

LESS than three years ago, Wayne Gardner, the rider dominating this year's British racing scene, was being advised to stay at home in Australia by one of Britain's leading sponsors.

He had ridden in a couple of races on Mal Carter's Yamahas at Donington Park in 1980 and big Mal, never one to mince his words, was unimpressed to say the least.

"It was a real case of 'Don't ring us we'll ring you,' but he never did," recalled 23-year-old Gardner relaxing in the Donington paddock after a rather more successful day than three years ago. "I remember him calling me a name which I couldn't repeat

here and reminding me that after a good start I'd gone backwards to finish 12th on his 250cc Yamaha.

"I'd only come over for six weeks holiday after getting laid off following my apprenticeship and I was hoping to find a sponsor for the next year. I'd been to watch the TT and met Mal.

"After his rider, Donnie Robinson, had fallen off at Knockhill the previous day, he offered me a ride at Donington. I'd had no practice and went straight into the heats where I think I finished 12th in the 250 and eighth in the 350 and I thought that was the end of my career in Europe."

A rather disillusioned Gardner returned to

Woolongong near Sydney, in New South Wales, when another gentleman, not known for mincing his words, offered a rather different view about the young Australian's talent.

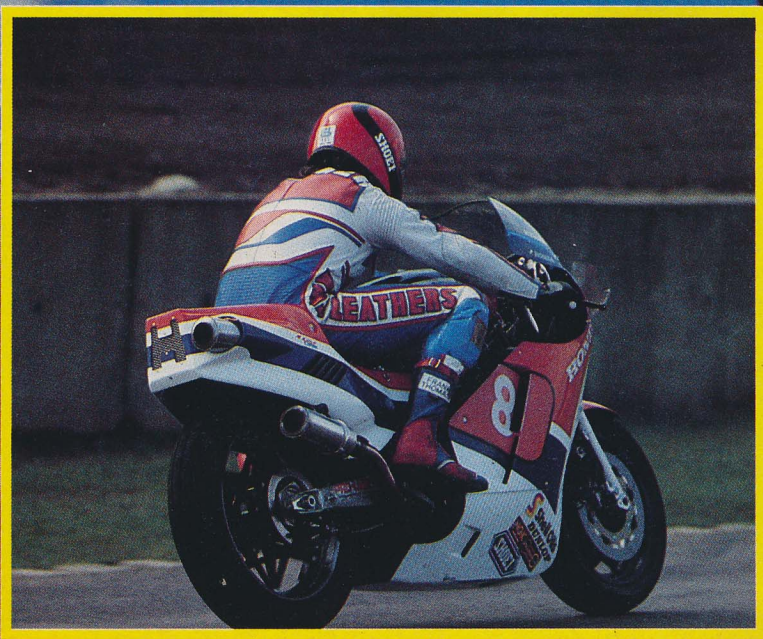
"Graeme Crosby, who'd just returned from his second season in Europe, saw me riding in the Swann Series and set me up a deal to ride the Moriwaki Kawasaki he'd ridden the previous year in Europe.

"The trouble was I'd also been offered a very good deal to stay at home and I didn't sleep for three weeks worrying what to do. Everybody told me to go back and so I took the plunge."

He teamed up with Lincolnshire's own Roger

Wayne Gardner—the ambitious Aussie waiting on the GP sidelines. Nick Harris reports

Marshall in the Moriwaki team and although the season went a little sour at the finish because of lack of machinery and spares, they formed a firm friendship and became teammates once again at the beginning of this season when Marshall joined Honda.



Wayne Gardner, once turned down by sponsor Mal Carter, turns on the style in these pictures on his RS500 Honda. After this season's impressive start, he's banking on a works Honda for next year.

They are really good mates. Gardner now lives in the Lincolnshire village of Wragby near Marshall with his pretty Australian girlfriend Donna, and obviously the bracing air from the North Sea is doing him a power of good.

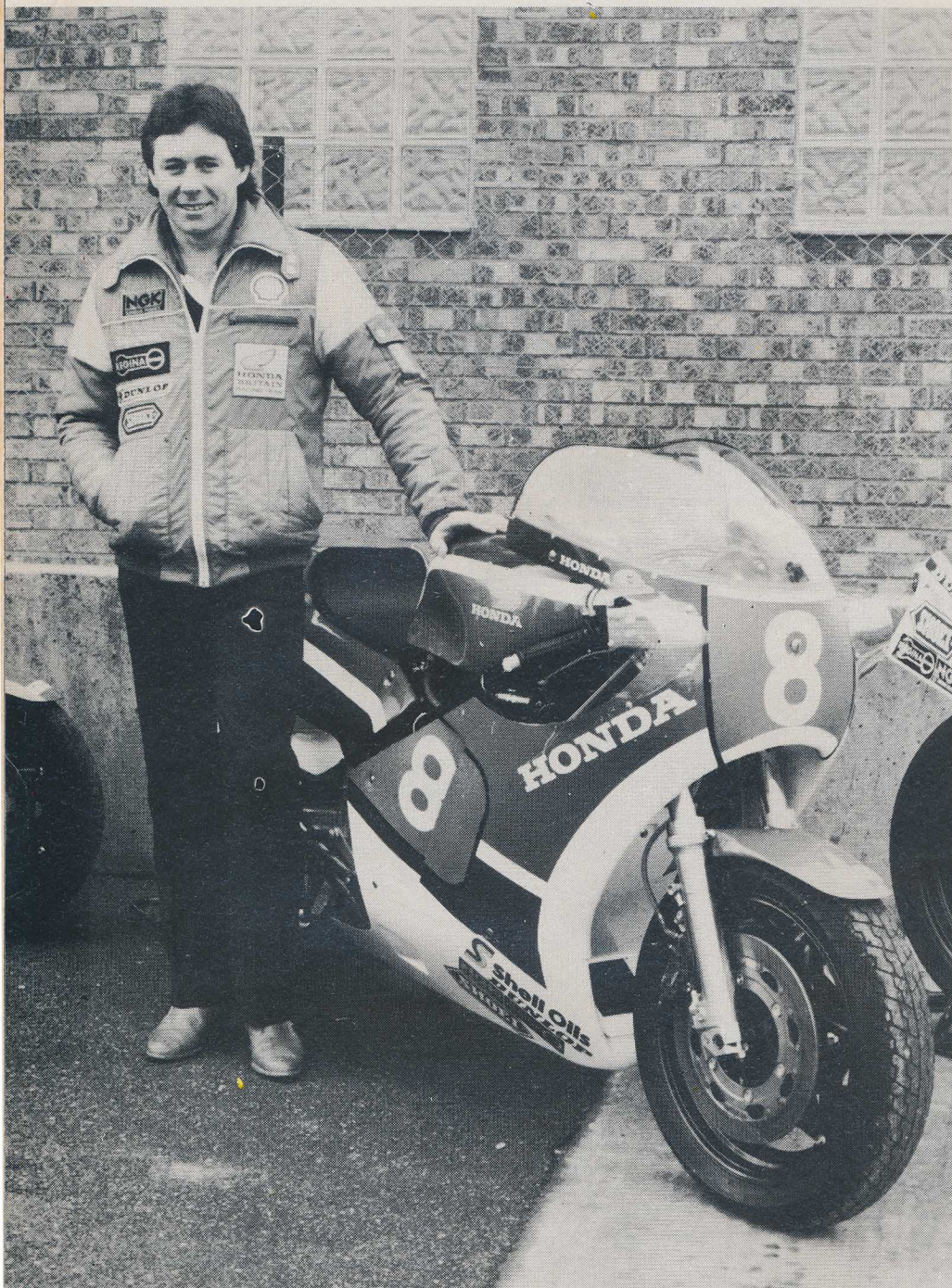
"The Moriwaki deal all ended a bit sadly but it got me a factory ride and I met Roger," explained Gardner, who's also been a big hit with the female spectators with his bronzed looks and cheeky grin.

"The season though started well enough with a win at Cadwell beating Croz, the man responsible for getting me the bike, and at the end of the year I was lucky to get a factory contract with Honda."

He was hot property at the time and was already being called the second Crosby. He'd turned down an offer from Suzuki and has never regretted that decision.

... AND THEY SAID HE WOULDN'T MAKE THE GRADE





"I thought at the time I might have made the wrong decision but I know now it was definitely the right one," he confided. "I just want to go grand prix racing and I must do well in Britain to show Honda I'm next in the queue for GP rides."

"Ron Haslam's performances in the grands prix have really encouraged me because last year I was dicing with him and now he's second in the world championship."

In typical Aussie fashion, Gardner certainly is not short of a bit of the old confidence when it comes to discussing his chances in grand prix racing.

"If there is a place in the grand prix team next season I guess I must be on that list. They will make their decision after this year's results."

"It must be every road racer's ultimate dream to go grand prix racing and I'm not just joining the queue. I have to do it because I just know I could be in the first five with the right chance, the right bike and a little bit of luck."

"I've really enjoyed riding the RS500 Honda. It's a fantastic bike although at first I was trying to ride it like a four-stroke, but each time I ride it I feel more at home."

A fact borne out by his performance in the recent Donington International Gold Cup meeting which he was leading until the last lap when the RS500 seized. He has a real chance to show his mettle to the assembled Honda hierarchy when he rides the bike in the British and Dutch Grands Prix but he knows he must be patient.

"I would love to do more, but I know I've got to be patient and win as many races as I can in Britain. Racing in the UK, especially against the likes of Marshall, is very hard. I don't think Grant and Rob McElnea on the works Suzukis are that great a threat, although by mid-season McElnea could be a bigger threat when he gains some more experience."

Obviously rivalry is high between the two Honda team-mates, as clearly illustrated by the Mamola/Crosby affair in the Suzuki team. This can cause real problems.

"With Roger and myself—who are such great friends—both riding for Honda, there could be problems, but everything is working out fine."

"Both of us want to win races and the only team orders we have at the moment is One place Gardner will not be riding the works Honda is at the TT

in June but it's a decision entirely of his own choice.

"Honda don't want me to go and ride because they think I'll try too hard, but one day I'd like very much to go there to race," he confided.

"Obviously with my grand prix intentions it's very important that I win as many 500 races as possible, but I'd also love to win the Formula One championship. It's the one Honda want to win so much and I'd love to do it just for them."

"We are having a few problems with the 850cc V-four Formula One bike at the moment, but Honda won't stop until they have got it right. It handles and stops well but lacks a little jump coming out of the corners. It's going to make me feel so good when I do win on the 850 against the 1000s."

Obviously Mal Carter, who's probably got his mind on other things, like a certain son called Alan, realises that he was wrong three years ago, while Graeme Crosby, sitting at home in New Zealand, realises his judgement was spot on. Certainly Gardner wants to show Croz he was right and just go one better.

"Croz is a great guy and I really respect him. I want to do what he did in grands prix but just go one step better than him and win the 500cc world championship."

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