

Three laps into the Daytona 200, Kenny Roberts was fighting not for the lead, but for control, his Yamaha sliding sideways on the banking at 180 mph. He'd planned to run the 200 miles as the endurance race it is, and his plan hadn't included trouble, again.

Trouble, again, is the story of Kenny Roberts at Daytona. Roberts was the fastest man at Daytona, again, had qualified on the pole, again, and was in trouble, again. He's started the race 10 times, been on the pole seven times and has won just once in all those tries.

He did nine laps last year before his bike seized; quit after two laps with a stuck throttle caused by a kinked cable in 1981; pitted after two laps in 1980 with a throttle stuck by sand in the carburetors; missed the race altogether in 1979 with injuries. He won, lapping the field, in 1978. He finished second in 1977 with clutch problems, and led until he wore his rear tire through the cords in 1976.

For Kenny Roberts, finishing, let alone winning, Daytona is a problem, and, as far as he could tell, here it was again. He thought he had blistered his rear tire, he would say later, because Dunlop technicians had told him not to go too fast in the early laps. His plan was to lay back, conserve his tires, then make his move after his second pit stop for fuel. But here he was, sideways, scared, puzzled. So Kenny Roberts pulled into the pits...

The fourth lap began as Roberts headed off the track, with Mike Baldwin leading Eddie Lawson and Ron Haslam, Steve Wise already eight seconds behind.

Roberts had come to Daytona as prepared as any man

could be. He and new teammate Eddie Lawson each had two OW69 Square Four two-stroke Yamahas, bikes proven reliable in 500cc Grands Prix. But these OW69s weren't 500s. Roberts had ridden a 500 at Daytona in 1982 and lacked power compared to the Honda FWS1000 V-Four four-strokes, so this time the Yamahas were big. How big, nobody would admit, but hints and educated guesses put them at about 670 or 680cc, and Roberts had engines built to three different specifications to choose from. He started with what team manager Ken Clark called "the tractor motor," built with a broad powerband and what Clark said was enough power to reach—given the room—195 mph. The tractor was strong enough to put Roberts and Lawson one-two in qualifying and one-two in radar-measured top speed, but if it hadn't, there were two more

engines ready to use, each with progressively narrower powerbands and more peak power.

Team Honda was as serious as Yamaha. Baldwin and Wise each had an FWS, the class of the 1982 field. Freddie Spencer and Ron Haslam were on three-cylinder two-stroke Grand Prix NS500s bored out, according to Team Honda P.R. man Stuart Rowlands, to 540cc. Roberto Pietri rode an air-cooled, CB900-based Honda in a Moriwaki aluminum frame.

Kawasaki entered one bike in the 200, a KR1000 using a 1982 Superbike engine in an all-new, single-rear-shock aluminum frame, ridden by Wes Cooley.

The Yamahas were the fastest, challenged by the NS Hondas in acceleration but pulling away in top speed. Next best were the FWS four-strokes, hampered by their own weight and bulk and

more prone to spin the tire off the corners than the lighter two-strokes. Cooley's Kawasaki lacked both the acceleration and top speed of the other works bikes, although it was, at 350 lb., lighter than the four-stroke Hondas.

By the time Roberts pitted on lap three, Cooley had already crashed on the banking, breaking his collarbone, when a connecting rod came through the Kawasaki's crankcase. Spencer had pitted on lap two while in third place, to have a loose face shield taped to his helmet.

Roberts rolled back onto the course, having inspected his tire and been assured by Dunlop technicians that it was fine, that maybe oil on the track caused his slide. Lawson led, having, in one lap, come from three seconds behind to one second ahead of Baldwin, who had his own tire troubles when he tried to keep up with Lawson, slipping and sliding

DAYTONA

'83 *Big enough
to do the job.*

*With a big-bore kit in his tractor motor,
Kenny Roberts wins the Daytona 200 enduro.*

and correcting exiting infield turns, the compromise price of race-long tire life at Daytona being a limit to adhesion.

Spencer moved up and Roberts charged hard, mad at himself, he would say later, for having pitted at all. Robert's run through traffic was amazing, rapid, precise, Roberts' bright yellow Yamaha and bright leathers making him look, up on the banking, like a video game spaceship weaving through so many asteroids. Lawson's crew, meanwhile, signaled him to slow down—his lead was secure over the battle for second place between Baldwin and Haslam—from 2:01s to 2:02s to 2:03s to 2:04s, from a pace only four men could reach all the way down to a pace reached in qualifying by only six riders.

Spencer retired with transmission trouble, joining Haslam, whose bike had seized, in the pits. Wise was

third although his front brakes had faded badly after 10 laps and would, by the end of the 52-lap race, be metal-to-metal with the linings gone. Baldwin was fourth, the declutcher in his FWS slipping on hard acceleration. Eventually it would fail altogether.

Roberts led, Lawson just behind, Roberts straightening up early exiting infield turns, Lawson rolling off the gas to stay behind Roberts, both lofting the front wheel here and there out of the slower corners. The game now was saving the tires, and the pace came down, Roberts slowing to 2:05s, Lawson staying just behind, a shadow, watching. Four times Lawson drafted past Roberts on the last banking and led across the finish line, testing then falling in behind as the pair entered the infield.

Until the 39th lap, when Lawson felt something wrong

as he powered onto the banking from the last infield turn. By the chicane, he knew his rear tire wasn't right, and he sailed into the pits. His mechanics replaced the rear wheel in less than a minute, the tire flat from a nail puncture, and Lawson re-entered the race still in second place, just ahead of Wise. A lap later Lawson pulled out his lead on Wise three seconds on one circuit, then three more. Roberts slowed again in the final laps, down to 2:07s and 2:08s, lapping fourth-place Gervais near the finish. The last laps for Roberts and Lawson were 2:10s, the suspense audible, the fact that Roberts might actually finish and win slightly incredible.

He did win, Lawson second, between them leading 49 of 52 laps, Roberts first across the line 30 times including the time it counted, the finish.

Aldana was fifth, followed by steady, self-employed,

unsponsored privateer Kurt Lentz on a six-year-old TZ750 tuned with help from friends Tom Malaska and Kim Burd. Hap Eaton was seventh on another privateer TZ750, John Long eighth on a TZ sponsored by Scott Guthrie Racing. Rusty Sharp rode to 9th on a 1980 Honda Superbike frame with a 1982 works F-1 engine and front-end supplied by Honda to former Team Honda mechanic Dennis Zickrick, just ahead of Doug Brauneck's TZ750.

Pietri's fairing came loose early on, requiring a quick pit stop and his engine blew up later. Between those two incidents, Pietri ran much of the race just behind Wolff and Aldana. Baron, who qualified 10th fastest, ran with and finally passed Pietri, but his bike's fuel tank cracked and sprung a leak. Baron lost four laps to finding a replacement tank in the pits, and finished 23rd.

*Kenny Roberts led the race,
Eddie Lawson staying just behind,
a shadow, watching, testing...*



Photo by Rich Chenet

DAYTONA 200 RESULTS

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Kenny Roberts | Yamaha OW69 |
| 2. Eddie Lawson | Yamaha OW69 |
| 3. Steve Wise | Honda FWS1000 |
| 4. Steve Gervais | Yamaha TZ750 |
| 5. Dave Aldana | Yamaha TZ750 |
| 6. Kurt Lentz | Yamaha TZ750 |
| 7. Hap Eaton | Yamaha TZ750 |
| 8. John Long | Yamaha TZ750 |
| 9. Rusty Sharp | Honda CB900 |
| 10. Doug Brauneck | Yamaha TZ750 |
| 11. Boonie Knott | Yamaha TZ750 |
| 12. Henry DeGouw | Yamaha TZ750 |
| 13. Harry Klinzmann | Kawasaki KZ1000 |
| 14. Uri Bergbaum | Suzuki RG500 |
| 15. Dave Busby | Yamaha TZ350 |