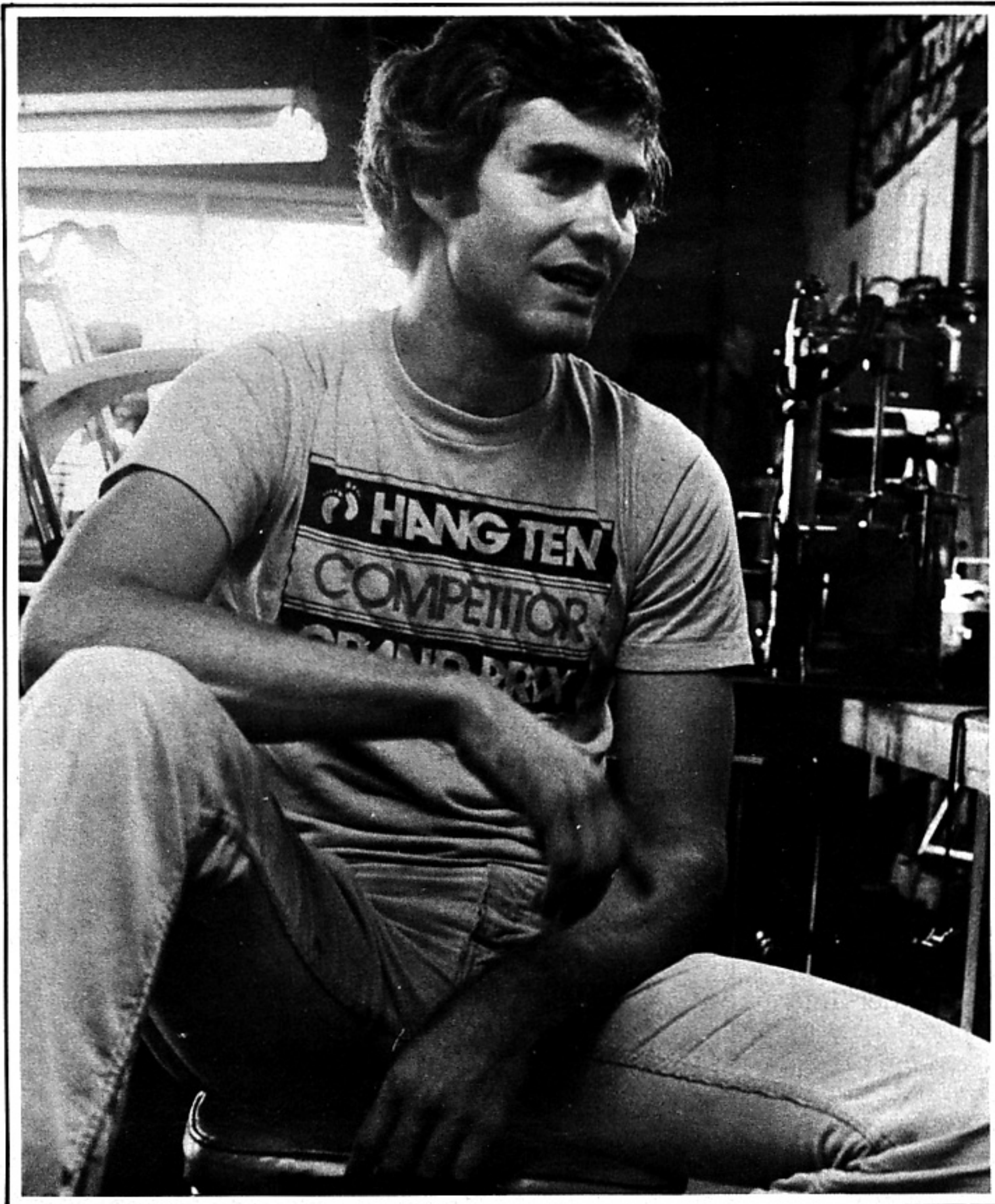


DIRT BIKE interviews three-time champ,

GARY JONES



Part One: The Yamaha and Honda Years

by the Dirt Bike Staff

("DB" will be used to designate one or the other DIRT BIKE staffers, GJ will be, of course, Gary.)

DB: You go back a long way in motorcycling, Gary. Why don't we start by talking about how you first got involved with Yamaha?

GJ: OK. Well, I was riding for BSA, you know, two big bikes, a 250 and an open class BSA. Anyway, Dennis Mahan [from Yamaha — Ed.] and my dad got to talking, and Dennis said, "Shoot, I'll give Gary

one of the MX 125s and then it won't conflict with his contract with BSA-Triumph." They did, and everything was cool. I'd ride the 125 in the morning and I'd ride the English bikes in the afternoon, ride all three classes. Do you remember my 250 BSA?

DB: No, but I should, really . . .

GJ: I still have it. I still have most of my bikes.

DB: Hey, if you could get us some pictures that would be fine.

GJ: Yeah, my mom has a lot of

pictures, motorcycle baby pictures, that kind of stuff. You know, they drag them out . . . (laughter)

I was really little when I started racing. I feel like one of the old-timers, sometimes, but I'm not, I'm still a young kid. It's just that, like, I used to race TT with Jim Hunter and all those guys. Try to talk to some of these kids about that stuff . . .

DB: They wouldn't know what you were talking about.

GJ: But I learned a lot from those guys . . . just crashing and running into each other . . . elbowing. They think they're getting close now, when they run into each other like Stackable and me the other night [at the Superbowl — Ed.]. He bumped me a little and I bumped him back. I mean, that's nothing like some of the stuff we used to do. There were guys, like at the TTs at Perris, that, if they weren't first going into the corner they'd just knock everybody down.

DB: Cause a restart, huh?

GJ: Yeah, that kind of stuff, crazy stuff.

DB: When was it when you got that first bike from Dennis?

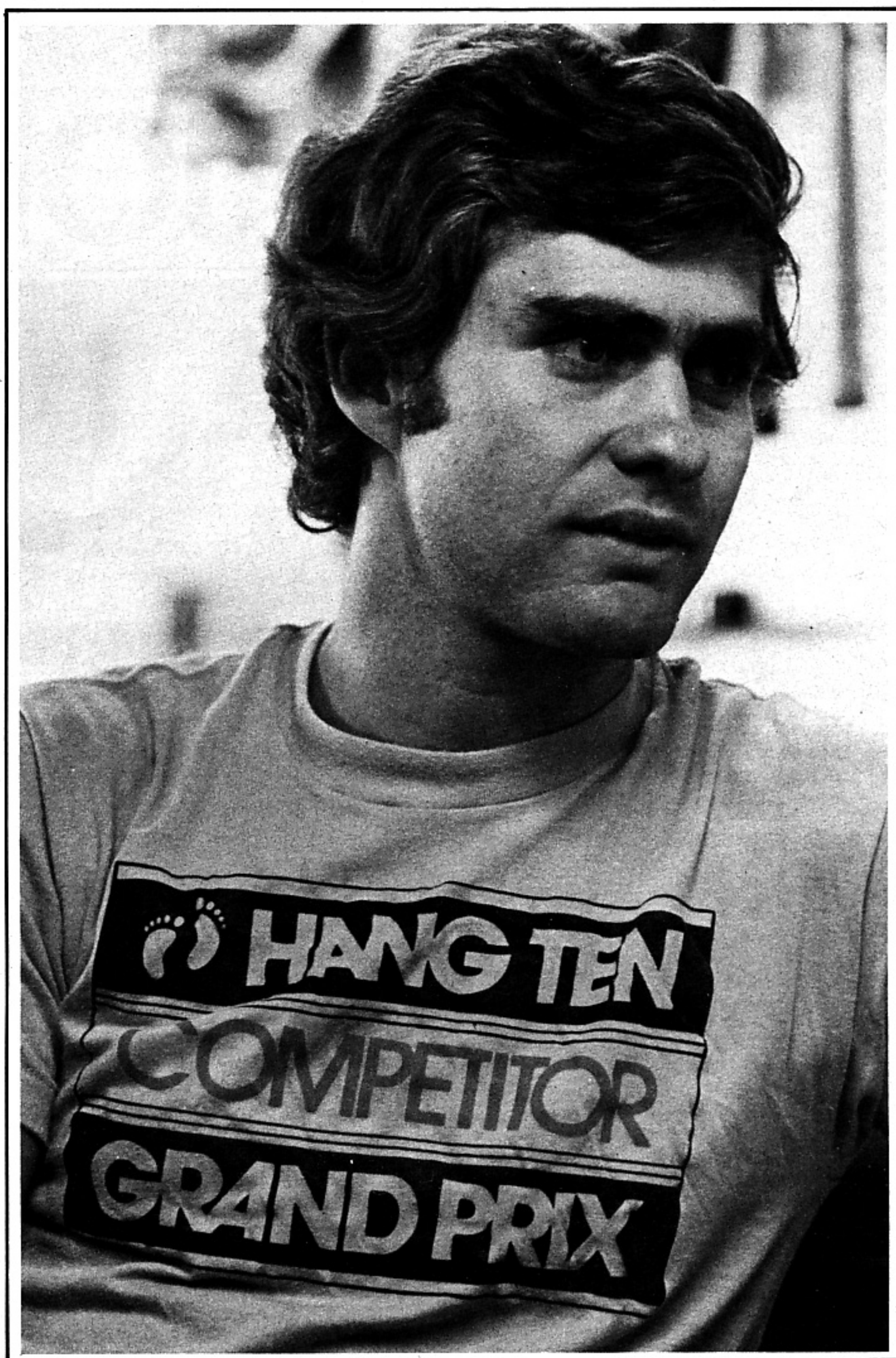
GJ: Oh, probably 1970, for the 125. But then in a few months they had the new 250s out, and the DT-1. We ended up taking one of the 250MXs, pushed the BSA thing back. I could go really fast on that BSA, but the bike wouldn't last over 20 minutes. The rod would break or . . . We got it so hot once that the cylinder fins melted on the side.

DB: So how did the Yamaha thing develop?

GJ: Well, we got the bike and I used to ride it every weekend at Indian Dunes. I'd go there every Sunday with a stock DT-1. People would laugh because we didn't have a Husqvarna or a Maico or something. I was the dumb clod down the street. But we turned our shocks upside-down, we did that *years* ago. Then we lowered the frame and I started winning, because that made the handling pretty good. So we started making lowering kits. We were the first ones to do that. Of course, right away everybody copied us. Anyway, we made the lowering kits, and then we made a whole new frame 'cause the kits were kind of shitty.

DB: They were heavy, too . . .

GJ: Yeah, so we made a frame and put some good wheels on it, some



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Cheney wheels, and changed it around. Fiberglass tanks, seat bottoms, it was fairly light.

It was our first real Yamaha racer, we called it the "A to Z." After that it disappeared and went to Japan.

DB: They took it over?

GJ: Not long after that the first YZs came out, they were top-secret. I showed up at the Dunes one day with one and won everything I rode.

DB: This was the 250?

GJ: Yeah, but the 360 came out soon, too. I won the Viewfinders GP on that. We won everything on them because they were so much better than any other bike around.

DB: Were they monoshocks?

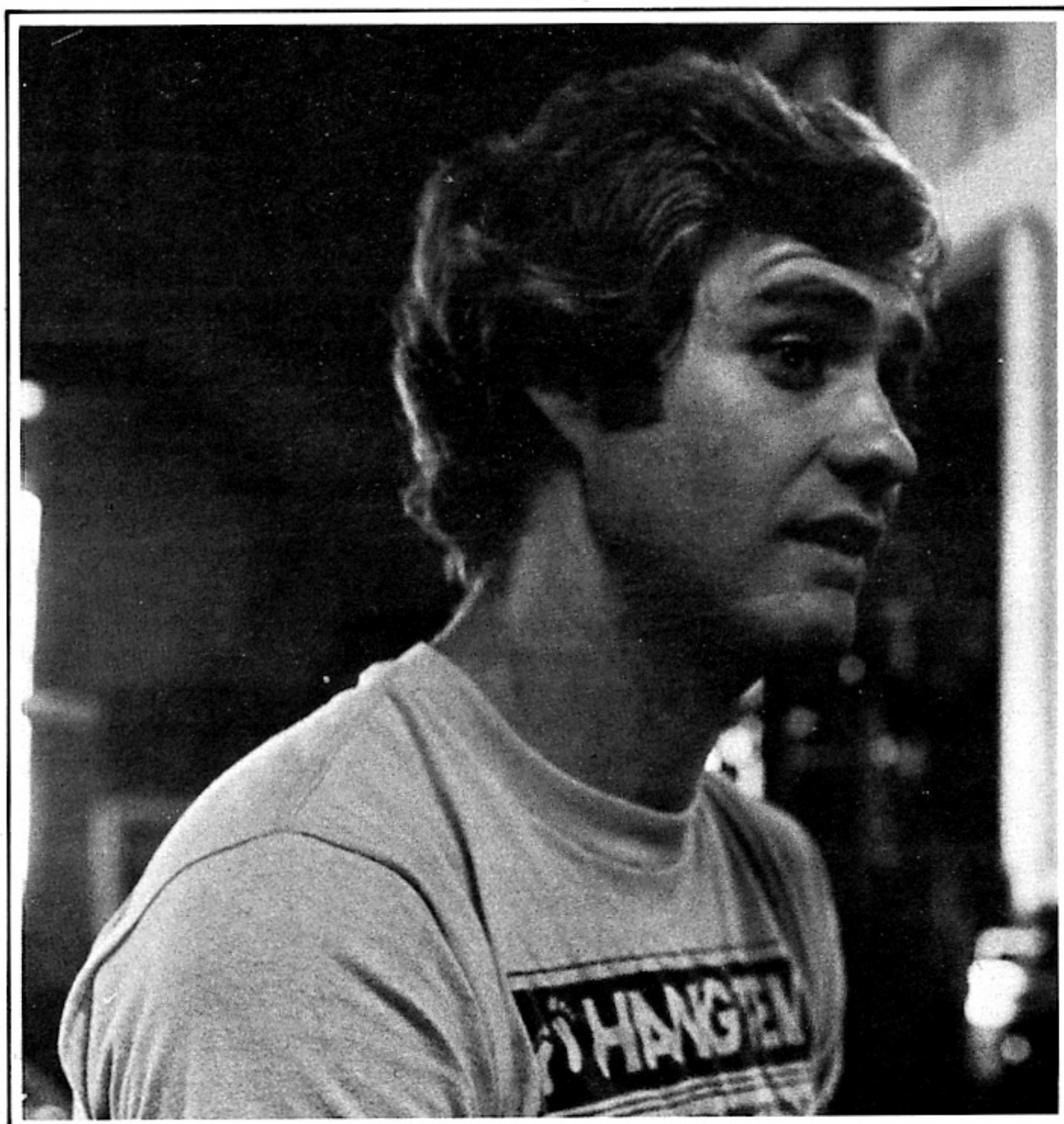
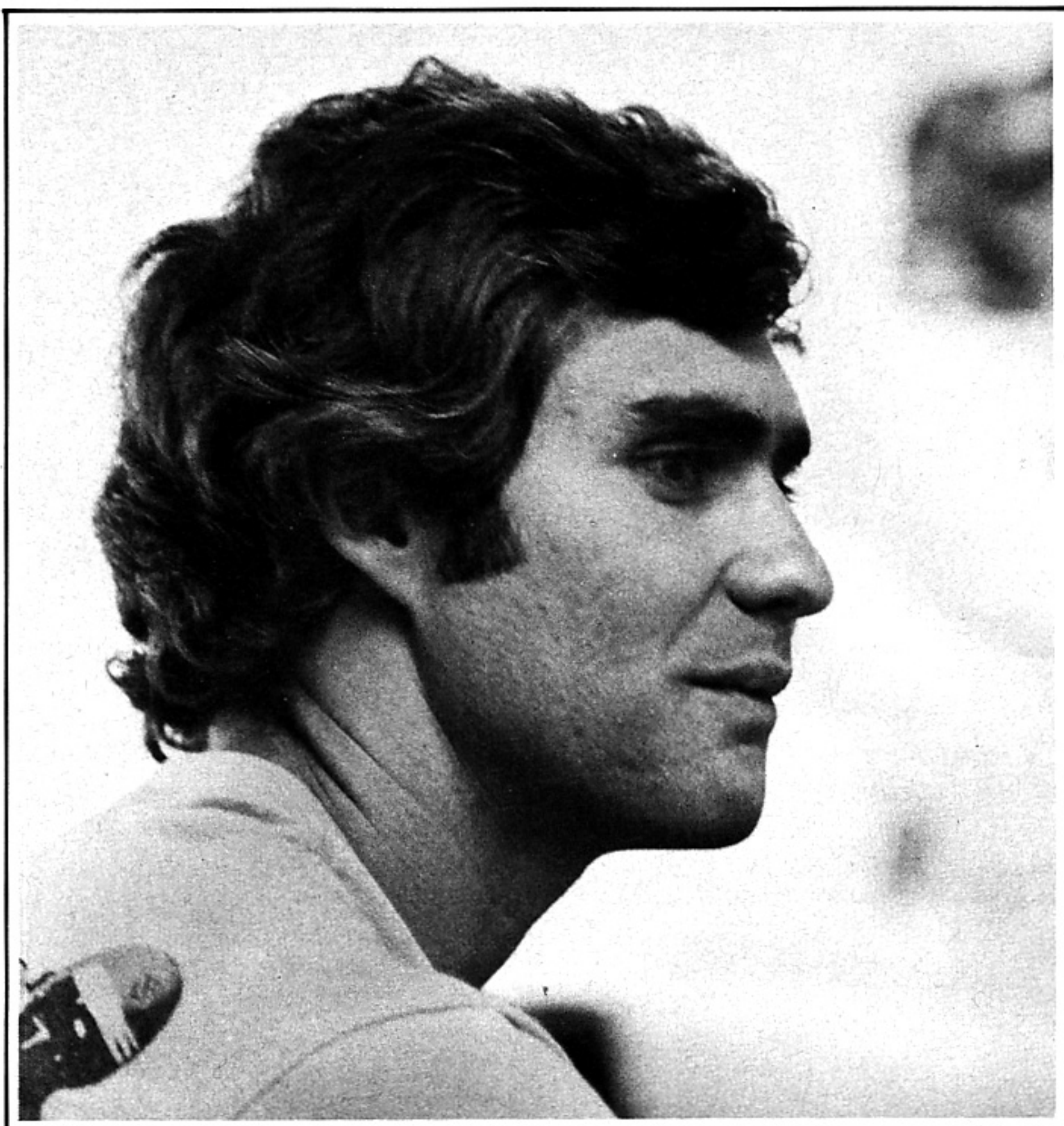
GJ: No, standard shocks. But we did a lot of trick stuff with them, later. Titanium frames, axles, gear shaft, everything.

DB: How come you could do all that stuff when you rode for Yamaha?

GJ: Well, because Dennis was in charge of it.

DB: They wanted you to work on development?

GJ: And they wanted to produce the stuff, too, but they didn't know



how. They would go to their engineers, but they, I don't know . . .

DB: The engineers likely didn't know what they were going to do.

GJ: Yeah, so we were doing it at our own speed, doing everything we wanted.

DB: When did Jimmy Weinert come in with you?

GJ: That was in '72. Husqvarna was talking to him, but then dad offered him a deal, we had the money and Husky didn't, so he took it.

DB: He rode the Yamaha at Daytona?

GJ: Right, he rode my bike. Jimmy and I trained every day. He won't admit it now, but he was mad at us, he was mad, and pissed at my old man. Anyway, every day we'd go out and ride the practice bikes we had. Thirty minutes, without the seats! You know, we had a heck of a training schedule then, I should be doing it now.

DB: Yeah, we remember, your old man was chasing you guys around.

GJ: He'd chase us down every day and make us ride from about 3:30 until dark. All sorts of things, for 30 minutes at a time. Races were just for 30 minutes then.

We'd ride . . . 30 minutes, without the seats!

DB: All the training was on the bikes?

GJ: Well, he'd try and make us run in the morning but I think I was the only one that did it. DeWayne [Gary's brother — Ed.] always had an excuse and Weinert would never come.

DB: You were obviously pretty happy with Yamaha's bike, what caused you to switch over to Honda?

GJ: Well, in 1972 we had everything working great. But we weren't getting paid as well as we felt we should be, especially compared to what everyone was saying we were and all. So we asked for more, of course. Terry Tiernan at Yamaha said, "I think we can do it." But Pete Shick didn't think so. And the Hondas were coming out. They were really impressive. They were fast and the company looked like they were going to go wide-open. They had Japanese guys running all over the place.

DB: Yeah, they were trying.

GJ: They were trying *hard*.

DB: *At Livermore they had one guy for brakes, one guy from Keihin carbs, one guy from the tire factory. There was a person to handle everything.*

GJ: So when Yamaha wasn't going to give us what we asked for we decided to try and get into Honda, a deal, you know. They'd never talked to us and we'd never talked to them. We made a few calls and they said, "Come out to the races." Okimoto and John Blum [from Honda — Ed.] came out to our place one day in the rain. We took the new production Elsinores over to Osteen's track here. Rode them in the rain with the track closed, they were still so secret. We — me, Dad and DeWayne — decided that they were good.

DB: *Which they were.*

GJ: They were very good. We told Honda what Yamaha had offered, and they offered us more. Yamaha couldn't match it, so we went with Honda. What can I say . . . money talks to everybody.

Anyway, we rode the standard production stuff for about two weekends locally. Then we got the trick racers for Florida and Daytona. We went to Florida with

I told them, "I'm not a support class rider."

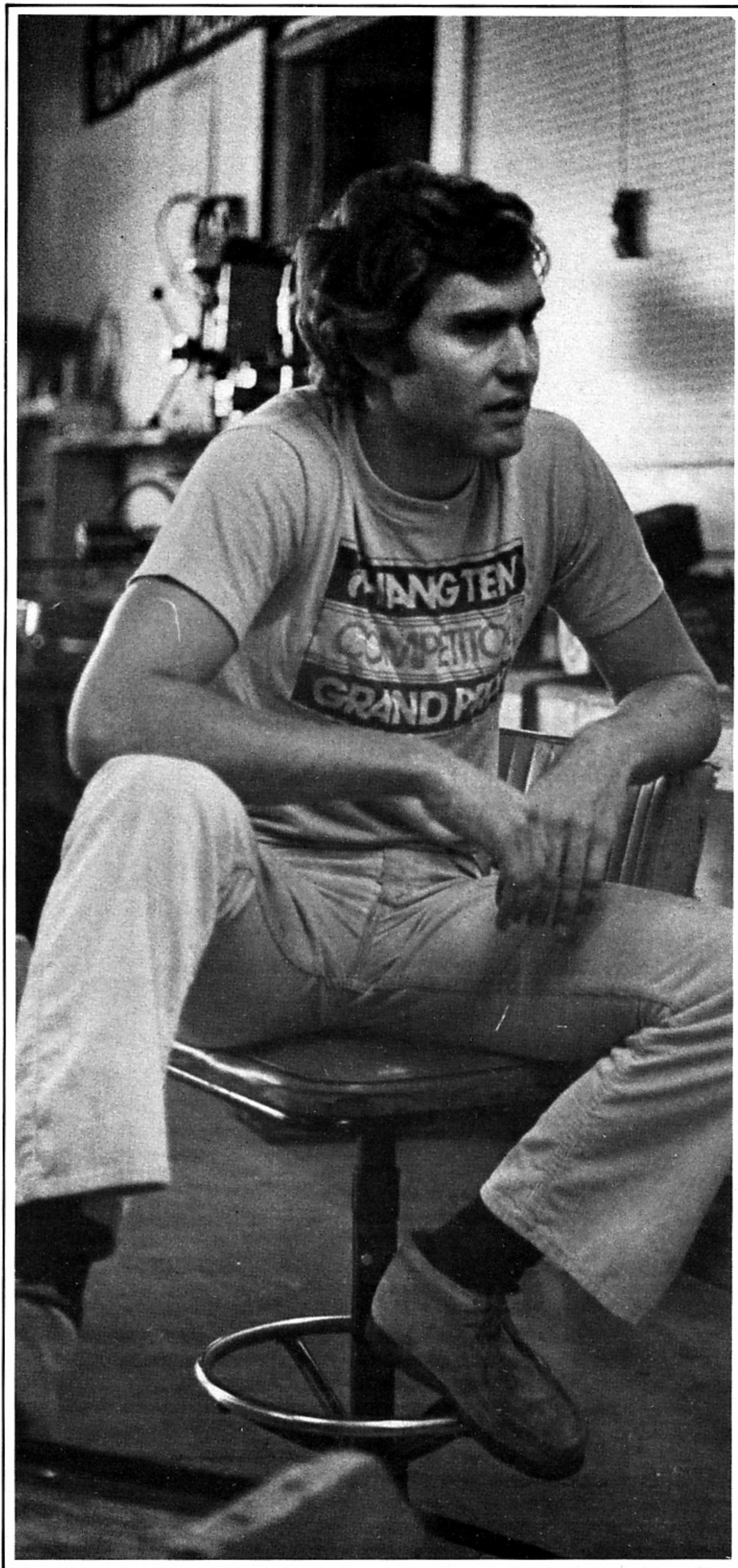
them but they were too light, didn't pass the weight limit. What we ended up doing, we put the magnesium engines, and the good forks and stuff, in standard production frames.

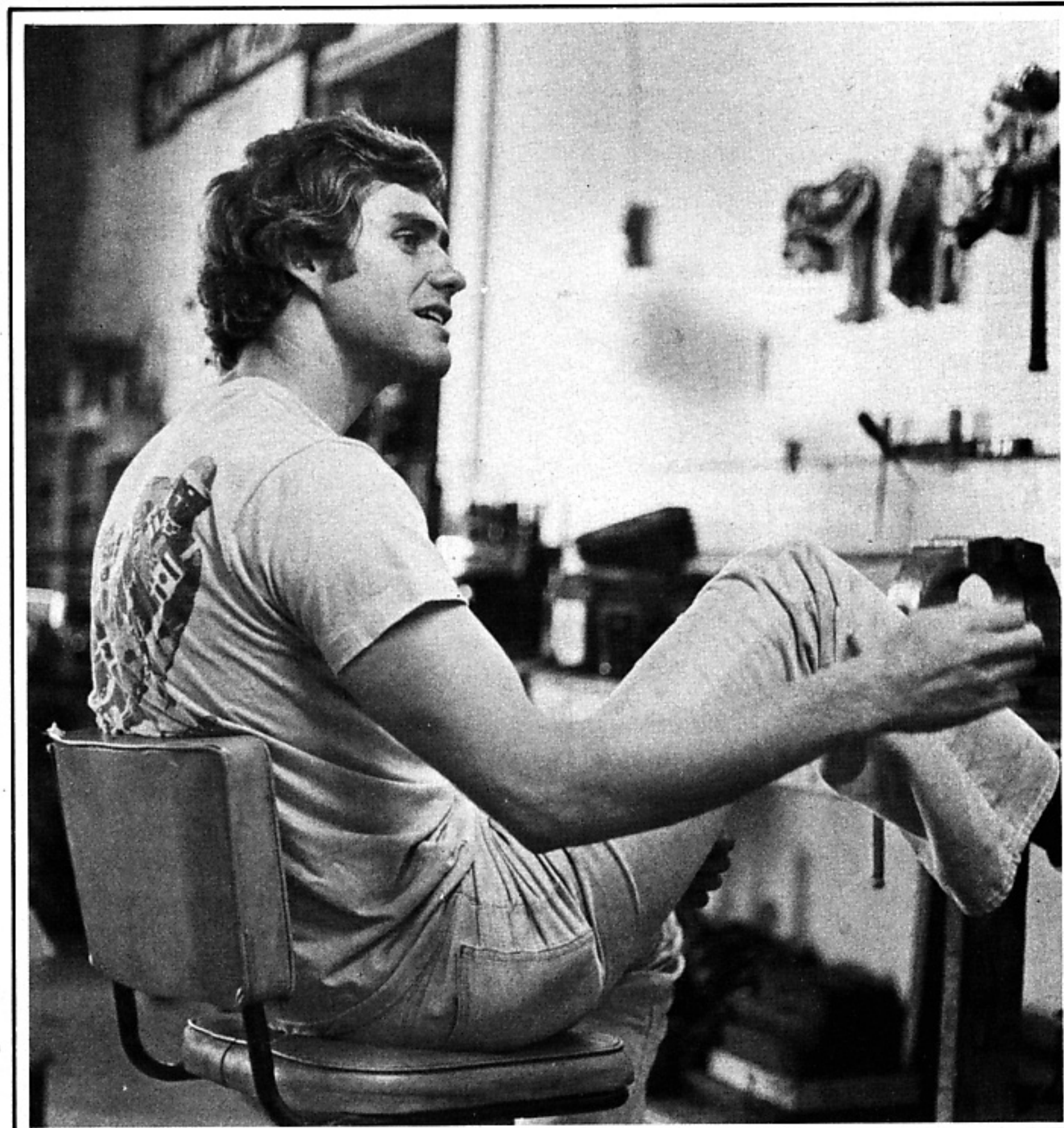
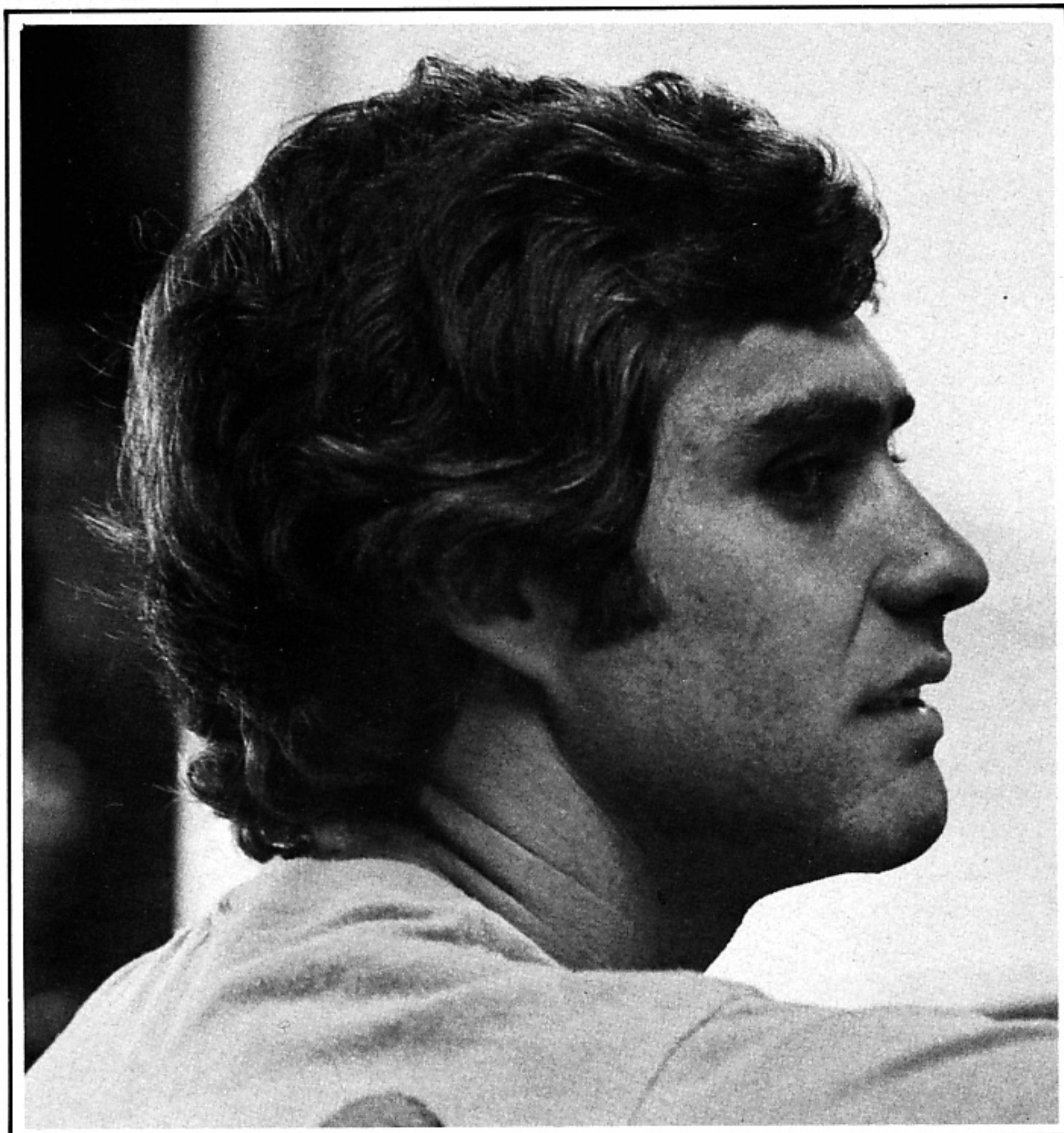
DB: *So that's when they started weighing them. Funny, it seems like longer ago than that.*

GJ: We had trouble with the clutches at Daytona. The bearings would seize if you held them in too long. Mine seized and I jumped the gate and had to berzerk it to qualify; I was coming from a lap behind.

DB: *There was an argument about that.*

GJ: Because I qualified and I shouldn't have because I was a lap behind, but I lapped everyone and made it. Then, in the main event I think we seized the engine or something. We pulled the cylinder off real quick and put a new piston in. We looked at it and the cylinder was awful big, oversized. The bikes weren't 250s, they were considerably bigger than that. That





was the last time we raced those engines. Dad said that we weren't going to race them anymore.

DB: How did that happen?

GJ: They just made them too big, Honda did. I guess they wanted to win bad. They were sure the fastest bikes at Daytona, though. Way bigger than 250 . . . big! Anyway, later we got new engines with standard pistons, and you know, they were just as fast.

DB: You did some work on the big-bore Honda, too, didn't you?

GJ: We rode that thing at the Grand Prix, the World Championship thing you know, and it was so fast . . .

DB: That was another special, huh?

GJ: Yeah, they had six of them down there. One rider but they had a bunch of bikes. They had a four-speed, a five-speed, different powerbands, like that. So I decided that I wanted this transmission, with another cylinder, and they had a special frame made for it, and a whole lot of shocks. But for some reason, I don't know why, every one of the bikes had poor rear brakes. They had good brakes on all of their other bikes, but that one, the open bike, never did have decent rear

We looked at it and the cylinder was awful big, oversized. I guess they (Honda) really wanted to win.

brakes.

DB: What happened to that open bike?

GJ: Well, I never saw it after that. After the 250 Nationals were over we had our falling-out about that.

DB: You rode Maico that fall . . .

GJ: Yeah, the contract said that I had to ride an open bike for the open class races. So, I told them that I was going to the Trans-Am and I think I'm going to go next week. They said that they wanted me to ride the support class. That hurt my pride right away. I told them, "I'm not a support class rider." I may be now, but I wasn't then.

DB: Well, you were the National Champion . . .

GJ: But they told me that they didn't have an open bike, and that they weren't going to have an open bike. That was the last argument we ever got into.