

features

WHICH MOTORCYCLE IS WORLD'S BEST HANDLER?

Cycle Canada Test

Borrowed from CYCLE CANADA September, 1979 issue.
Text Written by the staff of Cycle Canada, photos by Bill Petro.

Mike Duff and Yvon Duhamel help us compare the Ducati 900 Super Sport and the Suzuki GS-1000 to determine which is the best handling motorcycle in the world.

Everybody talks about it, not everybody achieves it and for most, it's seldom as good as they'd like.

It's handling. Unlike sex or whatever else you think is dirty, motorcycle handling is not easy to define, let alone quantify.

The motorcycle lexicon is full of jargon, buzz-words and vague expressions which if not designed to baffle the newcomer achieve that end unintentionally. Ask a biker what they mean and you'll probably get a contorted, lengthy response which shows how ill-defined the motorcycling argot is.

Handling is the vaguest expression of all. Something like horsepower you can define, picture in your mind and if you have a \$50,000 piece of equipment at your disposal, measure accurately to the second decimal. Top speed, acceleration and weight are easily quantified. Not handling.

The rider can tell how the bike feels when he hits the brakes in a corner or negotiates an ess-bend or gases it down a bumpy straight, but try attaching sufficient measuring and recording apparatus to prove it.

So far, the likelihood of the human motorcyclist being replaced by a machine is remote.

The observer can see whether a motorcycle wobbles in a corner, or scrapes its underbelly, and can measure its progress with a stop watch. Put lap times and rider's sensory perceptions together in some logical fashion, and perhaps you can arrive at a reasonable measure of what handling is all about.

You start with the machine. The best handler, or course, is Ducati's race-bred 900 Super Sport. Except that everyone knows technology has overtaken the Europeans and that in the big-bike stakes Suzuki's devastating GS-1000 is the best there is.

To settle the question, you compare them.

Whom do you get to ride them? Ask the two best motorcycle racers Canada has ever produced - Mike Duff and Yvon Duhamel.

Where to ride them? Perhaps the ultimate test would be the Tourist Trophy course in the Isle of Man. Except that it's used for other things during the last week in May in which we would do our test, and the food's not that good over there. Chips and peas.

Try Shannonville. The twisty 1.68km race course which grew from a go-kart track is known for sorting the nimblers from the stumblers during club races all summer long. Just east of Belleville, Ont. Sha-nonville Motorsport Park would be the venue.

To name a winner, you need a score. We would use lap times on the track to provide half the total, and rider evaluations for the other half.

The faster bike, based on its average lap time with both

riders, would get a perfect track score of 50; the other bike's score would be proportional, based on how its average lap times compared.

To allow riders to evaluate handling for the second half of the test, a definition was needed. After conferences, exchange of memos and some head-scratching, we broke handling down into five components, each to be scored out of possible 10 points.

They are: 1- Feeling of security at speed in a straight line; 2- stability in corners, lack of wallow or wobble, 3- behavior in corners while braking or altering throttle setting; 4- behavior during transition from one direction mode to another-- for example. straight line to corner, left to right and vice-versa; and 5- responsiveness or steering effort required.

Duff, Duhamel and the Cycle Canada staff, would contribute their scores, staffers' scores being based on riding on the street.

This was the first time Duff and Duhamel had ridden on the same race track together since 1971 at Daytona, Fla. in fact it was the first time they'd seen each other for a long time and they had a lot to talk about.

The reason we chose these two is simple.

Mike Duff came within a hairsbreadth of winning a world road race championship Yvon Duhamel hasn't enough fingers and toes to count all the Canadian Championships he has won. Not to mention the number of times he has tasted asphalt when his under-powered factory Kawasaki had its sights on the leaders of some AMA national.

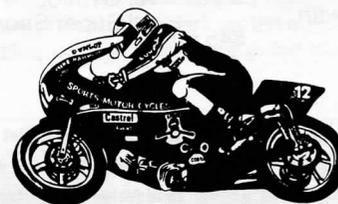
In years of experience with a variety of machinery on all manner of race courses they're the best.

Duff retired from active road racing in 1970, after a 15-year career. He bridged the transition from the classic British singles to the frantic Japanese two-strokes, and back again.

Good handling was pretty much taken for granted when Duff started in 1955. The Manx Norton was the bike to beat, and its TT-bred manners were impeccable. The frame was a Herculean structure of Reynolds 531 chrome moly tubing, the stuff the best racing bicycles are still made of today. The double overhead cam 500cc engine didn't have enough horsepower -- about 50 -- to tweak things out of line.

The combination was quick enough, and manageable enough, that it often left much more powerful but poorer handling equipment in its wake. In the hands of Mike Hailwood on the TT course, it could lap at 100 mph and embarrass the MV opposition on their Italian fire engines.

**DUCATI 900
WORLD CHAMPION**



Isle of Man - 2 June 1978 Driver Mike Hailwood

ISLE OF MAN T-SHIRT

This shirt was created to commemorate the tremendous win of Mike Hailwood at the famed Isle of Man races. It is silk screened in three colors, red, green, black on a white back ground. Printed on both sides. \$6.50 plus \$1.25 shpg & handling.