

= Kenny Roberts =

Kenneth Leroy Roberts ( born December 31 , 1951 in Modesto , California ) is an American former professional motorcycle racer and racing team owner . In 1978 , he became the first American to win a Grand Prix motorcycle racing world championship . He was also a two @-@ time winner of the A.M.A. Grand National Championship . Roberts is one of only four riders in American Motorcyclist Association ( AMA ) racing history to win the AMA Grand Slam , representing Grand National wins at a mile , half @-@ mile , short @-@ track , TT Steeplechase and road race events .

Roberts left his mark on Grand Prix motorcycle racing as a world championship winning rider , an advocate for increased safety standards in racing , and as a racing team owner and a motorcycle engine and chassis constructor . His dirt track @-@ based riding style changed the way Grand Prix motorcycles were ridden . Roberts ' proposal to create a rival motorcycle championship in 1979 broke the Fédération Internationale de Motocyclisme ( FIM ) hegemony and increased the political clout of Grand Prix racers , which subsequently led to improved safety standards and a new era of professionalism in the sport . In 2000 , Roberts was named a Grand Prix Legend by the FIM .

= = Early life = =

Kenny Roberts ' parents were Alice and Melton " Buster " Roberts . As a child growing up in the rural agriculture area just off highway 132 near the West side vineyards of E & J Gallo Winery of Modesto , Roberts was originally interested in horseback riding . He rode his first motorcycle at the age of 12 when a friend dared him to ride a mini bike . Roberts accepted the challenge and the experience thrilled him . He built his own motorcycle by attaching his father 's lawn mower engine to a bicycle frame . Roberts began his career in dirt track racing after attending a local race in Modesto and deciding that he wanted to compete himself . His father purchased a Tohatsu bike for him , but once it proved itself uncompetitive as a race bike , he moved up to a more powerful Hodaka motorcycle .

Roberts showed a natural talent for dirt track racing and began winning local races . In 1968 , his race results drew the attention of a local Suzuki dealer Bud Aksland , who offered to sponsor Roberts aboard a Suzuki motorcycle . He made the decision to drop out of high school before his senior year to pursue a career in motorcycle racing . Roberts was allowed to compete professionally when he turned 18 , and on the day after his eighteenth birthday , he entered his first professional race at San Francisco 's Cow Palace , finishing in fourth place .

= = Racing history = =

= = = A.M.A. Grand National Championship = = =

Realizing that Roberts needed more help if his racing career was going to progress , Aksland introduced Roberts to airline pilot and amateur motorcycle racer Jim Doyle , who would become Roberts ' personal manager . In 1971 , Doyle and Roberts approached Triumph 's American distributor to ask about the possibility of a sponsored ride , but were told that Roberts was too small for one of their bikes . They then turned to the American Yamaha importer 's team , who agreed to make Roberts a factory sponsored rider at the age of 19 . Yamaha asked the head of their American racing program , former 250 cc world champion Kel Carruthers to help guide Roberts ' racing career . It marked the beginning of a long and productive relationship between the two men . Carruthers ended his riding career after the 1973 season to concentrate full @-@ time on managing Roberts ' and Yamaha 's efforts in the A.M.A. Grand National Championship , a series which encompassed events in four distinctive dirt track disciplines plus road racing .

In 1971 , Roberts won the AMA Rookie of the Year Award . In his first professional race as an expert class rider in 1972 , Roberts rode to victory at the Grand National short @-@ track race in the Houston Astrodome . Roberts made a name for himself that year by battling the dominant Harley

@-@ Davidson factory dirt track team aboard an underpowered Yamaha XS 650 motorcycle , making up for his lack of horsepower with sheer determination . He finished the season ranked fourth in the country . In 1973 , in just his second season as an expert , Roberts won the national championship , amassing a record 2 @, @ 014 points in the 25 @-@ race series .

While Roberts had a natural talent for riding motorcycles on dirt surfaces , on paved road circuits , the motorcycle felt unsettled beneath him while negotiating a turn . After observing Finnish rider Jarno Saarinen win the 1973 Daytona 200 using a riding style where he shifted his body weight towards the inside of a turn , Roberts tried the technique and found that it helped settle the motorcycle . He adopted the cornering style and exaggerated the body shift to a greater extent than Saarinen had by extending his knee out until it skimmed the track surface . With his new riding technique , Roberts began to excel in road race events . Yamaha motorcycles performed very well in road racing , where the Yamaha TZ750 was the dominant motorcycle of the era .

In the 1974 Daytona 200 , after early leader Gary Nixon retired , Roberts battled for the lead with former 500 cc world champion , Giacomo Agostini before an overheated engine forced him to settle for second place . In April 1974 , Roberts ventured to Europe for the first time to compete in the prestigious Imola 200 road race for 750 cc motorcycles . He made a positive impression competing against the best road racers in the world , once again finishing second to Agostini . He then traveled to England with a team of American riders to compete against a British riding team in the 1974 Transatlantic Match races . The conventional wisdom at the time was that American riders , who competed mostly in dirt track races , could not race on asphalt at the same level as the British riders , who specialized in road racing events . Roberts dispelled any such notions by winning three of the six races and finishing second in the remaining three races . Roberts was the top individual points scorer in the event with 93 points , five more than Barry Sheene , the top British rider .

Roberts returned to compete in the 1974 Grand National championship and won his first national road race at Road Atlanta on June 2 , 1974 . On August 18 , Roberts won the Peoria TT race to complete a Grand Slam with victories in each of the five different events on the Grand National calendar . He claimed his second consecutive Grand National championship , winning six races and surpassing his 1973 points record by scoring 2 @, @ 286 points in the 23 race series , collecting points in all 23 races . Roberts also entered his first world championship road racing event , winning the pole position before finishing third in the 1974 250 cc Dutch TT .

Roberts continued his road racing successes in 1975 , winning three out of four races in the 1975 Transatlantic Match races . After having won the national championship in 1974 , Roberts faced an increasingly difficult battle in dirt track races as , Harley @-@ Davidson continued to improve their XR @-@ 750 dirt tracker while Yamaha struggled to maintain the pace . Roberts made up for his bike 's lack of power with an almost fearless , determined riding style . He battled Harley @-@ Davidson factory rider Gary Scott throughout the 1975 season but mechanical breakdowns hampered his title defense . He had been leading the Daytona 200 when mechanical problems yielded the victory to his Yamaha teammate Gene Romero . At the Ascot TT , Roberts battled from 17th place to take the lead before a broken sprocket ended his race . Roberts ' fearless riding style was highlighted at the Indy Mile Grand National . In a desperate effort to keep Scott within reach in the points chase , Yamaha wedged a Yamaha TZ750 two @-@ stroke road racing engine inside a dirt track frame . On a bike that was considered unrideable due to its excessive horsepower , Roberts came from behind on the two @-@ stroke , and overtook the factory Harley @-@ Davidson duo of Corky Keener and Jay Springsteen on the last lap for one of the most famous wins in American dirt track racing history . Afterward , Roberts was famously quoted as saying , " They don 't pay me enough to ride that thing " . Despite accomplishing another Grand Slam , this time in only one season , Roberts lost his crown , finishing second to Gary Scott in the 1975 national championship .

Although Roberts won four Grand Nationals in 1976 , he continued to experience mechanical misfortunes as well as a horsepower deficit to the Harley @-@ Davidson motorcycles in the mile and half @-@ mile dirt track events . He had been leading the Daytona 200 once again when tire troubles forced him to make a lengthy pit stop , and Johnny Cecotto went on to win the race . He dropped to third in the national championship as Jay Springsteen claimed the title for the Harley

@-@ Davidson team . He returned to England in April 1977 , winning four out of six races at the 1977 Transatlantic Match races . Roberts then travelled to Italy where he raced in the Imola 200 , leaving no doubt he was capable of competing at the international level by winning both legs and setting a new track record . He returned to the United States to compete in the Grand National championship where he won five of the six road races that made up the pavement portion of the series . In the road race event at Sears Point , Roberts started the race at the back of the pack and passed the entire field within four laps to win the race . Despite being in contention for much of the season , Roberts was unable to win any of the dirt track events and eventually finished the year in fourth place .

= = = First American world champion = = =

When it became apparent that Yamaha could not develop a dirt track motorcycle capable of competing with the dominant Harley @-@ Davidson dirt track team , the American Yamaha importer , Yamaha USA , offered to send Roberts to Europe in 1978 to compete in the World Championship Grand Prix road racing series , along with Kel Carruthers to act as his mentor and crew chief . Roberts also secured the financial backing of the Goodyear tire company . The team planned to compete in the 250 cc world championship as well as the Formula 750 series in order to have more practice time to learn the tracks , but their main focus would be on the 500 cc class , considered the premier class at the time . His main competition in the 500 cc world championship would come from Suzuki rider Barry Sheene , winner of the two previous titles . Roberts said that he was initially indifferent about competing in Europe , but when he read that Sheene had labeled him as , " no threat " , he made up his mind to compete . Few observers gave Roberts any chance of winning the championship , citing the reasoning that it would take him at least one season to learn the European circuits .

The motorcycle technology of the late 1970s featured engines with power in excess of what the frames and tires of the day could accommodate . Roberts ' riding style , bred on the dirt tracks of America , revolutionized road racing . Prior to his arrival in Europe , riders focused on attaining high entry speeds into corners , leaving braking until the last possible moment then , carving graceful arcs through the corners with both wheels in line . Roberts did just the opposite , braking early then , quickly applying the throttle which resulted in the rear tire breaking traction and spinning . The resulting tire spin caused the motorcycle to buck and shake as it continually lost then regained traction , creating a brutal , violent riding style that no one had ever seen before on the racetracks of Europe . His riding style was reminiscent of dirt track riding , where sliding the rear tire to one side is used as a method to steer the motorcycle around a corner . Because of his early application of the throttle , he was able to attain top speed faster than his competitors .

The 1978 season started with Roberts winning the Daytona 200 in a dominating fashion . After several near misses forced him to retire while leading the event , Roberts lapped the entire field en route to his first Daytona victory . He then won a rain @-@ shortened Imola 200 race and was the second highest individual scorer behind Pat Hennen at the 1978 Transatlantic Match races . The 1978 world championship chase did not start well for Roberts at the season @-@ opening round in Venezuela .

Although Roberts won the 250 cc Grand Prix , Sheene claimed the victory in the 500 cc Venezuelan Grand Prix while Roberts ' Yamaha suffered a mechanical failure on the starting line . In the second round at the Spanish Grand Prix , Roberts was leading the race by eight seconds when his throttle stuck , forcing him to settle for second place behind fellow American Pat Hennen . Roberts then won his first @-@ ever 500 cc Grand Prix with a win in Austria , quickly followed by two more victories in France and Italy , along with two second @-@ place finishes in the Netherlands and Belgium . At the 1978 Swedish Grand Prix , Roberts crashed during practice for the 250 cc race , sustaining a concussion and a thumb injury . Shaken up by the accident , he could do no better than seventh place in the 500 cc race . Sheene had come down with a debilitating virus at the Venezuelan round , but a string of podium finishes and a victory at the Swedish Grand Prix combined with Roberts ' failure to score any points in the Finnish Grand Prix , allowed him to close

the points gap .

The two championship contenders arrived in England for the British Grand Prix with only three points separating them . The race ended in controversy when torrential rains during the race , along with pit stops for tire changes by both Roberts and Sheene , created confusion among official scorers . Eventually , Roberts was declared the winner with Sheene being awarded third place behind privateer Steve Manship , who did not stop for a tire change . In the final race of the season at the daunting , 14 @. @ 2 miles ( 22 @. @ 9 km ) long Nürburgring racetrack in Germany , Roberts finished in third place , ahead of Sheene in fourth place to claim the first world championship for an American rider in Grand Prix road racing history . He also scored four victories to finish second behind Johnny Cecotto in the Formula 750 world championship , and won two races to finish fourth in the 250 cc world championship .

= = = The rebel leader = = =

The 1979 season began disastrously for Roberts when he suffered career @-@ threatening back injuries and a ruptured spleen in a pre @-@ season crash while testing a motorcycle in Japan . His injuries caused him to miss the season opening Grand Prix in Venezuela , but he completed an impressive recovery by winning the second round in Austria , followed by a second place in Germany , and another victory in Italy . Controversy again surrounded Roberts at the Spanish Grand Prix when Spanish race organisers , knowing that Roberts had to race to maintain his points lead , refused to pay him starting money as guaranteed by FIM regulations . An angered Roberts proceeded to win the race , and then refused to accept the winner 's trophy . The FIM initially suspended the championship points leader for his actions , but the suspension was later reduced to probation .

Further controversy ensued at the Belgian Grand Prix at the Spa circuit . The circuit had been paved just days before the race , creating a track that many of the racers felt was unsafe due to diesel fuel seeping to the surface . Roberts and the new championship points leader , Virginio Ferrari , instigated a riders ' revolt and refused to race . Once again , the FIM responded by suspending Roberts and Ferrari . The FIM later reduced this to another probation . The event highlighted the animosity between Roberts and the FIM concerning track safety . Roberts further irritated the FIM when he began talking to the press about forming a rival racing series to compete against the FIM 's monopoly .

The series then moved on to Britain , where Roberts would be involved in one of the closest races in Grand Prix history . Roberts ' battle with Sheene at the 1979 British Grand Prix at Silverstone has been cited as one of the greatest races of the 1970s . Minutes before the start of the race , Roberts ' Yamaha blew a seal and sprayed the bike with oil . His crew managed to replace the seal in time , but Roberts went to the starting line with his gloves coated with oil , causing his hand to slip on the throttle during the race . The race began with Roberts , Sheene and Dutch rider Wil Hartog breaking away from the rest of the field of riders . Hartog eventually fell behind as Roberts and Sheene continued to battle for the lead . The event featured numerous lead changes throughout the 28 lap race , with Roberts winning ahead of Sheene by a narrow margin of just three @-@ tenths of a second . A third @-@ place finish in the season @-@ ending French Grand Prix , along with a crash by his main championship rival Ferrari , secured his second consecutive world championship .

In December 1979 , Roberts made good on his threats when he , along with the other top world championship riders , released a letter to the press announcing their intention to break away from the FIM and create a rival race series called the World Series . When Roberts first arrived on the Grand Prix scene , motorcycle racers were competing for as little prize money as \$ 200 , at venues such as Imatra in Finland that featured railroad crossings and hay bales wrapped around telephone poles . In 1956 , the reigning 500 cc world champion , Geoff Duke and thirteen other riders were given six @-@ month suspensions for merely threatening to strike . Roberts adopted a confrontational , sometimes belligerent stance with race promoters , challenging the previously accepted poor treatment that motorcycle racers of the day were accustomed to receiving . Although the competing series failed to take off due to difficulties in securing enough venues , it forced the

FIM to take the riders ' demands seriously and make changes regarding their safety . During the 1979 FIM Congress , new rules were passed increasing prize money substantially and in subsequent years , stricter safety regulations were imposed on race organizers .

= = = A third world championship = = =

In February 1980 , Roberts made a remarkable return to the American Grand National Championship for two races at the season opening Houston TT and short @-@ track events held in the Houston Astrodome over two evenings . After more than a year away from dirt track competitions , Roberts won the Houston TT race to tie Bart Markel 's career record of 28 Grand National victories . He followed that the next evening with a third place in the Houston short @-@ track national . Returning to England once again for the 1980 Transatlantic Match races , Roberts was once again the top individual points scorer as he led the American team to victory over the British .

For the 1980 Grand Prix season , the Yamaha factory made the Yamaha USA team of Roberts and Carruthers the de facto factory racing team . The season got underway two months late due to cancellation of Austrian and Venezuelan rounds . Barry Sheene had been replaced by Randy Mamola as the top Suzuki rider as , Sheene had been dissatisfied with the Suzuki 's efforts and had turned to a privateer Yamaha team . Roberts won the first three races as the Suzuki team appeared to be in disarray , but by the third race , the Suzukis of Mamola and Marco Lucchinelli were making things more difficult for Roberts . Roberts ' Yamaha suffered a deflating front tire and a faulty rear shock absorber in the Netherlands forcing him to pull out of the race , but his main championship rivals also suffered setbacks with Cecotto , Ferrari and Hartog all missing races due to injuries and Sheene suffering mechanical breakdowns . Suzuki riders went on to win the last four races , but Roberts had built up a sufficient point lead to hold on and clinch his third consecutive 500 cc world championship .

= = = A reversal of fortune = = =

In 1981 , Yamaha introduced a new square @-@ four cylinder bike , similar to Suzuki 's RG500 . Roberts raced to a second @-@ place finish behind Marco Luchinelli at the non @-@ championship Imola 200 race . Roberts ' bike had a suspension failure in the Grand Prix season opener at Austria , but he rebounded to win the next two races in Germany and Italy . Roberts ' title hopes suffered a setback at the Dutch TT at Assen when his Yamaha 's front brake pads were installed incorrectly causing his front wheel to lock up on the starting line , ending his race before it had started . He came back to score a second place behind Lucchinelli in Belgium , but was once again struck by misfortune when a bad case of food poisoning forced him to miss the San Marino Grand Prix . He then narrowly lost the British Grand Prix to Jack Middelburg by three @-@ tenths of a second before ending his season with a seventh place in Finland and a retirement in Sweden . Suzuki team riders Mamola and Lucchinelli battled to the final race of the season before the Italian claimed the championship with a total of five Grand Prix victories , with Mamola finishing in second and Roberts in third place .

Roberts switched to Dunlop tires for the 1982 season , as Goodyear pulled out of motorcycle racing . New competition had arrived as Honda entered their new two @-@ stroke NS500 ridden by defending champion Lucchinelli , former 350 cc world champion , Takazumi Katayama and newcomer Freddie Spencer . Roberts won the season @-@ opening round in Argentina on the old square @-@ four Yamaha , but then switched to the new OW61 YZR500 V4 engined bike . He came in third at the Austrian Grand Prix then , sat out the French Grand Prix at Nogaro as he and the other top riders boycotted the race over unsafe track conditions . Roberts then won the Spanish Grand Prix at Jarama ahead of Sheene , and scored a second place behind Suzuki rider Franco Uncini in the Netherlands . In a portent of things to come , Roberts was leading the Belgian Grand Prix when his Dunlop tires lost their grip and he had to settle for fourth place as Spencer went on to win his first Grand Prix for Honda . Roberts then injured his knee and finger at the British Grand Prix

and had to miss the Swedish round , but by then the world championship had been claimed by Uncini with a total of five victories while Roberts fell to fourth place . By the end of the 1982 season , Roberts had won sixteen 500 cc Grand Prix races , more than double that of any of his contemporaries .

= = = Roberts versus Spencer = = =

Roberts announced that the 1983 season would be his final year in Grand Prix competition . Yamaha team manager Giacomo Agostini had been unable to agree on a contract with rider Graeme Crosby , so AMA Superbike champion Eddie Lawson was brought in as Roberts ' new teammate . The 1983 battle for the championship between Roberts and Honda 's Spencer would be considered one of the greatest seasons in motorcycle Grand Prix history , along with the 1967 500 cc duel between Mike Hailwood and Giacomo Agostini . Roberts began the season with his YZR500 having problems with overheating and rear suspension , while Spencer started strongly , winning the first three races and five out of the first seven . Roberts was leading the second race in France , when his Yamaha split an expansion chamber causing it to lose power as Spencer won , with Roberts falling to fourth place . In Round 3 at Monza , Roberts crashed while leading Spencer three laps from the finish . Roberts came back to win the German Grand Prix , but then finished second to Spencer in Spain in a race Spencer called one of the toughest of his career . Things began to go Roberts ' way at the Austrian Grand Prix as Roberts won while Spencer 's Honda suffered a crankshaft failure . In the Yugoslavian Grand Prix , Roberts ' Yamaha failed to start immediately , while Spencer charged to an early lead , leaving Roberts to fight through the field to finish in fourth place . Roberts then went on a three @-@ race winning streak with victories in the Netherlands , Belgium and England , while Spencer stayed close with a third place and two second @-@ place finishes .

The championship then moved to the penultimate round at the Swedish Grand Prix with Spencer holding a two @-@ point lead over Roberts . Roberts led Spencer going into the last lap of the race . Heading down the back straight , Spencer placed his Honda right behind Roberts ' Yamaha as they reached the second to the last corner , a ninety degree right @-@ hander . As both riders applied their brakes , Spencer came out of Roberts ' slipstream and managed to get inside of the Yamaha . As they exited the corner , both riders ran wide off the track and into the dirt . Spencer was able to get back on the track and back on the power first , crossing the finish line just ahead of Roberts for a crucial victory . Roberts considered Spencer 's pass to be foolish and dangerous , and exchanged angry words with him on the podium . Roberts would have to win the final round at the San Marino Grand Prix with Spencer finishing no better than third place in order for Roberts to win his fourth world championship . In a fitting end to a great career , Roberts won his last @-@ ever Grand Prix race , however Spencer was able to secure second place to claim the world championship . The two riders dominated the season with each claiming six victories in the 12 race series .

Roberts continued to ride in selected events in 1984 . In March , he battled Spencer to win his second consecutive Daytona 200 and third win overall . In July , Roberts won the first leg of the Laguna Seca 200 , then finished second to Randy Mamola in the second leg , as Mamola was declared the winner based on aggregate times . In September 1985 , he appeared at the Springfield Mile Grand National dirt track race riding a Mert Lawwill @-@ prepared Harley @-@ Davidson XR750 , but failed to make the final .

In July 1985 , Roberts won the pole position at the prestigious Suzuka 8 Hours endurance race , held in Japan . Teamed with Tadahiko Taira , the duo were leading the race until the final hour , when mechanical problems dropped them back to seventeenth place . Roberts returned to compete in the 1986 Suzuka 8 Hours , this time teaming up with American Mike Baldwin . He qualified second behind Wayne Gardner , but failed to finish the race .

= = = Career statistics = = =

In a 13 @-@ year professional racing career , Roberts won two Grand National Championships and

three 500 cc world championships including 32 Grand Nationals and 24 Grand Prix road races . He also won the Daytona 200 three times and was a six @-@ time winner of the Laguna Seca 200 . He was the second AMA rider after Dick Mann to accomplish the Grand Slam of winning all five events of the Grand National Championship .

= = Race team manager and owner = =

After his Grand Prix racing career ended in 1983 , Roberts briefly considered an auto racing career before deciding to field a Grand Prix team . In 1984 , he entered a team into the 250 cc world championship with riders Wayne Rainey and Alan Carter using Yamaha bikes . In 1986 he moved up to the 500 cc world championship with riders Randy Mamola and Mike Baldwin . After returning to the United States to compete in the AMA Superbike championship , Wayne Rainey re @-@ joined the team in 1988 , finishing in third place in his inaugural 500 cc season then , improving to second place behind Eddie Lawson in 1989 . In 1990 , Roberts secured the financial support of the Marlboro cigarette company , and his team became the official Yamaha factory racing team . Rainey and John Kocinski won the 500 cc and 250 cc world championships in 1990 , making Roberts the most successful team manager in Grand Prix racing at the time . Rainey went on to win three consecutive 500 cc world championships for Roberts ' team . After Rainey was left paralyzed in a crash at the 1993 Italian Grand Prix , the Roberts team continued racing with Luca Cadalora as their main rider , but struggled during a period dominated by Honda and their rider , Mick Doohan .

In 1997 , Roberts stunned the racing world when he left Yamaha after more than 25 years to start his own motorcycle company . Roberts had grown weary of battling over the direction he felt the Yamaha team needed to pursue . Basing his new company in England to take advantage of the Formula 1 industry , Roberts built a three @-@ cylinder , two @-@ stroke engine with the engineering assistance of Tom Walkinshaw Racing . He decided to take advantage of rules allowing lighter weights for three @-@ cylinder motorcycles after observing the agility and handling advantage of Spencer 's Honda NS500 during the 1983 season . Unfortunately , by the time the motorcycle had been developed , tire technology had improved to the point where any advantage over four @-@ cylinder bikes had been negated . The motorcycle did manage to win a pole position with rider Jeremy McWilliams taking the top qualifying position at the 2002 Australian Grand Prix against the new breed of 990 cc four @-@ stroke MotoGP motorcycles .

With the introduction of the MotoGP class in 2002 , Roberts ' team developed a five @-@ cylinder bike called the KR5 . The team was originally well @-@ funded by Proton of Malaysia , but by the middle of the 2004 season , it became apparent that the Roberts team was not able to field an engine capable of competing with the dominant Japanese factories . Roberts turned to the KTM factory to provide engines for the 2005 season , however after ten races KTM abruptly withdrew their support on the eve of the Czech Republic Grand Prix , forcing the team to miss several races . Honda stepped in to help Roberts ' team for the 2006 season by providing five @-@ cylinder engines , as Robert 's son , Kenny Roberts , Jr . , rode the Team Roberts KR211V bike to a sixth place in the championship including two podium results . The 2007 season saw the introduction of a new MotoGP engine formula using 800 cc four @-@ stroke engines . Roberts would once again secure engines from Honda for the Team Roberts KR212V race bike , but the results were not as hoped , and funding for the team faded . After the 2007 season , Roberts pulled out of MotoGP competition due to the lack of sponsorship .

= = Legacy = =

Roberts ' riding style in which he forced the motorcycle 's rear wheel to break traction to steer around a corner , essentially riding on paved surfaces as if they were dirt tracks , changed the way Grand Prix motorcycles were ridden . From 1983 to 1999 , every 500 cc world championship was won by a rider with a dirt track racing background . Roberts ' cornering method of hanging off the motorcycles with his knee extended forced him to use duct tape as knee pads , and eventually led to the introduction of purpose @-@ built knee pucks used by all motorcycle road racers today . His

battles with the Grand Prix establishment eventually led to the adoption of stricter safety standards for Grand Prix race organizers . He was one of the first riders to challenge the FIM over the way they treated competitors and helped improve prize money as well as the professionalism of the sport . It was not until Roberts planned his rival race series in 1980 that the FIM was forced to change the way in which they dealt with motorcycle racers .

Throughout his career , Roberts has been a strong proponent of raising the image of motorcycle racing among the general public . During his riding career , he made a point of returning to the United States during the mid @-@ season break in the Grand Prix calendar to race in the Laguna Seca 200 as a way to increase the profile of the event in order for it to gain Grand Prix status . The race eventually attained Grand Prix status in 1988 and in 1993 , Roberts took on the role of promoter , providing financial backing for the 1993 United States Grand Prix . In the 1990s when Grand Prix racing faced diminishing numbers of competitors due to increasing costs , Roberts demanded that Yamaha provide engines to privateer teams in order to bolster the number of racers .

Roberts ' son , Kenny Roberts , Jr . , won the 2000 500 cc World Championship , making them the only father and son duo to have won the title . Ironically , Roberts has stated that he considers himself a dirt tracker at heart and only took up road racing because it was necessary to do so if a rider was going to compete for the Grand National championship . He also said that he would have preferred to remain in the United States to compete in the Grand National championship if Yamaha or another manufacturer had been able to construct a dirt track racer capable of competing with Harley @-@ Davidson .

= = Honors = =

Inducted into the Motorsports Hall of Fame of America in 1990 .

Inducted into the International Motorsports Hall of Fame in 1992 .

Inducted into the AMA Motorcycle Hall of Fame in 1998 .

The FIM named him a Grand Prix " Legend " in 2000 .

= = Motorcycle Grand Prix results = =

( key ) ( Races in bold indicate pole position ; races in italics indicate fastest lap )