



Virginio Ferrari, Kenny Roberts closest challenger in the 500 cc class.
Photo by Champion Photo Service

began to slide later in the race, and he had to ease the pace.

But Yamaha suffered another set back in this race. A week earlier the young Frenchman Christian Sarron had crashed heavily in the British round of the Formula 750 world championship round at Brands Hatch and injured his neck so badly that he had been forced to miss the Salzburgring race, which was to have been his racing debut on the factory 500 cc Yamaha.

Then Johnny Cecotto had crashed heavily midway through the Austrian race at the chicane while trying to pull up through the pack to make up for a poor start. Cecotto had broken his knee cap in six places, and it was not until the Yugoslavian GP in June that the Venezuelan was able to make a comeback.

Not that Roberts worries overmuch about team mates. In fact his big complaint, well justified was that he had as much trouble beating the other Yamaha factory mounted men, as he did the Suzuki brigade in 1978.

Not that the battle was restricted to Roberts v Ferrari. Dutchman Wil Hartog has made a big impact in the GP trail this season, and when luck has been kind Sheene, too has been among the leaders.

Hartog did not help his title hopes with some very silly accidents early in the year. He lost a possible top four place by crashing at San Carlos, and then had the misfortune to step off again on the warm up lap of a Dutch national meeting.

Wil broke his arm in that fall, and the injury has made things more than just a little difficult for him. In Spain Wil finished second to Roberts, just a week after taking another tumble at the pits chicane during the Italian GP at Imola.

Even more remarkable was that Wil collected his points at Jarama with the arm broken again, after the plate joining the earlier break had snapped while carrying his baby daughter up the stairs at his home!

A fourth in Yugoslavia, despite suspension problems forcing him to run his toes blood raw as he scraped everything on the deck, and a third in Assen, in front of his fellow countrymen kept the Dutch hay farmer firmly in the championship chase.

Barry Sheene, on the other hand must look to divine intervention if he is to get back among the leaders. This year lady luck has not merely refused to smile on Bazzar, she has definitely thumbed her nose!

The brake problem in Austria was the first disaster, and others have followed swiftly. At Hockenheim, in the West German GP Sheene was riding superbly, and battling with the pack in pursuit of race leader and eventual winner Wil Hartog, when his Suzuki engine blew up.



Gregg Hansford, challenging for the 250 cc and 350 cc Championships.
Photo by Champion Photo Service

A week later Sheene switched from his usual Michelin to Dunlop tyres, topped the practice leaderboard, and then could only finish fourth when those tyres started to slide.

A practice spill at Jarama during the Spanish GP left Barry struggling and in pain. He landed on the same spot on his elbow that he had hurt in his crash a few weeks earlier at Donington. Barry bravely decided to race, but then had to push for 300 yards before the bike fired up, and after a few laps he retired.

What else can possibly go wrong, asked Barry after that. He soon discovered at the Yugoslavian. Riding well Barry was hit on the knee by a stone flicked up from the rear wheel of Marco Lucchinelli. The pain was excruciating and Barry again had to stop.

But Barry refused to give up. At the Dutch, while Kenny Roberts struggled to cope with his Yamaha after the big monoshock unit had failed on the warming up lap, Sheene and Ferrari had a superb dice, which finally went in favour of the Italian.

Sheene's team mate Steve Parrish has not had the best of seasons, either. Only rarely has the aggressive style that makes him one of Britain's best prospects shone through. The opposition is fierce this year, and every single world championship point is hard earned.

When Steve has managed to get his act together, though, he has looked good, but sadly inconsistency, particularly on the GP trail, has cost him some points.

Tragedy robbed the Suzuki GB team, and the road racing world in general, of one of its most popular, and hard riding competitors. Killed in an accident at the North West 200 meeting in Northern Ireland Tom Herron had finally landed the big works contract his ability had so richly deserved.

From the world go the Ulsterman had not been overawed, or outclassed in the 500 cc world championship battle. Third in Venezuela, Tom followed that up with a fourth in Austria, even though he was far from happy about the performance of the bike.

Tom was heard to mutter something about being sent out to win on a moped, after one practice session at the Salzburgring circuit. But his determination made up for any deficiency in pace or handling.

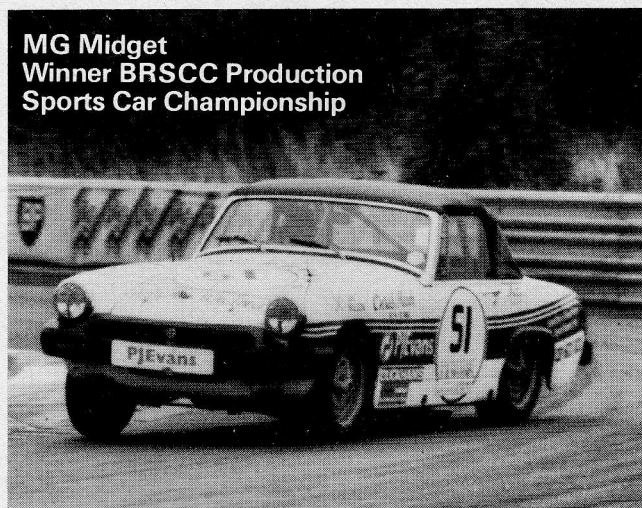
Like Sheene, Herron found the pace too hot at Hockenheim, and he too blew up his engine when up with the leaders, but after finishing third in Italy Tom climbed to third place in the title chase.

But a week later at Jarama Tom fell off in practice and broke his thumb. He couldn't race there, and flew home to Britain in a bid to recover in time for the NW200 and the Isle of Man TT, two of his favourite meetings. Sadly in the last race of the day he crashed,

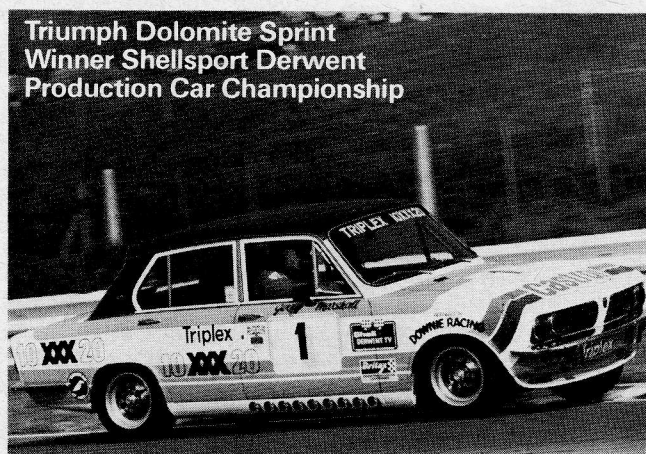
Last season's racing successes from Austin Morris Jaguar Rover Triumph-



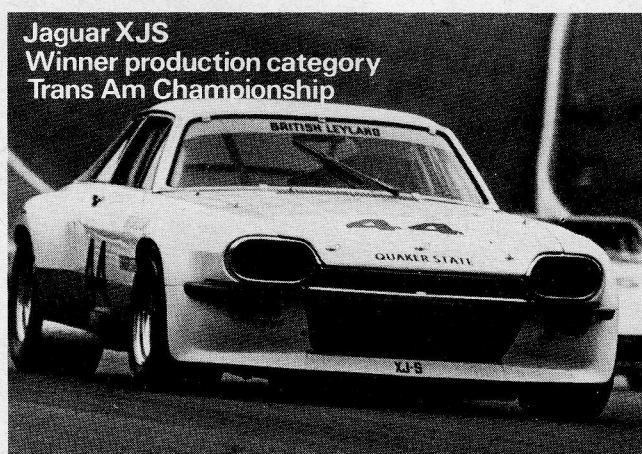
Mini 1275GT
Winner Tricentral RAC British
Saloon Car Championship



MG Midget
Winner BRSCC Production
Sports Car Championship



Triumph Dolomite Sprint
Winner Shellsport Derwent
Production Car Championship



Jaguar XJS
Winner production category
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and road racing is the poorer without him.

A racing accident has also robbed the 500 cc class for the rest of the season of the presence of American star Mike Baldwin. But before stepping off the Kawasaki at Loudon in June, Mike had made a big impact on the European racing scene.

Mike started off the year racing the big Kawasaki, but pressure of work back in California forced mechanic Randy Hall to return to the United States, and Mike fixed up a deal to ride for Belgian sponsor Serge Zago.

With a 750 Yamaha for the bigger class, and a standard RG500 Suzuki for the 500 cc world championship Mike has been a constant threat to the works riders.

In Spain Mike topped the practice leaderboard after collecting at the last minute a load of Goodyear tyres flown in to Madrid airport. But in the race, a sluggish start coupled with a few rear wheel slides forced him to settle for third place behind King Kenny and Virginio Ferrari, to take his tally of championship points to 17.

Mike says that he will be back next year, and certainly the fans will be hoping that the Connecticut rider makes a full and speedy recovery from his injuries. Suzuki had their eye on him to fill the gap left by Tom Herron, but Mike may well be the man picked by Kawasaki to launch their 500 cc four cylinder racer.

Talking of new machines Silverstone is expected to be the debut of Honda's new Grand Prix bike. Britain's popular Mick Grant and Japanese ex-world champion Takazumi Katayama are the two men who have been putting the four cylinder four stroke through its paces in private test sessions in Japan.

While the Zooming Taxi has had a quiet season so far, Grant bought a pair of RG500 Suzukis to race in the early GPs, to gauge the opposition, and refresh his memory of world championship circuits for the 1980 Honda GP challenge.

It proved hard work for the likeable Yorkshireman. In the first three months of the season Mick collected just a single championship points, thanks to some very quick opposition, and more than his fair share of mechanical problems.

But Mick will be determined to make it a very different story on those Hondas!

Of the privateers Italian Franco Uncini, Swiss Philippe Coulon, and Dutchman Boet van Dulmen and Jack Middelburg have been far and away the most impressive this season.

Uncini started the year riding Serge Zago's machines, but a disagreement led to him leaving, and thanks to Italian commercial support and backing from the sponsors of the British Grand Prix, Marlboro, Franco has been able to carry on scoring points.

In the first seven GPs of the year Franco failed to score in just one, the Italian, and his third place in the Yugoslavian GP at the new Rijeka circuit was a fine performance.

Philippe Coulon, too, has had some excellent rides, and the cheerful Swiss character has now hit the sort of form he was showing before he crashed heavily at Anderstorp during the Swedish GP in 1977. Like Uncini Philippe is one of the Marlboro World Championship Team.

But for mechanical problems in both Austria and Yugoslavia, when right up with the leading group, Coulon would be sitting even higher up the championship table than he already is.

Boet van Dulmen is another who can point to heart breaking engine problems foiling his efforts. Many times this year and last the Dutchman has looked set for a handful of championship points when mechanical trouble has struck, and though the season started just as badly, Boet has had a good run in recent weeks.

Jack Middelburg won three Dutch titles the year before last, but was not able to reproduce that sort of form on the world championship trail until this year. Like Wil Hartog, Jack makes some electrifying starts, but then gradually slips back down the pack.

Lately, though, Jack has found more consistency and stamina. With more experience he could emerge as one of Europe's top privateers.

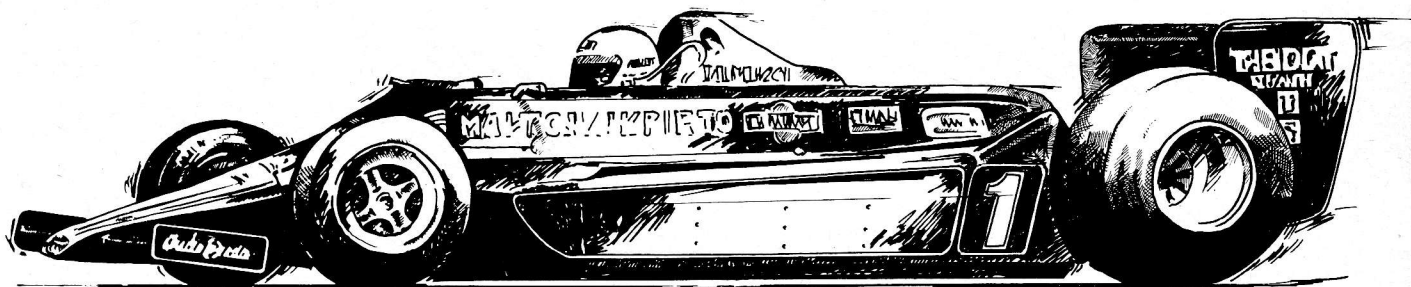
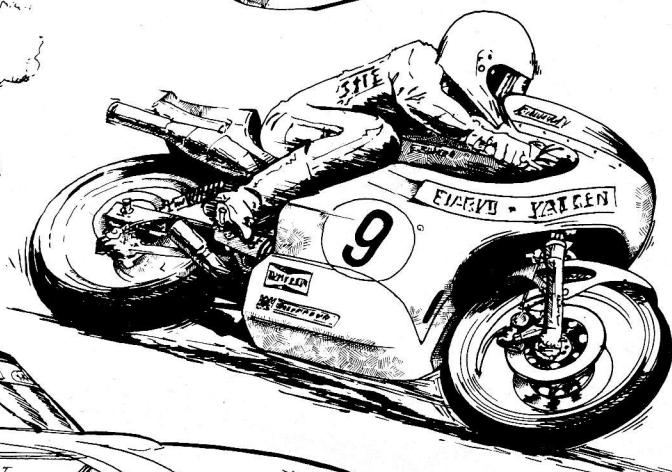
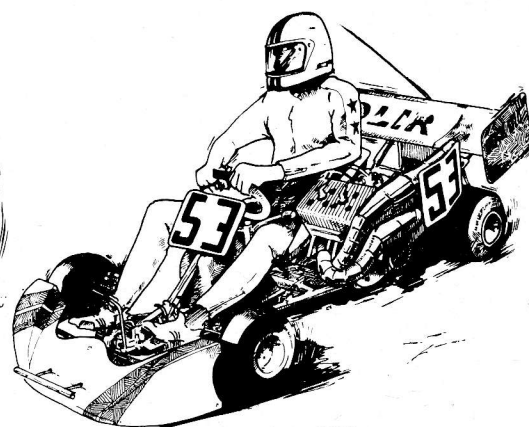
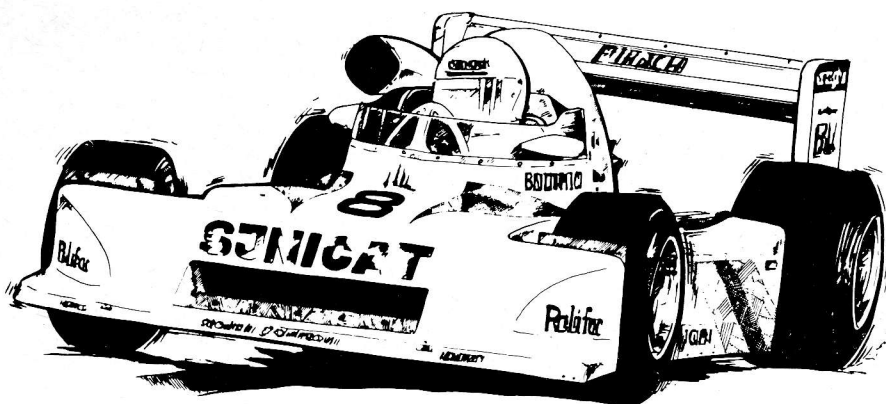
It's tough for privateers in the 500 cc class, but just as difficult for them to beat the factory machines and men in the smaller classes.

Take the 250 cc class for example. At the start of the year the ambition of the privateers was to tune their Yamahas to match the pace of the growing band of Kawasakis. But suddenly the



Phillipe Coulon (Suzuki), Barry Sheene (Suzuki), and Kenny Roberts (Yamaha) battle it out in the 500 cc Swedish TT at Karlskoga.

Photo by Esso Gunnarsson



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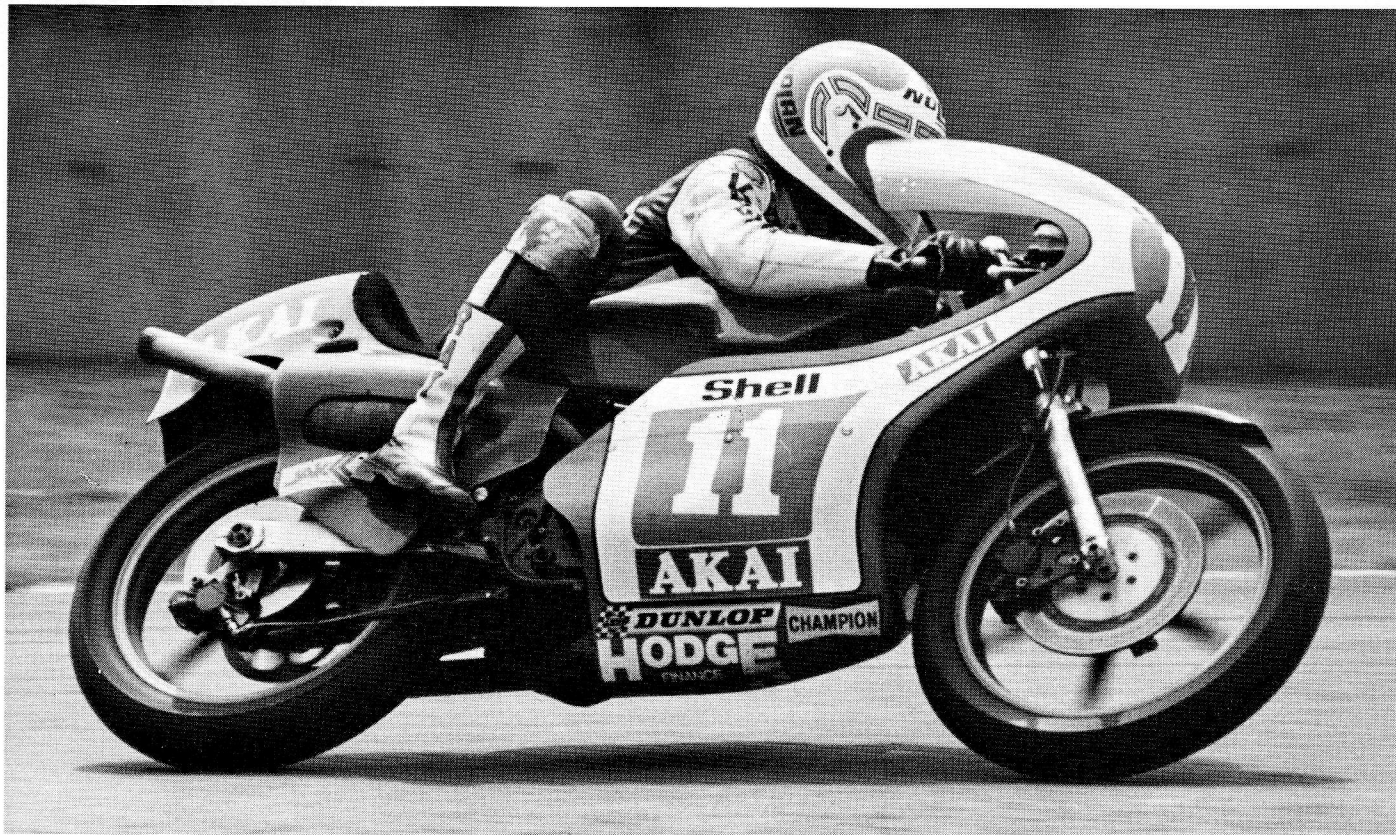
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Kork Ballington has almost clinched the 250 cc title but is finding things not so easy in the battle at the top of the 350 cc class.

Photo by Kawasaki Information Service

Morbidelli of Graziani Rossi proved itself to be an unbeatable combination.

Third in Spain behind the Kawasaki dynamic duo of Kork Ballington and Gregg Hansford, Rossi threw the 250 cc title chase wide open with clearcut and convincing wins at the Yugoslavian and Dutch rounds. Problems in the earlier rounds stopped the former school teacher from increasing his total, and the riders boycott at the Belgian GP will have made the Italian's chances of catching Ballington even more remote. But runner up spot is still up for grabs.

American teenager Randy Mamola is another rider aiming for that second place in the championship. Still only 19 years old Randy rode for the Italian MDS squad until a row shortly after the Italian GP.

For a while it looked as though the talented youngster might have to return home and concentrate on the domestic programme, but again Serge Zago in Belgium came to the rescue with the loan of a pair of Yamahas.

The standard bikes so far have not been quick enough, but with time Randy's mechanic George Vukmanovich seems certain to get them flying.

Kork Ballington looks unstoppable in his bid to retain the 250 cc crown. The South African is riding so well at the moment that it seems a tragedy that he has not yet had the chance to try his hand against the top men in the 500 cc class. Kork wants to race a 500, and if Kawasaki do not come up with their promised new bike, expect Ballington to be wooed by other manufacturers at the end of the year!

The other "Green Meanies" are going well, too. Gregg Hansford, certainly one of the very best riders in the world has had his fair share and more, of problems this year, but when the bikes have gone well, so too has he.

West German Tony Mang has been in sparkling form, too. But perhaps the biggest surprise has been the showing of Austrian Edi Stollinger, who has rocketed into the top ten of the 250 cc class at many meetings this year.

Frenchman Vic Soussan dented his championship hopes a little with a tumble at the Italian GP when he broke his collarbone quite badly, but the swarthy Soussan is as tough off the track as on it, and on the George Beale Yamahas, Vic was back in the points in Holland.

Patrick Fernandez failed to score in Venezuela and in Austria, but he has been grabbing championship points consistently since then, and can be guaranteed to be in the leading bunch.

At the start of the season the riders' outsider for the title was Jon Ekerold. The South African had the experience, the determination and the machinery to do the job, many competitors said.

Fifth in Venezuela, Jon followed that up with a second place in Austria, and a win at Hockenheim to go to the top of the championship table.

Could he hang on against the might and financial backing of the Kawasakis? Sadly the answer was no. He took a tumble during the early part of the race at Imola in the Italian GP the following week, and though Jon bravely tried to race a week later in Spain, his attempt failed.

Then, just when it looked as if he might bounce back into the reckoning at the Yugoslavian round, Jon fell off at slow speed in a Dutch international event when the collarbone snapped apart, and broke the other collarbone.

Following an operation to pin and plate the two Jon drove to Yugoslavia, only to be thrown down the road again on the last lap of the 350 cc race when the conrod on his Opstalan machine snapped, and locked up the motor.

Jon thought he had escaped uninjured from that highspeed fall, but a day later an X-ray revealed that he had broken his leg!

It's too late now for him to win the title, but Jon will be determined to make it as difficult as he can for whoever it is who will take the crown.

Favourite must be the reigning Champ, Kork Ballington. But two rare engine failures in Italy and Holland have stopped him extending too great a lead, and the opposition is still poised for the South African to make a mistake.

Frenchman Patrick Fernandez has been shadowing Kork throughout the season. The slightly built racer, who comes from the South of France resort of St Tropez, grabbed points in six of the opening seven rounds of the series, and he will not give up the fight to win the crown until it is absolutely mathematically impossible to do so.

Ballington's Kawasaki teammate has also found the 350 Kwacker lacking in reliability. Gregg's win at the Italian, fourth round in the series, were his first points of the year!

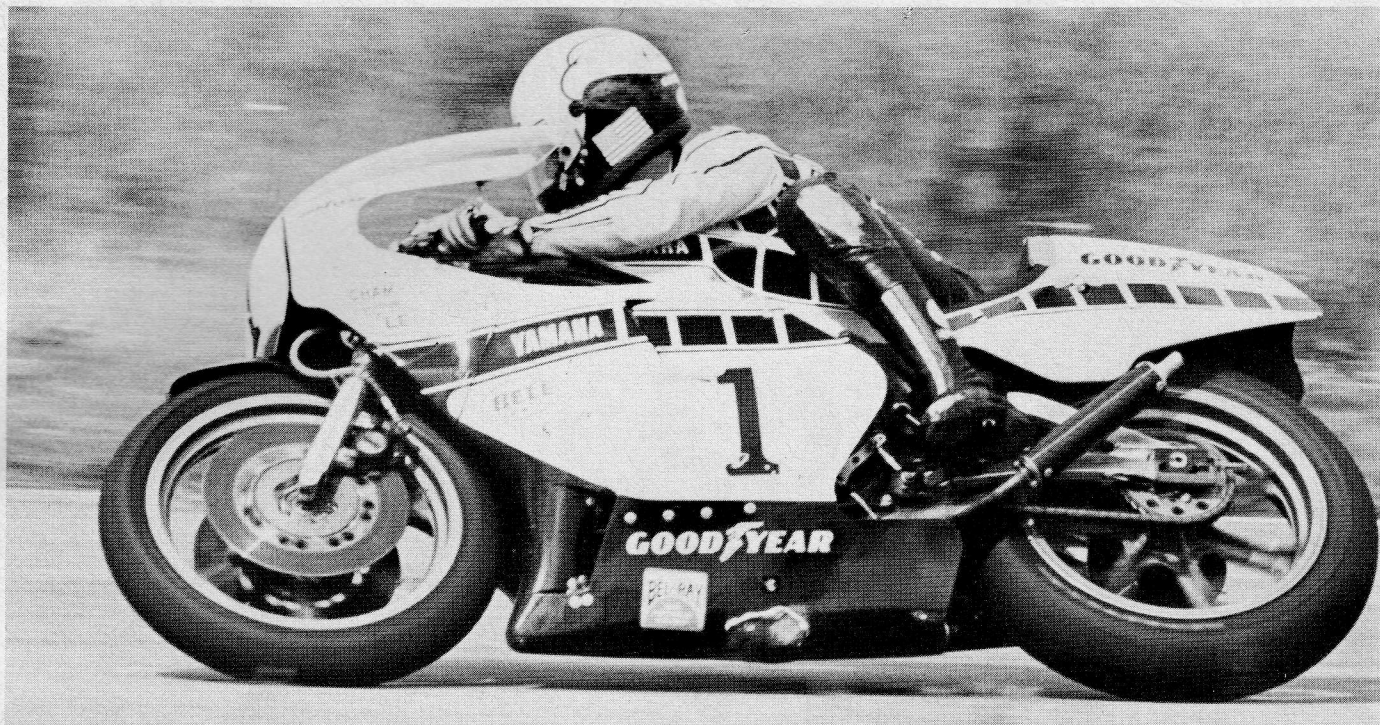
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Can Roberts repeat last year's victory?

Photo by Esso Gunnarsson

But others can point to their bad luck, too. Cheery Walter Villa, one of the nicest guys in racing, has seen dozens of points slide out of grasp this year, and despite a superb start to the season on the Venemotos Yamahas things have recently turned a little sour.

Take the West German GP for example, Walter was forced to stop in the 250 cc race when battling for third place, when he ran out of fuel on the last lap, and then had to pull off the grid at the end of the warm up lap in the 350 cc event, when his gearchange lever fell off.

Sadly there has been very little British interest in the 250 and 350 cc classes this year, and even in the 125 cc event, our sole representative Clive Horton has had to struggle hard for his success. His single point in the Dutch TT doesn't look much when written down. But convert that to blood, sweat and tears, not to mention a great deal of cash and Derby born Clive earned it the hard way.

Galloping ahead of the 125 cc title was Spaniard Angel Nieto,

but an accident while racing in Spain just before the Swedish GP, allowed the rivals struggling in the wake of the Minarelli rider, to see just a slight hint of hope. But with Thierry Espie, the young Frenchman who has been going so well on the Motobecanes out of the running after breaking his leg, there just doesn't seem any one rider capable of consistently winning the remaining rounds, and eight times world champion Nieto looks set to make it nine.



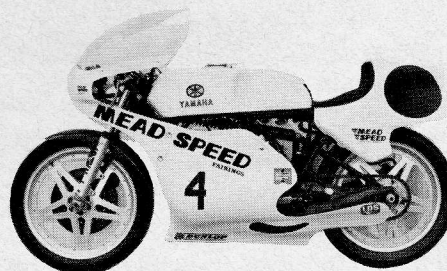
Graziano Rossi — contender for the 250 cc title.

Photo by Esso Gunnarsson

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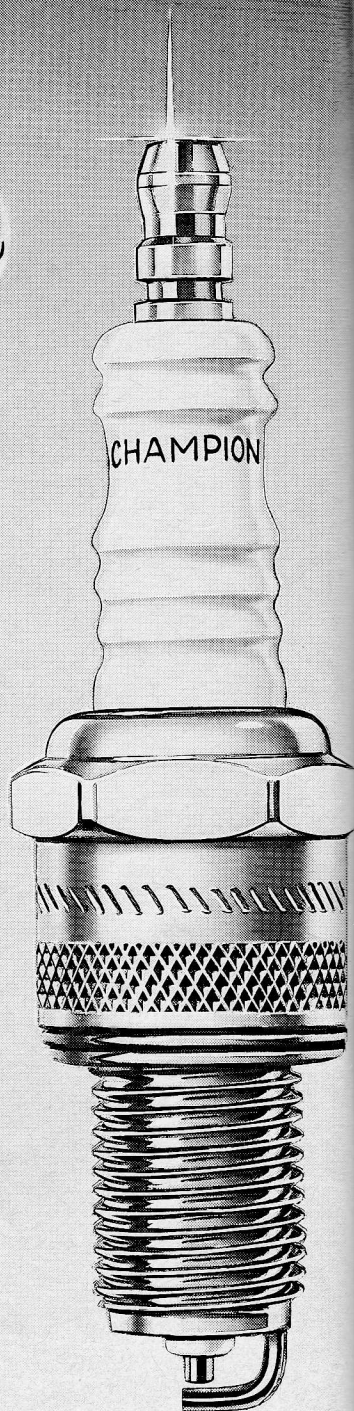
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Jock Taylor, currently in fifth place in the B2A category.

Photo by Esso Gunnarsson

THE SIDECAR SCENE — a year of problems

by Peter Simcock, Motor Cycle Weekly

Two years ago in the British Grand Prix, held here at Silverstone, Britain stood on the verge of one of its greatest moments in sidecar racing history.

Hemel Hempstead star George O'Dell and his then new passenger Shropshire's Cliff Holland had the world championship title in their sights after a hard season of consistent, if not brilliant, riding performances all over the world, and a good finishing position in the British GP would ensure them of that title.

We all know the ending to the story. In terribly wet conditions George and Cliff, using their well tried Terry Windle built outfit in preference to the newer and more radical Eric Varnier built Seymaz unit that had carried them to many of their world championship points, finished well to the front in the gruelling race and ended the day as world sidecar champions, the first Britons to hold the honour for many years.

In many ways 1977 was a red letter year for sidecar road racing. It was the calm before the storm, though even then some of the problems and aggravations that were to burst so dramatically on the scene in 1978 were already apparent.

The problem was one of too much growth in very little time. Unlike the solo class where machine development had been relatively slow compared with advancing engine technology in the past ten years, the sidecar class had seen rapid advancement in both departments.

Gone were the sixteen inch wheels, oil leaking four stroke engines and three inch wide tyres that would last a careful rider the whole of a season, to be replaced by small ten inch wheels that carry tyres nearly as wide — and they are needed to transmit the

power of the very powerful two stroke engines that most competitors now used to the ground.

The vast improvements have taken time of course, but they all came too quickly for the road racing bureaucracy to keep pace with.

The telling point was the appearance of Rolf Biland's Beo outfit in 1978. At first the machine was scoffed at by both riders and officials. Who would think that a sidecar which used two wheel drive — the sidecar and back wheels — had the engine mounted in the middle of the sidecar, and was obviously considerably heavier than any of the other machinery on the tracks would prove to be even relatively competitive.

The answer was given when Biland and his English ballast man Kenny Williams shot to the top of the world championship table at the start of the season, a position in which they were never to be seriously threatened.

The new machine caused a wide split in the paddocks. Whereas the hub centre steering outfits — such as the Seymaz — which had been seen on the tracks from the beginning of 1976 — had been tolerated, the Beo, because it was so advanced caused a furore and brought the whole question of sidecar racing to the boil.

Biland and Williams won the 1978 world sidecar championship on the Beo with ease while O'Dell and Holland, who at one stage did consider buying one of the new machines in order to have a chance of defending their title properly, had a disastrous season.

The FIM, governing body of motor cycle road racing, acted at the end of the season to try and restore a little sanity to the sidecar scene. They split sidecars into two classes, the conventional and

the prototype, which they called B2A (conventional) and B2B (prototype), with each class qualifying for its own world title.

The plan was fraught with problems. The main ones were organisation and finance. Grand Prix organisers were already struggling with too many classes without an extra one to contend with, and riders were finding that the cost of running even a modern conventional outfit for a GP season was far more than most of them could afford. The prospect of keeping two machines on the go — and the prototype machinery was nearly twice the cost of a conventional machine — was completely out of the question.

So organisers had to decide whether to run one or two classes — and the British Grand Prix is one of the few this year that will see the two types of machinery catered for at the same meeting — and riders had to decide where they thought they could do best.

Swiss rider Biland, this year riding with new passenger Kurt Waltisperg, was one of the few riders who had enough backing to compete in both classes, and ironically he is doing well in both, leading the prototype series and being in contention with the leaders in the conventional class.

Frenchman Alain Michel and his English passenger Stu Collins were another of the top brigade who said they would compete in both using their Seymaz outfit for the prototype rounds and a Terry Windle machine in the conventional. But a run of bad luck and the huge financial undertaking involved has made Alain opt out of the prototype series. So today we will only be seeing the likeable Anglo-French duo in the B2A race.

There they will meet some formidable opposition, with, it is good to see, several British crews in with an excellent opportunity of being among the top honours, and even of winning if things go their way.

But first let's take a look at the continental visitors who will be at Silverstone today, starting with the ever popular Rolf Steinhausen and his English passenger Kenny Arthur. Rolf, a former world champion, and Kenny are one of the best known of the continental based crews and have shown this season that they are one of the

most skilful pairs on the track with some fine performances. They had led the world championship table for much of the year.

Then there is Rolf Biland. Biland is acknowledged as one of the most skilful sidecar drivers ever, as well as having perhaps the keenest brain in the paddocks. Using his TTM outfit this season he and passenger Kurt Waltisperg have had an up and down year. But they showed that they had returned to something like their brilliant best with a superb win at the Dutch TT just a few weeks ago.

In the B2B class Biland leads the world championship table. This season he is using an LCR machine, basically a refined version of last seasons all conquering Beo machine, and the new version is proving to be just as dominant. Also using one of the LCR machines, is Bruno Holzer, another Swiss driver, and he is lying in second place in the table — the pair finished one and two with Biland leading at the recent Swiss Formula 750 round, which hosted a round of the B2B championship.

Werner Schwarzel and his crewman Andreas Huber with their Yamaha powered machine are another pair to be on the lookout for. The German crew have been among the most consistent of sidecar Grand Prix performers over the past few years and a win at Silverstone today would be far from the first that they have scored.

Another German crew in with a chance of doing well are Max Venus and Morbert Bittermann. They have had consistent placing in the championship rounds so far this season and could raise a few eyebrows in the crowd.

And don't forget Alain Michel and Stu Collins. They haven't had a good season so far, both in the B2B and B2A classes. But as Alain has showed in the past few weeks, once he has the measure of his English built Terry Windle machine then he will be a very hard man to beat indeed.

But what we will all want to see today is a British pair be first across the finishing line in either of the races, and there must be a reasonable chance that our hopes will be realised.

British three wheeler racing has come a long way in the past ten years. Long gone are the days when only a reasonably competitive German or Swiss rider would wipe the floor with ninety nine per



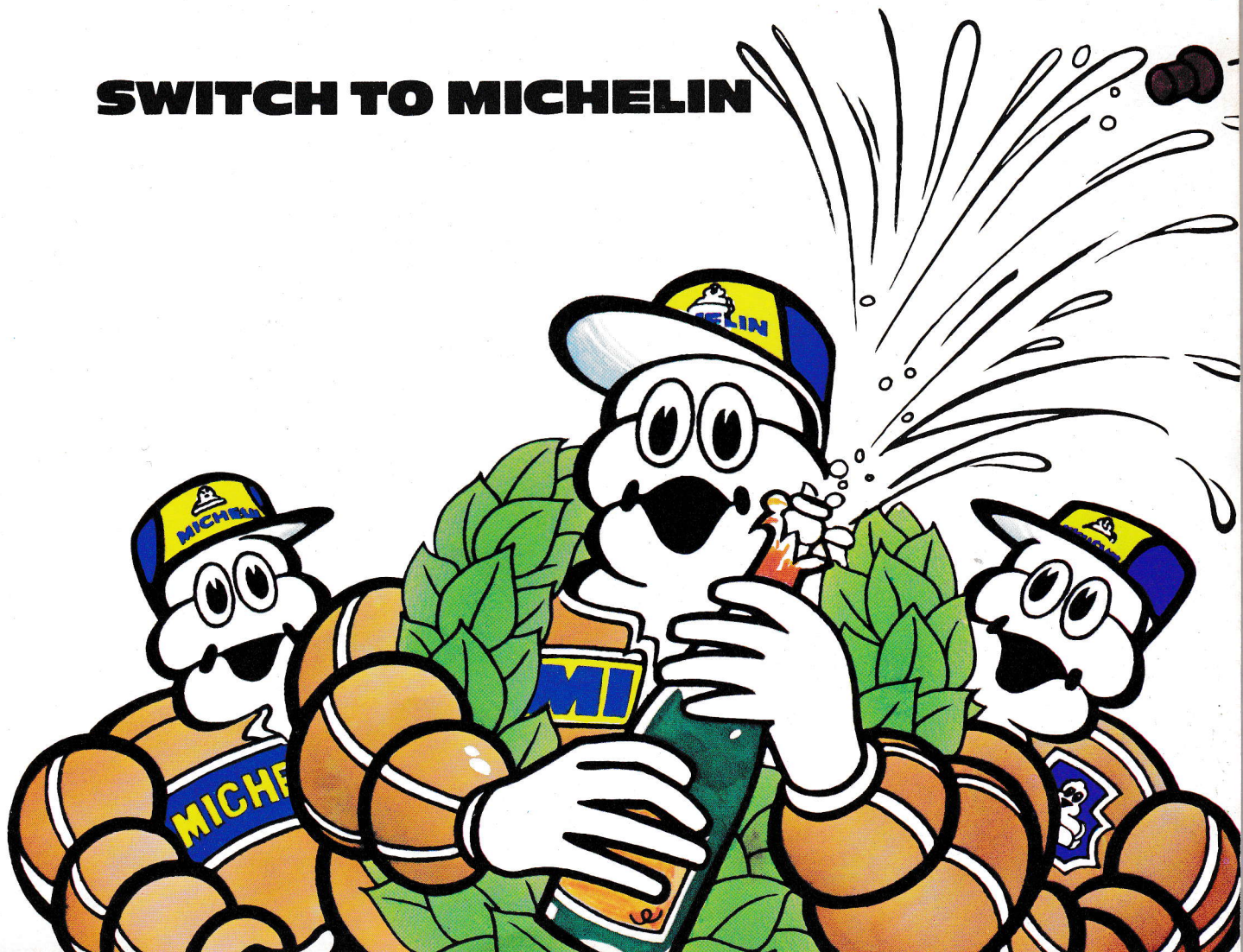
Rolf Biland (LCR Yamaha), leader of the B2B category.

Photo by Josef Mayrhofer

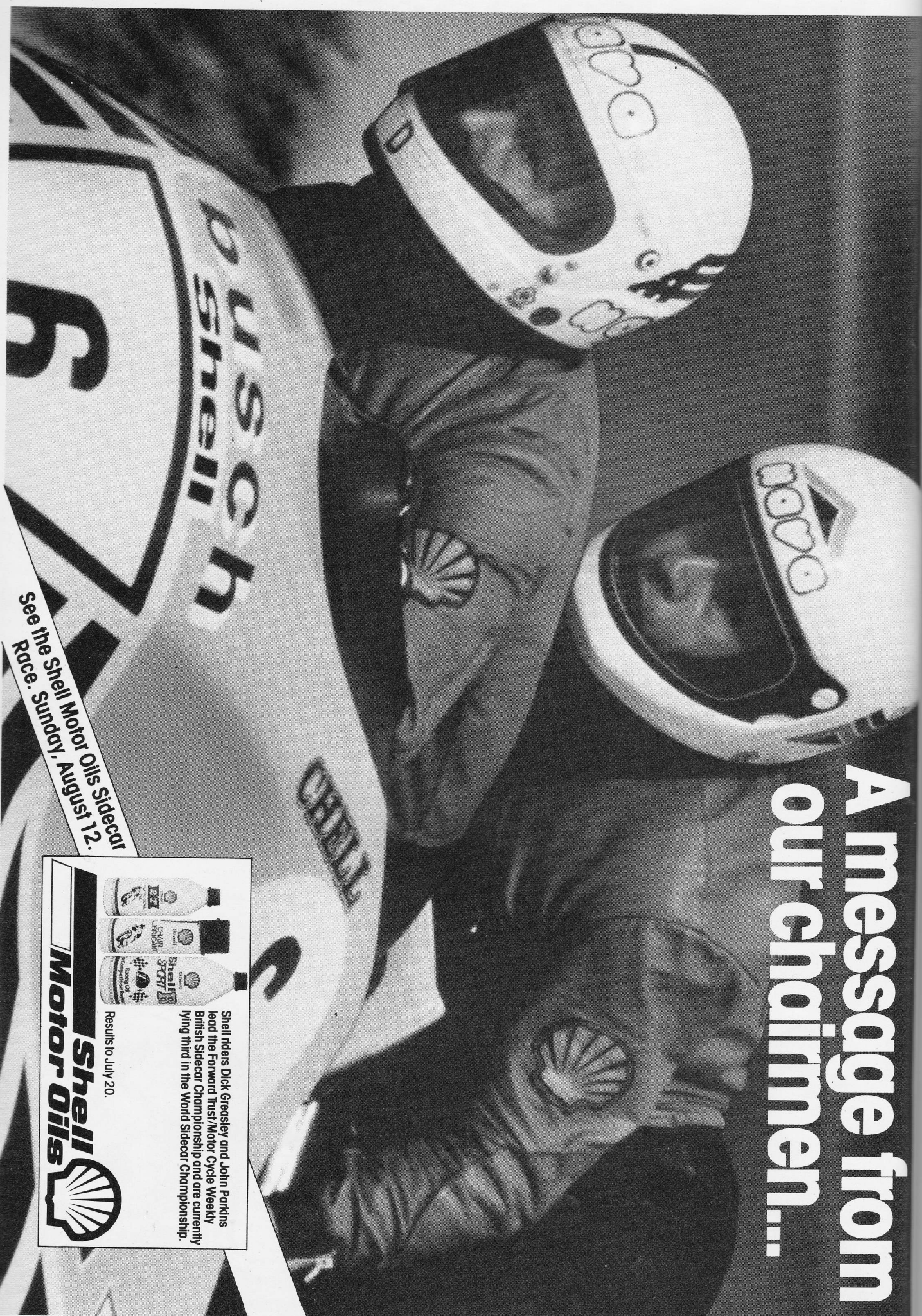
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