



LEGAL BATTLER

Not everyone finds it easy to put a plate on an enduro motorcycle. Norm Pope is out to prove the Yamaha DT200R can be both street-legal and enduro competitive.

By Bruce Reeve

Norm Pope is a worried man. He's a 28-year-old expert enduro rider, with six AMA national victories last season on his Honda XR250R, but what concerns him is the dilemma faced by a newcomer to the sport of enduro riding.

The problem is simple: competitive enduro motorcycles, strictly speaking, are not street legal. Their knobby tires and rudimentary lighting will not pass ordinary certification requirements. And yet, enduros, which include sections of public roads, require licensed and insured machines.

"It's difficult for someone who doesn't know the inner workings of the sport to get started," says Pope. Experienced enduro riders who are known and trusted by dealers have no trouble getting a KDX, XR, CR or RMX plated for road use, but few dealers will put a certificate on the line for a stranger who might turn around and wheelie down the main street. Enduro competition depends on the co-operation of local authorities, who unless provoked, will ignore the marginal legality of the bikes.

As a result, most enduro novices need to start with true street-legal dual-purpose bikes, which are not overly competitive—with one exception. The Yamaha DT200R arrived last year with a suspension upgrade and an overhauled engine of remarkable power and flexibility. Although cosmetically similar to previous DTs, the 200R was a serious dirt bike in street guise. To better underline its dirt talents, the '90 model comes in the blue of previous off-road IT models.

Pope is a keen supporter of grassroots racing, and as the CMA road race director for the Ontario region helped to establish YSR50 racing in the province. He sees the DT200R as the ideal entry-level enduro bike. Yamaha Motor Canada has provided a DT for Pope to compete on in the '90 season, to prove to

potential buyers that it can be competitive against specialized enduro machinery. Pope knows he'll have his hands full switching from his XR into a more competitive two-stroke class on the Yamaha, but says his "biggest concern is keeping the sport alive. I figure I can do more for enduro riding by doing this."

Pope also assumes he can do very well riding the DT200R after borrowing one from Yamaha for evaluation last fall. "I put 600 km of pure hell on that bike and I couldn't get it to break." That included a 40 km/h endo over a log in the woods in which one radiator was whacked severely out of shape. Pope straightened the rad in a vise and put it back in service, without a single leak.

The standard lighting, instruments, passenger pegs and excess bracketry drop off the DT quickly if an owner wants to fit abbreviated enduro-spec lighting, though Pope did ride an enduro with the standard equipment in place before switching to a small and light Acerbis headlight. For competition a small resettable odometer needs to be added, and Pope switched to Dunlop K990 knobbies he'd been using on his XR, which hooked up nicely.

The DT's standard brake pads have a fairly hard street compound, and after glazing the rear pads Pope switched to a softer EBC set. He'll replace the fronts as well, though the forward disc is excellent. YZ sprockets bolt on to the DT, and the rear 43-tooth sprocket was swapped for a 47-tooth Yamaha part. The stock fork springs are fine for trail riding, but Pope switched to the Progressive Suspension springs he'd been using with his XR and experimented with oil viscosity, quantity and air pressure. The rear five-clicker shock adjusts for rebound and compression and met with Pope's approval, as did the five grease-fittings for the suspension linkage.

One weak point is the

handlebars, which were easily tweaked after one of several nose-plants. Any set of chrome-moly bars could be used, but Pope swears by the standard Honda bars from the XR250R.

During his initial flogging of the DT, a spark-plug fouled after 200 km. Pope replaced it with a fine-electrode NGK V and had no other problems. The two-piece plug-wrench was essential for the change because of the tight clearances.

During Cycle Canada's test of the DT200R last year (Jan. '89) we experienced difficulty getting a prototype machine up to operating temperature. Later investigation showed an incorrectly machined cylinder head, but Pope found absolutely no problems with the cooling system on his production DT.

He did find a few traits to nit-pick: the toolkit can't be reached without using a screwdriver; the rear caliper holder interferes with quick rear tire changes; despite a hole for a front rim-lock, none is fitted, which would become noticeable during aggressive braking while running lower tire pressures in competition; and the rear brake pedal has excessive travel and isn't adjustable.

On the plus side are the excellent YZ-spec low-maintenance wheels and a quick-access airbox. For most regular service the DT rates above average in accessibility.

Pope is particularly impressed with the DT200R Power Valve engine, which was redesigned last year with case-reed injection and a flat-slide carb. A counterbalancer geared to the crankshaft increases the flywheel effect, and the engine is superbly tractable from low revs to the 9,500 rpm red-line. At 100 km/h on road sections the DT is practically vibration free. "The DT is a true road bike if you want to head up to Algonquin for a weekend and do some exploring.

"In the dirt, the DT gives excellent feedback. You



The DT is both legal and enduro competitive for \$3,999.

ride as part of the machinery, not just perched to enjoy the scenery. The seat is very firm and stays firm. At speed on trails, the airvents in the rad-shrouds form a set of pockets for your knees to grip. It forgives rider mistakes, but the DT will accept both the rider who can go quick and the learner."

Allen Oldham, an expert CMA rider who normally competes on a CR250, was similarly impressed with a stint on the DT. "It's just a scream to ride. In tight woods you can throw it into corners confidently. It's so much fun to ride I hated to give it back. I feel it would be an ideal beginner's or junior's bike."

There's more to getting started in enduros than having an appropriate motorcycle, however. Pope recommends that the first step is to contact a local club (the CMA can help you find one (416) 522-5705) and go to a meeting. "You'll learn a lot as you go along, but someone will say 'come on out to an event, we'll take you through the paces.' Some-

body will probably carry gas for you and help you with basic timekeeping if you go to a club meeting first."

Yamaha's DT200R removes at least one major obstacle for the budding enduro rider—licensing. "I remember I sent my mom to get plates for my XR one year," says Pope. "She spent about an hour arguing that the bike was street legal—which she thought it was—before they would give her the plates."

The DT200R's list price of \$3,999 is identical to that of a pure enduro machine like the Kawasaki KDX200, but unless you have friends at a dealership or a particularly obstinate mother, licensing problems make the Yamaha a better bet—especially if you plan to ride on the street as well as compete in enduros.

There's another incentive—at Pope's suggestion, Yamaha Motor Canada will pay contingency money at the junior and senior levels to encourage enduro riders and sales of the DT.

All this and Pope's blessing too.



For pure enduro use, excess components remove quickly.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN COOPER AND NORM POPE