

MINI SECTION

YAMAHA GT 80

Just watch out for parked trash cans

By The Staff of Dirt Bike



Some time ago, Yamaha converted their line of dual-purpose motorcycles from GTs to DTs. But one motorcycle stayed with the title of GT, the little street-legal Yamaha GT80. Although the smallest of the dual-purpose line, the GT is known throughout the world for its unusual size, and its ability to go where V-8s and straight sixes can go, minus the freeways.

When we got hold of our little GT, it appeared a bit awkward at first. With

the full-on street equipment such as a headlight, combination tail/brake light, blinkers, mirrors and speedometer, the bike just didn't look like it had a vein of off-road in it. The only traces of trail noticeable were a crossbar on the handlebars, and trials tires. That was it. The fenders didn't hint toward dirt, nor the chassis, nor the saddle/tank appearance. They all looked street.

So, just to see if the GT had anything

for the off-road enthusiast, we took it out to the desert to give it a spin. This is how everybody who got on it started off: Kick over the engine, which started quickly even when very cold, give the shift lever a swift tap down, and dump the clutch. Momentary loss of balance instantly followed, as the bike just stood stationary. The little four-speed transmission is all upshifts, with the extreme bottom the home of neutral.

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Oh well, after the initial embarrassment, it was out into the sands.

For a dual-purpose mini-bike, the GT80 had a fairly respectable powerplant. The engine would pull all four gears with a full-sized adult aboard. But that darned neutral at the bottom of the shifting pattern became a nuisance during riding. One minute you'd be setting up for a sandy berm, kick it down a couple of times, and the next thing you knew, you'd be on the ground with the GT on top of you, engine still happily idling away in neutral.

As for the tires and suspension on the little GT80, both left a lot to be desired. Both the forks and shocks were too stiff for a little tyke, but worked for a full-sized staffer. And there isn't anything to say about trials tires that hasn't already been complained about in the past, on bigger dual-purpose motorcycles coming out of the Yamaha factory doors. They just don't seem comfortable on the street, or tractionable in the dirt, but rather only acceptable in both areas. Nothing spectacular at all.

One thing that is nice about the little GT is that it is street-legal. That means that if you're out riding in the desert, or at the edge of town, and decide that it's time for a cold one, you can putt on down to the store and pick up a Pepsi or something.

The tank, lighting, blinkers and mirrors are all too street-oriented to make the GT a good dualer. The tank is metal, as are the fenders, lights and blinkers, and upon impact with the soil, they tend to bend a lot. Especially the blinkers. Some rubber should have been put here. Shame on you, Yamaha. Those components make the GT too much pavement-preferable.

Overall, the popularity of the Yamaha GT80 has not been brought on by the off-road population. The little motorcycle just doesn't have enough of what it takes to survive in the sand. Everything is put on the bike in a place where it will break off in the first few crashes.

But the GT is still popular for those folks who take the RV motor home out to the lake every summer, and instead of packing along another car or a big bike, they throw the little buzzer in the trunk or the back of the camper. It gets great gas mileage, with oil injection, stores anywhere, has a good engine, and is totally street-legal.

Maybe someday the GT will get acceptable off-road components, too. It wouldn't take much more than a little plastic on the tank and fenders, and a little rubber around the headlight, tail-light and blinkers, and voila!—instant dual-purpose bike that truly has a dual purpose. □

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