

It was quite a week. On the Friday I had interviewed Lewis Collins and he was a pretty tough guy. On the following Wednesday it was a confrontation with Fonzie's personal rock Queen, Suzi Quatro, and you know something — she was even tougher! I suppose it was my own fault because right at the start I told her I wasn't a fan of her particular brand of rock'n'roll.

We sat in the boardroom of her record company which is euphemistically called Dreamland. It was eyeball to eyeball with only a cassette recorder to keep us apart. It took about one minute for the sky to fall in.

### Proud of it

"I'm not going to ask you your age Suzi because . . ."

"I'm thirty," she said quietly and the voice lifted a few decibels as she snapped out: "what's the bloody point in lying about your bloody age! I'm thirty years old and proud of it — thank you very much!"

The cassette recorder over-modulated and I wilted. It was going to be one of those interviews, was it? Valiantly I tried to maintain my cool. I muttered something about a lady's age being a very personal thing.

"That's asinine, it's stupid — I just don't see the point in lying about anything."

It was a fair point and I had no intention of arguing with this five feet one inch packet of dynamite with a short fuse.

"I was born in Detroit on June 3rd 1950," she continued, "I'm a Gemini."

Well now, that explained everything, didn't it? Her voice had levelled out and the full mouth was now more relaxed. Perhaps she wasn't so tough after all. I had to admit that she didn't look tough, despite a red leather jacket and a pair of black leather jeans which hugged her 33 inch, snake-like hips. Leather suited her. She looked good and she knew it.

### Box size

Somehow she wasn't quite like her stage image. Perhaps it was because she is actually smaller in person than she seems on the box. However, she is big in charisma and it was easy to visualise a big throbbing superbike between her thighs! (Fantasy perhaps, but stars have been created from less.) Actually, nothing could be further from the truth. I discovered, with some disappointment, that she'd ridden nothing bigger than a Honda 50, although she's been



# Oh Suzi Q

## Rapping with Ms. Quatro down at Devilgate Drive

crazy about bikes since she was fourteen. It was then that she first rode pillion on a boyfriend's Harley.

"The police used to ride them too," she recalls, "those bikes really had style."

After the Harley freak, her next boyfriend used to take her out on a Honda 175. She experienced her first accident on this.

"We were on a golf course and it was wet. We were just being silly kids. Anyway, he lost control and skidded into a tree. He broke a leg and I remember flying through the air. That was great fun — the only problem was . . . hitting the ground!"

Watch Suzi Quatro storming her way through a raunchy, hard-cookin' rock number, such as her latest release "Glad All Over", and it's easy to understand why she is such a cult figure amongst bikers. She follows in the great tradition of such legendary rock heroes as Gene Vincent and Eddie Cochran.

How the image has grown and perpetuated is quite extraordinary, though Suzi insists that it is not something she deliberately works on. The on-stage Suzi Quatro is the real McCoy; it's her, just the way she is. How could I possibly imagine otherwise?

The phenomenon can't be any bigger anywhere in the world than Australia. In a land where Sheilas come second to a can or three of Foster's, Suzi has had fourteen number one hits. It's not difficult to work out who buys them if you go back to Melbourne, 1976.

When Suzi and her group landed at the airport to start a nationwide tour of Australia, she disembarked to find the airport literally jammed with hundreds of motorcycles. They were Hell's Angels and they had travelled from chapters all over the country. She was accorded a multi-cylinder escort and a bike cavalcade took her to the hotel. Melbourne has never been quite the same since!

At the age of thirty Suzi is about to turn the clock back fifteen years. She has just taken delivery of a new Yamaha 250 Special.

"I've wanted a bike since I was fifteen" she explained, "but I was on the road all the time and didn't get a chance. Then when I became famous nobody would let me have one. I guess if I'm out of work then a lot of other people are also out of work. Anyway, where we live in Cheltenham I can ride without people getting mad."

Suzi says that a 250 is all she can handle, mainly because of her size but she has still to pass her test.

"I'm going to do it properly," she says very definitely. "I'm going to get the right training and get it all down pat so that I don't hurt myself."

### Definite opinion

She leaned forward just a little and those big, but rather soft eyes, narrowed a fraction. I was about to get another, very definite opinion.

"It's ridiculous . . . no, absolutely irresponsible, that anyone can go out and climb on a 100mph bike without proper training. They should change that! You'll soon be able to get a licence in a crackerjack box!"

She was warming to the subject now and no matter what I'd thought about Suzi Quatro, I had to admit that she didn't sit on the fence.

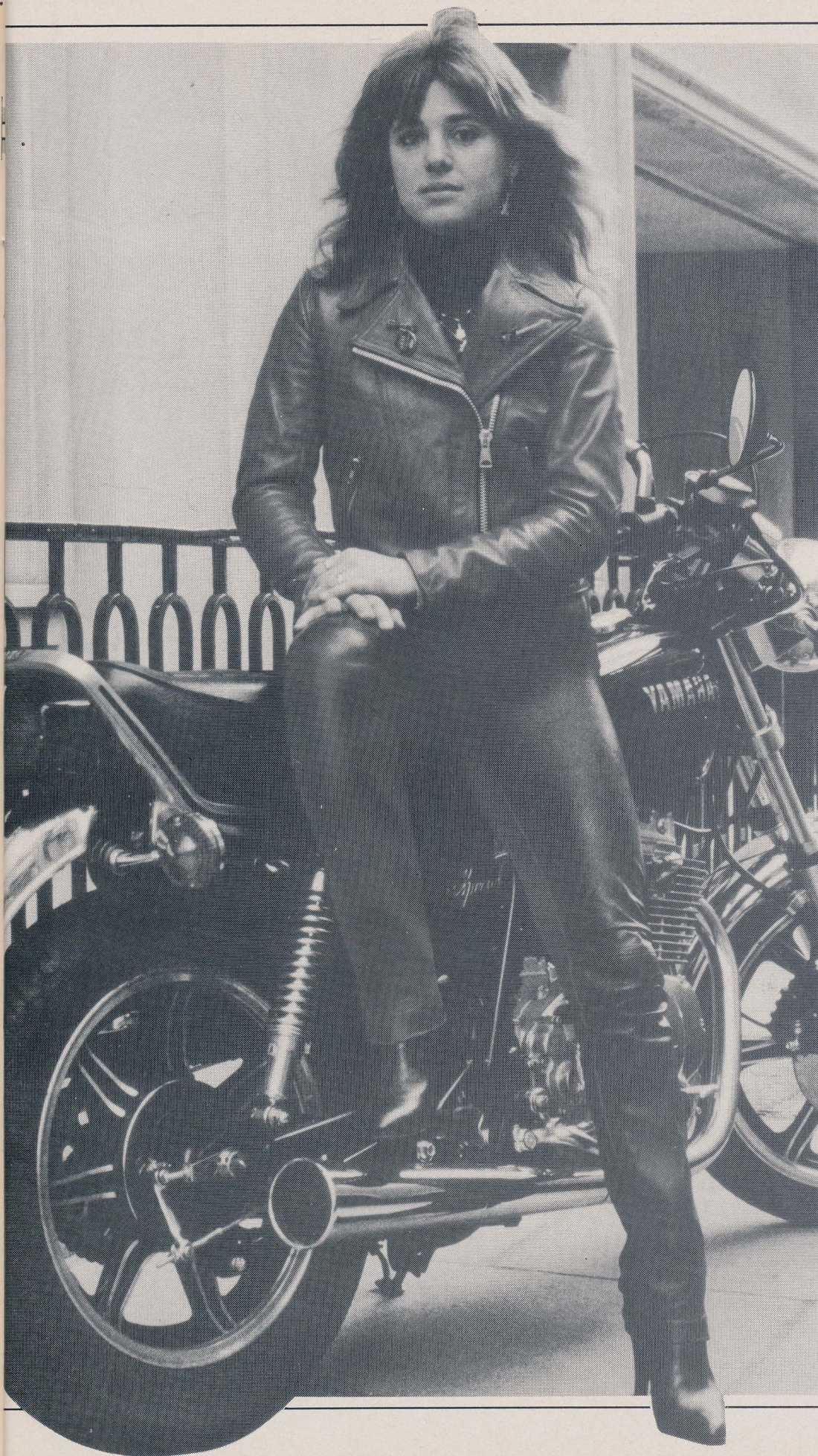
"How many times have you been driving down the road and some dick has ridden up all wrong and you've almost hit him? I mean motorbikes are always in the way (sic), so maybe if people would learn from the start how to ride them properly, they wouldn't be persecuted. There are a lot of idiots riding bikes as well as good riders, but as my dad used to say: The good you take for granted and the bad you notice. So that's why I want to learn to ride properly."

### Soft curves

I was starting to appreciate her Gemini personality. Most of the hardness I'd imagined was about as hard as the soft curves beneath the red and black leather. (Very symbolic.) To quote her manager she's really: ". . . a tough cookie with a soft centre!"

Although I'd wilted in the firing line Suzi Quatro didn't, so I asked her about the helmet law.

"I've heard all sorts of different things. I've heard people say that it cuts down your hearing or it cuts down your car sense. True or not, it should be compulsory — definitely. A lot of people don't protect themselves and you



have to do it for them. I mean, you do get the odd case where a helmet wouldn't make any difference in an accident, but they're few and far between. In most cases a helmet is good."

Despite her lack of real biking experience, Suzi must have lived and breathed them for fifteen frustrating years. Now that she has her own bike, her enthusiasm is intense and very real. I wondered if the leather clothing had been some sort of mental balm, or a tenuous thread to tie her to something a long way away.

I didn't put the question quite like that, but I'm sure she knew what I was thinking. She laughed and began to explain the leather connection.

*"It was two things really. I liked Elvis a lot and he used to wear leather. Then one of my friends, who made custom bikes, gave me a leather jacket. That was my first leather garment and I had it right up to a couple of years ago when I gave it away for charity. It was a really great jacket."* She paused and then added almost proudly, *"I think it raised about a thousand pounds!"*

#### **More relaxed**

It's strange, but as the interview progressed I swear the soft American accent had become even softer. As she became more relaxed her voice lost its slight edge. Nine years in England and her marriage to English guitarist, Len Tuckey, had not Anglicised her one little bit. They even lived in rural English splendour.

*"I like the house where I live and I like the area too. It's an old house — an old English manor — you can't get that in America!"*

The coffee had arrived and the Daily Mirror was waiting. We were getting along really well now and Suzi had allowed something of her real self to reach across and touch me. I enjoyed her warmth and femininity, and was sorry that our interview had nearly finished. I suppose I was quite pleased with the response I was getting. Then I went and blew it.

*"Do you always play your own bass guitar tracks when you record, Suzi?"*

*"That's about the silliest question you've asked! Women always seem to get that — it annoys me. You wouldn't have asked a man that question!"*

Hmm. She's been playing bass guitar for sixteen years and does a twenty minute solo during her stage performance, so I guess I really ought to have known better.

Anyway, I didn't feel too bad this time because when she answered the question she was smiling . . .

Vic Barnes