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PROMOTIONAL DEVICE

Cover story: Yamaha spent several grand flying three UK bike journos to Egypt and entertaining them with everything from dancing girls to syrup of figs in the hope that said journos would say something nice about the 750 Super Ténéré. Pic: Kel Edge.

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JULY — DEC 1989

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MAY, 1989



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FROM MUD, THROUGH BLOOD,



Super Moto racing has arrived in England. Yamaha lent Paul and Forsyth a couple of TDR250s to do it with.

It was with a severe dose of cowardice that I approached our first practice session. It was damp, to the extent of being three inches deep in places; it was muddy, to the extent of being four inches deep in places; and I was scared.

The third TDR, ridden by a streetwise Bob Farnham, showed obvious signs of inside knowledge, which is what really started to worry me. A competitor/survivor of the

previous round of Super Moto, his TDR bristled with a host of modifications that team PB's didn't.

Perhaps most importantly he'd changed the clog-quickly OE tyres for a Pirelli MT rear and an Enduro knobbly front. The TDR is notoriously front-heavy and once the small 18 in front wheel finds its way into ruts it is reluctant to remove itself using normal steering techniques.

By sitting on the back

mudguard and nailing the throttle on the faster dirt sections, it was just possible to remain upright. The direction of travel, however, was far from predictable.

Thanks to team PB's lack of preparation it looked as though we were beaten before we'd even started. In the deep mud sections the motocross bikes were finding grip like you wouldn't believe, pulling yards in the process.

The clouds were pushed



Left: Bob Farnham (41) bent the forks of his tuned TDR250 on the Editor's leg. Tyres frequently break away, hence the foot down cornering. Above: Super Moto meetings also have quads. They crash too.

towards the direction of the Brecon Beacons by the coastal breeze and the sun shone. Things were getting better.

I'd learnt a lot in practice by going so fast that I was out of control. Swaddled in a layer of thick leather and T Pro body armour gives you the most amazing sense of security, especially on soft soil.

Perhaps the most important lesson was learnt from the likes of Steven Gray on a little 125 Cagiva crosser. What he made up on the dirt I could make back on the tarmac by using the top speed, acceleration and

TO THE GREEN FIELDS BEYOND



awesome front brake of the TDR. When he came past me again on the dirt I got a clear view of how to do it.

Whereas a road racer, or road rider for that matter, makes a smooth arc through a bend, the experienced dirt rider squares off the corner early and extremely tightly. Then he powers round hard because he's upright and pointing in the right direction a lot earlier than the constant radius method would allow.

On the track this leads to an interesting, and sometimes bloody lethal, assortment of cornering techniques. If you didn't adapt to the motocross straighten-up-and-squirt-it method the chances of getting T-boned by a CR500 or similar were high.

The lunch hour allowed aching wrists and thighs to

recover.

We made the most of the March sunshine by wallowing around in the back of the pick-up and eating particularly un-user friendly hot dogs. Then it was time for the serious stuff.

The quads went out first for their two heats. The wildly spinning wide rear wheels de-rutted the off road section as if it had all been freshly chain harrowed. If that was the good news, the bad was that they'd spread most of the soil onto the tarmac giving the once leech-like surface the frictional qualities of a teflon frying pan.

The mad dash into the first corner was pretty scary. The full width of the tarmac starting area, taken up by riders looking for a faster line.

I lost about four places on the dirt and made five up on the

Super Moto: is . . .

Everything in Super Moto racing is a contradiction. Typical battle dress is road racing leathers, with full body armour, and motocross helmet, goggles, boots and gloves. Or, if you prefer, the complete opposite.

To be good you have to employ techniques from road racing and dirt riding. It is quite possible to encounter high friction tarmac and low friction mud on one corner. Naturally, you can play safe and wobble round but you can bet there'll be ten other lunatics who won't. You need to cope with that hazard faster than anyone else to win.

The bikes need low tyre pressures for loose surfaces and high tyre pressures for tarmac. You need knobblies one second and road racing intermediates the

next. Each corner of each lap demands individual consideration.

If all this does one thing it allows a rider's character and ability to shine. And that alone gets Super Moto eleven out of ten as a spectator sport. Confined to the paddock after getting mown down in Race Two I could only watch open mouthed as Mark rode his trousers off across a rutted, muddy field on the TDR. At 80mph. Even more unbelievable were the antics of Mitsui Motocross rider Ady Smith. Running low pressures in a square section rear *trials* tyre he negotiated the fast left past the pits in a series of short slides which had his YZ250 teetering horrendously on the verge of crashing. How he managed 45 degrees of lean, lap after lap, on a tyre completely devoid of sidewall tread, is a mystery.

RP



tarmac, so after a period of about fifteen laps (in fifteen minutes) I'd elbowed my way up to fifth place. Things were looking up.

The physical effort required to wrestle the TDR into some

kind of submission was enormous. My legs, particularly my thighs, ached, my kidneys hurt, both my forearms had swollen and I was sweating as profusely as Salman Rushdie. In fact, it made even

sidecar racing look lethargic.

As the back wheel on my bike was beginning to resemble a very secondhand one and Rupert had done his utmost to destroy his own, a local hostelry was sought as a substitute for the last solo race; after all there was still another day of the event left.

We were late for practice on Sunday morning — true to form. We were greeted by a pensive looking Mr Farnham: "It's 'kin lethal out there." His worried expression was enough to convince me that he wasn't telling porkies. "There's surface water on the track and it's like riding on ice on the tarmac." My new found enthusiasm for Super Moto suddenly shrivelled up and died. I was having enough problems in the dry soil, never mind deep mud.

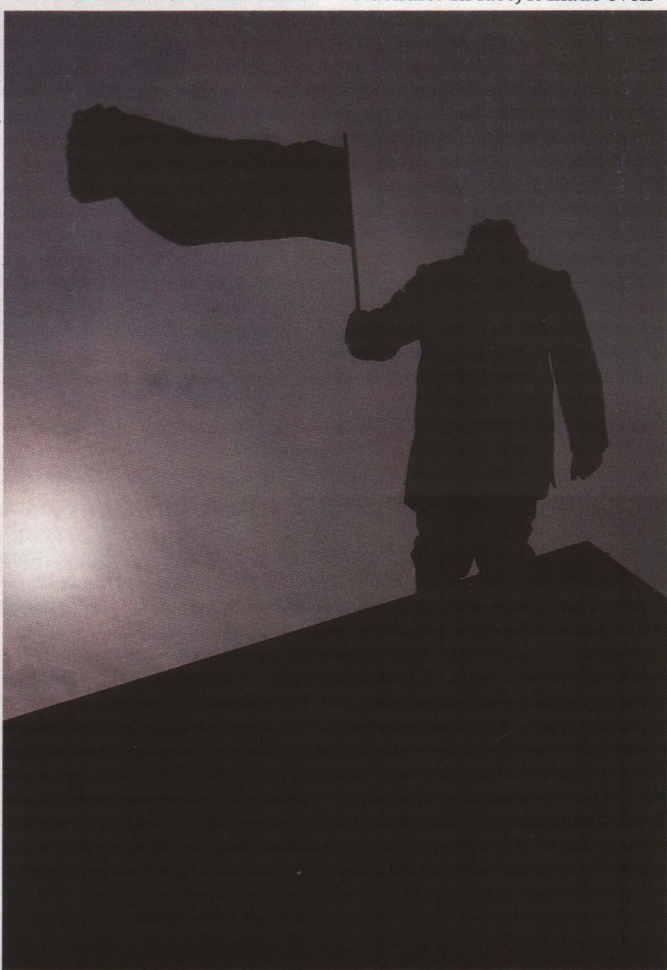
Yep, he was right. People

Team PB contemplate relative grip of Metzeler Saharas on mud and wet tarmac. Mark got the pegs down on the track; Rupert got 'em down on the dirt, but they stayed down.

were going down like nine pins. Paul Blezard was seen staggering away from his upside down Transalp which was steaming in the thick black mud like a hopelessly beached whale. Blezard was in a similar state; black, steaming and dripping. Not a pretty sight.

The problems on one practice sessions were completely different for the next session. The soft waterlogged soil, especially after the quads had been out, didn't even stay the same from lap to lap.

At the point where mud met tarmac, the mud was spread 30 yards or so. Berms were



TDR250 FUN CUP

Since the invention of the TDR250 the French have added a new dimension to their Super Motard series — TDR racing. The French were therefore the first nation on earth to demonstrate scientifically that TDRs disintegrate when they land from any reasonable height. To compensate for the subsequent flatness of the circuits, the French promoters introduced prizes for first rider into first corner, best character, best paint job, and best riding gear.

The good news is that Mitsui are

backing a British National TDR series this year, to be run alongside Super Moto races. Prize money is the same, too — £150 for first down to £50 for fifth, with £50 bonuses for the fastest lap and first rider into the first bend. Better still, the overall winner gets £1,000 at the end of the year, plus sponsorship for 1990. Do you own a TDR? What are you waiting for? Ring Bernard Conche at Euro Racing Ltd. (0460 30592/30744).

RP

beginning to appear all over the place and some humungous ruts had sprung up just where they weren't wanted. To make matters worse still, the TDR's tyres were finding it difficult to shed the sticky mud — hello wheelspin.

If the average race speed had been down in the thirties then the treacherous conditions would have just livened things up a bit. As it was, they averaged exactly sixty; a mistake in the wrong place could have spelt painful trouble. One particular stretch (a real buttock clencher) was a very gentle left hand curve, snappily named "Conche Curve". The TDR was happiest entering it in third, foot down and sliding on an open throttle. As the right hand entry was tarmac with a film of mud, a closed throttle spelt front end disaster. From here it was a case of wringing its neck through all the gears, sitting on the rear mudguard, with both eyes tightly closed. Sixth gear was reached about half way down the final stretch. With the damping getting worse as the race wore on, the TDR's behaviour got steadily more frisky. Gulp.

It was hit and miss. Sometimes I would run onto the grass on the infield and others I would run on to the grass on the outside. But never did I end up where I wanted to be. As this was all going on at



about 80-90mph, usually with both legs flailing about like they were both broken at the hips, my bottle started to go.

A course change to eliminate this sixth gear mantrap was out of the question because there wasn't enough time to let everyone practice again. So, in the interests of self preservation, I wimped out; after all, the following weekend's Oulton park road race meeting was much more

important.

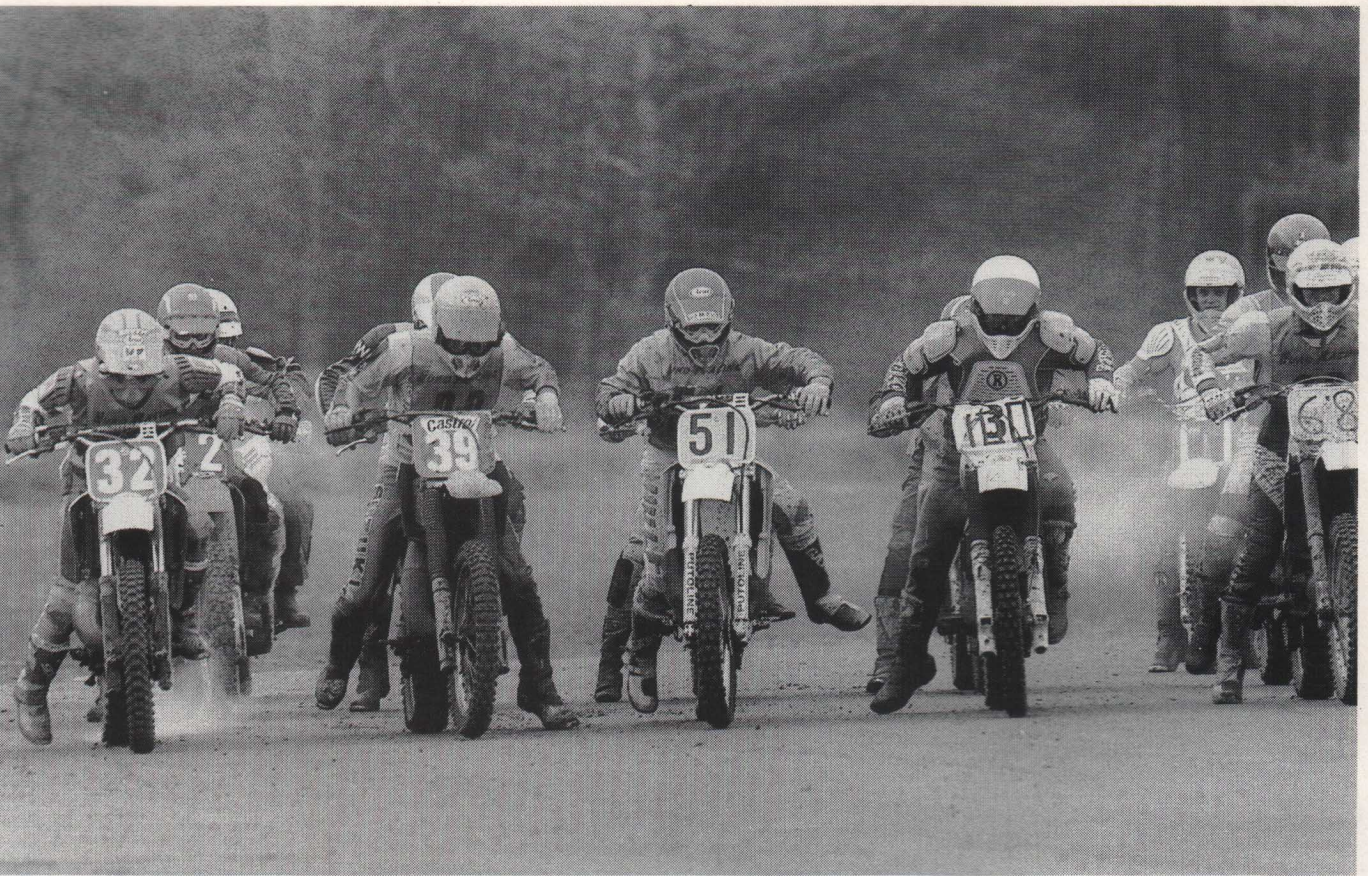
As I write this (four days after the event) my legs are still aching from the weekend's endeavours — but not half as much as Rupert's.

MF

Above: Mad Australian quad champ Matt Coulter rode a Farnham-tuned RG500 quad which disintegrated gradually during each race and had to be welded together afterwards. In the end, single cylinder quads (below) stayed in one piece longer but Matt (bottom) looked more spectacular. Below left: Rupert half way through wrecking his TDR.



FROM MUD, THROUGH BLOOD, TO THE GREEN FIELDS BEYOND



The moment the clutches slam home. Not surprisingly the front row consisted entirely of MX bikes. Smith (51) won everything.

“ There didn't seem much point slowing down, but as things turned out, there would have been. At the end of a 40mph muddy straight about a third of the way round the course, a Rupert fell off in front of me, sprawled in the dirt gave me approximately two milliseconds to do something. Unable to change direction at the best of times on this part of the track I had no choice but to hit the softest object. There was a thud, a scream and a howl from the motor as the back tyre scabbled for grip, then I cartwheeled over the handlebars.”

Yes folks, fate certainly is a funny thing. Bob Farnham, the man who lent me an RGV250 to test only to have it written off after I used it to T bone a dog, has himself discovered the dubious delights of running over large mammals. Only this time I was the one under the wheels.

I can only thank good fortune, good leather and Pro-Tek for confining the ravages of Bob's TDR to a badly bruised knee, shoulder and both wrists. If that rear Metzeler had fastened itself into my soft and unprotected neck I fear I would be faxing this copy through from eternity.

As you might expect from a formula designed to encourage rear wheel sliding techniques, TDR racing concentrates the mind. Trying to guide a top heavy, wheelspinning styling

exercise across a soaking muddy field for 15 minutes was harder, for me, than two hours at Weston Super Mare Beach Race.

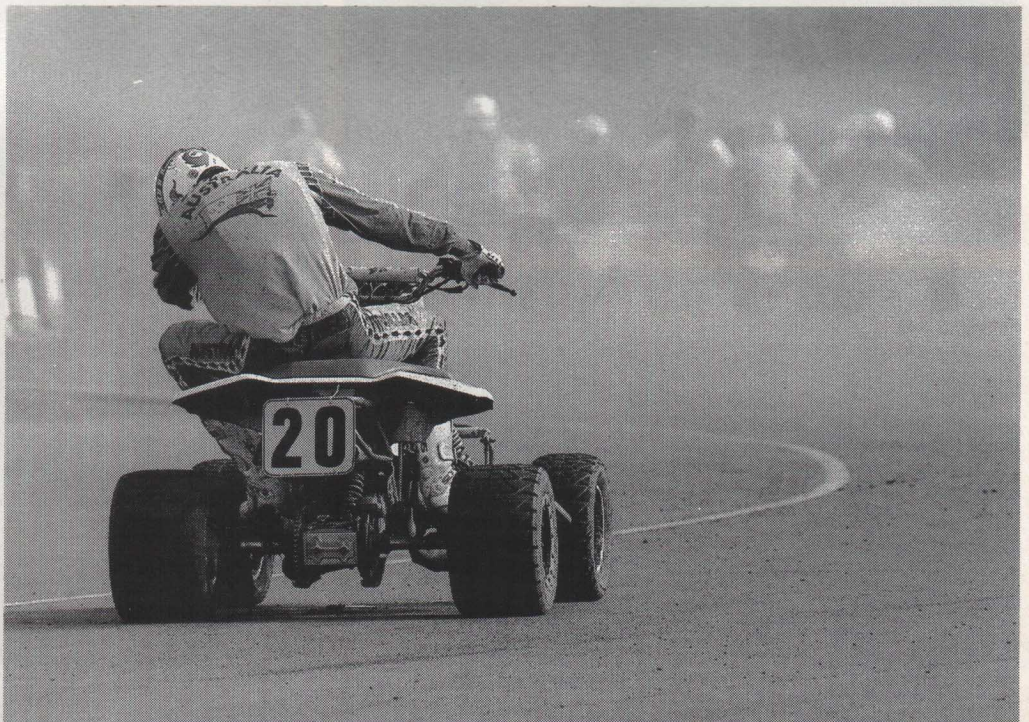
If you ride a TDR on the road you could hardly describe it as top heavy, and on tarmac the grip from the standard Metzeler Sahara tyres is good enough to graze the pegs occasionally. The trouble is, when everyone else is riding motocrossers, on knobbly tyres, then it's only a matter of

time before you bale out over the handlebars in an attempt to keep up.

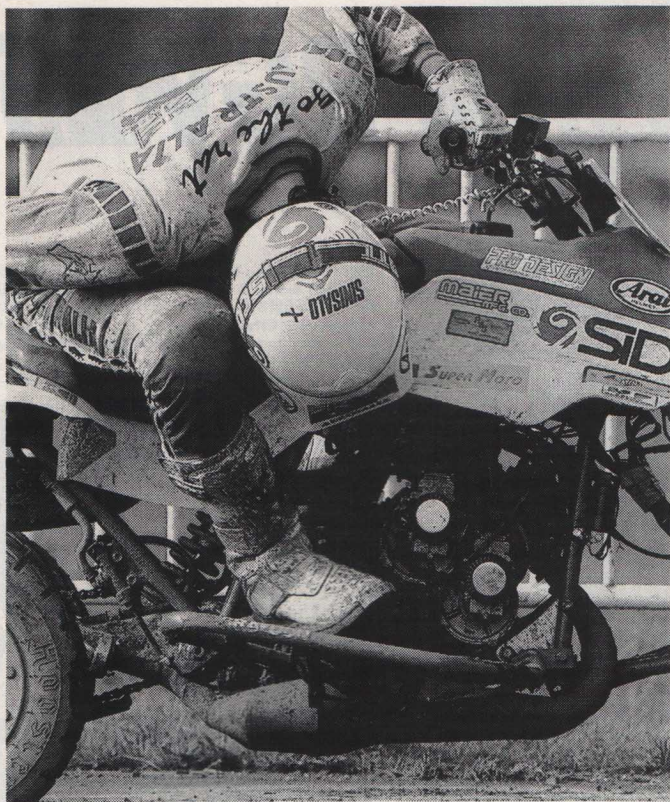
But that's looking at it from the wrong angle. Managed properly, the 1989 National UK Super Moto series could recapture all the lunatic, headbanging appeal of the early eighties 250LC Pro-Am which launched such names as Kenny Irons, Ray Swann, Niall MacKenzie, Rob MacElnea and Mat Oxley to fame and fortune. The potential really is that big.

It could even get onto TV.

The idea of racing bikes on part dirt/part tarmac tracks comes from the french, who in turn got it from the Americans. The original name of 'Superbikes' was therefore translated into the Gallic 'Supermotards' and is now known in England as 'Super Moto'. The man who imported this bizarre form of racing from across the Channel is Monte Carlo Rally organiser Bernard Conche.



When you bolt a 500 square four motor into a 500 single chassis, reliability can suffer.



Mad Matt listens for mechanical carnage after riding through a bog with K&N filters. Note safety ignition cutout.

What is the philosophy behind Super Moto, Bernard? "It's something different. In France, it's an event run on non-permanent circuits in towns, and that makes it far more accessible than a normal race at a circuit. Sideshow attractions provide entertainment for all the family and the series attracts huge press coverage. Ultimately, it's people doing funny things with funny bikes."

Having been to a French Super Motard meeting in Nantes I can confirm that all this is true. I can also confirm that while the event Mark and I entered at Pembrey had its own free funfair it was also miles from anywhere, with a fairly chaotic mix of quads, trikes, trail bikes, motocrossers and TDR250s running anything from standard road tyres to racing knobbies hacksawed down to a regulation 10mm.

"We're just starting the Super Moto series here," defended Bernard. "Sure, Pembrey is hardly a central location, but you have to begin somehow. Ultimately I envisage meetings at places like the NEC during the Bike Show. In France, you know, they bring in special lorryloads of earth and make the dirt section of the course that way, so that you can run a race in a car park."

What about the bikes? Can't you introduce separate classes to give people on trail bikes a chance to win something?

"Sure. Starting at Lydden on April 1 we'll run separate classes for motocross/enduro, four strokes and TDR250s. I'd really like to have a class for trail bikes with a one day licence system. Then anybody could enter, take off their indicators, tape up the headlights and go racing.



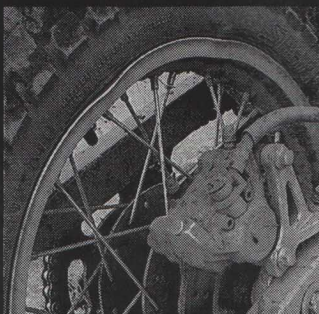
A post-impact Editor writhes in his death agony while a nonchalant TDR lies on its side with its arms folded.

The Bike

There's no doubt about it, the TDR was hopelessly outclassed against the open class motocrossers. Though that's not to say it didn't cope exceedingly well. In straight races (no heats) the completely stock TDR managed three fourth places, a couple of fifths and a sixth. Remember that only the tyre pressures (15-20psi) were changed and the indicators removed.

Considering that it accelerated away from 500 crossers from a standing start and would outdrag them exiting surfaced corners, that should give you an idea of its performance.

Handling on the track was probably good enough to net you an upper midfield position in most club 250 proddie races and the



Dirt/concrete joins plus low tyre pressures = this.

"It'll take some time to work out what is successful. For example, in France the rules dictate 18 inch front wheels and a tread depth of 8mm on the tyres, which means road racing wets or intermediates. So I thought this would be a good thing to do with my 500KTM. As it turns out, that set-up doesn't work on Pembrey's rich soil (I know Bernard; even I

standard Metzeler compromises were sticky enough to allow the scraping of footrests and brake pedal. The front dinner plate disc and four piston caliper was just the job for outbraking anybody and everybody.

The handling on the dirt was, ahem, interesting but nevertheless extremely good fun. The damping characteristics lasted for about a lap and a half by which time the front heavy TDR would wobble, fishtail and bounce its way in the general direction of the next section. At least it made it difficult for the competition to get past.

I don't think I used the clutch once for upchanges, there was just too much going on to warrant removing four fingers from a flapping handlebar, but it never protested or refused to engage the next gear. The standard gearing that Rupert and I were running was well up to the job; Bob Farnham opted for lower gearing on his own tuned TDR but the advantage was questionable.

At last the TDR has found a new purpose in its life — Super Moto. The idea of twenty identical bikes battling it out on a rallycross circuit would be the ultimate spectacle, especially if you were stuck in the middle of it all; it would make the CBR series or Pro-Am racing look positively wimpy. Wonder what I'm doing on the first of April? MF

managed to lap you — RP). Then again, at Lydden, where you are riding on shale, you get the best grip with road race tyres. So it's not just a question of copying the French rules. For one thing, the weather is different here. As the series grows and sponsorship increases so Super Moto regulations will form. It'll take a season to get it right. RP

What the riders said



"I like it." — Ady Smith, Team Mitsui Motocross rider and overall winner on a YZ250.

"I saw the American Super Biker races on telly in the early eighties and they appealed to me; that's why I'm here. I hope they get the classes sorted out because you can't really compete against motocrossers on a trail bike. I

usually ride enduros but until the end of the day you don't know how you've done. This is much more cut and thrust, and that's how I like it. I want to do as many Super Moto races as I possibly can." — Alan Berkley, best trail bike rider of the weekend on an immaculately prepared SP370 Suzuki.

"No racing experience whatsoever. A friend recommended we had a go. It's excellent. We're having the time of our lives. It's cheap and flat — we can't do jumps — and the regs aren't too tight. Good weekend fun. Next time we'll bring some more sprockets." — Chris Pike (Andy MacGladdery's mechanic) and Julian Bounds, best complete novices on KTM125 motocrossers.

"I'm quitting while I'm ahead. If I go out again I'll crash." — Mark Forsyth, best and only surviving TDR250 rider.