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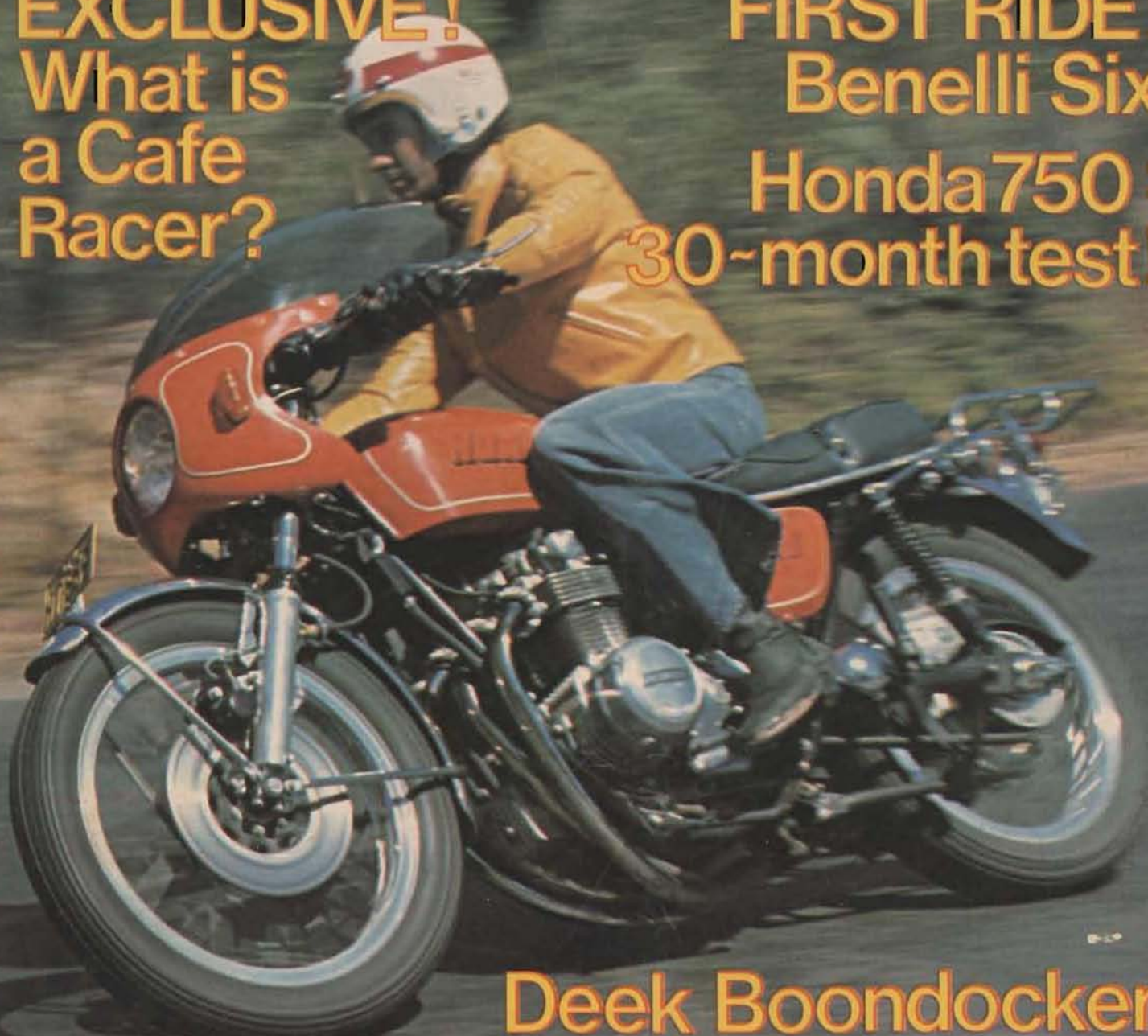
EXCLUSIVE!

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FACE TO FACE

GREGG HANSFORD

Australia's champion

At just 23 years of age, he's the top road-racer in the country, the pin-up idol of motorcycle sport. And he just happens to be a nice guy, too, as Brisbane correspondent PHIL HUNT discovered in this exclusive interview:



THERE WON'T BE a Castrol Six-Hour this year. Oh sure, they might organise and run a race called the Castrol Six-Hour, but without Bryan Hindle and Gregg Hansford and who knows who else, it just won't be the Six-Hour I remember.

Bryan Hindle, one of Australia's most dedicated racers, has already announced his retirement with the bitter comment, "I'm completely disillusioned". And in an exclusive interview with CYCLE AUSTRALIA Gregg Hansford, Australian Unlimited Champion, said, "I'm finished with production racing. It's just too risky."

That's a strange comment from a man who forever seems to be taking risks on the track. But Gregg doesn't see motorcycle racing as being dangerous. It's a sport in which he takes calculated gambles — betting his ability and his machine against the track. The hazard for Gregg in production racing is the risk of the loss of his racing licence.

"You may not be aware of it," Gregg confided to me just after Christmas, "but they've taken away my ACCA licence for six months and fined me \$200."

"You're joking!" I exclaimed. "What for?"

"Non-standard machinery in the Six-Hour. Apparently they stripped our Kawasaki 750 down and found an undercut gear."

"But surely you're not to blame for that."

"Well, I don't think they should be taking it out on me," Gregg said, "I just rode the bike." In fact, Gregg had nothing at all to do with preparing the bike; much of his pre-race time was spent racing in Ontario, Calif.

The 1974 Six-Hour wasn't exactly a high spot for Gregg Hansford. Although in the lead, Warren Willing (co-riding with Gregg) complained about the Kawasaki jumping out of gear. Then there was a mix-up in filling the petrol tank. Gregg actually ran out of petrol and was forced to push the bike into the pits. No sooner had he arrived than a machine examiner declared the rear tyre (a Dunlop K81) was bald and had to be replaced. Since they were only interested in first Outright, Gregg and Warren withdrew from the race.

The bald tyre saga has been bandied about racing circles for some time now and raises several interesting points. Several bikes which finished the race,

02 Gregg Hansford and arch-rival (and close friend) Warren Willing at Bathurst last year.

including the winning Kawasaki 900 of Len Atlee and Ken Blake, had rather less rubber left on their rear tyres than might have been expected of the Hansford-Willing tyre had it run the full distance. This is because the Dunlop K81 has less tread depth than the Avon used by Atlee and Blake, but more rubber from the bottom of the tread to the canvas.

Greg and Warren knew right from the start that the tyre would go bald before the race finished. But they also knew it wouldn't wear through to the canvas before the six hours were up. Their strategy was to run so fast while they had good tread depth that, once the tyre began to get slippery, they would be far enough in front to ease up and still win. Before their withdrawal Gregg had, in fact, slowed from his earlier lap times of around 62 seconds to high 63s and even the odd 64.

Disappointed by the machine examiner's decision, Gregg was even less enthused by the officials who removed the Kawasaki's key. "It was really silly," says Gregg, and then, without venom, "absolute bloody rubbish". In fact, the act was an insult, since it inferred that Gregg and Warren weren't to be trusted.

The matter of the undercut gear also

raises an interesting query (the gear is undercut to stop the machine jumping out of gear — it's a common modification on Kawasaki 750s). Adams and Sons, who prepared the bike, say this year's machine is virtually the same bike Willing rode to second place in 1973 (the '74 model isn't quite as fast, and the extended wheelbase of the newer machine doesn't suit Amaroo Park). The conclusion can be drawn that if the gear was undercut in 1974 it was probably also undercut the year before. If so, why was no action taken in 1973?

Gregg is too much of a gentleman, and believes too much in the innate goodness of Mankind, to believe racing officials might be looking for an excuse to save face over the bald tyre incident. So the benefit of the doubt shall prevail.

Is there a solution to this apparent disregard of production racing regulations? What about pooling all the bikes together and having them prepared under supervision?

Gregg dismisses this out-of-hand. "Wouldn't work! The only thing that would work is if a club official went into the showroom and picked a machine off the showroom floor. But then most of them probably wouldn't finish." It is clear Gregg is not optimistic about the

future of production bike racing in Australia. He is adamant he will not start in the 1975 Six-Hour "unless quite a few things change". And then, as if mentally compiling a list, he gazes off into infinity and repeats "quite a few things".

The melancholy is instantly dispelled when I mention Ontario. "What a fantastic track. It's long and very fast, and it's got 23 corners," says Gregg, welcoming the change of subject. "It's dead flat except for the banked corner 'Speedwell'. Warren and I really did well there considering we made the wrong choice of tyres. In the first heat everything was OK, but in the second heat Kenny Roberts changed tyres and he just left everyone."

"You fell in the second heat, didn't you?" I remind him.

"Yeah, well I just let go. I was dicing with Gene Romero and we were going so hard, and leaning over so far... well I just let go. You know, I was leaning over so far that I actually scraped my knee a few times. First time I've ever done that." It seems an unusual way to mark an achievement, but an achievement it is, nonetheless.

"And what memories do you have of racing in Djakarta?"

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GREGG HANSFORD

from page 25

"Just two weeks in a sauna bath. And people. One hundred thousand people came to watch the races, both cars and bikes. It was really scary because they just climbed over the fences and stood on the track, maybe a metre from the line through the corner. They'd even cross the track while a race was being run."

"Wasn't anyone hurt?"

"Not in the bike races, no. But you couldn't ride flat out for fear of falling off and hitting people."

"And what about prizemoney?"

"Prizemoney is very good there. But it's the heat you remember. I nearly passed out in the heat. I came in and Denny McCormack poured a couple of bottles of water down the back of my leathers and that revived me a bit. I was out there dicing with this Japanese

rider, Asumi, for fourth place and it was so hot and so bumpy you couldn't keep the bike straight even on the straight bits. I was just about to slow down and let Asumi through because we were side by side and it really was taking it out of both of us, when he slowed down and let me through. I finished third."

I recalled that Agostini had said soon after converting from MV to Yamaha that the TZ700 was a very difficult bike to ride.

"Well, it might have been for Agostini, but I think it's right for me" Gregg says without a trace of self-praise, "you see, Ago probably found it a lot different from the MV, but I think it's a really good bike. And once you get it sorted it handles as well as any. You've just got to use the power properly. You can't go wrapping it on in a corner or it'll go out from underneath you. With the right tyres and ridden properly it's a great bike. I never thought you'd be able to get a 750 around Lakeside faster than the 350, but after we sorted out a couple of little problems, we knocked nearly a second off the lap record."

Gregg and Ron Toombs shared the previous lap record of 61.7; (Gregg pushed it down to 60.8).

"Where did you pick up the skill to set records like that?"

"On the dirt. Anyone who wants to be a road-racer, or even a competent rider, should do some dirt racing — either short-circuit or motocross. You spend most of your time sideways or falling off and that teaches you the basics of handling. You've got to crash when you race, so you must learn how to fall safely and how to get out of trouble if you get into it. On the dirt you can learn those things without getting killed. And you've got to learn those skills before you start thinking about trying to win."

'You've got to learn how to fall,
Before you learn to fly....'

Paul Simon.

Gregg Hansford has learnt all about falling, he's learnt about racing till your knees scrape, and maybe now he's learning about officialdom. He sums up his philosophy thus: "I don't want to make waves or lose friends anymore." All Gregg Hansford wants to do now is race but not production racing — it's a bit risky. ●

FOOTNOTE:

After correspondent Hunt filed this story, Hansford's six-month suspension was lifted and his \$200 cut to \$100. Hansford also signed on with Kawasaki this year. — Ed.