

# Don Vesco



## 281.49 mph... Just add wings

*On a quiet day in October on the snow white salt flats of Bonneville, Utah, likeable Don Vesco of El Cajon, California, became motorcycling's king of speed in a Yamaha-powered Streamliner.*

The bespectacled tuner and former winner of the Daytona classic, broke the late Cal Rayborn's four-year-old world speed motorcycle record. His **mean speed of 281.49 mph (456.38 Kph)** broke the previous record of 265.49 mph even though his 1400cc "cigar" was only running on seven cylinders.

If it hadn't been for the troublesome rubber belts that connected the crankshaft of the two TZ700 engines, Vesco just might have surpassed his personal goal of 300 mph. It was dusk on the salt flats when Vesco broke the record and conditions were ideal - warm and still. Using a four mile run-in Vesco streamed through the timed flying start in only 12 seconds, clocking 281.030 mph.

"The first three miles were really bumpy," Vesco said. "It was revving about 9,700 as I hit the trap and close to 10,000 coming out. I switched the engine off and pulled the clutch in and she started to wobble and shimmy. Then I put the parachute out and it wobbled some more but stayed on its wheels."

After that first run, Vesco's crew changed the cooling water in the header tanks, changed the belts and refueled the streamliner. Thirty-five minutes later Vesco was ready for the crucial return run from which his average speed would be calculated.

"I had one hand on the parachute release as I went through the trap," Vesco recalled. "It's the only safety factor you have. Funnily enough, I lost my concentration at one stage and missed a marker. So I wasn't sure which was the actual trap and in fact wasn't going as fast as I could have."

When it was over, Vesco climbed out of the cockpit to learn that his return run was 282.375 mph and once again the 35-year-old American hero held the world speed motorcycle record.

Back in 1970 Vesco first took the record when he clocked 251.9 mph using a streamliner powered by two 350cc Yamaha road racing engines. Less than a month later Rayborn on a Harley-Davidson of twice the capacity took the record away.

Since then Vesco has been working hard to win the record back. When Yamaha introduced the TZ700, Vesco knew he had a chance. Two new 700 engines finally arrived at Vesco's shop in California only seven weeks before Bonneville's annual Speed Week in August and Vesco had to get his machine together on time.

"Fortunately, the TZ700 engines are ideal for coupling," Vesco explained. "I took the end covers off the crankcases, drilled holes in the end of the crankshafts and bolted pulleys onto the ends."

Vesco really didn't get a chance to break the world record during Speed Week but he and his crew managed to sort out a lot of the new streamliner's problems. Still, Speed Week was not a complete loss for Vesco for he put

himself once again in the record books by going more than 170 mph on an unfaired road race TZ700 Yamaha.

Vesco returned to Bonneville in October and shared the salt with Dennis Manning's twin-powered Norton Gulf streamliner. The Norton managed to overcome its early mechanical difficulties and closed the gap on Vesco

by hitting 271 mph. At press time however Vesco was ready to return to the salt if his Yamaha record should be broken.

But Vesco isn't satisfied with just holding the world record. He's still set on going 300 mph plus next year. □

