

# WINSTON PRO SERIES

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# THE LAST DAYS OF HARLEY?

*A Look at the Ascot TT  
and the Future of the 500s*

By Paul Clipper



*In this incredibly blurry photograph, Mickey Fay shows that the factory Honda people know what it takes to build a competitive mount.*

Although it isn't what you'd call earth-shaking news, last July 19 Mike Kidd bit off a small chunk of AMA history by winning the Ascot TT. No, it's not so great an accomplishment for Mike, who has, in the past, proven himself capable of winning a number of different flattrack events. Rather, what is significant is the fact that he did it on a 500 machine, a feat which has not been duplicated in the previous 17 years.

Ascot has always been known as a 750 track, and by the end of time trials that evening, things looked as if the reputation would stand for a while longer. The first five qualifying positions were all 750s—Brad Hurst on his Triumph, Alex Jorgensen on his well-worn BSA, Jay Springsteen (returning after a layoff caused by his recurring

stomach trouble) on his factory Harley, Gary Scott riding a Triumph, and Scott Pearson on the Yamaha 750 twin. Pretty much the normal lineup for the Ascot TT.

But wait! There's trouble brewing in the pits! The next three fastest times were posted by mounts based on the Honda XR500 motor: Mike Kidd, sponsored by Team Army, and the Honda factory effort lead by teammates Jeff Haney and Mickey Fay.

Three Honda singles in the top ten. This alone would be considered a victory in itself to Honda fans, who remember quite well how badly the 500s fared against the 750s last year at this time. But it didn't stop there, as Mike Kidd and Jeff Haney did well enough in their heat races for a spot in

the final, while Mickey Fay struggled into the national lineup after a mediocre finish in his heat and a second place semi finish. Three underdog Hondas would race in the final, giving all of us non-750 Harley, BSA, Norton, Triumph riders something to root for.

And we weren't disappointed. Aside from a little pressure from Springsteen, Mike Kidd all but walked off with the final, with Mickey Fay thrashing his way up to second by the time the checkered flag came out. The first 750 was Ricky Graham in third. Rookie Jeff Haney put on a very respectable show on his XR500, finishing sixth.

What a turnaround! Last year saw the Hondas struggling to stay on the track, and now they're winning. Why is this such a big deal? Because it represents



*Mike Kidd had a little bit of trouble with Springsteen (Jay, not Bruce) in the beginning of the National, but quickly opened up a comfortable lead.*



*A certain amount of partying is to be expected.*

progress, that's why. The ability of taking a machine giving away 250ccs and an extra cylinder to the competition and honing it into a winning mount. And doing it on a budget, too, compared to the competition.

Let's look at this closer. A winning Honda TT bike weighs in somewhere around 240 pounds or less, and puts out at least 50 horsepower. At what price? Well, say \$1000 for the engine, the same amount again for the frame and related chassis parts, another grand spent turning the power output into the "awesome" range, and it begins to look like the privateer can get into some serious TT racing with a minimum outlay of about \$3000. A Harley Davidson XR750, on the other hand, is a little heavier and a lot more power-

ful—right around 85hp, weighing at least 300 pounds. The Harley is capable of some truly frightening racing speeds—in excess of 130mph—and it also goes for a premium price: right around \$6000 stock, if you can get one. H-D only makes a limited number of them each year, and for every model run, there's a waiting list a mile long.

Factory efforts aside, this isn't the best situation for the privateer. The average privately-sponsored rider can go out and set up an XR or TT500 for TT events, and can easily put together a shorttrack machine, which by AMA rules is limited to 250cc. So, in that case, most racers can use a 250 motocrosser motor. However, the miles and half-miles are still ruled by the bigger bikes.

The AMA stirred up quite a bit of controversy a couple years back by proposing a 500cc limit on all Grand National racing. Harley-Davidson wouldn't hear of it, and fought the rule change until the AMA decided it wasn't a very good idea. Harley, you see, doesn't build a 500 single, and even if the 750s were sleeved down to 500, they would still be out of the ballpark in the weight and price department and, after all, what would the Grand National be without Harley-Davidson?

What is the Grand National anyhow? Well, for starters, it's one of the most visually exciting series of sports events around, with sheer speed and borderline control separating the winners from the also-rans. It has the most meaningful race schedule for the selection of a champion, with 27 different events on the 1980 calendar, spread all over the continental United States. The format of the Grand National is also the only truly American motorcycle race there is—trials, enduros, motocross and speedway are all European imports.

And last but not least, the Grand National Championship is the last Grand Dinosaur parade in existence. With the emergence of the Honda 500 and the refining of the Yamaha 500 in the last two years, the Grand National has seen the development of some good, new technology, if only at the TT tracks across the country. At the big ovals, it's still a battle between the outdated behemoths, and likely to remain that way till the AMA finally makes up their mind as to which direction the Grand National is going to go: lowering the limit to 500, thereby allowing all current motorcycle manufacturers a shot at the top; or leaving things the way they are, ensuring Harley-Davidson a long and prosperous racing career.

Just for the record, our money's on the 500s. □

**AMA WINSTON PRO SERIES TT  
ASCOT PARK,  
GARDENA, CALIFORNIA  
July 19, 1980**

1. Mike Kidd .....Hon
2. Mickey Fay .....Hon
3. Ricky Graham .....H-D
4. Jay Springsteen .....H-D
5. Scott Pearson .....Yam
6. Jeff Haney .....Hon
7. Brad Hurst .....Tri
8. Rick Hocking .....Yam
9. Randy Goss .....H-D
10. Steve Morehead .....H-D