



# Bike Magazine

August 1987

## The Master Race

When the fearful spectre of MZ racing graunched into gear at Cadwell Park, Roland Brown was there to cheer 'em on.....

By Roland Brown

Through the blue smoke hanging in a cloud over Cadwell Park's grid I could just make out a marshals frantically waving yellow flag as MZ racers charged headlong into the hairpin for the first time with all the aggression of a Pro-Am final. These strangely styled road bikes looked almost comical, jockeying for position with their long chrome pipes ringing out as the riders hauled on an assortment of disc and drum brakes and attempted to hack down through gearboxes.

As the pack bumped and bored their way out and up the hill we'd lost two – that's the spirit – to leave only eight bikes but no shortage of close racing. The lanky figure of Steve Long came back into view first, orange vest flapping over black Suzuki leathers in his first-ever race. A cheer went out from the handful of spectators brandishing a big MZ flag along the start line – then another cheer as a huge missed gear revved Steve's battered old TS250 through its redline. The chasing bunch, on newer ETZs, inched closer.

Two laps later, leader Long looked back to see them right on his tail with heads down and teeth bared. This was good stuff, the closest race so far at the Vincent Owners' Club meeting. Paul Streets and Dave Cummings were battling for second on their orange tanked machines and by lap four Cummings led the race by half a Pneumant's width from Streets, with Long now back in third.

Through the final turns Cummings still led. Streets came out of the bend hard, inched alongside...and just failed to sneak past at the line. Matthew Baldwin pipped early leader Long for third. The finish-line marshals grinned, the flag-wavers applauded. MZ racing had arrived.

More precisely, the Bike/Avon MZ 250 Challenge had arrived, and so what if only ten of the East German two-stroke singles had lined up for Cadwell's first round on a showery Sunday in June. We'd still come a fair way from the idea that a group of MZ-riding friends from Herfordshire had thought up last year, and from the fist small mention in our January issue news pages. Since then the rules had been changed to take in the disc braked ETZ250, originally excluded for being too new and expensive, but the aim had remained the same: 'the cheapest form of bikesport since Moped Mayhem' was how we'd described it. And on proper race circuits too.

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If anyone epitomised the sort of people we'd been aiming at it was Steve Long, a contestant in three forms of motorcycle competition this year despite being unemployed since Christmas. "We're the leading British moped racers y'know," grinned Steve through a mop of dark curly hair, referring to this Scunthorpe-based Crash Plus Four team's victory in the four-stroke step-thru class at the Hednesford Moped Mayhem. He's also been beach racing on a Yam DT175 "that's even rattier than the MZ" and, as his old TS250/1 cost £45 from a local breaker's yard, the value of the three-bike Long equipe could hardly have been more than a hundred quid.

Steve's MZ was a mixture of standard machine and bits mobbed, in a fashion typical of most of the contestants, with whatever was available cheap or preferably free. The engine had been "opened up a bit" and a 35mm Mikuni card borrowed from a TZ350 Yamaha. "The motor's going pretty well really. Seems about as quick as the quickest," he'd said after morning practice. But the standard rear shocks' adjusters were seized in the softest position and the bike's forks and even its front drum brake were spongy shock items. "It doesn't brake at all. We failed scrutineering first time because the bloke pulled the brake on and pushed the bike forward. But we ran it up and down a few times to heat the brake up and it got through in the end."

A local dealer, Brian Lees Motorcycles, had given Steve a pair of tyres made by series backers Avon but otherwise the finance was down to him. "But I'd like to say a big thanks to Maggie because she's been sponsoring me. You want to see my card?" said Steve, whose main concern seemed to be the clash of dates between the next rounds of moped and MZ racing. "As a professional I'll have to go where the money is," he decided, settling on the West Raynham MZ round.

As Steve recovered from the shock of leading for the opening four laps of his debut race another first-timer, 24-year-old Adam Shearing, was busily attempting repairs to the throttle of the bike he'd just crashed in the same event. Adam's 1971 ES250/2 Trophy was ugly even by MZ standards with an old-fashioned headlamp nacelle, huge front mudguard and hefty pair of leading-link forks, not to mention the long, low exhaust pipe that had caught Adam out when it grounded and tipped him off at Park corner.

"My first race and I crashed on the second lap. I knew I was overdoing it, I didn't hang off like the people in front. Now I know why they did," he said ruefully, attacking the broken bike with the help of his brother Giles, a large hammer and a jubilee clip.

Adam's 16 year old ES could have been entered into the day's Classics races, too, and must have been the cheapest bike of all to get onto the track. He bought it for £35 and used it on the road for two years, abandoning it in the garden last winter before hearing about the MZ race series. "I've always wanted to try racing and when this came along I thought I'd have a go. We spent £13.50 on a battery, gave it a lick of paint and that was the only expense."

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Some mild engine tuning and an extra hold drilled in the big silencer helped liberate an extra horsepower or two, and Adam reckoned his bike to be almost a match for the newer tackle. "It doesn't seem much slower than the others. I've only got four gears but third's so torquey I can keep hacking away while the others are slipping through their five-speed gearboxes. The forks are good – inbuilt anti-dive! – and it doesn't wobble or anything. I'm just surprised there aren't more bikes out there because racing MZs is a brilliant idea."

A few large plops of rain began to fall as Adam and Giles finished bodging together the Trophy just in time for round two. By the time our ten heroes were lined up on the grid the track was looking damp and slippery. The starter's flag waved, they tore off again – and again the yellow flags were flapping madly as two bikes went down at the hairpin. While one rider hopped away, 17-year-old Matthew Baldwin was back on his silver-tanked ETZ and chased the leaders as if nothing had happened.

First race winner Dave Cummings led and mastered the tricky conditions to pull away from Steve Foster for a comfortable win. But the story of the race was the ride by faller Matthew Baldwin, who by the fourth lap had caught the bunch dicing for third and by the end had pulled away to beat them. His dad Martin runs Burwins, the north London MZ dealers, and was racing the same bike against Vincents, BMWs, Kawasakis and Ducatis in the day's open races. You might as well get your money's worth, even if the bike is only worth a couple of hundred pounds.

Money – or lack of it – had been Steve Foster's incentive to take up MZ racing. With a second place in his second ever race he could almost have justified forgetting to wear his orange novice jacket, and was enjoying himself hugely. "I threw my Honda VFR750 road bike up the road in March and decided that was it, racing MZs must be cheaper. I bought the bike specially and didn't have the heart to tell the fellow I was going to race it. It cost £100, which was a bit expensive, but I got a spare for ten pounds as a bag of bits."

A new set of leathers and boots cost somewhat more than the bike, a standard looking black TS whose rear carrier had been cunningly converted into a passable paddock stand. A bit of filing to the exhaust port, a Honda front wheel and twin-leading-shoe-brake, and Steve was away. "And it's great. My problem is finding the right lines but I've been getting faster all the time and I know I can go faster still. I've got sixth and second so I'll see what I can do in the last one."

The answer was second again, after a great three-way scrap at the front that saw Steve take the lead from Matthew Baldwin, only for Dave Cummings to come whistling past him into the hairpin to win by a yard. Behind him an equally good race for fourth was won by Paul Streets, famous for pitting south London dealers Raceways' ETZ250 against GSX-R1100s et al in last year's Snetterton six-hour production race.

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The Raceways bike had not been improved by having gearbox oil, instead of two-stroke, added to its petrol that morning – the bike had seized in an earlier race – but Paul loved it anyway. “The forks are underdamped, it’s an absolute animal but it’s cost virtually nothing whereas my TZ has cost me about three grand already this year and all it’s done is hurt me...”

What Dave Cummings’ MZ had done was take him to wins in all three races – not bad for a bloke who’d not raced for five years after giving up through lack of funds. Bushy bearded and quietly spoken, a 30-year-old Dave owns a bike shop at Whitacre Heath, near Birmingham, and has recently become an MZ dealer. The race series was just what he needed to tempt him back onto the track, especially as he had raced one of the East German bikes against Cottons, Honda Red Rockets and the like in the single cylinder class back in 1982.

Not only that but he still had the bike, “It as just sitting there but it was fully faired, with a home-made tank and seat, so most of it was no good for this series. (Frames, forks, tank and seat must be standard, though tuning is allowed.) The engine was quite highly modified and had a 38mm Amal carb and a Motoplat racing ignition, so I pulled it out of the modified chassis, bought a non-running ETZ250 as part of a job-lot and put the tuned motor in that.” Some tinkering with the exhaust allowed the big carb to make itself felt but the bike still wouldn’t pull the tall standard gearing – Dave got around that by fitting the smaller front sprocket listed for sidecar use.

The ETZ looked pretty stock but its suspension too was better sorted than most. A pair of red Sebac shocks matched the paintwork and stiffened up the rear – “it’s a bit harsh now but dead steady” – while up front inch-long spacers and #30-weight oil kept the gaitered forks under control. A pair of Avon tyres put Dave in contention for a share in the end-of-season prize fund, and he was already looking forward to the next round at West Raynham airfield in Norfolk. “I thought the bike would be quick because I knew the engine, but I never expected to win. Now I can’t wait for the next one.”

And if Dave Cummings’ hat-trick of wins had proved the value of a few careful mods, then the pack of hard-charging novices snapping at his silencer had shown the MZ series’ potential for enjoyable and competitive racing on the cheap. Let’s hope there are a few more on the grid at West Raynham on July 26. This could be the start of something big in every aspect except wallet damage....