

# Kawasaki Tracking

Formula one is something else as staff riders, Bob Goddard and Neil Millen discover at Snetterton . . .

"It's going great, and the tyres are warmed up well. Don't let them cool down or they'll lose their grip," so said Les Borgan, Oxford Fairings team rider, as he handed over his potent 1000cc Peckett & McNab Kawasaki Formula One racer and pushed me away up the Snetterton pit lane.

This was it then . . . check there was nothing coming up the straight, open the taps and aim under the Dunlop bridge for the first bend, Riches.

The Oxford Fairings race team had offered us this rare chance to try out a pukka F1 machine to let us see just what this stock-based racer formula was all about. Not being ones to look a gift bike in the bellmouth, Neil Millen and myself had thrashed up to Norfolk for the ride and at this very moment, Neil was on his third lap on the team's number two bike.

Our photographer had vanished in the direction of the esses, with instructions to film the two bikes together and with rain threatening and another magazine journalist waiting for a ride, there was no time to waste in catching Neil up.

## Slick handling

Opening the throttle brought an immediate response. From only 3000rpm the short 4-into-1 exhaust gave a hearty growl and I was pressed back into the ample seat pan. Delivering over 100bhp at its slick back tyre, the P & M Kawasaki was very quick, but progressive. Power came in smooth and fast as the tacho needle raced towards 8500rpm, the front wheel became light and I jabbed the reversed gear lever down for second and almost immediately third.

The bend appeared, surely I wasn't going that fast, squeezing the brakes and heading into the two-part right hander. The bike felt firm and stable as it leant over, Girling Gas Shocks coping with Riches' ripples and slick rear and treaded front tyres glued to the track. Must remember to take that bend faster next lap. Accelerating hard now, drifting out to the outside edge of the tarmac and hitting fourth before the right-angle Sear corner which leads on to the back straight. Slam the brakes on, down two gears and throw the bike into the tight right-hander.

Starting to feed the power on gently, then I remembered what Les said . . . keep the tyres hot. Right, wind the throttle open and the bike leaps forward, still cranked over but no hint of slipping from the rear tyre. Upright now, third gear, fourth . . . 8000rpm . . . into top and the 300-yard board races at me from nowhere and the brakes are on with the bike cranking ever

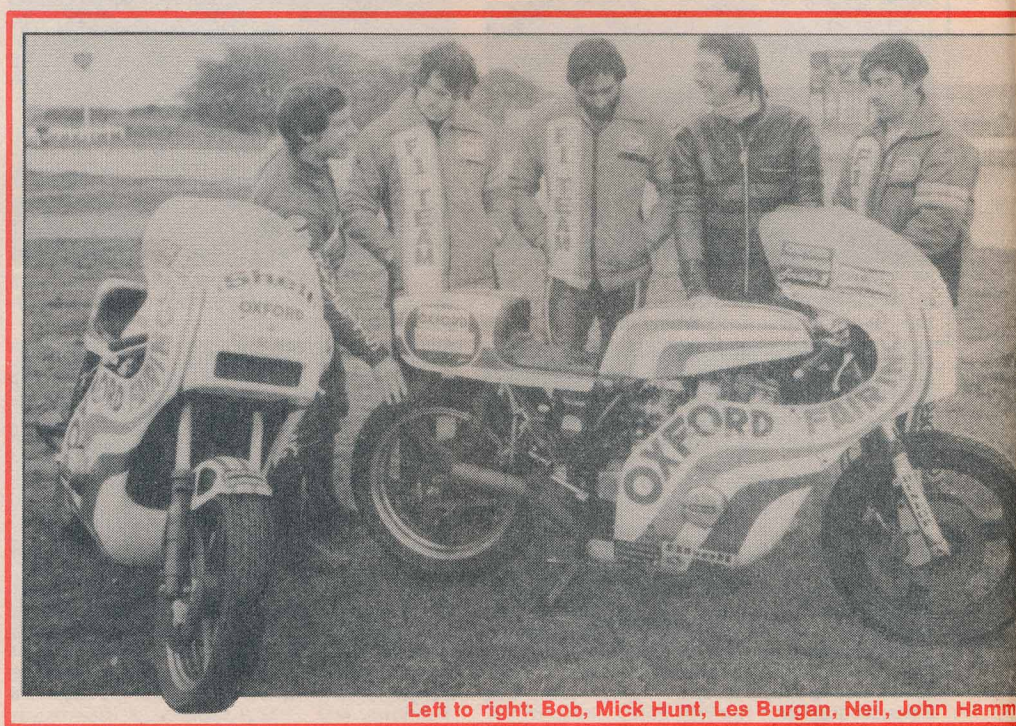
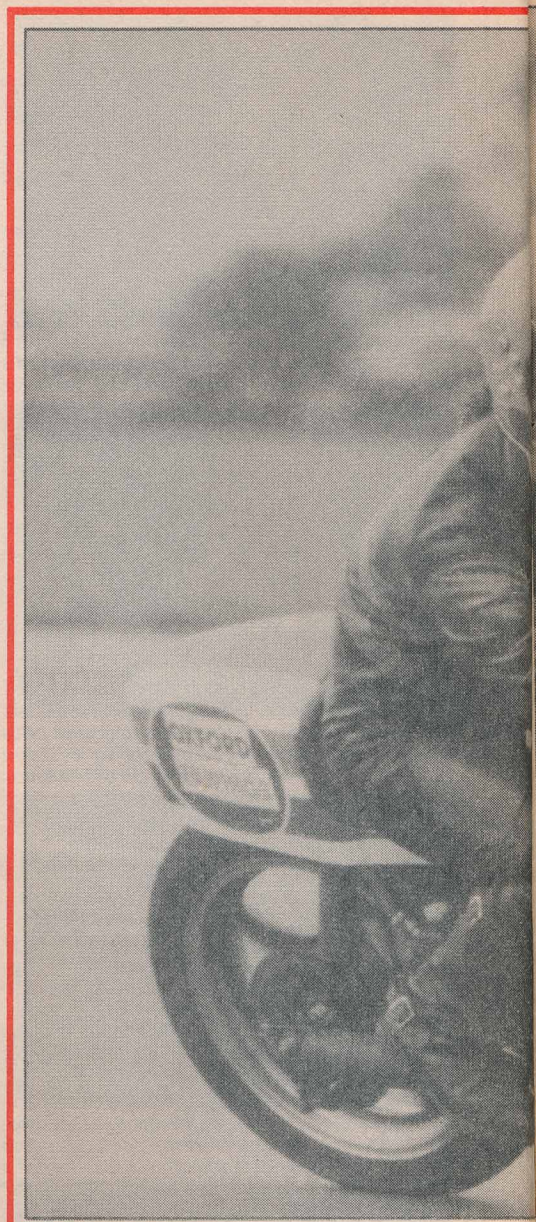
harder into the tightening left-hander of the esses.

Down to fourth, third, second and finally, first as the bike is thrown from left to right for the slow turn under the bridge. Up into second and just into third before chucking the bike into dipping Grandstand right-hander. Throttle against the stop, clipping the grass on the exit, fourth gear, then rolling it off and pulling the bike across the track to get the inside line round Coram curve. Bump on the way in, feeding the power on, knee skimming the kerbstones on the inside, this bend goes on forever. Ah, there's Russells, the chicane before the start/finish straight.

## Overcooking performance

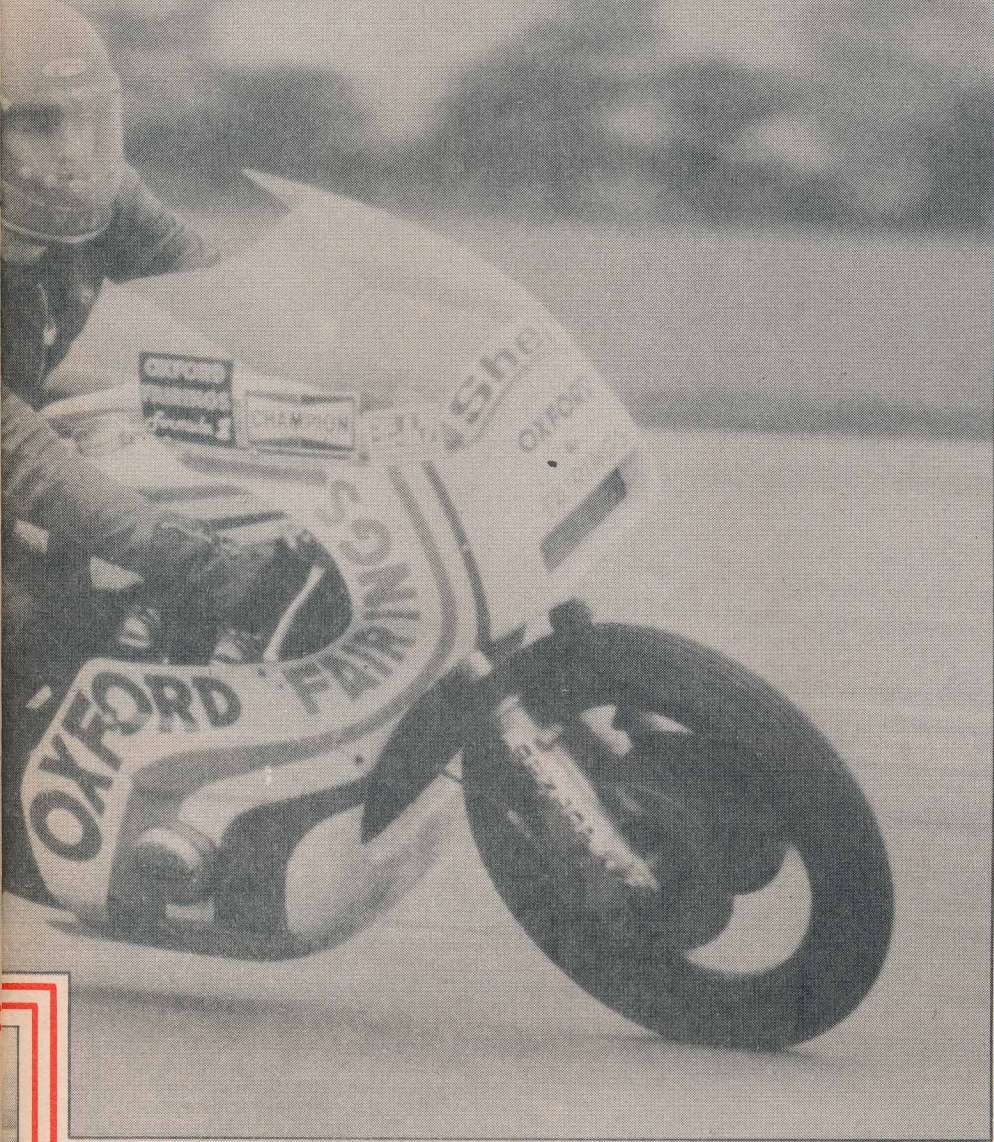
Throttle against the stop, no time for top, just a dab of front brake and cranked hard left. The overlapped kerbs of the left and right kinks come apart, aim through the gap leaning hard right now and full power on again.

Past the pits and a jumble of bright blue anoraks — the Oxford Fairings' team. Chin on the tank, top gear, under the bridge and there's Riches. Christ . . . going too fast, panic



Left to right: Bob, Mick Hunt, Les Borgan, Neil, John Hamm

Neil discovers that being an F1 racer isn't easy — even with a tractable motor



brake . . . too late . . . gottaleanitover. Sheesh, we're gonna make it after all. Felt like my right elbow nearly touched the deck that time. But I was the only one worried, this machine must consider it child's play after dicing with the Hondas of Grant and Haslam.

So, thinks I'm playing does it? Crack the throttle open, snatch another gear. Sears coming up . . . keep it open . . . NOW bang the anchors on, down through the box, back wheel hopping madly, ease the back brake to get it under control again. Stuff it into the bend, whack open the throttle. Got a twitch that time but it felt safe enough. Into third, upright and flat on the tank, fourth, aiming for the right-hand edge of the track somewhere over the horizon, fifth . . . wow — now we're flying! Three-hundred yard marker flashes past, sit up, brake, heel left, down again to fourth, third, second, flick right in first gear, feeding the power on and we leap under the bridge hard into the righthander, third and fourth up to Coram keeping the power coming all the way round. Bike drifting out as the track straightens and dives for Russell, left, right and back on the tank for the straight.

Where's Neil then? Still no sign. Gotta catch him for these photographs.

Into Riches, bit more controlled this time but just as fast, power on sooner, just about ran off the track on the exit.

Back wheel hopping again into Sears, I must be changing down too soon. On to the back straight. There he is . . . blue helmet disappearing into the esses.

### Barry who? . . .

Really screwing down the straight this time. 8500 in each gear, holding on in top 'till the last moment, about 140mph here. Left, braking all the way, changing down, flick right, open it up. There he is again, nearer now, hurl it into the right-hander. The Peckett and McNab Kwacker doesn't even bat an eyelid and it's full bore again as Neil disappears into Coram, 40 yards ahead. Hard into the curve feeding the power on, a quick glance and he's 30 yards away now.

As the track straightens he's only 20 yards away and I'm closing fast, very fast . . . Neil's

braking for the pit road entrance before Russells! I'm going too fast to follow without ramming him. Gotta take Russells instead. Oh well, I'll pull in next lap and find out what's up. Besides, this is such good fun I don't want to stop.

After another rapid trip around the circuit, the bike and I are getting to know each other and the bends are falling into a rhythm. The bike is big, yet it fits like a well-worn glove. Steering is amazingly light and precise, handling taut and firm. The machine cranks easily and feels totally safe.

The power is terrific. I can't imagine needing any more, but it's very progressive and predictable. The brakes are powerful with bags of feel, well able to cope with the performance of the Kawasaki and the rigours of racing.

It is impossible to criticise a bike like this as it is so much better than me in every respect. Its sole function is to circulate a race track as quickly and as safely as possible.

It forgave my ham-fisted mistakes and let me indulge my racer fantasies without tossing me on my ear, or even putting the wind up me. On the short Snetterton circuit top speed was about 140mph, but the bike will top 160mph on a faster track.

The bike's results speak for themselves . . . Les won all five rounds of Oxford Fairings' own Formula 1 championship last year despite some stiff opposition. He also came fifth in the F1 race at Donnington's international meeting early in the year — the race was won by Ron Haslam, with Graeme Crosby second. Add a 110.41mph lap by Mick Hunt on the No.2 bike in the IOM Classic, and you can see that these bikes are serious contenders in the F1 class.

### Rain stopped play

I pulled into the pit lane, but there was no sign of Neil. He'd set off after me. By the time Les had explained, Neil appeared at Russells and I joined him on the track for our photographs. Within a couple more laps the threatened rain became a wet reality. It's easy to overlook rain when you're tearing round a race track. The fairings kept us dry and it wasn't until I saw Neil's slick rear tyre glistening wet that I realised just how slippery the track was getting.

How to warn Neil of the danger though? If I try to pass him to make some kind of sign he may think I'm racing and stuff it hard into the next bend, taking me up the road with him.

Neil got all the warning he needed when we rounded the esses to find a Yamaha TZ rider picking himself up. After checking that he was okay, we gingerly returned to the paddock. Here we found the other Oxford Fairings' sponsored rider, John Hammond, who had slid off his immaculate 350 Aermacchi in the downpour.

With the rain settling in for the rest of the day, there was every excuse to retire to the Snetterton bar for beer, sandwiches and a natter.

Les gave us the low-down on the F1 bikes. Both are basically Peckett and McNab racing chassis housing Kawasaki Z900 motors, but the number two machine had suffered an engine mishap a week before our test session and had been hurriedly rebuilt with standard barrels and pistons to provide a second bike. It was considerably quicker than a stock Z900 motor, having gas-flowed head, hot cams, etc, but lacked the flexibility and outright power of the number one bike's 998cc engine.

In this, the standard four-cylinder block has been overbored to take Yoshimura slipper pistons, which feature a three-piece oil ring and single, chromed, compression ring.

Compression ratio is a heady 11:1 and the cylinder head has two-stage gas flowing. First Peckett and McNab carved a goodly quantity of metal out of the ports, then Les got to work himself — it took a full week of days and nights to grind, blend, hone and polish the ports, valve guides and valve seats to the Nth degree.

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There's nothing wrong with P and M's gas-flow job you understand, it's just that Les wanted more power than the rest of the field and it's that sort of greed that wins races.

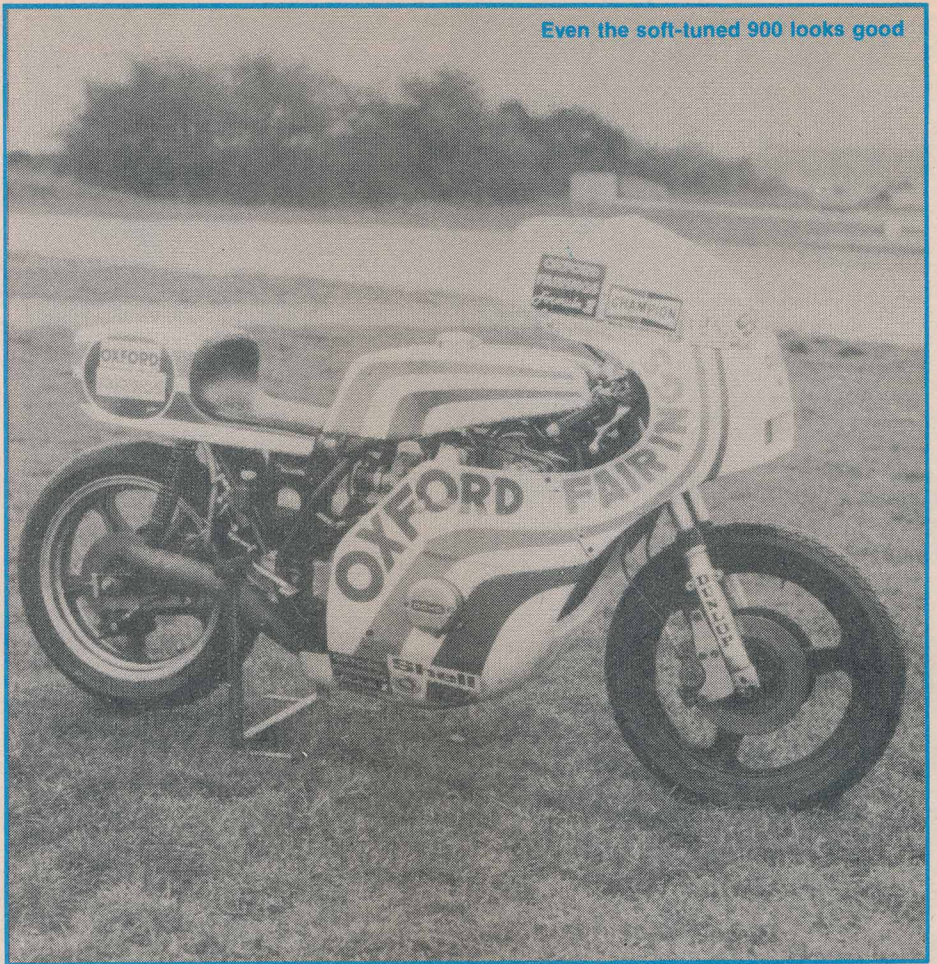
## Race mods

The combustion chambers are volume-balanced (a lengthy job involving burette, grinding wheel and oodles of patience). Breathing is restricted to some extent by the Formula's standard carburetors ruling, but the 28mm Mikuni's are encouraged to pass more mixture through 2mm overstock inlet valves and 1mm oversize exhaust valves courtesy of P and M, all operated by Yoshimura Bonneville Cams. (Nothing to do with Triumphs!) Standard valve springs are retained as the tune-up job actually lowers the power peak to 8500rpm. Maximum valve momentum is subsequently reduced, so stronger springs would only rob power and overload the valve train.

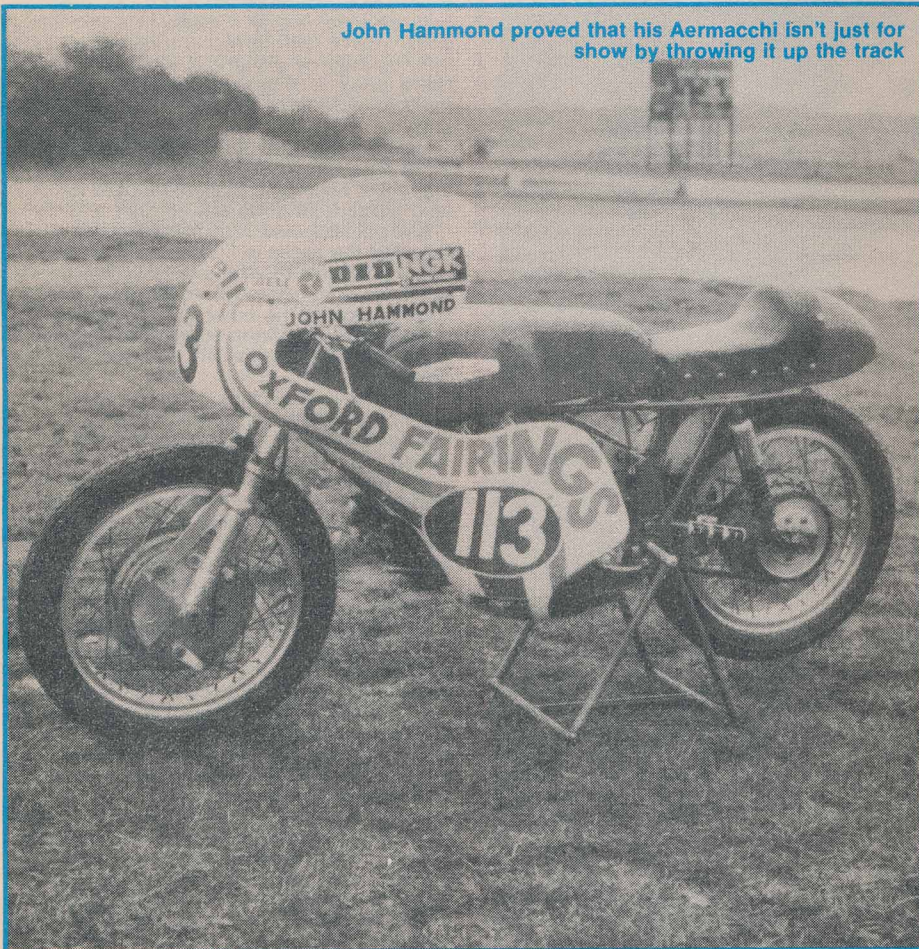
The standard Kawasaki bottom end is strong enough for the job, but Les has welded the crankpins into the flywheels to avert disaster should one work loose under the extra loading.

One essential mod, carried out by P and M, is to re-route the oil pump pick-up pipe to the back of the crankcase. Under the acceleration

Even the soft-tuned 900 looks good



John Hammond proved that his Aermacchi isn't just for show by throwing it up the track



the tuned bike is capable of, the motor's lube can be thrown away from the standard forward-positioned pick-up point, starving the bearings of oil. Shell SR mineral racing oil is used to keep it all turning smoothly.

The only other engine mod is to shorten the alternator shaft, the generator being removed, to aid ground clearance. Despite a raised engine position, the bike's crankcases limit the angle of lean and have been shortened and chamfered — both in the workshop and on the track.

## Standard parts

Gearbox is a Kawasaki close-ratio unit which features a tall first gear and narrows the gaps between the rest. Clutch is standard and 'beautiful' says Les. D-I-D supply chains for the cam and rear wheel drives and the Oxford team swear by them. The cam chain is renewed every 1000 racing miles as a business-like precaution, but the bike goes a full season on one rear drive chain.

The chassis is a standard Peckett and McNab unit with the only mod being inverted footrest hangers to keep the rider's feet off the tarmac. Girling gas shocks suspend the rear wheel, and 38mm Spondon forks the front. Wheels are currently CMA units, but are being replaced with Dymag wheels for the 1980 season.

The standard Kawasaki rear disc brake is retained but the front stopper is a powerful combination of TZ750 Yamaha cast iron discs with Lockheed racing calipers.

Les and team manager Alec Hammond are satisfied with the machine's power output and are now putting the bike on a diet. They hope it will have lost a lot of weight by the time it sees its first starter's flag of 1980. When it does, the blue and white Oxford Fairings P and M Kwacker should have its stablemate alongside on the grid — being ridden by new teamster Mick Hunt. Wish it was me.

Bob Goddard