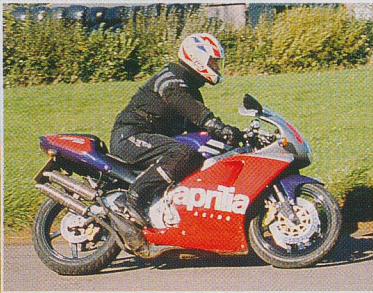


FEBRUARY 1996

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THE QUALITY MONTHLY

Motorcycle SPORT



APRILIA RS250



GUZZI NEVADA

On Test: **MUZ SKORPION**

Single stinger

APRILIA RS250

What a Cracker!

GUZZI NEVADA

Italian Custom

HONDA XR250

Dirt Devil

Cagiva v Citroen

Counting the costs!

GET ADVENTUROUS - WIN A YAMAHA XT600E

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SIDECARS PLUS GPs AND WORLD SUPERBIKES**



ISSUE NUMBER: 424

Motorcycle SPORT



Motorcycle shows extend throughout the year these days, culminating of course in the Big One at the NEC in November. Motorcycle Sport is pleased to be associated with several of the 1996 shows, as detailed in the "News" pages in this issue

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Letters

Advocates of new-age "FF" motorcycles, controlled by supine pilots, ignore loss of the motorcyclist's bonus of a lofty riding stance. Mr Hill writes, mildly, that the conventional bike's riding position helps in overtaking in safety; Mr Thompson says the FF-ers are bonkers. Takes all sorts ... especially among MCS correspondents.

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One Track

OT sheds a tear for all the poor folk out there who don't ride a motorcycle: most to be pitied are the faint-hearted ex-bikers seduced at an impressionable stage into Fiats and Rovers and such .

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Books Reviewed

"Jim likes to preach" - Jim being Jim Rogers who has written a book on investment opportunities ... presumably for bikers ... capitalising meantime on other opportunities while riding with a beautiful companion, Tabitha. They're both on BMWs, though that is possibly not significant, and cover many boring miles together. "Investment Biker" (£12.99 to you, guv) is a world away from Bacon's feel-the-width efforts reviewed in this issue.

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What a Cracker!

And it's an Aprilia - the RS250. Mr Kerr rides the road version of "Mad Max" Biaggi's world-championship-winning bike and thinks it's, well, pretty fair. (He quoted somebody else saying it was a cracker and drop-dead gorgeous, and that sort of thing; Mr K keeps a tight rein on his own adjectives.)

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All manuscripts, illustrations and photographs submitted to *Motorcycle Sport*, whether at our request or otherwise, are submitted entirely at the supplier's risk. While every possible care is taken, in the event of loss or damage to material, etc, the company cannot hold itself in any way responsible.

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RoadRace

“The only British interest in the 250s was Niall Mackenzie, with his supposed works-spec Docshop Aprilia. Unfortunately the ‘works’ content of the Aprilia proved a myth, and the Docshop bike turned out to be both dog-slow and unreliable.” T.R.T. recalls downbeat – and inspiring – “Darren Barton was magnificent!” ... stories in his round-up of 250, 125 and sidecar fortunes in the ’95 GPs; and then has a further look at likely antics among the “500” camps during the forthcoming season



▲ Alberto Puig: testing at Jerez on the Fortuna Pons Honda



Olivier Jacque (19): best newcomer among the 250 men ... should be on a full works-spec NSR Honda this year

JUST as Carl Fogarty and Ducati contemptuously demoralised the Japanese-mounted opposition in their defence of the WSB title Mad Max Biaggi and Aprilia did exactly the same in last season’s 250 Grands Prix. Initially he didn’t have things quite all his own way, with a third in Australia’s opener behind Honda’s Ralf Waldmann and Yamaha’s Tetsuya Harada, followed by a win in Malaysia, then a lowly tenth at Suzuka. That Japanese round was particularly memorable; it was a rain-soaked affair from start to finish. Water

found its way into the Aprilia’s electronics, resulting in an unrideable on/off switch-like power delivery totally unsuited to the conditions. Tadayuki Okada crashed out whilst streets ahead, and presented Ralf Waldmann with the lead; the riders were so stretched out at this stage that Waldmann himself had time to fall off, remount without losing his place, and to continue for a few more laps before the race was mercifully red-flagged to a halt. Biaggi crossed the line flat on his back – he lost the Aprilia on the start/finish straight and slid the final

e Review

PART 2



100 metres or so. But the race was already stopped, and Max was credited with a points-scoring finish.

In a way, that performance serves to underline Biaggi's brilliance and consistency last season. In 1994 he frequently threw it all away, apparently without reason whilst in the lead, and the title was in doubt until the final event at Catalunya. In 1995 he scored in every round, culminating in eight wins, runner-up three times, and nine pole positions. Whilst his disc-valved Aprilia is undoubtedly the most powerful of all the different works 250s, it is also the most difficult to ride to the limit – as it



Jean-Michel Bayle: moving up to 500s, with Harada

was too in '94 – being both peaky and extremely unstable on heavy braking. Swapping from WP to Ohlins suspension for '95 improved matters, but not so the layman would notice.

Compared to the fleet of Honda NSRs and Wayne Rainey's brace of works Yamahas, the number one Aprilia looked as if it was an accident about to happen – except it never quite did. Biaggi is an inveterate showman – on the last lap, on the podium and in the paddock – and is a master at psyching out his opposition. His pole position times were frequently out of this world, and in the actual races he would either storm off into the distance right from the off, or be content to allow Harada & Co to snap at his heels all race long before whipping clear on the final lap or two. He happily badmouthed everybody and everything – including Aprilia – to the media, and was so sure of himself that he was able to hold out for a million-dollar salary and sole works rider status for the '96 season. Aprilia had no choice but to eventually agree.

In short, the awesomely talented "Mad" Max Biaggi looks set to be the first Italian since Walter Villa (Aermacchi Harley-Davidson) to win three 250cc titles on the trot before moving up to 500s next year. It's a pity he's such an arrogant little sod!

Whilst Ralf Waldmann's season started well enough with wins in Australia and Japan, he had to wait until France and Le Mans before scoring another. For much of the rest of the time he had to be content with third, behind Biaggi and arguably the best 250 rider of modern times, Tetsuya Harada.

With just the one win in Spain, eight second places, and 220 points to Biaggi's 283 the bare statistics do Harada scant justice. Put simply, the TZX Yamaha was rubbish, being some 10-15 kph slower than the Aprilias and Hondas. Only Harada's riding ability and superb set-up skills worked in its favour; unlike riding a 500 getting a 250 sideways is not the way to go fast, and Harada's Yamaha always appeared the smoothest and steadiest machine of them all out on the track. That team-mate's Kenny Roberts Jr's didn't further emphasises the point. What he lost on the straights Harada would gain back in the corners but even he couldn't make up for the Yamaha's horsepower deficit in the longterm.

Yamaha had an all-new disc-valved YZR 250 waiting in the wings but it was never quite ready for Harada to use. He and team-boss Wayne Rainey were victims of 1995's IRTA one-bike rule



Max Biaggi: brilliance and consistency in 1995 voted in by the teams themselves. Unlike the 500s, the two smaller-capacity classes have to make do with just the one bike in qualifying and practice; a spare cannot be used unless the designated number one machine is officially declared a write-off. This rule was obviously introduced to save costs in an attempt to limit the advantage of the big-money factory teams, and in that sense it has succeeded.

The majority of the field consist of a rider, a mechanic or two, and their respective girlfriends; in the name of IRTA's one-for-one democracy the likes of the Aprilia factory and Rainey's Marlboro Yamaha team were simply outvoted by the shoestring squad. Good for the impoverished majority, no doubt, but hardly good for the sport. We are talking about racing on the world stage, after all, not some minor club series. Be that as it may, one result of the one-bike rule was the non-appearance of the oft-promised new Yamaha; in previous years it would have been run alongside the proven race tackle in practice and qualifying, and development speeded up accordingly.

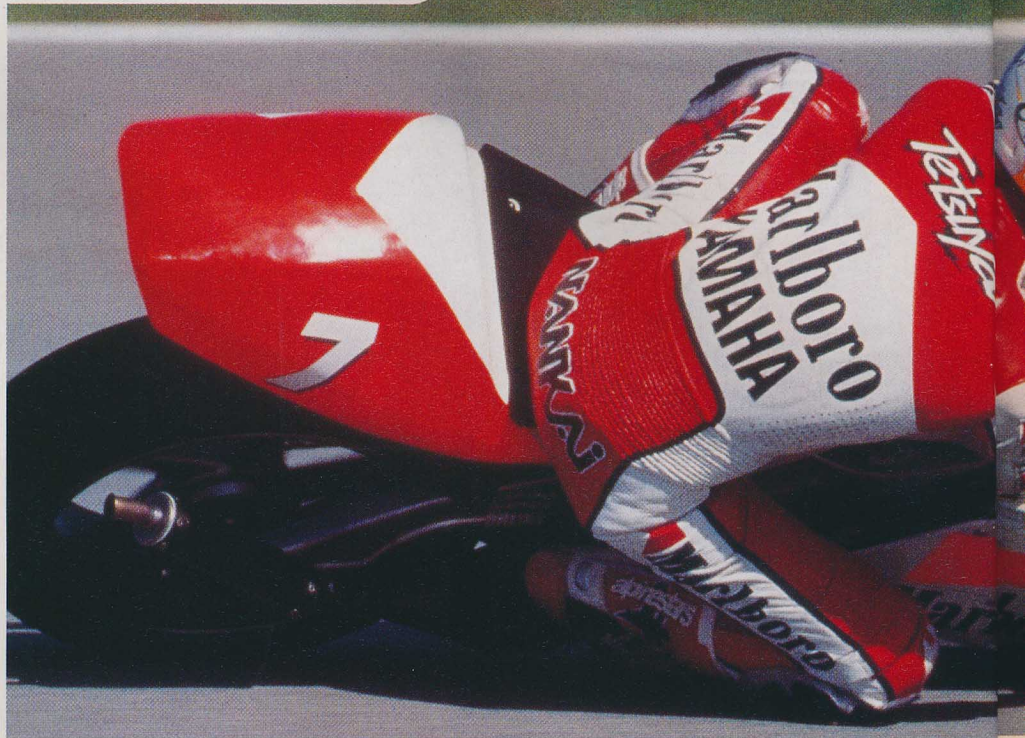
Nevertheless, with or without this new YZR, Harada's title challenge effectively ended at Assen; Biaggi had set an impressively fast provisional pole and Harada steeled himself to do something about it. He tried too hard, crashed, injured himself, was unable to start the race, and could only manage a fifth at Le Mans a few days later. Donington, another Biaggi win, and it was all over bar the shouting.

Doriano Romboni was the only other rider to claim a 250 win, in Brazil. His team, managed by Giacomo Agostini, was strapped for cash all season long; a heavy crash and resulting injuries kept him out for the middle part of the year. The 1994 runner-up, Tadayuki Okada, never really found his form this time

around, ex-motocrosser Jean-Michel Bayle spent the early part of his season whingeing about the second-class treatment he was receiving at the hands of Aprilia in comparison with Biaggi, suffered endless bad luck, and never quite made the podium despite qualifying on or near the front row from time to time, and even gaining pole in Argentina.

The veteran J-P Ruggia was another who never quite came up to scratch

Tetsuya Harada: a victim of IRTA's "one-bike" ruling



either; his excuses included a lack of funding combined with late delivery of his leased NSR Honda which further inhibited development work. Kenny Roberts Junior displayed the odd streak of brilliance on occasion but never actually made the podium; as his team-mate Harada couldn't make his Yamaha a winner it's hardly surprising that Junior couldn't either. Whatever, both he and Bayle will be moving up to 500s in '96 in a team managed by Kenny Roberts Senior.

Undoubtedly the 250 find of the year was Olivier Jacque, team-mate to Ruggia in the Elf Tech 3 squad. Whilst Ruggia enjoyed a full works-spec NSR Honda, young Jacque had to make do with a standard production kitted-RS. Race after race he would be right up there with the front-runners. However, once the tyres started to go off by half-distance the marked superiority of the works machines would come into play and Jacque would slowly drop down the order. Assuming his Elf team can procure a full NSR this year, Olivier Jacque will be the one to watch. Whether he can regularly mix it with the established Big Three of Biaggi, Harada

and Waldmann remains to be seen. Apart from this young Frenchman it's difficult to recognise any other serious challengers at this stage ... The only British interest in the 250s was Niall Mackenzie and his supposed works-spec Docshop Aprilia. Unfortunately, the works nature of this particular Aprilia proved to be a myth; the bike was both unreliable and dog-slow, resulting in a lowly 18th place overall with 26 points, and an incredible

eight no-scores. A sterling sixth at the British GP was some recompense, but not a lot.

Docshop has pulled out of the 250cc class this year and is concentrating solely upon 125s. Mackenzie's equipment is up for sale; British 250 Supercup champ Jamie Robison has so far failed to secure a works ride and now intends going the privateer route and acquiring the ex-Docshop tackle, assuming he can raise the necessary finance. We wish him better luck than Mackenzie had with it, but somehow can't see it happening.

The only other British regular in '96 will be Chris Walker, riding for the Padgetts team.

Not too long ago the 125 GP class used to be organised chaos, with the title being an all-European, nail-biting affair right down to the wire. In recent years things have changed: hordes of Japanese riders swamp the grid, Dirk Raudies ran away with the series for Honda in '93, Kazuto Sakata did likewise for Aprilia in '94, and last season it was the turn of Honda and teenager Haruchika Aoki.

Aprilia had apparently rested on its laurels over the winter and produced

nothing radical for Sakata whilst Honda's 1995-spec RS125 was all-new from the ground up. Including the tyres – Michelin returned to the 125 class and comprehensively outperformed Dunlop in most respects.

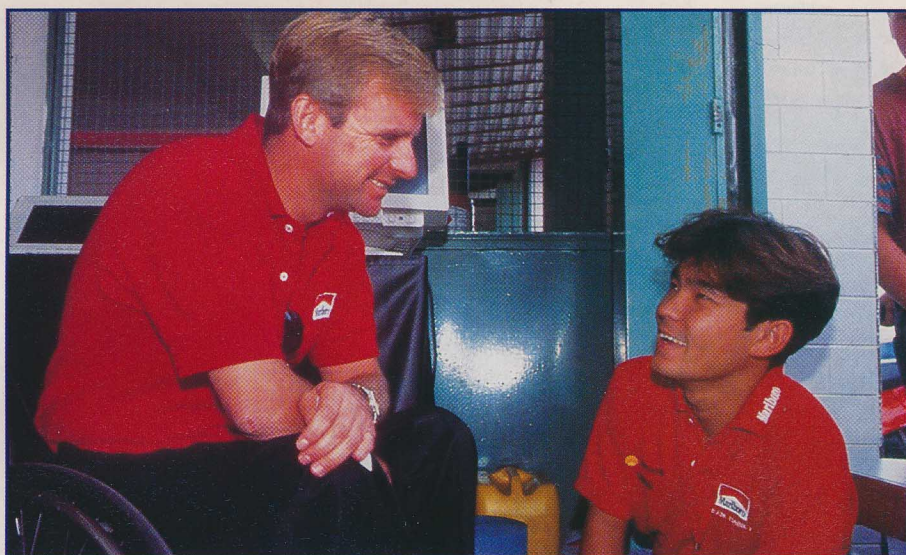
With five wins from the six races, nobody had any doubts that Aoki would easily win the championship but it was his manner of winning that surprised many. Simply, he appeared content to lurk with the front-running pack until



the very last lap, and then would leap-frog ahead to win by inches. Very impressive. Furthermore, the opposition couldn't really complain about Aoki's size and weight advantage (as they did over the diminutive Raudies and Sakata before) – he is probably the tallest and heaviest rider in the class and, in fact, towers over most 250 riders. And the lad is still only 19 ...

Aprilia eventually came up with some new cylinders and exhausts two-thirds the way through the season, enabling Sakata to regain some self-respect with wins at Donington and Brno, but by then it was too late. The title was sealed not long afterwards in South America, and Aoki's 224 points to Sakata's 140 succinctly sums up the latter's lacklustre season.

Other riders of note were Stefano Perugini, who made a habit of either finishing second or crashing out completely – 6th overall with 118 points; Emili Alzamora – 3rd with 129 and a win at Buenos Aires and runner-up at the season's final event at Catalunya; Dirk Raudies – 5th with 124 points, winner at Assen, runner-up at Le Mans;



Wayne Rainey (with Harada): boss of Marlboro Team Rainey

Akira Saito – 4th and 127 points, runner-up in Suzuka; Masaki Tokudome – 105 points, 7th overall, and a win in Brazil; Tomomi Manako – 8th with 102; then Hideyuki Nakajoh – 9th with 88. All in all, rather a lot of Japanese here, and this was just the top ten ...

Britain's Darren Barton will be amongst those doing their bit to safeguard European honour in '96. He had initially re-signed for the Scott-Attac team, but Barton and manager Rob McElnea took the opportunity to sign for

depleted affair with just seven rounds, and the same will apply this season too. Furthermore, for a variety of reasons the majority of the competing teams are either British or Swiss alone – arguably, this is not really a true world championship. Whatever, 1995 witnessed several important developments in the sidcar world.

Firstly, the ubiquitous LCR chassis were comprehensively overshadowed by British-built Windle outfits as used by Dixon and Steve Abbott (second in



Dirk Raudies: ran away with the 125s ... in 1993

Ditter Plastics, an altogether more professional outfit. Darren Barton only entered the GP scene at the tail-end of the '95 season and immediately displayed magnificent form. One can only hope that he continues in similar vein for '96.

British honour was more than upheld in the 1995 World Sidcar championships, with the title going to Darren Dixon and Andy Hetherington with 131 points. However, it must be said the championship is very much a

the championship until the final round when early engine failure forced him out, and down to fourth overall). Secondly, Rolf Biland's new BRM-Swissauto V-Four sidcar motor powered a significant proportion of the grid. It proved to be both fast and fragile; Biland himself broke down in the first three GPs and failed to score, but once the BRM's reliability was sorted Biland and Waltisperg convincingly won the remaining four to gain runner-up spot in the championship with 100 points. Unluckiest BRM users of the lot were

Kenny Roberts Junior



Paul and Charlie Guedel – they won in Italy but failed to finish the other six races of the series!

In contrast, Darren Dixon stayed with in-line ADM power to claim two wins and three second places, plus points scoring finishes in the remaining two rounds despite frequent off-track excursions. In 1994 his Padgett's-based outfit suffered no end of trivial breakdowns but last season Dixon branched out on his own, raised all the necessary sponsorship, and remained firmly in control. Net result – no breakdowns and the world title! Whether he'll be able to retain it in '96 is altogether a different matter, we suspect.

Rolf Biland has decided to give it one more year; those BRM motors surely won't suffer the same degree of unreliability as last season – or so the Guedels fervently hope and, furthermore, Steve Webster will be back (having proved he'd lost none of the old magic with a one-off ride on a borrowed outfit resulting in fifth place at Catalunya's final round). Then we have the veteran Steve Abbott who more than deserves his fair share of luck this year, as do both the Brindley brothers, Barry and Derek. All in all, 1996 promises to be a closely fought and nicely fraught affair in the sidecar world.

Interestingly, Serge Rossett intends entering three of his ROC machines powered by modified BRM engines this season. Designated Elf 500s, they will be ridden by Juan Borja, Adrien Bosshard, and one other. A great pity Neil Hodgson passed over the chance to ride one!

Such is the way of things, Part 1 of our review was already at the printers when news of the once-mighty Kenny Roberts and his Yamaha plans for '96 percolated through. He'll be fielding three riders: Norifumi Abe and his son Kenny Jnr in Marlboro colours, plus J-M Bayle on a Chesterfield-backed one. The tobacco conglomerate Philip Morris owns both brands, of course. One suspects neither Mick Doohan nor Daryl Beattie will be particularly worried about this motley crew.

As mentioned in an earlier issue, both Carl Fogarty and Neil Hodgson could have hoped to find themselves in the Roberts squad but Marlboro apparently said no. KR also wanted to run John Kocinski but, once again, the sponsors and perhaps Yamaha itself vetoed the former King. Kocinski will thus inevitably find himself in World Superbikes this year, either on a works Ducati or – ironically – a factory Yamaha. This is really quite ridiculous: the GP series is under growing threat from WSB yet the powers-that-be and/or its major sponsors stupidly let three of the potentially best Grand Prix riders in the shape of Fogarty, Kocinski, and Hodgson ride in World Superbikes simply because no place can be found for them in the GPs. Short-sighted commercial madness!

The conclusion of Kenny Roberts' negotiations at least paves the way for the rest of the established 500 GP grid. Loris Capirossi moved to the new Wayne Rainey Marlboro 500 team; his place in the Pileri squad will be taken by Alex Barros, and Luca Cadalora has dispensed with a multi-million dollar salary from Kenny Roberts to have a real stab at the championship on a Honda with Erv Kanemoto.

Finally, despite the hiccups mentioned in the last issue Alberto Puig is indeed well on the way to full recovery, as evidenced by superb lap times in tests at Jerez and Shah Alam in recent weeks. Like Mick Doohan, he has been forced to adopt a thumb-operated rear brake system, and the gear-shift has been swapped over to the other side as his left foot is still virtually inoperative. Welcome back, Alberto!

There are some other significant developments brewing up on the GP and WSB scenes but they will have to wait awhile; next month we'll be concentrating upon Russell Benney and the Phase One Endurance team in our traditional Burning up the Bol feature.

T.R.T.