

GIANT TEST **beating the**

Bill Haylock and Mike Nicks find good times on Honda's CB200, Suzuki's GT185, and Yamaha's RD200

BUYING YOUR first bike is easy enough if your heart is set on one particular model and you've got the cash ready. But what if your fluttering little mind won't get decisive? That first set of wheels is an important choice, because chances are you'll have to live with it for quite a while before you're earning enough to buy the Z-1 that Keith Emerson'll be trading in next year. Yet your mates give out such a conflicting load of advice/prejudice/plain claptrap that in the end you're growing more dubious by the day. Play cautious and stick to the bus? Well, do it that way if you like, but the pick 'n' mix counter floozies in Woollies won't be impressed if the best you can offer is a slow ride home on the 19A two hours before the music stops down the disco.

So, in a philanthropic attempt to clear at least a little of the confusion, here's a Giant Test devoted to three of the bikes a first time buyer or a graduate from sixteenner specials is likely to end up owning. The contenders are the nifty Japanese offerings in the 200 cc class — Honda's CB200, brand new this year, and the Suzuki GT185 and the Yamaha RD200, both of which have been running around for a while now.

The CB came from the Honda folk themselves down in Chiswick, but getting the two-strokes wasn't so easy. Telephoned on two occasions separated by a period of weeks, the Suzy and Yam people said they hadn't got test samples of their 200s on the road, didn't foresee having any ready in the near future, and showed no interest in doing us (and themselves) a favour by making special arrangements to supply the necessary bikes. Ah well, we're only the fastest growing motorcycle publication in the UK. The non-co-operation from Yamaha was particularly odd, since they've been placing big ads for the RD200 in the motorcycle press.

However, thanks instead to a couple of helpful London dealers, Daytona Motorcycles of Ruislip Manor, and RB Racing Equipe of Leyton, who came up with low-mileage used specimens of the desired scoots just like that, as the saying goes.

And now here's what we thought of the valiant 200s...



honda CB200

HONDA'S unassuming little 175 is a bike that must have given much pleasure to many people over the past five years. Lots of bikers have had a happy introduction to biking by courtesy of the four-stroke twin in both its CD and CB guises, because it was good value and perhaps the most viceless machine of the whole Honda range.

Well, of course, nothing stays the same for long in the frenetic pace of the Japanese motorcycle industry, and the 175 had weathered the winds of change longer than a lot of bikes. But it had to change in the

end and so it's been re-incarnated in the form of a full-blown 200 that'll probably make as many contented bikers as its predecessor. The CB200 is more sophisticated than the 175 and has flashier styling, but it is still basically a pleasant, practical and economical motorcycle.

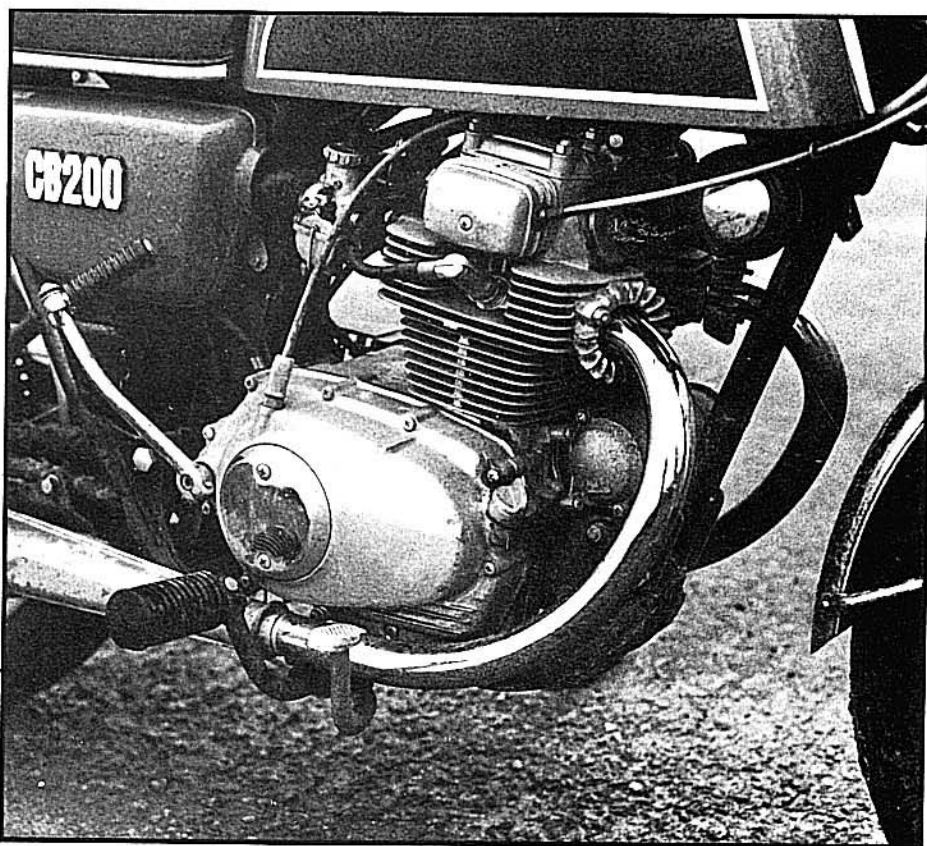
Regrettably perhaps, the new Hondas have tended to become more staid, partly at least because of the factory's awareness of the problems of noise and exhaust pollution. The CB200 produces roughly the same performance as the old CB175, and was the slowest of the three test bikes, recording 79.21 mph through the speed trap. It does feel a bit flat after riding around on the Suzuki and Yamaha, but at least it's easier on juice than those greedy strokers.

Anyway, the Honda's single overhead cam, four-stroke power does have compensations. It sounds nice, a deep subdued roar

first~bike blues



PHOTOGRAPHY ROBERT SCOTT



Left: The Red Arrows ain't got nuthin on our intrepid testers as they sweep through the wet in tight formation at . . . 30 mph?

Above: The CB200 was the only four-stroke among the test trio, and sports Honda's customary overhead camshaft valve operation.

making a pleasant change after the Suzuki that crackles and pops like Noddy's favourite breakfast cereal. It has better engine braking too, and generally gives the feeling that you're riding a bigger bike. The power characteristics are totally different from the two-strokes. The rev range is amazing with a steady flow of power from three thou to near on 10,000. It's smooth with it, too, so you find yourself pulling a higher gear than you would on the faster strokers. It's easy to send the needle swinging into the red if you don't keep an eye on the tach when buzzing the motor. Whereas the two-strokes noticeably come onto their power band and then lose steam before they reach the red, the Honda's power is smooth and consistent through the rev range.

Only thing that mars a smooth and otherwise pleasant power unit is a carburation fault causing hesitant pick-up from low spe-

eds. The motor stutters as you open the throttle coming out of a bend and this doesn't help smooth riding, especially in traffic. I don't know what causes it, but it's something Honda should look at because the same fault, only worse, manifested itself in the CB360 we tested in the last issue.

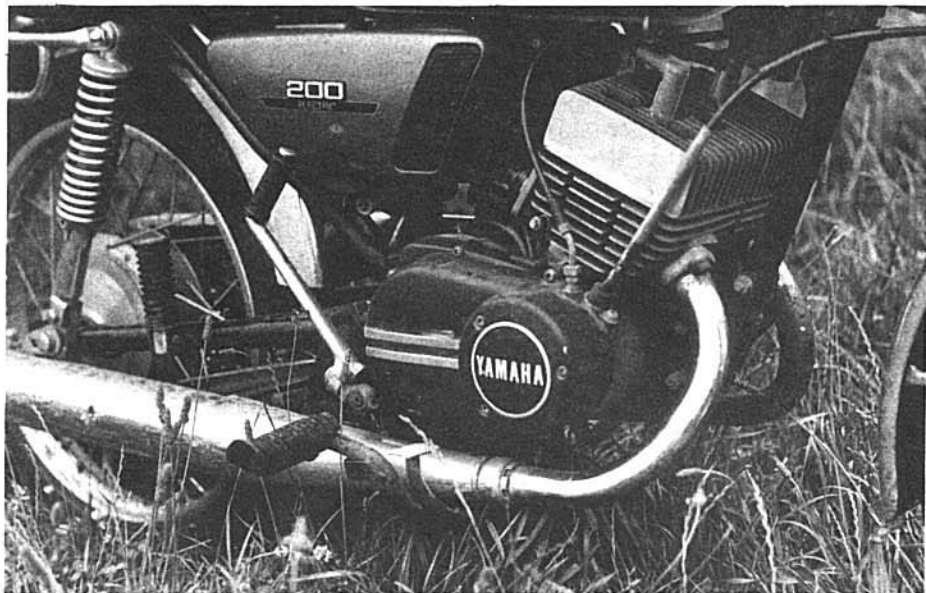
The motor's ancestry is evident, externally looking much like the 175, but it's history goes back further than that, in fact. It can be traced back to the 125 cc CB92, through the CB160. Of course there have been drastic changes, but the most radical differences are in the cycle parts and styling. We're not treated to the sophistication of the disc front brake that our American cousins get, but the machine looks pretty smooth compared to the 175. It appears slimmer for a start with that narrow, slab sided tank. That tank shape is quite a departure from the current trend of Jap sty-

ling and helps to make the bike more distinctive and I personally like it.

Re-styled rubber gaitered forks, slimmer headlight and totally exposed rear springs all help to make the bike look snappy despite the fact that the rear half of the machine, on careful inspection, appears almost identical to the 175. Some of the styling details are a bit gimmicky, like the plastic strip that runs along the centre of the tank from seat to filler cap, but Honda aren't the worst offenders with this sort of ostentation.

The handling complaints levelled at the Suzuki also apply to the Honda, but even more so. Honda's have been barracked often enough in road tests about the inadequate damping of the rear suspension, but they haven't done anything about it. I put the springs at their hardest setting and left them there, but the bike still wallowed

Right: Both the Yamaha and Suzuki strokers have handsome engine/transmission packages. The Suzy is distinguished by its "Ram Air" ducting shield above the cylinder heads.



around on all roads other than smooth motorways. With a passenger the rear suspension was continually bottoming. In a strong wind the stodgy handling became quite frightening, and on our windswept test track a combination of speed, bumps and almost gale-force cross winds really made life interesting. It was impossible to aim through the 20ft gap between the speed trap lights unless, to allow for the drift, I started on the left hand side of the track in order to pass through the traps set up on the right hand edge. And that track is 50 yards wide! The Yamaha, by far the best handling of the three, felt much safer.

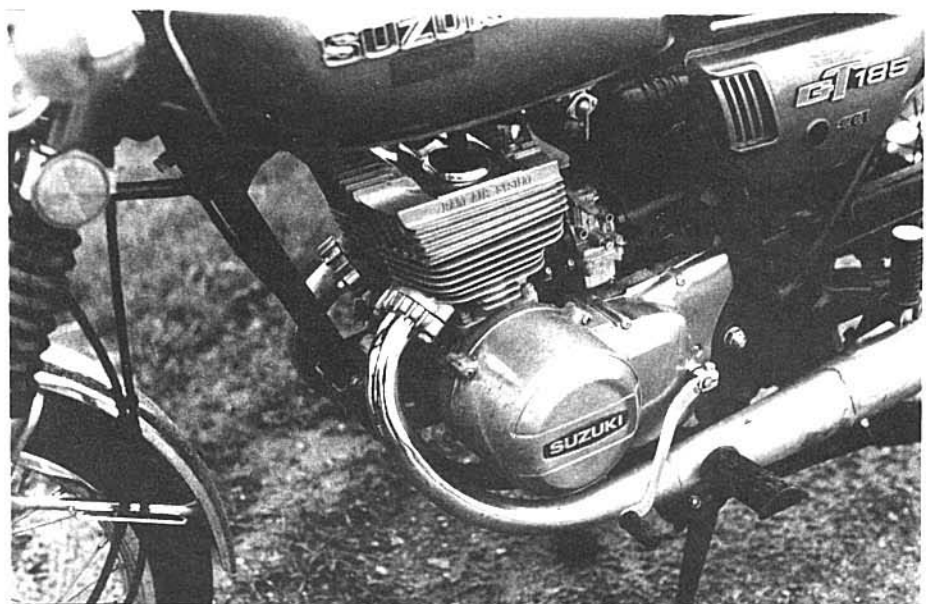
However, round town the handling is light and easy and gives you the confidence to squeeze through the narrowest gaps in snarled up traffic, and the brakes, while not the most powerful, were pleasant to use and adequate to keep you out of trouble.

When it comes to long distance cruising, the Honda doesn't seem so happy about sustaining the sort of speed the Suzuki was capable of. About 65 seemed the maximum for any distance, and headwinds or gradients sometimes reduced that to between 45 and 50mph. The consolation is that it does 50 per cent more miles to the gallon.

Personally, I found the bike a bit cramped, and although facilities for carrying a passenger are excellent, with a grab rail round the rear of the comfortable seat, the riding position when I sat forward felt weird and must have looked even more ridiculous — I was all knees and elbows.

The Honda's switch gear isn't very handy; for a start I don't know why we still have to grope around under the petrol tank to insert the key, when all the other Jap bikes have well positioned switches between the instruments. And then there's that silly headlight switch mounted on the headlamp shell and obscured by the instruments so you have to stop the bike and peer over the front to switch on the lights. As for the lights themselves, well they're OK, just about, for the bike's performance. Indicators on the Honda show more thought in their positioning than either the Suzuki or Yamaha, being set wide apart for better prominence.

For those of you whose ambitions are curtailed by the size of your pocket, the CB200 will make a good substitute till you can afford that 500 Four. It might not be the fastest thing around, but somehow it looks and feels more like a real motorcycle than its two-stroke counterparts. It's a little bike with a big heart.



suzuki GT 185

WE ALL KNOW how disgustingly quick the fiendish Japanese make their small bore roadsters go these days, and how the Ministry Meanies decided the innocent, vulnerable youth of the nation should be safeguarded against the dangers of such speed machines until they suddenly become responsible citizens at the age of 17.

Perhaps they were right about the danger, but it isn't the kind they imagined. No, the real hazard is other people who can't stand the humiliation of being overtaken by a runaway knitting machine zipping along at illegitimate speeds.

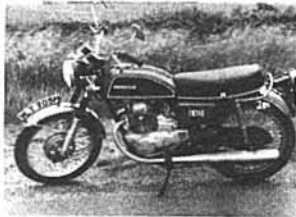
Landed me right in trouble when I was riding the Suzuki 185, it did. Just minding

my own business, I was, cruisin' down the A1 north of Newark when I saw an evil black cloud rolling southwards like a plague. As I got closer I saw a bunch of the filthiest and meanest looking specimens of humanity imaginable mounted on the cause of that noxious cloud of smoke, a collection of indescribably dirty and tatty contraptions only recognisable as bikes by the fact that they travelled on two wheels.

Obviously they hadn't stomped any old ladies or had a gang-bang all afternoon, and the sight of me flashing past twenty mph faster on such a puny machine was just too much for them. Sure enough, one of the bikes peeled out of the bunch to give chase as I went past. Just as well there was only one capable of exceeding 50 mph.

Seems they wanted to liven up a boring journey with a not-so-friendly game of cat and mouse and it wasn't too hard to guess who was going to play mouse. First of all they rode up alongside while the passenger contorted his grimy face into a mean snarl

Checkout



HONDA CB200	
Engine	sohc 4-stroke twin
Bore and stroke	55.5 x 41 mm
Capacity	198 cc
Comp ratio	9:1
Carburetors	two 20 mm Keihins
BHP @ RPM	17 @ 9,000
Primary Drive	Gear
Clutch	Wet, multiplate
Gear ratios overall	
(1)	23.90:1
(2)	16.25:1
(3)	12.52:1
(4)	10.13:1
(5)	8.29:1
Electrical System	12v AC generator battery/coil ignition
Lighting	35/35w headlight 7/23 tall/stoplight

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase	50.75 ins
Seat height	30.5 ins
Ground clearance	5.75 ins
Handlebar height	40.5 ins
Kerb weight	308 lb (with 1 gal fuel)
Oil capacity	3 pts
Fuel capacity	1.98 galls

EQUIPMENT

Steering damper	no
Trafficators	yes
Electric starter	yes
Trip mileometer	yes
Steering lock	yes
Helmet lock	yes
Headlamp flasher	no
Kill button	yes
Toolkit	yes
Spare parts	no
Others	mirrors
Tyres (front)	Yokohama 2.75 x 18
(rear)	Yokohama 3.00 x 18
Brakes (front)	t/s 6.3 in drum
(rear)	s/s 5.5 in drum

PERFORMANCE

Top speed	79.21 mph
Standing $\frac{1}{4}$ mile	18.45 secs
0-30 mph	3.87 secs
0-60 mph	12.55 secs
Speedometer error:	
At indicated 30 mph	28.82 mph
At indicated 60 mph	57.95 mph
Fuel consumption	
(average)	63 mpg
(driven hard)	57 mpg
Braking distance	
from 30 mph	37 ft 6 ins
from 60 mph	150 ft 6 ins
PRICE	£391.75 inc VAT

GUARANTEE 6 months/4,000 miles
parts and labour

SUZUKI GT185	
Engine	two-stroke twin
Bore and stroke	49 x 49 mm
Capacity	184 cc
Comp ratio	7:1
Carburetors	two 20 mm Mikunis
BHP @ RPM	21 @ 7,500
Primary Drive	Gear
Clutch	Wet, multiplate
Gear ratios overall	
(1)	25.23:1
(2)	16.63:1
(3)	11.47:1
(4)	9.17:1
(5)	7.34:1
Electrical System	12v alternator battery/coil ignition
Lighting	35/25w headlight 5/23w tall/stoplight

Wheelbase	50.6 ins
Seat height	30.8 ins
Ground clearance	6.5 ins
Handlebar height	—
Kerb weight	253 lb dry
Oil capacity	2.1 pts
Fuel capacity	2.2 galls

Steering damper	no
Trafficators	yes
Electric starter	yes
Trip mileometer	yes
Steering lock	yes
Helmet lock	no
Headlamp flasher	yes
Kill button	yes
Toolkit	yes
Spare parts	no
Others	mirrors
Tyres (front)	Inoue 2.75 x 18
(rear)	Inoue 3.00 x 18
Brakes (front)	10.0 in disc (latest model)
(rear)	s/s 7.5 in drum

Top speed	82.87 mph
Standing $\frac{1}{4}$ mile	18.12 secs
0-30 mph	3.66 secs
0-60 mph	13.87 secs
Speedometer error:	
At indicated 30 mph	29.00 mph
At indicated 60 mph	58.82 mph
Fuel consumption	
(average)	43 mpg
(driven hard)	40 mpg
Braking distance	
from 30 mph	28 ft
from 60 mph	138 ft
PRICE	£382.41 inc VAT (latest model)

GUARANTEE 6 months parts,
3 months labour

YAMAHA RD200	
Engine	two-stroke twin
Bore and stroke	52 x 46 mm
Capacity	195 cc
Comp ratio	7.1:1
Carburetors	two 20 mm Keihins
BHP @ RPM	22 @ 7,500
Primary Drive	Gear
Clutch	Wet, multiplate
Gear ratios overall	
(1)	22.525:1
(2)	13.562:1
(3)	9.938:1
(4)	8.311:1
(5)	7.288:1
Electrical System	12v DC generator battery/coil ignition
Lighting	35/25w headlight 8/23w tall/stoplight

Wheelbase	49.5 ins
Seat height	30.5 ins
Ground clearance	6.1 ins
Handlebar height	39.5 ins
Kerb weight	288 lb (with 1 gall fuel)
Oil capacity	4.2 pts
Fuel capacity	3.0 galls

Steering damper	yes
Trafficators	yes
Electric starter	yes
Trip mileometer	no
Steering lock	yes
Helmet lock	no
Headlamp flasher	no
Kill button	no
Toolkit	yes
Spare parts	no
Others	mirrors
Tyres (front)	Yokohama 2.75 x 18
(rear)	Yokohama 3.00 x 18
Brakes (front)	t/s 6.9 in drum
(rear)	s/s 5.7 in drum

Top speed	86.12 mph
Standing $\frac{1}{4}$ mile	15.67 secs
0-30 mph	3.62 secs
0-60 mph	11.92 secs
Speedometer error:	
At indicated 30 mph	29.44 mph
At indicated 60 mph	63.24 mph
Fuel consumption	
(average)	47 mpg
(driven hard)	44 mpg
Braking distance	
from 30 mph	31 ft
from 60 mph	132 ft
PRICE	£407.45 inc VAT

GUARANTEE 4,000 miles/6 months
parts and labour



that he'd no doubt practised carefully ever since seeing *Wild Angels* at the flicks. At the same time he made vigorous gesticulations intended, I presume, to make me fall off the bike quivering in fear. When he realised his comedy act wasn't going to achieve that result they tried to give me an introduction to trail riding by forcing me onto the verge. But I never have been one for off-road riding and we carried on handlebar to handlebar till the whole thing got rather boring.

I couldn't blow 'em off, the bike was just about flat out anyway, so I took the only alternative, and jammed the brakes on hard. When they eventually realised where I'd gone they slowed right down and started playing dodgems whenever I tried to pass. Ah well, little things... It was all very well, but the slower we went the faster their odious mates were catching up with us. Two of them on one bike were just irksome but a whole crowd of them would have been a bit more serious.

Anyway, I lost 'em in the end among the traffic around a busy roundabout. Great fun boys, we must do it again sometime. Only next time I'll be in my Land Rover and it won't be me who'll be doing the dodging.

Apart from that incident, me and the Suzuki had a good time together. The little twin's performance surprises a lot of people, including me, and its ability to maintain a respectable cruising speed, providing you're on the flat with no headwind, is quite amazing.

I've never been keen on small bikes, partly because I'm just not built for them. Being a gangling six foot odd, with abnormally long ape-like arms, I end up sitting somewhere near the back mudguard in a

futile attempt to get a comfortable riding position. And apart from that I've been prejudiced by my acquaintance with the gutless British examples of this capacity class. I get bored stiff pattering along at 50 mph. So the Suzuki was a pleasant surprise. I didn't fit the thing, I can't expect any manufacturer to cater for freakish anatomies, but I didn't get too bored with its performance, and acceleration is good enough to beat most cars from the lights.

Wide open dual carriageways aren't the most exciting places to ride a small bike, but I managed a steady 65 on the way up to Bradford for a weekend. (Ee lad, whatever happened to t' dark satanic mills? They've got a cleanliness fetish now and a mania for sandblasting buildings. Still, you can get a real tasty Indian curry for 35p!) Riding back home I went even faster at times, but it's downhill all the way to London of course.

Most owners of the Suzuki 185 aren't going to do marathon trips every weekend, I presume, and although the performance is very willing I wonder how long it would last if frequently ridden at that sort of speed. And of course, you pay for it in petrol consumption at about 40 miles to the gallon. Hmm!

But as a workaday around town and occasional trundle out into the country type bike the Suzuki is great. The one we tested had about 1,500 miles on the clock and was a few months old, but it behaved perfectly throughout the whole test. That fact ought not to be remarkable, but the way that so many bikes play up, even brand new ones, unfortunately it is.

Our bike, kindly provided by RB Racing Equipe of Leyton High Road, was not in

fact the latest model, which differs in having a disc front brake. But I don't see that a disc brake would make a pleasant lightweight much better.

Of the three bikes the Suzuki is the best mannered. Despite the fiery performance the engine is capable of, power is smooth and predictable through the rev range, in marked contrast to the Yam's peakiness. Like all small two-strokes though, it has to be buzzed to get the best out of it. Transmission is smooth and quiet, its only fault is difficulty in finding neutral. Apart from that the gearchange is light and positive, and the clutch action is fine.

Soft seat and spongy rear suspension make for a soft ride, but not for good handling. It's OK till you start scratching it along bumpy roads and then it begins to feel like it's got rubber spokes. The handling and fuel consumption are the only real grounds for complaint, though, and neither give you any problem if you're a sedate rider. But with such a willing little motor it's a temptation to make it work hard. I suppose we have to regard greedy fuel consumption as inevitable on rapid modern strokers, but suspension doesn't have to be bad. All it needs is better dampers. Crosswinds made the bike feel unstable. Any lightweight is bound to be affected of course, but combined with the inadequate damping it gave some weird sensations at times.

And while we're still moaning about the suspension, it's quite inadequate for carrying a passenger, even on the hardest setting, and the bike feels quite unstable.

All three bikes are incredibly sophisticated when compared with lightweights of a few years ago. Though the kickstarts would need hardly a tickle to gee-up the horses, all three bikes have electric starters. That's decadence for you; getting things too easy, the youth of today are. I mean, when I started biking you couldn't call yourself a man till you could kick over a 500 single while nonchalantly lighting a fag. Still I must admit, as one gets older one begins to appreciate the finer luxuries, doesn't one? Oh for gawd's sake get back to the point.

Yes, sophistication. The Suzuki's instrumentation and switchgear is the best of the three and as good as you'll find on a lot of bigger and more expensive road burners. The headlights are just about adequate, on main beam at least, though the 25-watt dip is a bit feeble. Tail light is massive and bright enough to warn off low flying aeroplanes, let alone other earthbound vehicles. Still, some wouldn't see you even with a flashing blue light and siren.

It's a nice looking bike, in a typical Japanese way. The little motor with its Ram Air cylinder head cowl and tiny ribbed crankcase is neat. I won't say much about the horrible pressed steel gusseting and dribbled welding of the frame. That's something you've just got to accept when you buy Japanese, it seems. But with nice shiny paint, it looks great if you don't get too close.

yamaha

RD200

STROLLING through the portals of the Daytona Motorcycles emporium, it was impossible not to be stopped short by the meaty sight of a 500 Goldie and a 1,000 cc Norvin that just happened to be standing one each side of the main door. Lovely bikes they were too, but not everyone has the cash, inclination or heavily developed right leg to own that kind of metal.

And anyway, there was nothing to snigger at in the way the RD200 zipped out into the London traffic and flicked through roundabouts en route to the M1. It was a low mileage (2,100 on the clock) model in prime condition, and speeding north up the motorway it proved capable of running with the fast pack in the outside lane under the right conditions.

The 200 Yam was launched in 1971 as the CS3, and even then it had an electric starter. Styling changes later gave it a fresh code name — CS5 — and then last year it became the RD200 when reed valve induction and seven port barrels were added.

Yamaha have christened the whole reed valve/seven port package Torque Induction, which at first sounds like one of those fancy Jap marketing labels intended to tart up minor bits of design innovation. However, during the test the RD emerged as a slightly more economical bike than the Suzuki, and it also ran significantly quicker through the speed trap. So maybe one shouldn't be too cynical about the tricks that lie under the smooth name tags.

All those who know about reed valves can skip this next paragraph, but for those who don't, here's briefly what it is: the reed valve consists of a pair of stainless steel blades mounted between the carb and inlet port of each cylinder. In a conventional two-stroke engine mixture can only enter the crankcase when the piston skirt clears the inlet port on the compression stroke. Then the fuel passes to the combustion chamber via the transfer ports during the piston down-stroke. But with the reed valve system, the steel blades are sucked apart to admit gas whenever crankcase or cylinder pressure drops sufficiently to demand it. The vital seventh port is located in the cylinder wall just above the inlet mouth, so that on the piston down-stroke fuel passes directly into the combustion chamber without having to travel via the crankcase and transfer ports. In addition, the ports aim the fresh charge in such a way that it forces all burnt fuel from the cylinder: must be like the Mississippi delta in flood in there at times.

Torque Induction is said to improve power at low revs and fuel consumption. Well, while the Yam was less thirsty than the Suzuki, it still eats a lot of two-star. If you ride it fast — and that's the way it

seems to like being treated — you're not going to see over 50 mpg. By the standards of just a few years ago, that's a pretty insane figure for a 200 cc motorcycle. The tank gives a range of between 80 and 100 miles before it runs onto reserve, which I suppose isn't too bad for a smallish bike.

Better low end power? Well, that's one claim that does seem to fall flat. Nothing much happens below 4,000 rpm, at which point the power zaps in with a rush. It shows a further quickening of interest at the 6,000 mark, before fading out at the red line (9,000 rpm) in the lower gears and at 8,000 in the top two ratios of the five-speed box.

The effect of the big step in power at 4,000 is also exaggerated by what seems to be an unnecessarily wide gap between first and second gear ratios. If you're riding briskly, you need to gun the motor hard enough in bottom gear to ensure that the revs don't sag below four thou on the change into second. Otherwise, the motor languishes for a bit and the 1100s with toy tigers dangling from the driving mirrors crowd your tail until things get back on the megga.

In good conditions the RD is happy to cruise at 60 to 70 mph all day, and the acceleration is sharp enough to take you well clear of most four-wheelers. But like all small-bore two-strokes, and most of the big ones too, performance is at the whim of the weather, road gradients, and the weight you're hauling. In other words head winds and hills tend to smother top gear performance. You can drop to fourth, which will slug (screech?) you back up to 75 mph, but it's probably kinder to the motor to just leave it in top and settle for a reduced rate of progress. It all depends on how much you've got the hots for that Woolies chick you're riding to see, but remember that it's only too easy to allow the buzz of all those revs and gears on sporty small bikes to lead you to ask just too much of them ... the bikes, that is.

The bulk of a pillion passenger also takes the edge off performance, and exaggerates the only real fault in the RD's handling, a tendency to front end lightness. Me and ole Jeff Smith, the only world moto cross champ that Britain's ever been able to boast, must have like minds, because he always used to direct withering blasts of dry humour at young dudes who sweated blood trying swanky cross-up wheelies all round the tracks. Dead right too — it all feels much more controllable with both wheels on the deck. The Yam'll pop a wheelie in bottom gear if you work clutch and throttle in the right combination either by choice or cackhandedness, and the front wheel also gets light under certain conditions while you're on the move — when, for example, you bank swiftly from side to side in a Z-bend. A passenger makes it just a bit worse, and you have to take things a bit steadier. Under hard acceleration in the lower gears, you sometimes hear the clunk of the forks topping out.

This aside, the general handling is great

— very precise and predictable. In combination with the lively motor, it makes the Yam a fun bike in the biggest sense of the word. Even the rear shocks, a weak link in many Jap bikes, hang on tolerably well over bumpy bits. The tyres are Yokohamas, and they seemed OK on the one occasion it rained during the test. I wasn't in the mood to press them too hard, though, due to mental sadness caused by unwisely turning on the radio that morning and hearing some dee-jay boring millions with details of a minor escapade he'd had in a saloon racing car the previous day.

Monologue over, let's proceed to other points on the RD200 Yamaha. The brakes are good and strong, the front one perhaps too much so, as it packs one hell of a bite — wouldn't like to have to use it in life-or-death anger on a greasy road. The crisp gear change action is as fast as the human limbs can move, and the riding position is a good compromise between city trundling and highway hauling. The bars aren't too high, and the seat is comfortably padded. There is some engine vibration between 4,000 and 5,000 rpm, but it's noticeable only through the footrests and is no real problem.

The choice of colour for the paintwork is not too sharp — it's kind of orangey/gold metalflake effect — but the matt black finish on engine cases and carbs looks neat. The tubular steel frame is a twin toptube, single front downtube affair that seems to knit everything together tautly. A friction steering damper is fitted, but the good handling makes it a redundant component.

Mike Nicks

Summary

THE TWO HUNDREDS emerged as three of the most pleasant bikes we've tested this year. They're fast, fun to ride, versatile and intelligently engineered.

Which is the best buy? We'd say it's between the Honda and the Suzy. Although it's quick, the GT185 lacks the sharp power band that detracts from the Yamaha, and at £382 it's also the least expensive of the trio — £25 less than the Yam.

Its only flaw is heavy fuel consumption. Based on the overall mileage figures we obtained, in 5,000 miles the Suzy would burn up about £63 worth of petrol, the Yam would use about £57 worth, and the Honda £43 worth. Put another way, on a 200-mile trip the Suzy would use just under £1 worth of petrol more than the Honda, with the Yamaha coming somewhere in between. It all depends how deep your pocket is.

The Yam is pretty close to the other two in terms of value, but its engine isn't as smooth and flexible as the Suzy's. That step in power means that novices will find it slightly less easy to ride during their first miles of ownership. The Yam's superiority through the speed traps doesn't translate into much of an advantage over the Suzuki on the road, although both the two-strokes have the steam to pull clear of the Honda ●