

# Brief Encounter

JOHN THORPE, CHARLES DEANE  
and MERRIL BOULTON  
scratch ride forty bikes  
in a day at a track  
'somewhere in Surrey'



## JOHN THORPE'S TALE . . .

IT was the twentieth bike I'd ridden that day, and by now photographer Roger Holyoake had my line all weighed up. As I came to the sharp left-hander, I laid the model well over, exposing half the underside to his lens. Which was just the moment the engine chose to seize. The rear wheel locked solid; the bike spun; and there I sat on the cold hard road, scowling into Roger's camera and just *daring* him to press that button!

So why didn't I whip the clutch out and coast, instead of falling off? Because the bike was Honda's mighty 75cc scooterette, the NF75, which has an automatic clutch. And when the engine locked, the dratted clutch didn't free. And with no clutch lever to grab, that was my lot . . .

Still, I'd had a memorable day. I'd started off with Yamaha's huge XS 1100 — too cumbersome on this 2-mile circuit for my taste — and then continued with the Kawasaki Z-1R. That *has* to be just about the most improved of the current superbike crop. I enjoyed blasting it along the straight, with the needle swinging remorselessly up and over first the ton, then 110, and finally just nudging the 120 mark before I had to shut off for a long left-hander. Even more, I enjoyed swinging it through the Snake, with the track doing its level best to eat through my boots.

Then I took out a bike that's becoming a bit fashionable again — Triumph's 750cc 'Tiger'. That engine felt awful at first — real vibro-massage stuff, and way down on flexibility — but hitting the faster corners I came to appreciate the Triumph's steering. Rock steady it was: and I think I surprised one or two gentlemen cornering on exotic Orientals!

Can't play with the big 'uns all day, though. So, down the scale I went to sample the first of Honda's Eurobikes — the new CB100N. What a little cracker! Over 60mph down the straight, and not much less round the corners. It handled like one of the race-bred lightweights the Italians used to do so well, before they went all big and pricey on us.

It wasn't my day with Yamahas, though. The XS 400 I took out was soggy on the suspension and lurched round the track, and I couldn't lay hands on the XS 750. Suzuki disappointed me on the handling side, too, the very quick X-7 evidently demanding a lighter rider to get it to steer as it should. But the GS550 'four' put that right, and I found I could run it round the outside of slower riders with no problems at all. Must be a toss-up between that and the Kawasaki Z 650 as the best of the current medium-capacity bikes.

The one I liked best? Well, I *am* a Honda rider normally, so it's no surprise that taken all round my vote would go to the CB750 F2, which hustled round the track as fast as the larger superbikes, and felt taut and handy with it. For this ride, I'll even forgive Honda for that NF75!

## CHARLIE DEANE'S TALE . . .

A TANNoy echoed around the pits, where Britain's motorcycle manufacturers and importers had their latest bikes lined up for journalists to test.

"It has been noticed that some riders are still exceeding the 70 miles-an-hour limit on the test track . . . will all riders please adhere to the limit for their own and others' safety!"

Hell! They must have seen me winding up the XS1100 Yamaha up to an indicated 120mph on the straight towards the control tower. But who could resist the opportunity of enjoying a thrash out on a private track?

Three bikes still stand out in my mind from that test day's riding: the Suzuki GT250-X7, the Yamaha XS1100 and the XS750.

The first I would consider the cheekiest; the second, the beefiest; and the latter, the most improved.

When one considers that Suzuki claim a top speed of just over 100mph for their new X7 250 two-stroke twin, it makes one wonder about the wisdom of restricting learner riders to machines of this capacity!

The motor is harsh, but the bike takes off like a scalded cat and the six-speed gearbox is excellent. But the handling certainly leaves a fair amount to be desired when related to the bike's potential. Fortunately, the braking is adequate for the performance.

Styling, too, is something which I think will attract many riders to the machine. It certainly looks sporty.

While on the subject of sporty motorcycles, there's no doubt that Yamaha have transformed their once-sombre touring XS750. With larger carbs, high-lift camshafts, and high-compression pistons, the revitalised triple positively flies when compared with last year's model.

Yamaha, of course, have shaft-drive on both of their big-capacity four-strokes, and the sheer bulk of the XS1100 four-cylinder hyper-bike is something which, as a small rider, I find awe-inspiring — as well as making it difficult to touch the ground when astride the bike!

However, once aboard you're riding a straight-line rocket ship on two wheels. It's the beefiest, meanest hulk of road-burning, tyre-ripping motorcycle I think I've encountered. A mind-bending 120 miles-an-hour appears on the speedo almost as fast as you can turn the twistgrip. But *you* try putting that lump into a corner at speed! It wallows and dips and, suddenly, you find that all those lightweights you'd blasted past are scratching around the beast. American freeways and German autobahns are the meat for this muscle bike, not the hairpins at Chobham.

Fortunately, triple disc brakes can hold the performance in check, and once one has overcome the urge to ring every ounce of power from the brute, more sedate riding makes things seem more controllable.

Unfortunately, all encounters with the bikes was far too brief to give a more precise analysis . . . but we enjoyed the riding.

## MERRIL BOULTON'S TALE . . .

"A MACHINE gun would be handy," I thought, as I stood impatiently behind long queues of journalists all waiting for a ride on some of the Japanese superbikes. All I got was a load of elbows and 'my turn next' as they scrambled to the front. Being only small I decided to be patient and made my way over to a quieter part of the track — where all the mopeds were!

I don't think mopeds have the lurgy, but it didn't look like they'd had a visitor all day, so I had plenty of time to browse, wondering if there could possibly be anything new there.

And sure enough I noticed something quite tasty-looking, literally — it reminded me of banana and chocolate ripple. It was really the Puch Maxi Super Executive, which is the original Maxi moped equipped with handlebar fairing, tinted windscreen, legshields, and trendy cast alloy wheels. It was also fitted with a couple of 'quickly detachable executive panniers', which you unlock and walk away with like mini suitcases similar in design to Krauser panniers. As mopeds weren't allowed on the big course I had a quick poodle round a one-way circular track which was enough to feel that it was the same sturdy easy-to-ride moped with the extra fittings and finish that gave it the air of a first-class bowler hat.

The next thing I rode was something you don't see in this country as it's too pricey. Nevertheless, I couldn't resist having a go. It was the Puch Cobra GT, which is a sporting 72cc single-cylinder 2-stroke with mag-alloy wheels, front disc brake, mini handlebar fairing and a metallic green BMW-type finish. I had a good screech round the big track on that and was impressed generally with its handling and performance — though the six-speed gearbox needed a lot of playing with in order to keep the revs up. It's a pity that it's not available over here, because the styling would greatly appeal to potential young scratchers.

The Honda CB125† 'Euro-styled' twin surprised me. It's more like a little racer — redlining at 12,000rpm and seeming to need about 10,000 of those revs just to pull away. It not only looked good, with its alloy/steel Comstar wheels, but it felt good and firm too, and seemed to enjoy all the sunshine and tasty bends in Snake Pass.

As the crowds dwindled I managed to ride most of the bikes I'd had my eyes on, such as the X7 250 Suzuki — which didn't seem to be in top form on the Suzie's handling side. I couldn't leave, though, without a ride on the Z650 Custom Kawasaki. Memories returned of the Z650 we had on test last year, and the great rides down to the coast where the combination of a flexible and powerful motor, nice handling, comfort, and 'feel' of a big bike, were enough to make this my top favourite. The Custom Kawasaki is the same — only better! — with improved handling, and those flash-looking cast wheels.

And I managed to have two goes — 'cos by that time I'd learned how to use a little elbow . . .