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**THE STORY
OF OUR EPIC
RIDE ON TWO
CX500s**

- XMAS GIFTS FOR BIKERS
- BOL D'OR: THE INSIDE STORY
- SUZUKI X7 ENGINE OVERHAUL
- YAMAHA TRAILING in YORKSHIRE
- KAWASAKI Z650 CUSTOM TEST

PAUL RICARD circuit smoulders un-comfortably among dusty, dry and rock-strewn hills in the south of France about fifteen miles inland from Toulon and the inviting Mediterranean Sea.

Fortunately, we arrived in the cool of the evening. Practise was over for the day and a late meal on the beach at St. Cyr was a welcome relief after the long haul by motor caravan from Le Havre.

This year, the Bol d'Or 24-hour race moved south to Paul Ricard from Le Mans following a dispute between the organisers and circuit owners.

Honda France were leading — and finally won — the Coupe d'Endurance series, but after a humiliating defeat on Honda's home circuit at Suzuka at the hands of 'Pops' Yoshimura's Suzuki, they were dedicated to winning the prestigious Bol d'Or race held last September 19.

Brand-new RCB78 race-prepared motors were flown in especially for the event along with a team of Japanese technicians. Add to this the full Honda France and Honda Britain race teams and it is easy to understand how Honda spend literally hundreds of thousands of pounds a year to achieve success — and some of the responsibility that rests with the riders, Stan Woods and Charlie Williams.

For three weeks prior to the event the British pair and specially contracted Americans, Dave Emde and Harry Klinzmann, plus reserve rider Gary Green, had been testing the Honda Britain raceware at Paul Ricard.

Two of the precious 1978 RCB motors had self-destructed and handling on the

two British bikes was still considered to be hairy on the tortuous French circuit.

With three days to go to the race, items such as a 1977 cambox cover were being cannibalised to fit the 1978 motor, while suspension units and springs grew into a veritable mountain as units were swapped in the search for acceptable if not perfect handling for the race bikes.

Like a watchmaker building the most precise of timepieces, Ken Hull assembled the 1978 RCB78 for the two Americans, while Norman White and John Gilles worked their own brand of magic on the Woods/Williams machine.

Dave Emde and Harry Klinzmann were complete innocents to the world of long distance endurance racing and smiled their way through all encounters as if a quick blast around the block was the beginning and end of this crazy, but very different, road racing scene.

Campaigners

Woods and Williams, both experienced campaigners, appeared to take the whole thing more seriously.

Running second in the Championship to Leon and Chemarin, they needed a first place to stand any chance of winning the Coupe d'Endurance.

From their first race at Liege, in June, where Stan Woods crashed, breaking a shoulder, the British team had finished second to the French at Misano, Italy on June 10, (with Gary Green riding as reserve); second to the French at Nurburgring, Germany, on June 18; and second again on Stan Woods' return to the team for the Barcelona 24-hour race.

Handling appeared to be the British riders' main worry and the constant swapping of suspension units during the practice sessions confirmed the trouble.

Pattering and bouncing on braking, plus twitching and snaking on different corners on the circuit, made the fault very hard to diagnose.

Neither rider was particularly happy even after they had qualified in official practise and the knowledge that they had to use the 1977 RCB motor for the race didn't help matters.

Charlie Williams is, of course, renowned for his success on lightweight two-strokes, particularly on the Isle of Man. We spoke to him about the massive Honda RCB endurance racer to find out what he feels about this 130bhp four-stroke with a top speed in excess of 170 miles an hour.

"Well, it's certainly different," he smiled. "Once you're committed to a line in a corner, that's it . . . you can't pick the bike up like you can a lightweight two-stroke.

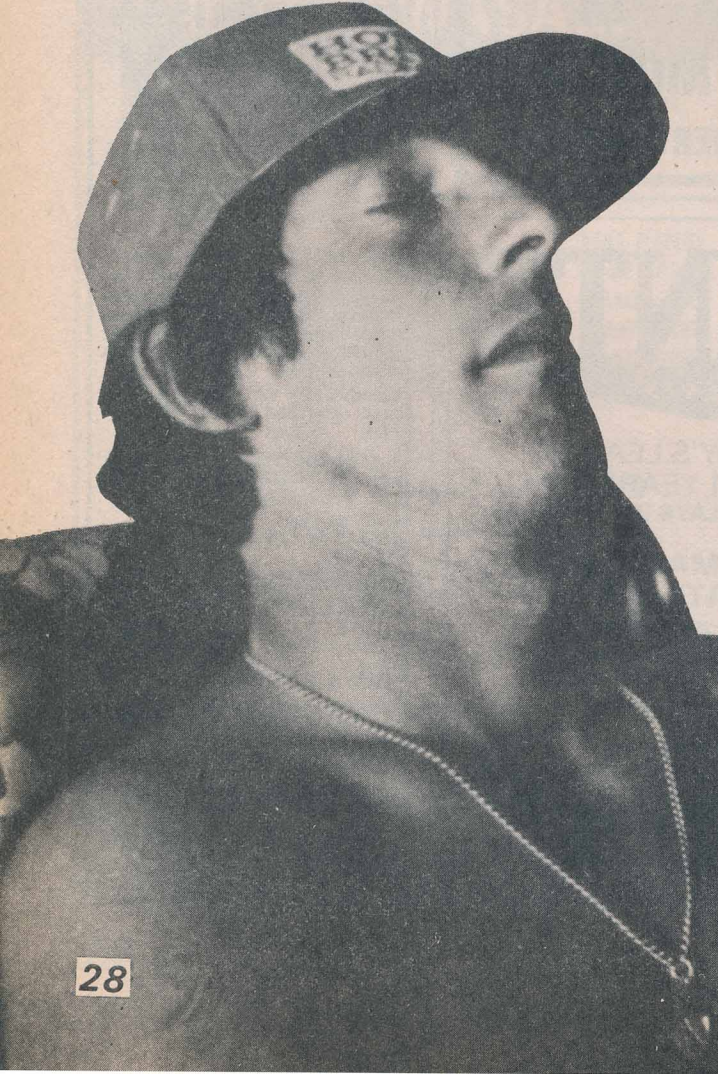
"Braking effect from the engine can also be tricky, especially on a wet track. If you slam the throttle shut, then it's just like putting the back brake on.

"Handling, or rather suspension, seems to be one of the major problems at the moment. Sometimes the back wheel hops on one of the corners, next time it doesn't. It's hard to work out just what is wrong and why the machine reacts differently under what appear to be identical circumstances," he said.

We went on to ask Charlie Williams about 24-hour racing.

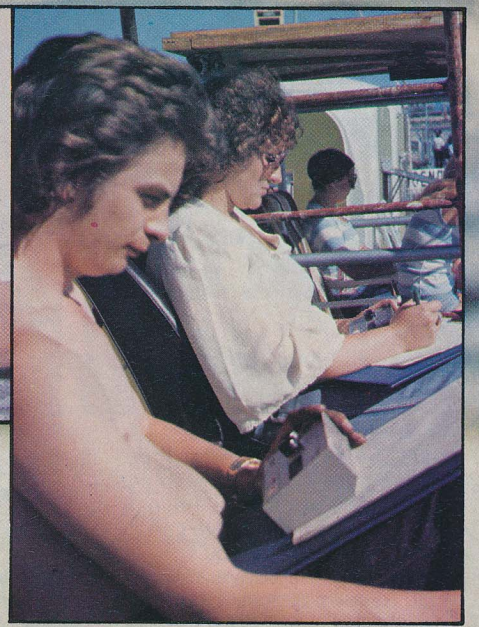
"It's hard, very hard. It requires so much concentration. Fortunately, we have our own race doctor, Richard Brooks, who looks after us. Hands ache, wrists ache and it's surprising how even 24-hours movement inside a set of leathers can make you sore.

"Talcum powder and taping hands and



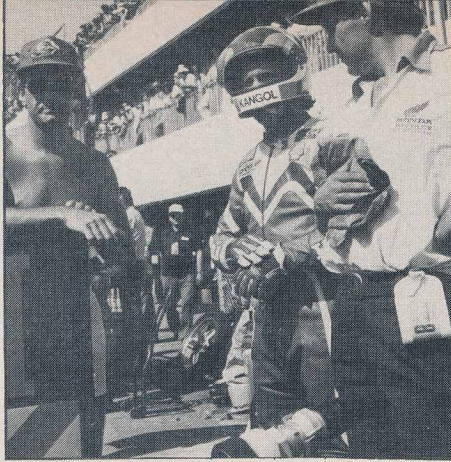
STOP THE RACE... I WANNA GET OFF!

Honda scoop the
Bol d'Or and take
Charles Deane
along for the
ride . . .

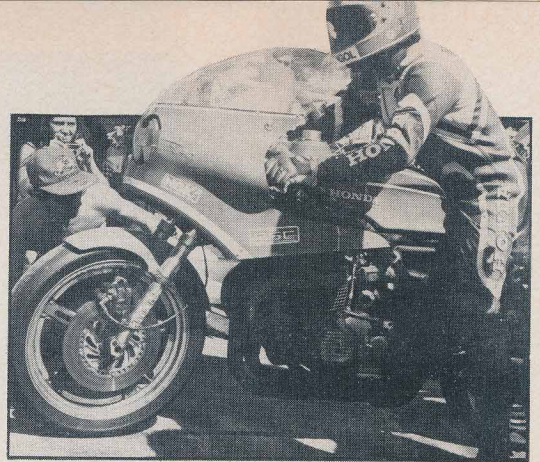




A relaxing drink of water ...



tension mounts for rider change ...



Stan Woods takes over!

wrists helps, but then there is the problem of relaxing between sessions on the bikes. Luckily we have a caravan behind the pits where we can lock out the world — except the doc."

Switching the conversation, we talked to Dr. Richard Brooks, Honda's race team doctor and, by coincidence, Charlie Williams' personal doctor.

"Normally, for the first few hours racing, unless there is a spill, we have very little to do. The problems come later when restricted muscle movement creates a build-up of acid in the joints which, in turn, causes cramp.

"We have two problems with which to contend, the physical and the psychological. The first we can resolve by immediately getting the rider to relax and stretch the limbs that have been cramped up for lap after lap on the bike and the second we can hope to help by talking about any subject, whether it be holidays, hobbies or even gardening, providing it gets the rider's mind off the race.

"I've even managed to stop Chas from smoking during practise and racing and his lap times prove that it is very much a benefit. Everybody seems to think that smoking is a help under pressure, but if anything it is a depressant which slows down reaction speeds," said the doc'.

Meanwhile, as we were talking, Stan Woods was out on the circuit thrashing the Honda Britain RCB racer around the Paul Ricard Circuit in third place.

Kerry Bird, an Aussie female, and Clive Rodber were lap scoring on the two-bike Honda Britain team, while Gerald Davidson the team manager and Barry Symmons, the team co-ordinator were pacing around the pits like caged lions, checking that all possibilities had been taken into account and that pit stops and refuelling were well organised.

Pit stop

Can you believe that within eight to ten seconds of the bike stopping in the pits, 18 litres (4 gallons plus) of fuel gushes into the petrol tank, the riders swap places, and the machine's back in the race?

Endurance racing has become as precise as a military tattoo. Seconds wasted in the pits add up to laps lost on the race track. All the weeks of preparation are geared to one aim, seeing the machine cross the finish line

Panic stations happened early in the evening after just a few hours' racing for the Honda Britain team. Charlie Williams had crashed when another competitor dropped his bike right in the path of the British rider.

Fortunately, Williams received only minor grazes and the big Honda had superficial damage to the fairing. As the pair limped into the Honda pits, it seemed as if the whole world moved into top gear.

The damaged fairing was ripped from the bike and the buckled headlight system straightened. While Stan Woods prepared himself for another stint out on the Paul Ricard circuit, Charlie Williams was led away to the race caravan for medical attention.

"It just happened so quickly," said Charlie. "One minute I was following this guy through the corner, next second he was down in front of me. I don't know whether I hit a patch of oil, whether I hit his bike, or whether I just over-reacted on braking to miss him. Bike isn't too bad though, is it?"

Meanwhile, back at the pits, the bike was rapidly approaching race-worthy condition. To save time, only the top half of the fairing had been fitted; the rest would have to wait for the next pit stop. A quick top up with fuel, a well-wishing slap on Stan Woods' race-leathered back, and he was in the saddle and away.

Precious minutes had been lost, which dropped the team a couple of places on the leader board. But the panic was over and it was up to Stan to pull back the lost ground while the mechanics prepared their 'operating theatre' for returning the RCB to fully-faired racing trim next pit stop around.

Out on the trackside, Kerry Bird resumed her lap scoring activities. Like a spectator at a tennis match, her head twisted from side to side as bikes howled, yowled and thumped past in a never-ending procession, with Kerry trying to spot the tell-tale identification lights of the Honda Britain Woods/Williams machine.

Alongside Kerry sat Clive Godber with stopwatches and notepad to record the progress of Dave Emde and Harry Klinzmann on the other Honda Britain bike. Their panic session was yet to come.

A fractured oil tank return pipe just below the saddle sprayed the rear tyre with oil and Dave Emde pulled into the pits complaining of lack of grip from the massive rear wheel slick.

The oil tank had to be changed and Dave de-greased before the American pair could continue the race.

"Your British mechanics are really great," said Dave. "They work their butts off and make you realise how important it is for the rider to do well out on the track. Man, you couldn't get a better back-up crew at any race meeting."

What did Dave think of 24-hour racing? "It's great. It's the first one I've ever

done and I must admit, I don't think we paced ourselves very well. It is a long, hard race and I know both Harry and I have learned a lot here at Paul Ricard. But it's been great, really great."

At Paul Ricard circuit, Honda's race efforts paid dividends. First, second and third places were won by three out of the four works' machines, with Dave Emde and Harry Klinzmann finishing in ninth place after their oil tank trouble.

Lap after lap the big fours howled past the pits and with lap scorers and pit crews beginning to yawn in the heat of the mid-day sun, twenty-one hours after the race had begun, everybody kept everything crossed in the hope that nothing would go wrong.

Winners!

At five minutes to three, before the true end of the race, the over-enthusiastic French crowds surged on to the track to welcome their heroes Christian Leon and Jean-Claude Chemarin as victors and literally brought the race to a halt.

In twenty-four torturous hours, the winners had completed 603 laps of Paul Ricard circuit and a distance of 2,175 miles to finish right back where they started the previous afternoon. The race winning average of 91.04mph shows that the winners don't hang about or nurse their race bikes to finish the race. From the moment the start flag drops, it's action all the way.

Out of 76 starters, only 24 managed to complete the race — which is like a war of attrition against man and machine, with only the toughest surviving.

After winning at Brands Hatch, Honda Britain finished as runners up to the Leon/Chemarin Honda France team for the Coupe d'Endurance. Once again that magic 'if' word crept into the conversation.

"If Stan Woods hadn't have crashed at Liege, I think we may have stood a chance of winning the series ... but who knows?" said Charlie, as he puffed on his first cigarette in thirty-six hours. "You can't win 'em all and, let's face it, there's always next year!"

Funny thing about twenty-four hour endurance racing; it sort of gets into your blood, and as we drove the race transporter back across France, nursing a clutch that had lost all hydraulic operation, our weary thoughts drifted back to the hustle and bustle in the pits during the race, the pile of empty Coke bottles afterwards and the aroma of garlic and Gauloises that hangs in Jeff's bar at Paul Ricard.

As Charlie Williams said, "there's always next year!"

