

# Gerard Rond - On His Way To A World Title?

It wasn't until mid-way through the 1977 season that Grand Prix moto-cross observers really started to take notice of Gerard Rond - the young Dutchman now in with a very solid chance of finally prising the World 125cc Championship title out of the clutches of Gaston Rahier.

At the beginning of that year, Gerard had just celebrated the winning of the Dutch National 250cc Championship but he was still virtually an "unknown" away from his home territory. He had done half a dozen 250cc Grands Prix but, until the final round in Sweden, never featured high in the results. Indeed, he had so much bad luck that season that he rarely even made the finishers list, let alone the leader board! Sweden, however, saw the young Dutchman take sixth place points and it was this effort, plus the 250cc National win, that prompted Yamaha to choose Rond to spearhead their renewed assault on the 125cc class. In America Yamaha had scored some startling, and at first unexpected successes, with young riders, relatively inexperienced in the "big-time". Riders like Bob Hannah and Broc Glover who have brought the American titles to Yamaha for the past two years.

Now, with Rond, they were to try the same tactic on the Grand Prix scene in Europe.

Suzuki's Gaston Rahier had dominated the 125cc class almost since its inception a few years ago and, as predicted by most fans, he

started the 1977 season off in his usual winning way.

Suddenly, at the fourth 125cc GP of the year, over a hard, fast course in Denmark, Gaston suffered his first defeat. And the victor was none other than newcomer, Gerard Rond!

Gaston did suffer some machine problems in Denmark so people waited until the next race in Poland before deciding whether or not Rond's win had been a fluke. The answer soon came. Rond once again defeated Rahier and all of a sudden the World 125cc Championship became a competition rather than a Rahier walk-over.

This year, Gerard is locked into a top-of-the-table battle with Rahier and his team-mate Akira Watanabe. He started the 1978 season with a second place behind Rahier in Austria, broke down in one moto to register a disappointing sixth in Italy but then exploded to absolute domination of the Belgian and Dutch Grands Prix...winning all four motos at the two Benelux races!

Even though he staved off Rond's challenge in 1977, Rahier must be more than a little worried about his chances in 1978!

Still only 21 years old, Rond began riding in 1972 on a 50cc machine built by his father. He graduated to a 125 the next year (like the 50, it was called a Rond-Sachs) and in his second season of racing took second place in the Dutch National 125cc class.

His third year saw him National Champion in both 125cc and 50cc categories and with that came a switch to Yamaha for the 1975 season. The switch brought with it his first National 250cc title but three mechanical breakdowns robbed him of a repeat win in the 125cc class by a handful of points.

1976 was the start of bigger things for the teenager from Bennekom, Holland. With three National Championships to his credit, he gained support from the Dutch Yamaha importer, I.M.N. This support, as well as being aimed at another National 250cc title, included racing in the World 250cc Championship.

Though bad luck kept him out of the results in most GP events, Gerard did take another National title and also rode on the Dutch squad in both Trophee and Moto Cross Des Nations.

For 1977 he aimed at another year of support from I.M.N. on production machines in the World 250cc Championships but at the beginning of the year, all that changed.

Yamaha decided to contest the World 125cc Championships with water-cooled machines that had already shown potential in the States and I.M.N. were asked to switch their young rider to the smaller category.

Only eight of the water-cooled racers had at that time been built but a season of serious testing in America had proved that they

were likely to be competitive. American rules allow any rider in a race to "claim" another machine and pay 2000 dollars to purchase it. The owner has no option but to turn the bike over to the purchaser...otherwise he falls foul of the American federation and is penalised by loss of his racing licence, or other drastic punishment!

The idea is that it keeps expensive factory development "specials" out of US racing and gives the private rider a better chance. In practice, most of the factory riders are better than their "private" rivals and can beat them even on regular production machinery but, in Yamaha's case, the AMA rule worked. No-one in Japan wanted to take the chance of being forced to sell one of the "water-pumpers" to some unknown rider who probably wouldn't be able to do it justice anyway.

Therefore, America's loss became Europe's gain. The water-cooled machines came to Europe and now the World 125cc Championship has taken on new dimensions. No longer is it a "one-factory" class. Though Rahier is still very much at the top of the tree, even he will admit that he wouldn't put more than an even-money bet on retaining his title in the face of Gerard Rond's 1978 onslaught!

And, just as a post-script to this.... Yamaha riders, Bob Hannah and Broc Glover are still dominating the American 125cc scene, even without the aid of a water-cooled engine!

COLOUR PHOTOGRAPH BY HARRY VAN HEMMEN.

## World Championship Update

(CONTINUED)

### ITALY, APRIL 16.

1, G. Rahier (Suzuki), 2, A. Watanabe (Suzuki), 3, C. Maddi (Beta).

4, M. Rinaldi (TGM), 5, I. Alborghetti (Aprilla), 6, G. Rond (Yamaha).

**First Moto Placings:** Rahier, Rond, Watanabe, Alborghetti, Maddi, S. Lerner (KTM).

**Second Moto Placings:** Watanabe, Rahier, Rinaldi, Maddi, A. Massant (Honda), Lerner.

### BELGIUM, APRIL 23:

1 G. Rond (Yamaha), 2, G. Rahier (Suzuki), 3 A. Watanabe (Suzuki), 4, A. Massant (Honda), 5, M. Auttio (Suzuki), 6, G. Liljegren (KTM).

**First Moto Placings:** Rond, Rahier, Watanabe, Massant, Auttio, Liljegren.

**Second Moto Placings:** Rond, Rahier, Watanabe, Auttio, Massant, Liljegren.

### HOLLAND, APRIL 30.

1, Gerard Rond (Yamaha), 2, Akira Watanabe (Suzuki), 3, Gaston Rahier (Suzuki), 4, Gote Liljegren (KTM), 5, Peter Groeneveld (Suzuki), 6, Andre Massant (Honda).

**First Moto Placings:** 1, Rond, 2, Watanabe, 3, Rahier, 4, Massant, 5, Matti Autio (Suzuki), 6, Dinant Zijlstra (Kawasaki).

**Second Moto Placings:** 1, Rond, 2, Watanabe, 3, Liljegren, 4, Yuri Khudiakov (CZ), 5, Groeneveld, 6, Kenk van Mierlo (Kawasaki).

### FRANCE, MAY 7.

1 Gaston Rahier (Suzuki), 2, Akira Watanabe (Suzuki), 3, Siegfried Lerner (KTM), 4, Corrado Maddi (Beta), 5, Ivan Alborghetti (Aprilla), 6, Gerard Rond (Yamaha).

**First Moto Placings:** 1 Rahier, 2 Watanabe, 3 Lerner, 4 Maddi, 5 Alborghetti, 6 Pauli Pippola (Husqvarna).

**Second Moto Placings:** 1 Rahier, 2 Watanabe, 3 Rond, 4 Lerner, 5 Alborghetti, 6 Maddi.

**WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP POINTS (to MAY 20).** 1 Gaston Rahier (Suzuki), 121pts, 2, Akira Watanabe (Suzuki), 113, 3, Gerard Rond (Yamaha), 106, 4, Siegfried Lerner (KTM), 48, 5, Andre Massant, and Corrado Maddi, 37.

