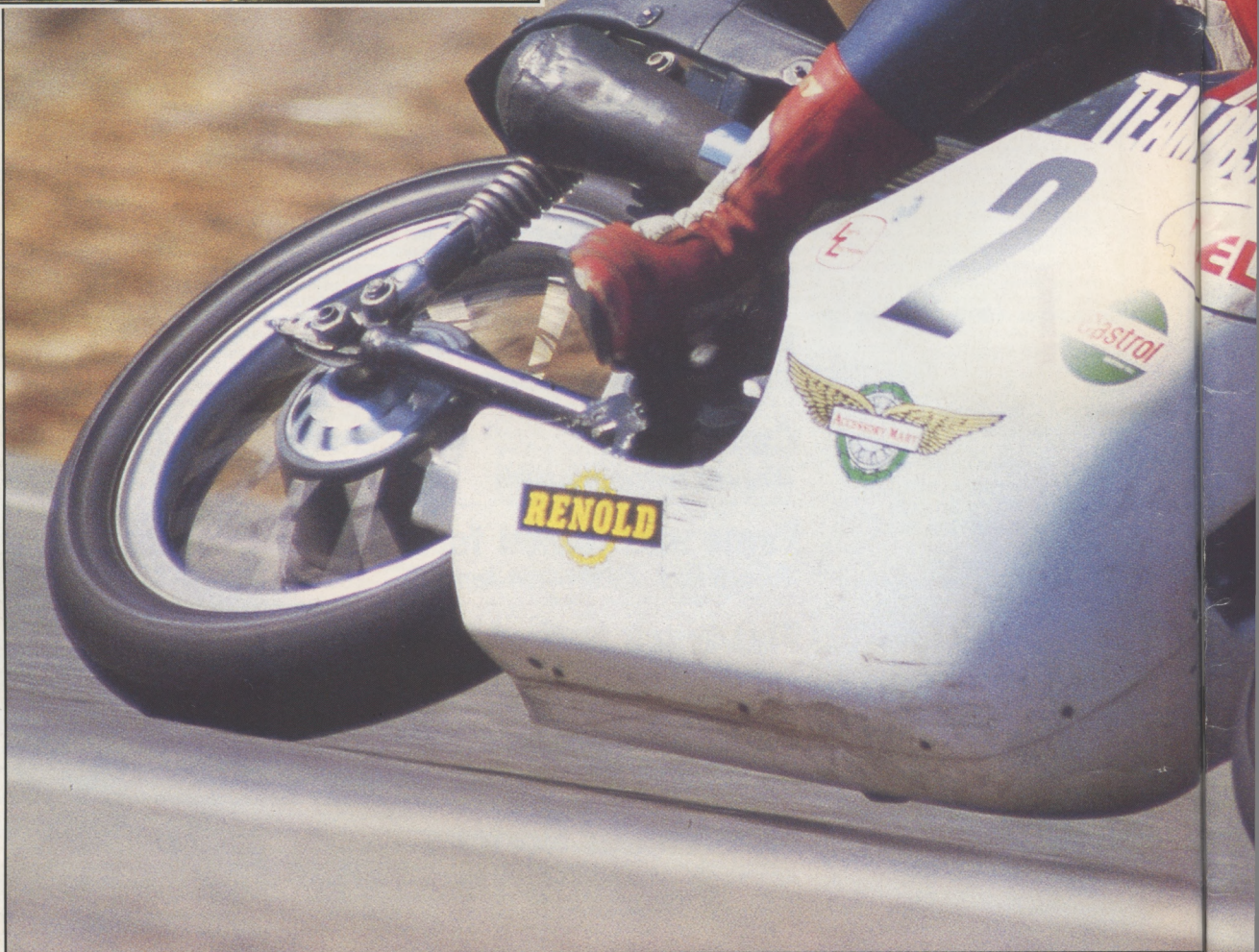




Above: Vintage riders on the curves that may host the 1988 US Grand Prix

Right: The style's still there: Read cranks his Matchless through Laguna's turns



Below: Rick Weber won Sportsman 650 on the West Coast British BSA Lightning

Below right: Pre-1950 winner Michael Moore in the Corkscrew ahead of Ducati rider Tom Rienecker



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*Classic Bike Magazine/AHRMA
West Coast Historic Series,
reported by Mike Nicks*

EIGHT-times world champion Phil Read enjoyed his most successful ride since his entry into classic competition when he took third place in the 500cc Premier race at the Budweiser/Nissan 200 meeting at Laguna Seca, California. 'That's given me a lot of confidence,' said the 47-year-old former MV and Yamaha works rider, who was entered on a Team Obsolete Matchless G50.

'Now I need a faster engine,' he added, only half jokingly. Team manager Robert Iannucci, who had seen Dave Roper win the race on another Obsolete G50, agreed with Read: 'Phil probably had the last of our standard engines. He could definitely have used a little more motor.'

The meeting, attended by more than 40,000, formed a round of the AMA Superbike national championship, and gave classic machines two races on the Saturday, one on the Sunday and a parade. Organised by AHRMA (American Historic Racing Motorcycle Association), CVRG (California Vintage Racing Group) and VROOM (Vintage Racers of Old Motorcycles), the events formed part of the *Classic Bike Magazine* West Coast Historic Series. A champion was to be decided from performances in the 500cc Premier races at Laguna and the Sears Point, California, AMA national in late August.

Top riders from America's West and East coasts converged at Laguna to fight out the 500cc race. In addition to the TO contingent, Nostalgica Scuderia partners Pete Johnson and Kurt Liebmann also made the 6000-mile round trip from the east, bringing their Drixton Honda and BMW Rennsport OL Special

Sportsman 750 winner Rob Tuluie keeps his Norton ahead of Kurt Liebmann's Honda four



PHOTOGRAPHY DAVID DEWHURST

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respectively. Johnson, a 41-year-old from Hamlin, Pennsylvania, was the hot name of the hour, having recently won the 500cc Premier and F750 Four-stroke events at Loudon, New Hampshire, on the Honda and his Triumph Trident. He led the AHRMA points tables in both classes going into the Laguna weekend.

The Californian force included Craig McLean on a Matchless G50, land speed record holder Don Vesco on a Manx Norton, Fred Mork on a 285lb BSA Gold Star special equipped with Italian brake and suspension components, and Fred Eiker on a Caffrey-framed G50. This is the ex-Martin Adams bike on which the British rider Dave Pither has had two unsuccessful forays at Vintage Daytona, but has been bought by the McLean family's Motorcycles Unlimited shop in San Francisco.

The first machines to get out on the 1.9-mile track were the Lightweight and Pre-1950 models – and they certainly put on a terrific advertisement for the classic cause. Bill McLain, a 29-year-old parts manager in a Honda shop, led on the first lap on a 1964 Honda Super Hawk bored from 305 to 350cc. But the lead changed constantly as Bret Morshead and Scott Obermuller on 350cc Ducatis, and McLean on a 1958 350cc Manx Norton, challenged the twin.

Obermuller lost the lead when he had to elbow himself off the bales at the tight last turn on one lap, but no one was expecting the late charge of a man on a cheeky 250cc Ducati, 25-year-old Jeff Hecox. Using an engine prepared by Kenny Augustine, better known for his work on dirt-track Harley-Davidsons, Hecox shrugged off the ten-second disadvantage of a second-wave start and grabbed first place within six laps.

As the leaders swooped down to the final turn they caught four back-markers, but among the melee Hecox held his cool to win from Obermuller and McLean. Ducatis filled the next three places, and McLain was seventh. Michael Moore won the Pre-1950 class in his first ride on Fred Mork's Garden Gate Norton.

A crash in practice took some of the tension from the F750 Four-stroke and Sportsman grid. On his 450 Honda, Pete Johnson had swept up on slower riders



and squeezed too heavily on a big 250mm Fontana front brake: the resulting lock-up threw him to the ground, tearing a ligament in his left arm and bruising his ribs. Johnson started the F750 race, but was not expected to keep with the leaders.

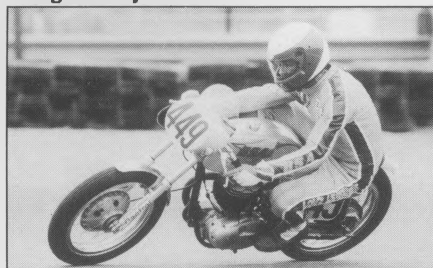
AHRMA's F750 class is open to ex-factory machines, or replicas thereof, of the early seventies, while the Sportsman classes cater for roadster-based motorcycles built to a less strict specification. On a Sportsman Norton Commando, German emigrant Rob Tuluie led on the first lap from Liebmann's Honda CR750 and Dave Troetschler's sprightly 350 Ducati.

Liebmann was in front on the second lap, but the pack right on his heels contained danger man Roper, on the ex-Dick Mann BSA Rocket III. By the end of that lap Roper had moved ahead, and then opened out a big gap. Laguna is a difficult circuit, with testing downhill curves and a lack of run-off areas on some corners, and it was Liebmann's first visit there. He was disappointed at not having disputed the race with Roper, but his Honda is a formidable hulk to handle, and under the circumstances his second place was honourable. Team-mate Johnson had to retire in pain.

Tuluie won a battle for third place from another Norton rider, Steve Dilallo. This gave Tuluie the 750cc Sportsman win, a pleasing success for a 23-year-old who races on a student's budget. Mike Green finished fifth on his West Coast British Triumph T140, Rick Weber took the Sportsman 650cc class on a 1971 BSA Lightning, and Dan Phillips the 500cc Sportsman section on an immaculately prepared BSA B50.

And so to the 500cc Premier glamour bikes, kindly scheduled by the Laguna promoters not as an end-of-programme tack-on, but smack in the middle of Sunday's activities. Their consideration was rewarded by a crowd that stayed on

Don Vesco enjoyed his Manx Norton before the gearbox jammed



Dan Phillips' four-speed BSA B50 was quick enough to take Sportsman 500

the fences to watch and listen to the throbbing singles, Liebmann's guttural flat twin and Johnson's shrieking Honda. On this bike was Russell Paulk, all the way from Nashville, Tennessee, a substitute for the machine's stricken owner.

From the drop of the flag, there was only one winner – America's finest classic competitor, Dave Roper. On a G50 which had already won five vintage races at AMA national events and twice taken the historic and single-cylinder classes in the public-roads La Carrera race in Mexico, Roper was unapproachable.

Paulk rapidly adapted to the Honda, whose engine is prepared by Erraldo Ferracci, a former mechanic with the Gilera and Benelli grand prix teams in Europe who now runs the FBF tuning company in the USA. For several laps Paulk came under pressure from Read – also making his debut at Laguna – until he pulled into a clear second place. Eiker took the Caffrey-G50 to fourth place, ahead of Liebmann, but Vesco's race ended with his Manx stuck in third gear.

For classic enthusiasts at Laguna, there was one more treat on the programme – the 40-mile race for Pro Twins, formerly known as the Battle of the Twins. Open to bikes of up to 1000cc and any age, the class encourages what



Russell Paulk (Honda, 141) leads Read in the Premier 500



Fred Mork's Anglo-Italian Gold Star is a hot West Coast contender

can be termed 'modern classics' such as the elegant V-twins made by Cagiva-Ducati (which people will most assuredly be restoring for historic competition a decade hence), modified Moto Guzzi Le Mans and Harley-Davidsons, and a few hard-pressed British parallel twins.

Now making a big export drive in the USA, Cagiva-Ducati sent former 500cc world champion Marco Lucchinelli to America for the second time this year — he had already won the Pro Twins race at Daytona in March. Riding Reno Leoni's Ducati, he duelled with Jimmy Adamo on another Leoni machine, the pair of them looking like poetry as they plunged around Laguna's curves on their fiery red bikes.

But the most extraordinary performance of the race was taking place behind them. On Dr John Wittner's 1000cc Moto Guzzi, Doug Brauneck

suffered a broken clutch cable on the grid. Wittner sent a crewman running into the pits to fetch a vice-grip, disengaged the clutch by actuating the external lever on the engine cases, and pulled enough cable through at the other end to grip it with the wrench, which was then secured to the handlebar.

At the start Brauneck revved the Guzzi, already in gear, hard, then tore off the vice-grip and hurled it over the pit wall. This meant that he had to control the hundred-horsepower bike with one hand when the clutch suddenly bit: not surprisingly, he was last away.

After surviving that crisis, Brauneck rode with calculated fury and breathtaking angles of lean to finish second. Slowed by an ignition problem, Adamo took fourth place behind John Long's Ducati, while Gene Church, Harley's reigning Pro Twins champion, felt his engine tightening and retired.

On the exotic (carbon fibre and titanium pieces) but largely untried 872cc Norton of Martin Adams, Californian Chris Scott rode well until the crankcases burst. But Scott was impressed with the machine, and hopes for other outings. The only British bike to finish the race was Mick Ofield's Norton in 11th place.

At press time, Laguna's organisers SCRAM (Sports Car Racing Association of the Monterey Peninsula) were hoping for FIM approval for their plan to hold a world championship grand prix on a lengthened 2.2-mile circuit in April 1988. If this comes off, there will be probably be classic supporting events, thanks in part to the entrants and riders who put on such a good show this year.

RESULTS

500cc Premier: 1 Dave Roper (Matchless G50), 2 Russell Paulk (Drixton Honda), 3 Phil Read (Matchless G50), 4 Fred Eiker (Seeley G50), 5 Kurt Liebmann (BMW Rennsport OL Spl), 6 Craig McLean (Matchless G50).

F750, Sportsman: 1 Dave Roper (750 BSA), 2 Kurt Liebmann (Honda CR750), 3 Rob Tuluie (750 Norton), 4 Steve Dilallo (750 Norton), 5 Mike Green (750 Triumph), 6 Tod Rafferty (750 Norton). **Class winners, F750:** Roper. **Sportsman 750:** Tuluie. **Sportsman 650:** Rick Weber (BSA A65). **Sportsman 500:** Dan Phillips (BSA B50).

Lightweights, Pre-1950, GP 2-stroke: 1 Jeff Hecox (250 Ducati), 2 Scott Obermuller (350 Ducati), 3 Craig McLean (350 Manx Norton), 4 Dave Walden (250 Ducati), 5 Bret Morshead (350 Ducati), 6 Mike Green (250 Ducati).

Class winners, 250 2-stroke/400 4-stroke: Obermuller. **175 2-stroke/250 4-stroke:** Hecox. **Pre-1950:** Michael Moore (500 Manx Norton). **GP 2-stroke:** Gary Kuesel (Yamaha). **Pro Twins, Grand Prix:** 1 Marco Lucchinelli (Ducati), 2 Doug Brauneck (Moto Guzzi), 3 John Long (Ducati), 4 Jimmy Adamo (Ducati), 5 David Kieffer (Ducati), 6 Duane Summers (Ducati). **Modified Production:** 1 Mark Yarrow (Yamaha), 2 Eric Swortsfigure (Harley-Davidson), 3 Randy Shemwell (Ducati), 4 Trevor Dunne (Cagiva), 5 Stan Friduss (Moto Guzzi), 6 Randy Decker (Cagiva).