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Yamaha YZ125F Motocrosser

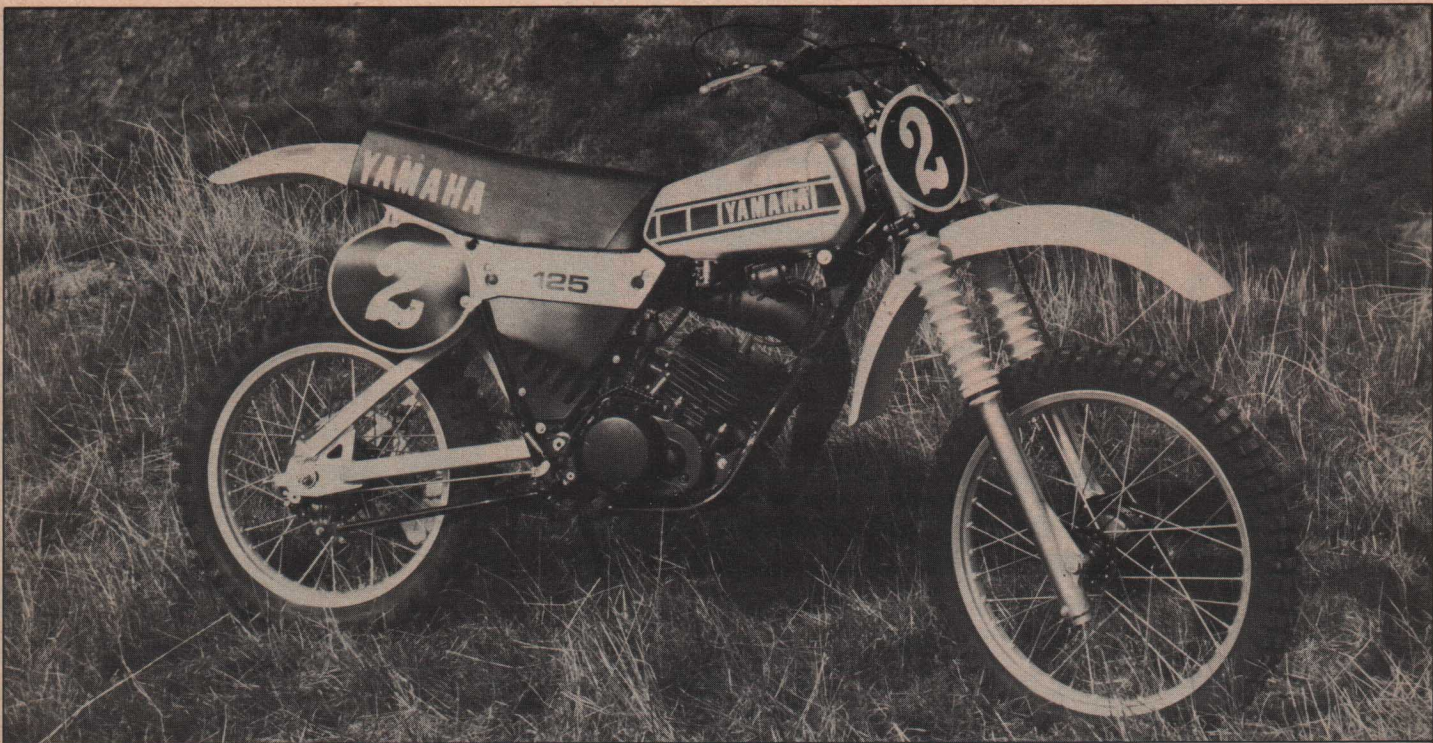
YOU'VE GOT TO RIDE IT LIKE HANNAH...

... To make it work
By the Staff of Dirt Bike

The Yamaha YZ125F: last of the Big Four 125s in our four-part series. Next month, the shootout between the four. Things are starting to shape up interestingly for that shootout, as we've been riding the bikes for a long period of time. One of the bikes that's been ridden the most is the YZ.

Strangely, we've grown to like the YZ more and more, as time has accumulated on the machine. At first, we felt it was a bit down on both power and suspension, but our staff 125 freak, John Rudder, has won a number of races with the machine in both the Novice and Intermediate classes. *(Continued)*





When first straddling the YZ125F, most riders invariably comment that the bike does not feel all that tall for a '79 racer. Riders standing 5'9" or taller can put both feet flat on the ground while straddling the saddle up near the tank.

Part of the reason for the low profile is the travel, or lack of, compared to other iron in its class. Up front, there's 250 millimeters of stroke, which translates into 9.8 inches. Surely, reason tells us that's enough for a light racer; it's just that long travel is what's selling right now.

At the rear, slightly over nine inches of travel do the job. To get this nine inches, the monoshock unit only travels about 5½ inches. This alone tells you that a great deal more travel is lurking under the frame. Unfortunately, modifying the mono is a headache. Officially, Yamaha tells us that the mono is not rebuildable on the 125. Unofficially, we've seen any number of shops attach reservoirs and tamper into the wee hours of the night. Most of the shock modifications seem to center around cutting down the large spacer that limits the travel. All the YZs from 125 to 400 share the same basic shock, with different-length spacers allowing the longer travel on the bigger bikes. Unfortunately, the heavier springs of the 250 and the 400 cannot be used in the 125, because the frame surrounding the mono unit is smaller on the 125. Still, we raced our bike in stock trim, replacing only tires and bars as needed. Crashing and thrashing take their toll.

In standard trim, we felt the forks did a decent job, while the rear end could

use some help. As long as the rider was careful in his approach to bad bumps and kept his weight shifts just right, the mono could handle most situations adequately. However, when blasting through a rough, dusty section, or when catching a square-edged bump unaware, a nasty, spine-jarring jolt could be felt at the rear.

Back in the saddle

The YZ responded best under most situations with the rider having his weight fairly far to the rear. It was not necessary to get way forward on the tank (like last year's 125) to get the front end to bite.

In fact, when accelerating hard on less-than-perfect traction, if the rider had his weight too far forward, the rear end would crazily slither all over the place. Again, weight to the rear proved to be the answer.

The overall layout of the YZ125F lends itself to the basic Bob Hannah back-flat, hips-to-the-rear, low-shoulders standing position. Pegs are farther back on the YZ than on most other bikes. This makes going from a seated to a standing position easier, but it also makes it too easy for a lazy rider to slouch forward and let the rear end get too light. Hence, the need for that rearward emphasis on weight distribution.

In the corners

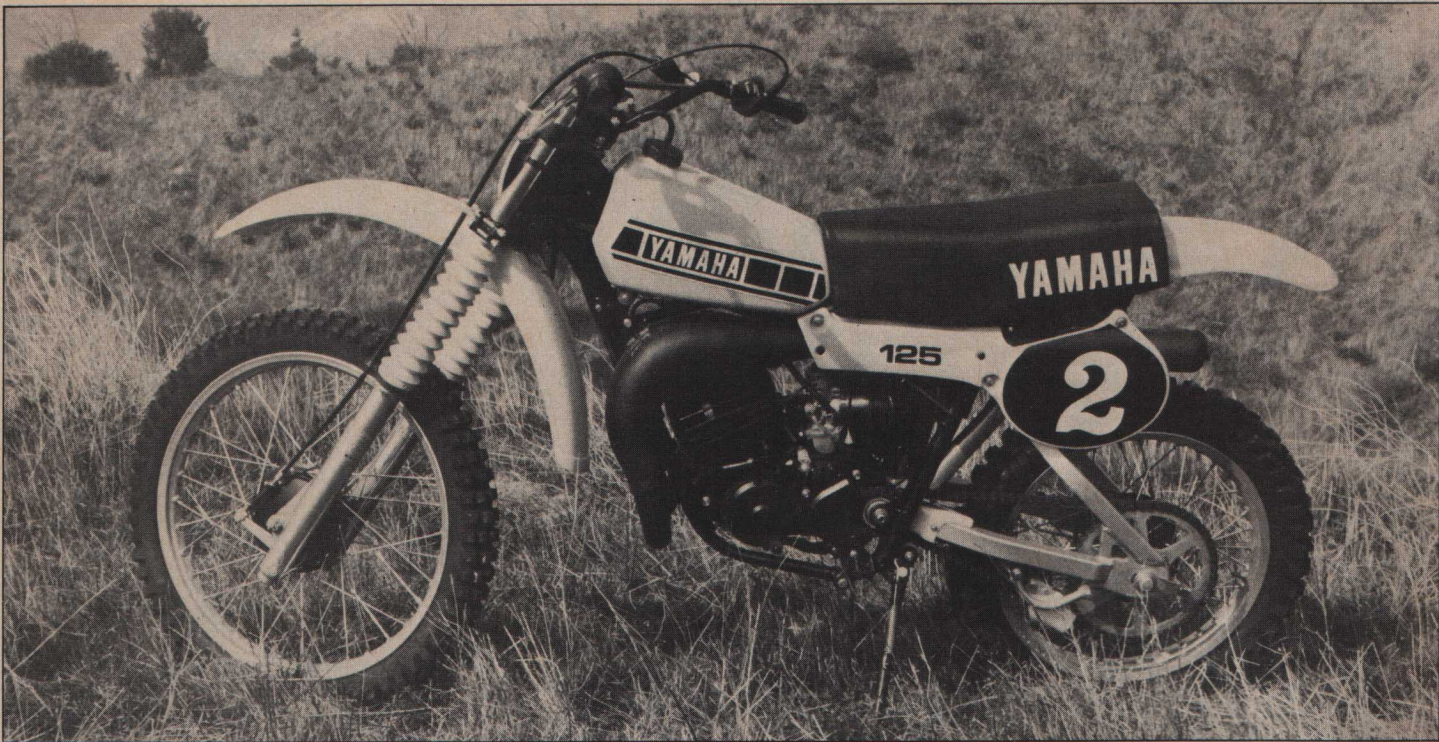
That's where the YZ is happiest. At first, the bike feels skittery and spooky, with the rear end being especially nervous. It's not uncommon for the rear knobby to lurch sideways when under moderate power, heeled

over in a flat turn. But, the rear end only goes out just so far. No more than a six-inch-to-a-foot skip. We rarely had the YZ do a full-blown spin-out, and soon learned to live with the snaky-feeling rear end.

Later on, after we had burnt out the stock 4.10x18 Bridgestone knobby, we replaced it with a hefty 4.75x18 Goodyear, admittedly a massive piece of rubber for a 125. However, this huge tire felt right at home on the bike and even eliminated most of the rear-end slithering. The only place where this tire was a slight handicap, was on starts. Here, the rear end was harder to break loose and we tended to bog fractionally between gears on long, uphill straights. On most parts of most courses, though, the Goodyear was a big improvement and one definitely worth considering for other 125 racers. Some conversation with other 125 YZ owners showed us that the stock rear rubber had an exceedingly short life span. While the larger Bridgestones seem like reasonable tires, the 4.10x18 is not exactly the shining star of their lineup.

Because of the low saddle height, the YZ was very easy to toss around in the turns like a 125 is supposed to. The 1978 "E" model had a distinct tendency to want to climb over berms. Our "F" model stuck well and accurately when up against the wall.

The steering head has been pulled back on the F version. This means less rake and less trail. It also translates into fractionally less stability at high speeds over rough ground. Still, everything is a trade-off, and we're pleased with the overall improved



handling.

The improvement is especially noticeable on a series of switchbacks, or S turns. Here, the F-model can be flicked quite easily from side to side without a great deal of physical effort. Naturally, weighting of the outside peg is critical, as with all new-generation, long-travel bikes.

Probably the most desirable feature of the YZ in the corners, is that the bike is low and you feel like you can toss it down on the cases without having to worry a great deal. More than one test rider stated that while the YZ was not as steady as other bikes in the turns, it was fun to push to its limits.

Power to the people

Again, we must compare the F-model to the E-model (for now) in the power department. Last year, the YZ125 didn't have much on the bottom or in the mid-range, but made most of its power in the upper rev range. On the F-model, we find that there's still not much real punch at the bottom. None of the 125s have what one could consider decent low end. However, the YZ has a strong mid-range that comes in fairly early for a 125 racer. Unlike last year's bike, the F-model does not wind out far. In fact, after the early mid-range sings out a bit, the rpm flatten and the power falls abruptly off. Nothing is gained by trying to over-rev the bike.

This means that the rider will have to modify his use of the powerband, especially when exiting turns. Here, it's most efficient to revert to the Bob Hannah technique once again. That is as follows: You dive into the turn with

the bike engaged about one gear too high *and* with the clutch held in as braking takes place. As the pivot takes place and the power is applied, the engine will start to lug a bit and pull flatly, slightly off the meaty part of the powerband. At this point, the clutch should be fanned quickly, to bring the revs up, and the bike will literally bolt out of the turn. The next time you get a chance to watch Hannah work a tight turn, look for this technique. It seems to work best with the kind of power the later Yamahas are putting out.

As far as the all-important drag race to the first turn is concerned, the Yamaha will not be there first, all other things being equal. You'll find the pecking order of the acceleration battle next month. While the YZ is not *that* much down on power compared to its counterparts of the red, yellow and green, it just does not want to upshift in a hurry. Trying to speed shift without backing off the throttle, is next to impossible. Even when fanning the clutch under full throttle acceleration, the throttle must be fractionally blipped off, or the bike will simply stay in the gear it was trying to get out of.

Oddly, the hotter the engine gets, the worse this problem gets. We'd recommend that the rider change his gearbox oil regularly. For a three-week period, we neglected to change our oil, and the shifting deteriorated. Once we got back on the drain-it-every-ride schedule, the shifting improved dramatically. This is one area where it just would not pay the rider to scrimp. On the 1978 E-models, we got a lot of feedback about gearbox problems from

readers. The picture seems greatly improved in 1979. Still, a case of high-quality gear oil seems like a good investment, when one considers the cost of transmission parts. Downshifting never presented us with any problems, no matter how clumsily we stabbed at the lever. In fact, when downshifting, we positively abused the gearbox and never used the clutch.

Bits and pieces

The front brake on our test bike was typically Yamaha: excellent. We didn't have the same thing to say about the rear. Even though it's got one of the much ballyhooed full-floating rear brake setups, it chattered like a chipmunk and a great deal of hopping, skipping and locking up was experienced.

The nylon roller on top of the swingarm that's supposed to prevent the chain from eating into the soft aluminum, broke after a few hours of use. We got another one and it broke quickly, too. Then another. . . same thing. The bike now has no roller and seems none the worse for it.

Our YZ125 stayed very tight, suggesting a proper set-up at the distributor. We had no problem with motor mount bolts and the spokes, in general, required little tightening.

Most everyone liked the shape and padding of the saddle. Maximum comfort, for sure.

Quality on the cables and controls was first-rate, with the levers being the next best thing to the shorty Sun-Line DeHandlers.

One interesting sidelight: We ran Yamalube R for the entire duration of



1979 Yamaha YZ125F

ENGINE TYPE . . . Single-cylinder, two-stroke, reed induction
BORE AND STROKE . . . 56 x 50mm (2.20 x 1.97 inches)
DISPLACEMENT . . . 123cc (7.52 cubic inches)
HORSEPOWER (CLAIMED BY FACTORY): . . . N/A
CARBURETION . . . Mikuni 32mm (VM32SS)
FACTORY RECOMMENDED JETTING:
 Main jet . . . 280
 Needle jet . . . P8
 Jet needle . . . 6F 22-3
 Pilot jet . . . 60
 Slide number . . . 3.0
RECOMMENDED GASOLINE . . . Premium, 90+ octane rating
RECOMMENDED OIL (MFR.): Yamalube "R"
FUEL TANK CAPACITY: 6.1 liters (1.6 gallons)
FUEL TANK MATERIAL . . . Plastic
GAS/OIL RATIO . . . 20:1 recommended by factory (Note: we used 40:1)
LUBRICATION . . . Oil in gas, pre-mix
OIL CAPACITY . . . N/A
AIR FILTRATION . . . Oiled foam
CLUTCH TYPE . . . Wet, multi-disc
TRANSMISSION: Six-speed, constant mesh
GEARBOX RATIOS
 1 . . . 32/13 (2.461)

2 . . . 30/16 (1.875)
 3 . . . 27/18 (1.500)
 4 . . . 25/20 (1.250)
 5 . . . 24/22 (1.090)
 6 . . . 23/23 (1.000)
GEARING, FRONT/REAR . . . 12/43
IGNITION . . . Hitachi CDI
PRIMARY KICK SYSTEM? . . . Yes
RECOMMENDED SPARK PLUG . . . Champion N-59G
SILENCER/SPARK ARRESTOR/QUALITY: . . . Silencer, average, as noted
EXHAUST SYSTEM . . . High-pipe, through frame, right side
FRAME, TYPE . . . Semi-double cradle, chrome moly steel
WHEELBASE . . . 1410mm (55.5 inches)
GROUND CLEARANCE: 290mm (11.4 inches)
SEAT HEIGHT AT TANK . . . 900mm (35.4 inches)
STEERING HEAD ANGLE . . . 29.5 degrees
TRAIL . . . 128mm (5.0 inches)
WEIGHT WITH ONE GALLON GAS . . . 202 pounds (194 pounds dry)
RIM MATERIAL . . . Aluminum
TIRE SIZES
 Front . . . 3.00x21 knobby
 Rear . . . 4.10x18 knobby

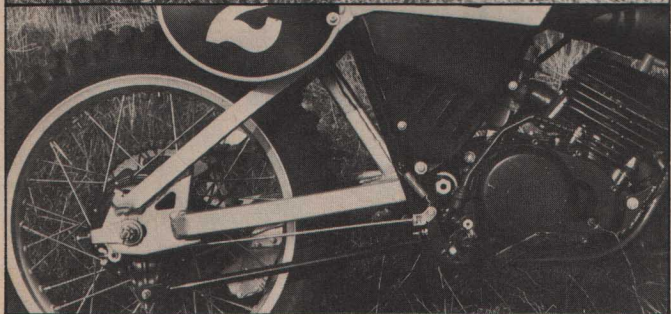
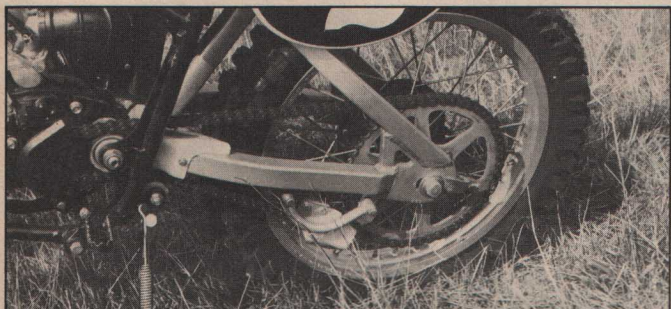
SUSPENSION . . . Telescopic, 250mm
 Front, type and travel . . . (9.8 inches) forward axle
 Rear, type and travel . . . Monocross, 230mm (9.06 inches)
INTENDED USE, MFR . . . Motocross, off-road racing
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 Cost . . . 92
 Attention to detail . . . 97
 Effectiveness, stone stock . . . 90



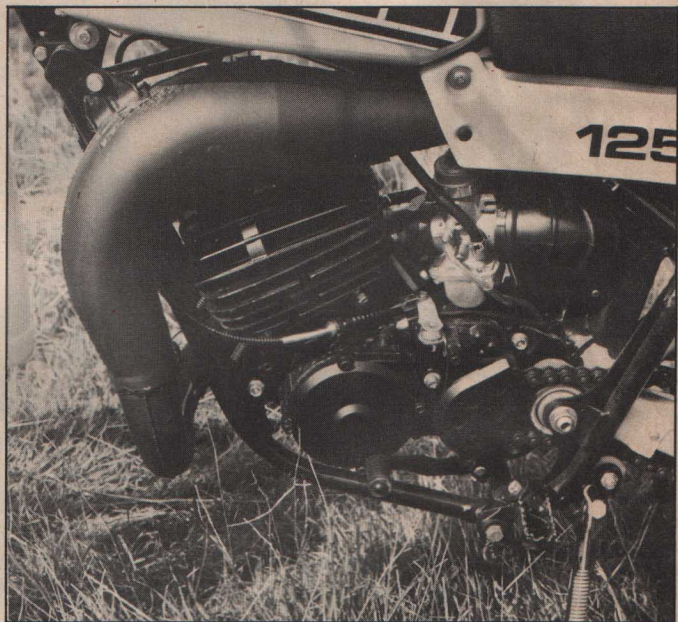
Compact engine has been around for a long time. Look for a change in the basic design next year.



YZ125F is very slim, due to no shocks mounted on the side. There's plenty of room for increased rear end travel. Swingarm is excellent, chain and tire marginal.



Two views of the aluminum arm. Good guides and rollers abound. Full-floating brake rod hangs too low and is vulnerable to rocks and sharp-edged bumps.



Even though pipe appears to be out and unprotected, no one complained of leg burns or excessive heat. Required rearward seating and standing position may have something to do with this.

the test on the YZ. After four and a half months of steady riding and racing, we re-ringed the bike, just because it was getting a bit loose and down on power. The top end was remarkably clean and carbon-free. No boring was needed and we slipped a stock-sized ring in. The rings cost us right around nine bucks, which is just about all we spent on the

bike, other than the aforementioned tire and one broken front fender. Not bad.

We also noticed no smoke while riding the machine and only a bit of smoke when first warming the YZ up.

At first, the muffler on the YZ was quiet, with a pleasing note. As time was put on the bike, the sound got

rattier and rattier. Not louder, just a loss of the sound quality.

One thing we learned about that silencer: When you squirt the bike off with a hose, it's best to remove the silencer before the operation. A huge amount of water accumulates inside the can, and even if you start the bike
(Continued on page 70)



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YZ125F

(Continued from page 23)

immediately after washing, we feel this will only shorten the silencer life. We've seen several that have been badly rusted on the outer shell.

Our front tire was satisfactory and we never bothered to experiment with other units. Very little wear could be seen after four months of riding.

Strangely, there was a lot of engine noise from the YZ125. We worried about it at first, but eventually came to realize that the 125 YZ is *supposed* to sound like a threshing machine. Piston slap was bad when the bike was cold and considerably reduced as the engine warmed up.

Because there's no set of shocks bolted to the side of the chassis, the YZ is very slim and presents no obstructions when the rider is moving back and forth.

Our bike was a very easy starter and rarely took more than a prod or two to get the fire lit. Also, the stroke of the kickstarter is clean and your instep does not whack into the peg as with some other bikes.

Our chain seemed to go away very quickly. We serviced the chain well and frequently, but it still was wasted by the time two months had gone by. Odd.

Servicing the air filter was easy. Just remove the side panel and go for it. Our test bike proved fairly waterproof when blasting across a few 18-inch-deep streams. We never tried it under arduous conditions.

The YZ remained oil-tight. We found no embarrassing spots of oil under the bike after it rested in the DB garage. Fork seals also stayed clean and dry.

Gearing, stock, had a 12-tooth countershaft sprocket up front. For a few long GPs, we ran a 14 and the YZ pulled it with no sweat. Right now, we are running a 13 for MX and only go back to the 12 when the track has a long, grueling uphill that calls for it.

The big picture

The bottom line is that while the YZ is *not* as fast as the competition, it's easy to ride and forgiving, once you adapt to the quirks of the rear end. It changes directions well and the front end bites like a bear trap when the bike is leaned over.

It's probably the easiest 125 to ride, with its combination of low saddle height and good manners in the turns. But, we feel the strongest point of the YZ, like so many Yamahas, is one of reliability. Treated properly, they just seem to run forever.

Next month, see how the YZ125F stacks up against the rest, point for point. There *will* be winners and losers. □