LIVING WITH A CAN-AM

How We've Kept The 350 Alive and Happy Through All Manner of Abuse

By The Dirt Bike Staff

After months of thrashing, the 350 is holding up well. The Vesco tank mounts with no hassle, doesn't interfere with leg movement.

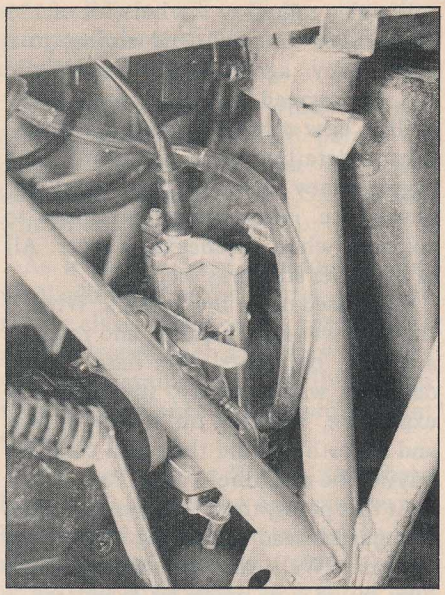
Back in the February issue, we did a test on the 350 Can-Am Qualifier. We had a few complaints about it, but overall, we liked the bike, and asked the Bombardier people if it'd be alright if we did a little tuning on their 280. What we didn't tell them, was that for the price of some head-scratching, a few parts and a bit of work, the staff would have a free ride for a while. At least until they got wise . . .

One of our major complaints was the size of the fuel tank and the voracious appetite of the Bing carb. The combination of the two rather limited our range with the bike. On a normal trail riding session, we could expect not much more than 40 miles from a tank of gas, which isn't the hot setup for either a long day, or a short enduro—too many stops.

The first thing we did, then, was pop off the stock tank and bolt up a Vesco Fat/Skinny (or Skinny/Fat) tank. We used a 3½-gallon model, and found that red was the best color match to the Can-Am. Vesco does make an orange tank, but it's quite a bit lighter in color than a stock Qualifier and looks a little weird on the bike. Mounting the tank was no problem, but it is necessary to pull back the seat cover and cut down the foam to allow the tank to sit back far enough so the triple clamps can clear the front. We cut out a little more than an inch of foam, and wound up with a pretty tight fit, but it's possible to take a full two inches off before you start to miss it, as the Can-Am's seat is a long one to begin with.

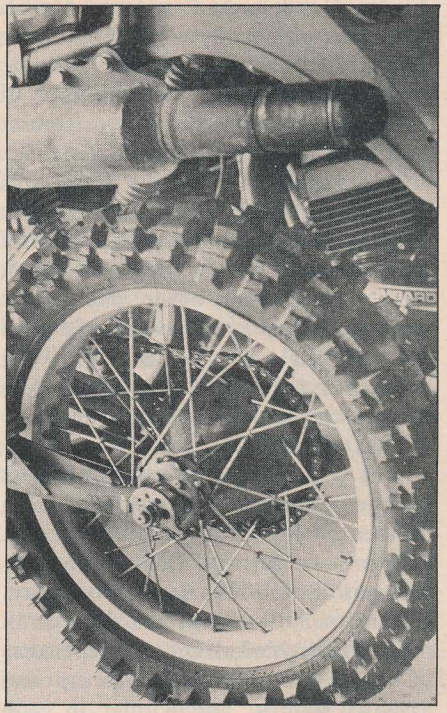
With the big tank, we were able to go 60 miles before filling up. Not too bad—more like what the stock bike should get—but still nothing to wave your arms about. At this point, we gleefully removed the Bing and put it to work holding open one of the many doors to the airy DIRT BIKE garage. We'd heard a few incredible stories of three-digit gas mileage in Baja, on bikes running Lectron carbs, so we decided to pop for one of the new Powerjet units.

We got our facts straight in one quick visit to Sparky Edmunston, the local Lectron rep, and wound up settling on a 38mm with a 4-2 metering rod and a #65 powerjet. Sparky had been doing a lot of work on Jim Weinert's race bikes, and promised that the 38 would



The 36mm Lectron jams into the space left by the Bing with plenty of room to spare. It's easier to get at the carb once the lower section of the air box is removed.

Front end is still stock, with the exception of a 3.00x21 Metzeler.



Even in the incredibly cluttered DIRT BIKE garage, the Terraflex is getting traction. Rim dent was caused by a Dunlop/hard rock combination early in the test.

tune up fine and hurt none of the low-end power. Fine, great, fantastic. Let's do it.

There are a few modifications that have to be done in order to make the Lectron fit in the small hole left by the Bing. First off, one or two millimeters have to be cut from the front part of the Lectron's bell to ensure a snug fit in the motor boot. The trick is to make sure the groove in the bell mates with the boot's inner rib, and then everything can be clamped up tight. Next, an air box boot from an MX-6 is used to connect the inlet to the box. The stock boot, the one for the Bing, has too small an inside diameter to stretch around the Lectron's air intake.

Once all the parts are fitted properly, the Lectron tucks in with no more problems. The stock cables fit fine. Make sure the cable is adjusted to give full throttle, and waterproof where it enters the top of the carb.

We used a 4-2 metering rod set 2½ to 3 turns from the top. The manual describes how to make jetting changes, and depending on conditions, it may be necessary to turn it up or down a half-turn or so. The powerjet is a #65, and is easy enough to change to suit top-end jetting requirements. By the way, Lectron powerjets are nothing more than Mikuni pilot jets, and as such are readily available.

With the new carb installed—wonder of wonders—we found ourselves capable of 90 miles to a tank of mix, which works out to be right around 25 miles per gallon. Not too bad for a crisp 350. Certainly a lot better than stock. As a side benefit, the properly carbureted Qualifier picks up a bunch more response, and third gear wheelies are as easy as cracking open the throttle. The motor revs out better than it ever has before, and try as hard as we can, it just won't load up. We'd have to rate this as one of the best things ever to happen to a Bing-equipped Can-Am. Or any bike with a Bing on it, for that matter.

Once we were satisfied with the carb situation, we turned our attention to the second major gripe: tires. Nothing could be simpler. We'd been working with Terraflex tires at the time, and mounted up a 5.10x18, a massive tire that gives new meaning to the word "traction." For our rocky, dry-as-a-bone riding conditions, there was no better choice than a 3.00x21 Metzeler on the front.

With the new skins, the Qualifier gained a whole new set of manners. The stock Dunlops are OK for wet riding, and even in Western adobe, the stock rear rubber isn't the worst choice we could make; but the front tire, a Dunlop Sports Senior, is absolute trash, pure and simple. Once the edges are worn off the knobs of a Sports Senior, you'd be better off riding on the bare rim, and you can quote us on that.

The wheels are fine just the way they are, and all we did was the usual spoke maintenance. Brakes were cleaned, and the wheel bearings checked periodically, but we have yet to replace anything in the hubs.

The rear shocks are worn to the point where they start fading after about ten minutes of riding, but the ride isn't so horrible that we're in a hurry to change them. Maybe one of these days we'll pop for a new set of Ohlins.

To smooth out the forks some, we went to PJ-1 10W oil, and usually ran about four pounds of air, depending on what kind of riding we were doing.

Aside from all that, we've done nothing but basic maintenance—keeping things tight and lubed, by any other name. The gear oil gets changed every 200 miles or so (oil's cheaper than trannies), and we've been running Duralube 50:1 as mix. No problems with the top end. Actually, since we solved the mileage problem, we've had so few complaints that there's nothing new to gripe about.

Meanwhile, the 350 keeps chugging right along. We've ridden it in a few local enduros, and put on countless hours of trail riding, and see plenty more to come. The next big trip for the 350 will be three days of riding in Baja—some of the nastiest terrain in North America, but we foresee no problems at all.

And if Mexican gas won't kill it, nothing will. □