



MATCH RACE OF THE CENTURY

Heading South on I-5

On the way through Seattle, they stop at the machine shop owned by Nitro's old friends, Dave and Pop, to pick up the titanium parts for the H₂O-S throttle, which are just being finished as they pull in. Titanium billet is hard to work with, especially when it has to be machined to the tolerances and finish required for the H₂O-S system. The trip south is uneventful, and lots of the time everyone is lost in their own thoughts. Nitro worries about not having enough time to test SuperBike with the new throttle system.

He likes to test everything very thoroughly. Nitro knows that's how you consistently win races, and they win a lot of races. Terry thinks, "I lost seven pounds while we were at home, I'll be leaner and meaner on the bike against Bo." Terry always loses weight at home. Nerissa's cooking is a lot healthier than the food on the road, and he gets a chance to work out and run on the beach. He runs every morning, but somehow running in a motel parking lot or at a rest area along the freeway just isn't the same as running along the beach at home with the twins.

Rocket Science

TK is thinking about the H₂O-S system and all the variables of setup and adjustment there are. The other kids always called TK "some kind of a rocket scientist", and now with the H₂O-S system, and even an actual rocket to play with, it looks like maybe they were right. Celeste is mulling over different promotional ideas for the race with Bo Barns. It has become the drag racing event of the year, and will be telecast live nationally. They are going to Sonoma several days early for the pre-

race publicity. Celeste will be very busy for a few days as this match race is her “baby”, and she will be coordinating the race track promotions department, sponsor publicists, the TV people, etc.

The idea of a one round, winner-take-all race between the world’s two quickest accelerating motor vehicles, and the dragster vs. bike aspect of it, has caught the public’s fancy and is being talked about everywhere. They don’t realize just how big it has become, until, as they are pulling into the City of Sonoma a TV news helicopter hovers 100 feet away from them with a cameraman hanging out the door filming them. Celeste, who is driving, waves to him.

Nitro mumbles, “Film at eleven.”

Sonoma, California

The next five days are very busy. There are constant interviews and TV appearances, etc. Terry and Bo are very good at giving each other a hard time. Bo has taken to calling himself Bo ‘The King’ Barns, which mixes it up even more. Interviews with the two of them together are a media person’s dream, and they are very busy doing the “Terry and Bo Show”. They might even be starting to like each other a little bit, although neither of them would ever admit it. Celeste even arranges an appearance on a major network late night talk show, where they wow a national TV audience and get more laughs than the comic host of the show.

Jim Truesdale arrives, driving his Cobra and wearing a Bikester shirt. “Ay, it’s the fifth Bikester,” says Nitro, in his best Beatles Liverpool accent.

“That’s me,” replies Jim, with a John Lennon lilt to his voice.

TK looks puzzled. “Who are you guys trying to sound like?”

“Kids,” says Nitro, “They ain’t been around.” Jim and Nitro laugh. TK just shakes his head, thinking: “Old guys; they’re weird.”

Jim, Nitro, and TK manage to hide out in the trailer most of the rest of the week working on the new throttle and final setup of the bike, and even getting some time to discuss the design of the rocket vehicle. Considering all that’s going on, they’re getting an amazing amount done.

Nail has appeared out of nowhere, as usual. To “hang with the famous guys”, as he put it, and is immediately recruited by Celeste to help out with all of the running around and organizing.

Among other things, Celeste has put together a party for several hundred kids from Bay Area Inner City Boys and Girls Clubs. She has hustled free hamburgers, hot dogs, and pop for the kids and, of course, they all get tee-shirts and posters and have a lot of fun. She even talks Bo into coming by letting him think the press would be there. She knows you can always play to Bo’s ego. What Bo doesn’t know is that they never tell the press about the events they have for kids or the visits to hospitals. This stuff is for the kids, not for publicity.

Counting Down the Days

Celeste’s PR work has been very successful. The interest in the match race is unreal. The guys are continuing to thrash away on SuperBike, but still haven’t been able to make a test run with the new throttle system. Nitro is worried.

While they work on the bike, Jim has some interesting things to tell them. Sun Tool has totally closed, but before they gave Jim his final check, several lawyers and engineers from Atlas questioned him about the H²O-S system.

In going through old records they discovered that Jim had worked on that project. They grilled him quite thoroughly, and are obviously putting a lot of effort into gathering all the information they can in an effort to recreate the system. But as Jim says, “A nice thing about being old is that you can become very confused and lose your memory when necessary. They ended up just shaking their

heads and saying: “We’re giving this guy a check for 53 years of profit sharing?”

“With interest,” added one of the lawyers. Jim just smiled.

They did mention to Jim that they had talked to one of his co-engineers on the project, but he was very old and could hardly even remember his own name, let alone anything about something he had worked on over 50 years ago. The man they found, Benjamin Carter, was a lead engineer on the project and lives near Lancaster, California, where he retired after many years at Edwards Air Force Base working on various experimental programs.

Before he left to come here for the race, Jim called him, and strangely enough as soon as he knew it was Jim Truesdale talking to him. Ben Carter was quite coherent, remembering all about the days when they worked together. In fact, he was reminding Jim of things Jim had forgotten.

Apparently Jim isn’t the only one with a convenient memory. They made arrangements for Jim to run out to Lancaster and get together with Ben after the race.

Race Day

The pits are overflowing. The track is putting on a big funny car race as part of the program they’ve built around what’s now billed as the “Match Race of the Century.” The Bikersters and Bo Barns are “pitted” by each other right in the middle of everything, crews working side by side. Talk about pitted against each other! Terry and Bo are taking digs at each other every time they get a chance. The crowd loves it!

While several kids that Celeste has recruited from the local Boys and Girls Club handle selling T-shirts and posters, both Terry and Celeste sign autographs and visit with the crowd. Besides all the publicity built up around this race, the anti-drug spots with the drug bust at China Lake are running on TV everywhere, and they both have become celebrities.

Behind them, Nitro, TK and Jim are working on SuperBike. They’ve fired it up several times, but it still hasn’t been run down the track to give the new throttle system a real test. However, it sounded really good and Nitro is starting to feel a little more at ease. They’re going to have time for one test pass. He knows that everything has to be working perfectly in order to beat Bo. The team huddles while Nitro explains to Terry the things they have to find out on this test run. They’re old hands at this and understand each other very well.

What has drawn Terry and Nitro together for all these years is a very strong compatibility with things mechanical. Nitro would not have created SuperBike if Terry wasn’t willing to ride it. They both know what SuperBike is capable of. Nitro feels that only Terry can control it. Terry knows that he is the only one that can.

Winning Combination

Because of SuperBike’s extremely high horsepower and very short wheelbase, it is very close to uncontrollable. The method Nitro and Terry have developed to get the maximum power to the ground, while not having the Bike suddenly swap ends, (or go into the ultimate wheelstand), is to have the back tire always losing a little traction, (spinning and smoking). Because of the huge size of the rear slick, 36 inches high and nearly 20 inches wide, this creates a gyroscopic effect, which in turn keeps the Bike pointed straight ahead and upright, which are both much better than the alternatives.

Accomplishing this is quite a trick when you are dealing with a bike with a 76 inch wheelbase and producing over 4,000 horsepower when the H²O-S system is cranked up to full boost. You don’t want the rear tire to spin too hard, or the bike can quickly be out of control. Then all the rider can do is hold on and hope for the best! Nerissa calls it “a wild horse”. They can fake it a little in their

regular match races and “King of the Hill” races, letting the slick spin a bit harder and make more tire smoke, (which the crowd loves), giving up some traction and efficiency, but still winning. However they know that to beat Bo Barns, everything has to be right on. There’s no room for messing around at all. If they give even a little bit they’ll lose, because Bo’s the quickest and fastest guy out there.

But they know they can run with him. They just can’t run the top speeds he turns (over 300 miles per hour), because SuperBike just doesn’t have the streamlining or down force that the bodywork and wings on Bo’s dragster provide. However, they can get to the finish line just as quick, because of SuperBike’s light weight and small size it gets off the starting line much quicker. They have to put as much power on the ground as possible and still keep SuperBike going straight to pull it off, and it’s still going to be really close.

Test Run

As they roll SuperBike up to the starting line, Nitro and Terry decide exactly what the profile of this test run will be. They both know this is the only run there’s time for before they race Bo, so they have to make it count.

The plan is to leave the starting line very hard so they can see how the H²O-S with the new throttle system acts during a really hard launch. Then Terry will ease off the throttle and get back on it a couple of times to see how it reacts. When TK gets the readout from the onboard computer there will be enough information to analyze how the system is working during a run down the race track, and they can make any necessary adjustments.

The Funny Car Eliminations are going on and the grandstands are packed as Terry pulls up to the line. As usual, SuperBike is very loud and there’s that strange exhaust that looks like steam. The people in the stands are all standing as Terry does a strong burnout with the front wheel about two feet in the air. Once back at the starting line Nitro walks over, and makes a small adjustment on the throttle and gives Terry the thumbs up. Terry carefully stages at the starting lights. Looking over to the left he sees Bo watching and decides to make this an ultra hard launch just to give Bo something to worry about before the race.

Terry leaves the starting line unbelievably hard with the front wheel in the air. He leaves so hard that it’s all he can do to stay on the bike. He immediately eases off on the throttle, as was the plan. He’s launched so hard that he’s already half way down the quarter mile. He gets on and off the throttle a couple of times and the run is over.

Back at the starting line the huge crowd is almost silent. They’ve never seen anything accelerate anywhere near that hard. Bo is just standing there not saying anything, which is quite unusual for Bo. He knows this race ain’t gonna be easy.

Data

As soon as the bike is back in the pits, TK goes to work extracting information from it. In a few minutes he has input the data from the bike into his computer, and is getting a readout that they can begin to analyze. Lots of data—TK loves it.

While TK, Nitro, and Jim are slaving away over data and adjustments, Terry and Celeste are dealing with the crowd, which by now is immense. Two hours later, everything is buttoned up, and they’re pushing SuperBike up to the starting line to face Bo.

The final of the Funny Car competition has just been run, and Dangerous Dan Jones (the same Dan Jones that Terry pulled from a burning race car in Phoenix) has won with his new car.

At the starting line Celeste has Terry and Bo giving a pre-race interview for TV. Meanwhile,

huddled by SuperBike, the tired trio of Nitro, TK and Jim discuss the situation. They agree that everything looks really good. There are a few small things that don't read quite right, but they're awfully close. In the end it's all going to come down to Terry hanging it out right to the edge!

The Race: SuperBike vs. Bo Barns

The interview ends and Terry and Bo shake hands. Terry walks over to the Bike while Bo prepares to get in his dragster. Bo's crew starts his engine first. All the huge crowd can hear is the staccato cackling of a top fuel engine running on 98% nitro-methane fuel with blower pressure so high it's almost blowing the heads right off the engine block.

The supercharger alone is larger than the engine in most small cars, and is necessary to produce the massive horsepower and torque necessary to propel one of these drag strip warriors from a standing start to over 330 miles per hour in around four and a half seconds.

Then Nitro hits the button on the portable starter plugged into SuperBike and the engine starts with its customary roar and vapor-like exhaust. Above all the noise the crowd is very aware of the animal like high pitched whine of the bike's monstrous twin turbo chargers.

Wild Horse

Terry can feel a very slight inconsistency in the engine as soon as it fires up. It's more like a slight wildness. Terry can live with that -- he has always felt the smallest change in SuperBike. As Nitro says, "Terry rides SuperBike like a race horse and can feel its slightest mood change." Nerissa has always called SuperBike "an animal", and she's never told anybody, but she always offers an ancient chant that protects horsemen going into battle when Terry leaves to go racing.

Terry has seen Nerissa out in the shop just sitting by SuperBike without saying anything, but he never asks why. Some things about her are very mysterious, and Terry knows he will never understand them. Nitro created SuperBike and he understands. Nerissa knows he will look out for Terry and protect him against the bike's extremes.

Burn-outs

Bo does his burnout first. It's very smooth, heating up the slicks and laying down just the right amount of rubber on the track. As he is backing to the starting line--watching the hand signals of the crewmen in front of him so he can stay right in the tire tracks he laid down--Bo has the same thoughts he always has at this point in a race: he visualizes the start and the race.

Bo, for all his flamboyance and arrogance, is a very methodical, careful racer. His car is meticulously prepared and he always drives the same race, smooth as silk. If anybody is going to beat Bo - they are going to have to drive their best race, because "Bo doesn't make mistakes and beat himself." All the preparation and intensity has paid off with three straight world championships for Bo.

Terry's burnout is much longer; almost to the finish line. But then, where Bo has to back up to return to the starting line (because with a 300 inch wheel base his dragster is too long to turn around on the race track), Terry can turn the short wheel base bike around right on the drag strip and drive back.

As Terry does his burnout he feels out the bike. "S-bike", (Terry's name for SuperBike's dark side), is always lurking, waiting for the chance to appear. He plays with the throttle. He wants to know at exactly what point the tire starts breaking loose and smoking a little too hard, and precisely where in the power range SuperBike wants to totally hook up.

Maximum traction on a 76 inch wheel base bike with this kind of horsepower is out of the question. Terry has experienced it a couple of times and it's only because the bike felt benevolent on those occasions that nothing bad happened. There's nothing you can do but hang on, you have no control at all. The S-bike just goes anywhere it wants.

The Outside Edge

Terry loves racing on SuperBike. He loves the feeling of running on the edge. He got bored driving funny cars and Top Fuelers but he never gets bored with the challenge of riding this Bike. It has to be total teamwork between rider and machine. It reminds him of his daredevil days. He gets that same adrenaline rush of excitement from riding SuperBike.

As Terry comes back past the starting line to turn around, Bo is just starting to pull forward towards the line. Terry gives him a little wave, just to keep the pressure on. He knows it's going to take everything both he and SuperBike can do to win this and if he can shake Bo even a just little, it might get him a little more advantage at the start.

Pulling towards the starting line, Terry gives a signal and Nitro makes a small adjustment on the H²O-S injector. He has great faith in Terry's ability to feel the smallest malfunction. They have worked out a set of hand signals so Terry can 'tell' Nitro if he feels there's a need for any last second adjustments before a run.

The crowd is on their feet as the dragster and the bike slowly and carefully "stage", lighting the yellow lights in both lanes. It seems like it takes forever as the lights go through their sequence. Then suddenly they are green!

Launch!

Terry is *gone*, making his quickest start ever. Even Nail, standing over to the side of the starting line by Celeste, is impressed. The bike launches even harder than it did on the test run, but this time Terry's ready for it, and it doesn't surprise him.

Bo makes a good start. He knows that he can turn times in the mid four second range all day long -- at speeds of around 320 miles per hour. If he runs with his usual consistency, Terry is going to have to push the outside of the envelope to beat him with the Bike.

After the very hard launch, Terry knows that he's got a good jump. He also knows that Bo will run a top speed at the finish of at least 50 miles per hour faster than him, so he's got to be very quick for all 1320 feet.

Pulling Hard

SuperBike is tuned to perfection and Terry is running it right on the very edge, something they've never done or had to do before. Terry can feel the Bike pushing down on the wheelie bars as it carries the front wheel. He can feel as it tries to pull, first to one side, then to the other in reaction to the tremendous torque and horsepower its putting on the ground.

But what he can feel more than anything else, even more than the awesome acceleration, is the strong gyroscope effect from the rear tire always losing just the right amount of traction and smoking just a little bit.

He can feel it throughout his body as S-bike fights against the gyroscopic force that keeps the bike going the shortest distance to the finish line, which is straight. The feeling of all that force is the most exhilarating thing Terry has ever felt! more exciting than jumps, stunts or driving race boats.

A Visit from S-Bike

As they pass the halfway mark - Bo is beginning to make his move. This is where Bo gets really strong and Terry has to hope that the initial quickness of the bike will carry through.

As he approaches the finish line, Terry can feel Bo coming up fast. This is going to be very close! There's a little throttle left, and Terry knows he has to go for it. He has to 'hang ten' over the edge if he wants to win this—and he plans to win.

He twists the throttle open to the stop. Terry feels a surge in both acceleration and the gyroscopic force that dominates a fast ride on SuperBike. He is within feet of the finish line when he feels the force change. He knows that he's over the edge and has totally lost traction. Suddenly he's looking at Bo's front wheel! S-Bike is sliding sideways at over 250 miles per hour with the slick completely up in smoke! Terry thinks, "Whoa, this thing has come totally unplugged!"

Through all of this Terry is aware of where the finish line is, sticks his leg out and is pretty sure he won by a 'foot' while going sideways across the finish line! Bo comes thundering by like a freight train. Terry notices that Bo is looking over at him as he's sliding through the lights--and that Bo's eyes are as big as saucers.

Hang On!

The S-bike is to the point where it's doing anything it wants to do! Terry is pretty much, just along for the ride. The bike continues to spin a full 360 degrees. Just as it comes all the way around and is pointing in the right direction again, Terry pops the chute, which pulls it straight and slows it down fast. SuperBike comes to a stop by Bo, who is still sitting in his race car.

Terry walks over to the dragster as he takes off his helmet. Bo doesn't seem to see him as he walks up, and Terry sees that Bo still has a shocked look in his eyes. "Gee, I didn't think that losing would be this hard on him," thinks Terry, as he waves his hand in front of Bo's face getting no reaction. He reaches down and helps Bo get his helmet off. Bo just looks at him strangely. Bo finally stammers, "I've been doing this for over 20 years, and I've never seen anything like that!"

"Yeah," says Terry, "my motorbike did kinda come unstuck out there."

"Yeah, kinda," replies Bo.

Back to the Show

Terry notices that the press and TV people are arriving. This race was broadcast live on national television and there's still a lot of interviews to do. Terry claps his hands in front of Bo. "Come on man, we got to get it together, the TV guys are almost here, it's show time!"

Bo shakes his head, his eyes coming into focus. "Oh yeah; did I win?"

"No," answers Terry.

"What!" barks Bo.

"You lost by a foot," says Terry, "10-1/2 EE."

By the time the cameras get there the Bo and Terry show is back in business. Bo is in fine form, complaining that you: "Can't win if you're not pointed in the right direction," and "It doesn't count if you stick your foot across the finish line first." But it's all to no avail. The decision stands.

Nitro says to Bo in front of the TV cameras, "We win, Nah Nah!"

Back home on the farm, Nerrisa, sits on the bluff with the twins as she gazes thoughtfully across the water. Somehow, she suddenly knows that everything is alright.

Later, after an astounding amount of post-race festivities, interviews, etc., the Bikesters go to dinner with several sports writers, and still haven't even had time to congratulate each other on

pulling it off. After dinner they head for the motel and plan to meet for breakfast and get organized.

The Day After

“Swiss cheeseburger with Miracle Whip, and please don’t melt the cheese on it,” TK requests of the waitress. “At least he’s not having Tater Tots for breakfast this time,” thinks Celeste. The gang has gathered in the motel restaurant, Nail is just walking in the door. He has been invited to join them for breakfast and to discuss a business proposition. During and after breakfast Terry signs autographs for just about everybody in the restaurant. Any form of privacy seems to have gone away for Terry.

Nitro finally gets to talk to Nail, and asks him if he would be interested in working for them for a few weeks. Nail is a welder and chassis builder and that is just what they need on the rocket project. Nail says, “Sure”, and they make arrangements for Nail to be up at the farm in a week. It means Nail will learn a very carefully guarded secret, the H²O-S system. After careful consideration, the Bikesters feel he’s OK.

Borrowin’ the Kid

Jim asks if he can ‘borrow’ TK for a few days. He wants to have TK along when he goes to Lancaster to see Ben Carter, his former engineering co-worker and mentor on the H²O-S project. TK is cranked. He not only gets to meet an engineering legend, but he also gets to go for a road trip in Jim’s Cobra. “Cowabunga!”

Celeste has mixed feelings about this. She and TK haven’t been apart for any length of time for almost six years. They’ve always been there to look out for each other, but she knows TK is growing up and is going to have more and more of his own life. So she has to say, “Have fun.”

“You know it!” replies TK

Besides, Nerissa and the girls are flying down and Celeste has made several appointments in San Francisco to see about developing a market for the Northwest Native design tee-shirts. She and Nerissa will be very busy for a few days. Terry plans to show the girls San Francisco while Nerissa and Celeste are taking care of business. Sometimes everything just works out for the best.

Chapter 6

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