

TWO -STROKES OR FOUR? SUZUKI TS250XE VERSUS HONDA XR250RF THE SAME OLD QUESTION

Oh no. Here we go again with one of ADB's most favourite of all dirt biking topics; the battle between two-strokes and four-strokes. This time round it is the 250cc trail/come fun/come enduro playbike class where Honda's XR250 and Suzuki's TS250 are the most popular choices for the majority of buyers.

Our young staffer, Mister Clubb, recently found himself in the position of choosing between the two, and seeing as he is fairly representative of the people who buy these bikes, we thought the story of what factors swung his decision over which bike to get would make interesting reading to all prospective XR or TS owners.

The twelve months up to the beginning of this year were a pretty quiet time for me as far as dirt bike riding went, but as far as dirt bike watching went, they were as hectic as hell. Nearly every weekend was spent reporting on one motocross, supercross or enduro event or another from one end of the country to the other (literally). So, like I said, riding dirt bikes took a back seat to taking notes and taking photos during 1984.

But joining ADB late in the year meant all that would change for 1985, with the first of my priorities for the new year being the matter of getting a bike. But ah, which one?

Good question. Ever since I went oh-so-close to wiping myself from the face of the earth by trying jump the practice double jumps on the Hungry Creek supercross tracks, I resigned myself to the fact that I will never (repeat; **never**) make as

good a motocrosser as Jeff Leisk or Vaughan Style.

And as far as trials goes, well, despite all the respect I have for what a good trials rider can do with his machine, that branch of the sport really doesn't tickle my fancy from a competitor's point of view.

So what's left? Enduros or just plain, good ol' trailriding.

Like a lot of other riders, this is the area in which my dirt bike riding interests lie. Any dirt bike I would commit myself to buying would have to be able to offer reasonable trail/enduro performance but at the same time combine bearable on-road manners for short jaunts into town and trips out to riding areas alike.

That last statement about on-road manners sure cut down the new bike field. Competition bred enduro machines such as the KTMs, Maicos and Husqvarnas were instantly dropped from the list, which was just as well be-

cause to be totally honest, I probably wouldn't know what to do with all the off-road performance they offer. A competition rider I'm not. For a while, an IT or KDX looked tempting but again, these bikes didn't rate too highly in on-road performance.

Very, very quickly, I found myself faced with having to buy a humble little trailbike, although Honda's XR250 was always lurking in the background, being half trailbike and half enduro machine. Having owned an XR350 for some time when they first came out, I knew I could easily learn to like another XR.

A 250cc machine was settled on, mainly because of their cheaper initial purchase price and lower registration and insurance costs, but also because I didn't feel any need to have own a heavy great 600.

Of the present crop of 250 trailbikes, Suzuki's new TS250X is my favourite as it combines an instantly responsive two-stroke motor with light, nimble handling on the road and excellent (by trailbike standards) performance off the road.

So finally, the contenders came down to just two, the TS and the XR.

WHICH ONE THOUGH?

After riding both the TS and the XR when we had the bikes on test, you could say I had a fair indication of the high points and the handicaps both bikes had to offer.

As far as road riding goes, the Suzuki is the obvious choice, due purely to the much more civilised way it goes about performing this task. Road riding on the XR is an exercise in frustration as the super low gearing fitted as standard limits the bike to a comfortable maximum speed well below 100kmh. At these sort of speeds the XR is revving its head off and the way the bike vibrates makes constant high speed running unbearable. The TS on the other hand is much, much smoother and will comfortably run out to maximum speed up around 130-140kmh. Plus, the TS will easily pull away from the XR from a standing start, with the rider of the XR being hampered by constantly reaching for another gear. Clearly, the XR is in desperate need of a change to a smaller rear sprocket for sustained road usage.

The XR's IRC Vulcanduro knobby tyres don't last too long when riding on the tar and the Suzuki's Dunlop dual purpose tyres are much better. So if you are going to road ride the XR, a change of tyres is going to be another expense, along with the change of gearing.

The TS is an easy starter. It's first kick, hot or cold every time. The XR is a different matter though and can start first up sometimes but can take ages at other times. The XR also takes much longer to warm up than the TS.

As far as ancillaries go, the TS comes out in front again with its ignition switch, bright 12 volt headlight, helmet locks, pillion pegs and super quiet exhaust note. The TS features CCI oil injection, so un-



like race-only two-stroke machines, you don't have to worry about mixing oil and fuel. Super grade petrol goes straight into the steel tank and the oil into a reservoir which is accessible by unlocking and lifting off the seat. There is even a warning light on the instrument panel to tell you when the oil reservoir is running low.

The water-cooled engine on the Suzuki should prove to rate well in the long term reliability stakes. The XR on the other hand is earning itself something of a questionable reputation with regards to correct engine lubrication. A wary eye on the XR's engine oil level is a must, as is regular servicing.

So far, it sounds like the TS is an obvious choice. And it is, if much of your riding is to be done on the road. It's been designed to cater for a big percentage of road usage

whereas the XR has been designed primarily for off road use. The TS may look all the world like an RM with lights but there is no escaping the fact it is a trailbike in the true sense of the word and has the usual compromising traits associated with trying to design a bike to perform admirably well in two totally opposed types of riding. Although the TS is an easy winner for on-road riding, when you get both bikes in the bush, you quickly learn the TS isn't all it looks and as far as I'm concerned, the XR runs rings around it.

First of all, the XR is a much more confidence inspiring mount than the TS. It has a much lighter, lower and manoeuvrable feel thanks to its narrower tank/seat junction and shorter wheelbase. It is so much easier to throw around and have fun on that it isn't funny.

It will chug along at idle and you can usually bound your way from one obstacle to the next whereas the TS needs much more careful attention to making sure you keep the revs up while at the same time working the clutch to make sure the whole show doesn't stall on you.

In the suspension department, the XR comes out ahead again by virtue of its much better performance at both ends. While both bikes offer travel of around 250mm at both ends, the XR's forks and Pro-Link are obviously designed to handle rougher off-road conditions than the suspension on the TS which is designed for both On and off road use. While the TS is good compared to its 250cc trailbike opposition (the XL, XT and KLR), it's just not as good in the bush as a purpose built off road

machine like the XR. The only time I preferred the TS in the bush was in more open, faster going where you could use the bike's more responsive engine to your advantage and really get the whole show going at a decent sort of pace. In this sort of riding, the suspension was more up to the task and I'd take the TS over the XR any day. But...

Most of my dirt riding is spent more towards the enduro end of the trailbike scale and like I said before, this is where the XR is right in its element. It is so much easier to ride in these conditions plus it has a whole host of enduro fittings like the smaller, less vulnerable headlight and blinkers, tool bag, hand guards, well protected engine (unlike the TS's very vulnerable exhaust pipe), rim locks, knobby tyres, grease nipples on

the rear suspension linkages and 16-way compression and 4-way damping adjustments on the Pro Link. All these features will come in handy too if and when I get around to pulling my finger out and start entering some events.

So, the bottom line is, I chose the XR for the reasons outlined in the last few paragraphs concerning the two bikes' off-road performance. The XR is the better machine for primarily dirt usage, so that's why I bought one. That's the kind of riding I intend to do so I'm willing to sacrifice some on-road civility for the sake of better dirt performance. If my interests lay the other way and I wanted a five day a week commuter bike which offered reasonable off-road performance, well, I would have been down to the local Suzuki dealer too sweet.

Photography by Andrew Clubb

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