

brake was not so grabby, but indiscreet foot pressure, combined with soft rear suspension (and damper travel inhibited by the forward cant of the units), could produce rear wheel patter. Handily, if you overshoot the turn, which we did once, Orange County has a nice, long sandbox for you to play in.

If you make it through the turn, entering wide to avoid running across a false apex with resultant wide and sloppy exit, the best part of the course follows. Accelerating all the while, you bear to the left side of the pavement and set up for a gradual 30-degree right-hander, feeding to a short straight and an identical 30-degree left-hander. This is a classic Keppel Gate, Isle of Man, situation. Use the whole road through the right-hander and you are on the wrong line to get the best speed exiting from the left-hander—an important point as higher speed on the following straightaway will net you better lap times.

The basically good Commando handling, the compliment of a road racing layout and an excellent, rigid double cradle frame and wide swinging arm mounting, showed itself well here. It is a heavy machine and has to be cranked hard, but it tracked true through this S-bend, held to line well, and showed no sign of front end wobble, in spite of speed through the latter bend ranging from 100 to 105 mph.

The rest of the course is straightforward and dull. A brief straight, a quick jog left and then right moving the rider about 20 feet over from his original path down the back straight. Then a sweeping left-hand turn through an oil-impregnated

parking lot back to the tower and the front straight. Basically, this adds up to a horsepower course, with only two turns requiring braking, and one S-Bend requiring impeccable handling. A mere hors d'oeuvre. But our appetites were whetted, so we moved to the entree...

Riverside yawns at you. Turns disappear into the yellow haze. They are sweeping and wide. The back straight seems endless, the high speeds insignificant. Rider and machine—a germ swimming trancelike across an uncaring set of tonsils. A true International Raceway.

First on the agenda was a top speed run, utilizing the entire back straight. It runs for almost a mile, adding impetus with a downward dip onto a certified flat where the times are measured. After a switch to 230 main jets to compensate for the 1500-foot altitude, the racer ran through at 131.02 mph at 6500 rpm, pulling a 3.83 top gear. The Commando is thus the fastest "production" machine ever tested by CYCLE WORLD. At this speed, surging in the carburetor float chambers became evident, probably induced by a sympathetic engine vibration working the floats up and down, alternately causing too much or too little fuel to enter the float chamber. Isolating the carburetors from vibration on rubber extensions would probably correct the surge and result in a few mph increase.

A 130-mph machine is an excellent match for the Riverside circuit, as it reaches speeds that require the rider to make full use of the wide paving. The entire course had just undergone complete renovation at the time of our visit, with new paving, a redesigned Turn 9, and new stands for 10,000 people at the starting straight and in the famous Riverside S-bends. The only racers to run on it so far were Dan Gurney, in a Trans-Am sedan, and a gaggle of Formula III drivers, so the pavement was fresh and clean. Track manager Dave Berg alerted the land-mover jockeys to keep an eye out for our little red speedster and graciously told us to let her rip.

Gathering speed through the right-hand 450-foot radius Turn 9, which was widened and enlarged by adding a dogleg to the left off the back straight, the Norton is rock steady, leaned well over and beginning to drift at about 80 mph. The triangular section K81s were just getting scrubbed in and seemed to offer much more feel at Riverside than they did at Orange County.

After Turn 9, a thousand-foot straight slings the machine at well over 100 mph in fourth gear towards Turn 1, a scary, slightly uphill left-hander—scary because you can't see where it goes. Naturally, it is approached from the right-hand side of the straight. You peel off late, but at full throttle. There's a bump near the apex of this turn that lightens the bike at about 110 mph and gives a good reading of the suspension.

