

Potter's Wheels

A decade of determined concentration on British short circuits has put Potter on top of the pile.

INTENT on beating the immediate production-race opposition, the young Yorkshireman accelerated his Norton hard towards a Lydden Hill left-hander. His line was wide, and corrective heavy braking failed to save the day. Norton and rider subsided gracefully into the lush Kentish greenery.

On the last lap of the final 1979 Duckhams Superbike championship race at Brands Hatch, the same Dave Potter spotted five feet of space between the inside of Clearways and front-running Ron Haslam. With controlled aggression and perfect timing, he squirted the Ted Broad TZ750 Yamaha through the ever decreasing gap. The last-gasp thrust won the race by inches and landed the prestigious Superbike title in Potter's safe keeping.

The Lydden and Brands adventures were separated by almost ten years, during which time Potter emerged from the crowded novice ranks to a hard-earned place among the short-circuit elite. Then going hasn't been easy, and at one stage of the game Dave's mind was instilled with ideas of quitting. But in the finest tradition of the best racing stories, honest endeavour, talent — and a little luck — overcame adversity.

Those remote Lydden days may conveniently be considered as the start of Potter as a someone in racing. But there is no point attempting to identify the subsequent ends and beginnings. For instance, the Brands Powerbike International ending the 1979 season was really only a date on the calendar. Well before then Potter had eagerly anticipated another beginning on the new

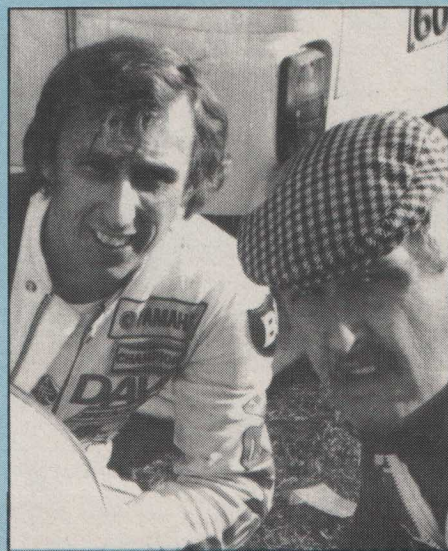
500cc Yamaha four. "Working with a new model", he rates as: "the guaranteed method of keeping enthusiasm flowing."

Before and during 1979, the Potter armoury lacked the fire-power of a fully competitive five hundred to challenge the RG500 Suzukis. While the 'cut-down' TZ750 he raced last year proved reasonably effective, the engine characteristics were all top-end power and no low-down torque. So it wasn't exactly the ideal tool for executing smooth exits from corners.

Earlier (1975) 500cc experience had been through a limited number of outings on a promising three cylinder Yamaha neatly engineered by sponsor Ted Broad. But development of that device was prematurely concluded when enthusiasm intervened in

the newly-arrived form of a TZ700. Working with the new model understandably received priority.

Potter uprooted from Yorkshire in 1970 and travelled South for nothing more glamorous than work, though the idea of racing 'down there' had attractions. Hearing from a friend that Paul Dunstall required mechanics, he promptly loaned his motorcycle bits and pieces in a Minivan and pointed in the appropriate direction. Not long afterwards, he and another Dunstall employee could be discovered working all manner of unsocial hours in a basic backyard workshop, fettling the Potter Equipe. One bike was a road-and-track Norton with Dunstall accoutrements, the other a 500cc Gold Star in Norton frame. Thus equipped, Potter set out to seek racing fame and fortune.

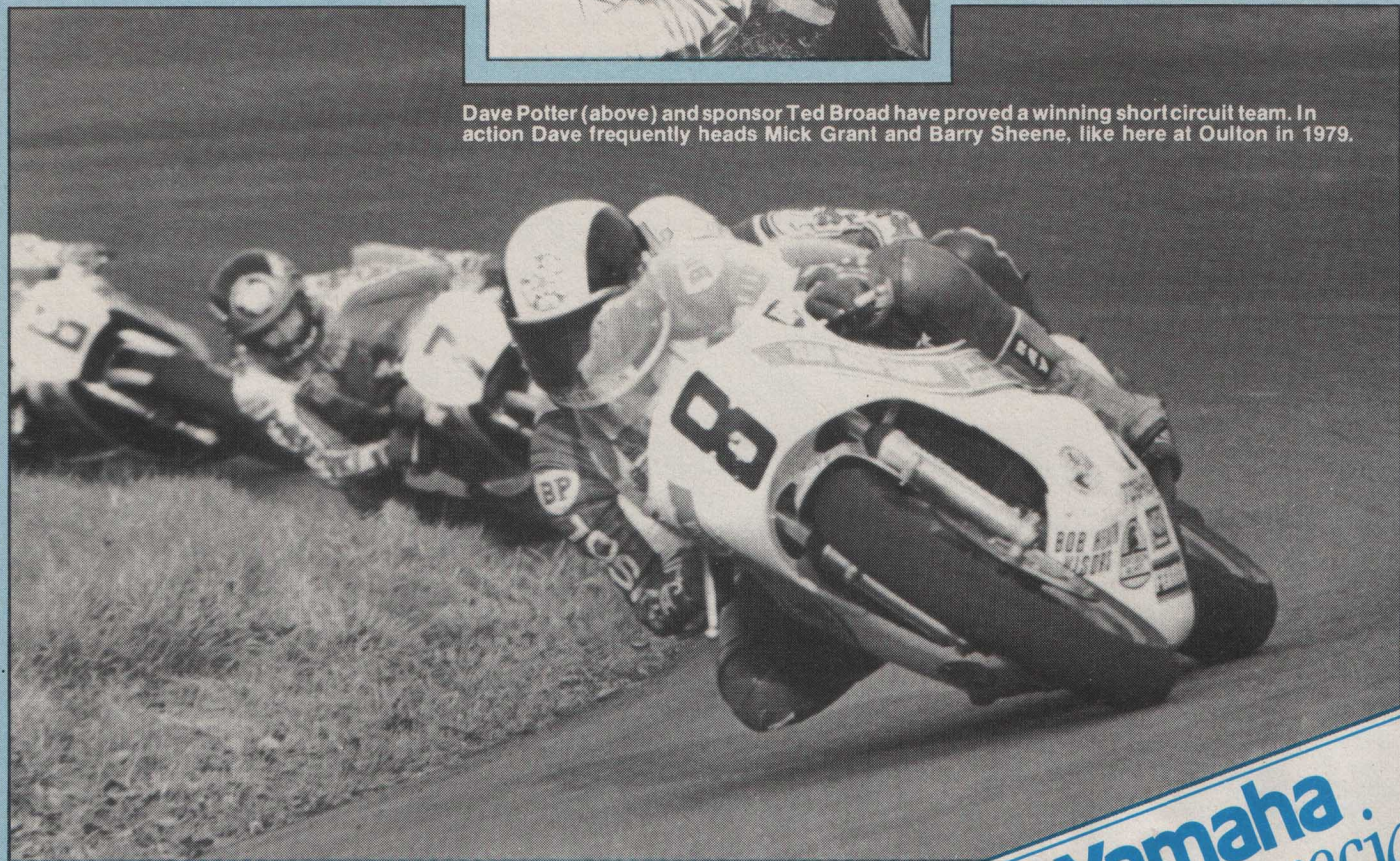


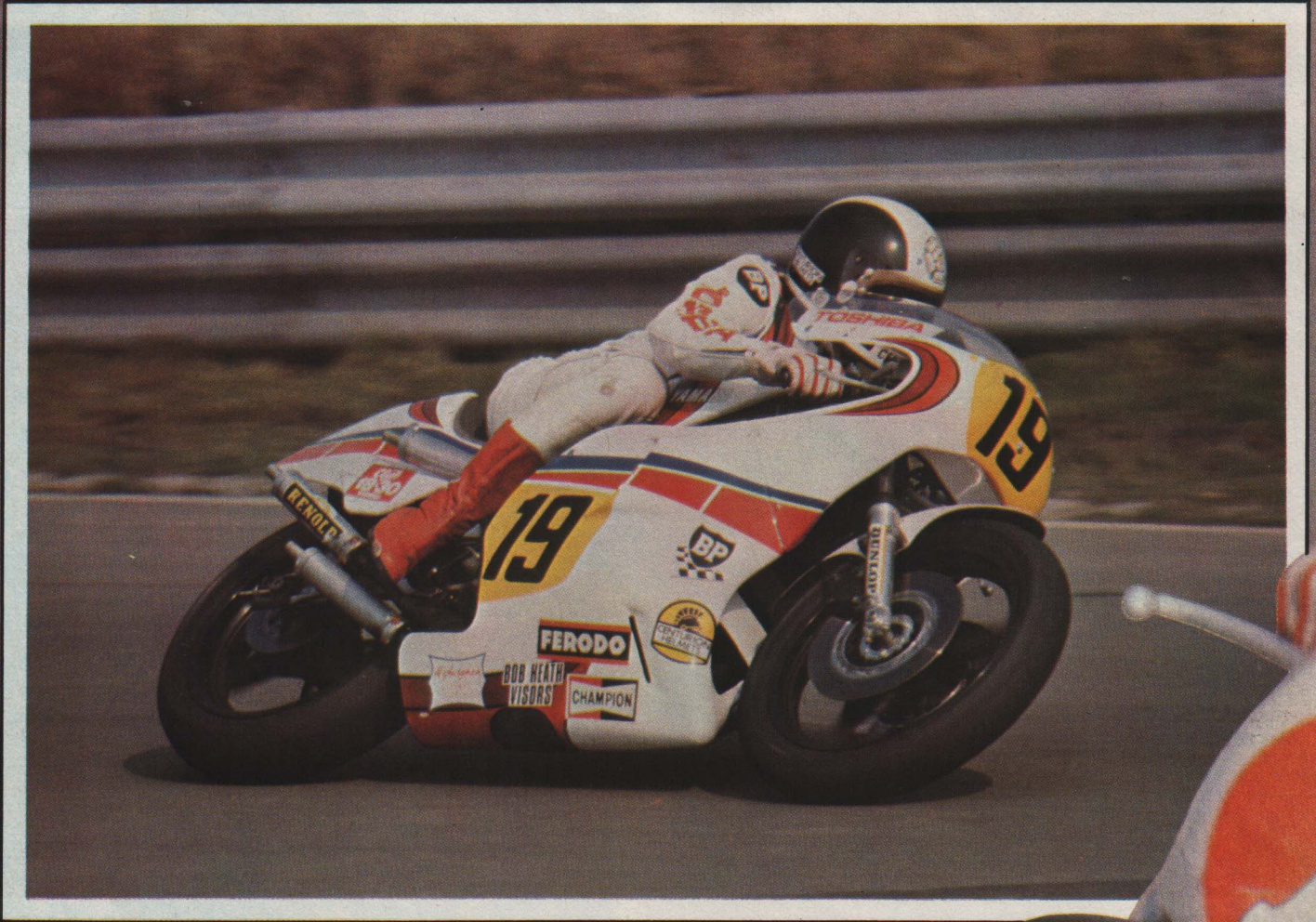
Commando specials

A change of employment meant crossing London to Gus Kuhn where Vincent Davey provided sponsorship on Commando-powered specials, in return for 50 percent of the prize money. Since Dave worked full time at Gus Kuhn, his share of winnings usefully supplemented the regular mechanic's pay packet. On the other hand, racing and sponsorship most assuredly did not overwhelm him with affluence. The time for writing 'full time road racing professional' against 'occupation' lay in the distant future. As recently as 1977, in fact, he still sought winter-time work to cover the difference between existing and living.

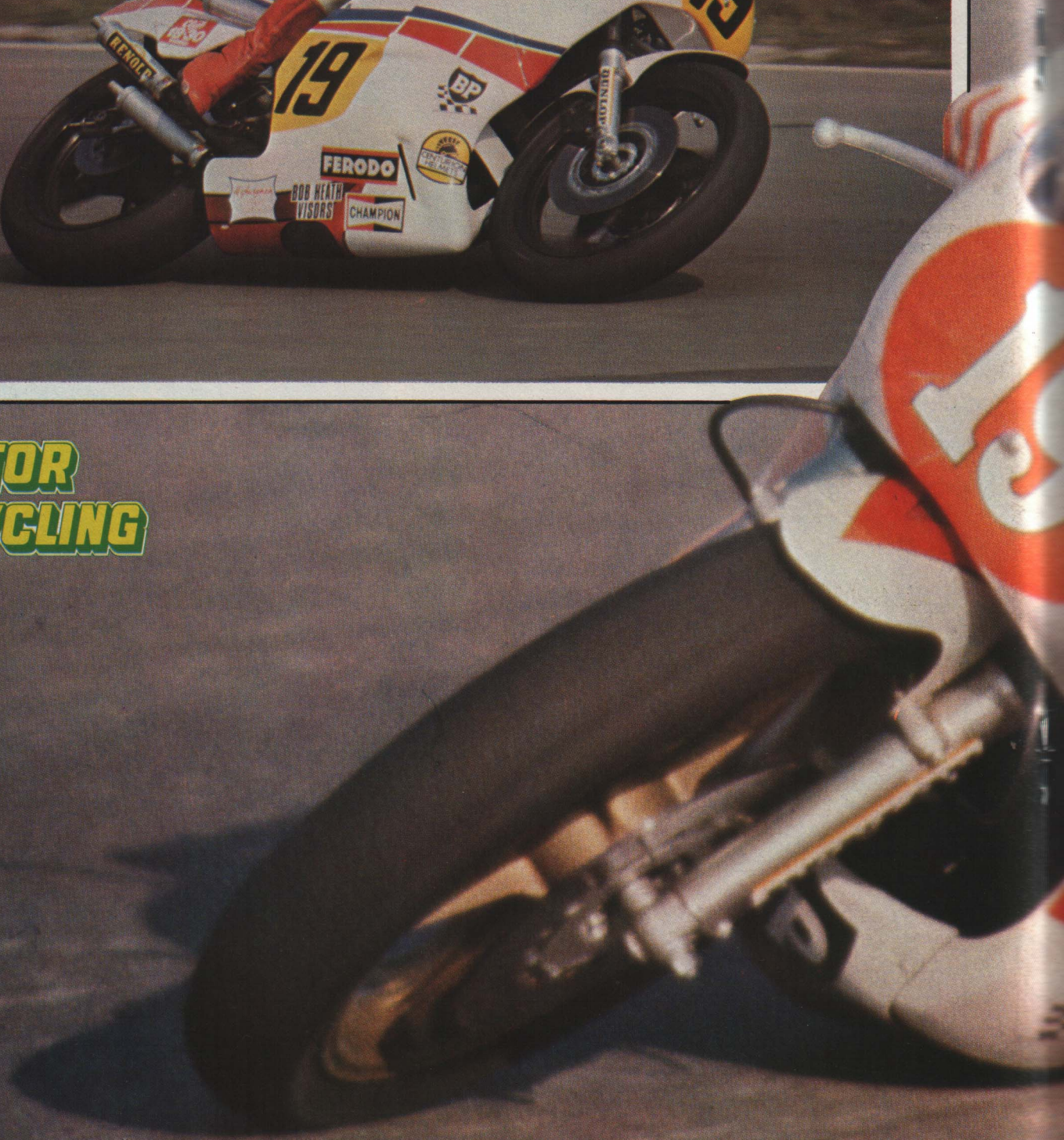
Potter's progress from proverbial rags to comparative riches seems a far cry from the present day that sees road-race hopefuls dashing around on expensive RG500s and

Dave Potter (above) and sponsor Ted Broad have proved a winning short circuit team. In action Dave frequently heads Mick Grant and Barry Sheene, like here at Oulton in 1979.



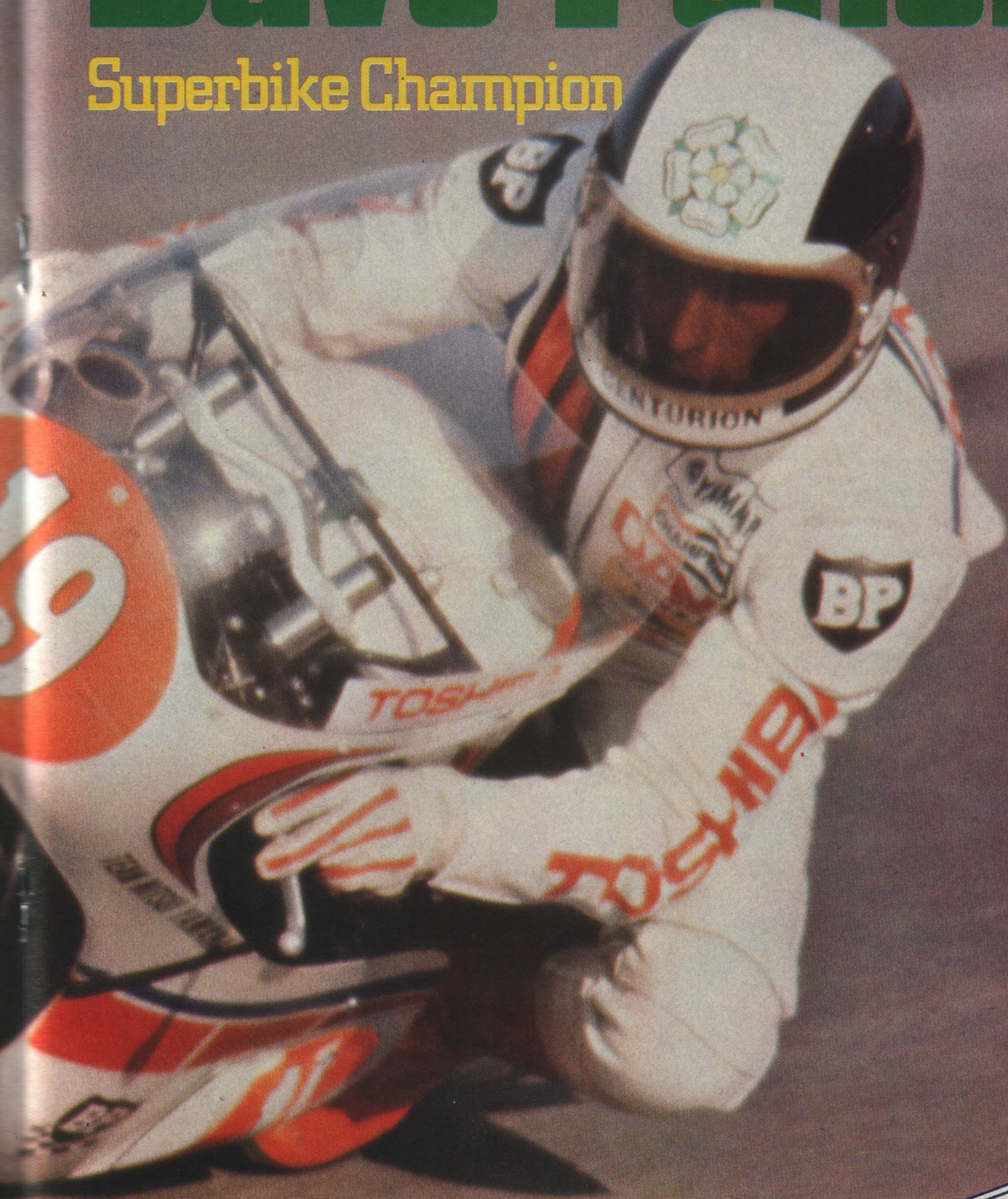


**MOTOR
CYCLING**



Dave Potter

Superbike Champion



Yamaha
16 page Special

Potter's Wheels

TZ750s. This is not something he finds surprising or, as some people suggest, ruinous for the grass roots of racing.

"It looks a whole different game these days when you see sophisticated machines. But basically it's always been the same, because riders going places need competitive machines. When I raced Norton twins for Vincent, they were competitive, and it was possible to transfer from club circles to the bigger time on similar models.

"I remember standing in the Mallory Park crowd, watching Ken Redfern on a Norton beat Agostini and the MV. And I made something of a hit with the spectators by telling them I raced against 'clubman' Ken the day before at Croft.

"The point is, no-one can advance very far on out-classed equipment."

By 1974, the day of the competitive Norton had passed and Potter's fortunes hit rock bottom. Former hydroplane champion Willie Ryan came partly to the rescue with the Crescent two-stroke, outboard motor based 500 which Dave rode in the TT as: 'The most unsuitable contraption ever to attack Bray Hill.'

Efforts to make the Crescent work effectively on short circuits consumed most of the waking hours ("If I hadn't been a mechanic, I would have packed it all in") and it wasn't until Willie bought a 350cc Yamaha that a gleam of better times appeared. The season ended with the Rothman's 350 race in the bag at Brands.

Sometime later, Potter heard that Barry Ditchburn was leaving Ted Broad to join Kawasaki. So, with uncharacteristic forwardness, he volunteered to fill the vacancy. "Go away," ordered Ted, "I don't talk to riders with sponsors." Deflated, Potter went off to ask Ryan what he should do. "I'll tell you what I'll do," offered Willie, "I'll give you the sack because you'll never get a second opportunity to ride for a man like Ted." In these amicable exchanges rested the roots for the successful and cordial Broad-Potter partnership, now in its sixth year.

Although often considered an exclusively UK-based rider, Potter can count a fair number of Continental appearances among his activities. The first, none too auspicious, European adventure took him to the 1973 Imola 200 and pitted his Norton against the Yamaha, Kawasaki, Suzuki and Ducati works

teams. Dave recorded the 41st fastest practice time for a grid taking 40 starters, and then discovered he possessed the wrong pass to even see the racing. Still, the kindly Italians did allow him to purchase the right ticket!

The Gus Kuhn period broadened Potter's experience to take in endurance racing. With Gary Green as partner, the Bol d'Or, Barcelona 24-hour, and other European marathons were contested with the expected mixed results. They gained second place in the 1975 1000-kilometre race at Le Mans, riding a pre-production 900cc five-speed BMW — and they got a few coppers for their efforts.

"It really was daft racing all those miles for no money," Dave recalls. "It was only made bearable by the way we needed each other — in fun of course. Though, in a way, we formed an ideal team. Gary clapped out tyres and I fried brakes. So the pit crew knew exactly what to expect.

"In other respects we were pretty easy on the machine, which is a great advantage when you take over at some unearthly hour of the night. There's nothing worse than climbing on a badly abused endurance bike with everything out of adjustment."

Following the endurance interlude, Formula 750 ambitions were savagely curtailed by rapid decline of the championship as a crowd puller. Going abroad would have been fine, but the tight money policy adopted by most organisers simply turned the more distant events into financial disasters.

Limited objective

For 1980, Potter plans to place more GPs on his itinerary, although classic campaigning remains a limited objective. Dave decided against a world championship plunge after lots of self-analysis in 1977. "Had I taken the chance, I suppose Dave Potter's name would be more widely recognised on the Continent by now. But, quite honestly, I couldn't stand the idea of starting again at square one and going through all the bowing and scraping and aggravation. While I have the greatest admiration for riders like Alex George who made it the hard way, I still back my decision to concentrate mainly on British meetings."

Since Potter avoided what he judged a GP war of attrition between organisers and riders, did he hold strong views on the World Series issue we wanted to know? "Well, not being intimately involved with events leading up to the revolt, it was an open mind actually."

"I'm sure everyone will sooner or later benefit from the efforts of Kenny Roberts and others, but I was never certain that all the WSR supporters knew exactly where they were heading."

To find out more, Dave attended a WSR meeting convened at Imola in 1979, and was disturbed at the levity of the occasion billed as The Grand Debate. "Believe it or not, some blokes started to play soccer with Coke cans at the back of the room."

Despite collecting the Superbike title, Dave has no illusions about cherishing the 1979 season. It started badly at Donnington when the 500 — resplendent in Toshiba-BP livery — was unceremoniously torpedoed by a wayward machine. The resultant collar bone break did nothing to enhance his form for the Transatlantic Trophy series. And if that wasn't enough, an Oulton spill broke it again.

Invited to Sugo, Japan, for Yamaha's demo races, Dave upended when the Japanese tyres on his borrowed TZ750 let go at 90mph. Considering the wrist injury, dodgy shoulder, and massive attack of jet lag he took along to Brands, that grandstand Superbike finish was truly remarkable.

Like Ron Haslam, Superbike runner-up, Potter missed one of the rounds; Ron's self-appointed Scarborough exile being cancelled out by Dave's injury-induced Cadwell absence. Snetterton in July was the Series' turning point for Potter who collected first and second places, then went on to the remaining five races without dropping below fourth. It was a decent end to a tough season.

Realism pervades Potter's precepts of racing. He acknowledges that there is little room at the top, especially when Mr. Sheene is around. He's aware that the earning potential of his profession is limited by time. He needs no reminding that from season to season a rider's status plays hostage to the hard-headed controllers of racing finance. Potter, now 29, made it through hard work, results and public acceptance. And he intends to abide by those rules.

Jon Charles



The TZ750 Yamaha has provided Dave with some of his finest rides. Here he shows how with the 1980 version at Oulton Park.