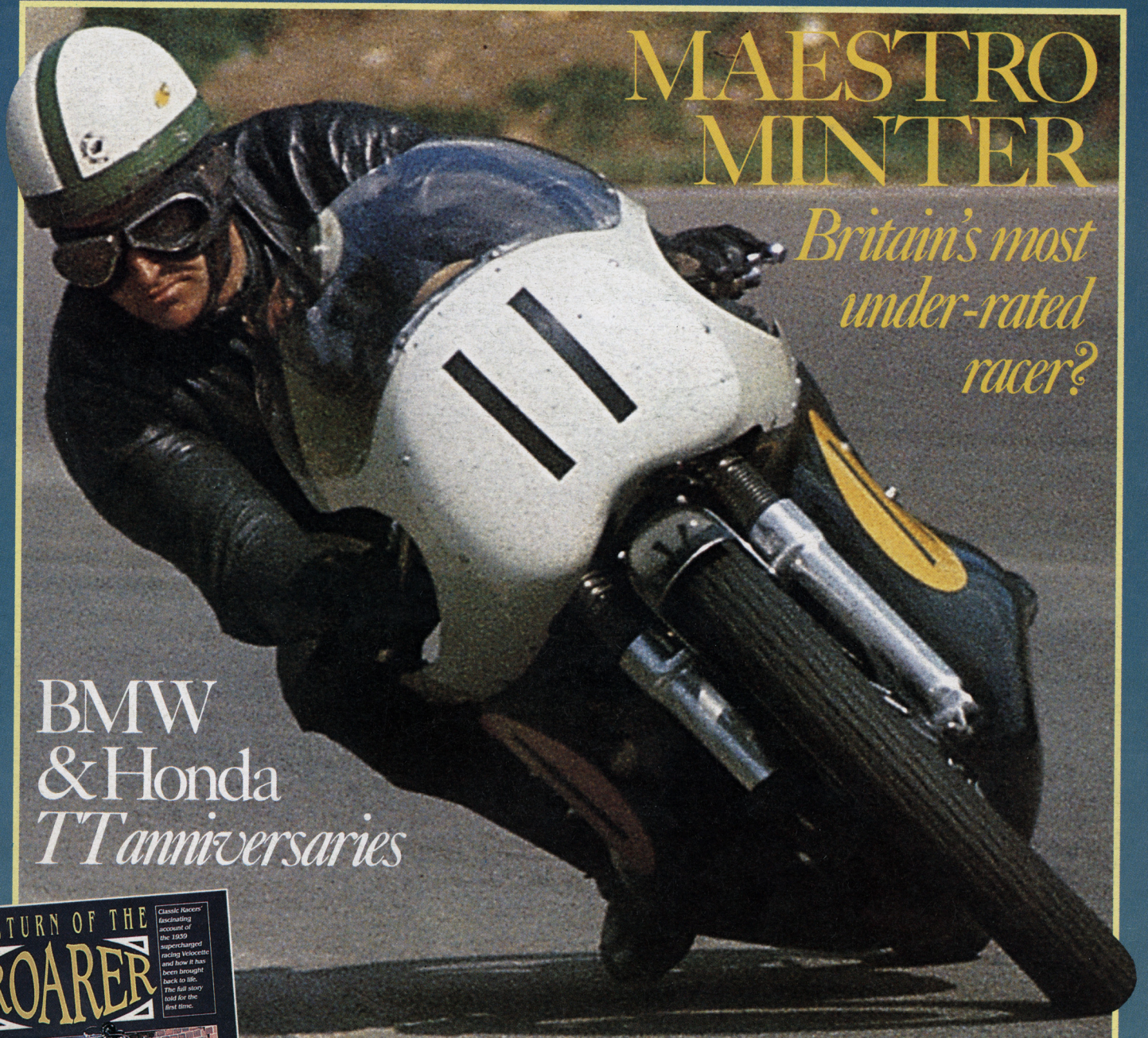


CLASSIC RACER

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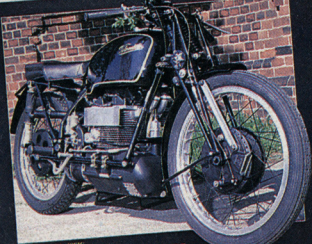
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16 PAGE
A RACER SPECIAL
written and compiled by Brian Woolley

INSIDE: Return of the 'Roarer'
16 page EXTRA on the world's rarest racer

Man and machine paying each other the perfect compliment. John Ruth discovers there's more than one similarity between the Dresda and its creator's character

Below: The immaculately-prepared little Dresda. Dave Degens can build on to a rider's personal requirements. Engine is basically a 500cc Daytona unit.

HAVE you ever noticed how some dog owners bear an uncanny resemblance to their canine companions? I have my suspicions that riders and their machines can be paired by the same yardstick.

That bearded, black Barbour-suited character in pudding basin helmet puffing at his pipe will almost certainly be the owner of a twin (from Stevenage) or a single (from the Hall Green district of Birmingham) both beginning with the letter 'V' and finished in black. The guy wearing the 'Chips' style helmet, jacket and boots will inevitably be found perched on a hog from Milwaukee, US of A.

Can these exaggerated observations apply to the classic racing fraternity? Riders in the Period One category (Manx Norton, Matchless G50 or AJS 7R) reflecting their allegiance through their choice of plain black riding gear? Or the colourfully attired riders competing in the later period events - up to 1972?

There will, of course, be exceptions to the rule but if ever a racing machine mirrors the persona of its creator it would have to be the 500cc Dresda Triumph of Dave Degens. Just three words - competitive, compact and tenacious describe both bike and rider to a tee.

DAVE first built a lightweight duplex frame to house the 500cc Triumph unit engine in 1969 using the same 53" wheelbase as the Aermacchi he was currently racing. It proved competitive from the word go, giving Triumph's lone works tester/racer Percy Tait and his Triumph Daytona a run for his money first time out and then winning the

Scarborough Gold Cup on its second outing.

Quite an achievement, and as Dave recalls, somewhat hectic. At that time he was trying an experimental Terry Shepherd front brake which faded alarmingly around the Oliver's Mount hairpins, getting hotter and hotter before finishing with the brake lever hard against the handle bar. "If that race had been one lap longer I wouldn't have won it," Dave recalls. "But by 1969 my interest in racing was beginning to wane, so to keep the Dresda flag flying I supported Barry Rodwell on the 500 twin on which he had had some fine results."

It was Barry who suggested they should fit the larger 650cc Bonneville unit into the same chassis and have another go at the Barcelona 24-hour Endurance Race which Degens and Rex Butcher had won in 1965 on the earlier pre-unit version.

The larger unit was (just about) shoehorned in but licence problems ruled out Barry from competing. The vacant seat was filled by the experienced Ian Goddard but a combination of a fragile engine and broken chains put paid to a repeat victory for Degens.

1970 proved another matter, however. Changing to a single 32mm carb, a lower compression ratio of 9:1 and retarding the ignition advance by two degrees only dropped the top speed by a few mph and Degens and Goddard won the event by 11 laps. They were also helped by a new double sided *four* (yes, eight shoes) leading shoe front brake produced for Degens by John Cerhan of later CMA fame, which gave constantly good braking for the entire event and

finished with the linings only partly worn at the end of 24 hours around the Montjuich hairpins.

This second victory inevitably led to a demand for replica machines. Dave produced a frame two inches longer in the centre to accommodate the 650 unit with more ease. Quite a few complete bikes followed until, with the supply of suitable engines drying up, Degens turned his attention to wrapping tubes around Triumph triples and Japanese multis for the emerging F750 category.

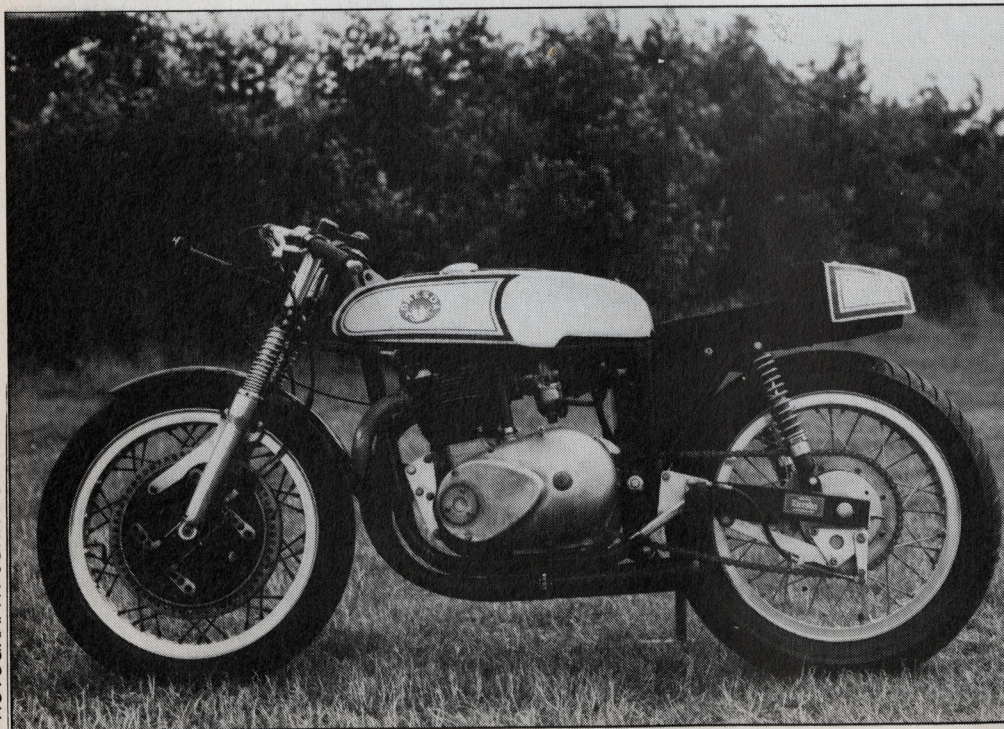
THE bike which Degens races now is the same mini-duplex frame that formed the basis of the 1969 Gold Cup winner but it now sports a Dresda box section swinging arm and short Hagon gas-damped units. To accommodate wider section rear tyres the 53" wheel base was originally retained but Dave, forever the innovator, has now reduced it by a further three inches to 50" which he feels gives it an advantage at the tighter circuits like Brands, Cadwell and Lydden.

Dresda top and bottom yokes support shortened Norton external spring fork legs up front with the same impressive looking Dresda CMA front brake dominating most of the front wheel between spindle and rim.

The frame is fabricated from 17 and 18 gauge T45 tubing and bears, as one would expect from the King of Triton builders, more than a passing resemblance to the featherbed design. But it is lighter, lower and shorter, with a seat height of only 26½" with rider aboard. A lightweight REH rear hub keeps the weight down but offers little in the way of braking. Dave rationalises this. "Who needs it with that massive Dresda unit up front?" Both 18" wheels are Metzeler shod with a Lazer on the WM2 front and a ME1 on the WM3 rear.

The engine is basically a 500cc Daytona with Dave's own cam profiles and valve timings. It's fed through twin 32mm Amal Mark 1 concentrics fitted with K and N air filters.

The five speed close ratio gear cluster requires an extension to the gearbox casing to get the extra pinions and related parts in. These five speed clusters are virtually unobtainable now. They were only produced in small numbers - but I'm sure if there was a sufficient demand, Mr Quaife would oblige! Chain primary drive is preferred to the increasingly popular toothed belt because there is little room to fit one and anyway, Dave considers it a dubious advantage. With the chain running in its own oil bath there are no lubrication problems, unlike an exposed primary chain and oiler.



PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN DOWNS

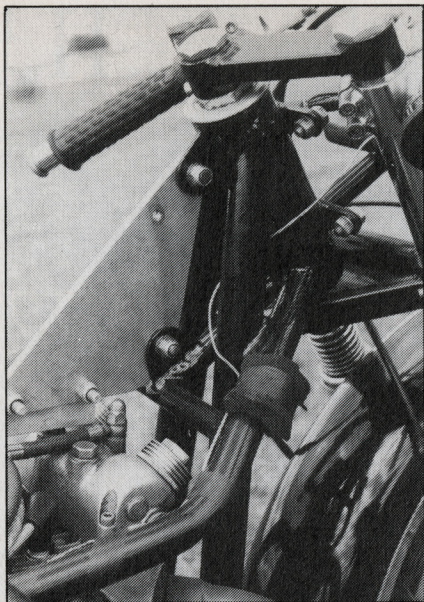
TRACK TEST

Racer Ruth gets down to it at Snetterton. 'The faster you drive it the more it likes it.' And the rider liked it a lot.



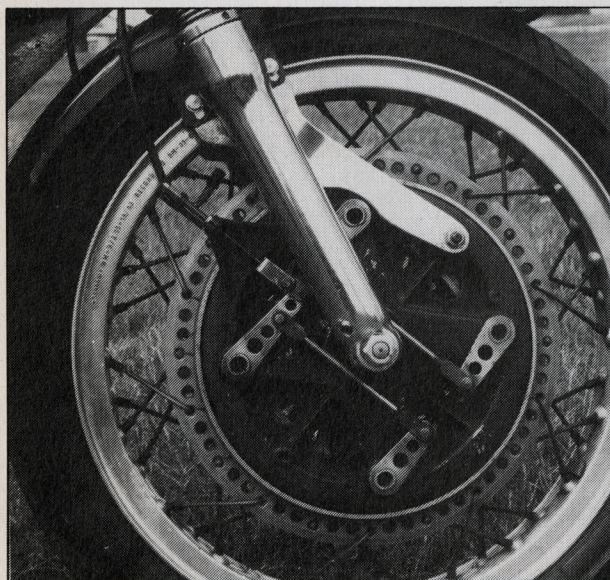
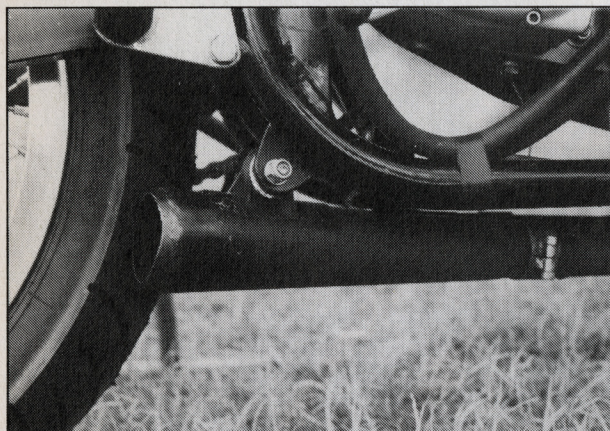
DAVE DEGENS' DRESDA TRIUMPH

Right: Frame is made from 17 and 18 gauge T45 tubing.



Below: Short 1½" Aermacchi style pipes finish just at the rear wheel.

Bottom: That mighty front brake features eight shoes and 'comes on strong'.



'This baby pulls sweetly all the way'

TRACK TEST

An 11.5:1 compression ratio is currently being tried, using Triumph type high compression pistons, polished rods and lightened valve gear with a standard Triumph crank as used on Dave's personal bike. A stronger crank is being tried in his second string machine. Rapid bore wear has been a problem with primary chains going solid when the bike ran on R40 oil, but a change to synthetic oil has cured this problem, the bore wear being minimised by this as well as the air filters.

Dave estimates the engine turns out around 48bhp, two to three bhp down on a good Matchless G50. An electronically triggered interspan ignition unit is fitted, the same type fitted to grass track and speedway machines which Dave simply re-energises from a heavy duty car battery after every outing. The interspan unit is stowed in the space normally occupied by the battery box – which also forms part of the central fibre glass oil tank and doubles up as a breather catch tank.

The petrol tank is fibre glass along, of course, with the fairing where a Krober electronic rev counter lurks with the red line marked at 8.2 thou. Short 1½" bore exhaust pipes fitted with Aermacchi style megaphones finish just in front of the rear wheel below the engine unit.

The whole machine weighs in at a mere 270lbs, 65lbs lighter than my Norton twin which runs in the same class. This light weight combined with the short wheelbase makes the little Dresda an exacting bike to ride.

OUT in the wide open spaces of Snetterton the first riding impression is of the Dresda Triumph's compactness and agility. The bike fitted me like the proverbial glove, hardly surprising since, give or take a few pounds, Dave and myself are the same build (they say best things come in small packages).

Predictably, like most 500cc push-rod twins, particularly those with over-square dimensions like the Triumph's 69mm x 65.6mm, the engine has to be buzzed to extract the best results. But this baby pulls sweetly all the way from 4.5 up to the 8.2 blood line which it reaches quickly, helped on the day by a strong tailwind down the Norwich Straight.

Gear selection through the five speed box was crisp and direct

through the short reversed lever on the right side giving a one-up four-down configuration. The engine feels really busy with some vibration. But it's not excessive and is a trait of the 360° twin due to the inherent rocking couple action. (Dave has just completed building a similar 500cc version with the engine completely rubber mounted in Silentblok bushes, which is being tried).

IT'S on the tighter twisting parts of the circuit where the bike really comes into its own. Braking hard at the end of the straight and hooking down three gears into the fast left hander into the Esses you grip the tank with your knees and hold on tight as the front stopper really comes on strong. Really powerful but with no hint of grab.

Likewise, the short wheelbase makes its presence felt with such an effortless 'flickability' it positively encourages quick changes of direction. That same 50" wheel base nearly caught me out, however, driving hard out of the bomb hole towards Coram, where there is a change of surface just on the exit. These ripples sent the forks into a wobble as the front end went light under acceleration but the hydraulic steering damper quickly arrested the oscillation. I soon learnt to transfer my weight over the front end on acceleration which improved things a lot.

Coram could be taken hard in fourth, with the bike tracking rock steady. At Russells' left, right flick the bike was in its element, needing the minimum of effort or easing in speed to place it just where you wanted it on the exit. Then accelerating hard and early up the start and finish straight towards Riches fast right hander, in top or fourth against the stop with no fear of the back end stepping out. Front and rear damping and spring rates proved just right for mine and Dave's similar body weight and build.

That never-ending quest for weight saving and maximum power output, together with Degen's tenacious riding style has, in the past, led to a race win or a retirement. But who would expect anything less from a seasoned navigator like Degens. His bike complements over 25 years of hard-won experience.

The faster you drive it the more it likes it. And I liked it as well. The Dresda offers a race winning alternative to the more expensive cammy singles it is often up against.

Although Dave's machine can be considered a purpose-built bike – the short wheelbase demanding a fluid body movement to extract the best results – he can build a bike to suit other riders' personal requirements. The geometry of the bike we tested

has proved to be very successful. Indeed you know you've got the opposition worried when there are mutterings of oversize engine dimensions levelled in your direction.

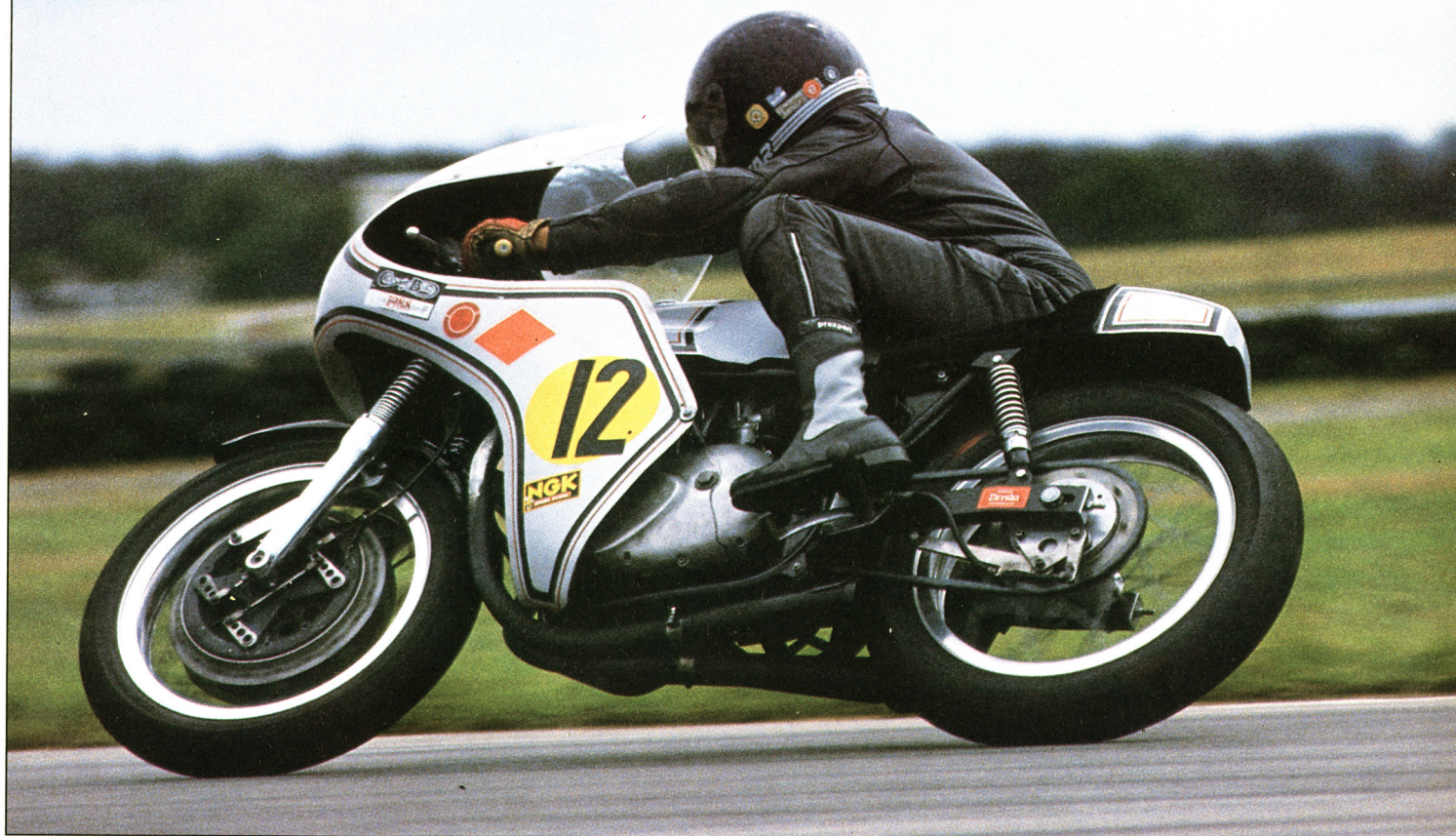
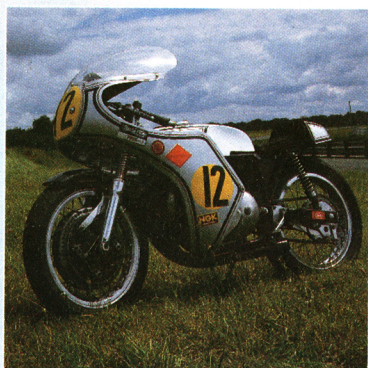
Dave is not the only one to have been on the receiving end of such allegations usually resulting in red faces all round when it comes to substantiating the claim.

Ultimately classic racing is all about having a good day's racing with the best man on the day winning. So, with a past master of the art of short circuit scratching like DD coupled with the little Dresda Triumph's competitiveness it's odds on he is probably just going a bit faster than his detractors. Competitive, compact and tenacious indeed!

Right: Degens fettle his Triumph-engined racer for our test day.

Below: John Ruth takes to Snetterton's curves on the Degens creation.

Inset: The bike as tested by John Ruth at Snetterton



Dave Degens on his Dresda Triumph
Brands Hatch, 1987

CLASSIC
RACER

