

Racing Report Cont'd

OIL CONTROL PROBLEMS CONTINUE TO PLAUGE NEILSON AT LAGUNA SECA

By Adrian S. Palmer

Photos by Terrance P. Jones

As the reader of the DIOC race reports is probably well aware by now, oil control appears to be a serious problem for Cook "Strictly Stock" Neilson and his Desmo Ducati. This problem, which surfaced at the Sears Point Race, struck again at Laguna, preventing Neilson from contesting Steve McLaughlin for first place.

Practice gave no hint of the difficulties ahead. The preliminary heat race turned out to be a three-way contest between McLaughlin, Pridmore, and Neilson, with the competitors finishing in that order. It was apparent to all that Cook was not going all out during the heat--preferring to sit back, study the style of the flamboyant McLaughlin, practice some new maneuvers (see "The Birth of The Burp"), and lull the opposition into a false sense of security.

This strategy appeared to work perfectly. Before the Super-bike finals, McLaughlin was heard on a number of occasions to state, somewhat immodestly, that he was going to "blow all of the competitors into the weeds," and that the promoters "might as well make out the winner's check right away and save the others the trouble of racing."

While McLaughlin was talking, however, the always serious team of Neilson and Schilling was hard at work honing the highly tuned Duck to a razor's edge. Tires were changed, wheels balanced, and gearing zeroed in to minimize the need to shift while, at the same time, maximizing the Duck's well-known ability to "honk" on the high speed sections.

While Cook and Phil worked, McLaughlin was giving interviews and, in the background, the big-buck Yoshimura R&D racing team was putting the finishing touches on McLaughlin's Suzuki. Now this is one impressive machine. Bored out to God-Knows-What, the Suzuki was outfitted with such typical stock Suzuki items as Kayaba gas motocross shocks and a square section swing arm, braced to within an inch of the enormous rear tire. In addition (or should I say "subtraction?") a few pieces of the electrical system which we have come to expect on all motor-cycles, not to mention tricko-slicko Japanese machines, were, inexplicably, missing from the bike--something which can, I presume, be attributed to careless assembly practice. But all this is beside the point. The Suzuki accelerated like you wouldn't believe and also, surprisingly, handled well. The honored opposition from the East is finally getting its act together.

The final line-up had McLaughlin, Pridmore, and Neilson in the front row, with Paul Ritter on his big-bore Desmo in the second, and one more Ducati, a nearly stock 900-SS ridden by Kurt Lentz, further back. When the flag drooped, McLaughlin outdragged everybody to the first turn, followed closely by Pridmore and Neilson. Shortly into the race, Neilson passed Pridmore, whose Racecrafter-prepared Z-1 Kawasaki was only running on three cylinders--apparently experiencing electrical problems.

Up until the 3/4 point, the race followed a fairly consistent pattern: McLaughlin would out-accelerate Neilson on the slower sections, where his booming Ducati didn't give away a thing to the highly modified Suzuki. Moreover, Neilson consistently outraked the hefty Suzuki, due both to the Duck's lighter weight and its superior brakes. (McLaughlin was overheard saying that the one-off trick front forks on his "production" Suzuki wouldn't allow the fitting of Lockheed calipers.)

Meanwhile, the Duck lovers in the crowd were hanging loose, knowing that Cook didn't want to play "I'll pass you, then you pass me" with McLaughlin--a game Cook would surely lose due to the four's superior acceleration. Instead, Neilson hung right on McLaughlin's tail waiting for the moment when he would go by for once and for all.

Alas, that moment was not to come, and Neilson's chance for victory was snuffed out by the previously-alluded-to oil control problems--only now Neilson couldn't control McLaughlin's oil. Steve, in his frantic attempt to stay out of reach of Cook's thrusting Ducati, leaned his broad-beamed Suzuki over too far in a bumpy section of the track and scraped a hole in

her side cover. The spray of oil from the hole did a beautiful job of lubricating the entire front of Neilson's bike--and his face shield--with 20-50W, forcing Cook to slow down, in order to avoid going off of the track, and settle for second place.

Finishing third was Pridmore, followed by an aggressive Paul Ritter, who went faster and faster as the race progressed and he got used to the track. Kurt Lentz on the remaining Ducati, distinctive with its orange Mulholland freon-cell motocross shocks drove a steady race on his brand new bike (only 250 miles on the odometer) to take 10th.

Naturally we were disappointed that Cook didn't get a chance to fight it out fair and square with McLaughlin. But the California Hot Rod's ability to hold its own on a "horse power" track which did not really suit it against the best that the land-of-the rising sun could put together gave us reason to be optimistic about the future. Moreover, we can always count on the articulate editor of Cycle to come in first in the fiercely contested "post-race-interview" competition. Cook was heard to say to Larry Huffman, Steve McLaughlin, and the huge crowd listening on the PA system: "It might have been a different story if I hadn't gotten covered with oil spraying from the left side-case of Steve's bike--right where his alternator is supposed (pause) to be" (emphasis, Cook Neilson's)

The huge crowd listening to the interview roared its approval.



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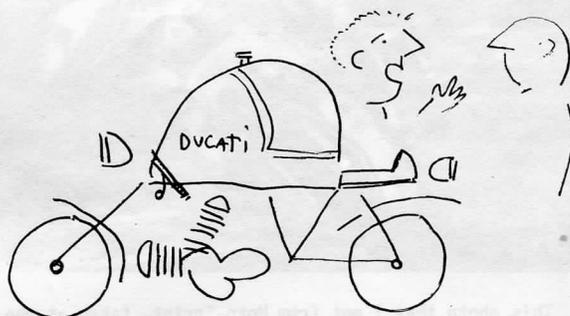
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I go 950 miles between gas stops but I'm having one hell of a time reaching the controls. Maybe I oughta get pull-backs....