

# australasian DIRT BIKE

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1979 \$1.65

Southerners \$1.65  
**MIKE  
LANDMAN  
MARK HILL**

The Power and the Glory

## **SUZUKI RM400N**

Cruising down  
mainstreet

## **YAMAHA XT500F**

## **Caterisms Part 2**

Shortening the odds,  
increasing the choice

## **YAMAHA IT175F SUZUKI PE175N**



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NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1979  
VOL. 4, NO. 2

australasian  
**DIRT  
BIKE**

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## PEOPLE

EDITOR: Geoff Eldridge.  
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS: Rick Verren, Garry Treadwell, Warren Jack, John Lethlean.  
PHOTOGRAPHY: Michael Andrews, Warren Jack, Bruce Dryburgh, Geoff Eldridge, Susan Nivison, Barry Marshall, Philip Eldridge.  
LAYOUT AND DESIGN: Geoff Eldridge.

Managing Director: David Yaffa  
Sales Manager: Adrian O'Mara  
Advertising Manager: Claus Bjarnoe

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**COVER:** Some like them powerful. Some like them to handle well. Others just like to have whatever is up with the forefront of design. This machine embodies the lot in one beautiful package. The RM400N.

Photograph by Michael Andrews, after ADB's trusty Pentax gave up the ghost on a critical day of shooting. RIP.

\*Recommended and maximum price only





## MINITEST:

# YAMAHA XT500F

There has to be a good reason why this is Yamaha's biggest selling registerable dirt bike.

**W**hy did you buy one?" The question seemed to be the only question which could have been asked in the circumstances. It was the afternoon we first picked up the XT; it was parked on the driveway outside a house in suburbia, the two-stroke oriented rider giving it a series of hefty four-stroke type kicks in an attempt to fire it up; the onlooker had come up so quietly he wasn't even noticed until he said "Give it a little throttle, roll it on as you kick it through. It should go then." It did. He smiled as if he knew it would.

As it turned out, there was every reason that he should have known: he owned one (his second), and both his father and brother each owned one. They went up and bought them all together.

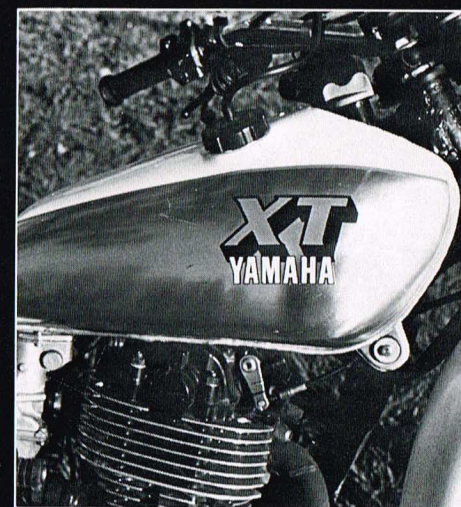
He had stopped to look at our bike only to ask if there had been any trouble with the cam chain. It seemed his, and those of his father and brother, wore out in next to no time. At least, on their F models they did: the chain on his old D was fine for some 20,000 kilometres. He wondered if ours was the same.

Anyway, talk rolled on about the XTs, until it just seemed the natural thing to do to ask him why he, and his family, bought them. His answer perhaps sums it up best.

"Oh, I ride it to work every day, and it's good for that. And occasionally I take it out in the bush, shooting; I do a lot of doubling. Besides, I started on an XL250 Honda, and I just wanted a big four-stroke..."

That's it. All of it. We figure that XT500 Yamahas are bought mostly by these people: people who need a hack bike to do all their normal routine transport on, yet who are people who have a basic mistrust of those dirty, smelly two-strokes. And a 500cc single, even today, means something in the mind of even the most non-enthusiast rider. Most of these people will only ever take their XTs off the road for things like a shooting trip, a friendly jaunt with some mates who ride dirt as rarely as themselves, or to go camping or whatever. Granted, a few will take their XTs far more seriously.

At the Lance Watson earlier this year, for example, we watched in desperation as a stubborn XT500 rider wrestled and pushed and cursed his way over a tricky rock ledge in the Saturday special test. As he sat at the top, exhausted, his bike looking much the worse for wear, we had to call out, "Why don'tcha get rid of that pile of lard and get something which works?". The reaction on his face was one of instant disgust: he sneered heavily, felt a sudden return of strength, somehow fired up the beast, and pressed on to show us that 500s weren't as



Polished tank and new graphics constitute the main changes.

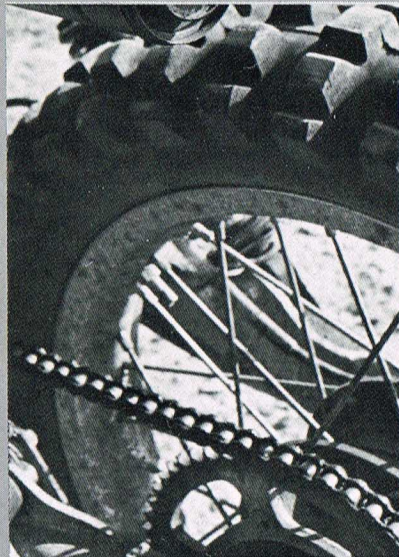
All manner or spendo enduro accoutrements abound on the bike, like a nifty chain tensioner hidden safely out of harm's way. But don't be fooled. The XT is an enduro in disguise only.

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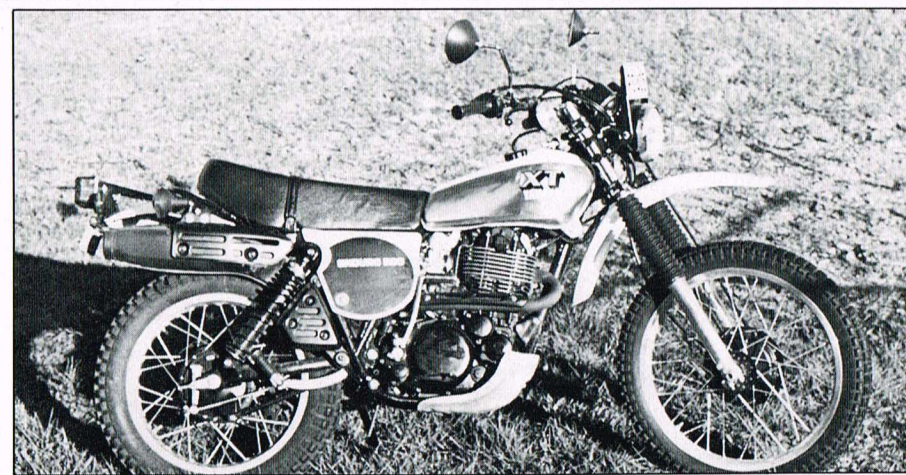
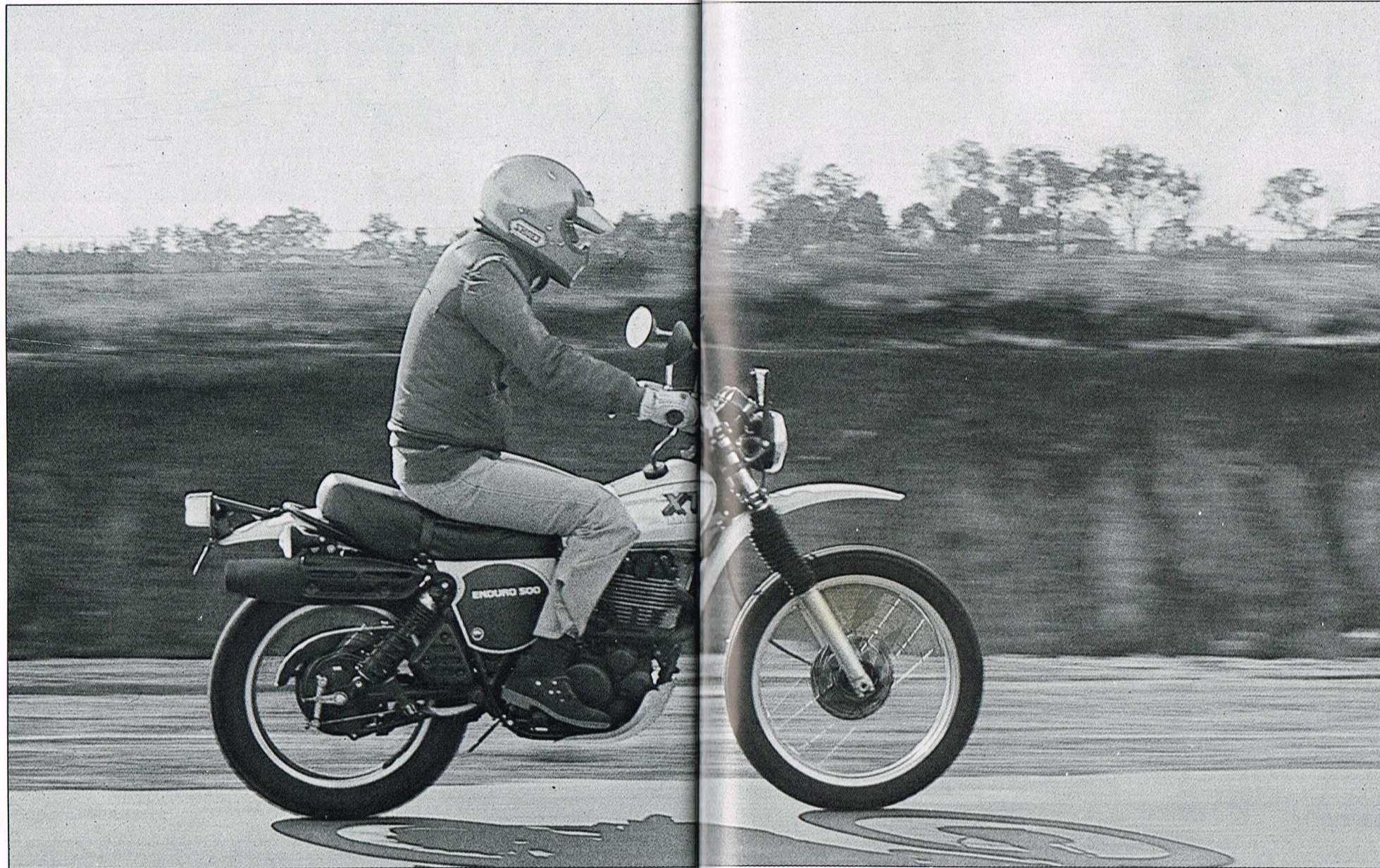


We now cater for all types of repair work — from small adjustments to major rebuilds. And as well as our proven port layouts we offer complete tuning on any engine, design and production of expansion chambers, cylinder grinding, manufacture of water-cooled heads, and machining of special parts for home tuners.

### MINI CYCLE MOTOR REBUILDS

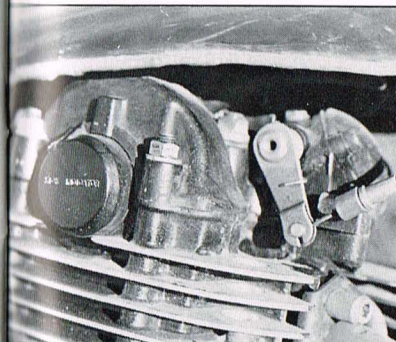
We also specialise in mini-bike motor rebuilds. If you've got a mini-bike which is worn out or which you want more power from, bring it to us.

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It doesn't look much different to the D or E model, does it? It isn't. Visual changes are all there are, but why change a good thing when sales are going well? As a

dirt bike, it is fair to middling: no more, no less. As a transporter, it is excellent, and helps you understand why these things have such a loyal following.



One change, and just about the only detail change, is the little cam view window to allow you to tell when the engine is ready to fire. We found that starting was easiest on the sidestand, using the right leg. You can clearly see the valve lifter arm in this shot.

difficult to get along with as we'd assumed.

There was no way known to Man that he would ever consider getting something else.

And with the XT500, that's what you are dealing with. There is no identifiable fault with this, either. These people simply know what they like, be it for reasons of having a big four-stroke single, having a bike which is definitely different to everyone else's, or using a dirt bike as a road bike.

Whatever the reasons, though, there is one which is universal. That engine! All 499cc of it. And it is everything it is cracked up to be, with one or two minor inconsistencies. We said about the Honda XL/XR 500 that they weren't very good at climbing hills; and by that, we meant HILLS. Not your innocent pussy-fotting slopes, but real hills. For a lot of reasons to do with the design of big capacity four-stroke singles, these engines will never, ever, cut it on a difficult hill. The XT is no exception. It exhibits the exact same traits as the Honda: it will stall easily, it is difficult to restart in such a situa-

tion, and you can really feel those power pulsations.

Apart from that, like the Honda, the Yamaha engine is pure pleasure to use, the extra vibration notwithstanding (the Honda has those brilliant counterbalancers, remember? Vibration is minimised, remember?). A small picture window is provided in the head so that you can tell by the white spot when the engine is at the right point to fire up. There is a valve lifter on the left side of the bars to facilitate this. Once it is all fired up and rumping away nicely, you can expect a return of some 100 kilometres per five litres of fuel. Not too bad in these days of petrol shortages.

Visually, the F model XT has changed very little from the previous line. They left the tank in polished alloy with a bit of paintwork along the top, and they changed the graphics of the tank logo. Colour of the sidecovers has also been changed. Apart from all that, it is still the same beast people have grown to know and either love or hate.

As far as we were concerned, there was no particular interest in taking the XT off the road for any great dirt test. We've done it in the past, with earlier model test bikes (once even going so far as to enter one in the BP Desert Rally and finishing a satisfying 76th out of 700, but swearing never to do it again), and saw no real need to do it again.

What was done instead was to use it as everyday hack transport, and for this the XT is perfect. Fuel economy is surprisingly good, the powerband is excellent and always has some reserves for those occasions you need to power on, handling on the road is just fine, with plenty of ground clearance and suspension which is superior to what is usually found on road bikes.

After a while, the XT assumes a different identity when you use it in this way, and it isn't hard to see why one-time owners would front up for a second model when it was time to update.

There's something about taking a set of sweeping curves on a 500cc single with decent road-going suspension. And the graphics aren't too bad either.

## XT500

### SPECIFICATIONS

<b>ENGINE</b>	
Type	4-stroke, Single SOHC
Displacement	499 cc
Bore & Stroke	87 x 84 mm
Compression ratio	9.0 : 1
Max. torque	3.9 kg-m @ 5,500 rpm
Lubrication system	Pressure-feed dry sump
Starting system	Primary kick starter
Transmission	5-speed gearbox
<b>DIMENSIONS</b>	
Overall length	2,155 mm
Overall width	875 mm
Overall height	1,180 mm
Wheelbase	1,420 mm
Min. ground clearance	225 mm
<b>WEIGHT (NET)</b>	148 kg
<b>FUEL TANK CAPACITY</b>	8.8 lit.
<b>OIL CAPACITY</b>	2.2 lit.
<b>TIRES</b> front	3.00-21-4PR
rear	4.00-18-4PR