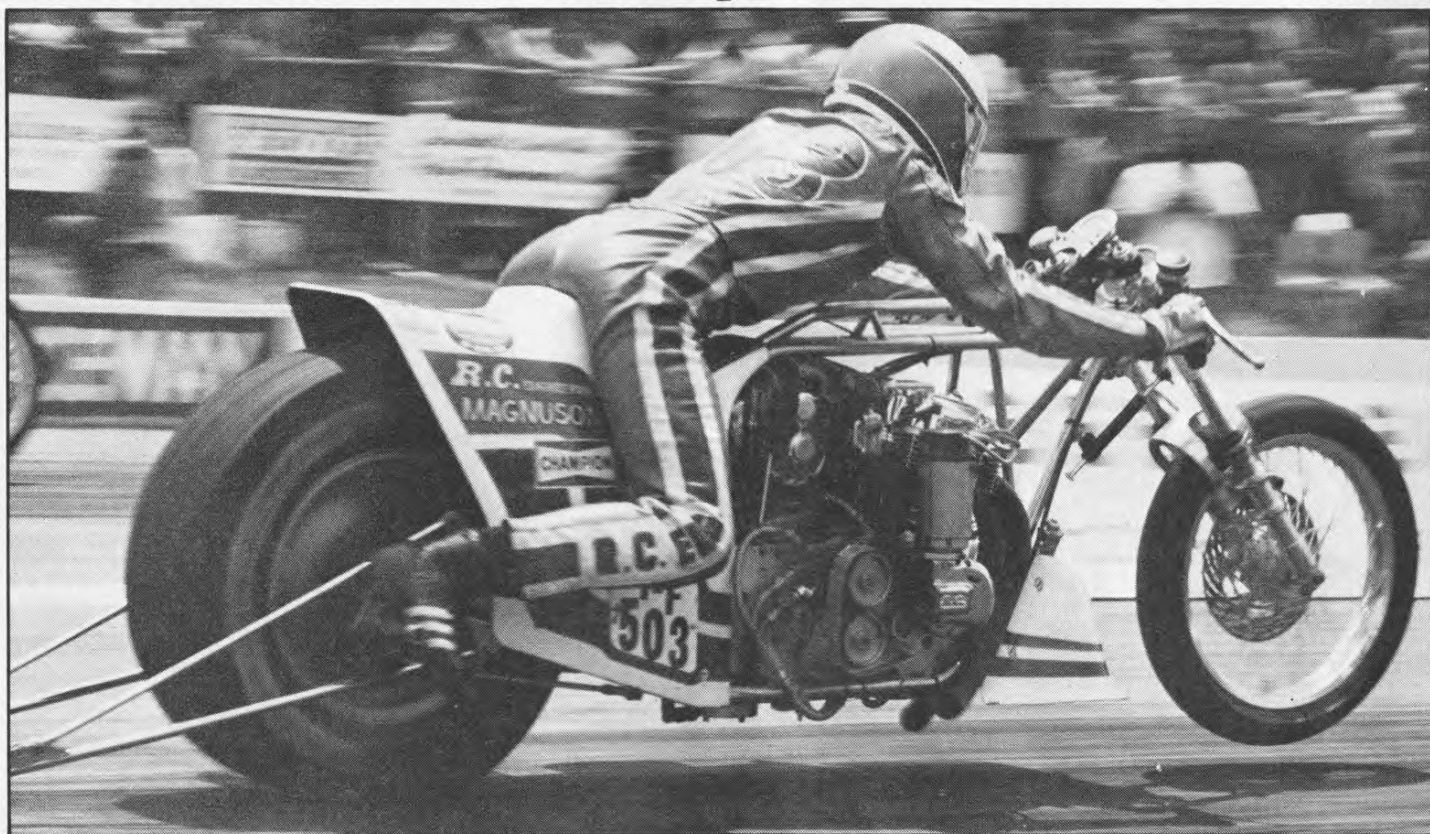




# THE GIANT KILLER

**One Engine And A Blower Is All It Takes For Teson And Bernard To Rule Top Fuel**

By Rich Cox



**D**rag racing spectators generally don't pay much attention to single-engined Hondas, but when the Teson/Bernard blown nitro-burning Honda stages at the lights, its 300-hp engine throbbing thunderously on 90-percent nitro-methane, one thing is certain: everyone's eyes are focused intensely on the sleek-looking 465-pound rocket. This machine has the distinction of being the quickest bike in the world (it holds NHRA's all-time low e.t. record of 7.65), and also owns IDBA's top-speed record of 184.42 mph. It's the only single-engined bike to date ever to blitz the quarter-mile in under 8 seconds; in fact it has 15 7-second passes under its cylinder head.

With such sparkling credentials as these, you'd expect the little "giant killer" to be the product of a mega-buck speed shop, but guess again. Its designer, builder and tuner is 37-year-old Ron Teson of Lakewood, California, who oddly enough earns his full-time living more conservatively with his own business of making furniture frames. But don't let that fool you; he's been tinkering with Honda engines since 1969 and knows them just like his furniture: inside and out.

Ron's bike represents more than just one man's personal accomplishment: it's the first and most impressive performer among the new "breed" of Top Fuel contenders—machines that are powered by one, simple supercharged engine (instead of two or three coupled into one monstrosity), and which are agile and relatively inexpensive compared to their older, outdated counterparts. As most of the "progressive" drag racers will agree, this latest new-generation machine has evolved basically for two reasons: (1) Recently there's been a

rapid increase in blower technology for motorcycles; (2) these units, and their related parts, are finally becoming available to the consumer. Even now, with blower development going full-steam ahead, Ron admits that for his sized Honda engine there are only two blowers now being manufactured which will work on it.

This is the first year the flashy little Honda has had the correct parts to make it a consistent winner, even though the bike was originally built in April of 1976. But the final product was well worth waiting for. Compared to some of the complicated and expensive machinery it now competes against and usually annihilates (such as Russ Collins' V-8-powered Sorcerer which comes with a \$35 thousand price tag), Ron's Honda is the epitome of simplicity and thriftiness. Discounting "freebies" from his two main sponsors (Jerry Magnuson Blowers and R.C. Engineering), he figures about \$4500 is all that's invested—and since October of last year it has collected over \$5000 worth of prize money. That doesn't sound like much, but in the expensive world of Top Fuel, few bikes ever repay their creators—especially in only one year's time.

The Honda's internal workings have never been a secret to anyone since most of it was lifted from an R.C. Engineering parts catalog. Inside it has: an almost-stock crank; R.C. "golden-rods" (the same used in Russ's V-8); R.C. 6½:1 low-compression "blower pistons;" an R.C. "big-block" cylinder (the engine displaces 970cc's, which Ron laughingly states is equivalent to one hole in a Top Fuel car engine); and finally, you'll find a nicely-ported and polished R.C. head capping off the unit. Anyone can buy most of the other components too: a Vertex

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magneto (similar ones are used on VW engines); R.C. mag drive and housing; Hilborn PG150 fuel pump; Crowder slipper clutch; Kosman chassis; Cragar wheels; and Goodyear tires. However, the Lenco 2-speed transmission can't be purchased new since they're presently out of production.

Any secrets no doubt lie in the careful feeding and metering of highly volatile 90-percent nitro into the specially adapted Hilborn injector and No. 80 Magnuson supercharger, which is similar to those used on small cars such as the Porsche 924. While Ron relied on the usual drag-sport learning method—trial and error—when it came to “stepping-up” into the blown-nitro world, he acknowledges he had considerable help from Jerry Magnuson and especially Byron Hines of R.C. Engineering. “I had plenty of background with an injected bike, the blower was just one step further. We simply put it on and started running. We melted-down one motor and blew the end off a manifold, but just kept plugging away until it was right.”

Busting into drag racing's limelight with the blown Honda didn't come without knocks—Ron's paid the price of being a “trend setter” dearly in more ways than one. He vividly recalls the second pass ever made on the bike with the Magnuson blower installed, in which he was pitched-off at the timing lights while traveling 145 mph. “The front end was too weak and too small. Everything was wrong with it. Heck, we didn't know any better until we started going faster.” Since then he added a Ceriani front-end to the Kosman chassis, a combination which now keeps the Honda “wobble-free” through its 180-mph passes.

Being more or less the pioneer of supercharging a nitro-burning four-cylinder, Teson spent months getting the engine “dialed-in” to its diet of force-fed nitro. “The first time the bike really ran good—a full, strong pass—was in October of '76 during the NHRA Supernationals at Ontario; it turned an 8.37 e.t. @ 158 mph.” One month later, at Fremont, California the single really made the old timers' jaws hit pavement: it blasted an incredible 7.96 @ 172.74 mph, marking the first time a single-engined machine had ever spanned the quarter-mile in under 8 seconds. But it wasn't until eight months later, a period of time that saw the Honda continually plagued with blower failures, that it ran in the sevens again. “We chucked 15 blowers in one way or another. It would either blow-off the manifold, rip the drive belt or break the rotors inside; we'd do one burn-out and then it'd usually go to pieces. It was constantly broken. We'd be a year ahead right now if the blower had been right in the first place.”

The last race Ron rode the bike himself was Bristol, Tennessee (July '77) and it turned-out to be a highly significant event for the Honda. It marked both an end to the blower problems and the last race which Ron would ride the bike himself. He delegated riding chores to a close friend, 25-year-old Jim Bernard, who has proved unbeatable ever since. “Jimmy had already been riding an assortment of bikes for the past five years—he just had to get used to the awesome power increase. It's actually easier to ride than the slower bikes because there are no clutch levers to pull—you just push the lever once when you want to shift.” We asked how Jim knows when to shift without a tachometer. “It doesn't much matter,” said Ron, indicating that the engine possesses so much brute horsepower that it's really mindless. Once the trigger is pulled the bike catapults down the quarter-mile no matter what.

Ron gave-up the riding chores for the universal reason in the competition world: “It's just too much work trying to ride and tune at the same time.” While trackside maintenance is usually minimal (new Champion plugs and three fresh quarts of Valvoline 20-50 racing oil before every pass), there are always those “after raceday chores.” Following each meet Ron pulls the cylinder, hones and re-rings if necessary and replaces any parts that look deficient. “I've been through so many parts, I've forgotten what's really in it. It's always a continuous thing when you run fuel.” But it has paid off, especially when looking at the Honda's consistency; Jim rarely fails to qualify first or second at every meet he attends—and that's as important as having 1000 horsepower between your legs.

Is being at the top lonely for the Teson/Bernard Honda? Hardly, especially with guys like Kenny Annesley (his double-engine nitro-injected Kawasaki holds both the ID-BA and Dragbike e.t. records at 7.71 and 7.89 respectively) and John Dixon (his blown Yamaha XS1100 turned an impressive 8.26 @ 167 mph at its first official meet). Nor does he expect to occupy that position much longer if he stands still. “My records will probably fall by the end of the year. The Honda engine is just too small—it's through.” With that he points to a bare frame sitting in R.C. Engineering's back room and says rather slyly: “I've got a new bike in the works for next year—maybe even by the end of this year. It'll have a bigger 1100cc engine, a larger 12½-inch tire (his current Honda has a nine-incher) and it will definitely be faaaast. I'm not going to say what brand just yet—but it won't be another Honda.”

The Teson/Bernard four has paved the way for a whole new generation of Top Fuel machinery—bikes which are simple, outrageously fast and quite affordable. Perhaps the manufacturers of production motorcycles should take a look at their approach. **M**



Removing the left sidecover shows Crowder slipper clutch driven by a duplex chain. A Uniroyal belt turns the Magnuson blower at 15% overdrive.