

Kenny Roberts (the first American motorcycle racer to win the 500cc Road Racing World Championship; two-time AMA Grand National Championships [1973 and 1974], three-time 500cc World Champion [1978, 1979 and 1980]) on **Mental Imagery**:

“The first time I went over to the Match Races in England, it was at the Brands Hatch short circuit. I had run a bunch of laps in the morning and I was three seconds off the pace. I mean, I was three seconds off the lap record! There were a lot of tires up in the transporter we had, so I moved a bunch of them around and got up in there where nobody could bother me. I stayed in there for two hours.

“For the first time, I thought about every single thing I was doing on the track, what RPM I was turning in this corner, who was going better than I was and where and how, if I was having a braking problem someplace else. When I had some idea of what I ought to be doing out there, I must have done 200 laps in my mind. I came out of there and went one lap to warm up the tires. The next lap was three seconds better – right at the track record. I went back up in the truck again and I came out with a new track record. That was the first time it dawned on me that my mind had more to do with fast laps than skill.”

“An hour before the start, all the mechanical stuff with the bike is over, and I don't think about it anymore. When I set off from the motorhome, my concentration is fixed. As I walk through the paddock, I don't have to worry about not talking to people for fear of disturbing my concentration because nothing can disturb it anyway. It's already sort of on automatic pilot. When I sit on the bike, my concentration takes over. I stop hearing noise and I stop seeing people in any particular way. I don't focus on anyone or anything I see. I'm programmed, and the programming takes over.”

“You see, we only get a few laps of practice, maybe six or seven, and there's very little you can learn in that time, so I have to make up for it in my head, lap after lap, until I know it. Right now, I know every bump and ripple out there.”

“I regard my brain as just another part of my body, a sort of programming center. Over the years, I have trained it just like I have trained the rest of my body. I have practiced it, taught it how to behave in the sort of situation it's likely to meet on a racetrack. By now, it works pretty well, so that when I start to concentrate to some extent and in some ways, it's automatic. It all starts to happen, it's sort of switched on and I can start to think about something else.”

“Between race meetings, I spend so much time thinking about the racetrack because there's so little time to do everything when you are actually there that I can never figure out how people who don't do that manage it all.”