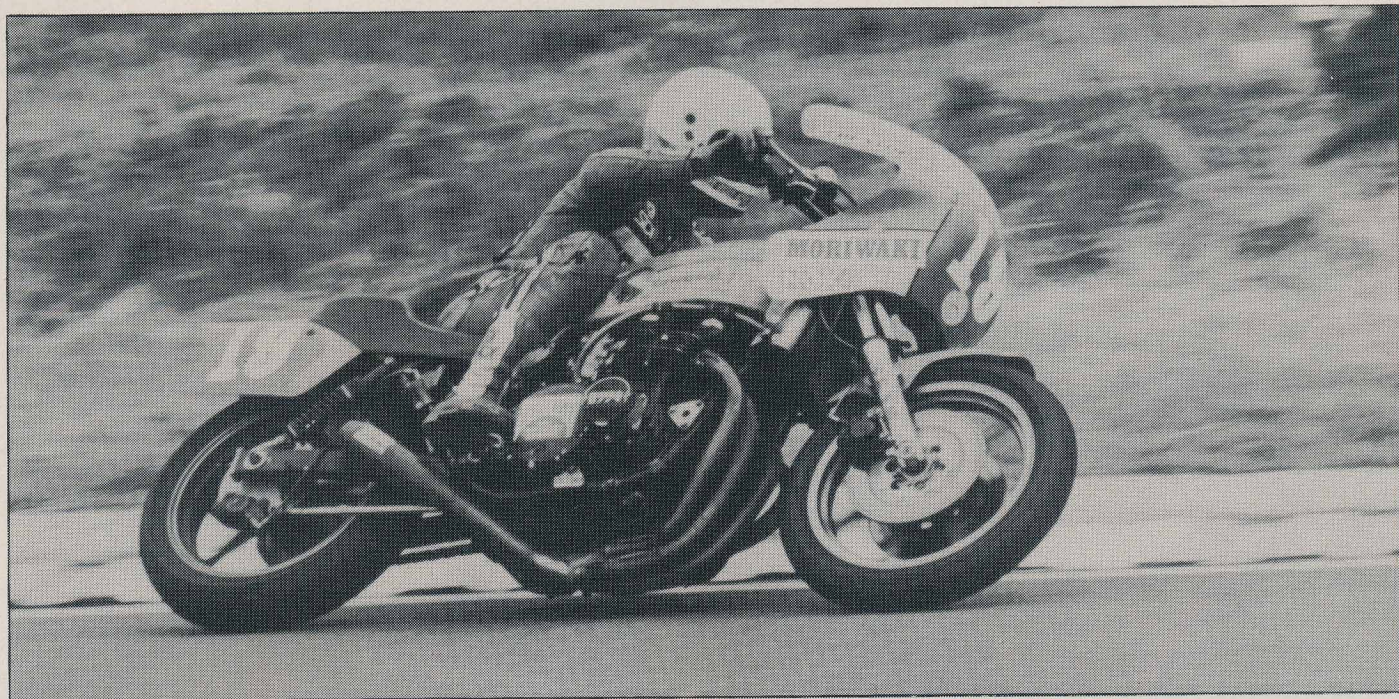


Graeme Crosby

The Wizard from Oz...



GRAEME CROSBY TOOK THE BRITISH FORMULA ONE BIKE SCENE BY STORM ON HIS MORIWAKI KAWASAKI . . . WILL THIS FLYING KIWI CHALLENGE FOR GRAND PRIX HONOURS IN 1980? A SUZUKI RG500 COULD DO IT . . .

ON the circuits he's a tiger from 'down under'. Away from the tracks, he will readily confess to a marked inclination for visiting English public houses.

Sceptics believing that real road racing characters disappeared with the arrival of heavy professionalism have obviously missed being introduced to the delights of Mr. Graeme Crosby. With his distinctive elbows-out, toes-down style on the Formula One Moriwaki Kawasaki, the 23-year-old, globe trotting New Zealander provided new dimensions of entertainment for British spectators throughout the 1979 season. In the process, he did more than any rider to prevent the Forward Trust-Motor Cycle Weekly F1 Championship from degenerating into a processional display by Honda and Ron Haslam.

Crosby may fairly merit the description of archetype Australasian racer, exuding an aura of sheer enjoyment when engaged in the fiercest of battles. It would, however, be absolutely wrong to categorise Graeme as a fun-rider-cum-desperado simply because he refuses to abandon his easy-going attitude for the dubious privilege of joining those who insist that racing is a serious business and nothing else.

Croz, as he is known to the paddock fraternity, is in fact a genuine competitor with a winning urge second to none. Of course,

appearances can be deceptive and a few local observers managed to read 'desperation' into Crosby's F1 exploits on the strength of the Kawasaki looking unlike the usual run of British Formula-TT machines.

Boasting straight handlebars, abbreviated nose fairing and totally exposed engine, the Big Beast is clearly different from the clip-on equipped streamliners favoured by the opposition. Few concessions are made to what many people believe comprises a 'real racing chassis', that's to say a complete special.

Basically a road going Z900, with additional welding in strategic areas, the frame is race-tweaked to give an increased head angle. In the suspension departments, Kayaba equipment is employed fore and aft; air-charged forks at the front and adjustable units in fairly pronounced laydown position behind.

Since the sit-up configuration, good for product identification, is the norm down under, Crosby saw no reason to modify the layout for British circuits. Certainly, the second places gained at Brands Hatch, Donington Park and Snetterton suggested no particular disadvantage when it came to short-circuit scratching.

"After Brands, we reckoned the Kawasaki would be fully competitive," Crosby remembers, "But the Hondas started going better and faster."

"Maybe, without a doubt really, we could have discovered a little more performance by

using a bigger fairing and clip-ons, but our main drawback is undersize carburettors." A new full-fairing Kawasaki was built in time for the last Brands meeting in October.

Unfortunately, for the Moriwaki crew, the rules mean sticking to 28mm-choke instruments as specified by the manufacturer for road machines. Although some optimistic estimates put the Big Beast in the 125bhp class, a 118bhp rating is probably nearer the mark. And, considering the obvious carburettor restriction, tuner Manoru Moriwaki may have exhausted the benefits accumulated from magic valve timing and other internal modifications. On the other hand, he has produced an engine very strong on flexibility, an attribute Crosby makes good use of when cornering.

But the advantages gained from fitting 31mm carburettors were immediately apparent in the Suzuka 8-Hour Moriwaki Kawasaki, derived from Crosby's I.O.M. TT Formula One mount with legal 28mm carbs. Following the island thrash, the bike was despatched to Japan and literally cut up to evaluate the effectiveness and quality of the special parts. The outcome was an 8-hour machine which, to quote Crosby: "Flew to within 0.4 secs. of the outright Suzuka lap record in practice and got us all steamed up for a high placing. But my riding partner decided to stuff the thing into a barrier and make it the shortest racing Kawasaki of all time."

Back in May '79, Crosby's assault on Britain's Formula One series was insecurely based on an undisclosed sum of MCD start money and 300 Australian dollars stuffed in his wallet. Initially he intended to clear off home after competing in the Brands, I.O.M. and Mallory F1 events, but decided to extend his stay after making the splendid discovery that financial survival didn't promise the horrors he imagined. Then he and jovial sponsor Ross Hannan, International Sales Director of Moriwaki Engineering, went for a

(Continued on page 34)



Graeme Crosby

CHALLENGER FOR FORMULA ONE HONOURS



**MOTOR
CYCLING**

The Wizard from Oz...

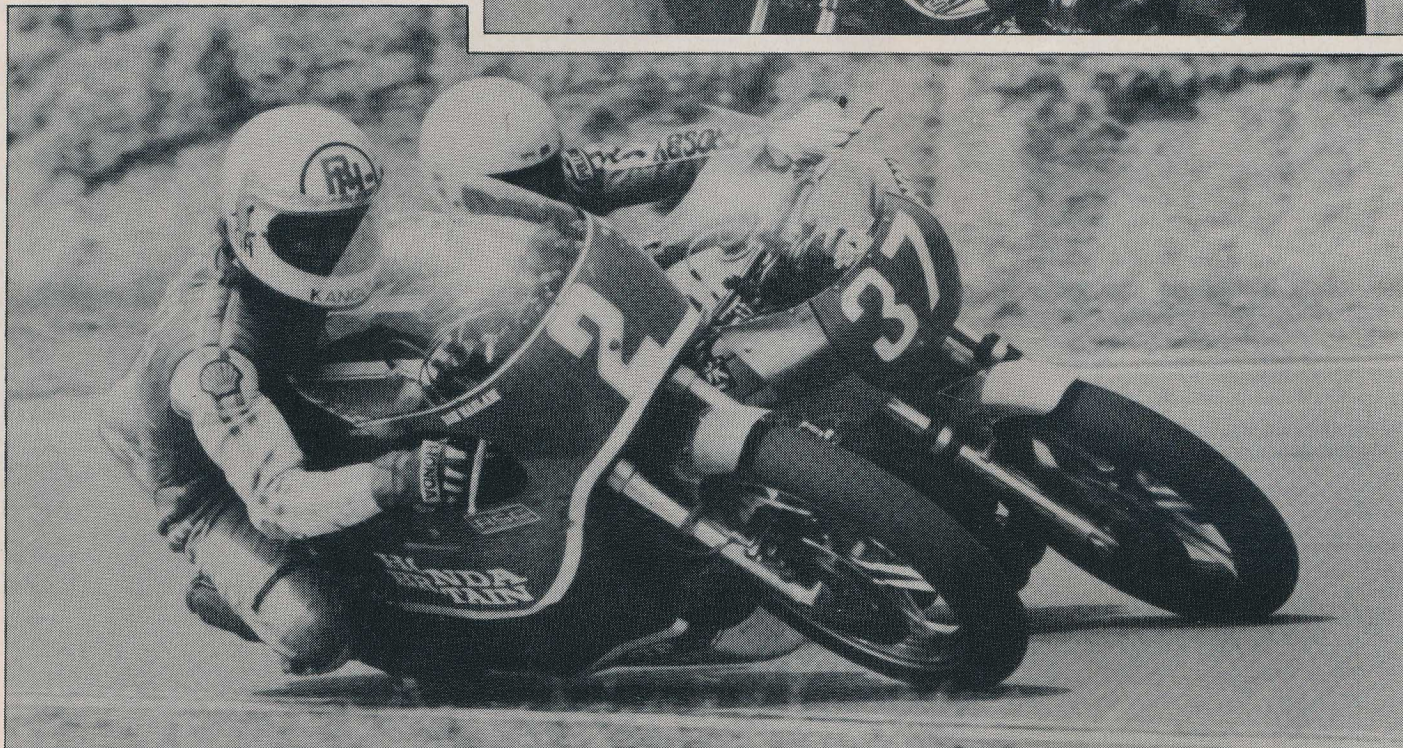
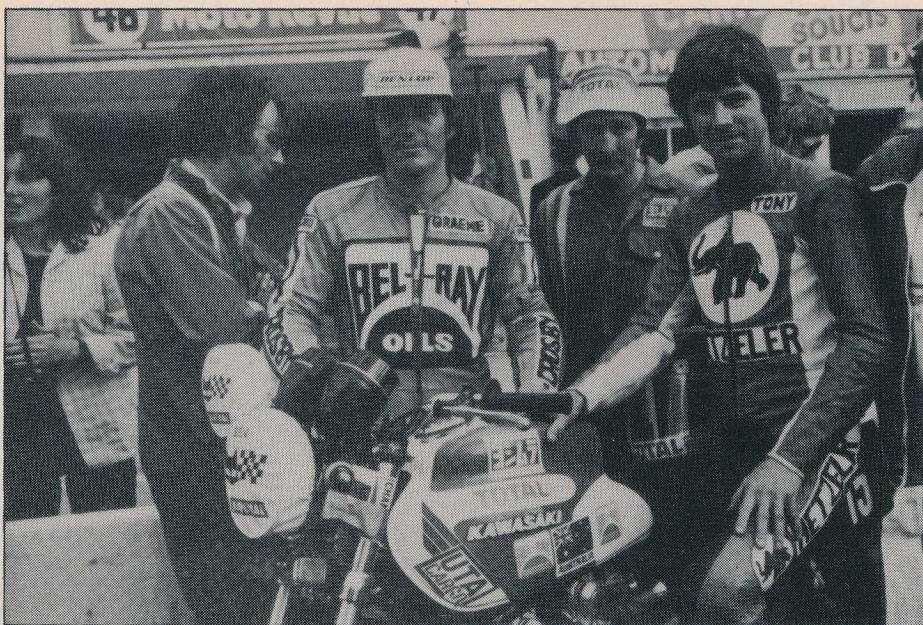
full UK season as a market research exercise for Moriwaki wares.

Not surprisingly, riders and tuners have been keen to discover more about the bolt-in goodies capable of propelling a Kawasaki among the works' Hondas.

Crosby's first experience of European competition came in the 1977 Bol d'Or at Le Mans, where he shared a Yoshimura Kawasaki with Australian Tony Hatton. The bike was late in transit, leaving the team with a problem of transporting it from Paris to Le Mans. So, as the most natural thing in the world, they rode to the circuit after ordering the local filling station attendant to, "Fill 'er up, mate." He did — with two-star petrol.

Graeme Crosby's first excursion into European endurance racing with co-rider Tony Hatton at the 1977 Le Mans Bol d'or 24-hour race

'Sit up and beg' Crosby scratches alongside Ron Haslam at the Mallory Park Post-TT meeting



Despite the inevitable bout of seizures and a late discovery of the reason, they qualified in 14th fastest spot on the naked Kawasaki. More impressive still, the down-under pairing held seventh place in the race after four hours. But the heroics were of no avail, because the jumbo battery pack crammed beneath the seat started to break up and nearly vibrated the whole endurance contraption to bits.

In England, Crosby adapted to the peculiarities of the circuits with the same *sang-froid* as he undertook the Paris-Le Mans adventure. As a newcomer, his first sight of a particular circuit could be on race day, leaving him little enough time for the essentials like arranging the correct gearing and tyre combinations and discovering the fast route. For instance, his introductory tour of Oulton Park, in a van, was unceremoniously halted by the Esso Bend roadworks. Later, during race-day practice, he legged himself off when hitting the alleged repairs. "Hey, want a good quote?", demanded the unabashed Croz. "Tell them I was riding the hairpin rubble like a roller-skater in a gravel pit."

On one occasion the renowned Crosby humour did become somewhat strained. It happened at Snetterton, following some

highly entertaining antics on Russell Bend, the chicane just before the finishing straight. For four or five laps, Croz cheekily bounced across the rough concrete boundary on the exit. As a result, he was arraigned before an official inquisition to explain his 'crime'.

Feeling rather disgusted over the whole affair, not to mention the subsequent lecture about 'regaining the circuit at the point you left it,' Crosby was all prepared to pack his gear and head rapidly for the Southern Hemisphere. But as it turned out, the good Snetterton folk retained their sense of proportion and stopped short of making the issue a great test of principle. After all, they were dealing with a foreigner!

Crosby becomes extremely non-committal when asked how the British riders compare with those back home. He'll promptly sidetrack the question with: "Don't know if the overall standard is any higher. Can't tell, because the numbers are incomparable. There are many more Poms riding in lots more races over here, so trying to make a percentage comparison would get you nowhere. In Aussie and New Zealand I managed to get through 24 races in the 1978 season which lasted eleven months, and somehow lacked balance and variety at the

same time. Now and again the size of the grids seemed pathetic."

It can safely be stated that Crosby is unlikely to feel terribly overawed wherever he races. His racing philosophy is clearly to make every effort to beat whoever he runs across at the tracks. And he made the point by conquering most of the Formula One riders during the 1979 season, leaving the impression that he is capable of climbing high among racing's elite.

In the main, the Crosby effect on Britain has been two-fold. First, it encouraged everybody who loves a showman who's a highly skilled practitioner of the racing arts. Secondly, it's silenced any pompous Pom foolish enough to be complacent over this country's supposed Formula One superiority.

In 1980, it could be the European mainland's turn to sample the Crosby experience. For Croz, not unnaturally, sees his logical progression taking him into the World Championship arena, probably on a 500cc factory Suzuki. Anyone harbouring a suspicion that Graeme Crosby is no more than just a very good rider of the Big Beast, may be in for a very nasty surprise.

JON CHARLES