

MOTORCYCLE SPORT

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The irresistible lure of the 500 cc class, that brings the big crowds to far-off meetings

THERE is something about the world moto-cross 500 cc title that gives it a little extra pulling power, over the smaller-capacity classes, when it comes to attracting spectators. We suppose it is simply that it sorts the men from the boys; this is the title every aspiring moto-crosser wants to win; the same goes for the 500 class in



road-racing. "Five hundred" denotes the blue riband. Whatever it is, the British round of the world 500 cc championship certainly drew the crowds to Farleigh Castle. There was the added spice of seeing our own Graham Noyce battling to win back the crown that he lost to team mate Andre Malherbe through injury last season. Malherbe has been the front runner this year, giving the impression that he would be retaining the title; indeed it was beginning to look something of a two-horse race, before battle started at Farleigh . . . but it is amazing the difference one meeting can make, with 15 points available in each of the two races that make up a championship meeting. If Farleigh proved anything to us, it was that the title is never lost until won, and the other lesson showed just how invaluable, from a spectator's point of view, is the system in which all points count to the title; here it ensured that Malherbe fought back hard in the second race after failing to score in the first.

It was a ride worthy of a champion. He fell early on, and from the back of the field fought up to seventh by the flag to gain four points that

WORLD 500 MOTO-CROSS



No luck for Noyce at Farleigh



Riding Number 1, Andre Malherbe of Belgium gave Honda and the crowd good value by storming through the field after failing, to take seventh place and score four points. Above: Jaak van Velthoven on his 495 KTM. Left: Graham Noyce took a second place and a third. Billy Aldridge (right) rode well, taking his Suzuki through to sixth in the second race of the day



could even decide the title at season's end.

The first race had seen the Swede Hakan Carlqvist (Yamaha) take an early lead and forge ahead for an unchallenged win, while behind him Noyce seemingly looked safe in second place. But then Frenchman Jean-Jacques Bruno (Suzuki) got the better of KTM-mounted Gerard Rond in a fight for third place and put pressure on Noyce. To the despair of the crowd, the Frenchman appeared rather too good for their hero who was relegated to third at the flag. For Carlqvist the second race was much the same as the first as he made it all look so easy in winning. The wins must have been more than welcome to the Yamaha camp who have been filming the championship series this year without a lot to angle it on, from a Yamaha point of view.

Noyce made no mistake in holding on to second place but Bruno stood no chance of repeating his first race performance and ended 10th. American Brad Lackey (Suzuki) pushed ahead of Rond, for third place. Of our other riders, Billy Aldridge (Suzuki) did best with sixth place in the second race, beating Dave Thorpe's eighth on his Kawasaki in the first race. But to Thorpe went the distinction of scoring in both races.

Farleigh always attracts the retired aces of moto-cross. The star visitor this year was Jeff Smith, the last man to win the title on a four-stroke in those good old days when BSA had a say in world moto-cross. How long ago was that? Well, Jeff took the title in 1964-5. Fifteen years ago riders often arrived with their bikes on a trailer and could be found working on them in the paddock. Nowadays they disappear behind closed van doors or hide in tents and caravans, to emerge just in time for practice and racing. The writer preferred old times when riders were more approachable and enjoyed a chat. Perhaps there is too much money at stake, and available, these days?

* * *

WE SOMETIMES wonder, while attending the various branches of the sport open to motorcycle enthusiasts, which would be the one we should most like to participate in as a top-flight competitor. Our Walter Mitty existence has seen us winning the Senior TT (when it was held on a Friday, of course), the Scottish Six Days, and a world moto-cross title round, among others. But then we got round to "negative" thinking; just what would we *not* entertain, at any cost? It was the world sidecar cross championship round at Beenham that brought all this to mind, because passengering in one of the

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SPORT COMMENTARY

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cross outfits is second only to ice speedway as an experience that we never want to have! Yes, we'll watch for hours, marvel at the expertise of the competitors, thrill to their skills — but it's all for the other fellow, as far as we are concerned. Thirty minutes plus two laps twice in an afternoon seems to us more than flesh and blood ought to be able to stand, but that is what these sidecar men do. It is a sport that has terrific action and yet it fails to attract spectators in the numbers one might expect. We doubt if the crowd at Beenham numbered 8,000 and yet Camel, who sponsor so much moto-cross, see fit to put money into it — so they must think there is a potential for them in it. Next year should see greater publicity beforehand in non-motorcycling areas such as local radio and the national press. If that happens then the facilities must be there to accommodate a larger crowd. If there is one sure way of making certain people do not come a second time, it is lousy loos. Fortunately, Beenham is one of the better organized in this respect.

The leader of the championship, Dutchman Ton van Heugten, was campaigning solo a decade ago but found more success in the sidecar class, winning the European championship, as it was then, in 1975. He must have been somewhat apprehensive of his chances of improving his points tally at Beenham; on his previous three visits there he has failed to score. In fact, before racing started he told us that he would be happy to take 10 points from the two races.

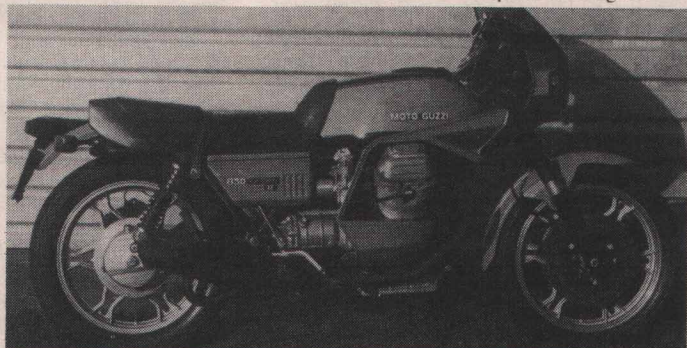
With that background, it must have been a very pleasant surprise to find himself in the lead at the end of the first lap. Using every bit of his vast experience, Heugten paced the race perfectly, never relinquishing the lead as his Yamaha powered him to victory over similarly mounted Reinhold Bohler, from West Germany, whose compatriot Josef Brockhausen, on yet another Yamaha, took third place. No longer is the big Norton twin a force to be reckoned with in world sidecar cross.

The second race was won by the swiss ace, Emil Bollhalder (Yamaha) who had been involved in a first-lap crash in the previous race, leaving him struggling just outside the points bracket in 11th place. Heugten was contesting the lead early in the second race when his passenger fell out and broke a collarbone, continuing his saga of problems racing in England. Brockhausen chased Bollhalder home with Dutchman Wil van der Laan (Weslake) third.

As a result of the Beenham meeting Heugten now leads the table with 119 points from Jan Bakens on 81, who only gleaned eight from a first-race fourth place. Brockhausen made up most ground with his score of 22 and third place, on 75 points. While the points differential seems considerable, the title is by no means settled; a lot will depend on the collarbone injury to passenger Frits Kiggen.

While the sidecars were busy at Beenham, Graham Noyce was away in Holland continuing his efforts to regain the 500 cc title from his Honda team mate, Andre Malherbe. Noyce had gone to Holland with a seven-point lead after Malherbe's poor showing at Farleigh Castle but any hopes he had of extending that lead sank in the Dutch sand during the second leg. Noyce had won the first from Malherbe, with Jean Jacques Bruno (Suzuki) third. But in the second race it was the Belgian, Andre Vromans (Yamaha), who won ahead of Malherbe with Noyce down in sixth place after a bad start. Hakan Carlqvist, who won so convincingly at Farleigh, had a fifth and third place to take his championship points to 130. That puts him third but out of touch with Malherbe, 164, and Noyce, 167, unless something disastrous happens to the Honda men in the last three rounds.

With three rounds to go, we have a sneaking feeling that the odds are slightly in Malherbe's favour, as the penultimate round is in Belgium on the infamous Citadel circuit at Namur, a cauldron of nationalism that seems to inspire Belgian riders to heights no other riders can reach. We think it will be the decisive round and hope that Graham Noyce will upset all the odds and end the season as world 500 cc moto-cross champion once again.



A Le Mans, as recently reported on in these pages. Compare it, a mark two model, with the latest version shown on page 472