

## “Racing solo was starting to be like going to work”

Imagine yourself in the same situation. A one-time world moto-cross champion forced to accept the fact that you are finished as a top line pro'. No longer do factory gates open so generously towards you, no longer do the autograph hunters flock round wherever you go. But you have worked hard to promote the machine that has for so long provided your livelihood. For nine years you slogged to make the name of “your” factory synonymous with success, during which time you not only gained the British import agency but annually sold thousands of machines besides.

Suddenly, what seemed to be a long term agreement between you and the factory is unexpectedly ended. All the long years of effort are destroyed at a single stroke. At such times the future can look unimaginably bleak.

All this happened to Dave Bickers just a short time ago when CZ, the Czechoslovakian motorcycle manufacturers, were compelled by their state directed administration to direct British sales through Skoda, their state owned car concessionaires in Britain. Instead of wallowing in his own misery and spreading vitriolic tales of woe, Bickers cut all ties with CZ and concentrated on developing a new wholesale spares and accessory business. At the same time he dived headlong into the deep end of moto-crossing's toughest, roughest and most punishing class, the sidecars.

“Racing solo was beginning to seem like going to work. I've been doing it so long now you see. I reckon I was enjoying only half my rides. It must be more than 20 years now since I began and I've been feeling for some time now that there was nothing new left for me to work at.”

There is no more physically demanding form of motorcycle sport than scrambling chairs. I have seen leading crewmen fall from their rig in a state of total exhaustion on the last lap of the last leg of the last championship round, when all depended on finishing those few remaining, agonising yards. I have seen men's fingernails exude blood, so absolute was their effort during a race. I have seen others unable to even sit, let alone stand after a race, with palms rubbed raw. That's chair racing and Bickers, at 40 years old, long past the stage when most guys even have the energy for starting a big single, let alone riding it, is going to race it, and a third wheel and a crewman besides!

Sure enough it's all for fun, but the Coddenham Flyer means it for real, and when that shrewd brain and those powerful muscles start working as a team you can bet your sweet life that the action is going to be fast and furious.

Alan Clew reacted to Bickers' request for a CCM rear hub with a suggestion he might like the whole outfit instead. At first neither man took the idea too seriously but the more they thought about it, and the more they talked about it, the better it appeared.



“I don't have to learn about moto-cross again, but because I haven't got much experience with sidecars I reckon I might come up with a new technique. I'll have a new style anyway because I'm a new rider. Trouble with a lot of blokes, particularly the older ones, is they can't change from the way they learned it, so they never get any better. I reckon I will because I'm not in a rut and I'm looking for something new.”

The “Battle of Newbury” meeting on March 9 was Bickers' first competitive ride and subsequent meetings will include all those required for eligibility in the British Sidecar Championships. A few American meetings will also be on the agenda because the CCM concessionaire in the States has requested that he be allowed to enter the CCM/Bickers/Garrod team. The possibility of Continental meetings are not wholly excluded but at present Dave's plans include only his regular solo CZ armed meetings. You didn't know about that? Well, maybe he did pack up British scrambling in '71 but the Bickers name over the channel is big, and big means big money.

Trouble was, after Dave retired from the world championships in 1969 to concentrate on expanding the CZ concession, his business boomed so rapidly he had to stop mixing business and pleasure in this country. Only by riding on the Continent could he

**Rex Garrod looks confident that the lightweight CCM outfit will be able to compete with the much faster bigger engined outfits. Dave's experience with motorcycles goes back to the days when the big single was the only way to win a scramble. Could it be the CCM single which will put him back at the top in moto-cross?**



really enjoy his sport. Belgium at first, then France particularly. Over there he was simply a top rider, while in this country, no matter how fraught the paddock situation, someone would always arrive with some sort of business problem that could only be settled by sacrificing the sport he loved so much.

“It was difficult breaking into France; it's almost a closed shop over there, but after winning a few minor meetings they soon wanted me. It's good money and I like the courses — fast tracks with big jumps. Those little corrugations on the British circuits might be OK when you are young or have a works mechanic to do all the repairing needed after racing over them, but they do me a power of no good. Anyway, I like to get a bit of a move on these days and you can't do that on a tight course or a muddy one.”

“You'd be surprised what a happy atmosphere they have over there as well. For one thing it always seems to be sunny, but mostly you can see it in the faces of the crowd. Have you ever noticed in England? Long lines of blank white faces of the crowd, all still and sort of staring. In France everyone cheers and waves. They're excited by racing. Maybe the crowds in Britain see too much of it and are too familiar with it.”

Last year he competed seven times in France and won four meetings outright,

# THIS MAN BICKERS



By Dave Minton.

made two second places and was forced out with minor machine trouble in another. Of the CZ's reliability he said: “Makes no difference to me what I ride these days but I wouldn't trade in my CZ for anything. It's not as fast as the works Huskies, or the Yamas or Suzukis, but it's a darn sight faster than the regular machines and it doesn't wear out either. My works bikes were never much more than well prepared production models, and it's the same today. What's more, I've never had to replace more than one piston, a pair of forks and rear suspension legs in any one season.”

Which might sound like so much sales patter until you reflect on the fact that this season Dave will be competing in the British 500cc Championship. Not because he wants to particularly, but because he has to in order to retain his British licence. And what machine will he be using now that he is a paying customer like any other? A CZ, that's what, so here is one guy who has put his money where his mouth is because Dave, like anyone else these days, has to buy his CZs.

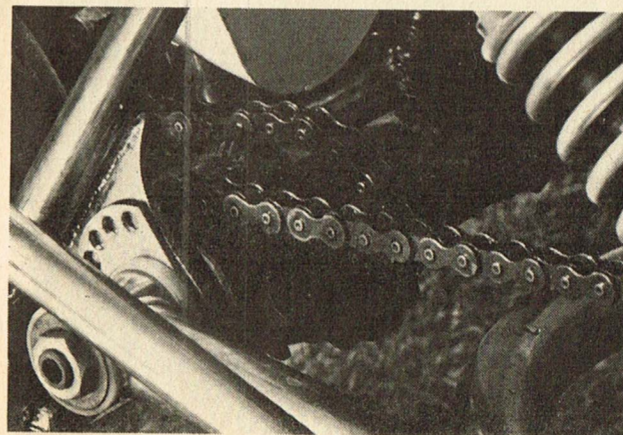
We walked out to look at the CCM outfit he had collected the day previously and I found it immediately recognisable as the Racing Show model. The difference between it and other outfits lies in its long stroke rear suspension combined with the

rear chain countershaft sprocket which revolves around the pivoted fork spindle.

One of the greatest problems in motor-cross is finding the right type of traction necessary to utilise all the power developed. Rear wheel skittering wastes a lot of power through inefficient suspension action allowing the wheel to bounce. The only way around it is to use suspension with a long and soft action, but this encourages rear chain tension extremes during wheel movement because the wheel arc does not follow the same one as the chain would like, thanks to the layshaft and fork spindle being a few inches apart. CCM's system guarantees constant chain tension from the layshaft mounted gearbox sprocket to the fork spindle, both of which remain at a constant distance from one another.

Dave has had the outfit tailored to his personal requirements and has already discovered a few details he would like changed, such as the front fork springs. These are outside the stanchions and butted between the bottom yoke and a clamp, which in theory should give seven inches of front wheel movement, but as the spring coils are tight they bind before travel is complete.

Power is not the aim of the designer and Bickers is in total agreement with him. He is anticipating that the CCM's agility will compensate for the lack of horses; that and vastly improved handling given by the new sus-



**The long travel rear suspension could cause chain trouble so the swinging arm pivot is employed as a sort of countershaft. The rear chain is in constant tension, all the movement being taken up with the short coupling chain.**

## “He's used to speed, Rex is. He doesn't worry”

pension, both of which are an Alan Clew brain wave. Amazingly, wheelbase is 63 inches, some six inches more than is average on a big roadster.

Crewman will be Rex Garrod, the ex-scrambler and speedway pro'. A very brave man with a tiger like Bickers at the helm “He's used to speed, Rex is, so he doesn't worry. Knows what it's all about. We've been pals for a long time and we understand each other.”

Sidecars are not wholly new to Bickers. Way back in his early days with Greeves in the late fifties he tried his hand at three-wheeling but as the bike was a trials machine — so was the chair come to that — the attempt at moto-crossing remained one of interest rather than success. Mind you, Dave is happy to be racing chairs, feeling that the atmosphere is so much more friendly. “What else can you expect nowadays? There's so much at stake in the solo classes. I once rode grasstrack but they threw me off because I frightened them. Years ago it was. I borrowed a BSA outfit and found I could get round corners quicker by putting my left leg up on the left handlebar to lock it all in place and putting both hands on the throttle so it couldn't move.”

Dave's face creased and he chuckled over the memory. “They didn't like that at all, and they complained. Probably because I started to go quickly.”

He grew up racing big singles of the old British style — Gold Stars, AJSs, Ariels, and particularly his works Matchless. “When I raced that 500 Matchless it seemed like the fastest thing I had ever ridden or seen. I mopped up everywhere on that thing. Finally the works wanted it back for “tuning” they said. When I got it back in time for the Moto-Cross des Nations it was slower than I'd ever known it. Same thing a few days later at Hawkstone Park. After its rear suspension finally broke I had a good look inside but found nothing wrong at all, so I asked around and discovered that it had been sleeved back to a 500. Before that I had been riding a 600 and never knew it. No wonder it went well!”

Dave spends his leisure time stock car racing — the car of the moment is a big Fiat of around three litres. With this he has followed his pursuit with such dedication that he is at least as well known as a stock car racer in East Anglia as he is elsewhere as a scrambler. For two years now he has been the East Anglian Champion.

I suggested it might be wise of CZ to develop a four stroke seeing the way the future was apparently going. “They've got four-strokes running around the factory all right but I reckon it's going to be some time before we see them. The trouble is they take so long to get going over there. I've been telling them to build trials bikes for years but they refused. Then they altered a moto-cross machine and wondered why it was wrong. They seem to have something on the right lines now though, but it's a two-stroke. The four-strokes are just experimental.”