

## Beech Bend Drag Championships

With Russ Collins in a wheelchair and Joe Smith sorting out his new Harley-Davidson, T.C. Christenson's double-engined Norton got stronger every round and won its umpteenth Top Fuel crown.



● Beech Bend, aka Bowling Green, is to the Nitro-Nasty set what Daytona is to the asphalt rashers and San Jose is to the dirt track crowd. However assiduously Roy Strawn and his AMDRA crew beat the sticks and flog the burgs in search of fresh venues for motorcycle drag racing action, Beech Bend is the sport's lodestar. There's always a meet there, the fast guys always come and a knowledgeable, sizeable crowd always shows up. It's been like that for seven years; 1976 was no different.

The qualifiers for Top Fuel were T.C. Christenson and his classy old double Norton (8.45 @ 170.13 mph); Joe Smith's double 74 (8.50 @ 165.3 mph); the Boris Murray/Dennis Dean triple Kawasaki (8.65 @ 165.44 mph); Marion Owens' double 74 (8.73 @ 157.61); Joe Thronson, Bob Mauriello, Bonnie Truett and Joe Stadler. Russ Collins would have qualified if he could have gotten the nitrous oxide injection worked out on his wheelchair; that's what he was riding, his triple-engined Honda having gone to that Great Trophy Presentation In The Sky. The Triple had gotten upside-down at Dragway 42 in Akron, Ohio two weeks before the Bowling Green meet and had scraped Russ down the strip like a curb-feeler. It cost him four broken ribs, a spleen, a gall bladder, a punctured lung, two broken

toes, 77 stitches, a dislocated shoulder, two broken fingers and a monumental dose of abrasion stew.

First-round Top Fuel action saw T.C. jump up and down on Mauriello with an 8.48—172.74, Bonnie Truett beat Boris Murray by seven hundredths, Smith beat Thronson when Thronson's double Harley came unravelled on a burn-out and Marion Owens whip Joe Stadler when Owens' double turned to a single closer to the finish line than Stadler's did.

The AMDRA's new Super Eliminator category, with a sixteen-bike field, consisted primarily of A/Fuel bikes, last year's Top Gas bikes, and almost anything else that can run low nines or high eights. At the Bend the class's lions turned out to be Ron Fringer's A/Fuel Sportster, Ray Price's stock-looking 107-cube HD and an ultra-new double turbocharged Z-1 sponsored by MTC Engineering and Bill Hahn's American Turbo-Pak and ridden by PeeWee Gleason. In the finals Price's fuel funny-bike gunned up an 8.85—155.70 to beat Fringer. Short and twitchy as Price's Sportster must be, his win was typified by consistency. He qualified with an 8.91—155.70 and made subsequent passes of 8.98—155.70, 8.89—155.70, 8.97—155.17 and 8.85—155.70.

Pro Stock, based on the NHRA car

category of the same name, is probably the AMDRA's most active class. The rules mandate that the bike has to run on gas and it has to look stock; everything else is for the most part run whatcha brung. What Terry Vance and Byron Hines brung, a big-motor R.C. Engineering Z-1, made it to the finals on a string of 9.8s, and once there met Bob Carpenter, who had climbed up the ladder with ETs of 9.86, 9.92, 9.78, and 9.80. Vance was strongest when he needed it the most; his 9.74 final pass edged Carpenter's 9.81, even though Bob's trap speed was 134.74 and Vance's was 134.73. There is a 3000 mile distance between Vance and Carpenter; when they met in Bowling Green they discovered that they had built two bikes which were for all intents and purposes identical.

In the semi-final round of Top Fuel TC's Norton, as it so frequently does, improved to an 8.41 beating Bonnie Truett's 9.08, and Joe Smith's 8.77 was more than enough to defeat Owens' single-engined Harley double. So it was Smith against Christenson in the day's last race, and once TC gets that close to the money he very rarely loses. He didn't this time either, the Norton pumping out an 8.31 (low ET of the meet) to stop Joe's 8.64.

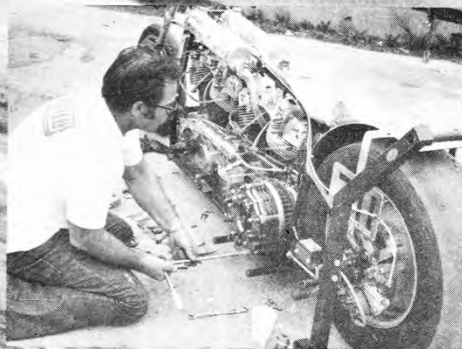
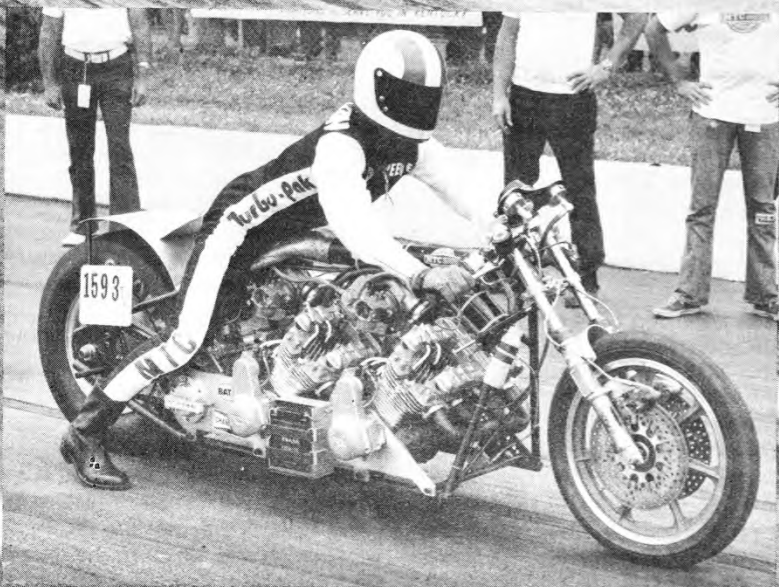
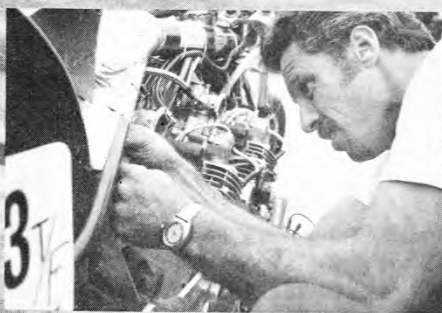
Good meet.

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One of the most exciting bikes at the Beech Bend meet was Bill Hamm's double-engined turbocharged Z-1, ridden by Pauline Gleason (below) and wrenched by Lou Hauert (right). Its future holds injection and nitro.



Russ Collins (top, center), lucky to be anywhere after 170 mph whoops off of "Atcheson, Topeka and Santa Fe," was wheeled through pits by Christenson and Joe Smith who, above, sets pressure on HD's clutch.



