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SEPTEMBER 1980 \$1.25 UK60p

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CAN-AM 175

BAJA TEST

SUZUKI RS-250

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KX-420

THE TRUTH



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It's our middle name



DIRT BIKE

SEPTEMBER 1980

VOLUME 10, NO. 9



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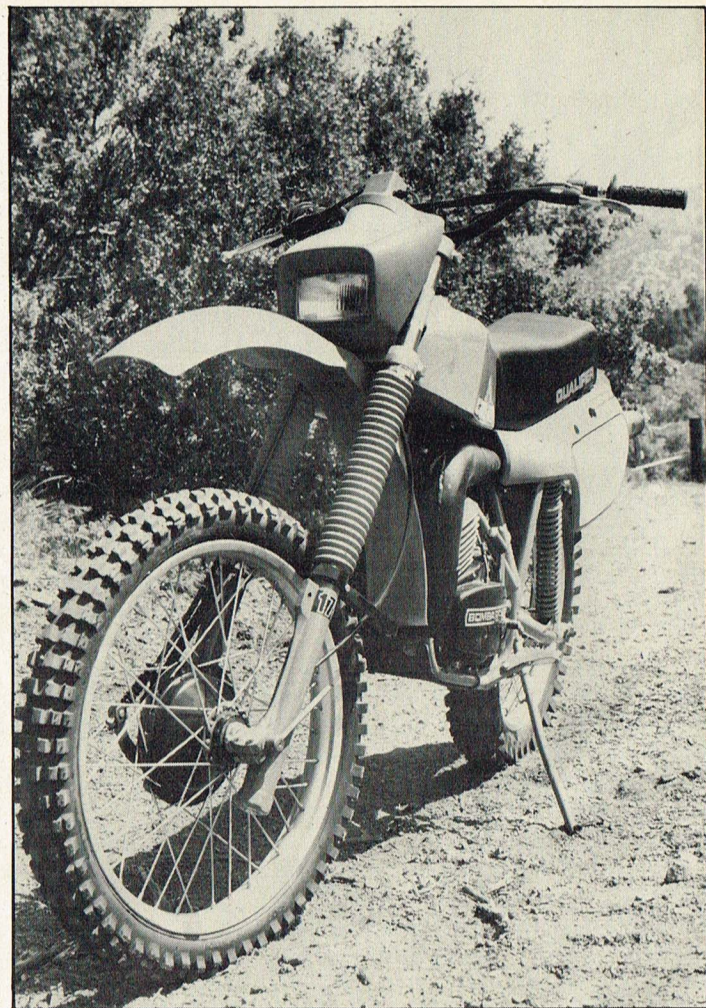
ON THE COVER: — Rod Brand on the KX420.

DIRT BIKE ISSN 0364-1546 (Sep. '80) is published monthly by Daisy/Hi-Torque Publishing Co., Inc., with editorial offices at 16200 Ventura Blvd., Encino, California 91436. Subscriptions \$10.98 for 12 issues (one year). Foreign subscriptions add \$3 per year and Canada \$2 per year for additional postage. Copyright © 1980 by Daisy/Hi-Torque Publishing Co., Inc. All rights reserved. Nothing in this magazine may be reprinted in whole or in part without the express permission of the publisher. **CONTRIBUTORS:** Photographic submissions must be 5x7 or 8x10 glossy black and white, or 35mm and larger color slides. Please mark each photo with owner's name and address. Manuscripts should be typewritten. Unsolicited contributions must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Unless special arrangements are made in advance, all published material becomes the sole property of Daisy/Hi-Torque Publishing Co., Inc. The publisher does not assume responsibility for unsolicited material. Second class postage paid at Van Nuys, California 91408, and at additional offices. DIRT BIKE, P.O. Box 317, Encino, California 91316.

BAJA BASHING CAN-AM 175 QUALIFIER

*The Nastiest Test
in North America*

By the Dirt Bike Staff



Rather than just taking the 175 Qualifier out for a few quick rides, we decided to give it a real workout of a test. After one day of break-in in the desert, we hauled it down to Baja for three wide-open days of riding on the Baja 500 course. This isn't the best way to treat a motorcycle, but considering Can-Am's reputation for out-of-the-crate reliability, we had to try it.

Most all of the Baja terrain is very fast, rocky and dusty fireroad, with the occasional deep washout and closed gate to keep you on your toes. It calls for a bike that's really stable—you don't spend a whole lot of time picking your way through trees or rocks.

The Can-Am pulled through with hardly a mark against its name. The only real problem was the tires—in less than perfect traction conditions they leave a lot to be desired, and at the air pressures we ran in Mexico—as much as 18-20 pounds, front and rear—every time the bars were turned was an adventure.

It's a shame Can-Am chose to use those tires, or rather, *that* tire, because the main culprit is a 3.00x21 Dunlop Sports Senior which does its best to

destroy any semblance of contact between the front end and the ground. Of course, this is in dry, dusty terrain, and the Dunlop will perform slightly better on wet ground. Don't expect miracles, though.

Once the stock rubber is worn out and replaced, the Can-Am picks up a whole new set of manners. The front end starts tracking better in the corners, and almost all of the front-end washout is taken care of. Even with good rubber, the Can-Am is still a slow turner, wanting to drift wide in the fast corners, and most of this behavior can be traced right back to the rather low steering head angle—30 degrees, compared to 28-29 degrees for the quicker-turning competition. There was a time when the fork angle on the Can-Ams could be changed by swapping bearing cones in the steering head, and if your dealer still has a set of cones or so around it may be possible to change them yet. Pulling the 175's forks back by even a half-degree would help make the front-end bite better.

The forks are 9.4-inch-travel Marzocchis without the air caps of the larger Qualifiers, and we never missed

the lack of air. Ripple-bumps and whoopdies were soaked up with no problem, but every now and then a square-edged hole would send a good jolt up through the bars. With a change to lighter oil this problem will disappear.

With the strong triple clamps and a good, solid axle attachment, front-end flex is nowhere to be found. All in all, the front end is a strong, stable unit.

Holding up the rear is a pair of Girling shocks delivering 9.6 inches of travel, and working very well. Chances are, most of the people the Can-Am owner will meet will giggle uncontrollably when Girling shocks are mentioned, but the truth of the matter is this: They ain't as bad as they used to be. One of the other bikes used on our trip through Baja was the 350 Qualifier test bike, still with its original shocks—still working fine. And that's after a good number of miles under its belt.

We would only experience fade in the Girlings well into a long section of whoopedos, and once they got a chance to cool off some, they were fine again. Once the Can-Am owner manages to beat them to death, it would be a good idea to change to something

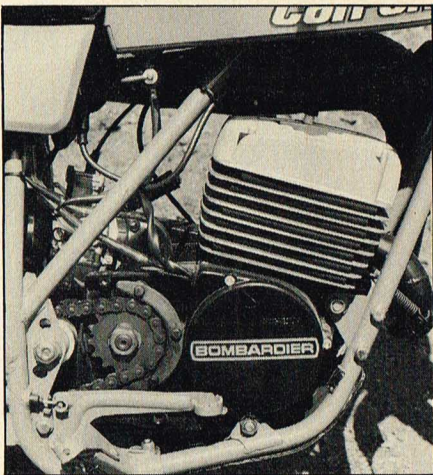


better, but they're just fine, new.

Like the rest of the Qualifier line, the 175 is using the new rear wheel assembly—a conical hub with the brake and drive both on the right side. The brake is a full-floating unit which works very well when dry, fades a little when wet or hot, and then will need an adjustment to bring it back up again. Spokes are heavy-duty eight-gauge and lace up to a Sun rim—very strong setup.

The rim uses bead pins rather than rim locks, and as a result the rear wheel is lighter and simpler than much of the competition. The bead pins work fine until you get a flat. If you're forced to ride on a flat tire, the pins will chew the tire bead to shreds—keep this in mind if you're debating whether or not to carry tire tools. It's no problem to change tires with the bead pins installed; as a matter of fact, it's just a little quicker than having to fool with rim locks.

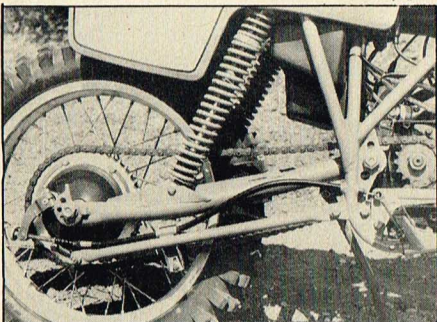
The front hub is almost a dead ringer for the rear, with eight-gauge spokes, and a good Sun WM-2 rim. The brake is



The Qualifier's 173.6cc motor uses a rotary valve like the 250 and 350, delivers gobs of power.

on the right side, and hopefully Can-Am will someday be convinced that it should be on the left. As it is, the brake cable is forced to make a severe bend right up at the lever. Very awkward, and not too good for a long cable life. With the hub on the left side, the cable would have a smoother path up to the right handlebar.

The motor is a rotary valve six-speed, with the same design as the rest of the Qualifiers, with the exception of the 400 which is a standard reed-induction design. The power output is excellent for a 175, with plenty of low end and the ability to rev surprisingly high. Even though the stock gearing is rather high (15/44), we had no trouble torqueing our way up the few rocky uphill sections we encountered in Baja. First gear is good and low and we could work the bike right down to a crawl, and then when a long,



Good, strong wheel and swingarm, acceptable shocks, and the worst chain we've used in a long time.



smooth, slightly downhill section came up we were surprised to be able to pull nearly 80 mph out of the bike! This is a phenomenal range for such a small motor.

If the past is any indication, the 175 should be stone reliable. A big cylinder and massive finning keep the 175 running cool, and the Can-Ams are known for long engine life.

Carburetion is by a 32mm Bing, and our jetting was spot-on for the riding we did—from sea level to right around 4000 feet. Air filter is a K&N with a foam sock which screws into the top of the air box, and draws air in from under the seat. The air box is in two sections and is easily removable for cleaning and maintenance. Good thing, too. Because of all the frame rails in the neighborhood of the carb it's necessary to pull it and the air box out for any kind of serious jetting change. Waterproofing is good—although we did manage to get some of the wet stuff onto the filter, none passed through to the inside of the box.



New accessory for this year is a compact odometer which looks suspiciously like a Suzuki unit.

The carb gets its fuel from the standard 2.6-gallon Qualifier tank. Although we've complained about this tank on the bigger bikes, the fuel capacity is fine for a 175, and we were able to get 65 miles out of a full tank. With the bigger bikes that figure will drop to as low as 40-45 miles from a full tank, but Can-Am has come to the rescue with an optional 3½-gallon tank, which we used on the 175 in Baja. With the optional tank (it should retail for around \$49 from Can-Am dealers), we were able to go 90 miles before having to fill up, and the bigger bikes should be able to go about 70 miles. The tank worked, and fit, fine. Our only problem was all the ribbing we took for its unusual shape (see photos).

Take a Ride, Fella

As we said earlier, the riding in Baja is almost all wide-open. You ride for so long in fifth and sixth gears that the

fact that you're going 60 or 70 miles an hour no longer registers—until an unexpected obstacle scares you back into reality and puts a demand on either lightning reflexes or a good suspension. The Can-Am had a few problems with obstacles, and all were a direct result of the marginal tires. When it came time for a fraction more bite or a little quicker reaction, the 175 rider found out it wasn't there for the asking, and a crash or at least a close call was the direct result. This didn't happen more than twice, and most often the only trouble from the tires was a nagging insistence on going wide in every turn. As delivered, the Can-Am is not a tight turner, but we already told you what to do about that.

For all that straight-line, fast-as-a-bullet riding there was no better choice than either of the Can-Ams. The frame is as rigid as a small bridge, and the suspension was firm enough to handle most anything at speed.

Throughout the test, the motor never failed to start on the first two kicks, and we never heard a stutter, a pop or a dingle from the motor, even though we ran it long and hard and hot enough to the point where the cylinder paint was literally smoking. Can-Am really has their business together when it comes to making fine motors, and this 175 must get our vote as one of the best in its class.

Bits and pieces

The 175 runs on straight pre-mix now—gone is the injector oil of years past. As a result, there's one less thing to worry about breaking, and the motor is good for just a little more power than the old oil-injected design.

The photos of the bike should show a nifty new odometer for all the time-keeping freaks. This is an accessory, and doesn't come stock on the bike. For \$59 you get a choice between this and the old standby speedometer in a complete kit with cable, drive, and all the little mounting parts.

Like the bigger Qualifiers, the 175 uses the new throttle assembly which is adjustable for ¼ or 1/8-turn operation. Now if only it was a straight-pull item . . .

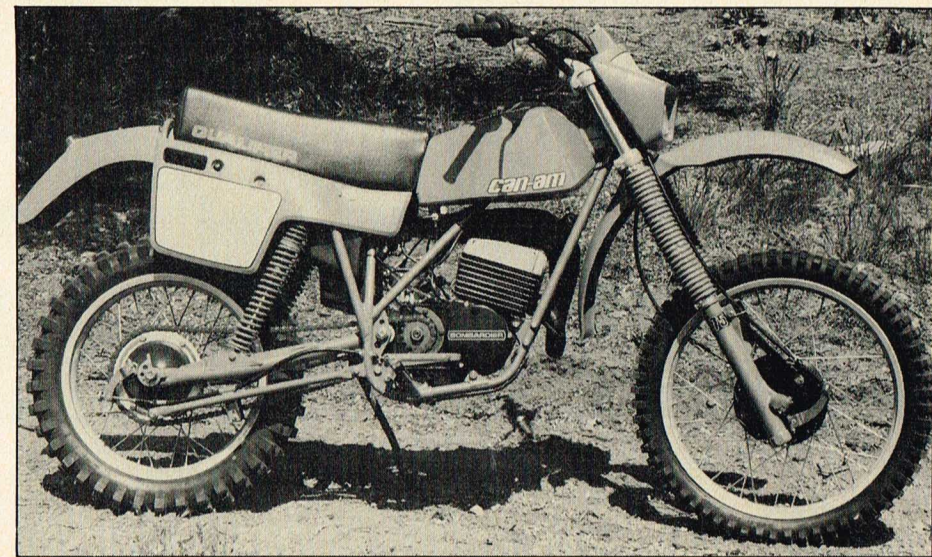
The side covers are pretty, but not really necessary. We just pull ours off and leave them in the garage when we ride the bike.

Snail-cam chain adjusters make chain-tightening a 30-second job on the Can-Am. Also, both wheels are quick-change items—you don't have to unbolt the backing plates in order to pull

the wheel free. Very nice when it comes time to change those lousy tires.

Did we mention the chain yet? No? It's grim. After the first 20 miles we pulled it off to clean it and it was already kinked. After the trip to Baja the chain was one long row of kinks and nearly useless. Replace it with a Tsubaki—very inexpensive, very good chain.

For the record: During the Baja excursion, six of the 13 bikes involved had problems with parts falling off, pieces breaking, engines seizing and various other difficulties. Nothing came loose on the Can-Ams, nothing broke, no seizures—absolutely no problems during three days and 350 miles of riding.



CAN-AM 175 Qualifier Specifications

NAME AND MODEL	Can-Am 175 Qualifier
ENGINE TYPE	Two-stroke, rotary valve
BORE AND STROKE	62 x 57.5mm
DISPLACEMENT	173.6cc
HORSEPOWER (CLAIMED)	24 at 8500 rpm
CARBURETION	32mm Bing
FACTORY RECOMMENDED JETTING:	
MAIN JET	150
NEEDLE JET	2.70
JET NEEDLE	ST.#4
PILOT JET	40
SLIDE NUMBER	#1
RECOMMENDED GASOLINE	Premium
FUEL TANK CAPACITY	2.62 gallons
FUEL TANK MATERIAL	Plastic
LUBRICATION	Pre-mix
RECOMMENDED OIL	Bombardier
AIR FILTRATION	K&N w/ foam sock
CLUTCH TYPE	Wet, multi-disc
TRANSMISSION	six-speed
GEARBOX RATIOS:	
1	3.40
2	2.31
3	1.68
4	1.31
5	1.095
6	0.913
GEARING FRONT/REAR	15/44
IGNITION	Bosch CDI
PRIMARY KICK SYSTEM?	Yes
RECOMMENDED SPARK PLUG	Bosch W300T2
SILENCER/SPARK ARRESTOR/QUALITY	Yes/yes/very quiet
EXHAUST SYSTEM	Up-pipe, left side
FRAME, TYPE	Double downtube

After the Fact

The Can-Am 175 is a strong, reliable bike with two minor problems: the tires, and that 30-degree steering angle. If these two problems were taken care of, we'd have to rate the Qualifier in the top three of the 175s.

As it is, the 175Q costs \$200 more than its Japanese competition. Is there enough there to justify the time and money that needs to be spent on the tires and front end? We think so, for its basic dependability and the agreeable motor. With a little bit of basic upkeep, you may even find that the extra \$100 the front tire and bearing cones may cost is the only spending you have to do for a whole season. That would make it all worthwhile. □

WHEELBASE	145.1 cm (57.1 inches)
GROUND CLEARANCE	28.6 cm (11.25 inches)
SEAT HEIGHT	95.2 cm (37.5 inches)
STEERING HEAD ANGLE (RAKE)	30 degrees
WEIGHT WITH ONE GALLON GAS	225 pounds
RIM MATERIAL	Sun aluminum alloy
TIRE SIZE AND TYPE:	
FRONT	3.00x21 Dunlop
REAR	4.00x18 Dunlop
SUSPENSION, TYPE AND TRAVEL:	
FRONT	Marzocchi, 240 mm (9.4 inches)
REAR	Girling gas, 244 mm (9.6 inches)
INTENDED USE	Off-road, enduro
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	Canada
RETAIL PRICE, APPROX.	\$1599
DISTRIBUTOR:	
Bombardier Corporation 4505 West Superior St. Duluth, Minnesota 55806	
PARTS PRICES, HIGH-WEAR ITEMS:	
PISTON ASSEMBLY, COMPLETE	\$59
RINGS ONLY	\$10.89
CYLINDER SLEEVE	\$58.11
SHIFT LEVER	\$17.12
BRAKE PEDAL	\$8.05
FRONT SPROCKET	\$10.78
OVERALL RATING, 0 TO 100, VARIOUS CATEGORIES, KEEPING INTENDED USE OF MACHINE IN MIND:	
HANDLING	93
SUSPENSION	95
POWER	97
COST	90
ATTENTION TO DETAIL	98
EFFECTIVENESS, STONE STOCK	96