JULY 1984

# Cycle

## Honda V65 Sabre
It's A Cannon

## Harley FXRDG
AKA Disc Glide

# Honda VF500F
## The Best Interceptor Yet?

## Pocket-Sized V30 Magna
### A Mini-Cruiser With Jeweled Movements

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Cycle®

July 1984 Volume XXXV No. 7

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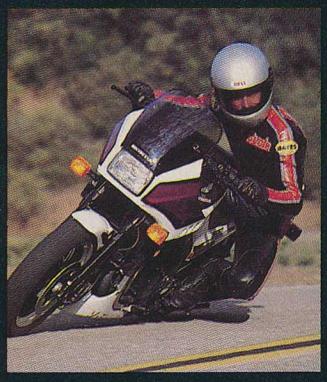

*This Month's Cover:* Dave Hawkins catches the VF500F Interceptor at full hum, with TW Wolff at the controls. On the panel, five-four Scott Darough used his eight-four camera to make this V30 Magna image, which newboy Art Director, Mark Covault, reduced to usable proportions. The twin test begins on page 24.

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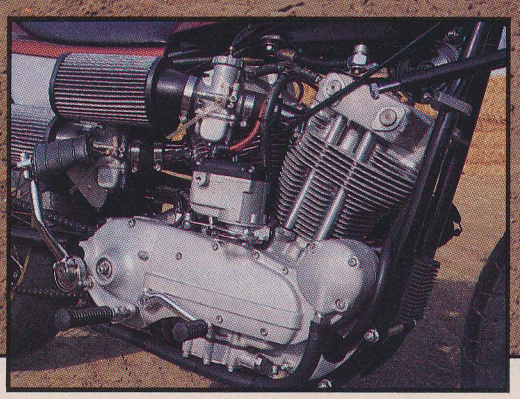

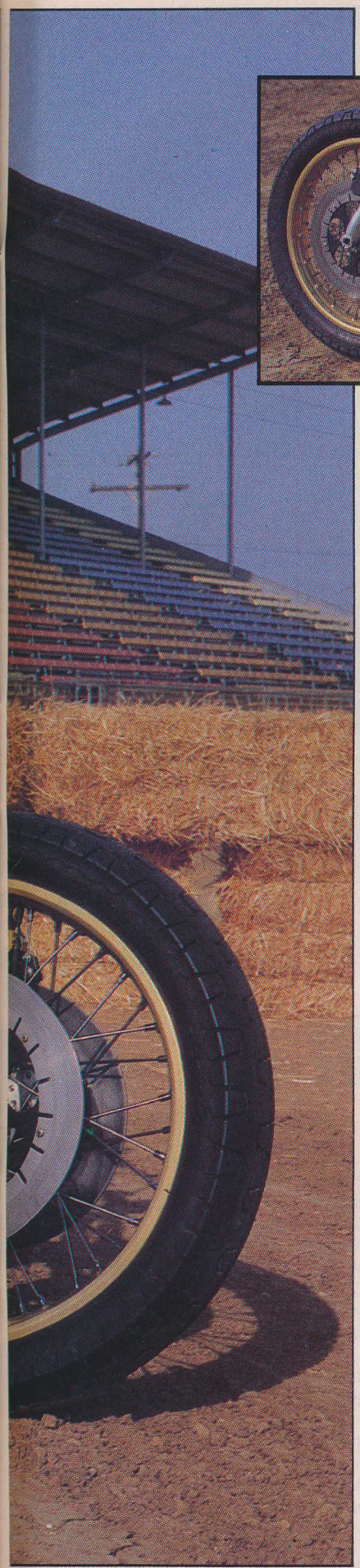

**In which a Harley XR750, dirt-tracker extraordinaire, is resurrected from a bin of parts and recast in the role of the yeoman's Superbike.**

**By Paul Gordon**

# RUGGED INDIVIDUALIST

We are speaking of Wednesday cars and winter motorcycles and the differences between them. The first is a mass-production ideal—the perfect, identical product of an assembly line that's had all its pits and ridges ground smooth. By Wednesday, even the flintiest party animal has slunk back to the work place, his hangover a dull buzz and the prospect of another bender still far enough down the line to keep his attention on the appliance in his hand.

While Wednesday is the period of choice for impeccable Cordobas, craftsmanship observes a broader schedule. The former is impersonal, the latter emotional. Labors of love generally do not issue from factory gates, but from small, informal workshops, and most often in springtime. When assembly lines fall idle in the off-season, it makes for wildcats and walkouts and trouble. When artisans are left free to putter in their shops and studios, they make art.

Steve Storz's production schedule is the schedule of the artisan. When winter settles around his Ventura, California, shop, he goes to the bins which have been filling beneath his workbench since the racing season began, pulls out parts, and does what he knows best. He knows Harley XR750s, those thundering pit bulls of the dirt-track oval, and in winter his attention turns from building XRs for other people to building them for himself.

Studious, bespectacled and soft-spoken, Storz, 34, doesn't look like the type to ply his trade in the gladiator pens of the dirt-track arena, yet he has probably spent as much time searching for the edge on dirt-track racing machinery as any tuner on the West Coast. He apprenticed to Shell Thuet back when Thuet's protégé Kenny Roberts was campaigning dirt-going Yamahas, and he tuned for the short-lived Norton/Triumph team until hooking up with dirt-track racing's great gray eminence, Harley-Davidson's Dick O'Brien, at a race in Delaware in 1976.

In three and a half years on the national circuit wrenching for Harley factory riders Ted Boody and Steve Morehead, Storz watched the Yamaha and Triumph challenges fade away as the XR750 rose to dominate oval racing, its torquey power, heavy flywheels and uneven firing impulses giving the XR an uncanny capability for high-speed traction on dirt. In 1980, Storz quit H-D and moved to California, where his Ventura shop became a gathering point for West Coast privateers and other riders steeped in the mystique of the XR.

It takes a little history to appreciate the motorcycle and why every passing season seems to add a sprig of laurel to the XR legend. The die for the present-day XR was cast more than a decade and a half ago when the AMA opened the national

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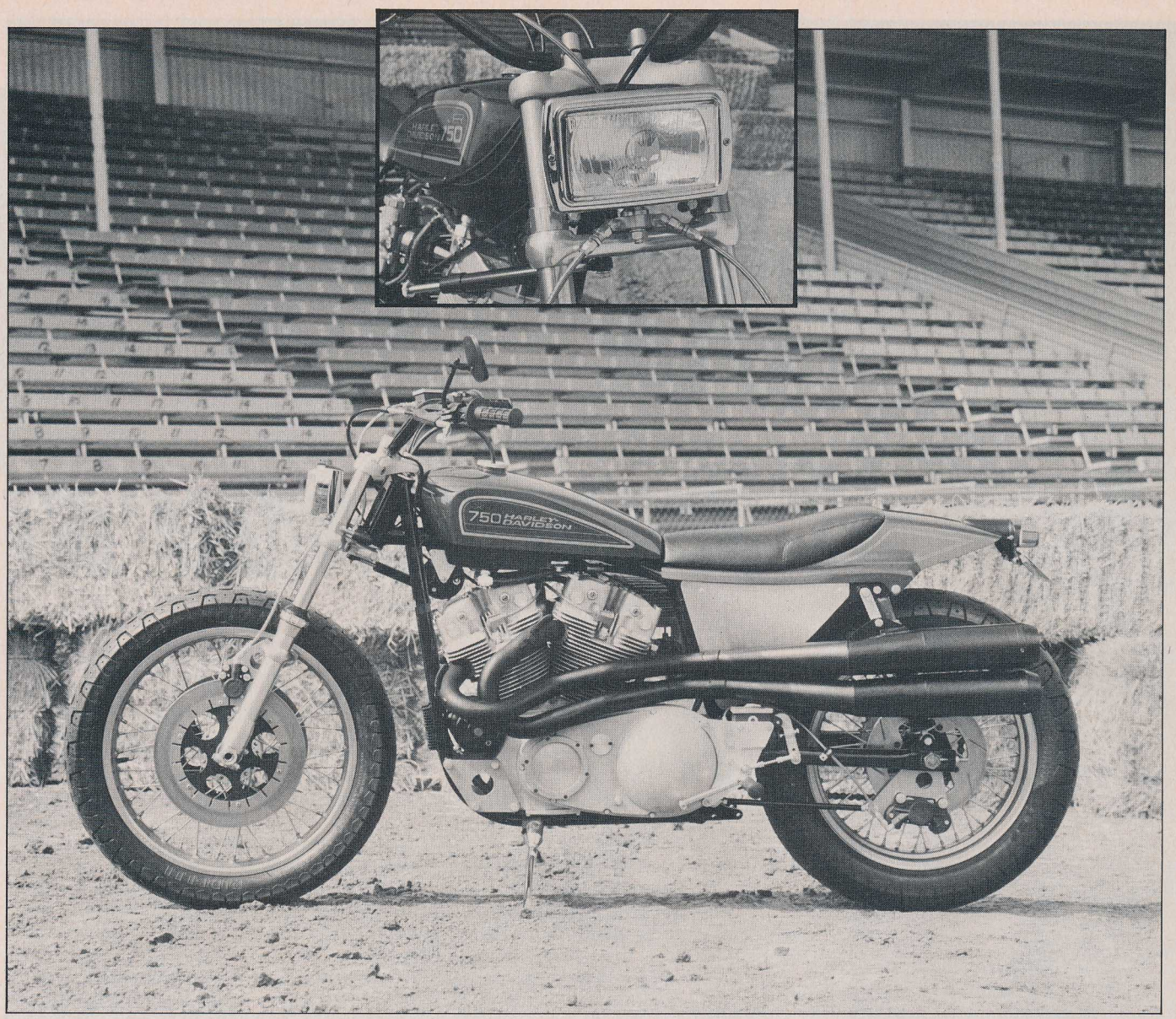



# RUGGED INDIVIDUALIST

championship chase to 750s with overhead valves. At the time, Harley-Davidson was racing side-valve 750s, locked in combat with the British Triumphs and BSAs. The rule change appeared to favor the English twins, and though Harley's flatheads prevailed the following season, the handwriting portending a new design was on the wall and a new bike soon in the works.

The first version of the XR750 was a "Band-Aid" bike, culled from iron Sportster engine parts, destroked and pressed into service in a road-racer frame. Its performance was miserable, its record of achievement ignominious. But in 1972 an alloy version superseded the ad hoc iron XR, and Harley had the seemingly perfect combination of light weight, reliability and power. The XR became unbeatable and has been only superficially changed (in 1975, the bottom of the crankcase was modified to accept a small magnesium sump) over the last 14 years.

No wonder. The XR represents perhaps the strongest single argument in the industry for the longevity of a sound basic design, presenting stats that would give any twin hot flashes: Strong-running XRs develop upward of 86 horsepower at the rear wheel in a power curve that broad jumps from 5600 to 8500 rpm, and even with gearing for wide-open mile ovals they have run the quarter-mile in under 12 seconds.

Mostly the XR750 is small, a tightly compressed set of essential components. The seat rests 30 inches off the ground. Rake at 26.5 degrees, trail at 3.5 inches and wheelbase at 56.75 inches from axle to axle would be quick geometry for a contemporary 550. Dry weight hovers a notch shy of 300 pounds.

XRs are also rare, and the rein-holders at Harley-Davidson aren't about to dilute the *éclat* of their racing thoroughbred with ubiquity. Production follows a serendipitous schedule—the bikes appear in batches whenever demand and coordination of the many outside jobbers who fabricate the racer's components combine to permit a limited manufacturing run. Harley-Davidson has built only three batches of XRs since the alloy model first appeared in 1972, and estimates of the total num-

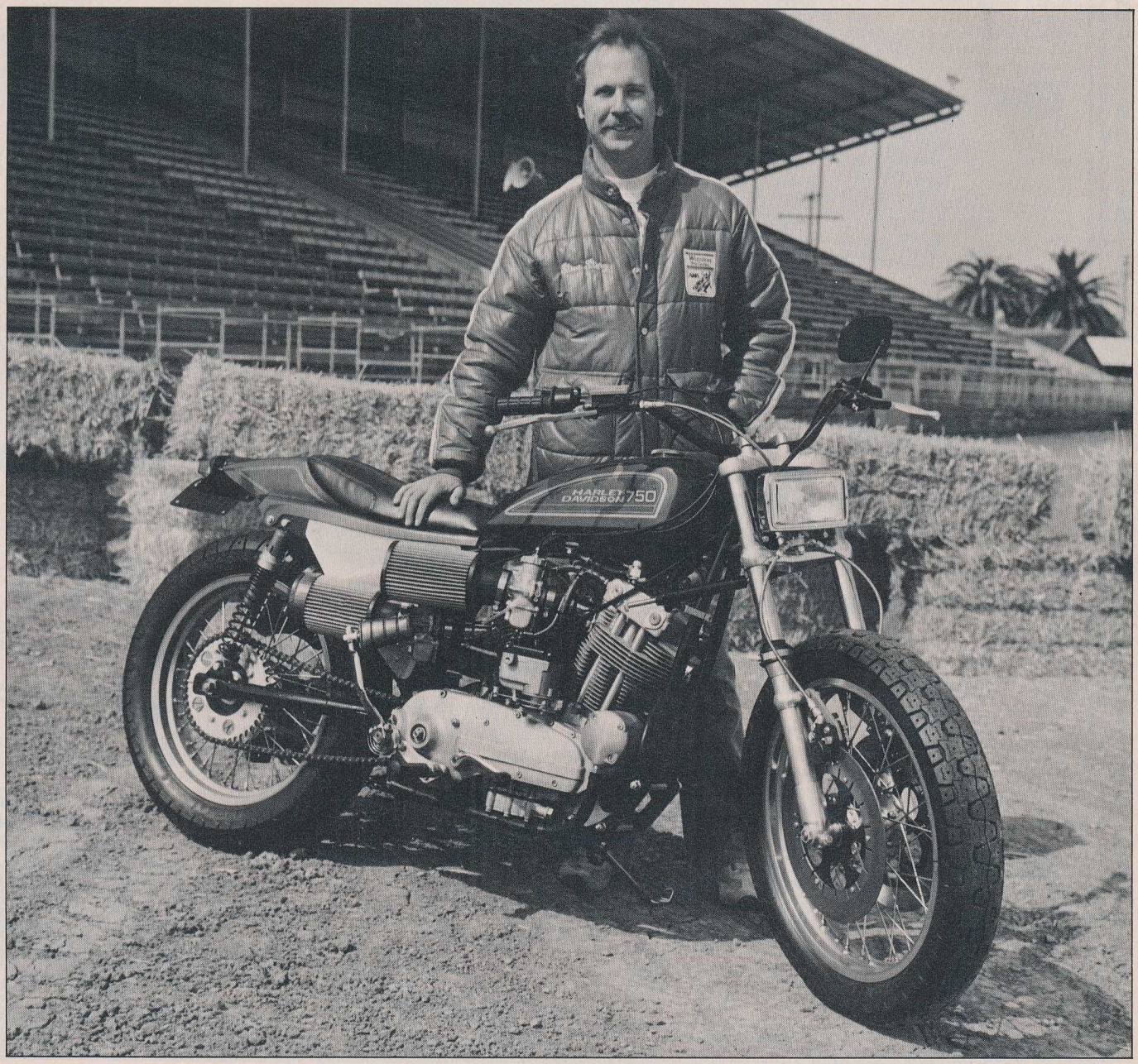
# RUGGED INDIVIDUALIST

ber produced runs to under 800. This year Harley is gearing up to assemble 25 new engines, the first XR parts to emerge from Milwaukee in four years.

Further limiting the number of XRs is, simply, their price. A new 750 retails for $5695 from a sympathetic dealer, and for that you get, as they say, "the bike"—a pair of brakeless wheels, no instrumentation, one set of sprockets and, according to Storz, a significant amount of sand in the bottom of the sump, courtesy of the case-casting process. Most owners invest about $3000 in preparation costs before their XRs turn a trackside wheel, putting the total bill at close to $9000.

Pedigree, simplicity and race-winning performance—enough of the classic virtues are embodied in the XR750 to create a following beyond that of a handful of dirt-tracking hard-core. To help explain the attraction, and to illustrate what it's like to live in the vicinity of a real XR750, Storz arranged a ride on a paved section at Indian Dunes in California.

He rolled the XR out of his faded orange van and onto the tarmac. Tiny, the thing looks smaller than a 350 dirt bike except for the massive alloy cylinders dominating every angle of view. Storz starts up the engine, ignition announced by a series of rapid-fire volleys—like buckshot ringing inside a 40-gallon steel drum. A three-inch throw of the right-side shift lever down into first, release of the clutch, and the engine's first dozen revolutions carry you smartly as many yards down the road. Open the throttle and the revs seem to mount inside your skeleton as the



engine rattles every weld of its skinny cage. Raise your right leg for the upshift and, oh my, the front end gets awfully light, the bike feeling absurdly small beneath and the engine so outlandish, like a runaway tractor as the cowhorn handlebars, bisected by the fenderless, blurring front wheel, begin a lazy oscillation. With the right handlebar, street rubber and brakes, lots and lots of brakes, what a street bike the XR would make!

Just so, thought Mr. Storz the first time he rode an XR on a paved oval at Harley's test facility at the Wisconsin State Fairgrounds, and discovered the handling was dead neutral at over 100 on the banking.

Storz's streetable XR is made up of pieces from all the XR batches, with crankcase circa 1972, flywheels and rods from the '75 vintage, and J-type cams from a stock 1980 XR. The Sportster kickstarter tucked neatly into a boss in the case casting, and large-diameter handbent pipes replaced the stock XR exhaust.

To power the taillight, horn and Marchal halogen headlight, Storz fitted a Sportster DC generator into the magneto mount, affixed a standard solid-state voltage regulator in front, and located the stock magneto where such things used to be found on early Sportsters, atop the cam cover.

Storz claims the stock XR frame is rigid enough for most road work, requiring only minor gusseting above the swingarm pivot and in front of the top shock mounts. Fox 13-inch shocks steady the rear end, with an airless Ceriani road-race fork in front. The XR's 19-inch front Akront WM3 and 18-inch rear Sun WM5 rims are shod with Pirelli Phantom tires.

Up front a pair of 12-inch Barnes rotors with tiny Grimeca 1000T calipers and steel-braided hose lines perform the stopping chores, mated with a 10-inch floating disc in back.

Storz estimates horsepower output at between 76 and 77, and with a compression ratio of 10:1 the XR streetster runs on pump gas.

But thoroughbreds, even when called in from course-running, still require special care and feeding. Once duly registered as a "special construction" vehicle, the XR was taken out only rarely on the street, Storz convinced that his license or good health would be forfeit in short order if the relationship continued. Storz is a builder first, then a rider. Projects entice him, then are done. When the XR seemed no longer in need of his ministrations, it was sold.

The racing season is upon us, and Storz now has his hands full with business. Parts are piling up beneath his workbench. For one-offs, and builders in small workshops, winter is the breeding season. ■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