

6 Star Riders

500cc Road Racing

Most famous of the host of star riders who have competed successfully on Yamaha machines is American Kenny Roberts, winner of motor-cycle sport's most prestigious title, the 500cc Road Racing World Championship three years in succession – 1978, 1979 and 1980. Californian-born Kenny won his first major race for Yamaha in 1972 and eleven years, and several million dollars, later he led the Yamaha team into the 1983 season and was soon locked in a battle with Honda's Freddie Spencer, a fellow American, in an effort to regain that 500cc title.

In fact Roberts, in six years in the incredibly competitive world of 500cc racing has never finished outside the first three places. During this spell, he has won virtually every major race including America's prestigious, but non-championship, Daytona 200, a race which Yamaha have dominated in recent years winning twelve times in succession!

Barry Sheene switched from Suzuki to Yamaha for the 1981 and 1982 seasons, but Roberts' team-mate for 1983 was fellow American, Eddie Lawson, who made his name in the States riding for the rival Kawasaki factory.

Other top line Yamaha riders in the 500cc

class include England's popular Steve Parrish and Frenchman Marc Fontan, but while Yamaha have always built very competitive factory machines for the 500cc class their 'over the counter' racers, sold to private owners, have never matched the RG500 Suzukis and in 1983 were out-classed by the new RS500 Hondas too.

250cc Road Racing

It is a very different story in the fiercely competitive world of 250cc Grand Prix racing. For there the TZ250 Yamaha remains the most popular machine. Frenchman Jean-Louis Tournadre won the World Championship in 1982 on a stock production model and in 1983 it was the talented Venezuelan, Carlos Lavado, who set the pace with a host of other Yamaha riders snapping at his heels. Prominent among them were England's Alan Carter, who scored a brilliant win at the French Grand Prix at Le Mans when he rode through the field after a slow start, German Martin Wimmer, Swiss Jacques Cornu and French veteran Christian Sarron.

American superstar Kenny Roberts on his 500cc Yamaha during the 1983 French Grand Prix at Le Mans.





Sidecar Road Racing

Strangely, Yamaha-engined outfits continue to dominate sidecar racing despite the eclipse of the TZ500 Yamaha in the 500cc solo class. Machines powered by Yamaha engines have monopolised the top places in the Grands Prix in recent years with star riders Rolf Biland of Switzerland, Werner Schwarzel of Germany, Egbert Streuer of Holland, Alain Michel of France and Derek Jones of England all relying on Yamaha power for their successes. The main reason for this loyalty to the Yamaha engine is that the sidecar boys fit the more highly tuned barrels from the TZ250 units to boost their power. This is something the solo riders cannot do successfully because, while it increases the power, it also

Newboy Eddie Lawson, signed for the 1983 season to support fellow American Kenny Roberts, in action during the South African Grand Prix.

narrows the power-band and makes the machine very difficult to control without spinning the rear wheel to keep the revs up and the engine in the power band.

Moto Cross

Yamaha involvement in moto cross goes back a long way and although the factory only spend a fraction of the money on the sport that Honda do, Yamaha are currently bidding for both 250cc and 500cc World Championship honours.



Britain's top Yamaha moto crosser, Neil Hudson, slides into a corner. He won the 250cc world title in 1981 – then moved up for a crack at the 500cc crown.

England's Neil Hudson won the 250cc crown for Yamaha in 1981 before moving up into the 500cc class, and American Danny La Porte surprised many when he retained the title for Yamaha in 1982. Poor results in the early rounds of the 1983 contest dropped the American well behind Belgian Georges Jobe (Suzuki) but, as he proved at the British Grand Prix at Hawkstone Park when he tied with Jobe for first place (both scoring a win and a second place in the two races), he is still a top contender.

Finland's Heikki Mikkola was a dominant figure for Yamaha in the 500cc class in the

'seventies and now former 250cc World Champion, Hakan Carlqvist, is Yamaha's leading challenger in the big class supported by Neil Hudson. Carlqvist, from Sweden, has always been among the fastest riders in the half-litre division, but injury and inconsistency robbed him of possible honours in 1981 and again in 1982. But in 1983 he really got his act together to win the title.

Sidecar Moto Cross

In the rough tough world of sidecar moto cross racing in which the rival factories take very little





above: *Swift Swede Hakan Carlqvist, Yamaha's main challenger for 500cc moto cross honours.*

left: *American Danny La Porte, surprise winner of the 250cc moto cross World Championship in 1982.*

interest, leaving it to the riders to select and prepare their own machines, the Yamaha engine reigns supreme – just as it does in sidecar road racing.

But while the road racers favour the 72500 two-stroke engine the sidecar moto crossers prefer the twin-cylinder, four-stroke roadster engine, usually enlarged to around 850cc. These engines have proved to be remarkably robust, despite the super-tuning that goes into them,

stressing them way beyond anything their designers in Japan envisaged!

Top riders in this, the most physically demanding branch of all motor-cycle sport, are the Swiss pair Emil Bollhalder and Kurt Buesser who won the World Championship in 1982. They looked set for a successful defence when they led the 1983 championship midway through the season from a pack of Yamaha-powered rivals which included England's leading sidecar moto cross contenders Terry Good, Doug Fox and Paul Millard.

Those then are today's star riders of Yamaha machines – some of them factory riders, others professionals who simply choose the best machine for the job. Add to them the great names from the past who achieved major successes on Yamaha machines and you begin to grasp the magnitude of the Japanese factory's sporting achievements. Those names include Giacomo Agostini, Jarno Saarinen, Phil Read, Bill Ivy, Johnny Cecotto, Rod Gould, Kent Andersson, Jon Ekerold, Takazumi Katayama, George O'Dell, Steve Baker, Dieter Braun, Jock Taylor and Heikki Mikkola. All won World Championships riding Yamaha machines and it is worth repeating that Yamaha have won more road-racing World Championship Grands Prix and World Championships than any other make.