

# superbike six

JOHN C. GEE reviews what could have been a fascinating event.

THE 'CONTEST OF THE DECADE', otherwise known as the *MCN-Strongbow Superbike Six*, was a bold initiative that didn't quite come off at the first time of asking. Delayed (on the Sunday) by appalling weather conditions, overtaken by nightfall, and dumped into chaos by the announcement of false results, the event limped to a sad and argumentative conclusion in the damp dark of Donington Park. Not that hordes remained around the scene to become embroiled in the controversy. For when the rain-lashed prizegiving ceremony at Starkeys Bridge eventually reached the scrutineering-bay haven for the final decision, most spectators were long gone, having decided enough was enough. In any case, the foggy soggy meteorological outlook kept the spectator ranks to very thin proportions indeed.

It's only reasonable to suppose that fair weather would have brought more fans through Donington's gates. But the percentage increase can only be estimated and the guessing game leaves a lingering suspicion that the multi-event instant-allrounder competition isn't an automatic crowd puller. The

novelty is fine, but motorcycle-sport spectators are creatures of habit, not given to straying far from their chosen environments. Road racing buffs, for example, are inclined to mutter "*Malcolm Who?*" when confronted with a trials ace. Regulars at grass track meetings display minimal curiosity over road racing affairs. And so on through the Super Six list.

On the other hand, there *may* be enough super-fans — dedicated followers of *champions* full stop — to make the all-in contest a viable spectator sport after all. The trouble is the lack of encouraging evidence arising from the October try-out. True, the evidence was distorted by lousy weather, but the chances of seeing one day's crowd-topping five figures remains quite remote to my way of thinking. Certainly the disappointing turn-out implanted seeds of doubt in S.P. Marketing (promoters/organisers) and Strongbow (major sponsor) quarters — or will do when they come to deliberate on the possibility of making the Super-Six an annual affray.

I hope it *does* become a yearly fixture, because the 1978 offering provided lots of entertainment, and



Winner of the Kart race was Roger Marshall. Clearly the last minute advice was good!

*Mick Andrews leads the moto-cross from Mick Grant and Malcolm Rathmell. Trials riders proved the best all-rounders.*

*Trials man Andrews again, this time performing on the grass — less intimidating than modern-day trials?*



the Super-Six contestants went about their business in a thoroughly professional manner. The competition was intense to a degree that dismissed all ideas of the Super-Sixers being out for a cheap giggle, or in pursuit of a few easy pounds. That said, I'm still uneasy about the potential spectator following.

I have no hesitation, however, in declaring Superbike Six super TV fodder to be appreciated in edited-film form devoid of all those infuriating delays inflicted on the live audience. No, I haven't seen the Beeb's rushes. But I did witness the four camera crews in action, performing such manly acts as shoving a movie camera into Ivan Mauger's face when he lay writhing in pain after a grass track misadventure. This observation isn't meant as a criticism, rather as an indication of how a few seconds of film captures atmosphere in a way the written word cannot. Though, on second thoughts, that's wrong. Brilliant descriptive writing is unbeatable (I'm not pretending *this* is it) but in the context of Superbike Six competition it would take acres of print to do justice.

So it's only, like (with hindsight) wondering why the organisers dropped the curtain with a mini-enduro consisting of five timed laps with three special tests thrown in. The format left onlookers hard pushed to sort out the pacemakers, let alone the downfielders. And at the end, the results team had the unenviable and time-consuming task of computing who had gained or lost what against standard time. Obviously a straightforward race, where everybody could count the finishers across the line, would have been a far more satisfactory conclusion to the two-day action. But to be fair, the organisers were in no position to forecast the long delays which turned their event into a late, late show.

Road racing followers gave the impression of believing that the series was loaded against their favourites, to the positive advantage of the off-road exponents. With some justification they singled out the enduro as giving the moto-crossers and triallers a second bite at the cherry, most especially the trial riders who had at one time or another counted scrambling among their serious activities. Mind you, in these days of specialisation the road racers are more than ever isolated from the other branches of motorcycle sport. A few may dabble in keep-fit trials, or even take their balancing acts seriously, but the days are long gone since road racing fields contained a

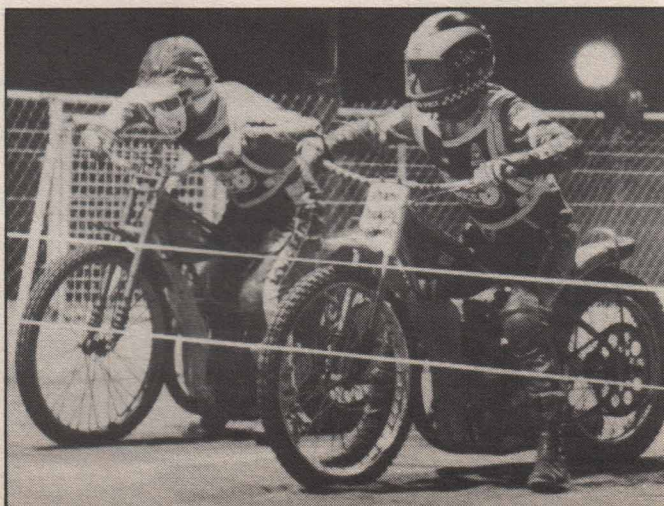
*Overall winner of 3-leg moto-cross, Martin Lampkin keeps his borrowed Yamaha YZ 250 ahead of Mick Andrews.*



*Peter Collins finds the pace of a trials Bultaco rather less than his normal speedway machine, but no less easy.*



*Eddie Kidd (left) and Phil Read wait for the Speedway starting gate to rise. The event brought crashes and injuries for both.*





Eventual winner of the series Malcolm Rathmell leads Mick Andrews but Andrews gunned the little 125 Honda on the last lap to win the racing event.

fair sprinkling of ex-rough-riders. As things turned out, the only Super Six event won by a road racer was a road race! Specifically, the 8-lap kart dispute, in which Roger Marshall put it across Phil Read after some thrilling — and at times hairy — action. A case of the injured leading the wounded, because Read's speedway crash and Marshall's grass-track bang had ruled them out of high points/pounds contention. Mick Grant, who expected a decent speedway result, also dumped at Wolverhampton and depressed his overall chances more than somewhat. Nevertheless, the next day saw Mick bouncing back to collect second place behind moto-cross man Andy Robertson in the trials contest.

Like the road racing fans, speedway supporters had cause to feel disgruntled by the way their men were handicapped out of grass track honours. What had worked at speedway, when grass-tracker Chris Baybutt raced through to victory from a quarter lap handicap, didn't come off on the short bumpy 'grass' oval. Even the experienced Peter Collins found the final beyond his reach, thanks to being presented with a half lap starting deficit in the 'semi'. Still, Collins proved he knew a bit about the other disciplines by finishing the trials sections in fourth

place, collecting fifth from the moto-cross, and coming home third on his Zip-Yamaha kart. Then it all turned sour in the Honda 125 road race when his challenge for Bryan Wade's fifth spot ended in the heap on the damp track.

That a trials rider emerged to head the Superbike Six could conceivably offend those people who consider hazard-hopping nothing more than an occupation for the aged and infirm. But anyone who has seen the terrifying sections confronting the professionals in world championship trails, knows differently. (After belting a Bult full bore at house size boulders, grass tracking must seem almost tame!) So when you combine steady nerves and lightning reactions with ability to ride somewhat rudimentary motorcycles over a variety of terrain — sometimes at respectable speeds — it's little wonder that Rastus & Co. were seen putting on the allrounders' style at Donington. Of course, they had some unfamiliar nasties to overcome in the shape of road racing and, before that, speedway (actually, a couple of rather well known Yorkshire types had practised hard). But clearly moto-cross, grass track and enduro riding held no terrors for the trials trio of Martin Lampkin, Malcolm Rathmell and Mick Andrews.

Although out-gunned by Bryan

Wade (long-time moto-crosser) in the grass track section, the trials boys made the three-leg moto-cross competition their very own. Martin Lampkin won by scoring two wins and a tactical third that would have done Roger De Coster proud. Andrews secured second place, surviving two falls in the first moto, but Rathmell's second-leg crash dumped him to number three via two second spots and a third. None of them shone like beacons in the Donington gloom when mounted on four wheels during the kart event. Yet when still on the hard stuff, Andrews and Rathmell displayed great compatibility with the little Honda 125cc racers, putting on a show to gladden the hearts of hardened road racing observers. Andrews out-braked his old trials opponent in the classic last-corner fashion and won the sprint to the line — just like a budding Sheene.

At that moment it seemed as if Rathmell had tossed away the best part of £5,000 quid along with the five points he'd lost by failing to finish first. (Scoring was on a 25, 20, 15, 12, 10, 8, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 basis.) For with just the enduro remaining, Wade led by a useful six points and seemed a fair bet to collect at least second place in the decider. Unfortunately, he promptly dug into the past to rediscover his old 'wild' form, and managed to fall off twice. Thus the Superbike Six title was handed to Rathmell more or less on a plate.

Now the '78 opener has become a matter for the record books, the organisers have no doubt learnt a lesson or two that will improve this year's event (assuming there is one). In my opinion, all the riders should take part in every event, if only to act as indicators to the 'intruders' prowess in their non-specialities. There could even be a case for allowing the road racers to score in road racing, the moto-crosser to score in moto-cross, etc., etc., depending on the chances of the all-score system levelling up the points in the final result. Meanwhile, I leave you with a sort of analysis which might bring happiness to trials supporter, and provided food for thought among the others. (The best from each branch of the sport is listed.)

Normal Activity	Name	Overall Position	Best Event & Place	Worst Event & Place	Total Points
Trials	Malcolm Rathmell	1st	Enduro 1st	Karting 8th	95
Moto-Cross	Bryan Wade	2nd	Grass 1st	Karting 7th	88
Grass Tracking	Chris Baybutt	6th	Speedway 1st	Karting 10th	68
Road Racing	Mick Grant	7th	Trials 2nd	Speedway & GT 9th	58
Speedway	Michael Lee	8th	Trials 3rd	Enduro 9th	56