



600

Kawasaki

KLR

TÉNORÉ

GOING THE DISTANCE...

WHAT to do and where to go, that was the poser we faced with the three big singles. A dash through Europe to some exotic off-road event was discounted as being too predictable. And anyway, where were we going to find British trail conditions over there? Mid Wales was considered, as was Scotland. In the end the North Yorkshire Moors got the nod. One of our team – the boss, actually – had been there previously. He thought it an ideal testing ground. Under threat of financial recrimination, we agreed.

The test route, however, did prove an ideal mixture of fast tarmac work and varied trails. The road section involved several hundred miles of fast riding between fuel stops. All shone in this role; they handled well, stopped well and loved back lane scratching.

Our off-road exercise took in every challenge of the Moors from fast open terrain to dried up riverbeds and shale

Introducing the three contenders for the heavyweight trail bike crown . . . Honda's latest offering from the XL stable, the 600; Yamaha's desert-bred XT600 Ténéré; and the unknown newcomer from Kawasaki, the KLR600. The no-holds-barred contest takes place in the Yorkshire Moors. Team DBR covers the action.

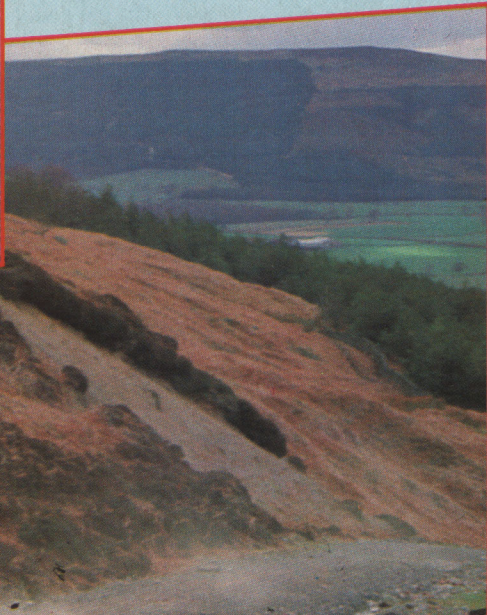
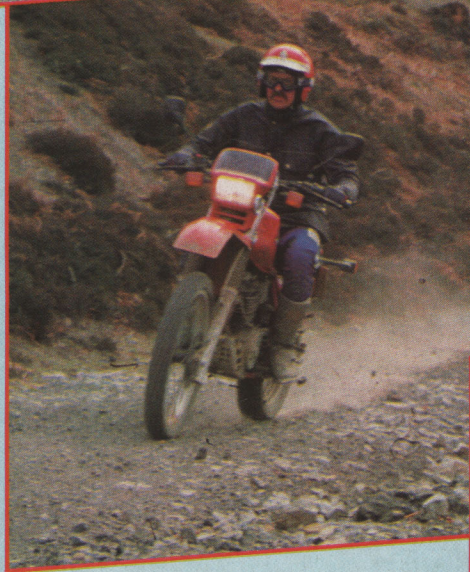
inclines. In this area we expected one bike to outstrip the others. But we were surprised. Sure, the big-tanked Yamaha was a handful, but not completely unmanageable. And the Kawasaki and Honda? Well, they came out of the test a lot closer than anticipated. Read on for the rundown. . .

SO the KLR600 is an offshoot of the Big K's prestigious GPz900R project, is it? The watercooled dohc single borrows technology straight from a 150mph-plus road bike, does it? Well, it sure feels like it. . .

Monster trail bikes like these ain't real dirt bikes, that's for sure. Like the other two, the KL comes equipped with a full complement of road gear: 12 volt 60/55 watt lighting and four ampour battery, indicators, tyres with a tread pattern and profile more akin to road race wets than Michelin Specials, and pillion handgrips. Okay, so the pillion grips can at least be used to attach a crane hook for winching out of mudholes.

First impressions of the KLR are good though. All around the bike there are neat touches and lumps of beautifully crafted alloy giving a high-tech feel. The motor on our test bike soon loosened up to behave like a good ol' Brit single, revving





and pulling lustily through the mid range. It'd lope along in top gear with great dollops of power available, revving out in all gears save top.

On the road it proved fractionally slower than the Honda but the air scoops for the radiators must act as air brakes. At a slow plonking pace though, the KLR leaves much to be desired. It doesn't really want to pull at less than 2500rpm so, coupled with the tall road gearing, you end up tackling trials-type sections at twice the optimum speed.

Kawasaki has opted for a long wheelbase but a steep headstock angle to give stability but turning power – and it works. Along the long straight green lanes on the hilltops of the North Yorkshire Moors – called Riggs for some reason – the KLR hardly twitched even when caught by a sudden puddle or soft patch. Though the motor's revviness made rocky climbs a physical version of Asteroids, the steering was quick and responsive enough to pick between the bigger boulders.

On country lanes – the tarmac type – the handling is sweet and coupled with the sticky quick-wearing tyres, the KLR could be thrashed along at a pace that'd embarrass many a true road bike.

Equipment is superb: The bodywork is straight off the 'crossers with a steel petrol tank sloping down to the safety seat giving the rider loads of room to slide his weight about. Bars are the black-chrome braced type but a shade too low for me. The dog leg levers are easy to reach, and the straight-pull throttle and switchgear all efficient.

That front disc brake is one of the best considering the KLR's compromised role; it's powerful enough for fade-free and worry-free stops on the road yet not so sharp that it has the tyre skipping on grass or muddy surface. The rear brake could be more powerful though.

Kawasaki makes much of the chassis construction, claiming the mixture of high-tensile steel for the main frame and square section alloy for the rear subframe, swing-arm and propstand cuts the weight to a minimum. The water-cooling gubbins around the engine must weigh a bundle in that case because it's 150 kilos fully fuelled.

The rear subframe is removeable for access to the Uni-Trak shock though you can reach the four-position damper adjuster and spring preload collar without dismantling completely. Almost nine

inches of travel is claimed for the rear end and a similar amount for the 37mm diameter forks. For a trail bike the suspension is excellent though don't try motocrossing without softening the whole thing up. That swing arm pivots on needle roller bearings with unusual eccentric-cam chain adjusters in the closed ends.

Starting. One word but the action induces many more, most unprintable in **DBR**. Kawasaki claims its Automatic Compression Release (KACR) solves the Big Single problem. Instead of Honda's cables linked to the kickstarter, KACR is a centrifugally operated device on the end of the exhaust cam. At below 1000rpm the exhaust valve is opened as the piston comes up to TDC; above that rpm and the flung weights prevent this happening. Well, that it may do but the KLR is still a reluctant starter. We tried all sorts of throttle openings but didn't hit the knack. Just make sure you're wearing solid-soled boots. We've got an in-office broken toe as proof of not following that advice.

Overall, we liked the KLR600 for its sharp styling and abundance of well thought out points: Straight pull spokes, folding tip gear lever and footbrake, enduro toolbag, alloy bashplate, O-ring chain, stainless steel exhaust pipe to name a few. It isn't really a dirt bike but for the occasional trail ride it's an interesting experience. Perhaps its strongest point is its price. At £1699 it's £181 cheaper than the Honda and £316 less than the Tenéfé.

PARKED in the fresh Spring sunlight, the three 600 trail bikes looked very inviting. But the Honda, in normal striking red garb, somehow seemed dated.

As soon as you sit on the XL you know it's a Honda. The ride position is very comfortable but you do seem to be sitting well forward. The shape of the stubby fuel tank and the long seat, contoured for safety at its front end to merge smoothly with the back of the tank, add to the illusion.

Immediately you ride away on the bike you get the impression of light, very light steering, wide handlebars and a front wheel not actually in very hard contact with the road. Weight transfer under power is quite marked, which is very useful when venturing off road. When you need to lift the front wheel to clear a rock or to miss a cross rut the throttle allows you to do so with commensurate ease. If you haven't tried wheelies, a large capacity trail bike is the place to start. You'll either scare yourself half to death or you'll master the knack!

Ride an XL on the road and soon, very soon, you'll be looking for sweeping bends to throw it round and a fuel station at which to fill it up. It's a sad fact but the bike is quite thirsty; ride it hard on the road and you will need to stop every 100 miles for petrol. With fuel economy in mind it would be hard to commend the bike to a would-be owner. But take into account its looks, its road feel, its dual purpose ability and strong engine – which revs past the red line in top (fifth) gear – and the equation turns more in favour of the bike.

Honda UK, which loaned the bike for



INSET: The liquid-cooled single cylinder engine fitted to the 600 Kawasaki bears a striking likeness to the latest GPz900 roadster.



INSET: The Honda engine, while looking very similar to the old XL500 unit, is a completely new one.

test, had been having some trouble with its carburation. It said the bike was running weak on its pilot jet and would sometimes cut out. It did!

Braking is excellent, the front disc seems well able to cope on the road and is fitted with a plastic shield to prevent dirt and rocks getting into the caliper when riding off road. Tyres are normally the limiting factor of any trail bike and the XL is no exception. They do cope very well with the type of terrain which we covered but on wetter, muddier going they are not so easy to live with. As a compromise they are acceptable but by fitting a 17 inch rear wheel to the bike Honda has rather restricted the choice of after-market tyres.

We were surprised at the way none of the bikes would pull slowly in first gear when tackling rocky uphill tracks. If the clutches are not slipped the engines stall. There is no compromise; you either hit the rocks hard, risking tyre, rim or inner tube damage, or pick your way slowly through while slipping the clutch. The XL is geared to do over 100mph on the road and as it has the ability to run past the red-line, the overall gearing can not really be lowered any more to make slow off road riding less hectic.

The suspension is, as one might expect from Honda these days, super. There is provision to inflate the front forks, to a maximum of 2.8psi, which did reduce the tendency of the front end to dip violently under braking but in turn fed more bumps through the handlebars to the

rider. The rear Pro-Link has pre-load and rebound damping and adjustment.

There are some good features on the XL, like an automatic de-compressor, which is operated via a cable connected to the kick-start mechanism; what else would you expect on a big single? In addition there is a handlebar mounted de-compressor which is very useful when bump starting or firing up after an endo. The lockable tool compartment ensures the tool roll is less likely to disappear than is the case with the Kawasaki or the Yamaha.

So much for the praise. What of the bad points? There are a few; not too few to mention though.

The bike decided to stop charging its battery while we were riding. Blown fuse we thought. Wrong. Battery dry because of all the fast road work. The battery is only a tiny one and with the headlight on, which incidentally gave exceptional night time vision, the charging system seemed unable to cope with the demand. The low battery resulted in weak indicators and a barely audible horn. The right side panel melted itself onto the exhaust silencer, the result of a pair of lightly-filled throw-over pannier bags, pushing the panel on to the hot exhaust. Suppose that was our fault really.

Would we buy an XL600 rather than one of the other bikes we tried? From certain standpoints the answer must be yes. The bikes are, in some ways, very equal and as such the final choice is one of personal preference.

FACTORY claims for weights and measures of motorcycles are always a source of merriment. Our test bikes were no exception. Although, to be fair, we did discover areas of understatement.

Take the Honda's fuel tank, Honda claims a capacity including a two litre reserve of 12 litres; we squeezed in 12.65 litres. Kawasaki, too, can take a bow. We put in 12.49 litres; Big K says it has an 11.5 capacity. Yamaha claims 30 litres, but we sweated to get in 29.16 litres. Interestingly, the XT has a reserve of more than 5 litres. Of the three, the KLR is the easiest to achieve close to maximum capacity at the fuel pump.

Forget about dry weight claims, whatever they mean, what do they total with fuel tanks full? Not surprisingly the Yamaha topped the scales. With near enough to 30 litres on board the weigh-bridge slip said 160 kilos. The KLR feels light but actually weighed in at 150kg. The XL, on the other hand looks heavy, but came out at 140kg.

In the fuel consumption stakes, the KLR returned an average 48.65mpg during the test period, the XL 42.71 and the XT 39.1. On the road the Kawasaki proved the most economical with a figure of 50.6mpg. The Honda was second with 39.81 while the Yamaha trailed with (gulp) 36.1. Off-road figures again favoured the KLR. It returned 45.50, the XL 44.17 and the XT, well, let's say you'd probably see better figures on a bank statement.

HONDA XL600R

Engine: The engine has a very over square aspect ratio, the bore (100mm) being far larger than the stroke (75mm). The cylinder head features Honda's latest valve arrangement thinking called RFVC. Roughly translated this means the four (F) valves (V) in the combustion chamber (C) are disposed radially (R) in the hemi-spherically shaped chamber's surface. Operation of the valves is by short rocker arms moved at the command of the camshaft mounted in the head and driven by a chain. There are two exhaust outlets, the pipes being siamesed into a single tube prior to entry into the extensive muffler with spark arrestor.

Suspension: At the front, suspension is effected by a pair of Showa forks which have provision for pre-load adjustment by means of air inflation. The inflation being carried out through two valves, one for each fork leg. Adjustment is an "in your garage" task because the bike has to be propped up on a stand or box and the pressure carefully set. Rear suspension adjustment is less bother and changes can be made when out riding by means of a small "click" set dial which is provided at the lower end of the suspension unit.

Frame: Engine oil is carried in the bike's frame. The top frame member being suitably large to accommodate the lubricant. The idea is sound enough, as long as the bike doesn't have a massive engine failure - an owner would find it very difficult to remove all the small particles of broken bearing material and the like from the inside of the frame. The structure itself is rigid enough, the engine being supported by an under cradle of tubes which terminate quite untidily in the footrest mounting area of the chassis.

YAMAHA XT600X TÉNÉRÉ

Engine: The engine fitted to the Tenere is a slightly de-tuned version of the four-valve dohc one fitted to the TT600 enduro bike. The bore and stroke dimensions are 95mm and 84mm and the engine has the YDIS system which has dual (D) inlet (I) tracts and a special double stage carburettor which operates through one port for low engine speed and both for higher ones. The engine is a dry sump, the oil being carried in a separate tank mounted under the bike's left side panel.

Suspension: Front forks feature massive 41mm stanchion tubes, larger than the other two bikes, and allow 255mm of wheel travel. The feel of the front forks is ideal. Rear suspension uses the rising rate system known as Mono Cross. "Click" set being the method used to alter damping. The adjuster is not too vulnerable to dirt thanks to a rubber flap.

Frame: The Yamaha is different to the other two bikes because it employs the engine as a structural member of the chassis. The lower section of the frame is detachable for easier engine removal. We found the Yamaha's chassis to be good and better finished than the other two bikes; the differences are very slight though.



INSET: The 600 Yamaha engine is a slightly de-tuned version of the one fitted to the TT enduro bike.

KAWASAKI KLX600-A1

Engine: The Kawasaki 600 single is novel in several ways. It features liquid-cooling with an electric fan to overcome overheating problems. During our test we never noticed the fan working nor did we see the thermostat rise above the mid-range on its scale. Bore and stroke dimensions of the engine, at 96mmx78mm, are not as over-square as the Honda.

The arrangement for automatic cylinder pressure relief is novel. The system, named Kawasaki automatic compression release - abbreviated as KACR - employs a bob weight which, when the engine is at rest, holds one of the exhaust valves open. As the engine speed rises above about 1000rpm the effect of the centrifugal force moves the auxiliary valve opener away from the valve and restores compression to the cylinder. With the exception of the new GPz900 engine, this is Kawasaki's only dohc four-valved combustion chambered engine.

Suspension: The front leading axle forks have 230mm of travel. They, in a similar manner to the Honda's forks, feature pre-load adjustment by means of air pressure. Uni-Track rear suspension is the new type, with the pivot crank under the unit. Pre-load adjustment is by means of screwed tensioning rings with a "click" set four position adjuster for rebound setting.

Frame: The main frame is built from steel tube but the rear section is a bolt-on alloy construction. There is evidence of haste in manufacture if the rear framework is closely checked although the bike we tested may not be typical of production models in this respect. We did feel the use of alloy for the rear frame and other parts may well have been a measure forced on Kawasaki by the need to carve weight from the bike.

Ténéré; most people seem to get the pronunciation wrong, so just for the record it's 'Tay-nay-ray'. The name derives from a 1000 mile stretch of featureless North African desert that for three weeks of the year forms part of the Paris-Dakar marathon route. And it's Paris-Dakar bikes on which the Ténéré is modelled, not least its monster - near 30 litre - fuel tank. Not too many gas stations in the desert y'know.

Yamaha calls the Ténéré an enduro bike; fact is it makes a mighty good roadster. It's comfortable, handles well and punches out decent urge from that single cylinder for competent acceleration and an impressively high cruising speed - like 85mph and more.

Best of all though is the fuel capacity. We could only squeeze in 29.16 litres (6.4gal), instead of the claimed 30 litres! But even the most uneconomical rider has got to clock up over 200 miles on this between refills - and that's a lot better than most pukka roadsters can boast.

Starting a big single can be a pain, to say the least, and the reports on the Honda and Kawasaki echo this sentiment. Not so the Yamaha. From cold the secret proved to be give it full choke, no throttle, ease the piston past compression on the throttle-linked kick starter then give a full swing to start first time. When hot it needed a touch of throttle but still started promptly.

At tickover, or indeed at any engine speed, the Ténéré's exhaust note is well muffled for a big four-stroke. It certainly won't annoy walkers out on the trails. The muffled note somehow makes the Yamaha appear less punchy at the bottom-end than it actually is. Make no mistake, it's more than capable in that department, pulling flexibly and strongly throughout the rev range.

Rather surprisingly, in view of the all that weight up front, the Ténéré will perform impromptu wheelies when given too much gas away from traffic lights or whatever. And that's with a full tank.

Overall the big tank proved less of an impediment than anticipated. When full the extra weight is obviously noticeable, particularly when dropping into tight turns or flicking through an S-bend. Moreover, on the dirt it had the heaviest front-end of the three bikes.

On the merit side, that extra weight helped make it by far the most stable at speed on the road, being unruffled even when blasting through a juggernaut's slip-stream at 90.

It's good on a motorway but proved to be even better on the twisty back lanes where we had a hooligan-style ride while seeking out the moorland trails. With sufficiently sharp handling and steering, decent brakes, punchy acceleration and bags of ground clearance, it's a grand scratcher's bike.

And sitting so high, you can look over

the hedges to make sure there's not a tractor and trailer or flock of sheep around the next corner!

The brakes, hydraulic disc with semi-metallic pads up front and a rear drum, work effectively. They've got two main – conflicting – requirements; to be able to haul the Ténéré down from its genuine 100mph plus top speed, yet give good feel on loose surfaces.

So, while some might criticise the front disc for being too powerful for off-road use, it has to be said that it makes a good compromise, with decent, progressive action. Likewise the rear. Moreover, despite being taken through several fords and many deep puddles, neither was affected by water.

The Ténéré's suspension package is a good one with air-assisted hydraulic front forks and Yamaha's new rising-rate Mono Cross rear suspension.

This gives a splendidly comfortable ride on the road – without a trace of flabbiness we hasten to add – and works well on the rough. The rear wheel

remained nicely in contact with the ground even on some quite rough moorland tracks.

We took the bike up to about 75mph on one open, but not particularly smooth moorland section and can report it performed remarkably well. The suspension really does its job, while the deeply-padded dual seat is up to the task.

Also helping comfort, but in a different way are the plastic hand protectors. Obviously useful for deflecting errant camels in the Paris-Dakar bash, or keeping bramble thorns out of the hands of aberrating trail riders, they also help keep the old digits warm by deflecting cold air.

Overall, it's a fact that most Ténéré's are going to clock up more miles on the black stuff than the dirt. And as a road bike it's ideal for motorway blasting, back lane scratching or as poseur tackle down the high street. In this role it is the best of the three. But as a pure dirt bike it's a touch behind the Honda and Kawasaki.

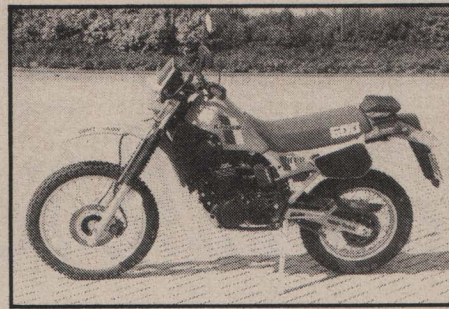
SPECIFICATIONS

HONDA XL600RE



Price, (incl VAT)	£1880
Engine	single cyl, sohc, 4-str.
Bore x stroke	100mm x 75mm
Capacity	589cc
Compression	8.6:1
Carburation	twin throat Keihin
Ignition	CDI
Max power (claimed)	43hp @ 6000rpm
Max torque (claimed)	5kg-m @ 5000rpm
Gears	Five

KAWASAKI KLR600A1



Price (incl VAT)	£1699
Engine	single cyl, dohc, 4-str liquid-cooled.
Bore x stroke	96mm x 78mm
Capacity	564cc
Compression	9.5:1
Carburation	Keihin CVK40
Ignition	CDI
Max power (claimed)	41.4hp @ 7000rpm
Max torque (claimed)	4.7kg-m @ 5500rpm
Gears	Five

YAMAHA XT600 TÉNÉRÉ



Price, (incl VAT)	£2015
Engine	single cyl, sohc, 4 valve, 4-str.
Bore x stroke	95mm x 84mm
Capacity	595cc
Compression	8.5:1
Carburation	dual throat Teikei
Ignition	CDI
Max power (claimed)	42.39hp @ 6500rpm
Max torque (claimed)	5kg-m @ 5500rpm
Gears	Five

CYCLE PARTS

Tyres	Bridgestone
Front	300 x 21
Rear	510 x 17
Brakes	
Front	hydraulic disc
Rear	SLS drum
Suspension	
Front	air-assist, 229mm travel
Rear	Pro-Link, spring adj, 230mm travel.

CYCLE PARTS

Tyres	Bridgestone
Front	300 x 21
Rear	510 x 17
Brakes	
Front	hydraulic disc
Rear	SLS drum
Suspension	
Front	air-assist, 230mm travel.
Rear	Uni-Trak, spring/damper adj, 220mm travel.

CYCLE PARTS

Tyres	Dunlop
Front	110/80 x 21
Rear	140/90 x 18
Brakes	
Front	hydraulic disc
Rear	SLS drum
Suspension	
Front	air-assist, 300mm travel.
Rear	Mono Cross, spring/damper adj, 270mm travel.

DIMENSIONS

Weight (with full tank)	140kg
Wheelbase	1420mm
Seat height	895mm
Fuel capacity (actual)	12.65 litres
Supplied by	Honda UK, Power Road, Chiswick.

DIMENSIONS

Weight (with full tank)	150kg
Wheelbase	1470mm
Seat height	870mm
Fuel capacity (actual)	12.49 litres.
Supplied by	Kawasaki Motors UK Deal Ave, Slough.

DIMENSIONS

Weight (with full tank)	160kg
Wheelbase	1485mm
Seat height	935mm
Fuel capacity (actual)	29.16 litres
Supplied by	Mitsui Yamaha, Oakcroft Road, Chessington, Surrey.