



Wegner performs his very delicate balancing act aboard a very expensive unicycle.

DIRT BIKE RIDES POMEROY'S LATEST GP HONDA 500

"You know,
if you loop it we may
have one less
GP bike this year."

by George Wegner

It's not often that we have the opportunity to ride a late-model works bike, let alone a brand-new GP unit from a manufacturer who is currently enjoying much success in their racing efforts. They say that all good things come to those who wait. Well, we've all waited, but this time it was our turn.

THE SCENE

We had driven out to Saddleback Park to do an interview with Jim Pomeroy and put in some test time on last month's 400 Maico. American Honda had rented the course for the day to break in their latest shipment of bikes from Japan. The track surface had been prepared to its usual perfection earlier in the day. Since only Pomeroy, Smith, Croft, their mechanics, myself and Bill Sherman were using the course, it was still in fine shape even late in the day.

THE BIKES

These were their latest works

bikes. Since the beginning of the year, American Honda has received three updated versions of the '77 model from Japan. Each time either the riders or the mechanics found room for improvement, three or four each of the 250s and 500s were built incorporating these modifications and sent to the States. Likewise, developments in Japan were also built into these machines. Honda has an excellent communication system between their riders and their designing engineers. If a rider wants his footpegs a tad higher and farther forward, they will come in that position on his next bike.

Honda's team manager, Terry Mulligan, was rather reluctant to get into specifics concerning engine dimensions and such, and with good reason. All that we could get them to say was that the 500 was putting out well over 60 horsepower.

The engine cases are sand-cast in magnesium and studded with titanium screws and bolts. A red

engine seems right at home in these exotic thoroughbreds, as do the gold anodized D.I.D rims. The rear wheel is of the ultra-wide variety to get more knobs on the ground. Showa forks and remote reservoir shocks perform suspension duties and give the GPs axle travel in the neighborhood of 12 inches at either end. A full-floating rear brake with a very beefy torque arm is attached to the rear of an equally rigid-looking boxed aluminum swingarm. The pipe, tank and seat look very clean and production-like. A single plastic roller takes up chain slack when the shocks are extended.

They had brought out several each of the new 250s and 500s as well as a few old Type 2s for comparison. With all those shiny-new red machines sitting around, so few riders to get them dirty, and such a nice course at our disposal, I couldn't help but ask, "Is there even the most remote possibility that I could take one of these 500s out for a few laps?" Terry Mulligan was quick to point out: "Well, you know if you bend it up, we'll have one less GP bike for this season." I was about to say, "Well, that's OK. I had to at least ask." But then, Terry said, "If you're going to do it, you'd better get on with it because we'll be packing up shortly." KAWA-BUNGA! I had my helmet on in a flash.

OUT CRUISING

Putting my weight on the seat collapsed the suspension an inch or so. This allowed me to put both feet on the ground, sort of. I stepped off to make sure that all of the critical components were secure while Pomeroy's mechanic fired it off.

It all seems like a dream to me now. A very real and vivid fantasy come true. It was as if the bike had been set up specifically for me. But then, J.P. and I ride a lot alike. Ahem!

First, I headed over to the line for a blast up the starting hill. INCREDIBLE! Fast, powerful, and smooth too. Then I set the front wheel down and swooped onto the course. With the excellent traction available that day, it was possible to loft the front end at any time.

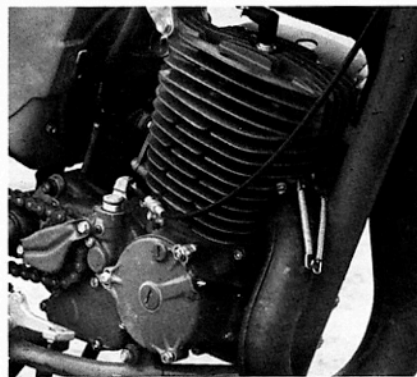
Terry had pointed out to us earlier that this was basically the same bike as the Type 2, but with some suspension improvements and a smoother power delivery.

The suspension was unbelievably plush. Never was the slightest jolting felt when landing from jumps or hitting holes. The front wheel did not flop from side to side when riding over grooves; it merely went exactly where you pointed it without the slightest bit of shock transferred up to the bars.

There may well have been over 60 horses on tap, but frankly, I didn't find too many places where I could peg the throttle. I have but one life to live, and I certainly didn't want to bend the bike. The portion of the power I was using felt like over 50 for sure. You



Not your basic Elsinore.



Timing is externally adjustable by rotating side cover.



One of Jim's bikes was equipped with these dual-pressure Fox Airshox.

couldn't ask for more. The rear end was always hooked up. And I mean *always*.

In spite of the tremendous power, it was the easiest bike to ride that I had ever been on. Necessities like shifting and braking were more a thought than a physical action. Both the front and rear brakes had a better feel to them than any I have known. Little pressure was needed, and they were very progressive in their stopping action. Shifting was the proverbial hot-knife-through-butter routine. Seriously. The action was on the short side and very positive. There was never a doubt as to whether the next gear had been engaged, and no shifts were missed.

Its comparatively light weight also helped to make it very easy to ride. Flipping the bike from side to side between turns was, again, more thought than action.

The rear end seemed to go out to a point, but no farther, as the power was applied when in a slide.

A definite plus feature; we wouldn't want it any other way. Like the power-slides, brake-slides were very controllable and predictable at both ends.

Overall, as you have just read, the GP handles like a dream. A very beautiful dream that I shall never forget.

Truly, the quality of production motocrossers has advanced tremendously in the past two years compared to years previous. It is all very exciting to see.

Are these bikes anything like the production Hondas due (overdue) to be released later this year? To some degree, they will have to be. To exactly what degree remains to be seen.

Clearly, Honda has some of the finest minds and machinery in the world at their disposal. Lackey, Pomeroy, Smith and Croft are likely to enjoy many victories with these machines, if luck is also with them. But then, if I had one of these bikes, I could easily . . .