

cases and the general visual appeal is more functional than flashy. Throw a leg over the seat and you find the 'bike is neither too big for confidence of operation, nor too small for its purpose. The weight, whilst not especially low, is well distributed and the centre of gravity feels as though it's in the right place — between your ankles.

The controls all fall into place naturally enough and there are no obtrusive engine or frame parts that deter your legs from staying on the folding, serrated edge footpegs.

The XT500's trump card is torque, a whole barrel full of it. The factory claim 28.2 ft. lbs. at 5400 rpm, but that's a little academic because you can feel the 4,00 x 18 Bridgestone knobbly clawing manfully into the ground from below 1000 revs. And although there's an endearing "thump-thrump-thrump" from the XT500's motor that makes sure you know you're aboard a gutsy big single, the power delivery is so smooth and rapid that you can find yourself approaching the 8000 rpm red-line (that's right, 8000 rpm!) without really knowing what speed the engine's turning at.

However, before you take off for the turf with the XT, you have to start it. Anyone who's owned a Velocette or Goldie will quickly master the business of easing the piston over compression, using a lever on the nearside handlebar to lift the exhaust valve, before plunging down on the kickstart lever. But for the rest it may prove a frustrating series of bruised insteps as they jump bodily on the lever and hope for the best.

Once you're rolling, however, the XT500 is one sweet trailbike, especially when you consider its capacity and its weight (quoted by the factory at 317 lbs. dry, but we'd add a few more pounds if we were guessing). It rolls along incredibly smoothly, the inverted,

forward-angled rear shock absorbers matched to a brace of long-travel forks which soak up bumps as a dry sponge soaks up water. The only trouble with this suspension package is that whilst it's beautifully balanced for average trail riding, anyone who decides to play amateur moto-cross on the XT500 is going to find himself on a fire-breathing bucking bronco.

Winding up the motor and driving the machine hard around the test circuit soon had us trying to uprate the rear shocks (which proved impossible because the right tools weren't available) and wondering what grade oil Yamaha specify for the front teles. The trouble was basically two-fold. Firstly the forks bottomed every time the 'bike descended from even a halfway respectable jump, and secondly the rear end wasn't taut enough to permit power slides round the bends. There's absolutely no doubt that the XT500 could be set up to overcome such obstacles to rapid off-road transit, but as it was I found myself frustrated with so much power on hand and not enough suspension to deal with it adequately.

In fact although Yamaha claim a healthy 39 bhp in standard tune, there's obviously even more power available for anyone who wants to win enduros. For starters there's an elaborate and very restrictive exhaust system which could be replaced by a straightforward absorber system, and uprating the valve gear and carburation would naturally follow such a move.

The 'bike's weight would obviously diminish as a result of such modifications and it could be further pruned by the diligent home mechanic. (Actually Yamaha have gone to some lengths to devise an acceptable compromise between functionality and sanitation. There are alloy wheel rims, conical hub brakes and oil bearing frame, an oiled

foam rubber air-filter, trip mileometer, soft rubber handgrips and lever shrouds and Q/D plastic sidepanels which cover various electrical components, toolkit and air filter. All of these are concessions to the serious off-roader, but the XT500 will surely find itself covering more tarmac than turf in the hands of most of its British owners and therefore the 'bike is strong on such things as lighting equipment, upholstery and, as we've already mentioned, exhaust silencing.)

I came away from Yamaha's press launch sufficiently impressed and intrigued with the XT500 by the XT500's promise of classic big single status to arrange a longer relationship with the 'bike.

### **YAMAHA TY50P "The introduction of Yamaha's TY50P to the UK market ... is a significant sign of the direction in which the motorcycling market is turning."**

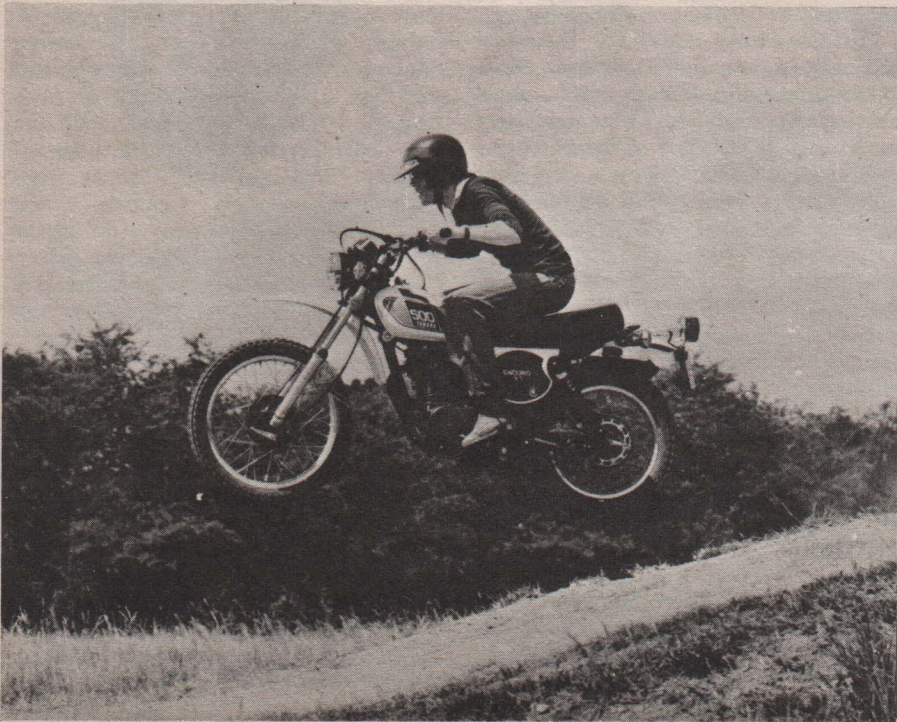
Thus read the press release announcing the entry of the first Japanese manufacturer into a market long catered for by just about every European producer of 'performance' mopeds, namely those whacky 50cc trail/enduro 'bikes endowed with pedals as a rather transparent gesture to licensing laws.

The blurb went on to explain that here at last was a machine that could satisfy the needs of the teenager with off-road aspirations but a restrictive licence and/or bank account, ignoring the fact that Messrs. Garrelli, Fantic, Malaguti, Gilera etc., etc., have been producing such machinery for some years. So one could perhaps assume that with the TY50P, Yamaha have taken the time to develop a machine of such overwhelming superiority in its field that they could afford to ignore the existence of the the established opposition.

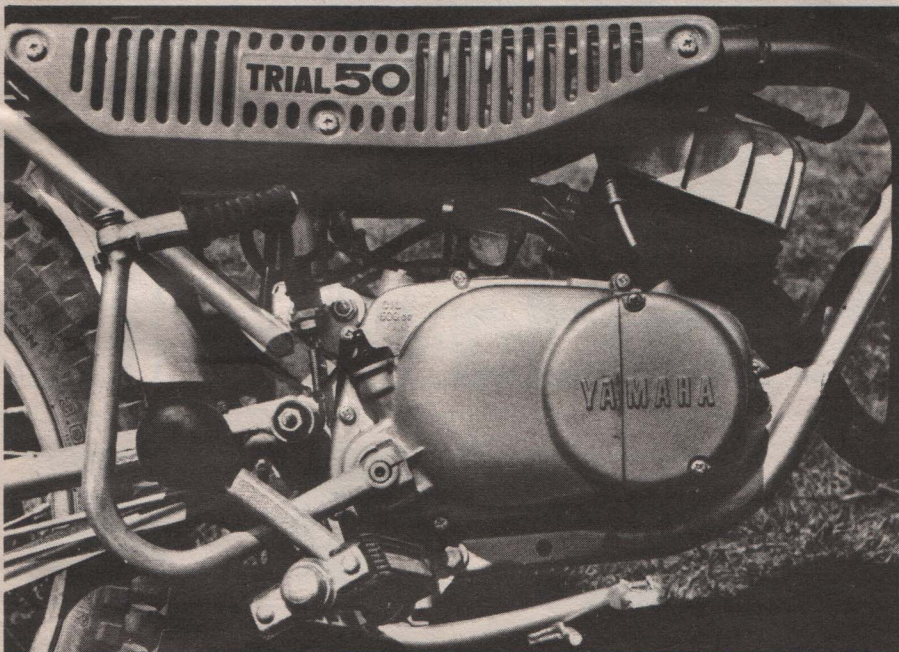
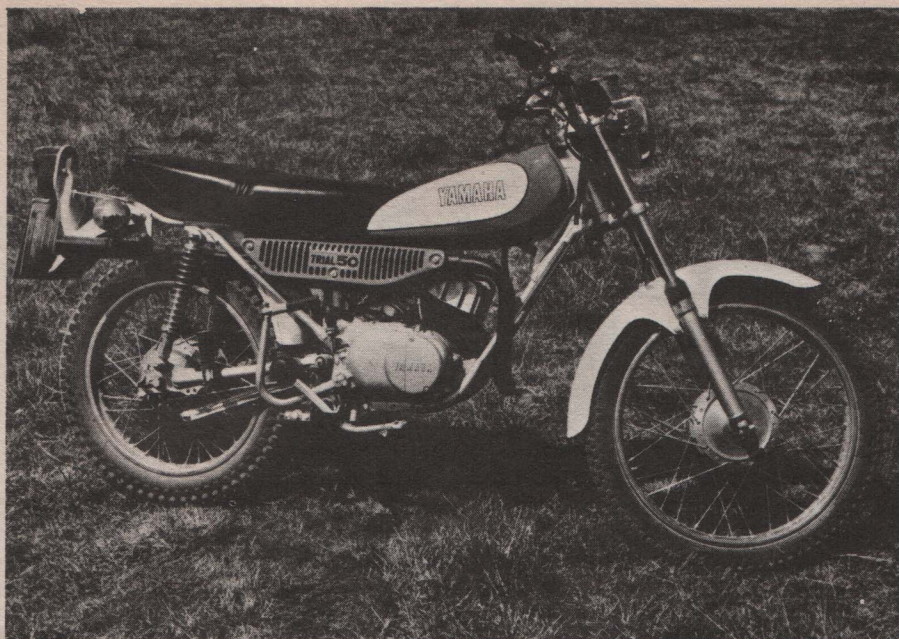
After taking the TY50P around the same test course as its considerably heftier big brother, I'm afraid that this is manifestly not the case.

The TY50P's power unit is, we were told, a derivative of various engines used in 'bikes unavailable in the UK and shares few components with Yamaha's highly successful FS1E 'sixteener specials'. It's a reed valve induction, conventionally ported 'stroker with almost exactly square dimensions of 40 x 39.7 mm and a low-ish compression ratio of 6.8:1 which shoves out 2.9 bhp @ 5500 rpm. (The current FS1E, by comparison, develops 4.8 bhp @ 7000 rpm from exactly the same bore and stroke and a 7.1:1 compression ratio, so we can at least assume that the piston and con-rods are identical.)

Now compared with the Italian enduro-peds, the TY50P's power output is somewhat diminutive, even allowing for a little Latin exaggeration (e.g. Malaguti Cavalcione 6.5 @ 8500, Cimatti Kaiman 6 @ 8500). Yet it has one less







gear than most of the five-speed Italian opposition and a bit more weight to lug around than all of them. So straightaway you will come to the same conclusion on paper as I rapidly came to on the track; the TY50P is significantly underpowered for the sort of job it is supposed to do.

That is not to say that the TY50P can't climb steep banks or lug across muddy ruts, for the machine is low geared and hauls well enough from low revs, thanks in part to its reed valve. But it lacks urgency and there was an appreciable lapse between grabbing open the throttle and actually accelerating. The trick proved to be simply holding the twistgrip wide open and stamping through the gears as quickly as possible, although I must say that the selector mechanism was an inconsistent as that on the FS1E, with neutral remaining annoyingly elusive whilst the engine was turning.

Doubtless the problems of gear-changing may be partially attributed to the relationship between gearshift and the pedals which look in position (after

a somewhat complicated set of manoeuvres) to provide a resting place for one's feet. Actually "lock" is a misnomer, for they have an inch or two's play and therein lies the problem of course. Actually the pedals are, as on most high performance mopeds, somewhat spurious, for there is a conventional kick-start which is bent in a contorted fashion to avoid snagging the pedal shaft. Like myself, most of the journalists at the press launch found this kick-start rather ineffectual in operation, maybe because it had such a limited travel. Once running, however, the motor performed quietly, ticker over smoothly and failed to gas up on steep descents.

In their sales literature Yamaha, perhaps wisely, concentrate on the TY50P's chassis and suspension rather than its engine performance. And indeed the duplex frame looks tough and the long travel front forks certainly look beefy enough to grace a machine over twice its capacity. But come nitty-gritty time and once again it's another story.

The TY50P has a short wheelbase, but that's no reason why it should skidaddle all over the place when ridden as fast as possible (only about 30mph) over a marginally rutted scrambles course. The first time I tried to lay the TY50P into a corner in the fashion I normally reserve for small on/off road 'bikes (i.e. change down, left foot on the ground, body well forward in the saddle, touch of rear brake to get the thing sliding then judicious acceleration out of the corner), the rear suspension bottomed, thereby allowing the rear tyre to wedge itself against the fender which sent the whole machine weaving sideways across the bend. Unable to correct my line at that stage, I chose to drive out as gracefully as I could, unwisely assuming that the front end would be able to cope with the deep ruts that bordered the exit to the bend. Silly me. The front suspension bottomed straightaway and within two yards had thrown me off the 'bike, breaking a rib on the handlebar as I descended ignominiously on top of it.

Later I discovered, somewhat more cautiously, that the forks would bottom from whatever height you could muster enough power to jump from. Indeed the whole 'bike felt frail and unsuited to off-road use. Despite its beguiling appearance the TY50P felt more like a bog-standard moped than practically any other enduro-ped I've ridden. In view of the excellence of the rest of Yamaha's off-road range, many of which I've ridden and raced, this was a big let down.

Nonetheless, for the youngster who is likely to confine most of his riding to the road but who goes for the dirt-bike image, the TY50P is a sensible enough choice. It will clearly meet the requirements of the upcoming revised moped legislation, it looks pretty natty in its red and white livery, it's backed by the after sales service of one of Britain's major importers and, you guessed it, it's the cheapest machine of its type on the market.

*Mark Williams*

