

Quasar's Last Stand

Unfair odds defeated the good guys.

Words and Photography by Tony Dennis.

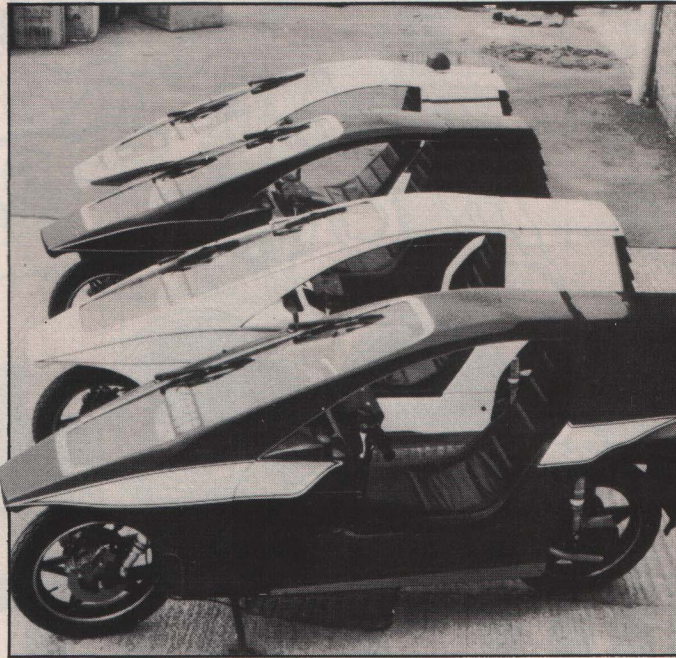
The banner headline flashed before my eyes: **Motorcycling Scoops Last Factory Ride. Without hesitation I grabbed the office camera, jumped on the nearest test bike and sped off in the direction of RAF Keevil, near Trowbridge in Wiltshire.**

The opportunity to ride a Quasar and see the assembly operation had arisen through a chance phone conversation with John Malfoy. Under the umbrella of Romarsh Special Products Ltd, John had been assembling Quasars since April 1980. Aided first by Kevin Smith then Mark Horner, ten bikes were produced in all. Money got tight for Romarsh, so now the Quasar side has been wound up. John's invitation made me the last journalist to visit the factory.

On the day of my visit one of the last machines was up for grabs, and John French had come down on his Harley-Davidson for a demonstration ride. The bike we both rode was in police colours, but no county force ever officially tested a Quasar. Afterwards John French did in fact buy one, but I didn't push to find out what bargain he had driven. List price was £5885.

On paper this British designed and built bike makes an ideal touring machine. Weather protection is afforded by the all-round glassfibre bodywork, the windscreen is fitted with wipers and there are two powerful headlamps for night riding. The Quasar features shaft drive, a relaxed feet forward riding position, luggage space behind the rider's head with the option of matching panniers and fitting a stereo/radio is a very practical proposition. It's a great recipe but success hasn't followed.

The Quasar uses a Reliant 850cc engine which along with other British components means that spares won't create a headache for owners. Back in



The last of the Quasars:- middle two models have gone to a collector.

February 1977 we ran a Quasar through the timing lights at MIRA recording a top speed of 101mph. With 500rpm still to go before the redline - a lowly 5500rpm - cruising along Continental motorways at 100mph would be no sweat. Fuel consumption was claimed to be around 60mpg as well.

My ride on the Quasar was very disappointing as a perfect man-to-machine symbiosis was not achieved. In other words the Quasar and I didn't get on! Sliding into the seat and releasing the sidestand (there's one on each side), the bike immediately felt top heavy. Fortunately this feeling disappears once you get rolling. Even without a helmet, I felt restricted, like being in a car.

Starting was easily achieved by pressing in a stalk mounted under the right handlebar. The clutch lever, in the usual position on the left bar, was surprisingly stiff considering it was hydraulic. The gearchange proved to be the bane of my ride. There are two offset pedals mounted next to your left leg. Giving the bottom pedal a hefty kick selects first and changes down, while the upper one changes up into the other three gears.

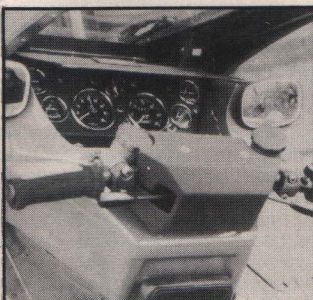
John Malfoy had warned me that there might be a wobble as I moved off, but the trick was to keep the power on and to relax. Typically I missed a couple of gearchanges and was rewarded with the worst bars shake that I've ever

experienced. Fortunately there's no fuel tank in the way to get slapped but when it happened at 50mph it was no joke. Leaning the bike rather than trying to steer it showed that the Quasar would otherwise handle very well.

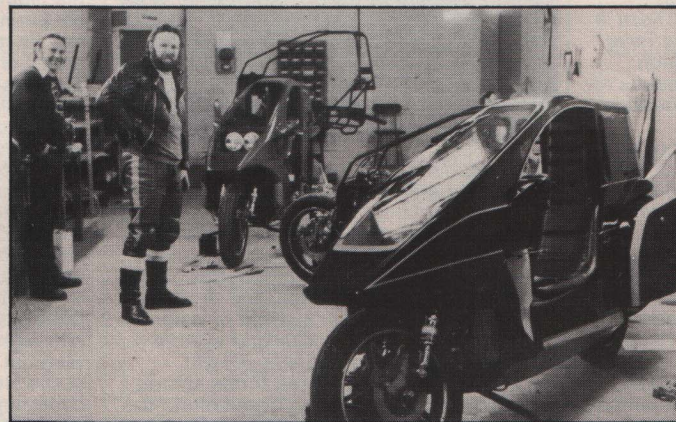
I spoke to our former editor, Charles Deane, and discovered that he'd experienced no steering wobble when he tested the machine. It may have had something to do with the fact that I'm tall and light but more likely the Quasar needs to be ridden positively by someone with more years in the saddle than I possess. Following John Malfoy in the Quasar back to Romarsh's premises at Calne, Wilts showed just how fast the Quasar can be ridden, although trying to manoeuvre through heavy traffic would prove very tiring I expect.

Back at Calne I saw the last three Quasars including a rolling chassis which gave a very clear picture of the bike's construction. The Quasar was originally conceived by Malcolm Newell and Ken Leaman back in the seventies. With Wilson and Sons of Bristol backing them (they still hold the design rights) around seven machines were produced before handing over to Romarsh. Malcolm has gone on to develop the theme with his Phasar, another feet forward machine which features a new frame, hub centre steering instead of the Quasar's leading link forks and a number of engine options including the big Guzzi V-twins.

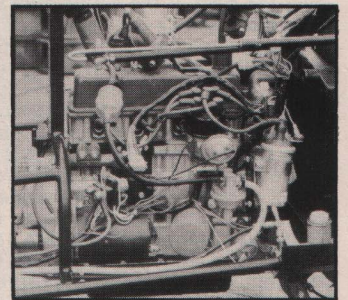
As I left Romarsh's Calne premises I had the sad feeling that another era in the history of the British motorcycle industry had ended. The Quasar was radical (and expensive) enough to deter the average biker, but I believe the idea was sound. A lighter and smaller version, capable of taking two people without a terrible squeeze like the Quasar, might well succeed where this bike left off. ■



Comprehensive instrumentation has temperature and fuel gauges.



Modest premises at Romarsh. Far left is Quasar builder, John Malfoy, with H-D rider John French who bought one of the last bikes.



Beneath the Quasar's bodywork lies this 850cc Reliant powerplant.