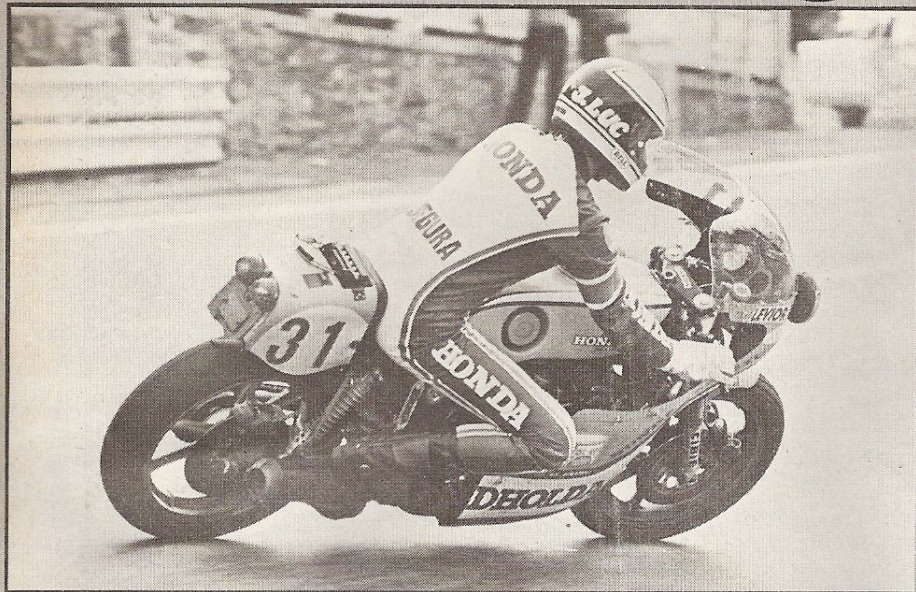
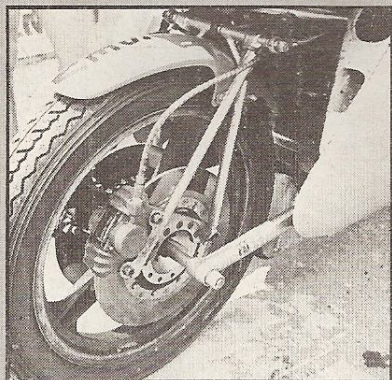
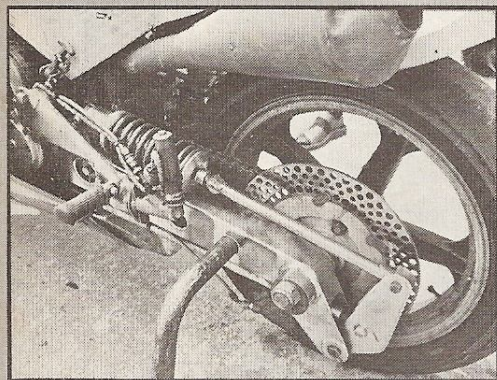


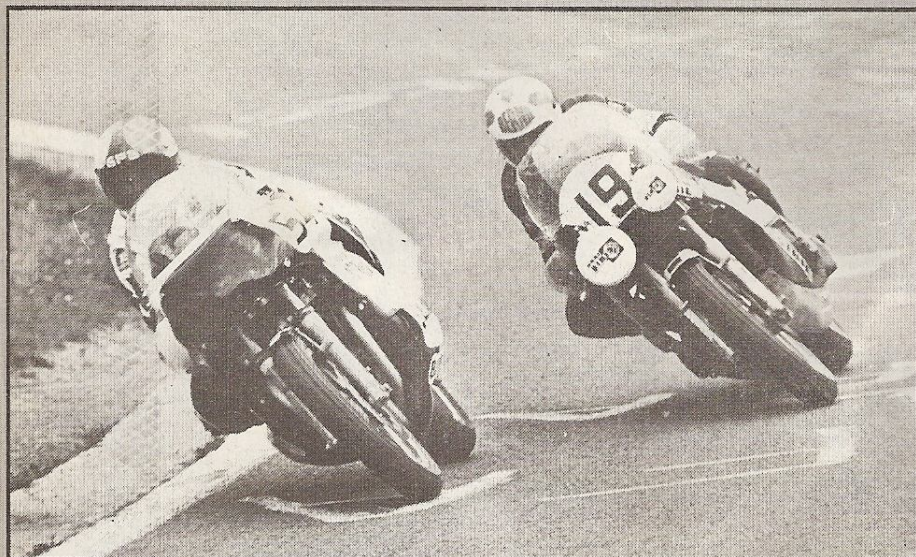
24 hours at Liège



Eventual winner, Jacques Luc on the Dholda RCB he shared with Buytaert.



Suspension and hub-centre steering on the M & T "Nessie".



Bernie Tolemàn (19) shared the P & M Kawasaki with John Cowie, finishing fourth.

The first round of the *coupe d'endurance* series on the Belgian road circuit at Spa-Francorchamps looked, on form, like a two-bike race. The works RCBs of Honda France and Honda Britain had to be favourites.

Each team had won at the two preliminary races, which don't count for points in the championship. Stan Woods and Charlie Williams had cleaned up the Zandvoort 600km event, while Leon and Chemarin took the le Mans 24-hour race. But both teams had had mechanical troubles, broken alternator drives and transmission problems in France and a faulty clutch on the French Honda in Holland. The reliability which let the RCBs dominate two years of endurance racing wasn't infallible.

Practice gave a hint of what was to come. In rapidly changing weather conditions the French riders pushed themselves and the machine, Chemarin sliding regularly as he hurled the bike into the rain-damped hairpin at la Source. Leon's enthusiasm finally got the better of traction, leaving a broken fairing and headlamps for the mechanics to patch up. Woods and Williams put in some steady laps to get third fastest practice time behind Honda France and the Luc/Buytaert team riding for D'Hollander, the Belgian Honda importer.

Although the works Hondas were favourites, there was a steady stream of Kawasakis waiting with riders more than capable of getting amongst the prize money. Roger Ruiz had a National Moto Kawasaki, Peyre and Maingret teamed up on a Pipart machine and John Cowie and Bernie Toleman, fresh from a third place at le Mans, were raring to go.

The circuit at Spa is over 14km of real roads, with only a handful of clearly defined corners. The rest is made up of fast stretches and sweeping main roads which tighten up into never-ending curves, lined with straw bales, armco and pine forest. Last year a chicane was put in at the beginning of the long Masta straight but it doesn't seem to have slowed the bikes a great deal. The quickest practice lap, at 4m 12.4 averaged out at just over 125mph.

Spending long periods on full throttle causes problems. Fuelling difficulties become more acute, as Wells and Osborne discovered when their Kawasaki started cutting out at 8,000rpm. The Mead and Tompkinson Kawasaki ridden by Hodgson and Eldridge was also having problems flowing fuel from its SU pump. They were hoping that earlier handling trouble had been cured; apart from getting suitable large bearings for their hub-centre steering, the whole arrangement is so different from anything else that each step covers completely new ground with no previous experience to fall back on. Watching the bikes go through the uphill right-hander off the pit straight it looked like M & T are winning the battle. The bumps and the suspension-flattening sweep of the hill had many machines pattering and leaping around while the bulging curves of M & T's "Nessie" looked comparatively stable.

But the real problem at Spa is caused by the ever-changing weather. It isn't unusual for bright sunshine to change into a heavy thunderstorm in a matter of minutes. Often the storms are so localised that they only affect part of the circuit. A rider going hard on slick tyres can suddenly find himself on a wet road.

Making tyre decisions can prove crucial, too. Obviously slicks aren't a lot of use in the wet, but the speeds are so high that intermediate and wet tyres will overheat and break

MOTOR CYCLE MECHANICS

up if the track dries out — which it can very quickly do.

The weather stayed bright and fine for the le Mans-type start and as Christian Leon rocketed into the lead, Honda France's tactics became obvious. Chased by last year's winner Jacques Luc, Leon kept up the pressure for nearly an hour, stretching out a long lead. When he stopped for Chemarin to take over, after a mere 50 minutes they had lapped all bar the first five riders. Making a slick pitstop, Chemarin was away without giving up the lead.

Stan Woods had crept up from around 12th spot to squeeze into second place by the end of the first hour. Chemarin knew that Woods and Luc still had to make their pitstops and that all he had to do was keep going.

Then it rained. A sharp shower hit la Source hairpin, spreading down the pit straight and coming on so heavy that ten or eleven riders pulled in to the side of the track. Others, skating round on the wrong tyres, were touring slowly back to the pits. Some were unlucky. Stan Woods' Honda and the Pipart Kawasaki crashed, Woods being taken to hospital with a damaged shoulder.

The lead Honda got through the downpour unscathed and actually benefited from the confusion caused by bikes coming in for tyre changes while others spluttered in with water in all the wrong places.

After two hours Leon and Chemarin were a lap ahead of the second machine, the Dholda RCB ridden by Luc and Buytaert. The tactics used by Honda France had paid off well and now all they had to do was match the pace of the following bikes.

But neither Chemarin or Leon ride like that. As the track dried out their RCB put in the fastest lap at 4m 11.3. And when the rain came down again, Chemarin's style would have done credit to a flat-tracker. While many riders pussy-footed along and others made a determined effort to straight-line a long left-hand curve, Chemarin took an unusually wide line, laid the bike in and with his left foot hovering off the rest waited for the back end to start sliding before steering it through on the throttle.

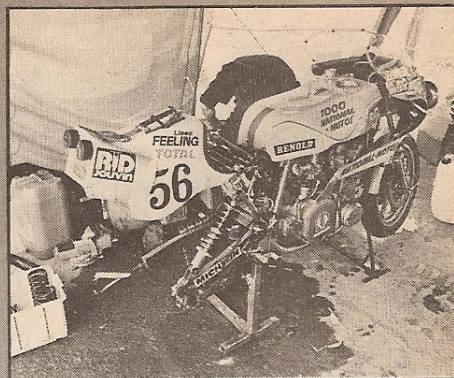
After three and a half hours, a puncture slowed the French team and the Dholda moved ahead. Only a couple of hours later Leon and Chemarin were back in the lead. The real battle was shaping up between the next eight or nine machines as the bikes continually swapped places. After the Dholda there was a Dutch RCB, and four or five Kawasakis, including machines ridden by Cowie/Toleman, Ruiz/Pernet, Peyre/Maingret and the father and son team of Jules and Charly Nies.

At 47 years of age, Nies Père is no stranger to endurance racing, having won his first 24-hour event shortly after world war two. This year they qualified 8th fastest and were there at the finish to take 5th place and a special award for the first all-Belgian team home.

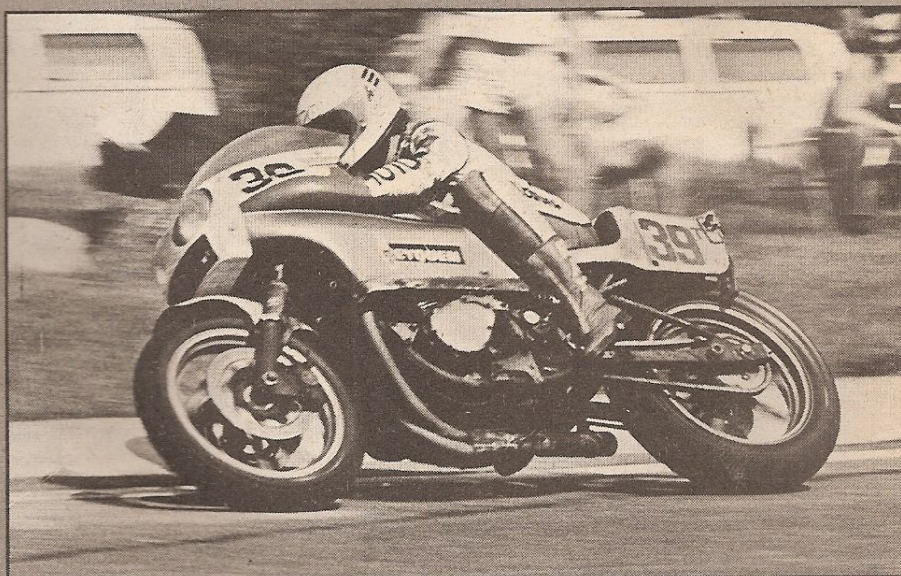
By 2 am the French RCB was two laps ahead of the Dholda; at 3.36 it was reported travelling slowly half-way round the course; at 3.50 Leon was pushing and at 4.40, a further 3 km on, the RCB was abandoned with a seized engine.

The Honda's failure left Buytaert and Luc some five laps clear of the Dutch RCB which was closely chased by the Peyre/Maingret Pipart Kawasaki, a Segoni, a Dutch Kawasaki and the Nies/Nies Kawasaki. That set the pattern for the rest of the race, with Luc and Buytaert staying comfortably ahead.

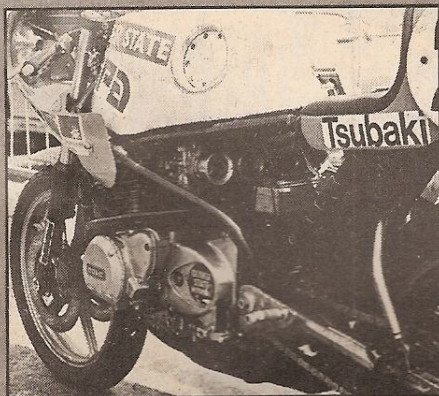
AUGUST 1978



Above: the National Motor Kawasaki ridden by Ruiz and Pernet.
Left: the Camier/Winfield 900 Honda
Below: Peyre and Maingret took the Pipart Kawasaki to second place.

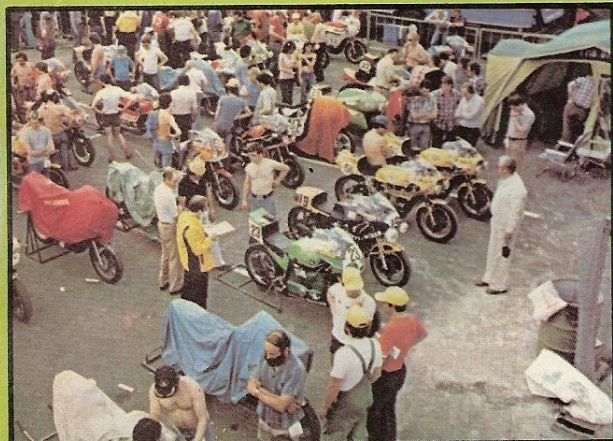


Right: the Dutch van der Wal Kawasaki skipping over a raised line.
Below: Nicco Bakker on the Dutch Durano Kawasaki.



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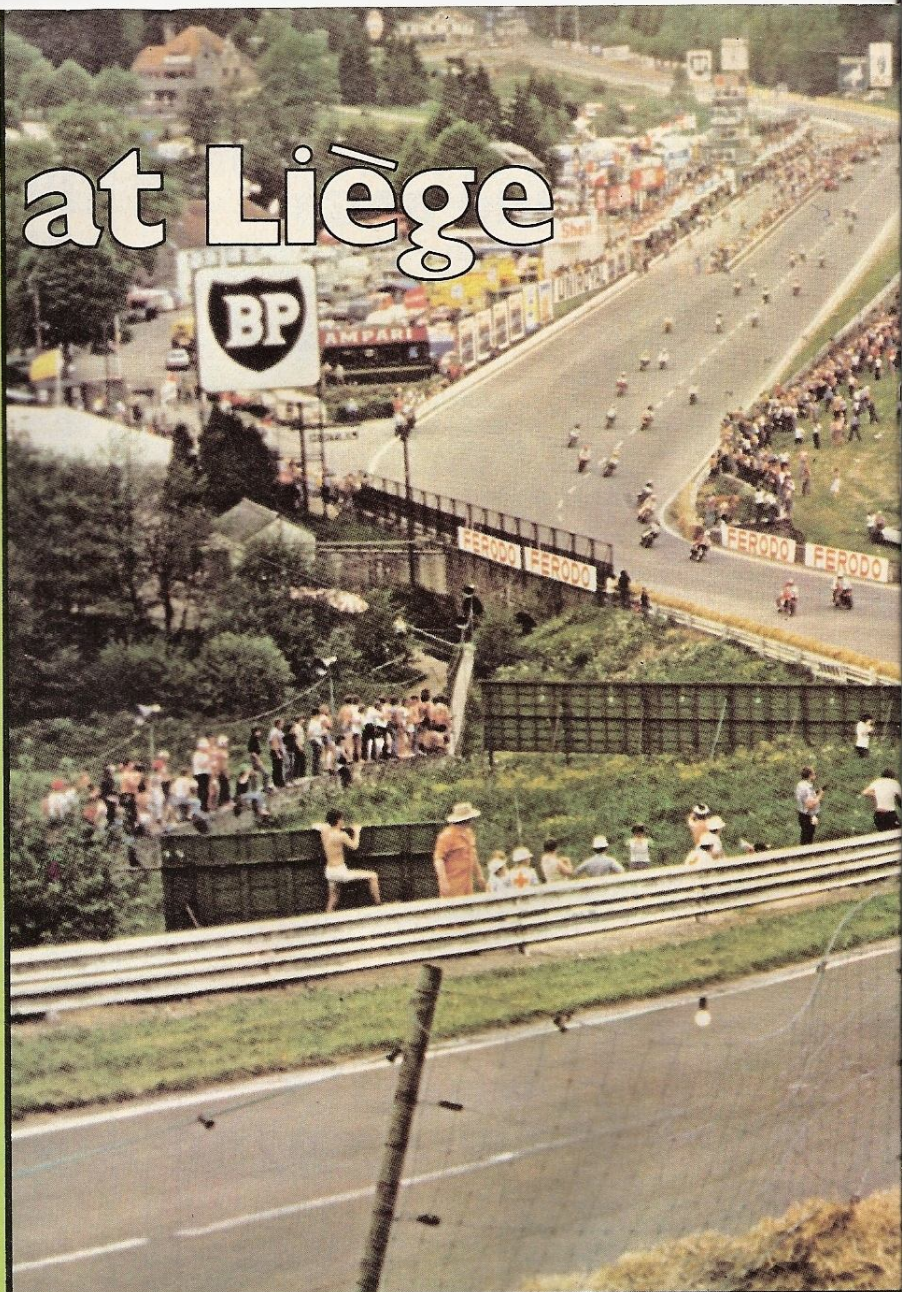
All the action from the first and fastest round in the Endurance series.



Before the start, thousands of bhp locked in the parc ferme.



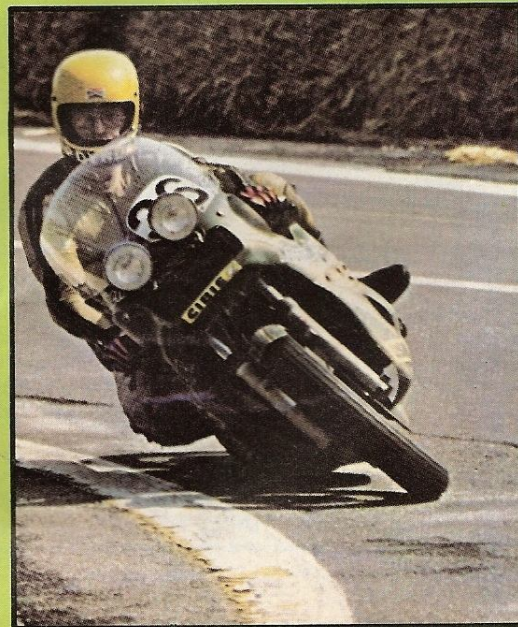
Lowline frame on the German Steinhausen Kawasaki.



PICS ROD SLOANE



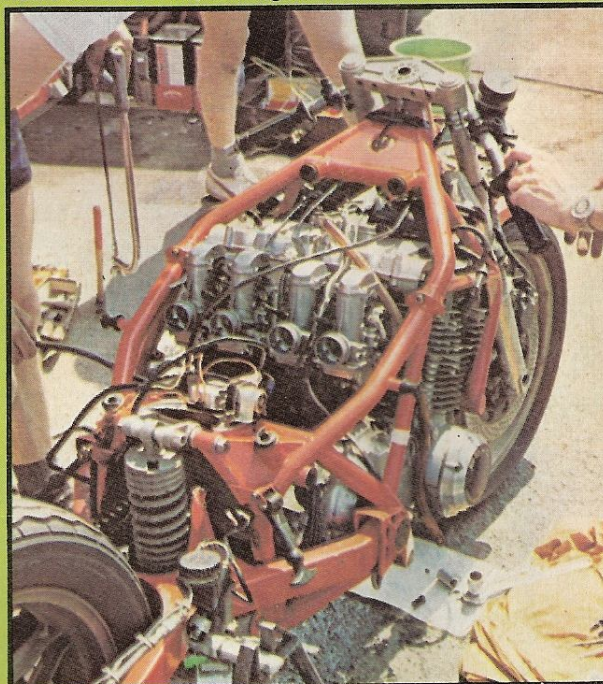
John Cowie heels the 4th place Kawasaki into la Source



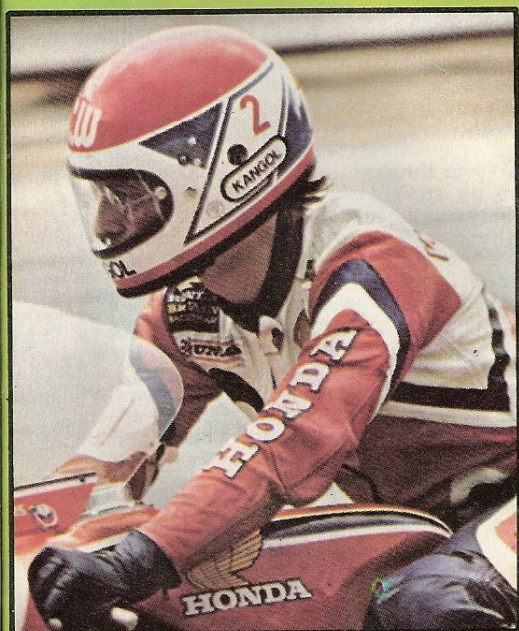
The Meyer Honda ridden by Dyrda/Schneider.



Rows of Kawasakis, waiting for Honda's mistakes.



Chassis development in its naked glory.



Charlie Williams — only got a practice ride.



Christian Leon kept up the pressure, even in the wet.