

features

Duff didn't ride for the Norton factory, but the private Manx and G50 Matchless was just about as quick when properly tuned. Duff was one of the first two riders to lap the Isle of Man at more than 100 mph on a G50.

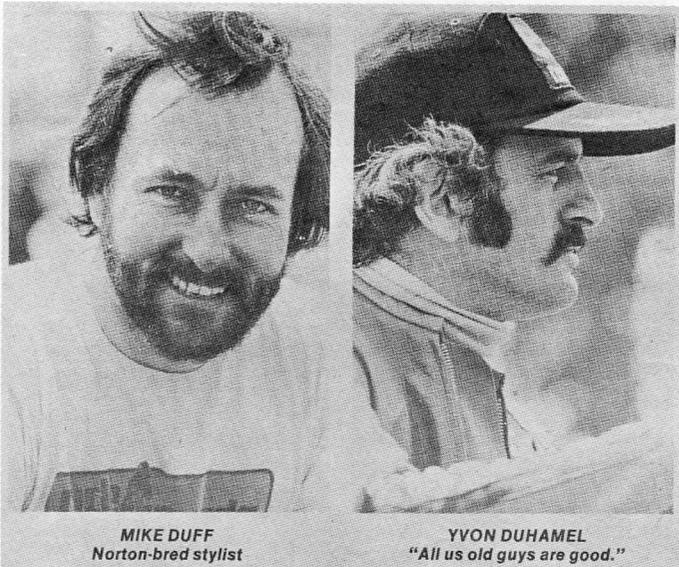
That was in 1962, two years after his first racing trip to England and two years before he signed with the Yamaha factory. Yamaha was locked in Combat with Honda for world domination in matters motorcycling, and race track activity was intense.

Duff rode the RD56 rotary-valve Yamaha 250cc twins and the 125 and 250 cc V-fours against the Honda fours, fives and sixes. Handling went out the window when shatteringly powerful engines were amalgamated with high centers of gravity for ground clearance and frames which were convoluted to tie the complex mechanism together yet allow easy engine removal for daily rebuilding.

Duff placed second to team-mate Phil Read in 250cc world standings in 1965. A violent crash in Japan at the end of the season put him out of the running for the final half of 1966 and left him with a limp which he still has today.

Back on Matchless in 1967, he rode for English sponsor Tom Arter and then came home to stay at the end of the season. He rode selected races at Daytona, Harewood, Mosport and St. Jovite but since 1970 has concentrated on his family and business.

Duff still dons leathers occasionally for selected events. When invited to participate in Cycle Canada's handling test, he decided to have a go.



Duhamel is a different person. Where Duff's emotional level is cool and measured, Duhamel's peppery nature can be as volatile as high test fuel. Don't get in his way when he's doing business; don't ask a dumb question at the wrong time.

For Duhamel on the track, and opening exists wherever there is daylight.

Typically, he crashed in his first race. He's done it many times since, but more often he won or broke the motorcycle trying.

Determination was the key word throughout. As when he won the Canadian No. 1 in dirt track six times between 1963 and 1970. And the Canadian No. 1 three times in motocross. And the Canadian No. 1 four times in road racing. And the national high-point award seven times and the Daytona 250cc race in 1968 and 69 on Deeley Yamahas. That sort of thing.

Riding for Kawasaki, he won AMA nationals in 1971, 72 & 73, culminating in victory at Ontario, California in the 250 mile road race at the end of 1973.

The advent of the TZ700 Yamaha in 1974 spelled doom for Kawasaki, but Duhamel soldiered on. Water cooling, new suspensions and careful development couldn't make the tripples competitive with the fours.

The green didn't come up lucky again until 1977 when Gregg Hansford won the Canadian F750 round with Duhamel right behind, already in possession of the Kawasaki Cup from the 250cc support race. In 1978, after a year's layoff, he placed third at Mosport behind Mike Baldwin and Ken Roberts. That was his last race after eight years with Kawasaki.

Duhamel, 39 looks at veterans like Mike Hailwood and Mick Grant and figures there should be a place behind a fairing for him. "All of us old guys are good." He'd like a shot at a 500 GP Honda if the opportunity arises. As reported he was to ride a Yamaha at Mosport.

Ducati and Suzuki could scarcely have chosen two more different means to the same goal.

The goal -- a fast, lightweight, sporting roadster in the 1,000cc class, with good handling a must. A sporting litre-bike could hardly avoid being fast, but civilized road manners aren't always part of the deal.

These two are the best. A succession of European bikes, from the Featherbed-frame Nortons to the Moto Guzzi Le Mans, have been known for good handling. The Ducati is heir to the Mediterranean tradition of motorcycle obedience.

Japan used to be another kettle of fish, or bag of snakes, as you prefer. It wasn't until 1969 with the CB 750 Honda that Oriental bikes became notably heavy, and it wasn't until the 60 bp 500cc Mach III Kawasaki that they became notably powerful for their size.

The Kawasaki and its 750cc sibling, the Mach IV, were the most terrifying street motorcycles of all time. On a race track they could be positively ghastly.

It's been an uphill struggle from there. The Z-1 did little to set handling matters straight. It wasn't until the Suzuki GS 750 appeared in 1977 that superbikes' handling began to deserve the name super.

In the meantime, you could buy frame kits, accessory swing-arms, better shocks, fork improvements and all manner of other after-the-fact fixes to render some improvement in your snaking scooter. But not good handling out of the showroom from Japan.

With the GS-1000 being an outgrowth of the 750, it was natural that it would have manners to match.

The 1971 Ducati 350 Desmo was one of the most harmonious motorcycles of all time. It was light, quick, sounded good and was sweet to ride. With the right tires, you could play boy racer until the cows came home or the vibration gave you whitefinger, whichever came first.

Today's 900 Super Sport Desmo is a virtual double-up of the 350's successful formula. Its dedicated and individualistic designer, Dr. Fabio Taglioni, saw to that.

When an idea works, be wary how you muck with it.

Confounding the cradle-frame tradition of the Featherbed Norton and its numerous copies, Dr. T., stuck to the open chrome-moly frame with crankcase as an integral part of it. The crankcase became a large sand casting with two cylinders grafted onto it.

In the cylinder department, it's 1956 all over again. Single inlet and exhaust valves incline away from hemispherical combustion chambers; spiral bevel gears drive the single overhead camshaft through a vertical shaft; a single offset spart plug ignites the mixture.

Of course it's desmodromic, a sporting Ducati tradition. Extra lobes on each cam close the valves positively through rockers, rather than depending on a spring.