

IT REALLY wasn't intended to turn out this way, we reflected as the test hung raggedly only halfway to completion and tense 'phone calls from harassed importers began pointing out that most of the bikes were already overdue for return. The rush of mail after the six-bike 125 cc Giant Test in the January issue had suggested that a similar venture with 250s would be welcomed, so we set out to assemble up to half - a - dozen quarter litre roadsters. But at that stage there was no intention of billing the project as any kind of biggest and best in motorcycle testing, as that kind of sanctimonious breast - beating is generally better left to the *Daily GetsMuchWorses* of Fleet Street.

However, matters began to change complexion once we drew up a list of potential victim machinery. For Giant Testing purposes, bikes often fall into neat and obvious little groups of twos and threes, viz. the Trident v Commando Brit-bikes in last month's issue, or the Suzuki v DKW Wankels in February. But in the 250 class, life turned out to be not so easy for hack scribes seeking clean-cut solutions. The four Japanese factories obviously had to be included, for the simple reason that a lot of people buy their 250s, either because they like them or because they think that's all there is.

MORE VARIETY

But it was felt that more variety was needed, so onto the list was pencilled MZ, who really had to be included after their unexpected success as value - for - money winners of the January 125 bash. But if the low-priced MZ was to get in, so should the even cheaper CZ. And a Ducati too, as these fuel-conscious four-stroke singles are apparently being snapped up faster than car factories are laying off workers.

That made a total of seven bikes, and it seemed a good time to call a halt. In any case, they represented every manufacturer attempting to sell 250 cc road bikes in quantity in the UK. Note that on this occasion we'd avoided trail bikes or dual purpose street / trailers, making 250s intended for pure road use the strictest parameter of the test.

The next step was to send out letters or 'phone calls requesting the various bikes. It's at this stage of a Giant Test intro that



8 Bike 250cc GIANT TEST

We get locked into the biggest comparison shoot-out ever, only to find a sense of something stale among the quarter-litre roadsters.

Of the test bikes, the CZ, Ducati, Harley, Honda and Suzuki came from the official importers. The friendly and efficient folk at Regent Street Garages in Kettering, Northants, repeated their gesture of the 125 test and supplied an immaculate used MZ; ever helpful Davicks put up a Kawasaki and were even kind enough to run it in for us; London dealers Coburn and Hughes provided a low mileage Yamaha; and RB Racing in Leyton loaned a CB250 Honda for a day when the official test bike wasn't quite ready for the picture session. The test took place just too soon, incidentally, to get in the latest RD250 Yamaha with the sixth ratio in the gearbox now unblanked. But as this is about the only major change to the bike, you can take it that Barney Williams' findings will generally apply to the new machine also.

As testing time approached, so tension increased. Would the eight really materialise as promised? Would we have to rip off some unfortunate individual's GT Suzuki or Mark III Ducati from the back streets of London if all else failed? A final round of check calls on a Friday afternoon revealed that all systems were still going, and then early the following week an operation took place that, in retrospect, now seems almost like a laughingly overplanned mission from the CIA archives. On the Monday, seven different bikes were collected from places as disparate as Croydon, Kettering, Long Eaton, Luton, King's Lynn, Harringay, and the West End of London. Next day, the eighth was picked up from Leyton, and riders and machines gathered outside John Wallace's Kensington studio.

CRUCIAL SESSION

T'was all planned that way, you see, to reduce to a minimum the risk of unmentionable disasters happening to men or machines before the crucial cover photo session. And just to prove that such things can and do take place, one buffoon who can remain nameless here actually laid it down as he sped off from the scene of the snap taking in a burst of bravado. Happily he was only doing about three mph at the time and no damage was done.

After the pics were done, it was then a matter of setting to and almost *willing* the whole thing into print. You see, what with

we usually lapse into slightly paranoid tirades against the myopic state of the motorcycle industry in the UK for frequent unwillingness and/or inability to allow the public to sample their products via the vicarious medium of road tests. So to give the trade the least possible excuses for avoiding the shoot-out, the begging letters were despatched no less than four months before the time you're reading this — in other words, a clear two months before testing was due to commence. But as it turned out, the expected wrestling match in procuring certain of the bikes didn't materialise, and most of them were promised almost by return of post.

Then, with test time rapidly approaching, Harley stepped in to offer us the first British ride on the SS-250, the new street version of their two-stroke single trail bike. Now this is the point at which things got really serious and heavy. We suddenly

realised that we had on our hands the most comprehensive motorcycle test ever attempted in Britain. It may not be modest to say so, but it's a plain fact that *Bike* holds all the records anyway, starting with the seven-bike trail test back in Spring '72, followed by an eight-machine moped squirt in the summer of '72, and the aforementioned 125 cc session earlier this year.

Now although this test includes the same number of bikes as the moped buzz, it's obvious that full-blooded motorcycles demand a lot more attention and riding time if meaningful results and conclusions are to be drawn. So we felt justified, if only we could keep the eight would-be suppliers up to their promises, in banging the can about this being the biggest test session ever compiled in British biking journalism.

Right, now the riders. A venture of this

magnitude was clearly too cumbersome for the mag's full-timers of Haylock, Mather and me to undertake alone. Fortunately, we're blessed with the support of a number of capable, if eccentric, freelances (for evidence of quixotic behaviour, check this and past issues for A History of Project Bikes I Have Boded / Forgotten About / Changed at the Last Minute, as compiled by Martin "Don't Worry 'bout a Thing" Harrison). So in they came, Harrison himself, the unrelated Williamses, Mark and Barney, and Graham Sander-son, who deserved something more pokey to ride in return for past support in compiling moped and 125 cc sessions. Plus Pete Ward, who was once gullible enough to ride to the Elephant Rally for *Bike* and who now races vintage grass track machines, but there, we all make mistakes some time in life and those are just some of his!

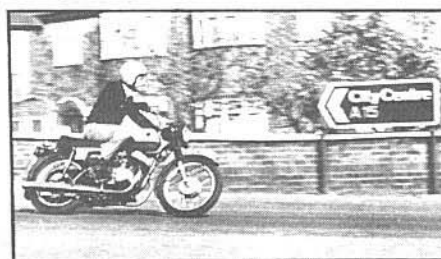
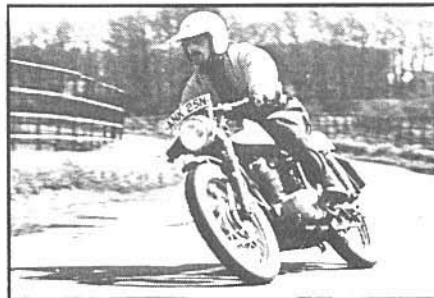
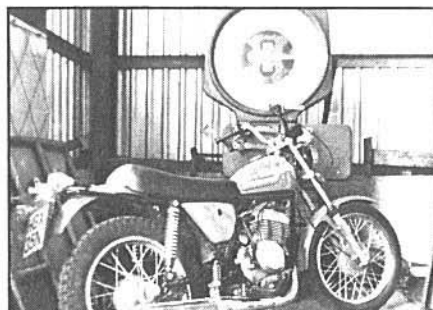
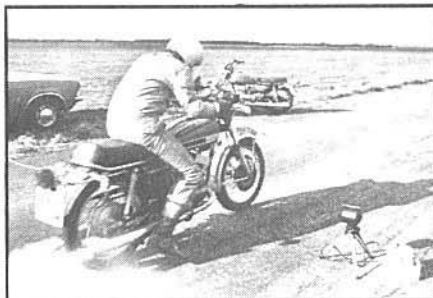
a few minor breakdowns occurring, some bikes not being run in at the time of collection, and the lengthy business of having to cart all eight to the test strip, and taking them back again if for some reason they'd malfunctioned the first time, it became obvious that we'd bitten off more than we could digest easily. That's why we were forced to hang on to the bikes for a long while, and we can only hope it didn't cause that much inconvenience to suppliers — we'll find out the next time we ask 'em for machinery.

Meanwhile, in the following pages there'll hopefully be pertinent information for anyone owning or contemplating the purchase of a 250 cc motorcycle, and wholesome entertainment for those who can't afford one or wouldn't even bother to spit dirt at one with the rear Metzeler of their R90S.

Mike Nicks

THE BIKES:

CZ 471, Ducati Mk III, Harley-Davidson SS-250, Honda CB250, Kawasaki S1, MZ TS250, Suzuki GT250 and Yamaha RD250.



WHAT YOU SEE is most definitely what you get with the CZ. Don't be fooled into thinking that because it's a two-stroke twin just like the Yamaha and the Suzuki, you're buying into some kind of secret society bargain that'll put a smirk on your face every time you go riding with your Jap-mounted buddies. The truth is, the smile will fade when they disappear over a faraway hill and you're still waiting for the CZ to peak in third gear.

However, that's not to say that Commie biking is all shattered illusions, merely to point out that the £200 difference between the CZ and the Japanese products is a pretty accurate reflection of their respective values, and the kind of biking fun you'll get from them. In any case, Skoda GB are honest enough to market the CZs as low cost commuter machines, so there's no reason for potential buyers to expect anything more.

Budget biking in the case of the 471 consists of the aforesaid twin-cylinder motor cradled in a single loop frame, and driving through a four-speed gearbox. It must be almost unique these days in being a twin with only a single carburettor (a 24-mm Jikov), although that's entirely in keeping with the CZ's prosaic style. Lubrication is by messy old oil - in - the - fuel, and electrics are only six-volt.

Items you don't expect to find on a three hundred quid 250 include alloy rims and a fully enclosed rear chain, the latter making it easy to keep things clean. But the handlebar switches are as shoddy as on any Italian bike, and the one on the right controlling the indicators works in the confusing up and down plane. The dip and the horn button are on the left. A two-tone paint job is evidence of CZ's attempts to get on terms with the decadent West, which makes it even more of a shame that they should have chosen sickly shades of either green or brown. Overall, the CZ's appearance is, shall we say, ruggedly sturdy.



Above: Owner's manual says don't take too much note of engine noises — it's all down to those super-efficient silencers drowning the exhaust! Right: Front brake was a disappointment.

As the motor puts out a modest 17 horsepower, it's hardly surprising that the Japanese and Italian competition, and even its MZ Commie bedmate, will leave the CZ well behind in the performance stakes. That's an observation rather than a complaint, however, as when one cocks a limb over something that's obviously designed as a utility machine, the blood tends to cool and you even begin to enjoy motoring at a more sedate pace, watching the landscape and the cities you're passing rather than frantically trying to outbrake a line of 47 Ford Cortinas into the next roundabout. Suffice to say that the CZ has adequate acceleration, and progress is assisted by the lulling lack of vibration at medium engine speeds.

On the subject of roundabouts, and indeed bends in general, I slowed down a lot for the first one on the CZ, allowing for the worst just in case lousy handling went with the low price. But it seemed to track well, and after swinging through the next two a little deeper and harder, it became



obvious that CZ put into their road bikes what they've learnt from their famed dirt bikes that clean up every year in the International Six Days Trials.

A pity then, that the brakes on the 471 were so feeble in contrast. A stopping distance of 176 feet from 60 mph comes perilously close to earning the kind of abuse we heaped on the Russian two-strokes we had the misfortune to test last year, both of which were so disgustingly underbraked that they were potentially lethal in Western Traffic conditions. It's a mystery really, as I don't recall previous test CZs being that bad in stopping qualities, and the 471 does have the benefit of a twin-leading shoe front anchor.

While they need better brakes, what CZ ought to junk is that appalling arrangement of the clutch being operated by both the clutch and gear levers. The clutch lever only has to be worked if you're engaging gear at rest, pressure on the gear level doing the work automatically during on - the - move changes. But really, all it

achieves is to fuzz up even further an already long and clunky gearbox action.

Really earning its keep, the gear level also doubles as the kickstart once you tap it lightly in the direction of the crankcase, allowing it to be swung up and back for action. You then find that the CZ is one of the easiest two-strokes to start, always burbling to life within two or three swings even after days of inactivity.

A steady flow of approving readers' letters would seem to indicate that most CZ owners don't get stuck by the roadside too often, which made it more surprising when the test bike started wheezing asthmatically one day. A knackered head gasket was speedily repaired while I attended the press opening of Skoda's big new distribution and service plant at King's Lynn for their tractors, cars and bikes, which served to indicate that they are serious indeed about selling their products in the UK. Would-be owners need have no fears about being left with obsolete and unrepairable machines on their hands in future years.

With the gasket job done, it was back to finishing off the running in session before taking the bike to the test strip for performance tests. But time was running out too, so we had to take 'er up there still with only 800 miles on the clock. By most two-stroke standards that's a reasonable mileage, but CZs seem to need longish running in periods, and the test bike more or less told us so when the motor seized up with an anguished yelp just as I was doing my Kenny Roberts bit up the strip and only 50 yards from the speed trap. So, although we had acceleration figures by that time, you'll see in the Checkout panels only an estimated figure of 75 mph for the bike's top wack. This seems realistic for a bike with a cruising speed of around 55 to 60 mph.

A pity she locked up, though, because an event like that always seems to end a test on a sour note, even though it was in a way our own fault through not having the time to do more preliminary miles with the motor. Still, by that stage I'd already decided that £308 was about as much as one can be asked to pay for a bike with lousy brakes and a bad joke for a gearbox.

Mike Nicks

ducati

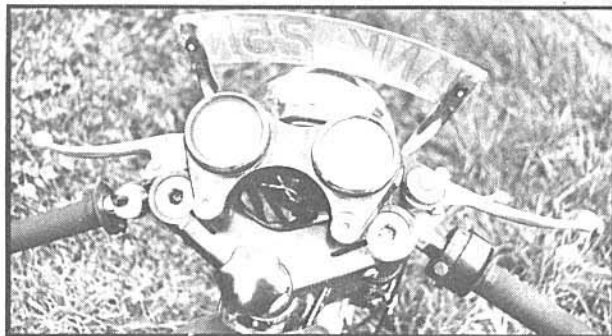
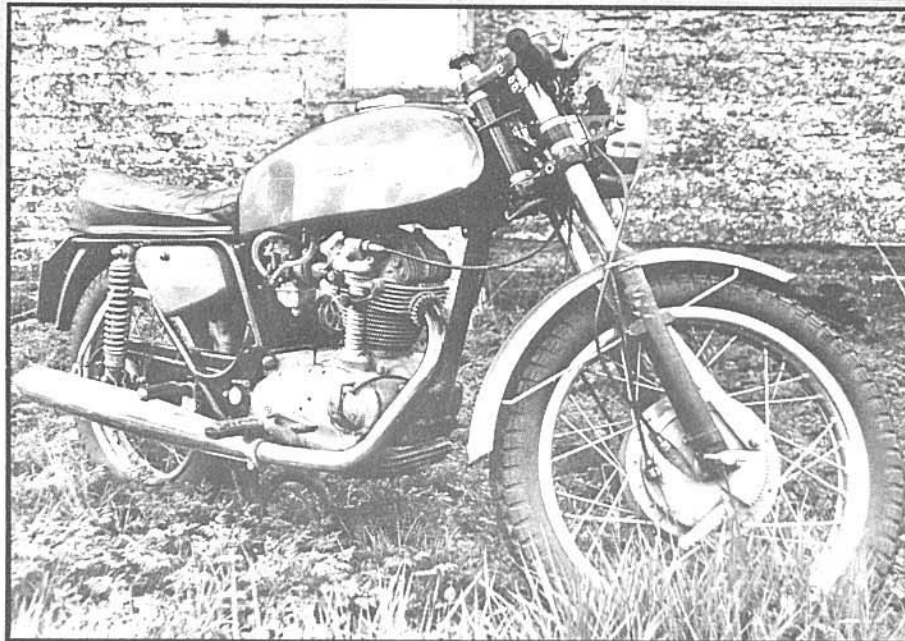
Mk III

IT'S A FINE day and a cheerful whistling floats from the door of the bike shop. The sunlight glints on the well greased hair of the boss as he makes his morning inspection of the assembled machinery, checking tyre pressures with practised kicks. Enter a kid just turned 17. Nuts on bikes, his FS1E is propped against the wall outside, its barrel glowing cherry red.

With the expert eye of a youth who's digested all the road tests, he examines the rows of gleaming machines, firing questions at the man like he was leading the case for the prosecution. "What'll it do?" "Is it right they don't 'andle?" "Ow much a week?"

Now for the purpose of this story. Mr. Brylcreem turns out to be the kid's fairy godfather, forming his opinion and guiding his choice with the expertise and wisdom of 20 years in the trade. "Jap crap," "Yer can't get no spares," and "Sold," dispenses with Honda, Suzuki and MZ. So the pair reach the end of the row, and there proudly displaying its £519 inc. VAT price tag is a Ducati Mk 3. For a few moments the kid's future is poised on a knife edge. It's only got one cylinder, and no winkers, no disc brake, and no flash paint job, and it looks little. At this point the fairy godfather waves his wand, seems it's special offer week and if the kid signs now he'll get an extra thirty bob trade-in on his FS1E. The spell is cast, the kid buys the Ducati. A few months later he's back for the Desmo SS 750.

Now the point of this fable is that I really think it could happen — naive kid in danger of ignoring the Ducati unless someone who knows better is on hand to tell him to look deeper than surface flash and glitter on other products. When I picked up the Duke I suddenly remembered there were a lot of pleasant things in motorcycling I'd forgotten about, so for today's teenager the situation is pretty



Above: Like all singles, the Mk III Ducati looks best from the exhaust pipe side. Left: Same old Eyetie story — crummy switches again.

serious because if he starts on an overweight Japanese 250 he's never likely to realise that there is a choice of alternative forms of biking.

First of all, the Ducati feels like a real motorcycle when you come to start it. There's real compression that threatens to break your ankle if it kicks back, though the test bike never did, and when it does start (usually after two or three kicks) it sounds like a proper bike, too. When it's warm you can close the throttle and it'll tick over with a gentle thump from the exhaust and the rev counter showing nil.

So it sounds good and it looks good.

But how does it feel? Initially it's kind of funny if you've been riding Japanese bikes. The suspension feels really bad, and after about ten minutes you've got a pain in your back which lasts until you get off the bike. The vibration is considerable and it gets worse as you go faster, with the usual destructive effect on light bulbs.

With a bike like the Ducati, though, it seems petty to moan about minor failings because once you get on it and find that favourite stretch of windy road, it's a real dream. Flicking through S-bends, going up and down that sweet five-speed box, I realised that this is genuine fun biking. I

did things on the Mk III I thought I'd grown out of; I went round corners too fast, I left my braking too late, in fact on occasions I thoroughly frightened myself, but not once did the bike hint that things had been pushed too far. Now I'm not the sort of tester who wears away crankcases on corners, but I reckon you'd have to do something pretty dumb to drop the Mk III.

The hard suspension means you feel every bump and dip in the road, yet it was almost a pleasure to meet a bump half-way round a bend and well cranked over. Your backside might leave the saddle, the rear wheel might step out a bit, but that was it, no snaking or weaving for the next 500 yards, just line it up for the next bend.

For those not familiar with Ducatis, the Mk 3 model has an overhead cam engine with the valves closed by springs in the normal manner, unlike the Desmo jobs where the valves are opened and closed mechanically. Either way you get lots of revs: 8,000 rpm is recommended peak buzzing point for the Mk. III. The 250 Desmo, which costs £599, goes to 8,500 rpm.

Essentially, the Ducati is a pokey motor in a lightweight chassis that steers and brakes really well. But for what it is it's not cheap — and some things about the bike are almost trashy, particularly the six-volt lighting system, the usual junk Italian switches, and the weird forward siting of the footrests that need to be replaced with rear-sets.

Some aspects of the Ducati marketing organisation also give cause for concern. Certain of the bikes appear to arrive in this country incorrectly geared. The 450 Desmo tested in April was originally badly undergeared before the fault was corrected, and the importers also had to gear up the 250 test bike before we received it. Then it wouldn't rev in top gear. Ever helpful Mick Walker at Wisbech found the bike had been fitted with an incorrect plug and was wildly under-jetted. Hmm. But having got that problem sorted out the motor really buzzed, and in the hands of the wily editor himself the Duke turned out to be the fastest of all eight bikes tested.

Peter Ward

harley- davidson SS-250

IT'S ALL very well bragging about racing successes when advertising motorcycles, but acclaiming one's new single-cylinder roadster as the hottest thing ever to grace tarmac simply on the basis of some rather limited racing fortunes is a little, well, *rash*. Nevertheless that's exactly what the British division of AMF Harley-Davidson are doing with their new quarter litre bolide name of SS-250, and it fell to me to contribute to this Giant Test fantasy aboard those very same wheels.

This is the first Italian built Harley I've ridden and it was just like I imagined an Italian built Harley would be — more Italian than Harley. Which isn't at all a bad thing I s'pose. But the typically annoying peculiarities found in most Italian bikes haven't been eradicated by American design, which I find disappointing.

Take my favourite beef: electrics (actually my favourite beef is sirloin, but enough of that). Italian manufacturers CEV have produced an alternative to the mediocre tin snuff boxes that most Italian 'cycle builders frivolously refer to as switches. My hopes were raised when I saw them on the SS-250, but in use they proved just as cumbersome and ineffectual as their forefathers. So why bother redesigning them, eh? Specifically, the horn button only worked if your thumb hit it fairly and squarely from a 90-degree angle, the headlamp flasher didn't and virtually none of the individual switches could be flicked or pressed without a fumble. Bad show chaps.

But enough of this introductory bitching, you want to know how the damn thing goes, right? Well it does. Quite nicely. Unfortunately Harley-Davidson had in time honoured tradition provided a road test bike which wasn't run in (and the lady secretary who showed me to AMF's basement garage wondered why

some magazines returned test bikes that appeared to be in "obviously second-hand condition". Well, well, well...

So the bike was tighter than *Bike's* accountant when it came to generous throttle opening. With just over 100 miles on the speedo I was unable to coax anything out of the conventionally ported 2-stroke above six grand except a little indignant misfiring. I was also unhappy about the bike's starting abilities, which were decidedly lacking when cold. The Harley uses a 32-mm Dell 'Orto which is fitted with a strictly on-or-off choke arrangement à la the Morini I tested last month.

Students of advertising copy will know that the SS-250 comes complete with chrome bore, oil injection and an integral oil reservoir in the top tube of its twin downtube frame. If you want to know anything more like what sort of main bearings or crankshaft it has, how often it should be serviced or anything else mildly technical, before you buy this machine, then you'd better go out and steal one, strip it down and work it out. Because the London HQ of AMF H-D may not be able to tell you. In fact all they were interested in when I 'phoned up to enquire about such trivia was when they were going to get it back. And this was the day after I picked it up! See penultimate paragraphs for evil suspicions thereof.

I was also unexcited about erratic firing which, in my naivety, I believed CD ignition was s'posed to eliminate. This prof-

fered itself most readily at the lower end of the rev range. However, the thing accelerated briskly enough whilst I had it, and the Peterborough boys managed to coax some very respectable times out of it through the traps (after Nicks had rushed it around the East Midlands for a day to knacker it, er, I mean loosen it up a bit).

In fact, the 80 mph top end was recorded from just one run through the lights, in deference to the meagre 400 miles still on the clock at that stage. The top clout of a fully run-in SS must be in the mid-eighties, and this, together with very sharp acceleration times (partly a result of the SS being lightest of the bikes on test, at just 267 lb) makes it most definitely a Quick One.

The handling was also a good deal. The SS-250 is set up like a trail bike and indeed it shares its frame with trail bike counterparts, so at first I was a little nervous about slinging it hard into bends. Familiarity bred confidence however, much of which must be down to the grippy Pirelli MT boots which did their thing come rain or shine (remember sunshine?) Shocks 'n' forks courtesy of Betor aided and abetted no doubt, but the price paid for the Harley's love affair with the tarmac was a ride that bordered on the harsh side of firm. The generously sized and padded seat partially compensated for this, though.

Gearbox and drive train married a positive stop five-speeder with helical geared primary drive, and I found the ratios a

mite closely spaced as I kept crying out for a sixth cog, even in town traffic. However they slotted into place quite snappily, which was just as well for after 20 minutes stop-start riding one's wrist became numbed from wrestling with the exceedingly stiff multi-plate clutch... scarcely had the strength to close my handbag after a day's riding, dearie. No-no number three, I'm afraid.

And straight on to no-no number four, inaccessibility to vital organs and lack of tool kit and a place to store it. See, the seat is bolted on, as is the nearside side panel, and neither can be removed to reveal battery, wiring etc., without a wrench. And she don't come with any wrenches. As a token gesture you can remove the plastic panel on the offside to get at the air filter, but that's all.

Sorry to be bitchy AMF (but I'm told your Baja 90 is a gas and I *love* your V-twins, by way of compensation) but to put tiny single leading shoe drum brakes on a bike you claim to be a world beater in the roadster stakes seriously challenges my credibility — 5½ inches of drum front 'n' rear is all you get kids, and it ain't enough. At low speeds it'll stop without drama, but grabbing anchor in a hurry from, say, 60 em-pee-atch is strictly a brown trouser affair.

For a town bike the SS-250 has promise, great promise, that it never quite lived up to. In my hands anyway. As this was a test bike designed to impress cynical 'cycle hacks, I'm afraid actual punters may have to put up with even less fulfilment. However I've heard it said in the trade that importers don't give a damn about what the press says anyway. If by some remote chance that should be the case, then I thought the bike was a disgustingly prepared travesty of what a test bike should be and Harley-Davidson deserve to go the same way as the importers of WSK, Bridgestone and all those other gentlemen who were only interested in shifting the largest number of motorcycles for the biggest possible financial reward in the shortest possible time and screw the consequences.

Me? I'm going to give H-D the benefit of the doubt and say better luck next time.

Mark Williams



The Harley has basically a trail bike frame but road handling is good, assisted by Pirelli MT rubber.

honda

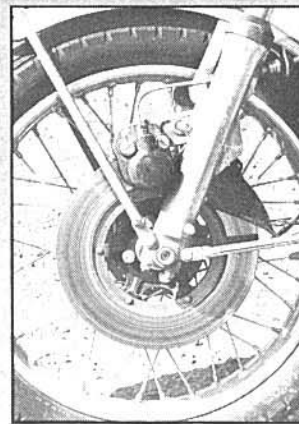
CB250

IN THE INTERESTS of fair, unbiased and sober(?) journalism I feel I must declare a minute interest in the vast Honda Motor Company, namely that I own one of their delightful CB 125's. However, I assure readers of this glossy toilet paper that this fact will have no bearing whatever on the underwritten epistle which, in the manner of most *Bike* tests, will be down-to-earth, occasionally cynical and maybe even mildly amusing.

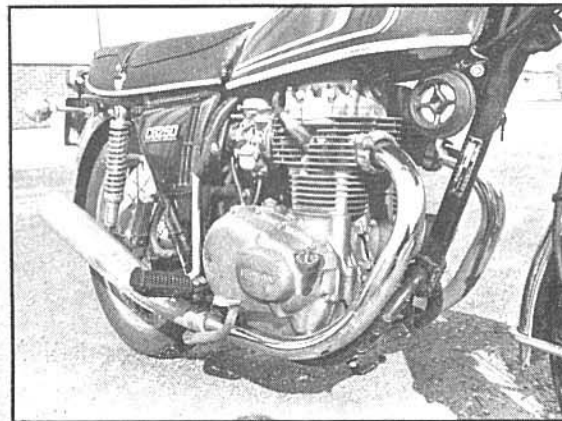
For your £540 you will get a machine which will be labelled mild tempered by Honda fans and downright gutless by those who continue to swear at Japanese engineering. The businesslike appearance of the hefty G5 with its racey upswept silencers, front disc and powerful looking motor, somewhat belies the machine's mediocre display in the performance stakes. But there is a logical explanation. Honda earn several dimes flogging two-wheeled exotica to down-town American college kids and at the moment President Ford is in the process of sweeping pollution, and particularly exhaust fumes, into his environmental dustbin, which has led to a tightening-up of pollution laws.

Restrictions on exhaust gas have led to reductions in performance, for the time being at least, and so the once quick K4's have developed into the much slower but more refined G5's. Anyway, less of the science and let's get kitted-up and go for a spin.

This machine took some riding, especially in the early part of our association when the rear shocks were set on the softest of five positions. It was mentally and physically exhausting slipping in and out of six gears, picking a way through bumpy corners and praying to the Heavens that the still rather hopeless Japanese tyres wouldn't give up their task in protest at a normal day's work. The bike would buck and leap over bumps, wallow and skip and generally sap every



Above: CB250 dials and controls are typically Japanese, i.e. good. Above right: front disc gave finely controlled stopping. Right: exhausts on latest model sweep racily up — pity the performance doesn't match.



ounce of confidence. These protests at cornering were pretty well remedied when the rear units were set at the stiff end of the scale. This transformed the handling into a bike that was happy, but still not overjoyed, about negotiating bends.

An electric starter dispenses with all that frenzied kicking, and the motor would fire up after three or four touches of the button with the right thumb. No sweat.

After a minute or two the engine would settle down into an almost BMW-like tick-over (honest) but a brisk movement with the right hand soon shattered any illusion that I was riding a Bavarian beauty when the rev-counter needle spun quickly clockwise to the accompaniment of that now traditional Honda Sound. Didn't like the handlebars much. Too wide, like riding a bloody scrambler, but more o' that later.

Selecting first gear was often a noisy affair that was soon put into order when things had hotted up. One improvement over earlier models is that you don't have to give the G5 quite as many beans. Despite the be-careful mark at 9,200 rpm it will pull quite happily from around three grand and there seems little to be gained by buzzing the motor over eight thou. The last 1,200 revs merely prompt reactions of "Cor" and "Coo" from tartan-scarfed youths. Acceleration is little more than mundane, but just enough to keep the rider interested and enough to put miles between you and the inevitable 35 mph Sunday afternoon clot of four-wheeled crawlers on twisty roads. It's no good grabbing handfuls of throttle, either, when the same result can be achieved by using a modicum of revs. However, speeding over

75 mph requires much stoking of fires but somehow I got the feeling that this is really a 70 mph machine which, despite lack of umph in the upper reaches of the speedo, performs 70 mph duties one or two up without fuss.

Two bodies on board did seem to take its toll on petrol consumption, and one 70 mph two-up run accounted for one gallon in 45 miles. But just to prove that *Bike* testers are not always throttle bending psychopaths, a sane one-up run using between six and 7½ thousand revs achieved the highly respectable figure of 68 miles for one's 74 pen'orth. The bike averaged 63 mpg throughout the 500-mile test.

Snicking through six gears is a novelty at first but gets rather laborious after the first hundred miles. Top is really a backwind overdrive, although on odd occasions the motor would hold and even increase revs — for a few miles at least. Handlebars are just too wide and consequently the rider is formed into a human parachute. Wind pressure is unpleasant at first and exhausting after 20 miles in moderate breezes. Controls provide no hassle but main beam in the illumination stakes fails to reach expectations. It's virtually the same as dip but condensed into a smaller area, penetrating the darkness only marginally better than dip. Both settings are safe for 60 mph.

Braking at the front end is excellent, with the well-mannered disc exuding confidence. Tentative use of the rear drum, which soon locks under a heavy boot, is the order of the day, but when used in unison it was quickly goodbye 70 mph and hello railway gates.

Vibration is always in the background with an ever-present tingle in the footrests both front and rear. Nothing to worry about, but I imagine it would increase significantly if regular servicing was neglected. For the technically minded, the latest models feature mods to rocker arms and cam chain tensioner.

You must admit that the G5 is a "nice" motorbike, even my mum wanted to hop on the pillion, but potential buyers should not expect too much. Remember, the more lively CB 360 is only sixty quid more.

Graham Sanderson



8 Bike 250cc GIANT TEST

Photography JOHN WALLACE



kawasaki

S1

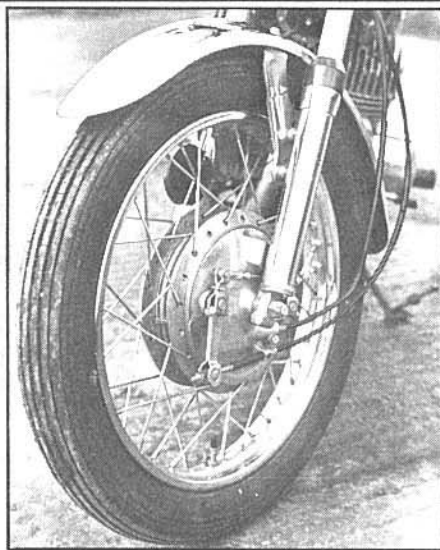
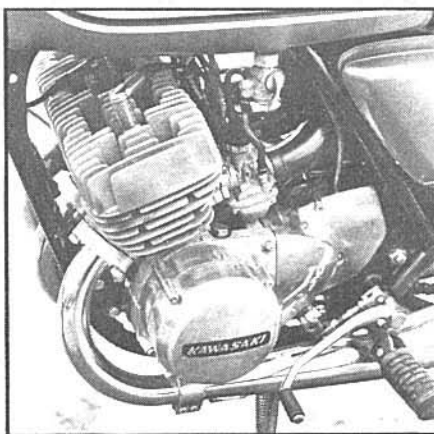
MY STREET seems to have a fatal attraction for loony bikers. It has a sharp bend at the bottom with plenty of adverse camber, broken glass and the occasional abandoned mattress, so you crawl around at a snail's pace until *wham* — 300 yards of straight road strewn with cars, coaches, kids on tricycles, sniffing dogs and little old ladies with shopping baskets on wheels. It's the nearest thing to a drag strip quarter this side of Hackney — or so the casual passer-by would imagine.

"Course I know different, because every once in a while one or more of these loonies squeals to a tyre shredding halt right outside my front door to take in the latest machine propping up the fence. Doubtless some of them think I'm an eccentric bike freak who buys a new cycle every other week, but those who know The Truth hang around prodding tyres, bouncing on dual seats, until I poke me nose around the door.

Naturally, word of the up-coming eight bike extravaganza spread through this neighbourhood biking fraternity like wildfire, so I got plenty of gratuitous advice when they heard (all right, I boasted) that I was going to get the Kawasaki.

Fast? You bet; fastest 250 on the street. Burns rubber in every gear. Mind you, wouldn't like to run one with the price of petrol these days — they won't be selling many now, just you see.

Hmmm . . . yet something somewhere wasn't quite right, as a quick burst on the Yamaha just prior to my collecting the Kawasaki found me a rather disappointed young man as I toolled the triple down the road from Davick's Long Eaton showroom. The Yam's pokey powerband had given me a taste for that sudden surge of speed as the tach swung past five grand — but the Kawasaki has no such characteristic. Sure it was fast enough once under way, and cruising over long distances it was as tireless as a big capacity



Above left: S1 is as good as any of the 250s on style. Above: Rare drum front brake on a Japanese sports bike stops as well as most discs. Left: World's smallest three-cylinder bike engine.

tourer, but coming off the line was not the heady experience I had expected.

At the time I thought it must be me; perhaps the Kawasaki was on the pipe from the word go, churning smoothly right round to the red line. Not having the two bikes to run side by side I was relying on brief road riding impressions and such things can be deceptive, but the speed trap confirmed that the Kawasaki was down on acceleration. As for fuel consumption — well you've probably guessed by now. Figures down in the mid twenties appear to be a thing of the past. Try as I might, the worst I could manage was a gnat's whisker under forty and that was through rush hour London, locked in the eternal life or death struggle with the four-wheeled meanies who glue their accelerator pedals permanently to the floor.

There had to be some explanation, but I couldn't find one. According to the publicity blurb the only major change for '75 is

the colour scheme. There's a new rider's handbook clip under the seat and a spare spark plug holder for three plugs. And one key now works all three steering, seat and fuel locks. Obviously nobody's giving away any secrets.

So whatever happened to the 98mph top wack recorded on our test session back in 1973? Gone the way of all good things I don't doubt. The 250 S1 is now "a luxury you can afford"; it's only the big triples, the 500 and the 750, that get the "handle with care" treatment. The press release reads like an apology, brimming with toadies like "connoisseur's choice", "discerning riders" and "ultimate in sophistication". "Kawasaki", it says, "have an established reputation for not making unnecessary changes." Funny, but that's not quite the reputation that springs immediately to my mind.

Myths, legends and old wives' tales apart, what do you get for your money?

Looking at the current 250 line-up the S1 is undoubtedly good value. It weighs quite a bit more than you'd expect for a machine of its size, which must lend something to its glued-to-the-road handling, and the brakes — a drum front anchor being something of a rarity these days — are more than adequate. I'm not too happy with the way the centre exhaust crosses beneath the motor to the offside, though. It's nothing to do with the looks, but Jap bikes are sods to clean and the S1 is no exception. The front wheel flings all manner of road grot onto the pipe and the only way to get it off is to grovel around underneath. A good dose of rock salt and you can kiss your chrome goodbye.

There's no electric starter; so who needs it with a bike you can turn over by hand? One unique feature when firing up is the choke lever mounted on the underside of the left handlebar grip. It's spring loaded so you have to hold it on when kicking from cold and keep holding it until the motor warms through. Obviously it prevents you shuddering to a halt two minutes down the road with a flooded engine that's going to be a bitch to re-start. By the same token you don't have to fumble madly for a stray lever to save a dying fire, but I'm one of those people with a strange aversion to things that snap shut the moment you let go.

The seat tail compartment has become something of a Kawasaki trademark, a neat touch to the machine's styling as well as a functional hidey-hole for stroker lube, the tool kit that comes as part of the set and has its own securing strap, and anything else you care to lob aboard.

Just what will motivate the motorcycle buying public in the future is every manufacturer's nightmare. Back in '73 it was speed at all costs; now it looks as though we'll be getting around economically but with style. That at least seems to be the way Kawasaki are thinking. But I still think it's a pity the S1 had to be tamed so noticeably, because while many future owners may never wind the throttle even halfway to the stop, that edge on performance is a sad loss for those who would have liked to use it.

mz

TS250

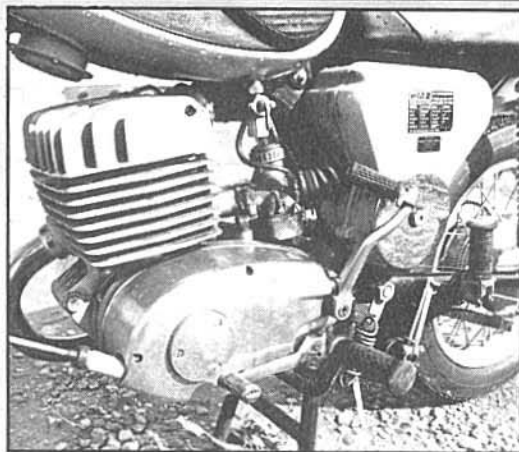
NEVER MIND the speed my boy, just *feel* the quality. The MZ 250 Sports may not be the most exciting bike in our line up, either on looks or performance, but you can't help being impressed by how well it's made.

Without doubt, the East German two-stroke single comes out on top for quality of construction. Its paintwork and smooth shiny cast alloy makes Japanese machinery costing £200 or more look cheap, and the durability of its chrome puts the Italian contenders to shame.

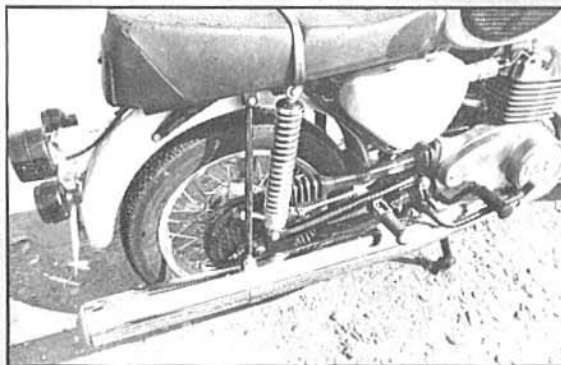
Let's take a close look at the long list of goodies you get for a pretty miserly price of £351 inc VAT. For starters there's alloy wheel rims (the cheaper CZ is the only other bike similarly equipped), neat alloy hubs enclosing some of the best brakes I've encountered on a lightweight, rubber mounted engine, fully enclosed chain, locking petrol cap, comprehensive tool kit (including a First Aid outfit, would you believe!) — the list goes on and on. Take a look at the way it's all held together too — none of yer pigeon crap welding on this bike.

Having told you about fantastic workmanship, it's a shame the MZ's a little bit of a let-down when it comes to the riding. Trouble is, it looks so well made that you come to expect more from it than you should from a pretty basic economy bike. But the handling leaves something to be desired. It ain't quite frightening — "lively" is the politest description I can think of, trying hard to suppress the obscenities. Soggy suspension and vague steering gives the bike all the cornering precision of a lump of jelly.

The other blemish is the gear change rather than the idiosyncratic engine speed clutch which road testers have bitched about for years. MZ seem oblivious to the criticism and MZ riders go on crunching through the gears and kangarooing from the traffic lights. The clutch is mounted on the left hand end of the crankshaft, just



Above: Motor hangs forlornly 'neath the MZ's spine frame. Above right: Ignition key slots into headlamp shell. Right: Enclosed chain is one of many MZ extras.



outboard of the main bearing, and is supported by an outrigger bearing behind that circular plate in the engine casing. Being directly mounted on the crankshaft it spins about 2½ times as fast as a conventional clutch mounted on the gearbox mainshaft, and this results in the action being much fiercer, and makes smooth, noiseless gearchanging impossible.

The clutch lever is light to use, but it's very much an all-or-nothing action which takes a lot of getting used to before you can take off smoothly.

Although the single cylinder, petrol lubricated motor is very conventional in design, it looks modern in comparison with most other Communist bikes with neat polished casings and wide finned alloy barrel and head. The motor's got the performance to match its sharp looks too. Power output quoted among the amaz-

ingly comprehensive facts and figures in the owner's handbook is 21 bhp at 5,200 to 5,500 rpm, enough to propel the MZ at speeds up to almost 80 mph in test conditions. Peak power is developed at relatively low revs, and the motor noticeably runs out of urge at the top end of the range. Unfortunately there isn't a great deal of torque low down either, and a fifth gear is badly needed at times when you want optimum acceleration for overtaking.

Rubber mountings insulate engine vibration from the frame, and the bike is remarkably smooth for a single — much smoother than the Harley, for example. The motor hangs by the cylinder head from a large block of rubber bolted to the massive spine tube of the backbone-type frame. The frame design could be partly responsible for the doubtful handling — it

certainly doesn't look a very rigid construction. It also contributes to the bike's weird appearance. The styling looks ungainly and strange to western eyes due to a lack of proportion between major components. Tiny 16 inch wheels only help to accentuate the spindly forks and massive hump-backed fuel tank. The headlamp too, is enormous, while the lack of frame downtubes leaves an obtrusive emptiness between the engine and front wheel. It's a shame, because the quality of the finish is superb and the chrome had a deep shine which looked like new, despite the fact that our test bike was several months old.

Getting back to the endearing points of the bike, which certainly do outweigh the doubtful aspects, everything does its job remarkably well. The brakes are one example of this efficiency — despite their modest appearance those single leading shoe drums made the MZ the fastest stopping of the 250s, apart from the Suzuki with its massive front disc. Lights, although only 6 volt, are perfectly adequate with a powerful 45/40 watt headlamp.

It always seems to be the case that the cheaper the bike, the better the toolkit, and the MZ's tools, stored in a locking compartment under the well padded seat, were of good quality and comprehensive. Not only that, there was a First Aid kit too, tucked away behind the side panel, with sticking plasters, safety pins and bandages — and instructions printed in German! In fact the bike is remarkably well equipped at the price which includes indicators and even a rear view mirror, although instruments and switches are pretty sparse.

So if inclination or miserliness confines you to the dreary commuter riding ranks you couldn't do better than the MZ. In value for money it must beat all-comers, for although not the cheapest of the budget bikes it does allow you some comfort and refinement — and a lot of quality. But for anyone looking for something a little exciting it seems a waste to have all that beautiful workmanship lavished on a simple economy bike.

Bill Haylock

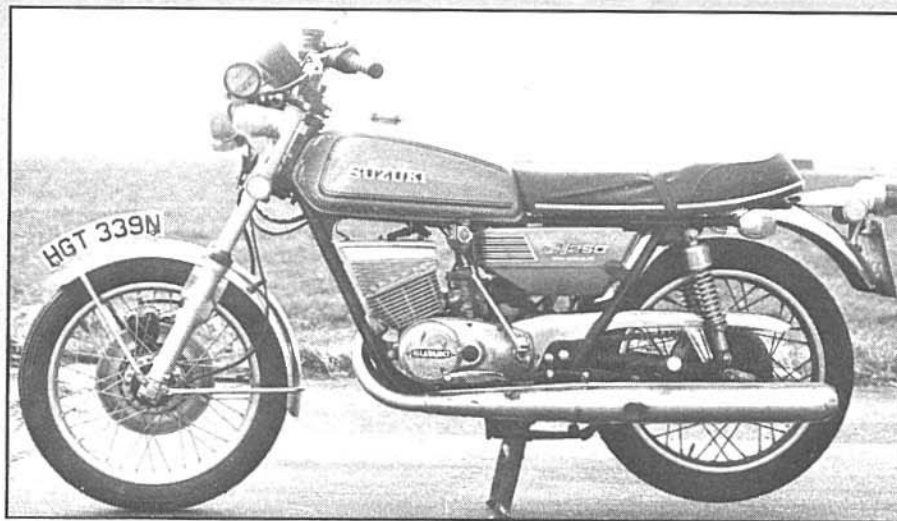
Suzuki

GT250

I MAY BE wrong, but I've never thought of Suzuki as being anything but ordinary in their approach to bikes. Of the Japanese that is. A certain lack-lustre, *un petit peu ennuyeux*, the *machina plebis* (for those of you who like to feel educated — *ede stercus*). Anyway, they try a lot, with three cylinders, odd numbers of cubes and all that "Ram Air" stuff, but never quite seem to make it all come right like the other lads. Generally up to around 500 cc, if it's four-stroke it's Honda, go fast a Yam, go faster and get scared it's a Kawasaki ... but what do you do with a Suzuki?

Well first of all you have to own one for a while. They do seem to grow on you — no yarroo, pow, instant wheelies and 100 mph cruising to get you all excited, just a kind of gradual feeling that maybe it's not such a bad bike. That's about how it felt with the 380 and 550 we had a while back, and this 250 was the same. If a 250 can be anything but dull that is.

As the first thing to do with a new bike is look at it, I'll start by suggesting that Suzuki sack their present design department for a kick-off. I can't think of a single proper road Suzuki that has any element of taste, whether classy or mean, right down to the pin stripe. And apart from its shape and lines, things like the silencers, that look as though they were designed for something else and had to have an extra hole in the mounting bracket to fit the 250, do not help. What are they playing at with those bits of bent alloy round the cylinder heads? It can't possibly do anything but look disgusting, and if it does, there's something mighty wrong with a two-stroke twin that only matches the top speed of a 1953 BSA C11. No, I reckon it's those designers again, like they imagine they've come up with what every motorcyclist needs; not tractability, torque or good handling but ... Ram Air. Smart. They really do some amazing stunts on the whole; pretty soon



Tasteless styling, but the Suzuki is the sort of bike that can grow on you.

I suppose we'll have the spiffing digital gear indicator that's on the 750 fitted to the 125 trail bikes. Ah well, it's not Suzuki GB's fault, and it's those poor sods that have to sell the bikes, not argue about design.

So, whatever your opinions, here stands another 250 that has to be judged against the others so that you can make up your minds whether to buy it or not. I wouldn't have the Suzuki because I didn't like the way it looks, though it's still a reasonably good bike if you like spending that kind of money on toys.

Starting the Suzuki is no problem. Once you've climbed on the bike and then off it again, because the kickstart's on the left, it always starts within three kicks. The motor itself is about the smoothest running two-stroke twin I can remember, not very noisy and feeling something like a quiet Kawasaki. At the rear of the engine is another piece of extraneous equipment, the six-speed gearbox. Mechanically, that was the only part of the bike I fell out of favour with. Apart from sixth being useless, had the ratio's been widened on five gears like any sensible design, far more use could've been made of the nice little engine, including more top end. Well, that is what L plate riders want isn't it, if this area's anything to go by (and I'll shoot the

next pack of whining FS1-Es who buzz my window on their way round the block for the forty-seventh time).

Because of the sixth gear (it's only use was on a flat road cruising around fifty at half throttle), the other five are so close it got to be a real drag. There's a lot of fun in rushing into corners and changing down and then screaming out again, but although we had the bike for a month, the number of times I set me and the bike up for a hasty exit, only to find I was in a gear too high and would get thrown off balance got extremely boring. Thrown off balance? Must be a lead into cycle parts and handling.

Suspension wise, the bike's very comfortable to ride. All the controls suit a five foot seven rider and it was quite a pleasure to be in or out of town 'long as the road was straight. Not that it was that bad through corners, but it did pitch around a bit on fast bumpy curves. Nothing like as bad as a Honda mind, the Suzuki at least stays on line. Once that was established, I found it really easy to lay into corners by just tensing the muscles of one thigh. Had the same system with a schoolgirl last summer.

If the handling was so reasonable then, how, you may ask, did I fall off it twice in one day? Same reason everybody falls off

250 Suzukis, that's how. Pissing tyres that are made of nylon. I spoke to several guys who had the same problem including the owner of a messenger firm who had six bikes crashed at least three times each before changing to rubber, so it ain't just me. Maybe the first smack was deserved, definitely not the second, and the third was only narrowly avoided by getting opposite lock and kicking the swine back upright. The really dumb thing was that I kept going down with a conscience and holding on to the bike, so it never got damaged but I wore through a pair of Levi's, a denim jacket, one shoe and sock and an elbow, knee and foot. Lovely, that's eighteen quid more than the test is worth.

Despite these little setbacks the Suzuki was quite a nice bike. "Was," because on the last day of the test it expired in a mysterious way that you may not believe. It was the first really warm day that we had and being only a moment away from the North Circular, what better way to spend the afternoon than rushing past Sunday motorists? North London's a handy place to live for that sort of thing, and the customary blind up the M1 to the first service area — a mere mile away from the North Circ — seemed like a good idea. However, on the return, just past Henley's corner and on the hill to East Finchley, the motor died. After a few pointless kicks I looked up the "Get you home" hints in a *Motorcycle Mechanics* that happened to be laying in the grass and thought, "Ahh, check the spark."

I took off the plug cap and wedged the HT lead somewhere, not being stupid enough to hold it and get dragged to my knees by eight million volts like last time, and kicked. Nothing. Kicking a few more times and looking down for the elusive spark, my helmet knocked the horn button. Brum, brum went the right cylinder, crackle went the HT lead, aaarrgh! went the horn — that's right, it jammed on.

Cackling into the wind I set off — horn blasting, old ladies scattering, cars in front swerving off the road, what a scene. Three miles later the engine died again. End of test, because then it just wouldn't run again and Suzuki's had to rescue it.

Martin Harrison

yamaha

RD250

MY INITIAL feelings about the Yam were not good, mainly because I happen to hold a personal bias against small machines and all two-strokes. So from the point of view of objective road testing, it was probably fitting that I ended up with the RD, as it shares with the Kawasaki triple a reputation as *the* hot street 250 for the kid who knows what's what in biking and would sooner not ride at all than punt round on a Russian two-stroke. At least I wasn't going to go all wobbly at the knees at the prospect of handling the RD chores.

Sure enough, getting astride it the first time it felt like a smelly, shrill fairy cycle. The twin mirrors that come as standard had somehow been removed along the line, so I couldn't keep a good eye out for the cops, and I swear I'd have died of shame if one had arrested me in the first ten miles.

But after an hour or two of riding the RD began to evolve as a highly respectable device indeed. It's rather plain to look at — the Kawasaki is better styled by far, as are the Harley and the Duke. But like a plain girl in her best kit, it's neatly trimmed out — not too much chrome, the motor nicely finished in alloy and black, a functional instrument housing, and a clean look about the front forks and mudguard.

And, lo and behold, a disc brake at the front end. That I found really superb, for the simple reason that one of my first bikes was a relation of the 250, the old 200, and that had a little drum brake that was about as much use as dragging your heels up the road. The disc is just great, and on the day of the photo session when the whole eight of us were barrelling round London, it seemed to stop the RD as well as anything else managed.

Some 250s can be as exciting in terms of performance as a lukewarm rice pudding, but the Yam is an exception, as one might expect. It pulls away well, and then

at 5,500 rpm the power comes in with a real mini-bang, enough to lift the front wheel if you've slipped the clutch a little first. It runs out of revs quickly, so that for zippy round-town work you're constantly hunting up and down through the gears, but that's no great hardship, as the box is very sweet, and I never once missed a shift or found a false neutral.

The handling can best be described as "uneasy". Although quite good, it never provoked perfect trust, and the bike had a habit of breaking into a soggy weave on fast sweepers, a curious sensation for a 250. It's probably nothing that thicker oil in the front forks and Konis on the back wouldn't cure, (if that don't work, try a new frame). Round town, though, the RD's fine, able to change direction quickly to get round the No. 15 bus and still avoid the beer lorry coming the other way ten yards off.

If you've gathered by now that the RD is a thoroughly good, zippy bike, with the kind of performance and handling that tempts you to toss it about a bit through the traffic, then you're quite right. It *is* all

of those things, and if it wasn't for one horrible, glaring error on the part of Yamaha (and all Jap factories, come to that) it would be a really good bike. The error is the tyre chosen for the machine — the Bridgestone Nylon.

Having said this, I can hear the chorus arising from tight-fisted geezers all over the nation. 'Knockin' Bridgestones again are they? Nuffink wrong wiv 'em mate.' — Satisfied of Bognor. All I can say, Satisfied, is that you must ride like a toad, and you don't go out in the wet. These tyres are really lethal.

It wouldn't be so bad if they only put them on commuter style machines, although maybe that's cruel enough, but to fit them to a bike like the RD 250 is lunacy. The Yam is going to be bought because of its performance qualities, and mostly by young lads of 17, so that they've got something respectable to ride while they're passing their tests. Almost without exception, these kids will act for a while like loonies, till they get to learn what biking's about. And with a bike fitted with Bridgestone Nylon tyres, they'll

not only drop it first time they brake hard in the wet, they'll also stand a good chance of losing it in the dry the first time they try braking late and deep for a corner, and tossing it in. If they pick a left hander, the beer lorry'll probably get them. If a right hander, the kerb will. Either way, it's a bit hard to have to learn that roughly. A bit of a slide that frightens but doesn't bring down is a far better way of teaching. Good rubber allows you the occasional slide and you can still get away with it.

If you think that I'm going on a bit, I'll illustrate. The day of the photo session, I whipped it into a roundabout on the way there, with blurred memories of chucking it into Charlie's going through my mind, and the whole thing went away from under me. I managed to kick it up, but it's a damn good job a roundabout's got four exits, because I didn't make the one I was going for.

Out on the strip, the RD was easily the quickest bike through the quarter, burning off the distance in just 15.7 seconds. Now that's good for a 250, and to get it in perspective it's in the bracket that much vaunted automobiles such as the Porsche Carrera will manage.

At just over 90mph, the Yam wasn't as fast flat out as we'd expected, particularly as an identical bike hit exactly 100.00mph through the traps when we tested it back in the Dec/Jan '74 issue. Maybe it just shows how identical bikes differ, but splitting the difference between the two speeds obtained would indicate that the average RD will hit the mid-90s with the rider prone on the tank, which merely proves how much it's holding in reserve when you're cruising at today's puny speed limits.

The Yamaha is comfortable and well finished, but mainly it'll be bought because it's fast. It's a two-stroke, so you'd better not mind about leaving a trail of blue fog behind you. Ecology isn't a subject likely to worry its potential owners, so this probably doesn't matter. Fuel consumption is average, I got 44mpg, ridden hard. It isn't going to be ridden any other way. Just change the bloody tyres first.

Barnaby Williams



Above: Motor of the quickest 250 you can buy is tastefully finished in alloy and matt black. Right: Big dials tell you all you need to know.



CHECKOUT

	4.7 CZ 471	11.8 DUCATI Mk III	7.5 H-D SS-250	9.4 HONDA CB250	7.3 KAWASAKI S1	7.6 MZ TS 250	7.5 SUZUKI GT250	8 YAMAHA RD250
ENGINE Type	2-stroke twin	ohc 4-stroke single	2-stroke single	sohc 4-stroke twin	2-stroke triple	2-stroke single	2-stroke twin	2-stroke twin, reed valves
Capacity	246 cc	239 cc	243 cc	249 cc	249 cc	249 cc	247 cc	247 cc
Bore/stroke	52 x 58 mm	72.5 x 57.8 mm	72 x 60 mm	56 x 50.6 mm	45 x 52.3 mm	69 x 65 mm	54 x 54 mm	54 x 54 mm
Comp. ratio	9.3:1	9.7:1	10.3:1	9.3:1	7.5:1	9.5:1	6.7:1	7.5:1
Carburation	24 mm Jikov	30 mm Dell 'Orto	32 mm Dell 'Orto	2 x 30 mm Keihin	3x22 mm Mikuni	30 mm BVF	2x28mm Mikuni	2x28mm Mikuni
Bhp/rpm	17 @ 5,250	22 @ 7,500	n.a.	27 @ 10,000	28 @ 7,500	21 @ 5,200/ 5,500	30 @ 7,000	30 @ 7,500
Gearbox	4-speed	5-speed	5-speed	6-speed	5-speed	4-speed	6-speed	5-speed
Electrics	6v battery/coil	Electronic ign, 6v battery	12v battery/coil	12v battery/coil	12v battery/coil	6v battery/coil	12v battery/coil	12v battery/coil
DIMENSIONS								
Wheelbase	52.0 ins	54.0 ins	55.5 ins	54.0 ins	54.0 ins	52.5 ins	52.0 ins	53.0 ins
Kerb weight	336 lbs	279 lbs	267 lbs	383 lbs	368 lbs	268 lbs	344 lbs	344 lbs
Seat height	32.0 ins	30.0 ins	31.0 ins	32.0 ins	33.0 ins	30.5 ins	31.5 ins	31.5 ins
Fuel capacity	2.9 gals	2.9 gals	2.8 gals	2.9 gals	3.0 gals	4.2 gals	3.3 gals	4.2 gals
Oil capacity	Petrol	4 pts	3.2 pints	5.3 pints	3.1 pints	Petrol	3.2 pints	4.1 pints
Tyres front	Barum 3.00x18	Pirelli 3.00x19	Pirelli 3.25x19	Bridgestone 3.00 x 18	Yokohama 3.00 x 18	Pneumant 3.00 x 16	Bridgestone 3.00 x 18	Bridgestone 3.00 x 18
rear	Barum 3.50 x 18	Pirelli 3.25x18	Pirelli 4.00x18	Bridgestone 3.25 x 18	Yokohama 3.25 x 18	Pneumant 3.25 x 16	Bridgestone 3.25 x 18	Bridgestone 3.50 x 18
Brakes front	6.3 in t/s	7.0 in twin s/s	5.3 in s/s	10.2 in disc	7.1 in t/s	6.3 in s/s	10 in disc	10.5 in disc
rear	6.3 in s/s	6.3 in s/s	5.3 in s/s	6.3 in s/s	7.1 in s/s	5.9 in s/s	8 in s/s	7.1 in s/s
EQUIPMENT								
Trafficators	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Elec. start	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Mirrors	No	No	One	Two	Two	One	Two	Two
Steering lock	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Other	Pump, enclosed Rear chain, alloy rims	—	—	—	—	Enc. chain, pump, fuel and tool locks, first aid kit, alloy rims	—	Fuel lock
PERFORMANCE								
Top speed	75 mph (est)	92.02 mph	80.4 mph	90.36 mph	89.55 mph	79.57 mph	81.97 mph	90.63 mph
Standing 1/4	22.3 secs	17.35 secs	16.8 secs	17.45 secs	16.43 secs	17.93 secs	16.28 secs	15.75 secs
0-30 mph	4.6 secs	3.8 secs	2.5 secs	4.6 secs	3.9 secs	4.2 secs	3.7 secs	3.6 secs
0-60 mph	—	11.5 secs	10.9 secs	11.9 secs	10.2 secs	13.3 secs	10.8 secs	8.9 secs
Brakes								
from 30 mph	38 ft	35 ft	35 ft	33 ft	36 ft	32 ft	30 ft	32 ft
from 60 mph	176 ft	131 ft	172 ft	157 ft	124 ft	135 ft	135 ft	152 ft
Consumption	55.5 mpg	78 mpg	55 mpg	—	48 mpg	—	—	—
PRICE	£308 inc VAT	£519 inc VAT	£554 inc VAT	£539 inc VAT	£510 inc VAT	£351 inc VAT	£499 inc VAT	£515 inc VAT
Guarantee	6 months parts only Skoda (GB) Ltd., Estuary Rd., King's Lynn, Norfolk.	6 months/ 4,000 miles Ducati (UK), 21 Crawley Rd., Luton, Beds.	Under review AMF Harley- Davidson, 25-28 Old Burlington St, London W1X 2BA.	6 months/ 4,000 miles Honda (UK), Power Rd., Chiswick, Lon- don W4 5YT.	6 months/ 6,000 miles Davick Motique, 11 High St., Long Eaton NG10 1HY.	6 months parts only Regent St. Garages, Regent St., Kettering, Northants.	6 months parts 3 mths labour Suzuki (GB), Beddington Lane, Croydon, Surrey.	6 months/ 4,000 miles Coburn & Hughes, 449 Green Lanes, Harringay, London N4.
Supplied by								

TEST CONDITIONS: Ducati, Honda, brisk tail wind; MZ, Kawasaki, CZ, neutral; Harley, Suzuki, Yamaha, strong cross wind. All sessions on dry track with 10½-stone riders in leathers, prone on tank for top speed runs.

SUMMARY

WHEN ALL the miles had gone by, the final speed trap session had been logged, and the last overdue bike sent packing, it was time to think not only about what came out best and why, but to assess also the delights that 250cc biking itself has to offer. It was then that a feeling of something gone flat began to surface.

For, with the possible exception of the Kawasaki and the Yamaha, there wasn't one natural born stand-out winner. All the eight had flaws, even if in some cases the failings were only minor. But it did begin to seem as though whoever created these bikes in the first place hadn't got their design parameters fully sorted, were not quite sure what job they wanted their bike to do, or exactly who they wanted to sell it to.

The Yamaha, for example, is the ultimate hard charging 250cc street bike — so why hasn't the job been finished with the quirky high speed handling smoothed out, and decent tyres fitted to contain the power? Likewise, the MZ, with that amazingly refined specification, is hardly a plodding economy bike. Yet the weirdo clutch and, again, the suspect handling won't let it become the light 'n' lively sports bike it could so easily be.

However, after all the ifs, buts and second thoughts, it eventually became pretty clear that the Japanese are still closest to finding the pulse beat of the 250cc street market. The four Jap bikes are shiny, glossy and . . . well, it just *looks* like there's a whole lot more motorcycle to them. And of the Japanese contenders, the Kawasaki and the Yamaha are clearly the best. So there you have our joint winners of the great eight bike 250cc Giant Test.

A dead heat? Well, if Kawasaki hadn't taken some of the fangs from the S1's performance, maybe we'd have had no problem in finding an absolute winner. But although it's been slowed down a bit, it's still the most sophisticated package in the

"All eight had flaws even if in some cases the failings were only minor . . ."

250 class, the third cylinder doesn't cost you any extra in either price or fuel consumption, and it handles.

Which the RD250 doesn't — at least, not as well as that magnificent motor deserves. And it's this flaw, plus the peaky characteristics of the motor, that keep the Yamaha from the clear overall winner's spot.

Of the other two Japanese bikes, the Suzuki with that delightful motor as mellow and pleasant as the Kawasaki triple, has a lot of potential that's largely hidden by some of the more irrelevant points in its design mentioned in full in the test. And the Honda was plain disappointing . . . too bland, too soggy, despite that 90mph trap speed, abetted as it was by a brisk tail wind. (In fact the entire speed trap business became slightly embarrassing when we found, for a thousand and one reasons, that there was no way we could get all eight bikes to the strip on the same day, and the wind conditions just *had* to be different on each of the three separate sessions we were forced to settle for. All we can say is, note the conditions listed for each bike in the Checkout panel, and make the necessary allowances.)

Of the European bikes, the Ducati is good to have around because it's so refreshingly different — or maybe we should say refreshingly traditional. But against the Kawasaki, for example, it seems

awfully pricey for what you get. To a certain extent, this goes too for the Harley, which will also be limited in its appeal by the fact it's set up primarily as a town bike.

To prove that *Bike's* Giant Tests are not just about power and speed, bear in mind that when we made the humble MZ winner of the 125cc session earlier this year, it was against Japanese twins a full ten mph faster. But in the 250 section, the Commie bikes find the competition harder. We've already mentioned the 250 MZ's confusing image — a pity, because it's the best built of all East European brands, and it has to represent the best value for money in this test. But biking's about riding pleasure even more than value, and on this count the MZ falls down for reasons already explained. The CZ is likeable enough, but somehow one feels that even three hundred quid ought to arouse something more than tepid acceptance.

If you picked up this test hoping that it would show up a neat handful of perfect lightweight motorcycles that you could sift and choose from, we're sorry, but it hasn't worked quite that way. There are good buys among the 250s, but what this test really proved is that as a class, it's getting stale. Look, for example, up the scale a bit at what's on offer in the 400cc range, which has become a highly indivi-

dual class of its own these days. In there you've got the S3 Kawasaki triple, and the new four-cylinder Honda with radical (for Japan) four - into - one exhausts and a startling lack of surface tinsel. They're two conceptually brilliant motorcycles, and you can find similar examples to illustrate the point in almost every capacity class except the 250.

The consolation is that most of the bikes in this test have been around a few years now, and maybe new designs, or more competent rehashes of the existing ones, are in the pipeline. If that is the case, here's our humble advice to the manufacturers on how to improve their products, although we're bright enough to know by now that these words are unlikely to reach anyone's chief designer.

First, Japanese manufacturers should stop plastering over their bikes smug little stickers urging almost childish inane safety advice on the biking public. Then they might find time to follow their own guidelines and start with what should be the simple job of making their lightweights handle predictably. Still more important, they should fit to their bikes tyres that can live with some of the rather fine engines they produce. If only it were possible to statistically calculate how many motorcycle accidents might have been avoided over the years but for Japanese rubber, the results could make chilling reading.

As for the Europeans, most of 'em already know how to make bikes go round corners, but some are a little short in finishing off the design and styling details of their products. Quick-peeling chrome on the Harley's exhaust pipe, cruddy switches on almost all of them, agricultural gear changes on the MZ and CZ — small points, but they can take a lot away from a bike.

What's that you say, you'd sooner stay with your Ariel Arrow anyway . . .