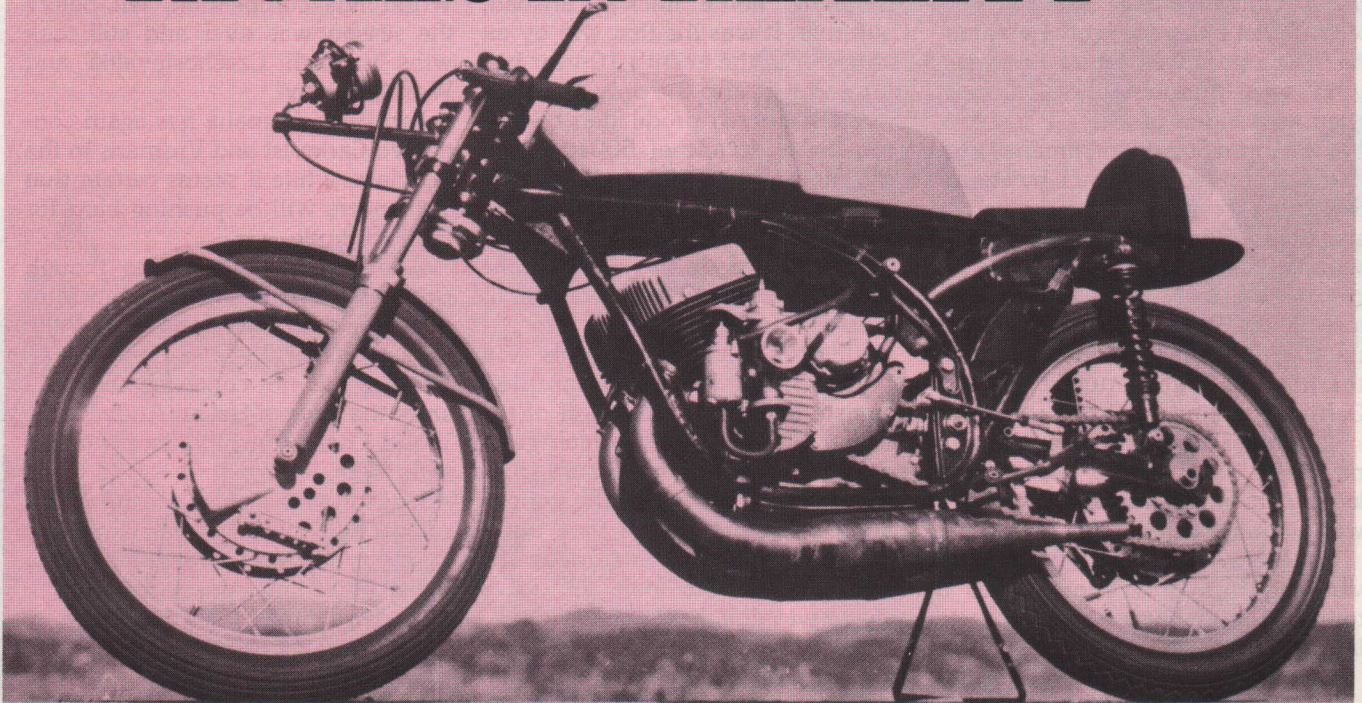


READ AND IVY — TEAMMATES IN NAME, RIVALS IN REALITY



Yamaha's first World Championship winner. The rotary valve RD56 twin.

YAMAHA'S KING OF SPEED

A three-part series on the superstars who brought World Road Racing Championships to Yamaha.

PART ONE: THE NINETEEN-SIXTIES

It was almost twenty years ago, in the 1961 French Grand Prix, that the Yamaha assault on the World Road Race Championships began. By that time, Honda was well on the way to proving that Oriental manufacturers were a definite threat to the Italian supremacy which prevailed at that time, so all eyes were on their wailing multi-cylinder four-strokes. Two-strokes were not considered as potential Grand Prix winners and,

therefore, very little notice was taken of the Yamahas of Taneharu Noguchi and Fumio Ito which finished eighth in 125cc and 250cc events respectively.

From France the Yamahas went on to Holland and Belgium, with the best places there being sixth and fifth positions by Ito on the 250.

What was obvious was that more research and development was needed on the bikes, particularly to cure vibration and plug oiling problems. In 1962, the Yamaha race team stayed at home and the result of their efforts in the workshops was more than apparent when the chequered flag dropped at the finish of the 1963 Isle of Man TT.

The revised 250cc rotary valve twin (designated the RD56) proved faster than the mighty Honda, which by then had come to dominate the class. The bike was timed at 141 mph

In the past seventeen racing seasons there have only been three in which Yamaha did not field at least one World Champion . . . 1966, 1969 and 1976. And in one of those years (1976), they had the consolation of taking the FIM Formula 750 Championship prize, a series which was to move to full World Championship status a year later. In that seventeen-season span, seventeen riders and four sidecar passengers have earned a total of 27 World Championship medals with Yamaha. Plus three FIM F750 prizewinner's medals in the three-year existence of that series.

This three-part feature gives "Circuit" readers a look at those Yamaha "kings of speed."

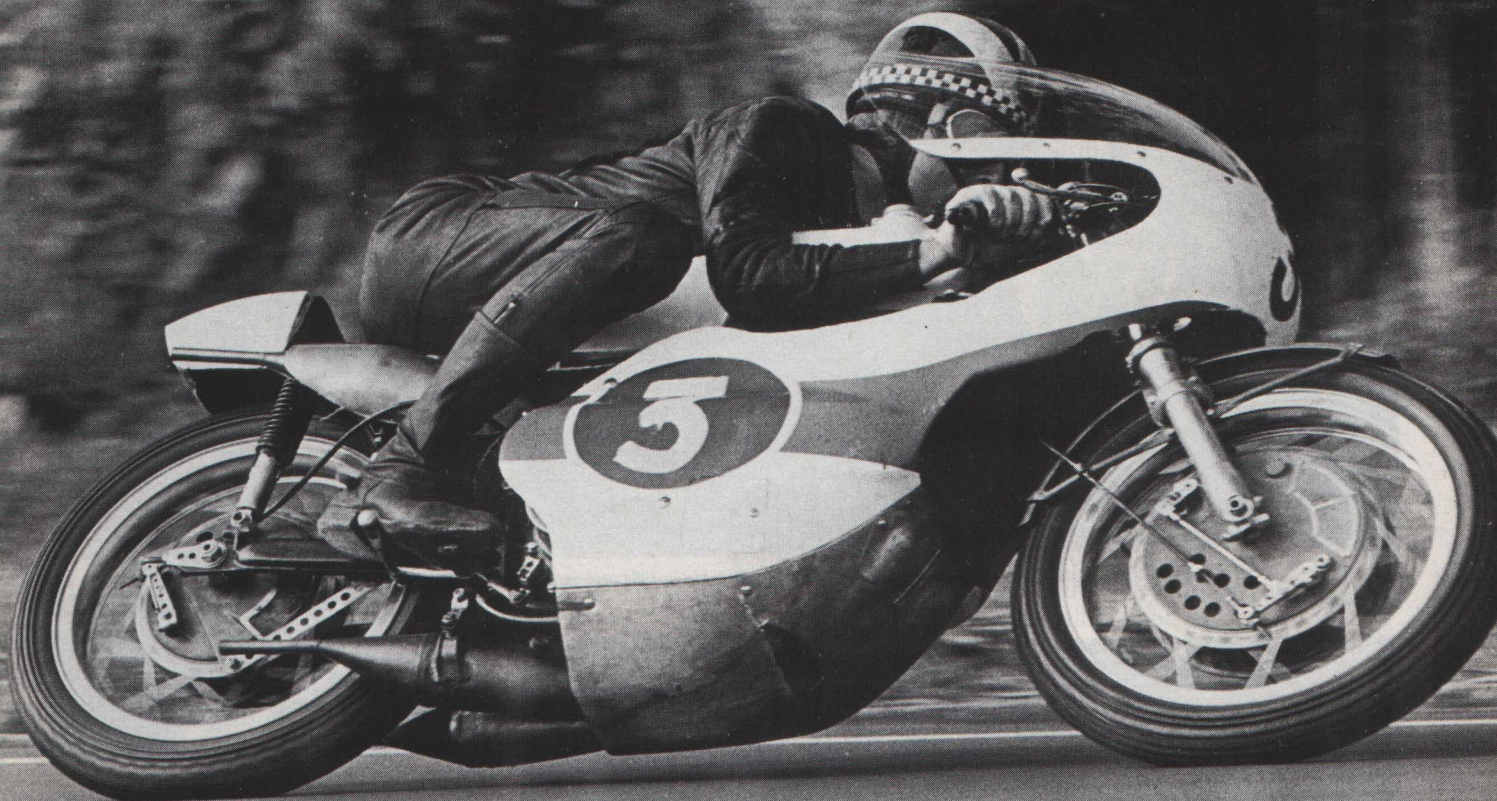
YAMAHA ROAD RACING WORLD CHAMPIONS

| | | |
|------|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| 1964 | Phil Read | 250cc |
| 1965 | Phil Read | 250cc |
| 1967 | Bill Ivy | 125cc |
| 1968 | Phil Read | 125cc |
| | Phil Read | 250cc |
| 1970 | Rod Gould | 250cc |
| 1971 | Phil Read | 250cc |
| 1972 | Jarno Saarinen | 250cc |
| 1973 | Dieter Braun | 250cc |
| | Kent Andersson | 125cc |
| 1974 | Kent Andersson | 125cc |
| | Giacomo Agostini | 350cc |
| 1975 | Giacomo Agostini | 500cc |
| | Johnny Cecotto | 350cc |
| 1977 | Steve Baker | 750cc |
| | George O'Dell and Cliff Holland | Sidecar |
| | Takazumi Katayama | 350cc |
| | Kenny Roberts | 500cc |
| 1978 | Rolf Biland and Ken Williams | Sidecar |
| | Johnny Cecotto | 750cc |
| | Kenny Roberts | 500cc |
| 1979 | Rolf Biland and Kurt Waltisberger | Sidecar |
| | Patrick Pons | 750cc |
| | Bruno Holzer and Klaus Meirhaus | 3-Wheeler |
| | Kenny Roberts | 500cc |
| 1980 | Jon Ekerold | 350cc |
| | Jock Taylor and Benga Johansson | Sidecar |

FIM FORMULA 750 PRIZE

(This series preceded the 750cc World Championship. Yamaha winners are listed along with the capacity of machine they used in the series.)

| | | |
|------|---------------|-----------|
| 1974 | John Dodds | 350cc |
| 1975 | Jack Findlay | 350/750cc |
| 1976 | Victor Palomo | 750cc |



and, despite extra fuel stops for the thirsty two-stroke, Ito chased Honda team captain home, less than 30 seconds behind him! A month later came Yamaha's first Grand Prix victory when Ito dominated the Belgian Grand Prix with teammate Gichi Sunako in second. Yamaha—and the age of the two-stroke—had arrived. Enter now the first of Yamaha's World Champions—a handsome, ultra-confident young Englishman by the name of Phil Read.

He had first come to the public eye by winning the Manx Grand Prix for amateur riders in 1960. Less than a year later he was back in the "Island" to win the professional Senior TT (at that time the world's most prestigious race) on his debut attempt!

In 1963 he wrestled an aging Gilera four to third place in the TT and was obviously deserving of a better mount than this Italian factory bike resurrected from the mid-fifties or his own "private" British single-cylinder Norton or Matchless singles.

Yamaha wanted a European rider, particularly one with a winning chance in the Isle of Man. Their need

became even greater after Fumio Ito received serious head injuries during the late-season Singapore Grand Prix and during the winter of 1963-64, Read was summoned to Japan for testing and contract talks.

The result was that he was to lead Canadian Mike Duff in an all-out, season-long attack on the World 250cc Championship. Previously the Yamaha squad had restricted their activities to certain races during the mid-season.

Read seized this chance of superstardom with both hands. All season long he battled with Honda's seasoned World Champion, Jim Redman, matching his fire and the Yamaha's undeniable speed advantage against Redman's racecraft and the well-developed handling of the Honda.

By the end of the season, the new combination of Read and the Yamaha had unseated Redman from his Championship throne, winning no less than five Grands Prix on the way to the title. It wasn't as easy as it sounds, however, for many of those victories were narrow ones. Some, like the Dutch TT, were decided by

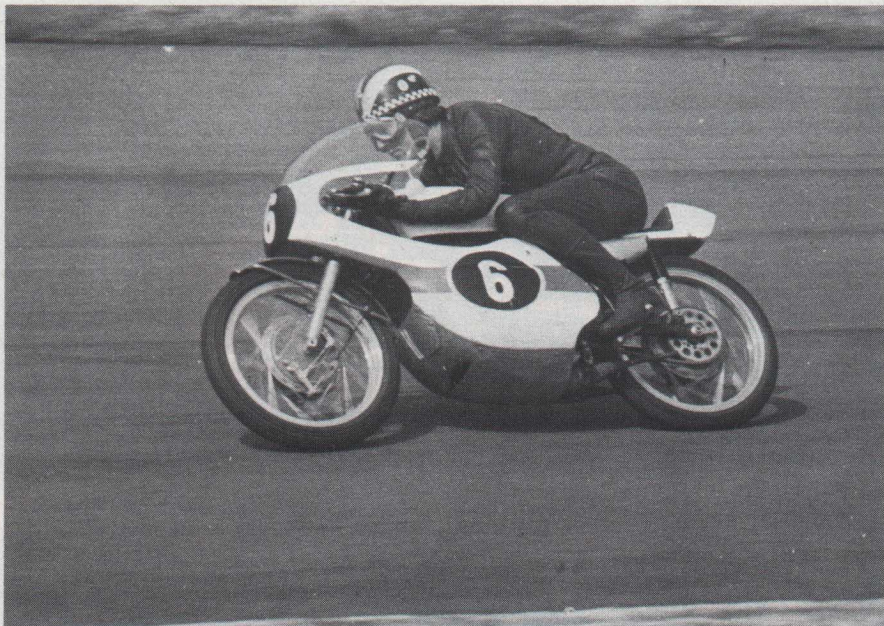
Read at his most determined—glued to the tank-top at over 150mph on the 250cc vee-four.

half a wheel! Neither Redman nor Honda were going to give up their title with good grace and for the 1965 season they wheeled out a new weapon . . . the howling Honda six-cylinder.

If anything, the 1965 season was even tougher than the previous one. Observers from that era rate the Read/Redman clashes of those two seasons as the most sustained and heated rivalry in recent motorcycle history.

All through the 1965 season Read and Duff battled the new Hondas. Battled them so well that Read added a second World Championship to his tally, with Duff next up in the standings. Even so, it had become obvious that it was now Yamaha who was going to have to return with faster machinery in 1966.

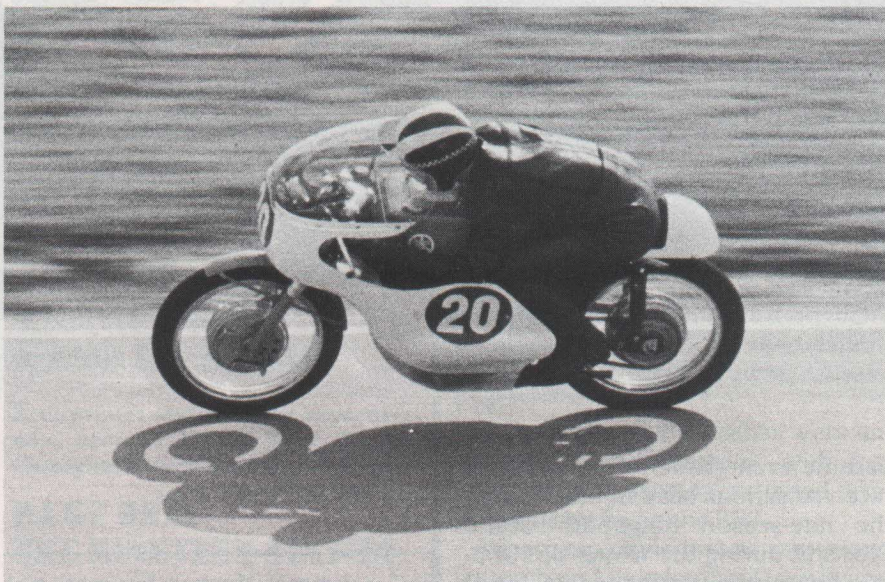
Their intentions were made plain in the last GP of 1965, when Read—already confirmed as Champion—wheeled out a 60bhp vee-four two-



Though a little tall for one-two-fives, Read still rode the small bikes to a World Championship in 1968 and numerous GP wins from 1965 onwards.



Phil Read—eight times a World Champion, five times with Yamaha.



Read used the RD56 twin to gather successive titles in 1964 and 1965... Yamaha's first of many.

stroke in front of an amazed Italian crowd. The new bike's debut was not an auspicious one. It was slow to start and, though it showed flashes of incredible speed, was soon sidelined by mechanical problems. Despite this, Yamaha had unmistakably produced the fastest 250 ever seen at that point in time.

Though the 1966 season started with a great deal of promise, it was eventually unfulfilled. Yamaha had reckoned without one thing—the genius of Mike Hailwood who had left the Italian MV Agusta factory to lead the Honda team.

By now Read had a new teammate... though "mate" was perhaps not the correct word in the long run.

Mike Duff had been seriously injured in a pre-season testing accident and his place was taken on the

Yamaha team by one of the most popular British riders ever to straddle a motorcycle, diminutive Bill Ivy. Though he stood only 5-feet, 3-inches tall, "Little Bill" was a giant in the saddle, coping with anything from 50 to 500cc. He had already helped out the team in 1965, leading the Isle of Man TT before crashing in the rain and mist. Now he was a full-fledged team member and wanted nothing less than a world title.

Both Ivy and Read had to postpone their Championship ambitions in 1966, however. They were beaten by a combination of Mike Hailwood, the perfectly-developed Hondas and, oddly enough, the very power of the Yamahas which put them into contention in the first place.

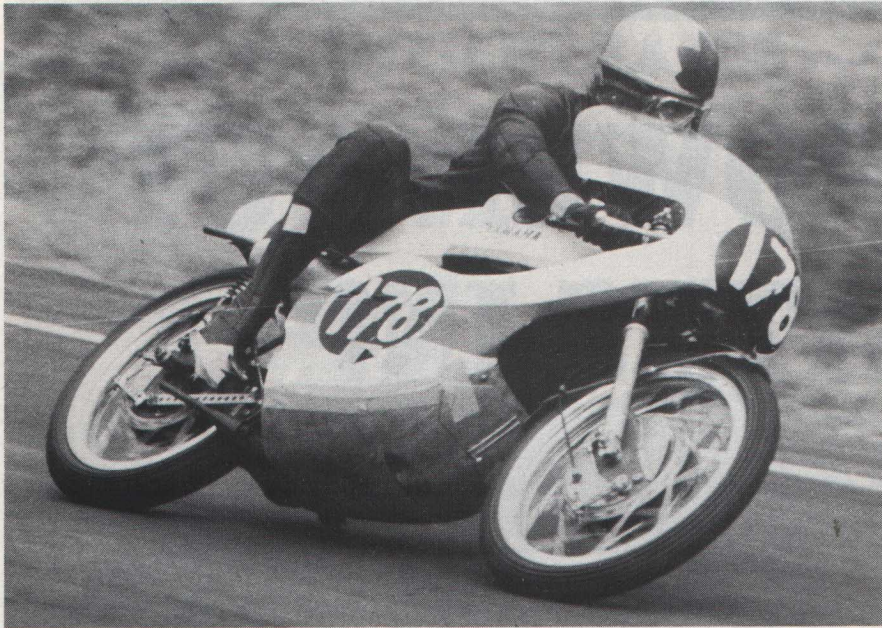
The vee-fours were by this time so fast that chassis development could

not keep pace with the fierce power characteristics. Read and Ivy had to be content with second place in 250 and 125cc Championships respectively.

Engine power was still ahead of chassis development in 1967, but Ivy got to grips with an incredible new 125cc vee-four which put out over 40bhp at 18,000rpm and brought the 125cc crown to Yamaha for the first time.

Read was still locked in epic combat with Hailwood for the 250cc title—carbon copies of his two torrid seasons battling with Redman—but despite four GP wins he still had to give best to "Mike the Bike" on season points.

And so 1968 rolled around. Motorcycle racing was in a state of flux. Faced with the 75bhp of the latest Yamaha V4, Honda felt that they had developed their four-strokes as far as was possible and withdrew from Championship racing. The governing body of world motorcycle sport, the Federation Internationale Motocycliste, looked at the situation and saw that, especially with Honda gone, there was literally no one who could even keep the Grand Prix Yamahas in sight. Their reaction was



Bill Ivy's 5-foot, 3-inch frame was ideally suited to the 125cc Yamaha vee-four with which he won his only world title, in 1967.

to change the rules of 125 and 250cc class racing. No more than two cylinders and six gearbox speeds was to be the rule for 1969.

Yamaha had committed a cardinal sin—they had built a bike that was just too good! The 1968 season would be the last for the nine-speed, rotary valve vee-fours.

This meant that Yamaha team riders Read and Ivy could virtually choose which World Championship they wanted to win. At the beginning of 1968, it had allegedly been agreed that Ivy should add the 250cc title to the 125cc honours that he won the previous season, while Read would win the 125 crown to add to his 250cc titles of 1964 and 1965. Though these "team decisions" have never been officially confirmed, and never will be, the events of the first half of the 1968 season seemed to bear this out.

Read made it obvious that he was slowing down in certain 250cc events to let Ivy win while Bill took up an incredible lead in the Isle of Man 125cc TT and then virtually coasted around the last lap, even stopping to ask spectators how far behind Read was! He made sure that he stopped to ask this rather unnecessary question in an area well-frequented by journalists and photographers and right beneath a race commentary box! Many people from that era felt that this deliberate slight to Read's considerable pride might well have had a great bearing on the upheavals which marked the close of the 1968 season.

Knowing that it was the last year of the vee-fours, and that Yamaha would probably not field an official



Cheerful little Bill Ivy. His death was an immeasurable tragedy for motor sport.

team for 1969, Read analysed the situation and, as he recounts in his life story, looked over at Bill Ivy as they sat on the grid for the 250cc Czechoslovakian Grand Prix and said, "You're going to have to race for it from now on, Bill." A flabbergasted Ivy could hardly believe what he was hearing. Read, with obvious assistance from Ivy, had already annexed the 125cc title. Now he was telling Bill that he wasn't going to back off and hand the 250cc crown to him!

Quite the opposite! Read went out and won the Czech race, leaving Ivy to trail furiously in his wake. On the victory podium, the hot-tempered little Ivy almost came to blows with the imperturbable Read and the press

had a field day. It was the hottest story for years in Championship racing and even the FIM stepped in to warn Yamaha that "team orders" were illegal under racing rules and could lead to the disqualification of both riders. Yamaha, of course, replied that there never had been such a thing as official "team orders." Their riders were there to race and "let the best man win."

The "best man" when the points were counted was Phil Read . . . 250cc Champion for the third time and a double Champion in 1968.

The row raged on long after Yamaha announced that they would disband their factory team for 1969 and that the vee-fours would never be seen in racing action again.

There was a lot of public sympathy for Ivy but still a sneaking admiration for the opportunism of Read.

Tragically, that 125cc crown in 1967 was the only World title which Ivy would win. Following Yamaha's withdrawal in 1969, Bill decided to combine car and motorcycle racing. He bought himself a Brabham for the incredibly competitive Formula Two category and finished third to Graham Hill and Jochen Rindt in his first-ever race . . . an event at Thruxton that was packed with established International stars.

He also signed with Jawa to ride their powerful but brittle four-cylinder two-stroke in the 350cc class. It was this machine which seized in the 1969 East German Grand Prix and pitched Bill Ivy to his death . . . a tragedy mourned by the entire motorcycle world. And not just by motorcyclists, for Ivy's short-lived car racing career had already impressed many four-wheeled experts.

No less a name than Jackie Stewart commented in one of his books that Bill's death was as great a tragedy for car racing as it was for motorcycling.

"He was one of the greatest natural driving talents I have ever seen," commented the man who has still won more Formula One car races than any other.

Read, of course, went on to become one of the most successful multiple World Champions of all time, taking another 250cc title in 1971 on a private Yamaha, 500cc crowns in 1973 and 1974 for the MV Agusta factory and the "one race" Formula One World Championship for Honda at the 1977 TT. Eight titles over a 14-year span to confirm his reputation as one of the biggest road racing names of them all.

NEXT IN THIS SERIES: The early Seventies: 1970-1975.