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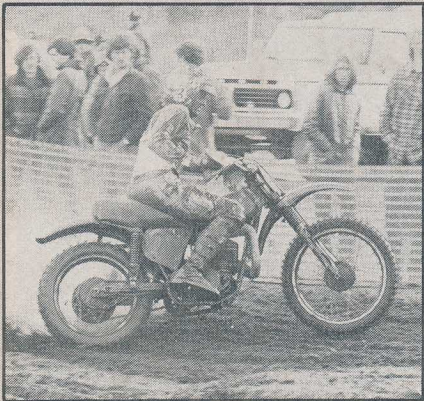
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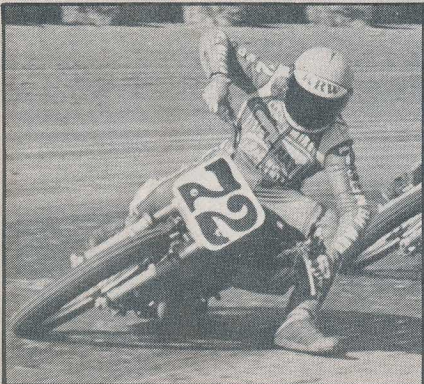
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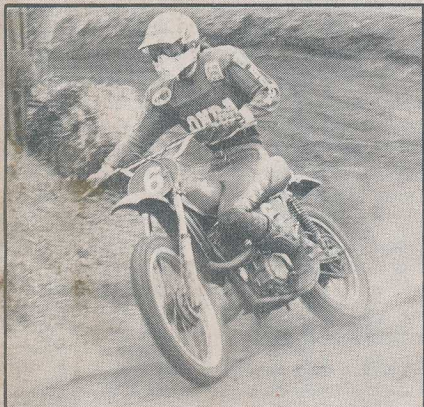
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Jason Harris

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Cover:

Team Honda's Pierre Karsmakers in action at the Daytona International Speedway round of the AMA's Supercross Series last March. Photo by Steve Reyes.

Centerspread:

Another Steve Reyes photo, this time from the San Jose Mile. Privateer favorite Alex Jorgensen, on just about the last competitive Norton flattracker left in the United States holds a slim lead over Kenny Robers, on his trick Yamaha twin.



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Finishing off the closest AMA
Grand National season in years

GETTING RIGHT DOWN TO IT



By Tom Beesley
Photos by Tom Beesley, Tom Culp, Steve Reyes, Mike Parris,
Bill Spencer, Dozier Mobley and Gary Van Voorhis/Cycle
News East



*Feet down and sliding, at better than
110 mph! New Grand National
Champion Jay Springsteen (25) and
Harley-Davidson teammate Rex
Beauchamp get it on the Indy Mile.
Receiving the spoils of victory (inset)
for the seventh time in the season,
Jay Springsteen douses himself with
champagne, Miss Camel Pro Series,
Lynn Griffis, tries to get out of the way.
But she got her champagne-shampoo
before the celebration was over.*

The battle for the 1976 Camel Pro Series Grand National Championship started out slowly, with several riders in fairly close contention for the prestigious title. But as the 28-race season wound down, the battle tightened up, eliminating riders every week.

With just a few races left, the potential was narrowed to only three riders; perennial rivals Gary Scott (the defending National Champion) and Kenny Roberts (the Champ for two previous years) and second year Expert upstart Jay Springsteen, a 19-year-old sensation from Flint, Michigan.

This three-way duel lasted right down to the wire, with the Camel Pro title undetermined till the final race of the season. That hasn't happened many times in the 21-year history of the Grand National Championship. And the points spread of 21 points between the winner and first runner-up has been matched or beaten only eight times in that history. There've been years when only a single point separated the first two riders at the end of the year, but even those titles weren't usually determined in the last race of the year.

And the guy who'll wear the prestigious National Number One plate on the front of his motorcycle next year? It's Springsteen, the boisterous, care-free youngster from Michigan who came out on top, by winning that final event, the half-mile at Gardena, California's Ascot Park.

No one who followed the '76 Camel Pro Series will give you an argument when you say it's been a weird year.

The weirdness started long before the racing season, when National Champion Gary Scott turned down a lucrative Harley-Davidson factory-sponsored contract to go it alone as a privateer racer. Some people said Scott was crazy; others felt that he could do it. But whatever was said, Scott stuck by his guns, and darned near pulled it off.

Springsteen took over Scott's niche on the factory Harley team, and from the very beginning was picked as a likely candidate in the chase for the Championship.

But the guy picked most likely to do the deed was Kenny Roberts, the Yamaha factory rider who had lost his two-year title to Scott. The word got out that Roberts was particularly keen to regain his Grand National Championship crown.

That was all before the season began.

Once underway, it seemed everybody on the circuit was winning National races. In fact, different riders won each of the first 12 races on the schedule. It was Jay Springsteen who broke the string becoming the first rider of the season to win two Nationals. He did it on a Fourth of July at a dusty, mile-long dirt track in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Once he had broken that jinx, Springsteen really caught fire and shot up in the standings. Early in the season, the battle for the crown was shaping between Springsteen, Scott and Roberts. There were other riders still capable of winning the Championship, but all odds were on those three.

The Camel Pro Series really got down to serious business back in August, at the Indiana State Fairgrounds. A pair of mile Nationals were scheduled, and it was expected these two races might be the turning point of the season; that from Indy would emerge a clear-cut leader in the pursuit of number one.

But it didn't happen that way. Gary Scott didn't win either of the Indianapolis races, though he came out of the weekend on top of the points pile. Still Springsteen was breathing right down his neck. And Roberts? Well, he was still right in there as well.

SUMMER FUN AT INDY

The Indianapolis Mile has for some time enjoyed a reputation as one of the best races on the circuit. It's a good race track, the riders are eager to go for points and it seems like something radical always happens at Indy.

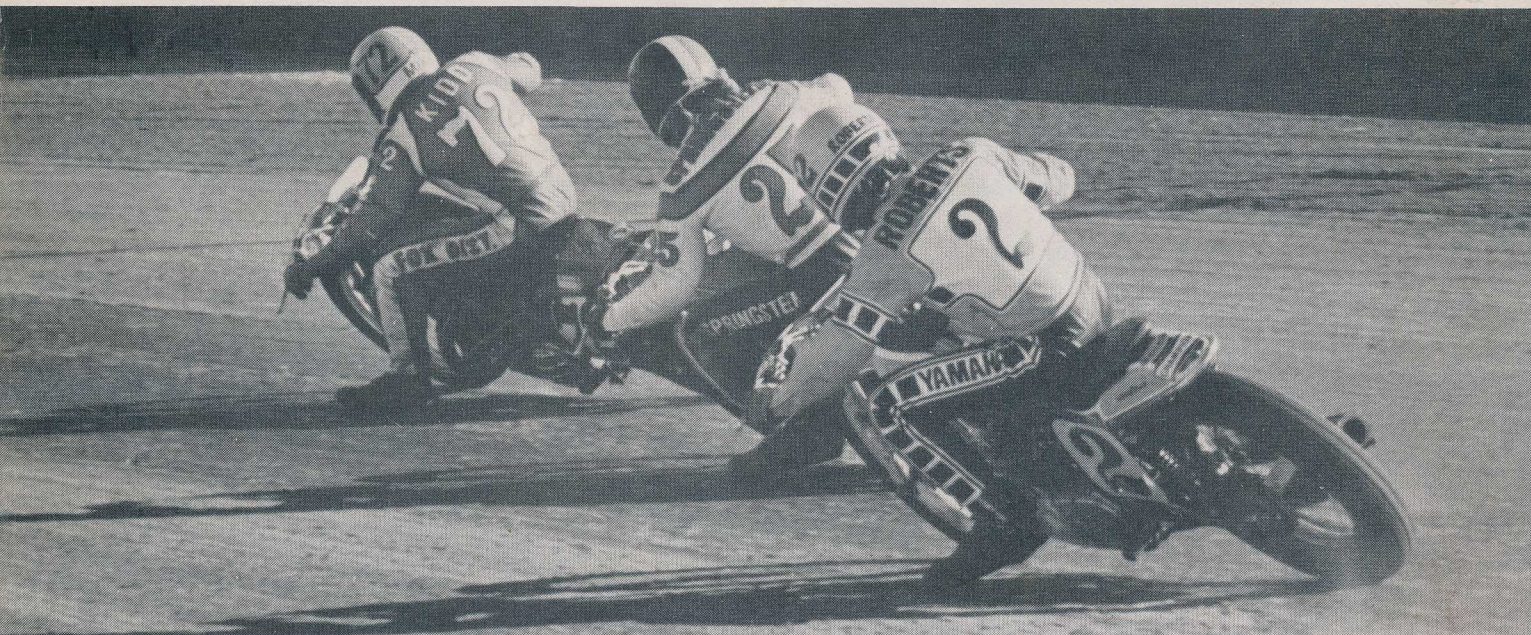
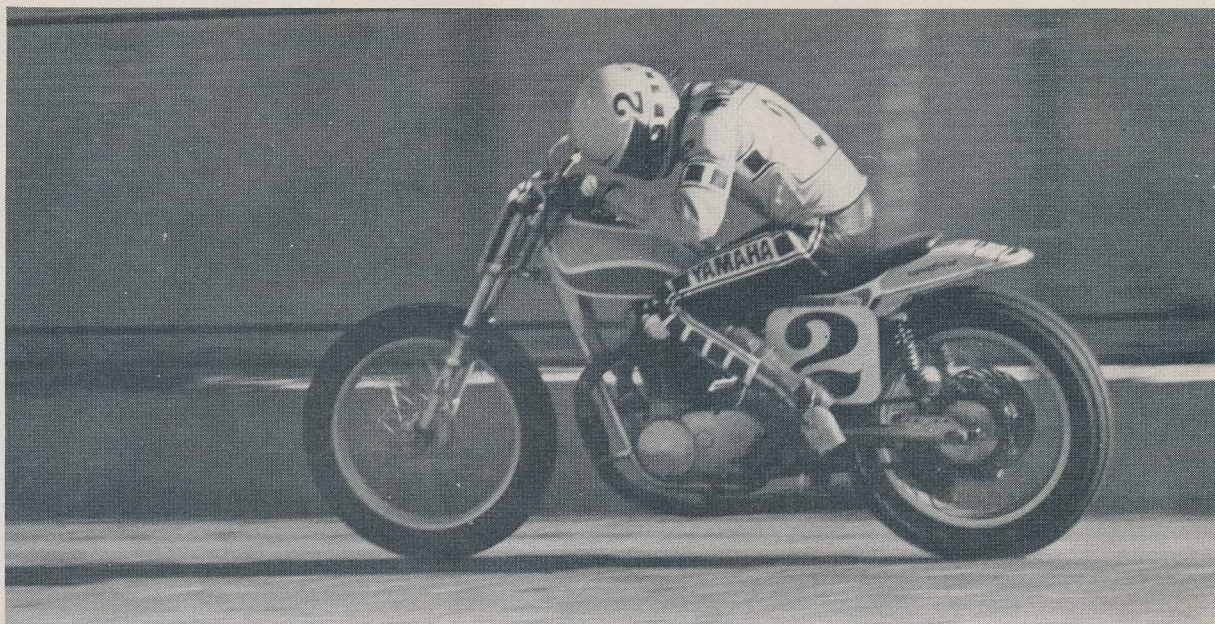
Last year, for instance, it looked like Harley teammates Springsteen and Corky Keener were going to have a sprint to the checkered flag for the win. Then, out of nowhere, came Kenny Roberts—completely sideways and riding like mad—on a completely unmanageable four-cylinder, two-stroke engined beast that Yamaha had assembled out of a 100-horse-power road racing machine. Roberts shot past Springsteen and Keener like a missile to take the win.

Indy Mile winner Mike Kidd, aboard the Mert Lawwill Harley-Davidson.



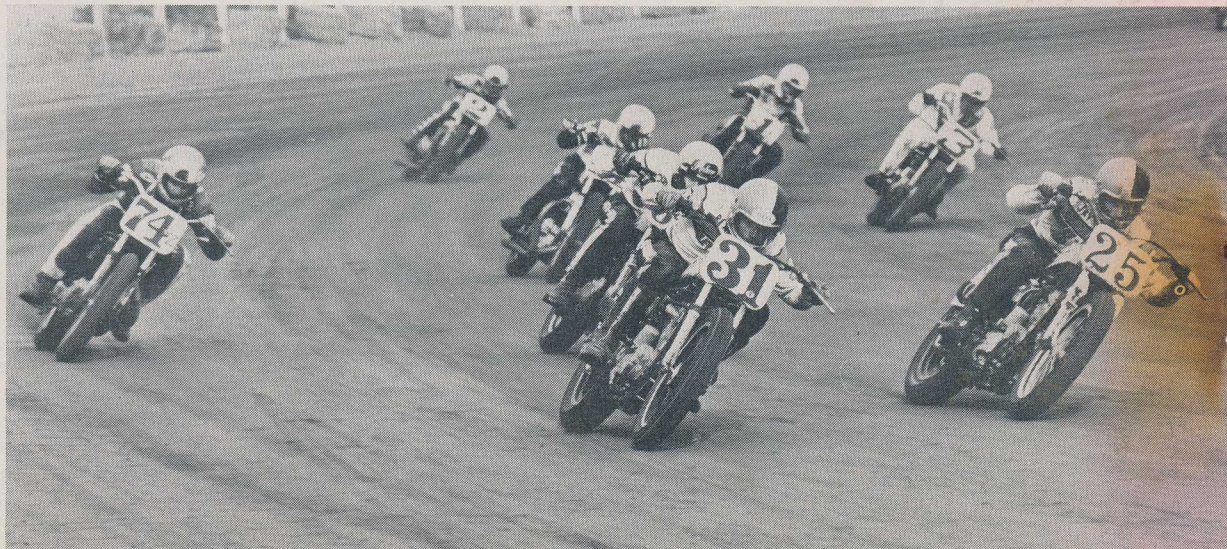


After a brilliant come-from-behind ride at Indy, Kenny Roberts (on Skip Aksland's borrowed Yamaha) broke his steel skid shoe in half. Here he looks down at it on the Indy mile straight.



"Freight-training" at the Indy Mile! Texan Mike Kidd leads eventual winner Springsteen (they swapped places) and third place man Kenny Roberts. This was the Sunday afternoon Indy Mile.

Close quarters at San Jose as Springsteen (25) holds the inside line over Beauchamp (31), Boody (behind Rex), Jorgensen (behind Boody), Steve Eklund (74Z), Gene Romero (3), Gary Scott (1) and Kenny Roberts (2).



Since last year, the incredible four-cylinder Yamaha dirt track machines have been banned, but Indy was still expected to be a very good and surprising motorcycle race.

Part of the lure and aura of Indy has to be the fair itself. As American as anything could be, the Indiana State Fair is reputed to be *the best* of all state fairs. That's most likely true. The fair-going fans testify to that, and the statistics back it up.

For the first time in history of the American Motorcycle Association, two National races were held on the same race track within a 24-hour period. The Indy fairgrounds mile oval is best known as a night race track. No one was sure just how good a racing surface would develop for the daytime event.

On Saturday night, the motorcycles followed the trotting races onto the track. There was barely time for a clean-up crew to go around the oval,



sweeping up lingering traces of the horses before the bikes began practice. Once racing got underway, it was soon evident that Jay Springsteen and a personable Texan named Mike Kidd were to be the chief protagonists of the evening.

Sure enough, the two friendly rivals diced right down to the wire in the Saturday night National, with Kidd taking the win by about half a bike length. Springsteen was second. Both rode potent 750 Harley-Davidsons; Springsteen his factory version and Kidd on a high-horsepower model built by racer Mert Lawwill.

The next day, the same two riders went at it again, only this time the finishing positions were reversed. Springsteen took the win, by a little more decisive distance over Kidd. Making a fine effort was Kenny Roberts, who was riding a borrowed

motorcycle after a local rider had claimed his works Yamaha Saturday night.

Roberts swapped bikes with protege Skip Aksland and worked his way up to finish third in the 25-lap National. It was an especially dedicated ride since the Yamaha was down on horsepower from the Harley-Davidson vee-twins.

Springsteen's successful weekend moved him up from third in the points standings (21 points behind leader Scott) into a tie for second, only six points behind. He was tied with Roberts, with 210 points, compared to Scott's 216.

Scott and Roberts came to a stand-off in Indianapolis. Each picked up 21 points, while Springsteen was racking up 36. Scott finished fourth on Saturday night and on Sunday, finished fifth despite crashing early in the race. The race was stopped and Scott was forced to start at the very back of the 20-man field.

Roberts was seventh on Saturday night, then had to borrow a bike from Aksland after Indianapolis privateer Sam Ingram fronted for a local dealer and put up \$3500 to claim Roberts' engine and transmission. The bike that he rode on Sunday was down on horsepower from his other bike, but for some reason, it worked better on the daytime track, and Roberts hooked it all up for a fine third place finish. He might have challenged Kidd and Springsteen for the lead positions if he hadn't broken his steel skid shoe in half just a few laps from the finish.

The next event on the Camel Pro schedule was a quarter-mile shorttrack in Talladega, Alabama. The win in that event went to Bultaco ace Terry Poovey, one of a crop of strong Texas short-track specialists. Of the top three contenders, Springsteen chalked up the best performance, putting the new but very successful 360cc two-stroke Harley-Davidson racer into fourth place. That finish was good for 11 valuable points, somewhat better than Scott, who was seventh for eight points and Roberts who had a hard time of it, finishing 12th, for only three points.

Following Talladega, the circuit moved north to Syracuse, New York, for another of the sensational mile races. Racing fans who have never witnessed the spectacle of the mile cannot comprehend what a sight it is . . . 20 motorcycles roaring into the first turn at more than 100 mph, bumping handlebars, completely sideways, jockeying for position. It's an incredible sight, and according to the riders, the ultimate in motorcycle racing. We won't dispute that for an instant!

At Syracuse, another state fairgrounds oval, Jay Springsteen proved once and for all that he intended taking Number One away from rival Gary

Scott. 19-year-old Jay came out on top of a race-long duel with Harley-Davidson teammate Rex Beauchamp. The finish was so close that Beauchamp protested the finish, claiming that he had been ahead at the line, not Springsteen.

But officials kept to their initial decision, giving the win, and the Camel Pro Series points lead, to Springsteen. By winning the Pepsi-Cola Gold Cup National at Syracuse, Jay Springsteen became the only four-time National winner of the season.

Now, four National races in one season is a pretty good performance, but young Springsteen wasn't to stop there.

At Syracuse, Gary Scott filed a protest against Kenny Roberts, claiming that he was shoved off the 'groove' and lost several positions. That protest was also disallowed.

Syracuse was the crucial race for every rider except Springsteen, Scott and Roberts. After that race, only those three had any chance of taking the Championship.

The stage was set for a fast and furious conclusion to a long, hard season of racing.

A week later, Springsteen picked up a little breathing room in his GN points lead (but not enough to relax) with his second consecutive and fifth win of the season in a half-mile National at Toledo, Ohio. 'Springer' added a precious four points to his lead, as Gary Scott was second.

Both Springsteen and Scott pulled away from Roberts, who could only manage a ninth place finish at Toledo. He thus fell 15 points behind second man Scott.

Springsteen dominated Toledo, but later played down the importance of the pressures of the ultra-close battle for the National Championship. "I race for fun," he said, "and this is fun. If I can miss Riverside and still win the championship, that's fine, but I'm not going to be all upset about it if it doesn't happen. All I can say is that we'll be at San Jose and Ascot, and we'll be having fun."

That pretty well sums up Jay Springsteen's attitude towards racing and life in general.

Toledo was not fun for Texan Mike Kidd, though. The night before the race, his van was *stolen* from in front of a local motel. Gone were Kidd's leathers, helmet, boots, tools and all his other equipment, not to mention his Harley-Davidson flattrack machine and a 360cc Bultaco Astro shorttracker.

Kidd had to borrow a complete rig, and ended up with Harley teamster Greg Sassaman's spare motorcycle, an old set of Rex Beauchamp's leathers, a helmet from somebody else, boots from another corner of the pits and a

steel shoe from yet another source. Despite the hassle and ill-fitting equipment, the good natured Texan went out and qualified fifth-fastest, made it into the National final, but only managed a 14th place finish.

14th is last place in a half-mile race. Kidd couldn't even get started, as the magneto went out on the borrowed Harley-Davidson.

The next stop on the circuit was San Jose, California, another miler. With only three races remaining on the schedule, the contest was still wide open between the three rivals.

Springsteen felt he *had* to do well at San Jose, because he knew that he was going to be handicapped the following week.

Even though he was leading the National points standings and is certainly one of the very finest dirt track racers in the country, Jay is not licensed as an Expert on 750cc road racing machinery. So he knew he was going to have to sit out the next-to-last race at Riverside and it was almost definite that both Roberts and Scott would score points in the pavement race.

The San Jose Mile, traditionally as super a race as Indy, was no exception this time. At the finish of the 25-lapper, you could have thrown a blanket over the top finishers. Springsteen led most the way, slipped as far back as eighth at one point, regained the lead, slipped to fifth a couple of laps from the finish and still got back in front in time for the checkered flag.

It was his sixth National win of the season, and gave him a cushion to rest on as he sat out the Riverside road race.

Scott, runner-up in points, was also runner-up at San Jose. Roberts finished fifth and fell 39 points behind the leader, with only two races and 40 points remaining. To regain his number one title, Roberts would have to win both Nationals and neither Scott nor Springsteen could score any points. It was an unlikely position for Roberts, but he never gave up.

More drama than just the racing took place at San Jose, as Gary Scott took out his anger and frustrations on Bill Werner, his former (Springsteen's present) Harley mechanic. Scott allegedly caught Werner in the restroom and the result was 12 stitches in Werner's jaw. The pressures and frustrations of the long hard season were telling on Scott.

THE TIRES MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

One significant feature at San Jose was an adequate supply of the new Goodyear DT II racing tire, built especially for the excessive high speed demands of mile racing. Heretofore, because of a tire strike at the Goodyear factory, there haven't been enough of

the road racing tire based DT to go around. Those riders who had tried them did not hesitate to say in most emphatic terms that they were greatly superior to anything else and that they made a radical difference on the track.

That was obvious at San Jose, as just about everyone had the tires fitted. No less than 24 riders qualified at speeds below the old track record.

A San Jose heroine was Miss Diane Cox, of Salem, Oregon. Diane, the first-ever lady AMA Class C Expert, has come close several times to doing well, but has always been hampered by inferior equipment. But this time, she borrowed Gary Scott's spare Harley-Davidson and doggone nearly won the Expert Trophy Final. She finished fifth in her heat race, one position away from a direct transfer to the National. She then went to the semifinal where she again missed qualifying for the National by a matter of inches, finishing third.

Thus relegated to the Expert Trophy Final (for riders who failed to make it into the National) Ms. Cox got a bad start, fought through traffic to claim second, then crashed at 100 miles per hour on the final turn of the last lap while challenging Pee Wee Gleason for the lead. She was unhurt and walked off the track to a standing ovation, having demonstrated her ability in her first appearance on a really competitive motorcycle.

Kenny Roberts was the odds-on favorite to win the Mulholland Shock Absorber Challenge Cup at Riverside International Raceway the week following San Jose. Perhaps the USA's premier road racer, Roberts desperately needed the points from Riverside.

When Steve Baker, the rider most likely to oust Roberts from the Riverside winner's circle, fell during a heat race on Saturday and injured his leg, Roberts was all but in for the National.

The Mulholland race was a first for Riverside, site of SoCal club road races for years. This was the first National road race there. The date was that of the old Champion Spark Plug Classic at Ontario. Champion moved their sponsorship to Laguna Seca and promoters Tripe-Cox & Associates looked around for a new sponsor for Riverside. They found it in Mulholland, manufacturer and distributor of suspension components for both motorcycles and cars.

With Springsteen sitting on the pit wall watching the races, Gary Scott was also trying extra hard at Riverside. Not known as an exceptional road racer, Scott has nevertheless proved his abilities on asphalt in previous years, on a private Yamaha as a Novice and Junior, and on a factory Triumph as an Expert.

Scott frankly didn't have great expectations of beating Roberts on the very fast Riverside circuit. But he gave

it the old college try and moved up from a 40th starting position to finish 11th on a private Yamaha; good for four extremely valuable Grand National points.

Roberts led the Riverside race wire-to-wire, with a group of road race specialists finishing in the top positions behind him. Second was Japanese rider Takazumi Katayama, followed by Pat Evans, Randy Cleek (also a very capable dirt track racer) and Ron Pierce.

With only the Ascot half-mile National remaining, there was a hell of a lot of pressure on the three riders. Roberts needed a miracle to pull it off, but anything can happen at Ascot.

Both Roberts and Scott have won their share of races at the famed Gardena, California oval, as both served their Novice and Junior apprenticeships there. They were arch rivals in those days, and nothing has changed except the numbers on the front of the motorcycles, the color of the leathers, and the stakes at hand.

FINAL 1976 CAMEL PRO SERIES STANDINGS

1. Jay Springsteen (301 pts.)
2. Gary Scott (280 pts.)
3. Kenny Roberts (265 pts.)
4. Steve Eklund (141 pts.)
5. Randy Cleek (130 pts.)
6. Ted Boody (128 pts.)
7. Rex Beauchamp (125 pts.)
8. Hank Scott (118 pts.)
9. Rick Hocking (96 pts.)
10. Gene Romero (93 pts.)
11. Mike Kidd (88 pts.)
12. Skip Aksland (78 pts.)
13. Corky Keener (76 pts.)
14. Alex Jorgensen (53 pts.)
15. Chuck Joyner (52 pts.)
16. Terry Poovey (49 pts.)
17. Bill Eves (48 pts.)
17. Steve Morehead (48 pts.)
19. Greg Sassaman (41 pts.)
20. Steve Baker (40 pts.)

FINAL MANUFACTURER STANDINGS

1. Yamaha (425 pts.)
2. Harley-Davidson (358 pts.)
3. Norton-Triumph (135 pts.)
4. Bultaco (91 pts.)
5. Kawasaki (79 pts.)
6. BSA (23 pts.)
7. Husqvarna (20 pts.)
8. Suzuki (13 pts.)

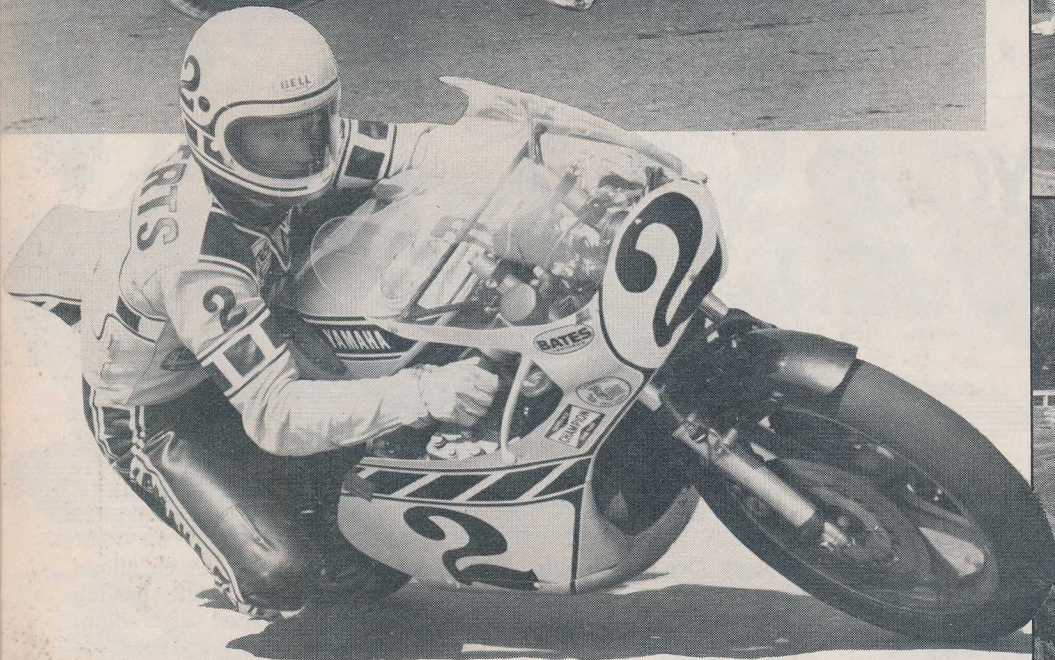
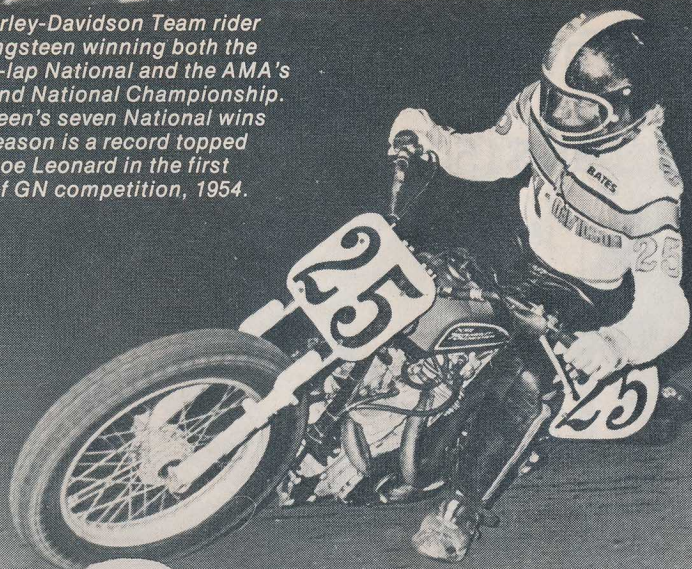
This was it . . . Ascot was a go-for-broke motorcycle race.

Jay Springsteen was the one that almost broke! During practice, Jay's teammate, Rex Beauchamp, slid down and 'Springer' hit him, also going down. He dislocated his finger but resolved not to let the minor but painful injury slow him down any.

Right off the bat, once the racing got underway, Springsteen knocked Roberts out of the running simply by qualifying for the National. Just making the main gave him one point, which put

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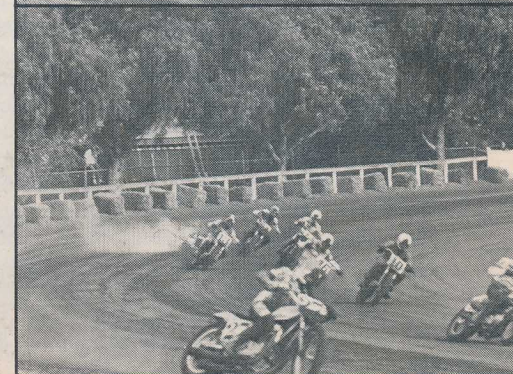
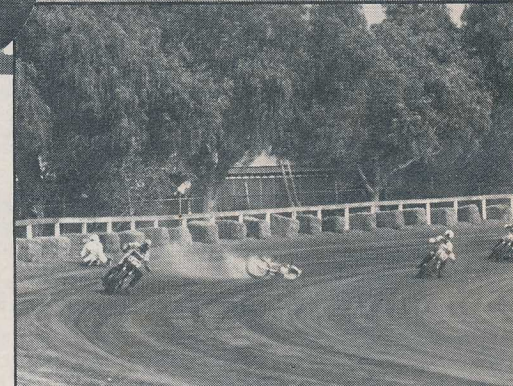
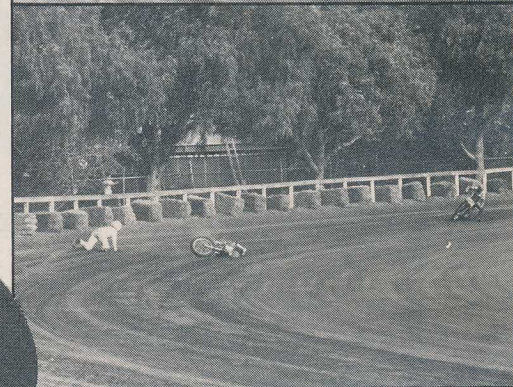
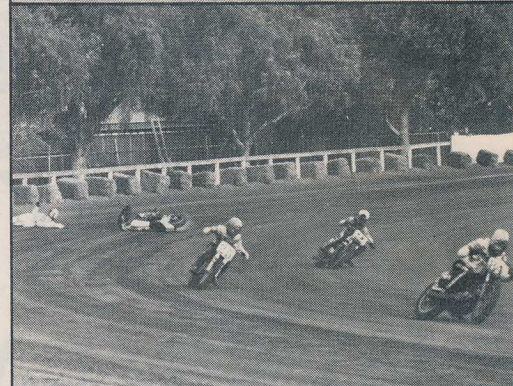
AMF/Harley-Davidson Team rider Jay Springsteen winning both the Ascot 20-lap National and the AMA's 1976 Grand National Championship. Springsteen's seven National wins for the season is a record topped only by Joe Leonard in the first season of GN competition, 1954.



Kenny Roberts easily won the Mulholland Shock Absorber Challenge Cup Road Race National at Riverside, to keep himself in the battle for National Number One going into the Ascot season finale.

Defending Grand National Champion Gary Scott gives a few tips to Diane Cox, the AMA's first lady Expert. Diane borrowed Gary's spare Harley-Davidson at San Jose and put in her best National performance to date.

In this frightening motor-drive sequence by Pop Cycle's Photo Director Steve Reyes, Gene Romero goes down and is narrowly missed by Jay Springsteen. As the pack goes by, Romero slides harmlessly out of the way. In photo #3 he starts crawling towards the bike but sees Skip Aksland coming straight towards him. In the next photo, Aksland has just clipped Romero's bike (Gene is still scrambling out of the way). In the final shot, more riders squeeze past, as Romero has gone over the haybales.



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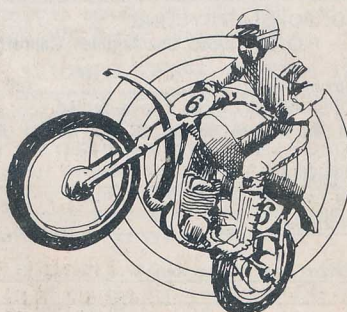
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GRAND NATIONAL

Roberts right out of the running.

That left only Gary Scott. Scott, the privateer story of the '76 season, practiced on a Triumph he had built especially for Ascot, but decided at the last moment to go with a Harley-Davidson. Despite the fact that he was mathematically in with a good chance, it looked grim for Scott, as Springsteen only had to finish seventh or better, even if Scott won the race.

You would expect that Springsteen would have exercised a good bit of caution under the circumstances.

But apparently he doesn't know the meaning of the word, for as soon as the race started, Springsteen stuck it right out in front.

Winning Ascot would only bring him about \$4000, yet the number one plate can mean as much as \$100,000. But to Jay Springsteen a race is a race, and races are meant to be run. Damn the torpedoes and full speed ahead!

Against possibilities (there were rumblings) of "overly aggressive passing and riding techniques," the AMA stationed officials all over the race track, specifically to watch for instances of 'dirty' riding.

But there was no opportunity for any of that. Springsteen was running out in front, while Scott was back in third. Ascot favorite Alex Jorgensen, on the immaculate Ron Woods Norton, eased into second and then moved up on Springsteen. The two engaged in a ferocious duel for the lead, and at one point (lap 16) 'Jorgy' did get by to lead the race. But two laps later, Springsteen stormed back around with a heart-stopping pass on the outside and went on to win both the Ascot National and the lucrative Camel Pro Series Championship.

Springsteen's win at Ascot was his seventh of the year, the most National wins registered in a single season by any competitor since Jor Leonard notched eight wins during the first official AMA Grand National season in 1954.

"I didn't come here to finish second," explained an elated Springsteen after the race. "I knew that if I fell, I could have lost number one, but the only way that racing is fun is when you race to win—and *that* was fun!"

Scott thus finished second in the AMA Grand National standings for the fourth time in his five-year Expert career. Springsteen's winning margin was 301 to 280 points. Roberts claimed third in the final standings with 265 points. Rookie of the Year Steve Eklund, of San Jose, California, placed fourth to complete an impressive first season which included three National victories.