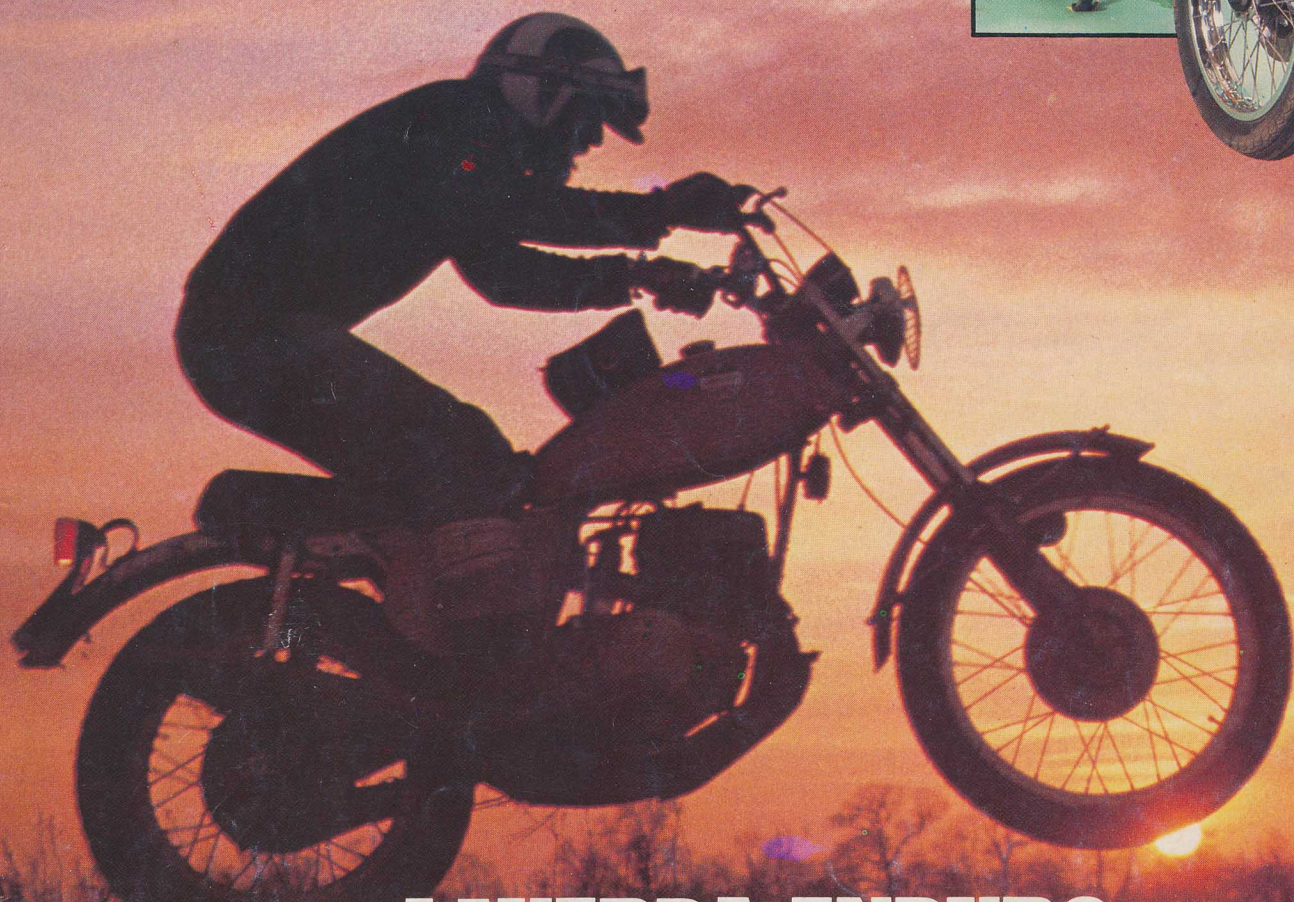


MOTOR CYCLE MECHANICS

MARCH 1977 35p

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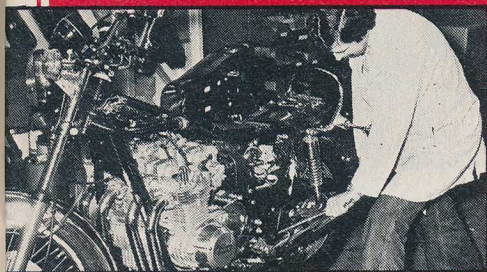
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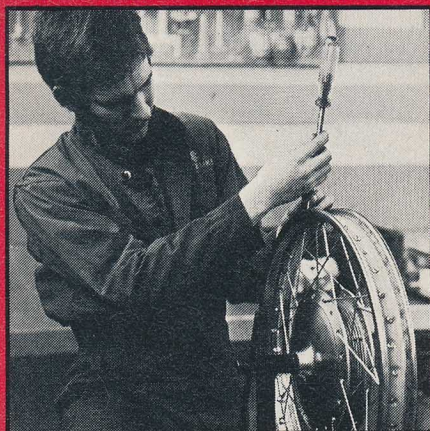
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MOTOR CYCLE MECHANICS MARCH



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WIN our fabulous CUSTOMISED 750 HONDA

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BARRY Ditchburn is a man with a big job on his hands this year. Determined to make his tenth racing season a memorable one by winning the world 750 championship, and with a much improved Kawasaki to do it with, Barry has to win every round he rides to stand a chance of achieving his ambition.

Reason is that Kawasaki race plans only include some of the 750 rounds, and with new rules from the FIM counting points from every round, any meeting "Ditch" misses means the loss of valuable potential points



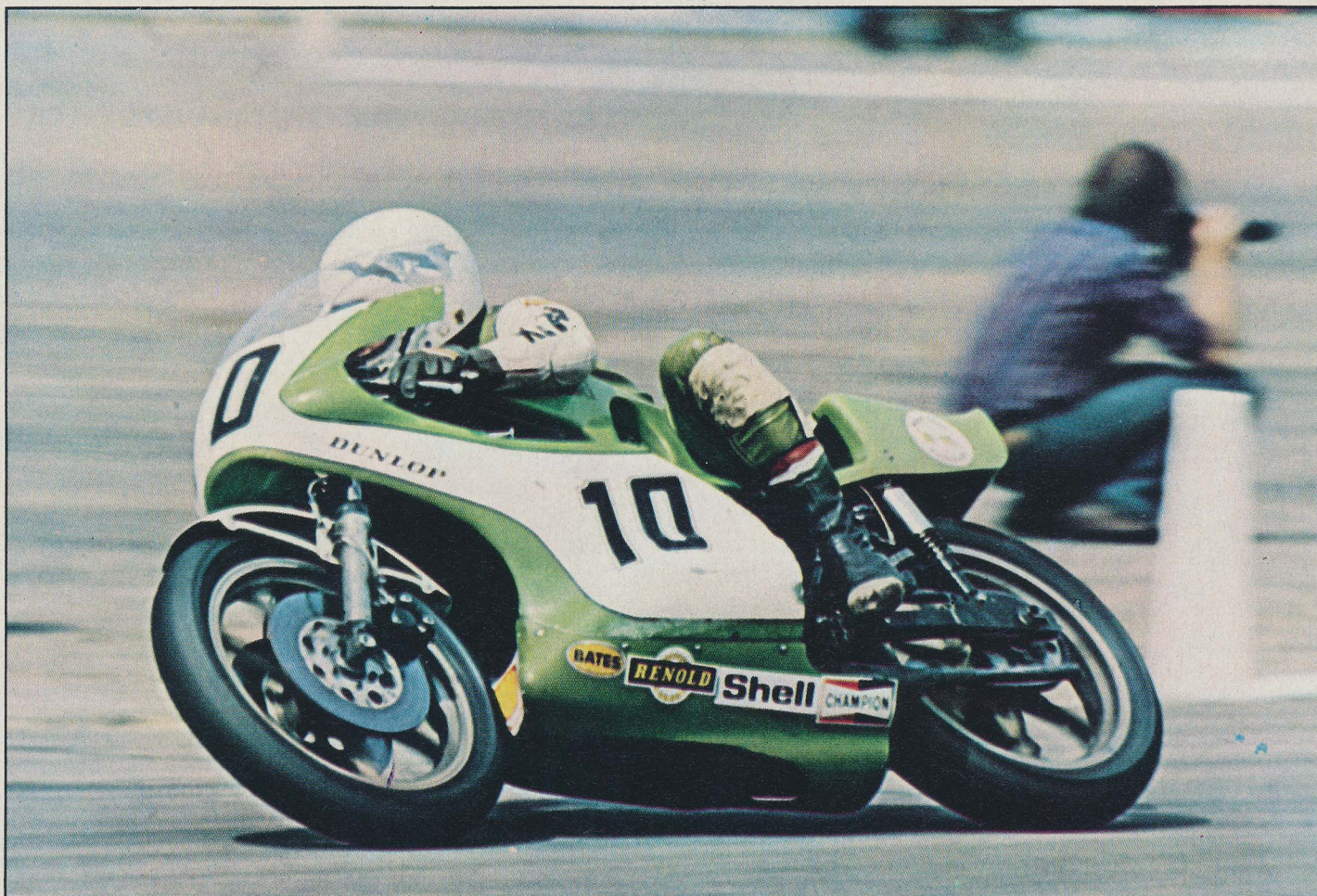
and aids the chances of his rivals. But in ten years of road racing Barry has had his fair share of disappointments and frustrations and has learned, philosophically, to take the rough with the smooth.

Ditch admits that it was a decade ago when he wheeled his first "world beater" — a £50 bitsa — out at Brands Hatch where he finished 13th. Considering the collection of parts he had nailed together into a motorcycle, his placing wasn't as unlucky as it sounds, and Barry has since steadily progressed to become one of the country's top racers.

BARRY DITCHBURN

... a man with no time to lose.

By BOB GODDARD



His highly competitive nature and his skill in extracting the best from the powerful Kawasakis, puts Ditch on the shortlist for 1977 750 world champion.

But very little is known about the inner man that hides behind the quietly determined outer crust. Ditch believes in keeping his thoughts to himself and has never sought publicity like many of the current breed of racing stars. Some people misinterpret his introverted nature for sullenness, and say that Ditchburn appears cheerless and even miserable in public, but the truth is that Barry's glassy stare and silent indifference to the crowds around the team Kawasaki camp, are the result of a trance that he slips into before racing.

While his mind traces the lines around the circuit's bends, he relives every bump, braking point and slide during practice in a detailed mental examination for faults in his riding. At times like this Barry is in a world of his own.

"I'm on cloud nine, deep in thought about the bike, the start, and which bend I have to try harder on — until someone speaks to me and I come back to earth," he says.

Once out on the track, when the flag drops, and revs scream as thousands of brake horsepower burst free in a crescendo of noise and smoke, Ditchburn's feet — and wheels — are firmly on the ground. He doesn't take unnecessary risks, and rarely crashes.

"I'll admit I'm a coward. If the bike is not going right, or something doesn't feel spot on I won't stick my neck out, and I'll be happy to settle for second or third spot rather than chance crashing and finishing nowhere at all."

It is difficult to believe that the man scraping his knee on the tarmac as he rides a 120 bhp motorcycle to its limit is anything but a fearless superhuman, but the more you talk to Ditch, the more you realise he has the same fears, ambitions and love of life as anybody else. It is more understandable then, when he says his prime ambition is to retire alive and well, and with his name engraved on the pages of the world's motorcycle racing records as a world champion.

Barry Ditchburn was perhaps born with a latent talent for racing motor cycles — inherited from his father Harry who was a big name in grass track racing at Brands Hatch in the forties, and rode in the 1947 Manx Grand Prix, as well as competing in scrambles and trials. But make no mistake, Barry has reached the top league of road racers by hard work and dedication, building upon his skill with the experience gained from hundreds of competitive races. His motivation has always been a genuine love for racing motorcycles and he says he would race for no reward if he had to, and didn't have his wife Christine and year old daughter Zoe to support.

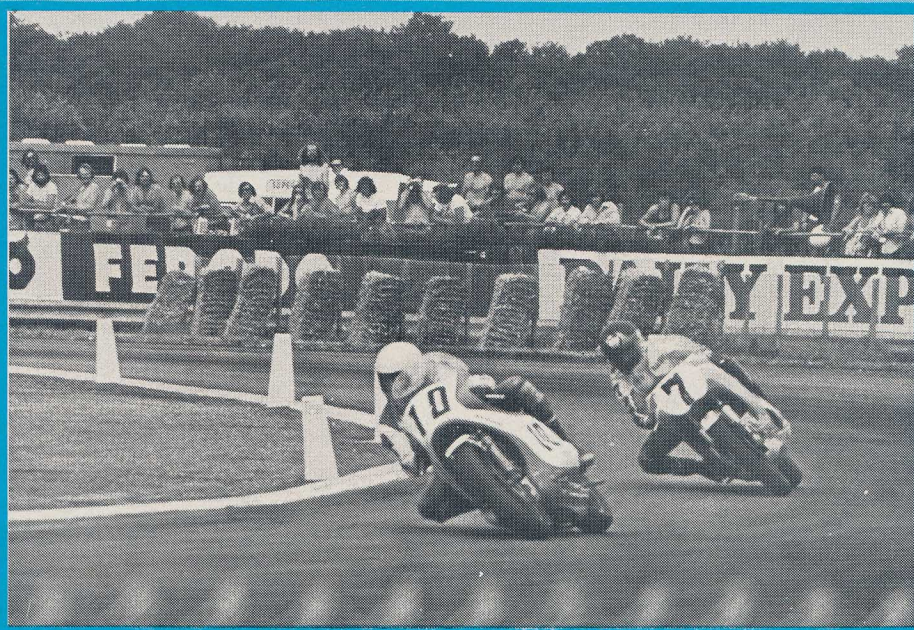
"I don't race for the money — although it plays a vital part now, and I don't do it for the glory or publicity that winning can bring. The personal satisfaction I get out of riding as hard and fast as I can is all I need to make the effort and risks involved worthwhile," he says.

"Obviously, everyone races to prove that they are faster than anybody else on that particular day and it is a tremendous feeling to win, whether it is a vital championship round or a programme filler event," says Barry.

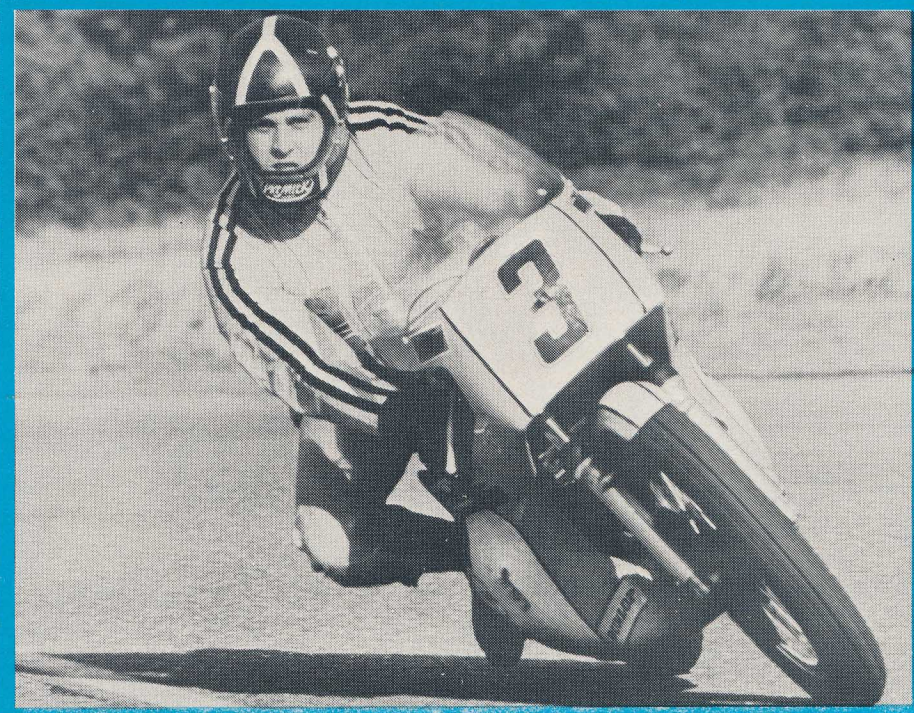
Being a works rider means you can't sit back and put your feet up, and Ditch says that

"I'LL ADMIT I'M A COWARD. IF THE BIKE IS NOT GOING RIGHT, OR SOMETHING DOESN'T FEEL SPOT ON, I WON'T STICK MY NECK OUT"

Showing an admirable lack of cowardice, Ditch screams the big Kawasaki round Becketts at Silverstone, in front of Barry Sheene.



"I KNOW I HAVE THE ABILITY TO WIN THE 750 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP"



After eight years of racing, Barry got a works ride with Kawasaki in 1975 — but his first bike was a "turkey".

"THE PERSONAL SATISFACTION I GET OUT OF RIDING AS HARD AND FAST AS I CAN ON A RACE TRACK IS ALL THE REWARD I NEED"

while the physical side of racing is made much easier with bikes, mechanics and transport provided, the psychological pressures are much greater.

Barry confesses that there are some days when the very last thing he wants to do is put his leg over a motorcycle — but he has to race just the same.

"It's crazy that I should ever feel that way considering how long I have wanted to race, and become a works rider," he says.

"I can remember standing on South Bank at Brands watching them all come out on their Manx Nortons and G50s. It always sticks in my mind how the sun used to sparkle on the wheel rims. I longed to be out there with them, but didn't think I ever would."

Perhaps it is those deeply implanted memories that make Ditch feel sad that there aren't any Manxs or G50s any more, but he reckons there will be few machines in the 750 class to compare with the 1977 Kawasaki he will use this season. The fact that the bike has arrived in plenty of time for testing before the new season, instead of coming as a box of bits a week or so before the first race, has done a lot for his confidence.

Barry has come a long way since he started racing with a 500cc Triumph engine in a Norton frame in 1967 when he contested five Brands Combine meetings and one Lydden event. Next season he was set to launch a full-scale attack on the racing world. Hurling the Triton around Brands, Mallory, Llandow, Snetterton and Lydden with the grim determination that Ditch has become known for. In his third season a friend's misfortune helped Barry along the road to success. By retrieving a 650 Triumph engine that had blown up in his mate's grass track outfit, and extensively rebuilding it, Barry had a new source of power. Although the cylinder head had several cracks in it, the motor was pretty quick, and at the 1969 Lydden National Barry beat Dave Croxford and all the established stars following which he was approached by his first sponsor. Riding the Stratford Motorcycle's Aermacchi-Metisse for the first time, Ditch won at Crystal Palace and nearly lapped the field. In addition he rode a 500 Seeley and his own Triton, now with a Weslake engine fitted, and during the 1970 season started riding Rod Gould's original 350 Yamaha which the shop had bought for him.

Barry had a habit of doing well first time out for a new sponsor, and in his first meeting for Ted Broad at Thruxton in 1971 he won his heat, final and took lap and race records that stood for several years.

The aircooled TR2s that were then beginning the Yamaha take-over in British racing were notoriously unreliable, and despite Ted Broad's undoubted skill in preparing the bikes Barry developed a finger-over-the-clutch habit to counter the numerous seizures. Nevertheless he continued to progress, and at Crystal Palace was considered almost unbeatable. He will hold for all time the lap and race records for the circuit now that it has been closed down.

When they did run, the 350 Yamahas were so quick that the inevitable happened and several were converted to 351cc to allow them to compete in the 500 class. It was the deathknell for the famous British four stroke singles that had ruled the roost for so long, and Barry himself put the first nail in the coffin lid when he rode the first ever over-bored Yamaha to victory in a 500cc race.



Then Ted Broad wheeled out his new secret weapon to beat the 750 superbikes — a Yamaha twin with an extra cylinder grafted on to make a 521cc triple. After coming second to his near neighbour Paul Smart in his first race on the three, Barry led the next event from start to finish.

The following year the triple was stroked down to 500cc to make way for a brand new machine in the 750cc class — the fabulous and fearsome Yamaha 700cc four. Keen to continue his record of wins on new bike debuts, Barry over-cooked it in his first race on the big Yamaha, and looped it in a big way. As if the legendary retribution of Mr Broad was not enough, the meeting was the first for years to be attended by Barry's Dad. After watching his son somersault the machine from Kidney bend to Clearways at Brands, Pa Ditchburn has never spectated again.

But Barry soon got the hang of the four, and won the King of Brands title, set a new circuit lap record for Snetterton at over 101 mph, and finished third in the British Grand Prix at Silverstone. The best part of 1974 was still to come, however, although it very nearly didn't happen at all.

"Stan Shenton, manager of the Boyer Kawasaki team asked me to partner Mick Grant on his 750 in the Thruxton 400 miler, but Ted said I would be riding his Yamaha so I turned the offer down. Two weeks later Ted said he wouldn't go to Thruxton after all, but when I rang Stan to see if the ride was still

open he told me Kork Ballington had taken it. It looked as if I was out of a ride altogether, but a week later Stan rang back to say that Mick was going to America instead of Thruxton, and would I like to partner Kork. I did, and we won it from the second lap on, which was the best day's work I ever did, because all Kawasaki's chiefs were there, and it led to the works ride the following year.

"I thought I had made a terrible mistake when I rode my very first race as a works rider for Kawasaki at Daytona. All the Japanese bosses were there, and my bike turned out to be a real turkey. They had detuned it so that it would finish the race, and it was real hard work because it was so slow.

"By the middle of the season, I and the bike were running great, I finished second in the MCN Superbike series, and I had gained more confidence in my own ability.

"Right now, I think the best road racer in the world is Barry Sheene, but I know that if the bike is going right and my riding clicks I can beat anybody — I have done it. When everything feels right, you just don't realise how fast you are going — like the Brands meeting when we broke Steve Baker's lap record and it was really easy.

"I know I have the ability to win the 750 world championship, but it is getting a real opportunity and then having the luck. I know it will be an uphill struggle this year with missing some rounds, but it is no good moaning—I want that title." □