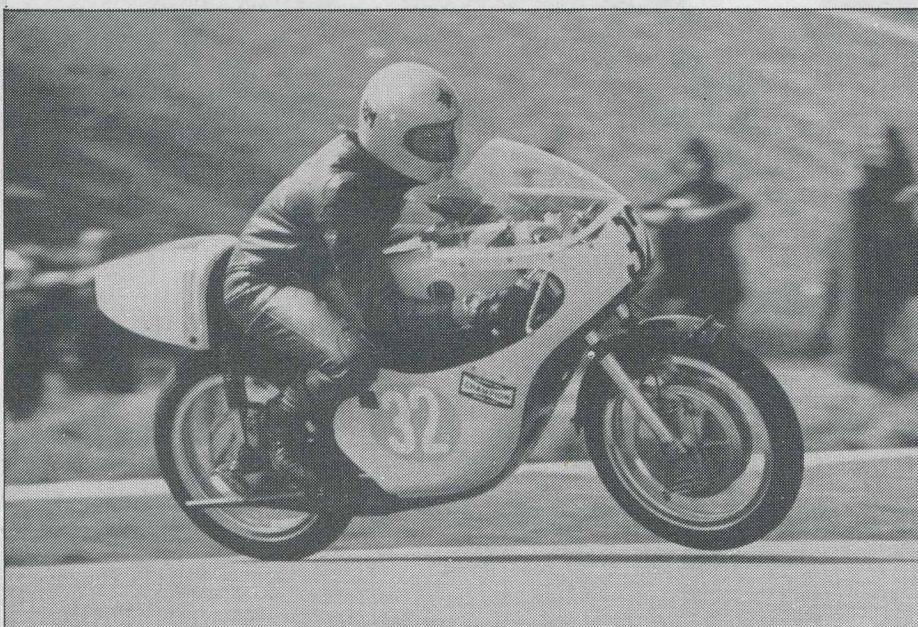
Roger still rode the Yam TR2B

with no sponsorship of any kind. His father had helped him to buy the van but money was always very short. This situation continued until 1972 when the Grimsby branch of a Canadian company called The House of Hay began to sponsor him. Tony Norbury, who managed the shop, undertook to pay all Roger's entry fees and to help with chains and other bits and pieces. In return, Roger had the bike painted in the company colours, red, black and yellow.

He would have continued racing even without the sponsorship, but the help given by Tony Norbury eased Roger's life considerably and allowed him to concentrate more on riding.

The biggest break in Roger Marshall's career was meeting Steve Machin who, Roger believes, made him the rider he is today. They first met after a meeting at Cadwell in late 1972. Roger had suffered two broken crankshafts in two outings and a third had just gone at that meeting. He was outside the van, working on the bike as everyone else was going home. The head and barrels were off, exposing one of the pistons which had been chewed by the big-end, when Steve Machin, who was British Champion at the time, stopped to see what was going on. Roger explained the problem and said that as far as he was concerned the season was over, the money had just run out.

Steve immediately set to with some spanners and helped Roger remove the engine. This done, he put it into the back of his Transit and said "Come over and see me on Thursday." Roger protested that he couldn't afford any work to be done but Steve took no notice and drove



**Now well on his way, with help and advice from Steve Machin, here Roger guns a 350 Yamaha up the "Mountain" at Cadwell Park in 1973**



off.

Later that week Roger travelled over to Ludford, where Steve had an old army hut which served as a garage. Steve and Don Briggs, his mechanic, had fixed the bike and had also put in a new clutch plate. All Steve asked for the work was a tenner. Why he had done this Roger didn't know, but somehow he and Steve had hit it off and Steve obviously reckoned that Roger was a prospect worth helping.

Steve had raced a Yamaha TR3 during 1972 but was selling it in order to use one of the new water-cooled machines. He offered the TR3 to Roger at a knock-down price of £1,200. Roger negotiated a bank loan, bought the bike and then proceeded to Glasgow to work and pay off the debt.

The influence of Steve cannot be exaggerated. When he returned to Grimsby, Roger spent most of his time in Steve's garage, working with Don Briggs on Steve's bikes as well as his own. There was a friendly rivalry between the two riders, during practices Steve would push Roger to make sure he always gave his best. It was a case of the man at the top of the tree helping the lad who was still on the lower branches.

The 1973 season was quite suc-

cessful for Roger as he was competing at National level for the first time. His best result was a second to Tony Rutter in the Bill Ivy Race at Croft where he not only beat Phil Haslam, Mick Grant and many other well respected 350 riders, but also Steve Machin for the first time. Roger got £600 for the second place. It was unbelievable! £600 - for just one race. It was another important milestone in his career and not just for the money. Six riders had been fighting throughout the race, breaking the lap record time after time and to come second after a pace like that was a feat to be remembered. Roger carried that cheque in his pocket for ages, not knowing what the hell to do with it.

At the end of the '73 season, Steve was talking of selling the water-cooled TZ. Again, Roger knew its condition, knew it hadn't crashed and could get it at a good price. He bought it and again worked away from home during the close season to raise the cash.

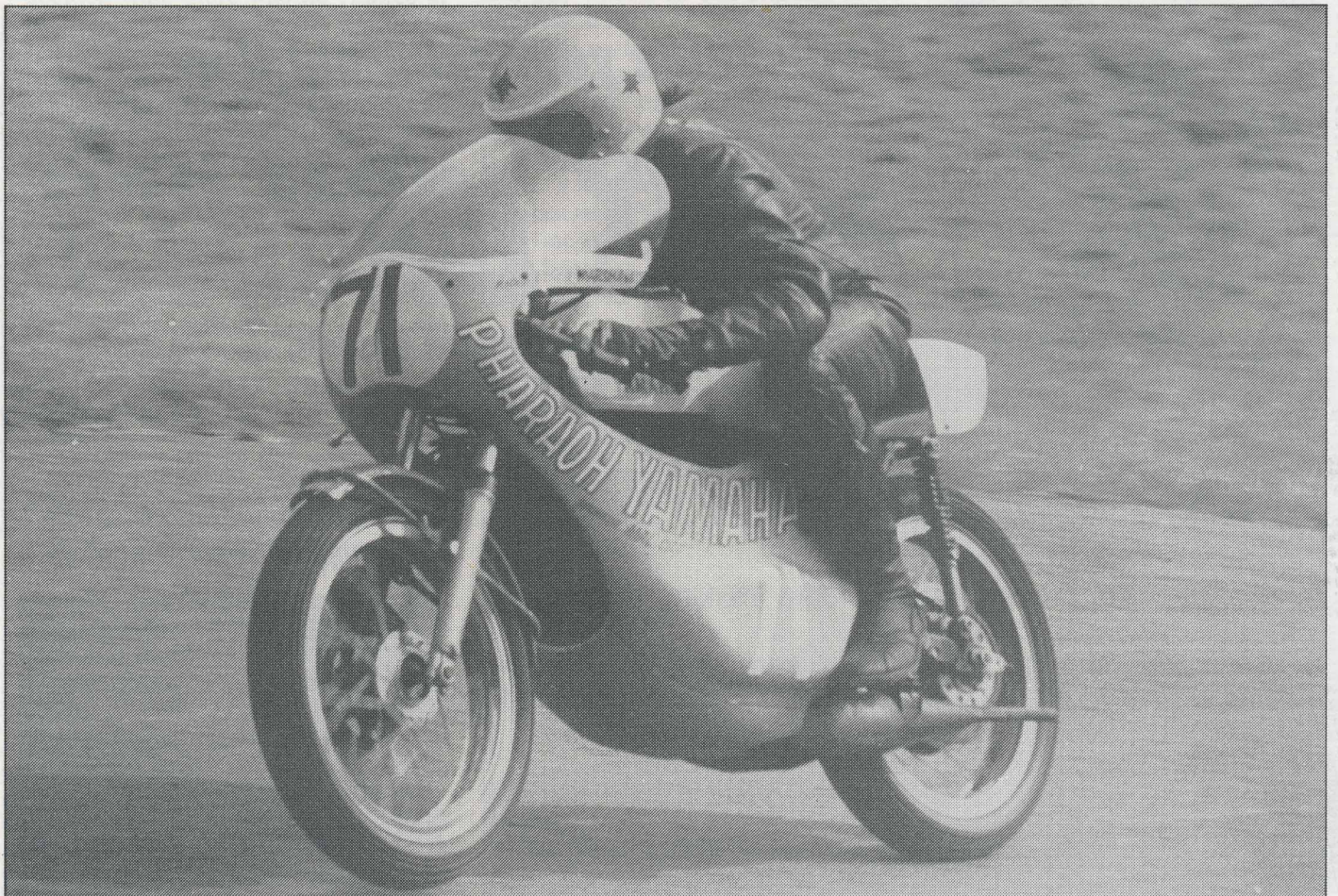
1974 was a mixed up year for Roger. It contained the best thing that has happened to him but also showed him the worst. The highlight was that he met his future wife, Jane. Roger helped out at Steve's garage by manning the pumps. Jane came in regularly for petrol and he took a

shine to her. In April he conned her, as he puts it, into going out with him and in May, when he and Steve went to the North West 200, he even rang her up from the meeting.

However, in June, everything collapsed around him. Roger had never known anyone who'd been badly hurt in racing. He was still young and blithely assumed that accidents always happened to someone else, never to anyone close to you. But then Phil Haslam, his very good friend, was killed at Scarborough, Steve Machin was also involved but escaped serious injury.

Two weeks later, Steve was at Cadwell, testing a 125 Bultaco for a customer. He didn't even complete a lap, going down the back straight, the gearbox locked up and Steve was thrown. He received a knock on the head and was rushed off to hospital where he was placed in Intensive Care on a life-support machine. Roger was contacted at work and he immediately went to see Steve's wife, June. Tragically, Steve died on the Saturday morning, two days after the accident.

Roger was completely shattered, the events of this disastrous June had shaken him so much that he didn't even sit on a bike until well into August. Mal Carter offered help, so



Roger aboard Mal Carter's Pharaoh Yamaha at Cadwell Park



did Don Briggs and June Machin, between them they managed to persuade him to race in the British GP at Silverstone. It was a disaster, the bike seized.

Roger just didn't have the will to race during the latter half of 1974. All year he gave mediocre performances even though his equipment and team back-up were both impeccable. He had inherited Steve's 250 and 350 machines and the 3-cylinder Suzuki Scitsu that Steve and Tony Dawson (now of Dymag Wheels) had been building. Mal Carter and Don Briggs were an excellent team and Roger had moved from scratching around for pennies to race one bike, to having three or four machines and good financial base. However, the vital ingredient, the will to win, just wasn't there.

Over the winter, Mal took the whole team, Roger, Don, June Machin and Jane, over to Daytona to race and to pick up one of the new 700 Yamahas which everyone reckoned would be the machine in the coming season. Roger managed to finish 16th in the Daytona 200, not bad from a field of 95 starters on the first time out.



Roger leading Paul Smart, his favourite rider

To be continued next month

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