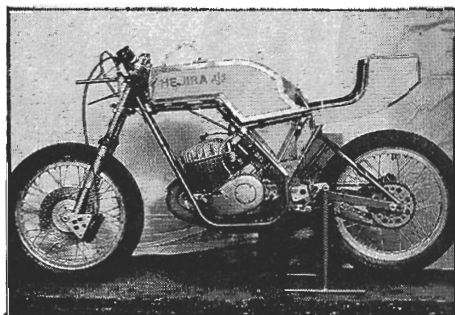




HEJIRA 'fly like the wind'

In Arabic Hejira means 'fly like the wind'. Barry Hickmott investigates the facts behind one of Britain's smallest manufacturers.



Even with Peter Inchley's help, the Starmaker motor wasn't enough

Some readers may question Hejira's right to be included in our series on British Racers. But in my opinion they have every bit as much right as DMW, Cotton or any of the other lesser known marques.

As single-cylinder racing motorcycles powered by Austrian Rotax engines, Hejira have recently constructed machines that hold their own in any company at Clubmans level. For these simple, but extremely effective bikes have captured several important club championships, including the coveted Bemsee awards. If you then begin to add all the Rotax twins, Ducati singles and twins, AJS Starmaker and finally Yamaha twins employed over the last decade, it will become obvious that Hejira have produced an amazing amount of different machinery and fully deserve to be recognised as a motorcycle manufacturer in their own right.

Our story commences some 20 years ago, when Derek Chittenden, a budding grasstrack competitor, was building another of those Triumph/BSA specials. but unlike the rest, Derek wanted a new and original name for his machine. Tribsa wasn't god enough, so he was reduced to some investigation work with a dictionary and up came *Hejira*, because this new name summed up all that Derek had been looking for.

Being a talented engineer with an endless obsession for frame building, Derek found himself during 1972 with enough work to go it alone. And so using the name Hejira formed his business venture that same year. Using his hard won motocross experience he soon adopted long travel cantilever suspension for tarmac racing use. One of his first customers was none



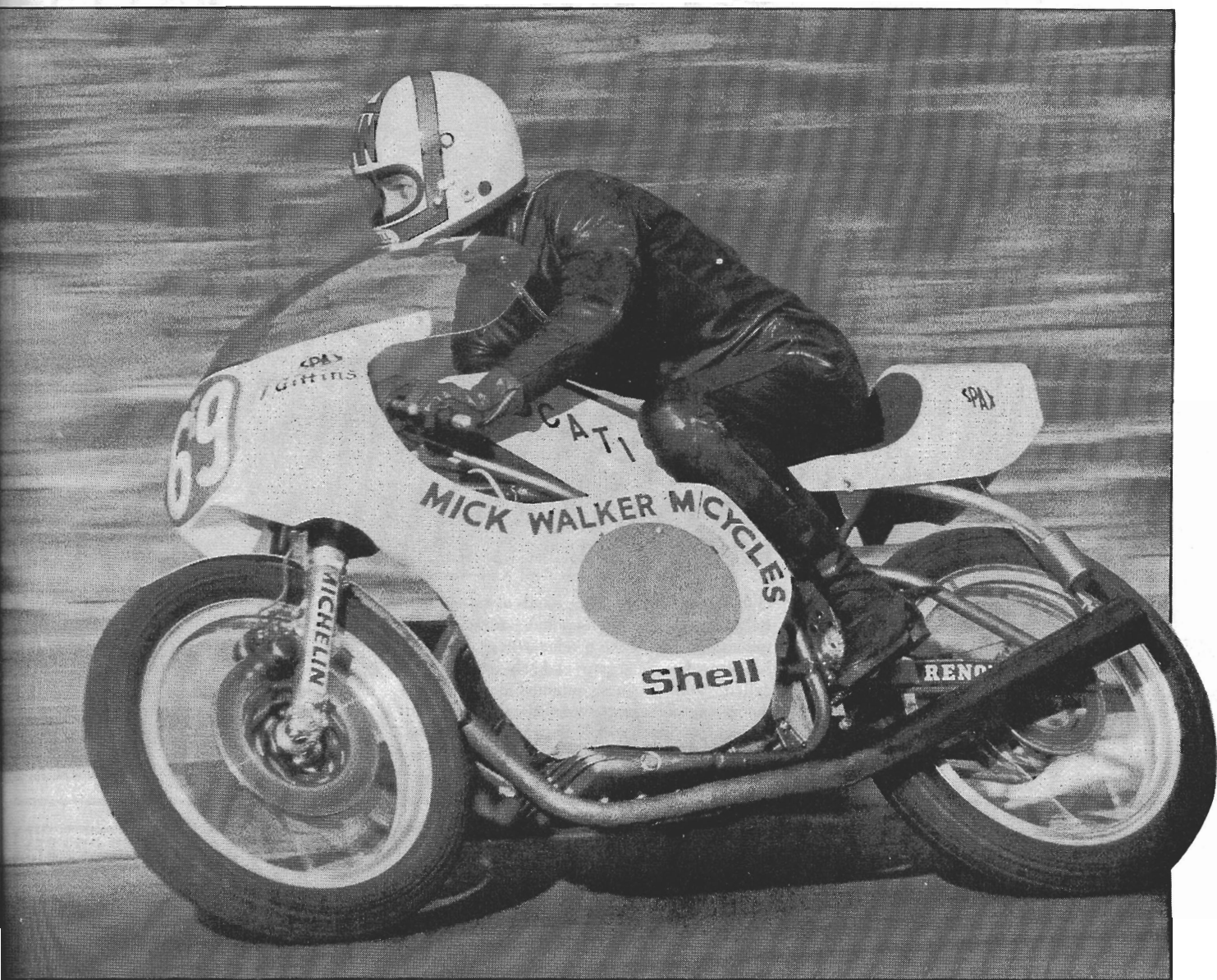
Derek Chittenden (left) and Danny Wilson with the interesting Rotax single

other than the Mick Walker sponsored Ducati rider, Ian Gittens. The Hejira tubular frame employed the Italian overhead cam single engine as a stressed member and came complete with box-section swingarm and a single shock rear suspension unit of Derek's own manufacture. This was soon followed by a batch of three AJS Starmaker engined racers in 1977 which made the name of Hejira more widely known.

Responding to the then new single cylinder class, Derek constructed each machine using a six-speed gearbox to do battle with the Vic Camp Suzukis and a host of Ducatis which ruled the roost at the time. Despite employing the talents of ex-Villiers/AJS development engineer Peter Inchley, the machines were never as successful as had been anticipated. Not that they didn't handle, it was just that they were not quick enough. This effort was not entirely wasted though, as they had caught the eye of Danny Wilson, who in 1978 approached Derek with the idea of a partnership deal. The advantage of this was

that it released Derek to concentrate on the design and manufacturing side of the business, whilst Danny's marketing and sales expertise could be used to capture new business.

One of the first fruits of this new team was a Suzuki 250 X7 engined Formula 3 racer. Although the new bike didn't have a fairy tale debut, it did come home a creditable third in the Formula 3 world championships that year, followed by a sixth in 1979. For another couple of seasons the team stayed with formula racing, but by now had moved up to the ultra competitive F2 class, with a Hejira framed Ducati Pantah. For 1983, Hejira selected Irish rider Steve Cull to ride the machine in the Isle of Man TT. At the end Cull finished in ninth place, but there was more to this than just the result. In practice Steve hadn't been off the leaderboard all week and was second only to world champion Tony Rutter. But, as they say, the best laid plans can be blown apart on race day, where after lapping at 106mph and lying in fourth spot, a last lap misfire slowed the unfortunate Cull to finish ninth. Just to

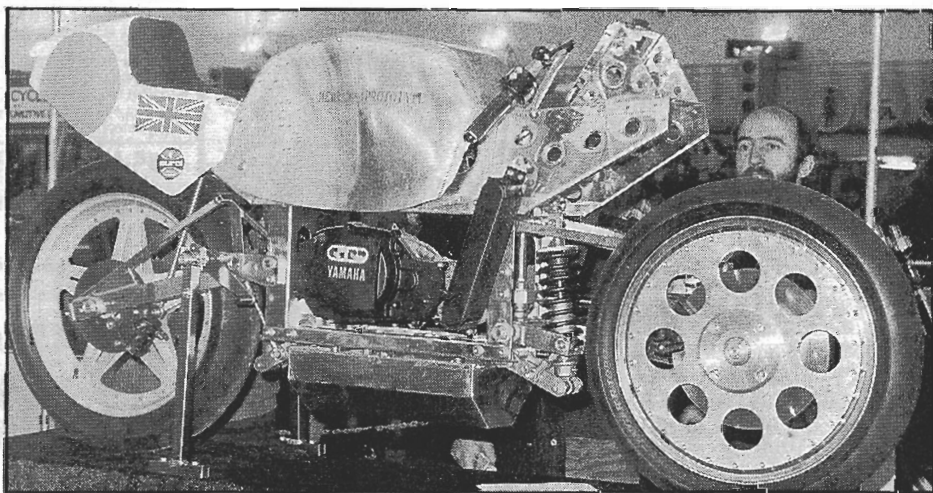


One of Hejira's first customers was Mick Walker sponsored Ducati rider Ian Gittens seen here at Union Mills during practice for the 1977 Manx

illustrate the handling properties of the Hejira frame, Steve Cull used a completely standard road going engine in practice and only a mildly tuned one in the race – a fact which rival Steve Wynne of Sports Motorcycles had at first refused to believe. However it was Ducati works rider Tony Rutter who finally made the Hejira team's day by saying that if he had one of their frames with his works engine, he could have gone even faster! As Danny said when I interviewed him, 'a good rider can make a bad chassis work but a good chassis will make a good rider even better'.

Following the F2 world championship trail over to his native Ulster, Steve Cull was fifth fastest in practice, but during the warm-up lap for the race a piston failure brought a premature end to such a promising start. Remember that high rev misfire? Well Danny finally concluded that the ignition box was to blame. Showing his engineers mind to the full he decided to find out just what was inside, and all that Danny found was about £3.50 worth of electronic components which anyone with half a brain could construct on his kitchen table!

Following more race track success, other people started to take notice of the small Buckinghamshire factory's efforts, notably Barry Hart of Barton Engineering. Barry



This Yamaha powered monocoque hub-centre steered Hejira prototype at the 1984 Road Racing Show

wanted to build his own 250/350 in-line twin. With the help of Rotax drawings, supplied by Danny, he did so very quickly. However, before a Hejira chassis could be made, Barry Hart was on the phone telling him of the Armstrong takeover of Barton Engineering.

A similar story can be related of an approach by the King's Lynn based Decorite team, which requested a chassis, and quickly, for their Rotax

twin. To meet this demand, Derek and Danny worked night and day for two days, at the end of which a complete sample machine had been built. This was taken as instructed to Silverstone but for reasons never disclosed the Decorite team failed to appear.

However, chalking up these expensive 'problems' to experience the Hejira partners manfully undaunted have not