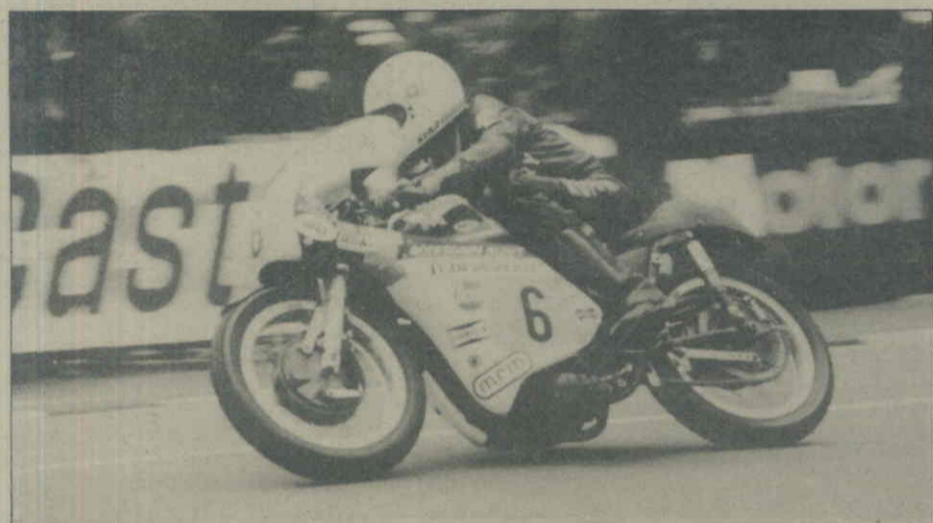


Dave Roper bump starts his bike for three laps on the 37.75 public roads course in a race against the clock.

Despite the rain on the second and third laps, Roper averaged over 96 mph on his way to becoming the first American to win a race during IoM TT.



(Left to right) Second place Ian Lougher, Team Obsolete's Rob Iannucci, winner Roper, and third place Sam McClements celebrated afterward.



Roper conquers Isle of Man

By Mike Nicks

DOUGLAS, ISLE OF MAN, JUNE 2

Dave Roper, the 35-year-old welder from Hicksville, New York, has become the first American to win an event on the world's toughest road race circuit, the legendary 37 $\frac{3}{4}$ -

mile Isle of Man TT course. Riding the Matchless 500cc G50 of Team Obsolete chief Rob Iannucci, Roper delighted thousands of spectators when he averaged 96.114 mph in the three-lap, 113-mile Historic TT. On the 1959 overhead-camshaft, single-cylinder machine, he beat 19-year-old Welshman Ian Lougher, who also rode a G50, by 38.6 seconds after more than an hour and 10 minutes of racing.

The victory is regarded by European race followers as a magnificent achievement. Roper has mastered the intricacies of the dangerous public-roads course in only four visits to the Isle of Man, and he also overcame a massive setback in practice when he crashed and fractured a bone in his left wrist.

Roper dropped the Matchless on a slow right-hand corner three days before the race, but local surgeons,

skilled at getting battered TT competitors in shape to reach the start-line, set the damaged wrist in a special cast so that he could operate the clutch lever.

"After the crash I had real doubts about whether I should ride at all," a delighted Roper admitted after the race. "I wondered whether the fall had made me too distracted, and whether the whole thing would turn into a real disaster."

By race day Roper had put thoughts of further contact with the island's street furniture behind him, and fully regained his confidence. His performance in leading virtually all the way astounded many rivals, however, particularly as rain fell on parts of the course on the second and third laps, leaving riders uncertain of the road conditions they would face round the TT circuit's innumerable blind corners.

"Fortunately I've raced a lot in the

rain, and it doesn't frighten me," said Roper.

Adding to the delight of Iannucci, the 39-year-old Brooklyn lawyer, his English rider, Paul Barrett, finished sixth overall and third in the 350cc class on an Aermacchi, an Italian push-rod single with a horizontally mounted cylinder barrel.

The Historic TT was a new event in the Isle of Man program this year, reflecting the huge growth in classic bike racing in the UK. Eligible machines were four-strokes manufactured from 1945-72, and two-strokes made between 1945-67. Nearly 70 bikes lined up, including Triumph twins, BSA Gold Star singles, an OHC Rennsport BMW dating from 1954, and the Matchless and Manx Norton OHC singles that formed the backbone of European road racing.

The world's oldest motorcycle races, the TT was first held in 1907, and for decades was regarded as the ultimate event in European motorcycle competition. But in recent years top riders, including Americans like Kenny Roberts and Freddie Spencer, have declined to race in the island. The course, lined with stone walls, curbstones, street-light posts and earth banks, has claimed the lives of more than 100 riders, and in 1978 one American who did contest the races, Californian Pat Hennen, crashed a

500cc Suzuki at 150 mph and sustained severe injuries from which he is still recovering.

Roper first raced in England in the mid-seventies when he rode a Silk, a 653cc British-built two-stroke twin, in club events while working on nuclear submarine maintenance in Scotland. Later he teamed with Iannucci to ride Team Obsolete's classic machinery, and first contested the TT in 1982, finished 12th in the Formula Two race on a 350cc Aermacchi.

Last year he gained more experience of the island course with TT rides on a 600cc Moriwaki-Kawasaki and an 950cc Ducati, and was fastest qualifier at the 1983 Manx Grand Prix, an amateurs-only event held over the same circuit in September. But the Matchless sucked a stone through its carburetor, which ruined Roper's chances of a win.

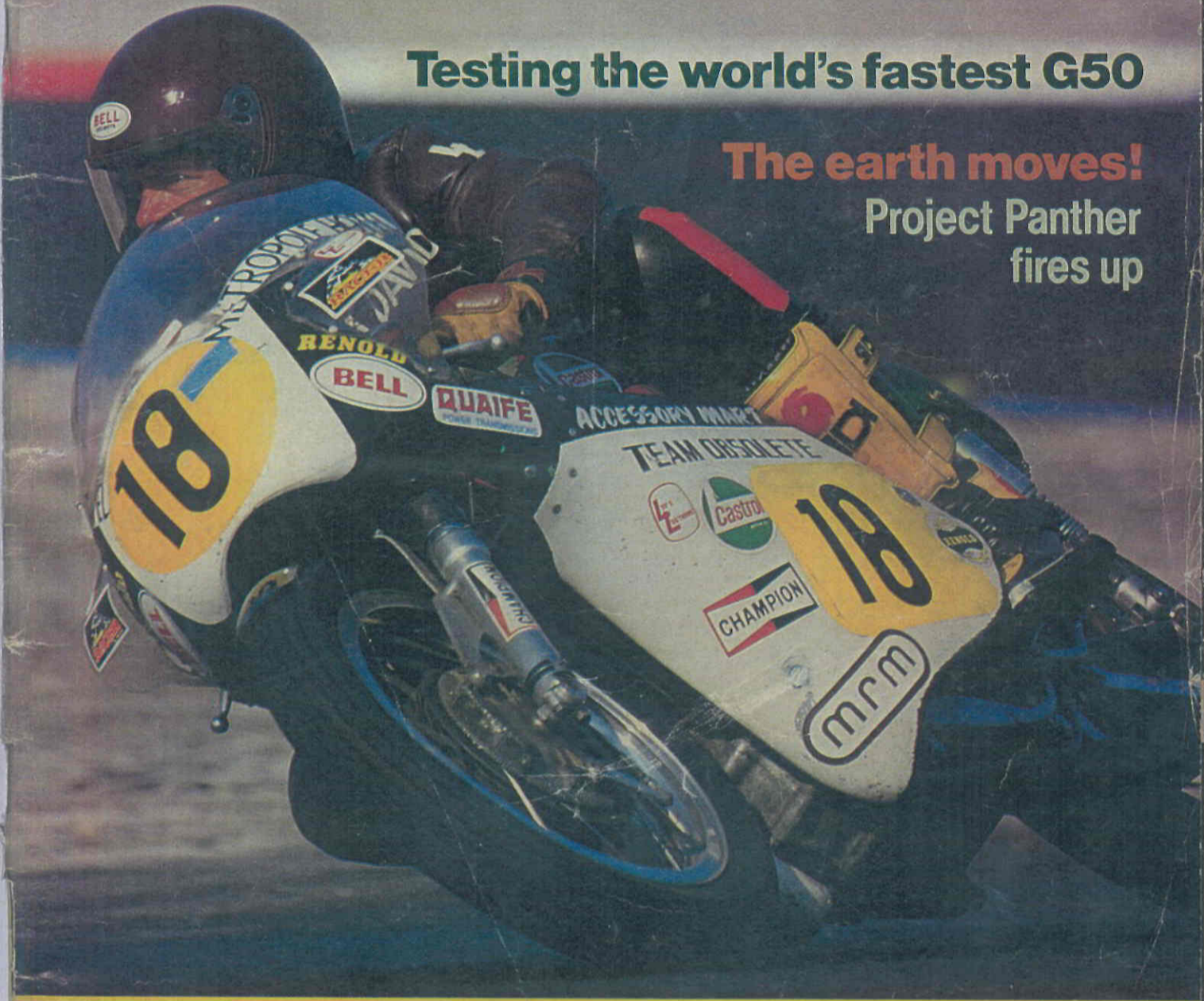
In this year's Historic TT he faced opposition from top British classic riders including Dave Hughes on the fastest single-cylinder machine in Isle of Man history, the Matchless G50 prepared by famous English tuner Tom Arter. This bike, with a special lowered frame, lapped the circuit at 102.74 mph in 1973 in the hands of Peter Williams, and the speed has never been bettered, even by modern single-cylinder specials powered by

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