

ATTITUDE REVERSAL

YAMAHA'S TT600 IN COMPETITION

They say time changes everything. Nothing could be truer when you talk about four-strokes. Once the greatest thing since Mae West, time's unstoppable march introduced the deadly two-stroke on them. But now they are fighting back and the TT600 is right there in the front line of the battle.

**by Geoff Eldridge
2nd, Qld Four-Stroke Championships, TT600**

Special thanks must be given to Cairns Yamaha, and in particular jovial Glen Jacobs whose ex-Finke TT600 received yet another hiding at the hands of a crazed ADB rider.

What have we said in the pages of ADB all along about four-strokes? That they aren't really competitive against two-strokes in open competition, right?

What's the best way to prove it? Enter one in an open competition, right? So, dammit, that's what I decided to do.

But not just any competition. A biggie. The Queensland Enduro Titles in Cairns (see elsewhere in this issue for an on-the-spot story). The reasoning was, of course, to win the title and then sit down and write it up from the position of Champion to tell all the four-strokes that we were right all along. Nothing boosts magazine sales as much as adding a little extra fuel to a raging controversy.

Along the way, however, a couple of minor things went wrong. First, ADB didn't win the title — Allan Cunynghame did, on his XR350 Honda. Second, the damn bike wasn't as bad as we imagined it would be. Third, some (not all) of our beliefs about four-strokes in competition were off-base.

Here's the full story.

The main thing I was worried

about beforehand was starting the monster. After all, 600cc four-stroke singles aren't your average KDX200. The day before the event that's about all I did — start it, over and over. Seemed pretty easy, too, I might add. Kick'er over slowly till the automatic valve lifter clicked, raise the lever right back to the top, no throttle, and kick hard. From hot, full throttle. Naturally, next morning I failed the coldstart test by something like ten minutes; damn thing would **not** start. I decided there and then that come what may I wasn't going to let it stall even once during the whole two days, because I figured that trying to start it on the side of a hill would be near impossible.

Almost succeeded, too — only stalled her once in 700 kms. Mind you, I also failed the cold start test on the second day. But next day, away from the hoots and catcalls of the Cairns four-stroke boys, the TT started first kick and I was hardly even trying! That was surprise number one: it needed a technique which I obviously didn't have, but after all it wasn't near as bad as I remembered other big singles to start.

Next, I figured 700 kms of tough enduro trails and keeping to tight times would leave me exhausted. Wrong. The TT has such nice weight distribution that it felt nothing like its weight of 270 lbs, it steered so well that tight bush was no effort, and the suspension worked, simple as that. I'm not fit, and I wasn't anywhere near tired.

My next surprise was that after day one I started to think the bike was competitive. You know, against two-strokes. Previously, I'd always gone out with groups of riders who would have both two and four-strokes when we tested a four-stroke, and it was always clear that riding a four-stroke competitively required more effort to achieve slower times. After a whole day with no other bike to ride and compare it to, the TT600 felt unreal. But one look at the special test times I did convinced me that it was self delusion. About the only place the TT could beat a two-stroke was down all the good dirt roads. Lot of fun there. Elsewhere, the two-strokes definitely have the edge, just as we always thought.

This isn't said out of malice, either. I loved the bike, and was glad I rode it. And it helped me understand what four-stroke owners see in them, just as it made it clear that they are getting more competitive each year.

The TT600 is a leader of thumpers as far as we can see. Next year they'll be even better, the year after that better again, and maybe the year after that you will be able to put one face-to-face against any race bike and see it come off even.

Until then, having a four-stroke class in competition will still be necessary.



FOOTNOTE

In no way does the above mention riding four-strokes on trailrides or for fun or to work each day. Like the title says, "Yamaha's TT600 in competition". We still think four-strokes make great fun bikes.

