

GRAVE CONCERNS

BY CHRIS HERRING

The loss of Supercup status has dealt the singles class a cruel blow, one some sceptics fear it may not survive

BRITISH single-cylinder racing enters 1995 with a death sentence hanging over it. The class is in turmoil, with even its own powerbrokers

predicting a premature end for the division which was not so long ago being hailed as road racing's saviour.

It grew from humble club beginnings in the mid-

1980s and, boasting the attraction of a diverse variety of pukka race bikes, has made a welcome change at meetings dominated by production-based machines. Last year it was deemed worthy of a place in Supercup, Britain's premier road race series, and was even granted its own Isle of Man TT race and European Cup series.

The inaugural Supercup series boasted a works MZ, a factory

Over-Yamaha, a couple of purpose-built Ducati Supermonos and the elegant carbon fibre Harris-Yamahas, in addition to a range of high-tech home-built tackle which has been

the mainstay of the class for a decade.

But a year on, the bubble has burst. Its Supercup and Euro Cup championships have been axed, to be replaced by a lower-status 11-round British national series, which has predictably been met with little enthusiasm from the class's chassis builders, engine tuners and component suppliers.

More prize money is on offer for the new-look '95 series, but the prestige has gone. There will be no Over, no Tigcraft-MZ, no Top Gun Ducati and a distinct lack of top-flight riders – an ingredient many felt added glamour and spectator appeal to the series last year. The major players are simply not interested.

"Kicking the singles out of Supercup has killed the class stone dead," claims Tigcraft boss Dave Pearce, who built 25 of his high-tech singles racers in 1993, plus three for MZ. He completed orders for a further 15 in 1994, blissfully unaware the Supercup was about to be axed. But he has little to look forward to this winter.

"I've got no orders at all. I'm hoping this is just

a knee-jerk reaction to the class being removed from Supercup. If I was a singles racer now, I'd just go out and buy a production Ducati Supermono at around £14,000."

The reasons for the series being slashed from Supercup to the new British National Cup are difficult to pinpoint.

The deed was done by the race promoters' committee, MRPC, which claims it is simply reacting to the wishes of fans it polled at British circuits.

MRPC spokesman and Donington Park promoter Robert Fearnall believes singles will be better suited to the new, lower-status series.

He says: "From the results of our spectator surveys we felt it was important to give a particular identity to different types of meetings."

"We want the singles to form the basis of the new format National Cup with the Triumph Challenge and 1300cc Open class. The singles riders have a full series, with more prize money, at prestige meetings."

Over Racing boss Graham Boothby, who ran Team Great Britain

rider Nick Hopkins in '94, fails to share Fearnall's optimism about the forthcoming season.

"It's still a B-grade championship and singles racing can only go downhill from here," he claims. "I just wish somebody would stand up and tell us the real reason we're out of Supercup."

"Let them say we are too oily, or the bikes blow up all the time or we are too messy, if that's what they think. Just give us a reason."

It certainly isn't the quality of racing that's at fault. Last year's series could hardly have been closer. MZ's Mike Edwards took his third successive win in the series at the Brands Hatch final round, but failed by four points in his bid to overhaul eventual champion Dave Rawlins on the Harris-Yamaha.

Despite the close racing at the head of the field, with star names like Alan Carter, Edwards, Rawlins, Hopkins and even GP star John Reynolds, it was the lack of talent in depth which gave concern to Britain's race bosses.

A hefty retirement rate meant some of the eight Supercup races had less than 15 finishers.

And on other occasions, British championship points were being collected by lapped riders.

"It needs more than a year at Supercup level to get rid of all the crap machinery at the back of the field," reckons Top Gun team boss Doug Holtom, who ran Alan Carter on a Ducati Supermono in 1994.

The last chance singles get to prove themselves as a major force will come in June when they do battle for a second time at the Isle of Man TT.

"It won't work," says Pearce. "Virtually all singles riders own their bikes and they are not likely to loan them to TT riders to be worn out."

The high hopes for the British series may have been severely dented, but Harris Performance, a financial supporter of the class for six years, is confident the 1995 championship will be successful if the faithful rally round and continue to support the class.

"The down-grading of the championship has knocked people's confidence, that's all. A lot of people are sitting on the fence," says Lester Harris. "We will support the '95 championship and I still think there is a future for the class."

"Singles is always going to be a support class for pure racing bikes, but it is crucial the new National Cup series is supported, otherwise singles will fade and become just another club racing class."



HIGH-TECH FUELLED RAPID GROWTH

SINGLE-CYLINDER racing was conceived in the early 1980s by die-hard bike racers who were keen on having a class in which to race modified classic-style machines.

By 1985, it had become so popular that a championship, with a class for 250s and an up-to-500cc class, was launched.

As a series for pure race bikes as opposed to the popular proddle machines, it was an instant hit. Honda's CB250RS fuelled the singles' fire by providing a workhorse machine for the masses.

"The attraction was, and still is, being able to

use your own ideas without regulation," says Hejira race team boss Derek Chittenden.

"Singles as a cheap racing class simply is not true."

Lester Harris of Harris Performance adds: "Originally it wasn't too expensive. It was perfect for those people who liked tinkering with bikes."

As the class flourished, classic machines started to disappear from the grids. Rotax and Honda motors began to out-pace the older Seeleys and Hagons.

With this injection of new, high-tech machinery, "Sound of Singles" gathered momentum,

picked up some sponsorship and ran successfully. One of its major attractions was the incredibly diverse range of bikes it attracted. The machines bristled with carbon fibre, kevlar, fuel injection, telemetry and other high-tech innovations. No two were identical – until Ducati jumped on the bandwagon in 1993 and launched its Supermono racer.

Although the class was booming, it still came as a surprise to many of the singles stalwarts when it gained Supercup status in 1994.

Tigcraft boss Dave Pearce explains: "We'd

built the series up over a period of time, but didn't expect to get to Supercup level that quickly.

"But to take the class away from Supercup now is the same as giving someone a Christmas present and two weeks later saying they can't have it any more."

Whether it's called single-cylinders, Sound of Singles or Supermono racing, the class has had many names and many chapters during its history.

The axing of the 1995 singles Supercup could prove just a hiccup in the development of one of racing's most high-tech classes.



■ **ANYTHING GOES:** Wayne Lamb (47) proved even moto crossers could win singles races