

WHY WAIT? WATER COOL YOUR 125 PG. 26

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# DIRT BIKE

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**BLUE'S  
BROTHER!**  
'81 IT125H



**3 WHEEL SHOOT OUT**  
YAMAHA · HONDA · KAWASAKI · HONDA

**STREET LEGAL BOOMERS**  
\* HONDA XL250 & 500  
\* YAMAHA TT & XT 500

**FIRST LOOK!**  
KAWASAKI KX-80 UNI TRAK



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**ON THE COVER:**— Jim Holley hang glides the IT125 against the better advice of his girlfriend. Super Hunky original photo.

"What in the world is this? Dirt Bike testing three-wheelers? These loonies have finally dived off the deep end!"

And if your reaction is anything like that, you'll be in complete accord with at least half of our testers. No we haven't gone entirely crazy, we're just looking for new limits to probe. In the past, three-wheeled transportation has meant nothing more to us than someone else's idea of what fun is, and although we couldn't agree with them and not giggle a little, we gave them all the room they required, and politely declined to join.

Just about this time last year, we took a trip to Pismo Beach with the folks from Honda, and got our introduction to the three-wheeled way of life. Over the lot of us, this had varied effects. One editor-type vowed never to sling a leg over one again, and two others decided, after watching ATCs being piloted capably at fairly high speeds, that there must be something to it and *next time* we'd try a little harder at learning how to control them.

There's not nearly enough time or space here to go into a lengthy dis-

course on how to ride a three-wheeled device at high speeds, suffice it to say that it's a whole lot different from riding a two-wheeled motorcycle. In its simplest form, the rider's body weight must be to the outside in every turn, with the inside wheel lifting off the ground. And that's all we're going to say.

But what's the big deal about? Well, things are starting to get serious. In the beginning, the only exposure most of us had to three-wheelers was squirrels doing wheelies in the pits of a few motocross and enduro events, up and back, in between the rows of parked cars, either on the two rear wheels or up on one side or the other, on these funny-looking three-wheeled things with *Honda* written on the tanks.

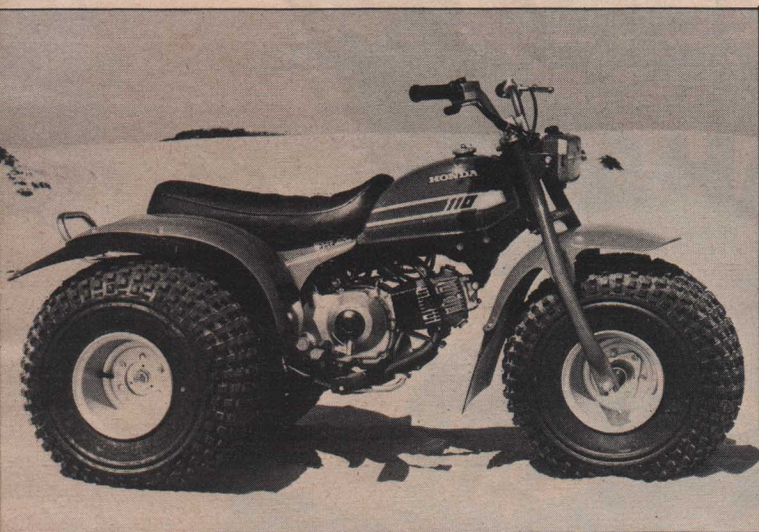
That was strange enough, but even as early as ten years ago, farmers were snapping up ATCs on the sly and using them for anything and everything, from hauling irrigation pipe to spreading seed. They cost a whole lot less than another tractor and, in truth, the ATCs would go many places a tractor couldn't get through. Weird, huh?

Before you ask the next logical question: No, we aren't going to start testing farm implements in the pages of *Dirt Bike*. And we promise not to use any lines like ". . . coming through the rye" in the rest of the test.

To continue, certain racing organizations started sponsoring three-wheeler races—a closed course, just like motocross—and in the past couple of years they've become immensely popular. So much so that now, in our neck of the woods, three-wheel classes are popping up in local enduros, and there are even three-wheeled and Odyssey classes in local grand prix events!

Add to this the fact that Yamaha and Kawasaki have beaten a path through a maze of Honda patents, and gone to great expense to bring out competing models, which seem to be selling well. Also, now that we're going to press with what we thought would be the ATC lineup for Honda for 1981, we get a few nudges and broad winks, and the none-too-subtle hint that Honda's got a few more in the wings for introduction later in the year!

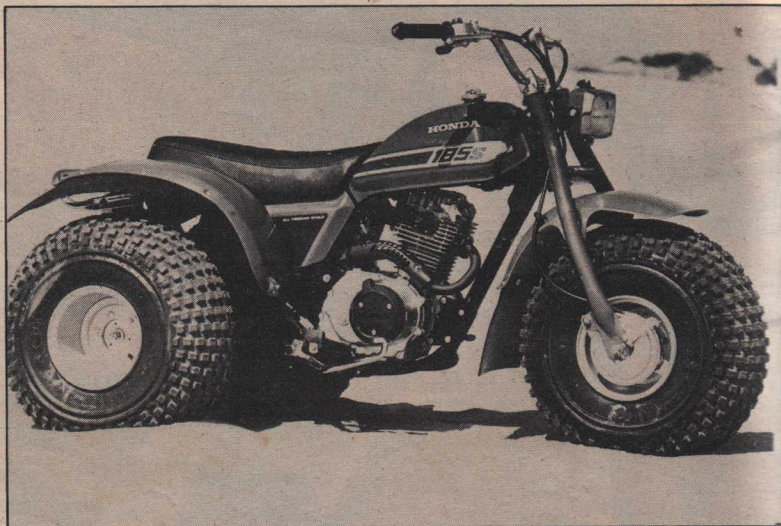
The whole situation becomes over-

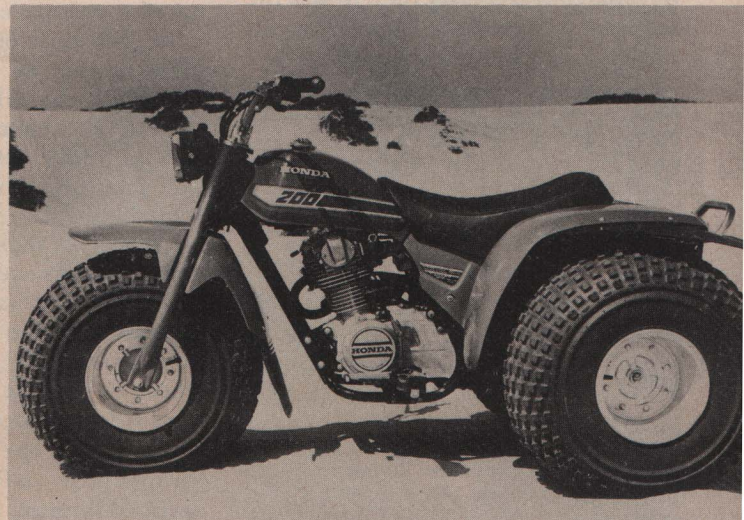
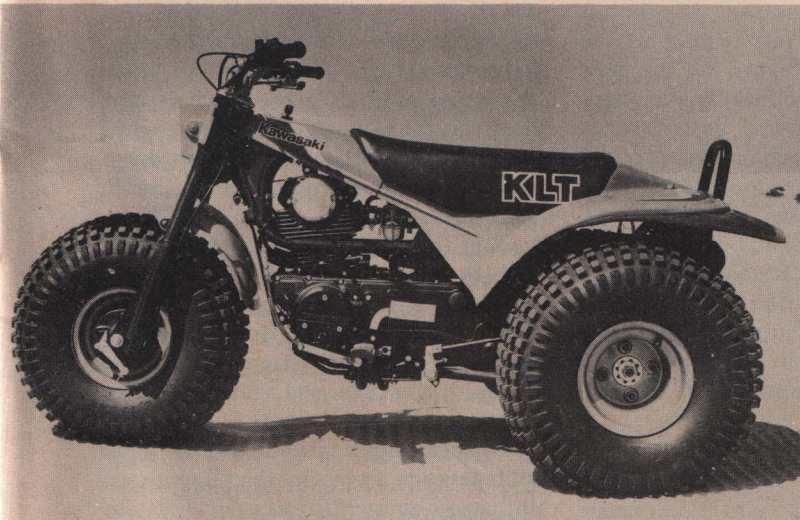


## FOR THAT TRIPOD-LIKE STABILITY **THREE BIG WHEELS**

*The Honda ATC Grows Up,  
And Gains Some Competition*

By the Staff of *Dirt Bike*





# BIG WHEELS

whelming in short order, but allow us to drop one more bomb in your laps: The ATC is the *single best-selling motorcycle division unit* that Honda manufactures. They actually sell more ATCs than *anything* else in their motorcycle lineup!

Whew!

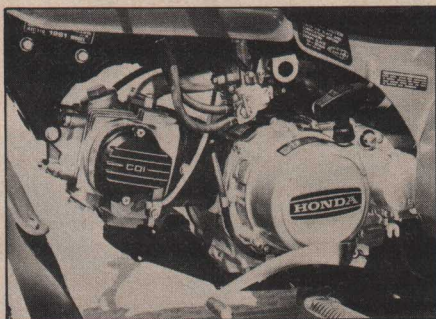
So what can we do? We can sit back, relax, test a few three-wheelers . . . and have a whole lot of fun in the process.

One more thing: Even though we've tried to be as fair as possible in this presentation, we were fortunate to acquire all 1981 machines from the good folks at Honda. This isn't exactly fair, because the Yamaha and Kawasaki are 1980 models, so in all direct comparisons we make between the different brands, we'll have to assume that for 1981 the yellow and green machines will feature improvements absent on the models tested herein. Fair enough.

## Honda ATC70 & 110

Right off, we have to say we didn't test the ATC70, but that doesn't mean we can't say a few words about it. The 70 is the smallest ATC Honda builds, and has remained basically unchanged for the past umpteen years. With a wheelbase of only 35.2 inches and a dry weight of 163 pounds, it is physically the smallest ATC and is geared toward kids and very small farmers (whoops!). It relies on a 72cc single-cylinder four-stroke engine for motovation, and features a three-speed transmission with an automatic centrifugal clutch, much the same as the rest of Honda's line.

The ATC110 is more than just the bigger brother to the 70; it's been the workhorse of the Honda lineup ever since it was cloned from the old ATC90. Up until 1980, the 110 was the largest ATC available, and as a result, it is the single most popular model.



*The good, old ATC110 engine, hogged-out from the original 90cc powerplant. A high/low range transmission is one of the nicer features.*

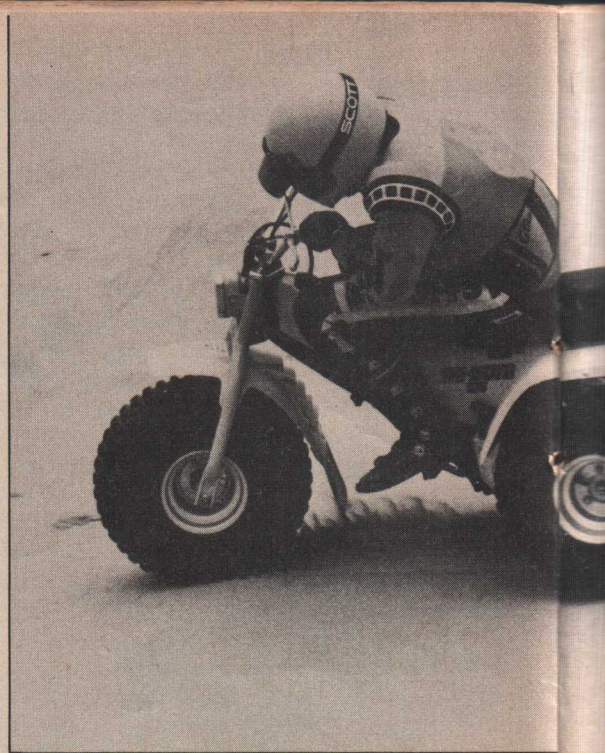
Like all Honda ATCs, the 110 features an overhead cam four-stroke single, an engine which, over the years, has developed a reputation for stone axe dependability. The 110 differs from the rest of the ATC line by virtue of its dual range transmission. A small lever on the lower left-side engine cases allows the rider to select between a stump-pulling low range, or a respectable high range of gearing. If you use the 110 in many different types of terrain, the dual range tranny becomes very useful.

The dual range (subtransmission) ratio has been changed for 1981. In the past, the low range on the 110 was a true stump-puller, and nearly useless on anything other than stumps. In second gear/low range, wheelies were as easy as opening the throttle, and by opening the throttle a little further, it was just as simple to pull the ATC right over backwards. Fourth gear starts were as easy as second gear starts on anything normal and, on that basis, it was decided that the stock ratios were too low. With the new transmission, a second gear start in the low range is just about the same as third gear on the older models, and as a result it's much more useful. Still a heckuvva stump-puller, though.

As can be expected, the 110 can best be described as "medium-sized," with a wheelbase of 40.9 inches and a dry weight of 240 pounds. If 240 pounds seems like an awful lot for a medium-sized three-wheeler, stick around. Both of the 200cc three-wheelers weigh in at a shade over 300 pounds (right around 21½ stone for all you U.K. freaks), which is more toward "ponderous" than "medium." This relatively small size makes the 110 a quick-handling little bugger, and also greatly simplifies loading and unloading in any situation where the ATC must be lifted over or out of any obstacles.

We did most of our testing in the "low range," as it gave us the best torque for the hillclimbing and deep sand we were riding in. The high range makes a very respectable top speed available, but that top speed isn't something that can be used in all situations. As short and light as the 110 is, high speeds over rough ground were a bit chancey as the ATC hopped around over the bumps. This is a normal trait of the smaller three-wheelers—they're much more comfortable at low-to-medium speeds.

Controls on the 110 include handlebar-mounted kill switch, thumb-operated throttle, and single rear drum



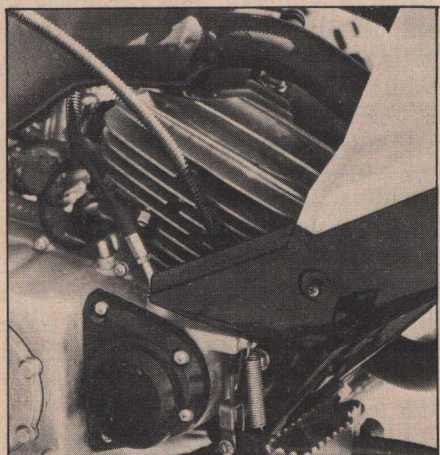
brake, operated by a lever on the left side of the bars or the right footpedal. The four-speed tranny shifts, as do all Hondas, in a "down for high" pattern, which takes a bit of getting used to if you've just hopped off of anything other than an AJS Stormer.

New for this year is an O-ring-type drive chain for less maintenance and longer life, along with a redesigned chain tensioner. The points ignition has been replaced with a CDI, greatly simplifying maintenance; the fuel tank is about 0.3-gallon larger, and the rear brake is better shielded to keep out water and mud. Also, the steering geometry has been improved for 1981, and compared to last year's model, the 110 feels a lot more stable in the rough.

## Yamaha YT125G

Yamaha introduced their three-wheeled effort early in 1980. The YT125 is a single-cylinder, reed valve two-stroke and, as such, is a complete departure from the Honda design. The engine is located far back in the frame, very close to the rear axle, and gives the YT a noticeable rearward weight bias. On the plus side, the rear engine location allows the use of a short drive chain, simplifying maintenance, and it also helps to keep the weight down low, as the gas tank needn't be mounted high above the engine.

The YT's transmission is much more conventional than the Honda's with a one down, four up pattern featuring a super low first gear and a normal spread between the other four. Clutch is a centrifugal automatic. The left side shift lever is a nightmare collection of linkages—every link has a little play in



**Buried beneath the YT's plastic body panels is its 125cc two-stroke engine. There's not much there, but with a little work, the Tri Moto can howl like a banshee.**

it, and by the time all these little loose points reach the tip of the shift lever, it turns out a lot of extra sloppiness in shifting. On our tester, the shifter was also mounted too low to suit most of the riders, and as a result everyone complained that the YT was difficult to shift with any degree of smoothness. Also, toward the end of our test the clutch started showing signs of abnormal wear, and by the end of two days the clutch was slipping badly. We traced both problems to improper adjustments, and strongly suggest that the owner keep an eye on the clutch and shifting mechanism.

The starting mechanism, like the Honda's, is by a left-side recoil starter, and the process is simplified by a handlebar-mounted choke lever. A large pushbutton kill switch is provided on the right side of the bars, right

next to the thumb-operated throttle. Unlike the Honda's throttle, the YT's pivots on the handlebar center and is very awkward to use. Because of the pivot point, the right thumb isn't able to wrap around the bars, and as a result most of the right hand grip is lost. At any rate, no one ever said that a three-wheeler *had* to have a thumb-operated throttle, and it would be a simple job to replace it with practically any motorcycle throttle assembly.

A single mechanical disc brake affects the rear wheels only, and is actuated by the left hand lever or right footpedal. There's plenty of stopping power available—the YT's only real problem is gaining enough forward momentum to make full use of the brakes.

The power output surprised us, to say the least. We expected a snappy two-stroke 125, with a lot of top-end and midrange power, and some good low gearing to make up for a slight lack of low-end torque. What we wound up with was a decent amount of torque, a tiny amount of midrange, and no top-end to speak of. We would suspect that most of the lack of power is a direct result of the small carburetor and a restrictive exhaust system. Especially the exhaust system. The pipes and muffler wrap around each other, forming a merry knot, and it would be hard to imagine a system more restrictive. Thankfully, every accessory manufacturer worth his salt will be offering a proper pipe for the YT, and it should be possible to pick up a good sized handfull of horsepower on that change alone.

Even though it was the most underpowered of our test machines, the YT wasn't bad once we got going. The ride was accurate and stable over moderately rough ground, due mostly to the low center of gravity and the medium-long (44.1 inch) wheelbase. Steering was accurate, although not quite as good as the Honda. The YT's rearward weight bias makes for a very light front end, and while this is no problem on soft surfaces that offer a lot of traction, on hard packed ground the front wheel had a tendency to want to push to the outside. This isn't a serious situation—all it demands is a little more body english from the rider.

A few more details worthy of note: The YT has a 1.8-gallon plastic fuel tank hidden under the plastic body, and it should be filled with straight gas, as the lubrication is via an autolube pump straight into the intake manifold. The oil tank is located under the seat and holds 1.4 quarts of Yamalube.

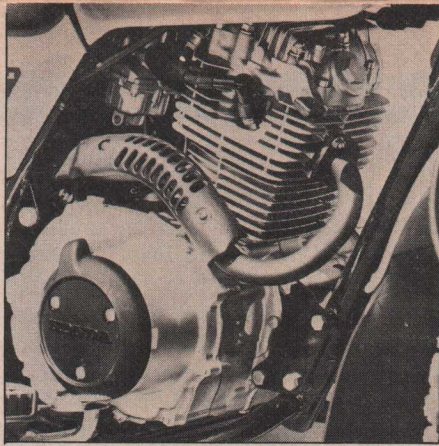
There are no points on the YT, as a CDI ignition provides the spark. A working headlight and taillight is supplied, and should be adequate for after-hours riding, depending on how quickly you want to plunge into the darkness.

The seat is long and thick, and hinged to flip up and allow access to everything underneath. After about an hour in the saddle the seat became nearly unbearable—it was much too hard to suit any of our testers.

#### **Honda ATC185S**

Everyone who drove the machine for a while agreed that there was no other name for the 185S except the *Hot Rod*





The ATC185S uses basically the same motor as the original XR185, identical to last year's ATC185, but in a lighter and smaller chassis.

## BIG WHEELS

ATC. The "S" stands for sport, and Honda is aiming this one straight between the eyes of all the high-performance three-wheeler maniacs.

The soul of the beast is the 180cc powerplant first introduced in last year's ATC185, which is nearly identical to the original XR185 engine introduced in 1979. Where it differs is in gear ratios and shift pattern, which are normal ATC fare—five gears, down for high, left-side shift. There is also a left-side recoil starter, and a heavy duty centrifugal clutch, just like the rest of the ATC line.

One of the original features of the 185 motor was an automatic compression release to aid starting. The release was tied into the action of the kickstarter with a cable, and with the absence of a kickstarter on the ATC the compression release has been converted to semi-automatic operation—pull up the lever on the right side of the cylinder head, yank the rope, and the lever returns to the neutral position. It's a little more of a bother, but well worth it for the easy starting.

None of this is all that new, considering that it was introduced last year on the ATC185. What makes the "S" model a hot rod is the chassis. Rather than build a crazy, go-fast motor, Honda decided to go the better route and slip the already proven 185 engine into a modified version of the 110 frame. What they wound up with is an ATC185 with a shorter wheelbase and smaller overall dimensions, weighing 40 pounds less than last year's bike . . . uh, trike, excuse us.

This doesn't automatically drop the 185 into the same class as the multi-cylinder three-wheeled specials we see tearing up the sand occasionally, but the loss of forty pounds makes a huge difference in the attitude of the ATC. Acceleration is immediate and surprising, and the "S" model will sail across

the landscape as fast as any rational person should want to go on a three-wheeler.

Following in the same vein, the handling is very quick on the "S" model. It's not quite as squirrely as the 110, due mainly to the fact that the new chassis is just slightly wider with a longer wheelbase, but the smaller tires and lighter overall weight will allow it to turn circles around the old 185 or the 1981 200. For the aggressive rider, it is the perfect compromise between the two.

We have to admit, at this point, that out of all the three-wheelers on these pages, the handling and comfort champs are the Hondas—no matter what the size. They win for two reasons: tires and seats. The tires are a special, patented Honda design with a very stiff tread area and extremely soft sidewalls. They work something like radial tires on a car, and give a ride so smooth at moderate speeds it almost feels as if the ATC grew a suspension while we weren't looking. And as long as the tires are soaking up the bumps and staying on the ground, the ATCs are still picking up traction and sticking on the turns.

What the tires don't soak up, the seat does. There simply is no contest between the Tri Moto, the KLT and the ATCs. The Hondas take the prize for best saddle, hands down. Or should we say, buns down? Every time one of our testers switched to a Honda from the other two there was a sigh of relief audible over the loudest exhaust. If you don't believe us, just try it out for yourself—we wouldn't lie to you.

The only real drawback of the 185S is also one of its main advantages—size. Riders approaching 5 feet 10 inches or over are liable to find the "S" model uncomfortable in certain situations, due mainly to the snugness of the machine and the compact controls. This is the only real compromise on the machine, and our testers only noticed it when forced to stand on the pegs for any long distance.

The 185S shares all of the control features of the 110, with the addition of a front drum brake operated by the right handlebar lever. The bigger Hondas and the KLT have front brakes, and they really do come in handy when backing the three-wheelers down steep hills and, of course, when you have to stop in a real hurry.

### Kawasaki KLT200

If the Honda 185S is the hot rod, then the KLT is the luxury cruiser of the bunch. One of the things which sets



the KLT off right away is a full electrical system and an electric starter. The Kawasaki actually has an ignition key, and there is no greater luxury than being able to plop down in the saddle and punch a button to get things rolling. It also comes in handy when you stall the KLT on a hill, and if you let the battery crap-out there's an accessory kickstarter strapped under the body along with the tool kit. Pretty tricky, huh?

And it's very easy to stall the KLT because, unlike the rest of the three-wheelers, the Kawasaki has a conventional motorcycle transmission and a clutch. Full standard setup: down for low and four up, with the clutch on the left side of the bars.

This is one reason why the KLT is the easiest to adapt to (for the average motorcycle rider), but it also brings about its own problems, the major of which is missed shifts. With the Kawasaki under full power and charging up the side of a hill, it was very easy to punch it into a false neutral on the downshift. We could have been sloppy with our shifting, after playing with all the automatics, but at the same time we can't help casting a suspicious glance at the tiny, flexible shift shaft and the long heavy lever. Things are a little weak and sloppy down there, and the whole area would be our first candidate for improvement.

The third, and most bizarre, innovation on the KLT is the rear axle, which is changeable between the standard locked axle and the differential mode. By changing the adjustment on a gearshaft in the rear, the differential mode can be selected, which feeds power to whichever rear wheel offers the least resistance—just like a car.

This would be an advantage on hard ground or asphalt, where the differential would allow the KLT to turn a much tighter circle than in the locked axle mode. It doesn't help at all when sport riding in the soft stuff, because quick turning on a three-wheeler is accomplished by lifting the inside wheel, and as soon as you do that in the differential mode, that inside wheel starts spinning and the KLT rolls to a stop. When the wheel comes down it either throws a roost and starts driving again, or it catches traction and loops out. The differential mode will find most of its use with the utility crowd—hauling heavy loads and such.

Design layout of the KLT is just as different (and sensible) as its details. Unlike the other two, Kawasaki decided to locate their engine forward in



the chassis. In order to keep height and center of gravity low, they opted to cover the backbone with a small body panel and mount the fuel tank in the rear, over the axle. The plastic tank is formed around the available space in the rear area and holds 2.6 gallons of straight gas, enough to give the KLT a considerable range. As soon as they start delivering three-wheelers with speedometers installed we'll be able to tell you what kind of range they get, but until then suffice it to say that we only had to fill the Kwacker up once in two full days of riding.

As well laid-out as the KLT is, it's still a heavyweight machine—313 pounds, dry. This is right in the same neighborhood as the ATC200, but because of the forward engine placement, the KLT steers slower and feels heavier than the big Hondas. The KLT would still keep up with the Hondas in most sections, but in every case the rider had to work harder to stay there, and would start dropping back when the going got rough.

In the detail department, the KLT features drum brakes front and rear, with normal (motorcycle) control layout. A thumb operated throttle is used, and although it's much easier to use than the Yamaha item, it's still not as smooth or comfortable as the Honda trigger.

The seat pulls off to get at the gas tank and air filter, and the rather large battery is located low on the right side.

Said seat is in the same ballpark as the Yamaha seat—it gets the job done, but is less than plush in the long run.

Unlike the rest of the competition, the KLT uses a conventional points ignition, which means you'll have to do some tuning occasionally.

For all its complexity and weight, we can say with confidence that the Kawasaki took all the abuse we gave it with nary a blink. We flipped it over a couple of times, rolled it down hills more than once, and forced it through some nasty terrain with never any trouble firing it up afterwards.

#### **Honda ATC200**

The ATC200 is Honda's refinement of the 1979 185. The engine has been bored out 2mm to increase displacement to just under 192cc, much in the same way the XR200 evolved from the original 185. There is a slight but noticeable increase in available power over the 185, and the 200 is the torque king of the group. We were constantly amazed at the pulling power of the 200. As often as not, we would be just squeaking over the top of a sand dune, lugging down to the last dying gasps of second gear and afraid to attempt shifting down for fear that a missed gear would send us backwards down 80 feet of near-vertical sand, when we found out that if we just kept our thumb in it, the giant Honda would grunt right over the top. Amazing! At nearly zero RPM in second gear!

*(continued on page 68)*



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### THREE BIG WHEELS (continued from page 37)

The torque and stability of the 200 are its finest points, with the longest wheelbase, widest track, and biggest tires available. The tires are massive 25x12-9 floatation tires, of the same design as found on the 110 and 185S, but offering better shock absorption due to their larger diameter. With these tires, and that comfy Honda seat, this is the plushest ride available.

With the exception of the displacement, the engine of the 200 is identical to the 185, with the same gear ratios, compression release and clutch. The chassis parts are essentially the same, although possibly a little larger to fit the bigger tires. Brakes, controls, and layout are the same as the 'S' model, so maybe we should just knock down the major differences for you here and move on.

Compared with the 1979 185, the 200 features a new air intake which is much more waterproof. The chain tensioning adjustment has been simplified, and the skid plate has been drilled to prevent mud accumulation. Oh yeah, and it also has a nifty carrying compartment on the back fender.

To give you some idea of how much we liked the 200, all we can say is that, after the 185S, it was the most sought-after ride during the whole time of our testing.

### Conclusion

At this point, there are probably a good number of you who expect us to pick the best of the lot and name a champion. And if we don't, we know we're going to get a whole lot of mail.

It's hard to ignore the fact that Honda has been building three-wheelers for ten years. It shows in their attention to detail and the overall refinement of the ATCs, and on that basis, Honda wins the manufacturer's award. The top of the list would have to be a tie between the 185S and the 200, with a slight leaning toward the sport model. The venerable 110 earned a solid second.

Next in line, and all around snazz winner, must be the KLT, all the Cadillac ease of a street bike in the clothing of a three-wheeler. All it needs is hubcaps and it would be perfect.

Last, but not least, is the YT. With a little more motor the Tri Moto would have beaten out the 110, but the ATC was a shoe-in when it came to comfort and handling. But, keep in mind that the YT and KLT were 80 models. Who knows how the story will read a couple of months from now? □

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