

MOTOR CYCLE MECHANICS

SEPTEMBER 1977 40p

Win
A YAMAHA XS
250

GRANT'S GREAT TT RIDE



KAWASAKI
KE125: Mixing
business with pleasure

TOMORROW'S WHEELS? SPX 500/QUASAR

MOTOR CYCLE MECHANICS
SEPTEMBER

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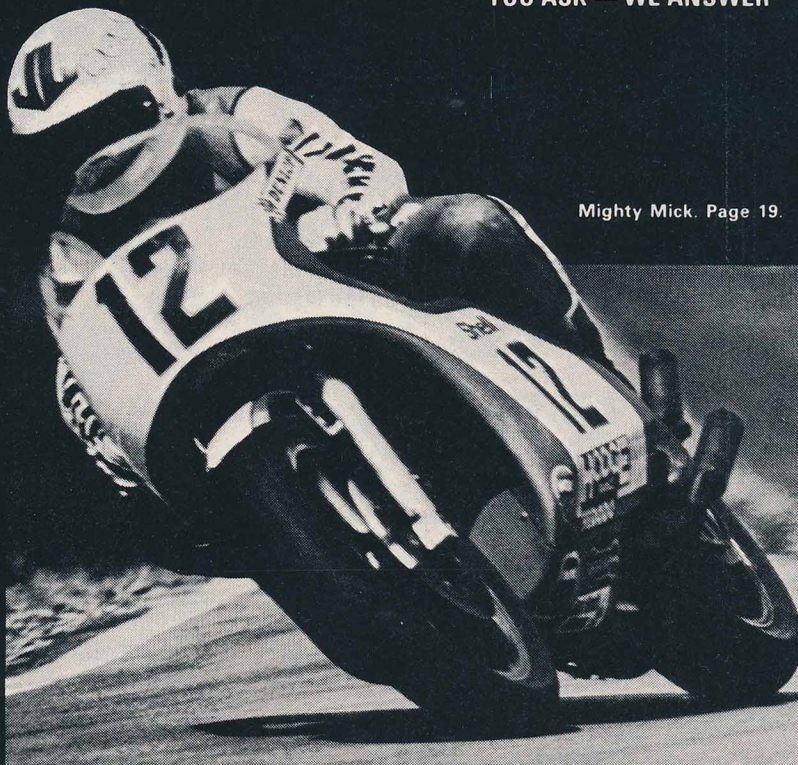
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'I'm a Gulf man all the way!'

says John Louis, Captain of Ipswich, the 1975 and 1976 Gulf Oil League champions, and a leading member of the Gulf Oil-Weslake team.

'It's not just on the track that I rely on Gulf Oil, you know.

'I insist on Gulf for my private driving too.

'Here's me with my motor in the picture.

And here's what I put in to protect the engine – Gulf Multi G 20W/50. Like Gulf says, it's one of the world's great multigrades. Not surprising it's got a Le Mans race win under its belt.

'Yes, that's certainly good enough for me!'



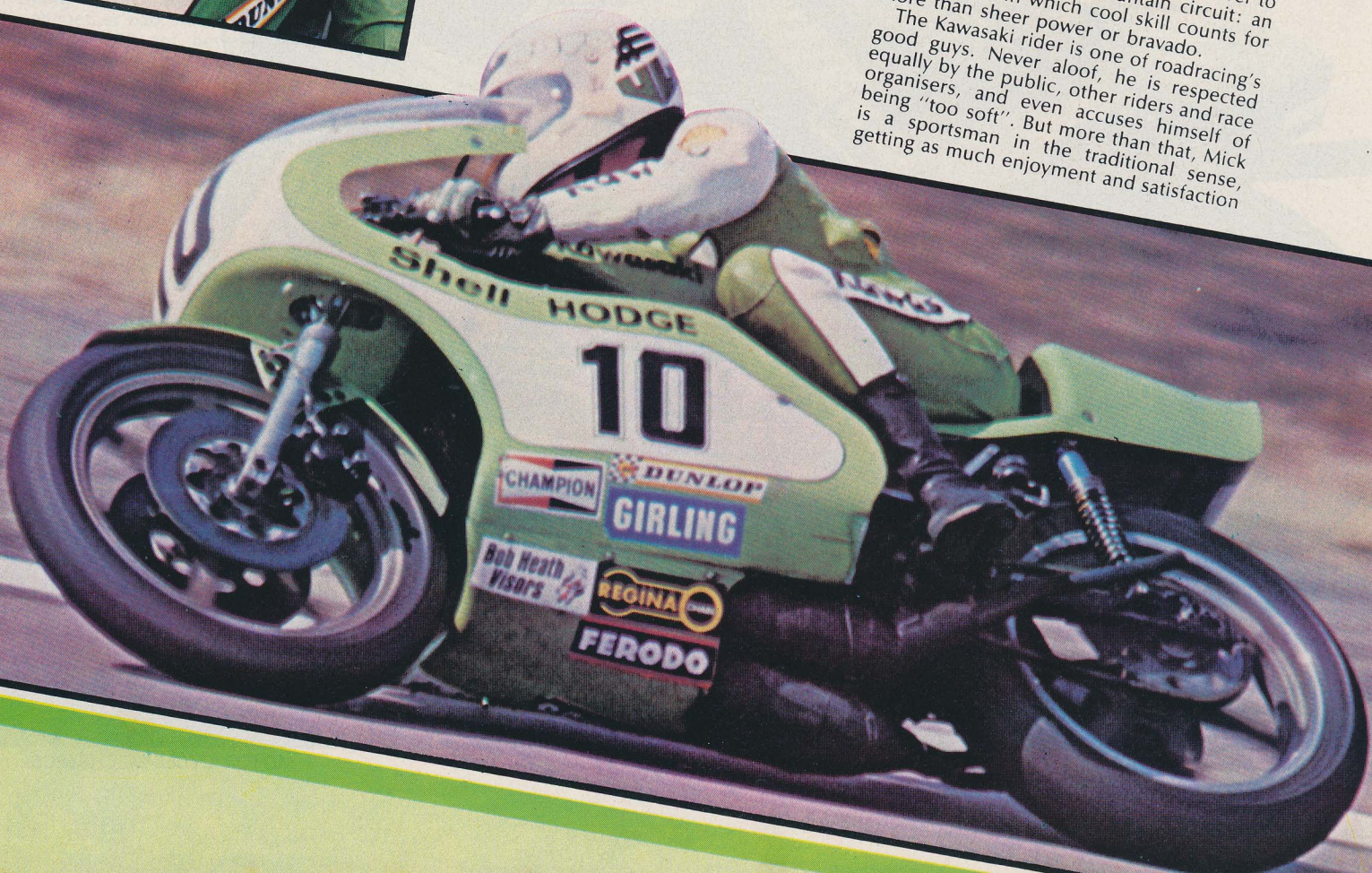
MIGHTY MICK



MICK GRANT TALKS TO JOHN ROBINSON

FOR some two years the TT stood wavering at a cross-roads. Finally, for better or worse, it has got a direction — and in much the same way racing in general finds itself with a similar decision to be made. There are too many champions, too many classes. At a time when the sport is strong and needs to be unified, can it afford diversions, restrictions and complex, often contradictory, formulae?

Mick Grant has been part of the racing world long enough to know his way around, to know where he wants to go and where he would like his sport to go. His current qualification to comment on such weighty matters is that he is the fastest man ever to lap the Isle of Man's mountain circuit: an achievement in which cool skill counts for more than sheer power or bravado. The Kawasaki rider is one of roaddracing's good guys. Never aloof, he is respected equally by the public, other riders and race organisers, and even accuses himself of being "too soft". But more than that, Mick is a sportsman in the traditional sense, getting as much enjoyment and satisfaction



MIGHTY MICK

out of simply riding well as he does from winning. Naturally if he rides better than everyone else and wins, he enjoys that too; "winning is important . . . it's an end-product. Winning means that next year I can carry on doing the job I enjoy doing most."

"Often though there have been days when I've come in considerably less than first and I've enjoyed it more than a day when I've won maybe three races."

It's a simple philosophy. If he rides better than other people, he beats them but that is their problem. As long as he knows he is riding at his best, he is happy.

Grant also carries on more traditions. Following Duke, Hailwood and Peter Williams, Grant has a classic style. He is one of the few riders around now who can handle the mean power of the big bikes and still ride with smooth, graceful lines. It may be

pretty to watch but occasionally it has disadvantages. With these ultra powerful machines it is often a case of squirting it hard down the middle of the road and when you reach a corner you stop, turn it and then accelerate away as hard as you can. There are plenty of riders who have mastered the art of keeping the bike upright for as long as possible so that they can use power more of the time. Riders like Mick are noticeably quicker in the corners but get outgunned along the straights.

He is very much aware of making the riding style suit the bike: "Occasionally now I have to slap my wrists for sticking my knees out . . ."

"I didn't get as much pleasure out of riding the 750 in the Isle of Man as I did from the 250. This is more like riding the old singles, you have to get through the corners at the fastest possible speed, otherwise, because there's so little acceleration, you feel the effects of it for the next two or three miles. On the 750 you can make a mistake, slow down and still have acceleration to get back up to full speed."

"I'd say I had more pleasure this year on the 250 than I've had for three years in the Island. Another thing is that you can do a

series of corners, not just one, and then if you get it right, you feel ten feet tall."

On a low-powered machine the difference between getting it wrong and getting it right shows up on the lap times, on the 750s it hardly notices. There are a lot of things Mick likes about the Island but there are two which he is not keen on. The world championship status is one which he feels is unnecessary — the TT as an event can stand on its own.

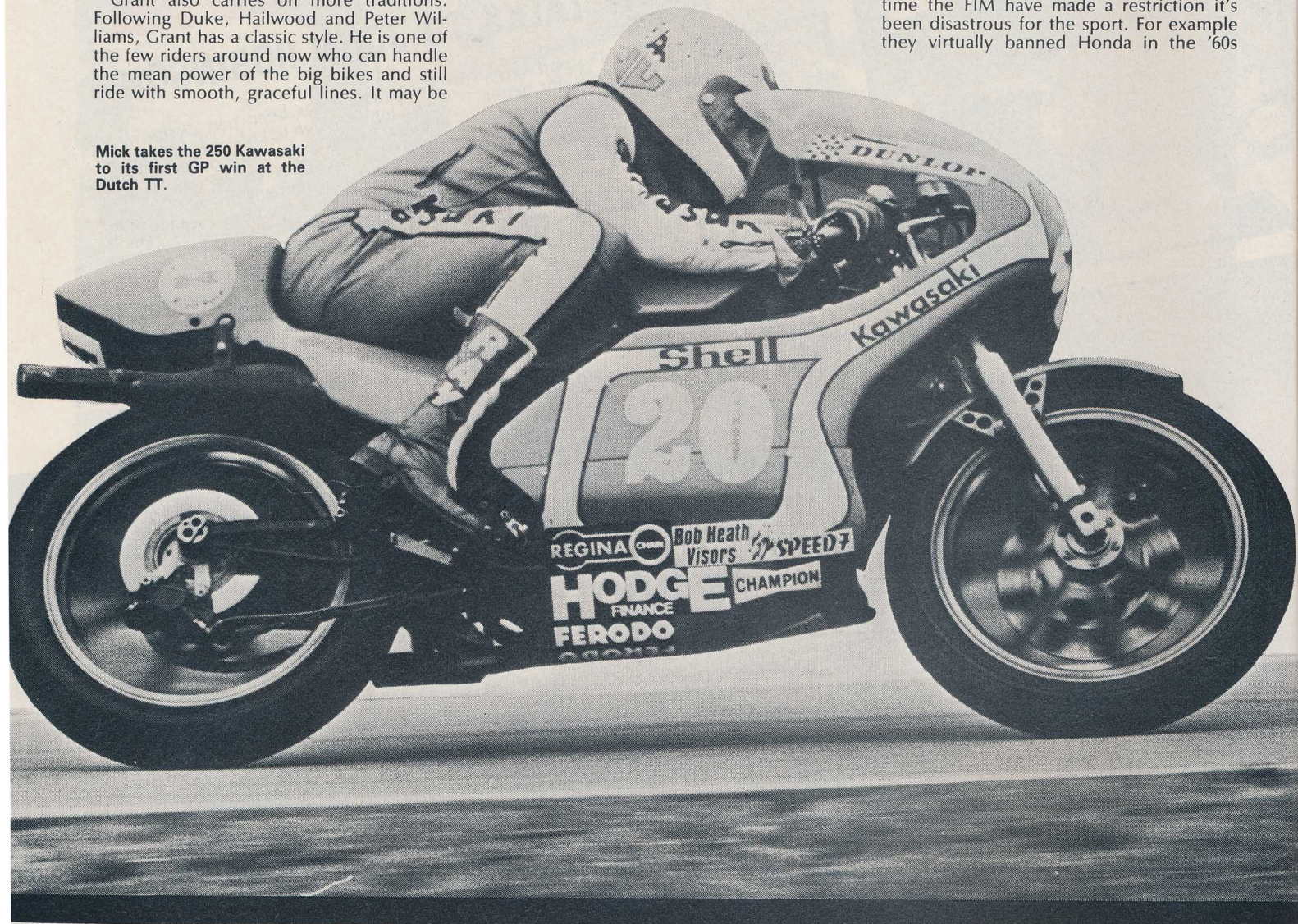
The other thing is the formula arrangement. Mick has very clear feelings about this, based on a view that the fewer the rules the better it is for everybody. He thinks this applies all the way through racing and that it would automatically take care of incidental problems like, for instance, machine safety. He isn't worried about the big two-strokes or the chances of them being phased out as their roadster counterparts disappear.

"The switch to two-strokes some ten years ago was a good thing — they're cheaper to make and they tied in with the racers developed from the '60s."

"Change is sometimes a good thing, but they'll keep racing two-strokes now they've got them, just as long as the rules allow it."

As for adopting a formula to equate different kinds of machinery — "absolutely ridiculous; look back in history and each time the FIM have made a restriction it's been disastrous for the sport. For example they virtually banned Honda in the '60s

Mick takes the 250 Kawasaki to its first GP win at the Dutch TT.



[when 250s were limited to twin cylinders and six gears] and look at the tyre battles in the last two years. There've been people who know nothing about tyres making the decisions and banning them.

"The best way to go is a completely open formula. 350s often have the legs of a 750 in the right conditions."

It follows that different types of circuit should not affect the issue if the rider has the choice of machine, tyres and so on.

"A champion should be able to win over a variety of races and conditions. I wouldn't blame anyone for refusing to race at one circuit. But a championship isn't just one circuit — I think that Daytona is the most dangerous circuit there is."

This sounded fine, in theory, but there seemed to be a paradox. If a circuit, like the TT were included in a championship schedule, would it not give an enormous advantage to those who had experience there simply because it takes so long to learn? Mick had a simple and direct answer to that.

"Pat Hennen proved the TT isn't that difficult. So did Katayama last year come to think of it." And Mick went on to point out there is no such thing as an easy circuit. There are some where it's easy to go fast, but then it is as easy for everyone else to go fast and winning is just as hard as ever. Mick considers that the TT has taken its turning point, that it has got away from the stigma that it would die if the world championship round were taken away.

"The Isle of Man will never get back into a championship series and that's a good thing to my mind. Look at the way Daytona is going downhill. It's a classic and it's a joke. The Isle of Man is a classic and it's going up."

The TT is a professional exercise and one which Mick obviously enjoys — and winning £6,000 from one race can't be altogether bad. Mick has no doubt that the money will get better and attract more riders. "There must be many now who are kicking themselves. I think the Isle of Man is going to take off and far surpass anything it's done before. In three years time it will be as colourful as in the Hailwood-Read-Ivy days."

Going back to a real world championship, Mick thought that three solo classes, one completely open, was more than enough, with one round catering for each class in each country. And if a country couldn't muster the support from the public or the riders, it shouldn't be allowed to run the event. As for every round counting, Mick's opinion is that only seven out of ten races should be used.

"In trials say, where there is no problem with machine reliability and little risk of a rider missing a round through a minor injury, counting the full number of rounds is probably a good thing. But in racing there are many more risks and the organisers don't have to pay as much if they know that the top riders have got to appear.

"If you worked it out, counting say seven out of ten results, you'd find the competition was much closer than if you counted all ten. There's a lot more competition and if riders have closer scores then, of course, they've got to go to all the rounds." As far as payment is concerned, obviously the top-runners have to be paid more, what is wrong at the moment is that in any event with a championship level the organisers

just pay the flat minimum rate.

"The top privateers should be paid at least what it costs them. Start money — anything from £70 to £200 — is often ludicrous compared with the gate money at £4 or £5 a head. The FIM should make the organisers guarantee a certain purse — enough to support the whole entry whether it is used as start money or in prizes."

Mick is equally dogmatic about restrictions on the bikes themselves. In reply to the arguments that the 750s are too quick and that engine size or intake area should be restricted he says, "It isn't necessarily the bike that'll do 200 mph which will win. That doesn't matter, what I'm saying is, leave the

"The only place I don't leave a safety margin is on the steps at the Villa Marina."

problems to the designers but don't restrict them."

He is confident that given a free hand, the designers could produce machines which are fast and safe because they wouldn't have to rely on brute power. Chassis design is years behind and Grant is keen on taking ideas from car and sidecar racing, especially after test riding the low Monark at Andersstorp some time ago. "If I could just stop for six months, I'd love to have a go at a really good chassis."

Mick is opposed to a wide array of classes and championships because it divides the sport up, confuses the great majority of the public and weakens the impact of any publicity. He is also less than keen on production racing, so what about the developments in endurance racing which does at least have a definite direction and growing support?

"I'll concede that you get more innovation in endurance machines than in Grand Prix racing. But I already see endurance racing as the beginning of the rot.

"There are two things I don't like. It's difficult for a top-liner rider to want to share — we get where we are through determination, often self-centred determination. I shared a bike with Dave Croxford in the Thruxton 400 miler, which we won. We rode it 50-50, but Dave had a problem on the last lap and had to push the bike in. Naturally he got all the glory, which I don't begrudge him, but it was hard for me to swallow.

"The second thing is that endurance racing gives more advantage to the manufacturers than to the riders. For the spectacle and promotion of the sport we need factory involvement and the personality of the riders. Personalities don't come across in endurance racing. In, say a 20 or 30 mile race, a really good rider is capable of winning even on a slightly sick bike. The way I

see racing is that you want to go out and beat people, not sit still waiting for them to drop out."

Mick's overall argument seems to be a very valid one. For the sport to succeed and promote itself it needs to have attention focussed on the essential elements — say three solo classes and one championship series. Then a world champion would be a world champion and everyone would know what he was champion of. The character — and purse — of events like the TT or Imola let them stand on their own anyway. With the minimum of restriction on designers and ultimate decisions resting with the riders and technical experts, Mick thinks that safety will look after itself — obviously accepting there will always be an element of danger. But there will also be the wilder fringe of riders who will take chances; those who's sole claim to fame for the next few months will be that they stayed in front of Barry Sheene or Mick Grant or whoever.

"If I'm in with a chance of winning, I've got to get past and when there's someone riding really ragged in front of you, you've got to do it cleanly. The only general rule is to pass them on the inside . . .

"My biggest worry then is that they'll try to get past on the next corner — the hairpin at Mallory is a favourite place, you're braking really hard and then, wham, you're up in the air and the bike disappears from under you as they lose it and run into the back of your bike."

But, again, Mick accepts this sort of situation philosophically, "I see it as my job to make sure nobody gets in my way or fetches me off," remembering that only a few years ago he was one of the scratchers and if he saw an established star right in front, he would pull out the stops and take chances to get past.

Being a works rider means he will be one of the targets for the up-and-coming riders — he is the guy to beat. And if he is up near the front he is a very hard guy to beat because he is prepared to take chances too. But he also recognises the danger of being too proud to back off: if he's down in sixth or seventh spot and someone squeezes past, sliding all over the place and generally making things hairy, Mick will let him get on with it.

Just being in this position obviously puts more strain on the rider and it's more important than ever that the machinery is set up to be as competitive as possible, that the rider is fully aware of the bike's limitations and can plan his race tactics to get the best out of it.

There were a couple of good examples at the TT and the North-West 200, circuits which are both long, fast, bumpy and demanding on the machines. It has become pretty obvious that the big Kawasaki's chassis is less advanced than those of the latest Yamahas and Suzukis. The most wheel movement they can look for is maybe three inches, compared to seven inches on the opposition. Then, when the suspension is set up for a circuit like the NW200, it destroys chains.

This was also Mick's problem at the TT; he knew that by the last lap he would have to back off because of chain and sprocket wear and this meant he would have to go quickest on the early laps. This he did but it was a double-edged problem because in the early stages he was wrestling with the top-heavy weight of a full petrol tank.

MIGHTY MICK

However, he built up his lead as planned and could afford to coast on the last lap when the chain started jumping the sprocket. You may be forgiven for thinking that Mick's idea of "coasting" is something of an understatement.

His biggest disappointment in the race was that Phil Read wasn't riding. "I know John Williams had problems on the first lap but I was still pulling away after he got going."

Mick reckons he rides at about eight-tenths in the Island but says he wasn't mentally capable of lapping any faster. "There's a mental switch which says, 'enough' and cuts out . . . if someone had been closing on me it might have been a different story."

"The only place where I don't leave a safety margin is the steps at the Villa Marina!"

Mick and mechanic Nigel had practised a refuelling and chain adjustment routine at Jurby which apparently paid off during the race.

"The most satisfying thing was that all our

problems had been foreseen and we'd taken measures against them."

But even races on purpose-built circuits cause problems. Mick takes a lot of time to get the bikes set up perfectly for each race.

"The first thing is to get the gearing right, either for top speed if there's a long straight, or to get the best acceleration out of the infield.

"Then we experiment with tyres. I do maybe 12 laps on the existing set up, until I've set a comfortable lap time, before we change anything. I prefer to make the changes 'blindfold' so that I don't know what the new tyres are, to destroy the psychological thing. I do three or four laps, come in and say what I think then we compare this with the lap times. Very occasionally the bike feels better but is actually slower, more often, when the set-up is right the handling is better and makes it feel slower. Usually, though, I can tell fairly accurately whether my lap times are up or down.

"Finally we go on to suspension. The difficult thing is that some settings affect others. Different tyre sections alter the gearing and this has to be allowed for. Some settings are critical — we had a wobble on the 250 at Ricard, close to top speed. Increasing the front tyre pressure by just 2 pounds totally eliminated it."

Fuel consumption is often a problem with a big two-stroke but Mick's only worry here is that they'll clamp further restrictions on the bikes. In Mick's opinion this is a bad thing and is unnecessary as it is another of those factors which sort themselves out: "Better mpg means less weight and fewer

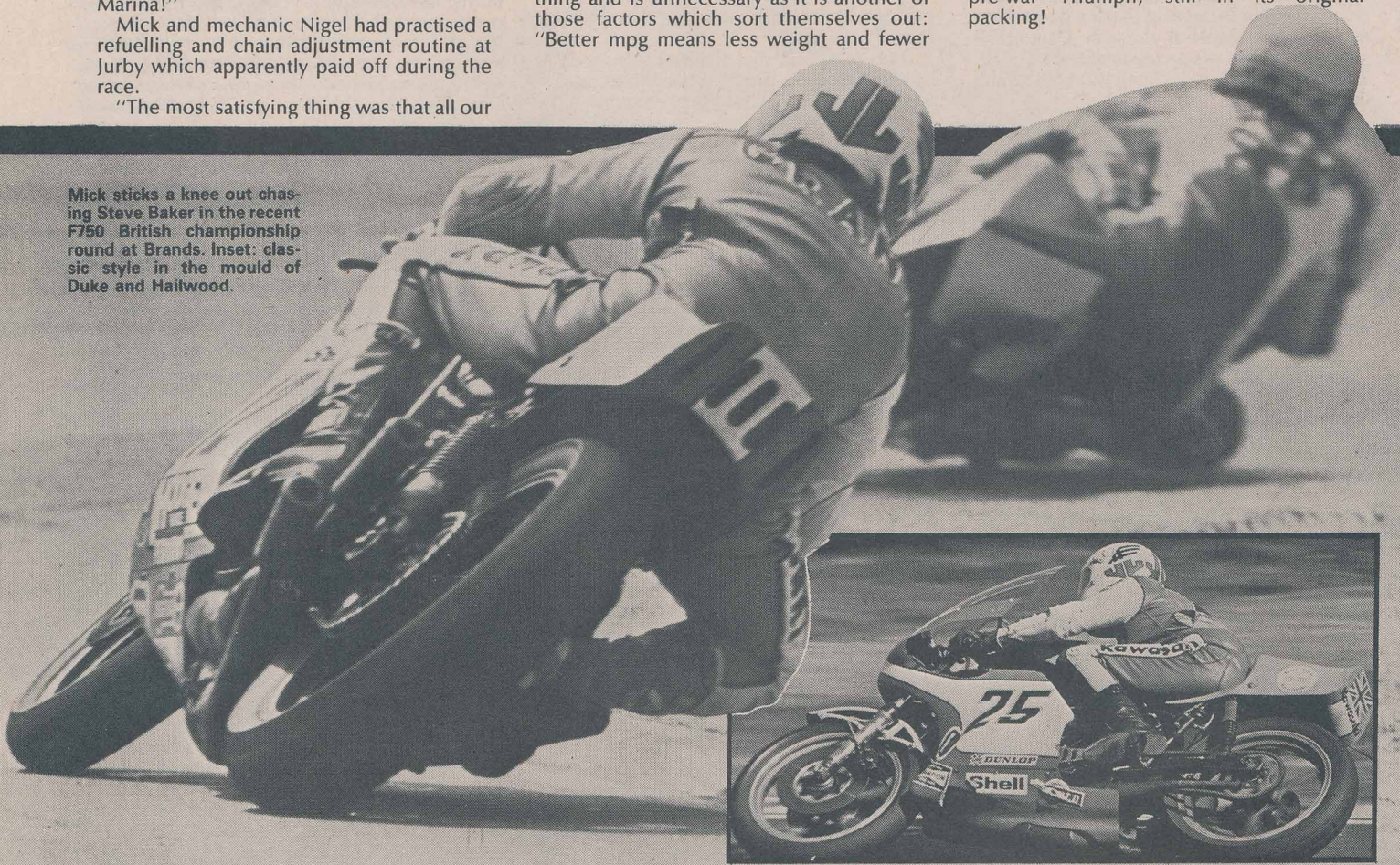
pitstops, if you can miss a pitstop you can save precious seconds — time which is very hard to make up even in a long race."

Mick has a strict professional discipline and refuses himself the luxury of favourite circuit or even a type of circuit. Similarly race length doesn't bother him, although, "I like long races on long circuits, short races on short circuits. 80 or 90 miles on a 6 mile circuit doesn't seem a long way but 80 or 90 miles at Mallory Park would seem like an endurance race."

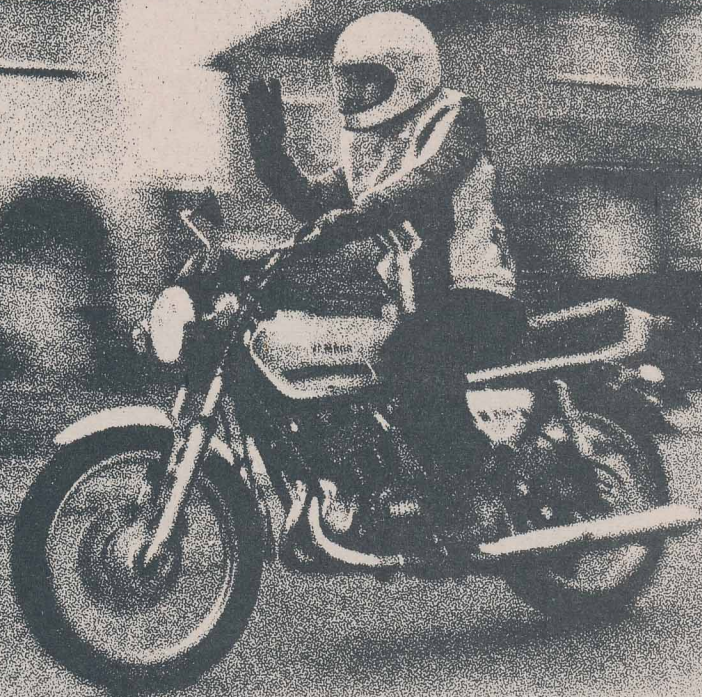
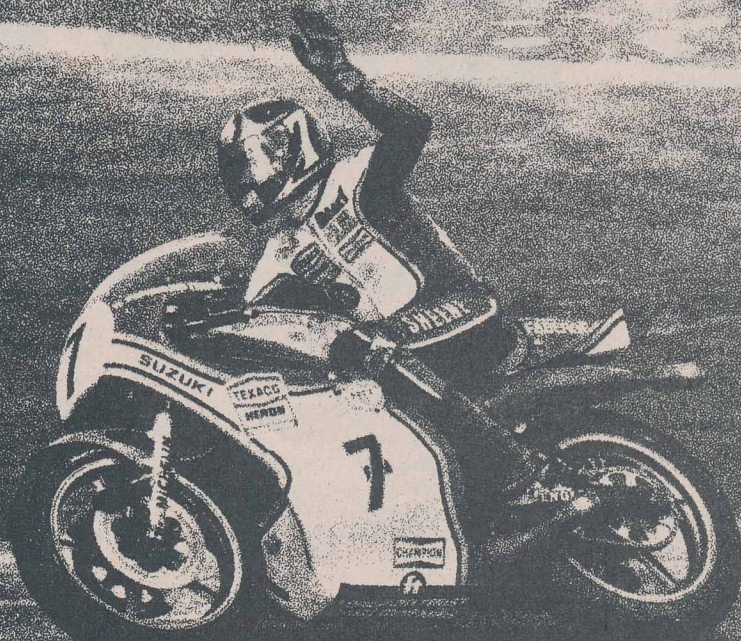
Almost in spite of the grandeur of being a works rider and the professionalism of the job Mick's popularity stems from the fact that enthusiasts can identify with him. He's lost count of the number of shop openings and club dinners he's been asked to attend but he always manages to find a few minutes to stop for a chat with the fans. When he's not racing or getting the Kawasakis set up for a meeting he still keeps a real interest in things motorcycling. There's his business, supplying clothing, accessories, big bore kits and so on to the trade. And when there's any time left he rides his trials bike up over the moors with Rastus or tinkers with his vintage bikes. He's got a love of 1930's machines and likes nothing better than taking some time out on a sunny day and just riding them.

We spent some time talking in a room with cups and trophies lining two walls but Mick made no reference to any of them. The one thing he was keen to show me was his latest "prize", a brand new seat cover for a pre-war Triumph, still in its original packing!

Mick sticks a knee out chasing Steve Baker in the recent F750 British championship round at Brands. Inset: classic style in the mould of Duke and Hailwood.



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