

THE ANGLO-AMERICAN MATCH RACES PART TWO



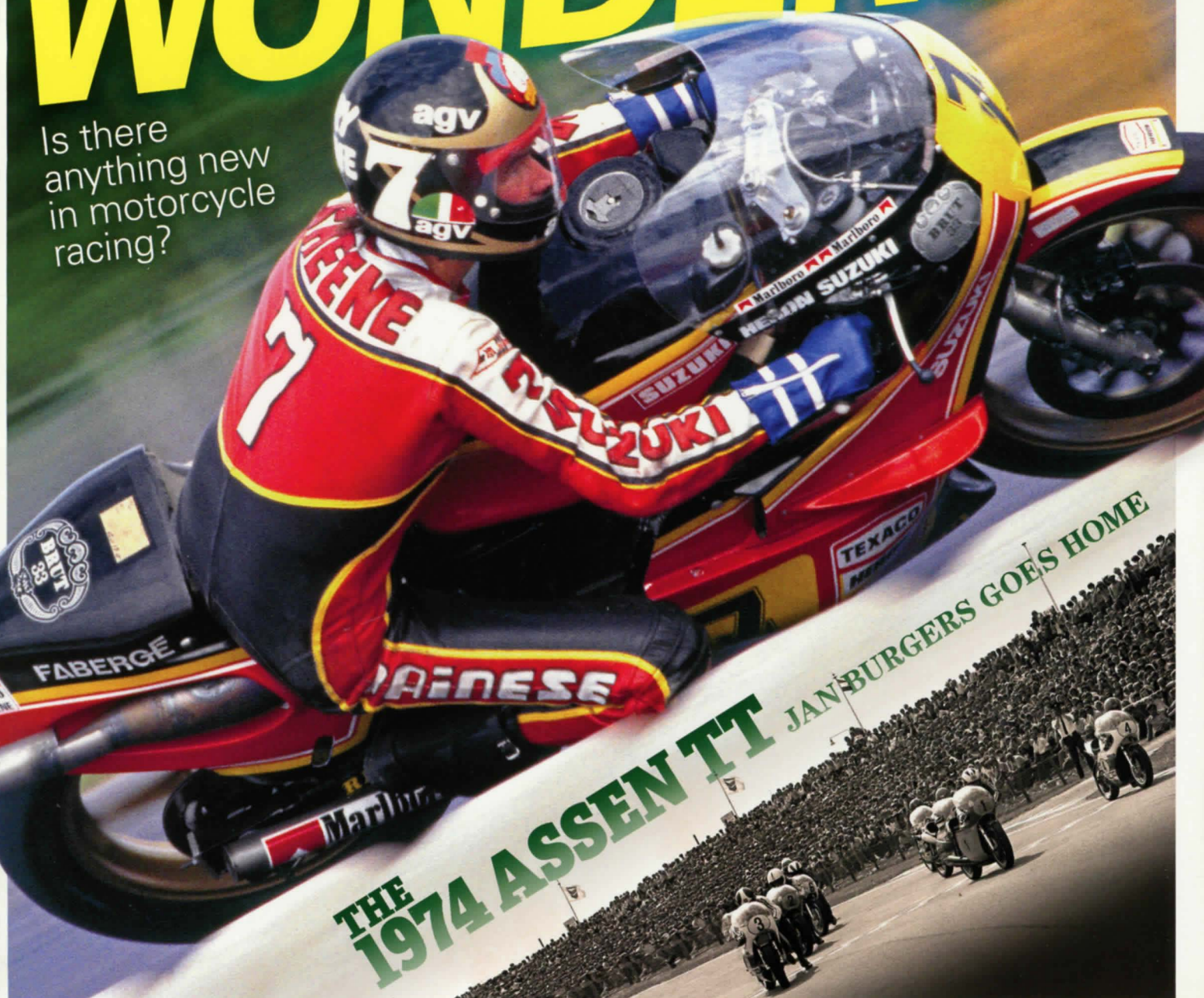
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in motorcycle
racing?



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| Apache Horse – Rare Bimota in profile | Devimead – The story of
racing Masons | On Any Sunday (& Saturday) – At Stafford show |
The classic season winds down | And all the regulars...



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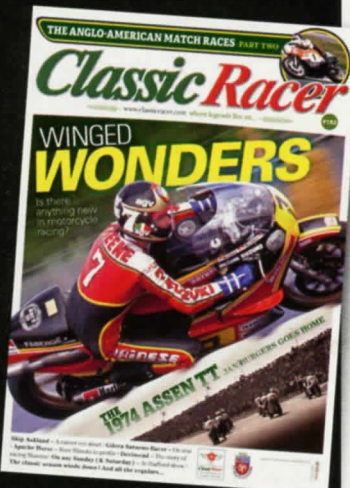
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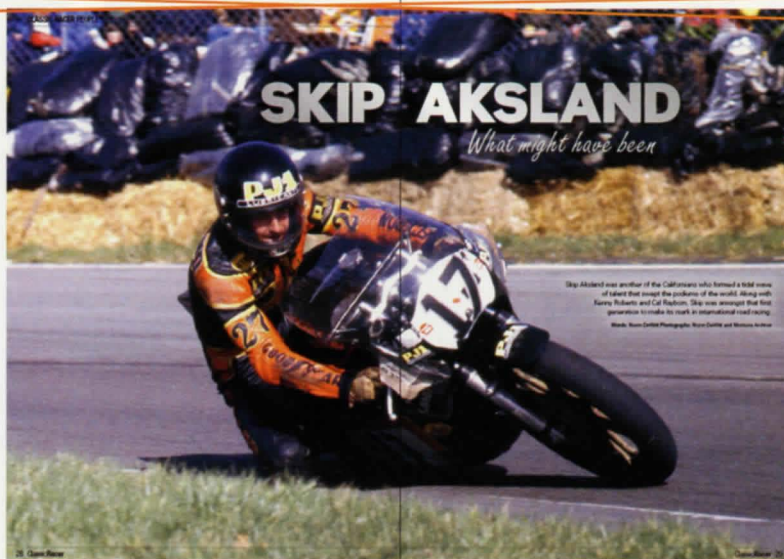
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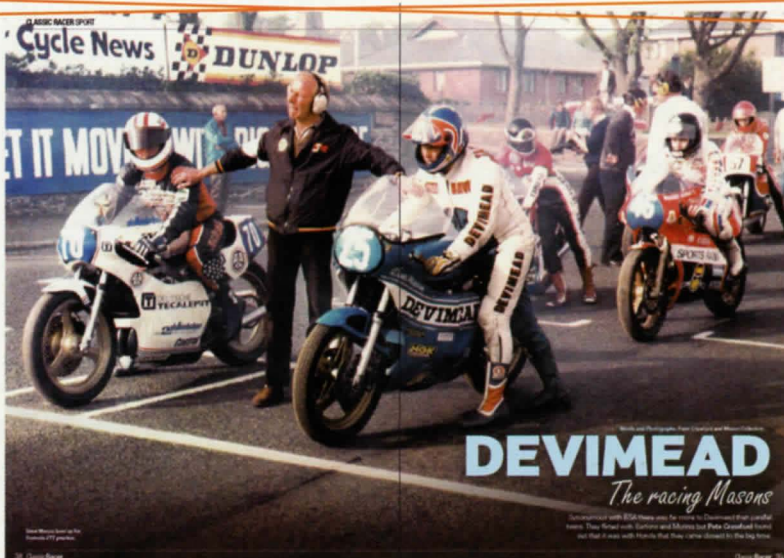
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Apache horse

Words and Photographs: Jeffrey Zani

Bimota's racing beginning



The YB1 was the first-ever racing bike made by Bimota. Designed by Massimo Tamburini, it was raced by a reckless and determined Italian who was nicknamed after an American Indian, and featured a 350cc Yamaha TZ engine.

“Its main strength was the chassis, its worst failing, the fairing.” This is an extreme summary of what worked and what didn’t on the YB1, the first racing bike ever made by Bimota, a plumbing company based in the city of Rimini, Italy, that in the early Seventies decided to promote itself by creating a prototype to race in national and international races.

The remarks come from Giuseppe Elementi, the man who rode it in 1974 and finished the 350cc Italian championship in second position ahead of a certain Giacomo Agostini, who that year won his 14th world title.

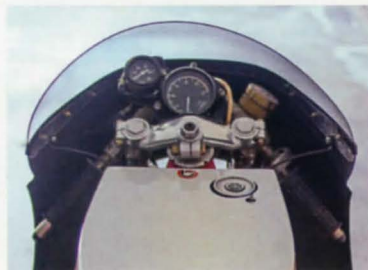


Better known as Kocis because of the somatic traits that made him look like an Apache American Indian, the Italian explains that riding the YB1 was a big pleasure for him, but the generous size of the fairing procured some problems in the bends: "Especially in the fast corners, the air kind of lifted the front of the bike, and that wasn't good at all. I often had to keep my ass on the tank in order to put some weight on the front and turn properly."

Elementi remembers in particular a race in Imola: "At the time there were no Esses, so you had a long straight from the Rivazza corner to the Tamburello. During one of the rounds of the Italian championship, while I'm in the middle of the Tamburello corner, I see a green-white-and-red ball close to my right knee. It was Agostini's helmet. He was overtaking me on the outside. With that fairing, I really couldn't do more. At the end of the race Ago came to me and made some comments about my weird riding position. I told him that he was right, but I had no choice."

At the end, the few miles per hour that the bike gathered in the straight, thanks to the jumbo-size bodywork that fully enveloped the rider, wasn't worth the time lost in the corners. But Massimo Tamburini, the designer of the bike, was so excited about it that he absolutely didn't want to change it.

"I have to go back to 1972 to tell you exactly what happened," says Antonio Morri, one of the co-founders of Bimota. "Massimo had built a chassis for a 750 Honda CB engine and had crashed at the Misano racetrack, breaking three ribs. I told him that I wasn't happy with him risking that much, because I needed him to work with me in the plumbing business company." So Tamburini quit, but only with riding.



In the following months, in fact, he convinced Morri to create a racing department and to design a bike in order to compete in the national championship. "He was very determined, but didn't have all the skills that were required in order to build such a bike. He was so dedicated that he spent a whole winter attending a TIG welding class, and later hired a technician that helped him to build what became the YB1.

"Initially the bike was ridden by Luigi Anelli, who provided the 250cc Yamaha TZ engine that we used. But he was so slow that his father once yelled at him and said that he probably was faster when he went jogging than when he raced the bike," Morri says. "So he quit."

"At that point we had to find an engine, which we bought, and a rider. The only one available to ride the bike, that

now used a liquid-cooled 350cc Yamaha TZ twin, was Kocis. But, if I have to be honest, I didn't trust him. He had the reputation of being a reckless rider. Tamburini, though, decided to give him a chance. At the end, it came out to be the right choice."

Elementi had something that was far from a standard path for a rider. He started to race when he was 28 years old, and in 1974 he only had two seasons behind him, one with a 250 Aermacchi Ala d'Oro and one with a 250cc air-cooled Yamaha. "The first race with Bimota was the 200 Miles of Imola," he says. "We didn't qualify because both the pipes broke. When the session ended I started to cry, because I thought that Morri and Tamburini were going to fire me. Instead, they told me that they were going to make me race the entire Italian championship. I was the happiest guy on earth."

Kocis was not the kind of man that complained, so he rode the bike regardless

Giuseppe Elementi stands proud at the top of the Misano rostrum in 1974.





of the problems given in the corners. The only aspect that he couldn't take, for safety reasons, concerned the handlebars: "I used to brake very, very hard – the Italian says – and broke them when I raced with my Aermacchi too. When it happened with Bimota it forced Tamburini to choose a different material. So he switched from titanium to chromium molybdenum."

The bike adopted a tubular chassis completely designed by Tamburini and a tank that reached the level of the carbs in order to help lower the centre of gravity. The swingarm had eccentric adjusters, and the engine was kept standard. "We never tried to increase its performances, because we were focusing on the frame and the aerodynamics," Morri explains. "Moreover, we weren't really able to do much. Elementi was a mechanic, but Tamburini and I were learning things slowly, step by step."

"Massimo had quit school when he was a teenager and never graduated. Everything he knew was self-taught or learned from friends and books." That is proved by the first ever racetrack experience of the YB1. "We go to Modena with Anelli and it's a complete disaster. The engine was directly attached to the chassis and the vibrations cracked the mountings. That led us to the use of rubbing bushing."

After Anelli's farewell, for the YB1 the most epic race was the last round of the 1974 Italian championship in Mugello. Elementi started very badly, and at the first corner his gap from the leading group was 45 seconds. He pushed his chest on the tank and overtook one rider after the other, finishing at a few metres from the winner. "The crowd went nuts – Kocis remembers – they lifted me in the air and celebrated me as a hero. What a race, I really enjoyed myself."

That moment coincided with the confirmation that Elementi was going to be Bimota's factory rider also in 1975. But then something went wrong. During a test at the Misano racetrack held in January, Kocis tested the bike of a customer of Bimota, which in the meantime had started to produce and sell a kit that allowed riders to use a copy of his chassis.



He crashed in the first corner and suffered some fractures in his left leg. He was taken to the closest hospital, and then to Bologna, where doctor Claudio Costa assured him that the professor that was going to take care of the surgery was one of the best. After the operation, though, the worst; due to gangrene, his limb was amputated. And Bimota lost its main rider.

That was the end of the first and legendary chapter of the Bimota saga, which was soon followed by wins and glory. The chassis used in 1975 by the young Venezuelan talent Johnny Cecotto, who won the 350cc world championship at the first try, was nearly identical to the one of the YB1. Massimo Tamburini, the co-owner of a Rimini-based plumbing business company, went on to become one of the most sophisticated and recognised motorcycle designers ever, and to shape contemporary jewels such as the Ducati 916 and the MV Agusta F4, more respectable members of a dynasty that began with the YB1.

The rider, Giuseppe Elementi, and the Bimota reunited in retirement.

