

THE B

There have been many candidates for the title of 'world's most fearsome motorcycle' but few can have been more deserving of this somewhat dubious honour than the beast which American Champion, Kenny Roberts, wheeled out for the US National Championship race on the one-mile dirt oval at Indianapolis in August 1975.

At that point in the 1975 season Roberts was fighting what was eventually to be a losing battle to keep his crown. Harley Davidson had developed a pure racing vee-twin engine for the dirt-tracks while Yamaha were forced to persevere with a stretched out version of the six-year old 650cc single-cam twin. For a couple of years the power units had been surprisingly equal. But Harley were able to continue development of their racing engine while the Yamaha roadster-based power unit was running out of both horsepower and reliability, having been stretched almost to the limit.

In a desperate bid to keep Roberts' title hopes alive, Yamaha race chief, former World 250cc Road Race Champion, Kel Carruthers, wheeled out his 'secret weapon'....nothing less than a 120bhp 750cc road racing engine crammed into an ultra-lightweight dirt-track frame designed by Californian chassis wizard, Doug Schwerma!

The whole package weighed less than 270lbs, giving the machine a power-to-weight ratio even more awesome than a fuel dragster!

Not only that, Roberts was going to have to convert all that horsepower into traction via a loose-surfaced dirt-track!

Was it a case of desperate 'overkill' or could the machine vanquish the Harleys?

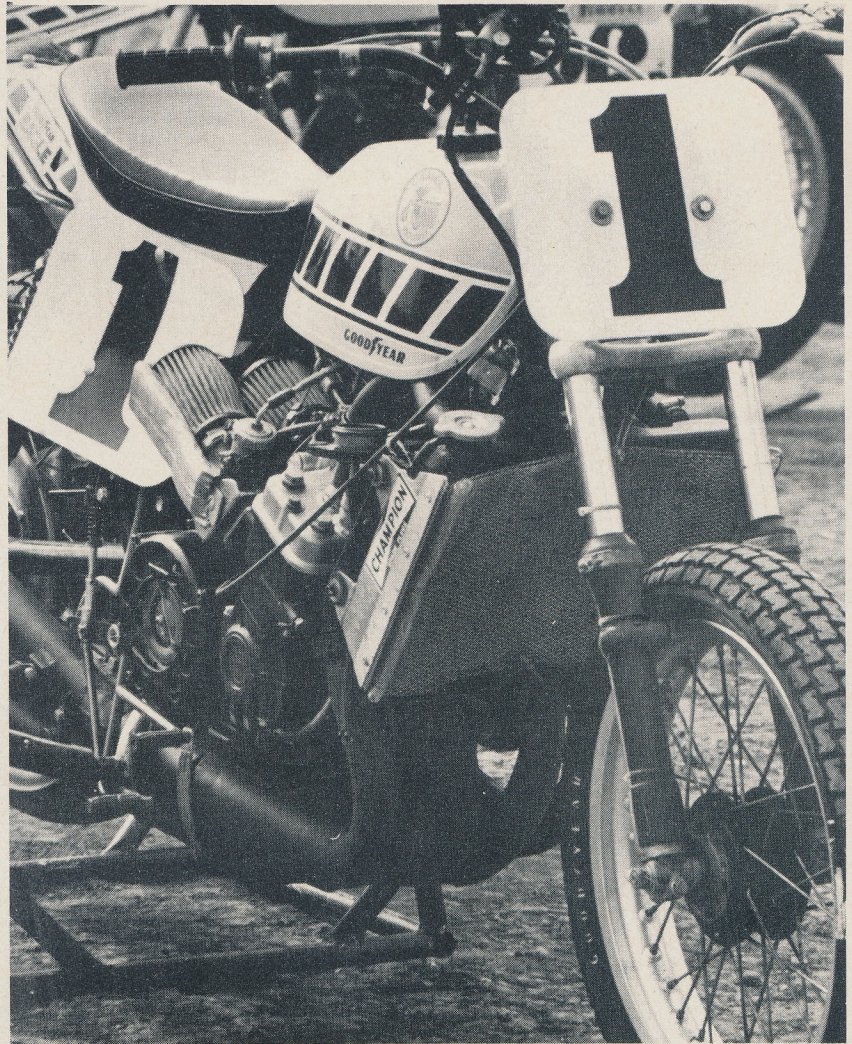
The answer came on the final lap of the Indianapolis Mile! Roberts had just scraped into the main event via a lowly qualifying spot in his heat race and started poorly in the big one.

He inched his way past the backmarkers and was in midfield with three laps to go. Meanwhile, Harley aces, Jay Springsteen and Corky Keener, were riding side by side at the head of the field, confident that victory would go to one or the other.

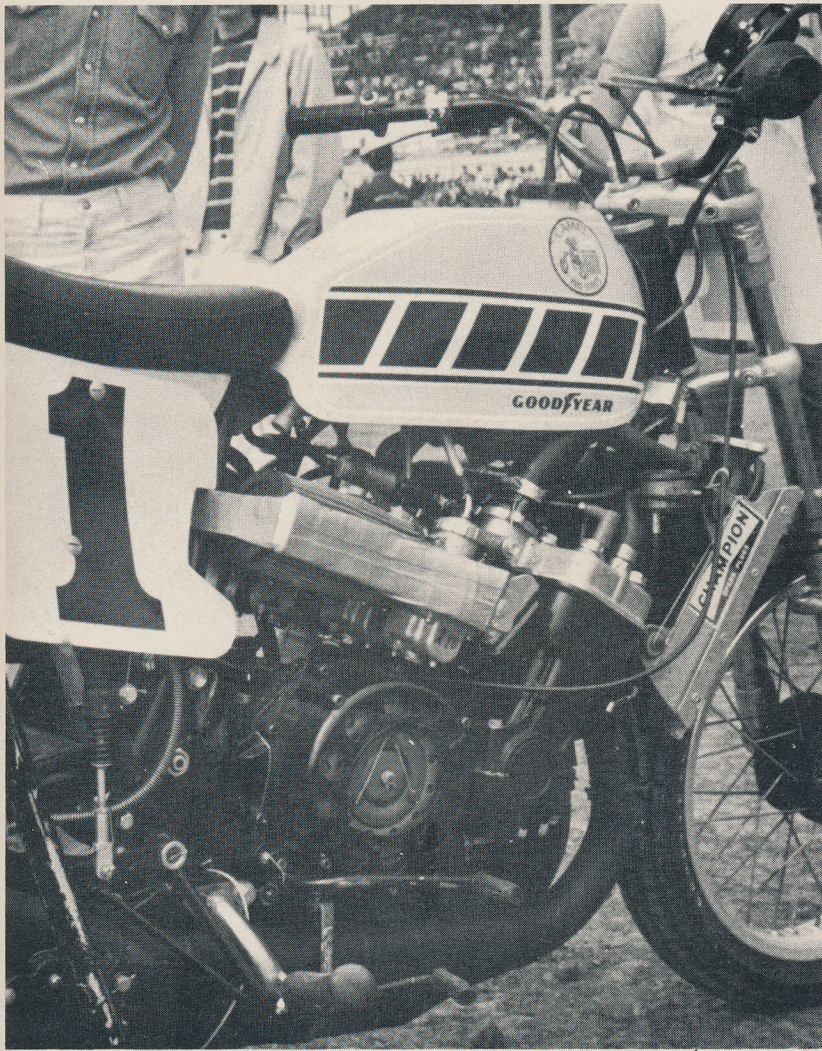
Then Roberts began an incredibly courageous final spurt, screwing every ounce of courage and determination into a ride that he will probably never need, or even be able, to repeat again.

To the roars of the crowd, but unknown to the leading pair, he narrowed the gap down until, in the final lap of the oval, he was about a dozen machine's lengths behind on the back straight. Even the Harley pit crew had written Roberts' chances off and had not even bothered to signal his presence to their leading riders.

They had underestimated the tough little Californian. He wrestled the beast around the final turn, sliding way out into the deep, loose dirt at the edge of the track. This brought him within five lengths of the leaders.



EAST!



Then, still sliding sideways but with both feet firmly on the footrests, he unleashed the awesome power of the TZ750. 'The Beast' wriggled, snaked, shook its head and then finally straightened out to shoot like a bullet down the final straight, passing both Harley riders on the finish line to win! An incredible performance but one which took literally everything out of its rider.

'I don't care if I never ride that thing again' said a shaken, palefaced Roberts. 'It scares me!' And Kenny Roberts is not a man to scare easily!

Kenny did, in fact, ride 'The Beast' again. Still throwing all caution to the winds he straddled the monster for another mile race at San Jose in California. The track there packs down into a hard clay surface giving almost as much traction as asphalt. But get off the groove where the mass of bikes run and it's loose, broken dirt offering no traction at all.

Several other American stars were also trying to tame 'The Beast'. Rick Hocking, Steve Baker, Randy Cleek and Skip Aksland were all on the TZ750 dirt-trackers but not even these stars could cope with the machine anywhere near as well as Roberts.

Driven by his obsessive desire to retain his National Championship, Kenny had Kel Carruthers fit the bike with a 'sticky' road racing rain tire at the rear and wrestled the bike to a spectacular win in his heat race.

It was obvious, however, that the tire would not last the 25 mile main event.

So it was time for one final, desperate gamble. Off came the treaded rain tire...and on went a completely smooth, road racing 'slick' tire, offering an ever stickier rubber compound than before.

Roberts was aiming to use the grip of the 'slick' and the power of the TZ750 to build up so big a lead early on that he could not be caught as the tire wore out in the later stages.

The gamble didn't pay off. The tire wore out even quicker than estimated, Kenny spent most of the race wrestling the bike out in the loose dirt, up against the rails at over 120mph. And Gary Scott took away the Championship.

'Well, at least I sure gave it a good try' was Roberts' reaction after the race...and everyone of the 20,000 spectators agreed fervently with him.

The Yamaha TZ750 dirt-trackers had provided some of the most electrifying moments ever witnessed by American dirt-track fans. The American Motorcycle Association, however, were worried by what might happen if lesser riders than Kenny Roberts tried to cope with such machines. Their reaction was to place a ban on anything other than twin-cylinder power units for dirt-track racing.

And not even Kenny Roberts, only man ever to tame 'The Beast', really felt like arguing with their decision!