



Vive les motos!

As one of the last remaining examples of urban road racing, GP Historique de Tours brings out some spectacular machines for some fun in the sun.

Words and photography: MIKE DAVIS

1 Denis Passenaud makes his way to the start on his 1966 Triton.

2 Bruno Normand's 1975 Benelli 750cc Sei at rest in the paddock.

3 The 1958 Matchless G11 of Marc Juillet exits the Place Jean-Jaurès.

The GP Historique de Tours is run over an elongated oval circuit of 970 metres in the heart of Tours in central France. For one day each year, the city's main square and central boulevard is closed and becomes the preserve of a century's worth of historic and classic vehicles demonstrating their speed and beauty under the summer sun before a large and appreciative crowd.

Starting in front of the City Hall, the circuit circumnavigates the Place Jean-Jaurès – twice crossing the recently opened urban tramway – before departing on to the long straight of the Boulevard Heurteloup and turning through 180° before returning along its other side, back to the start. Riders found the tramway crossings less daunting than might be expected, largely due to the city authorities constructing these with the circuit in mind. As a result, crossing them on two wheels was no more troublesome than hitting a good surface repair on an urban road.

Tours is a demonstration event. Being staged in a busy city centre over a circuit delineated only by crowd control barriers, that's hardly surprising in these days of 'safety first'. Speed was further curtailed by a pace car heading each class. Bikes, unlike cars, could overtake on the narrow circuit.

Of the 10 British bikes participating, the oldest was Marc Juillet's 1958 Matchless 600cc G11. Probably the most appealing was Christophe Dumortier's 1976

Rickman 750cc Trident Metisse, but sadly its performance on the circuit fell well short of what it should achieve. That criticism could not be applied to Denis Passenaud's 1966 650cc Triton. Taking the racing line and hugging close to the apex of the 180° bend at the end of Boulevard Heurteloup, he was never far off the pace and thus kept close company with the 1977 Norton 850 Commando of Régis Gauthier and Jean Hougron's 1973 750cc Norton cafe racer.

Ducati was best represented manufacturer among the half dozen Italian bikes. His son being unavailable to ride, Christian Hervet took the petite 1971 Ducati 450 Desmo out, though there was nothing petite about its performance.

Perhaps not surprisingly for a big bike event, Japanese manufacturers topped the head count with 16 entrants. But to demonstrate that quantity and quality don't always tally, many of the Japanese bikes participating might best be described as 'street ordinary'. But not so the 1969 Honda CB750 Four Racer of Edouard Delage, whose performance was anything but ordinary, or the water-cooled 1975 Kawasaki H1R, ridden with verve by Patrick Caralp.

There was a quintet of BMWs at Tours, but most interesting and competitive – by far – was the 1971 ex-works BMW R75/5 750, ridden by Jean-Paul Passet in 1972 but now the mount of Christian Hervet. He managed the circuit effectively and efficiently and was rarely out of the rear-view mirror of the pace car.

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