

EXCLUSIVE 2005 450 SHOOTOUT

DIRT BIKE

WPS 34355

DIRT BIKE

NOVEMBER 2004

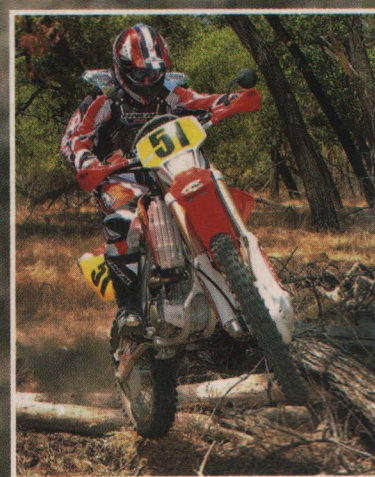


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FAT-TIRED GIRL BIKE

The forgotten dual sport bike



Dual sport bikes are great for investigating undocumented trails in urban and suburban areas. The inconspicuous TW is perfect for this sort of exploration.

Kelly Callan



You aren't going to want the TW200 for yourself, but it could very easily be the perfect bike for your girlfriend or grandpa.

► Sometimes a bike has been around so long that it blends into the scenery, even when it sticks out like a sore thumb. Half-motorcycle/half-ATV, the Yamaha TW200 dual sport bike has escaped our attention since at least last century.

BIKES OF FUTURE PASSED

The TW's retro-futuristic look reminds us of 1970s drawings of bikes of the future. Actually, the TW dates back to 1987, with the concept of a fat-tired dual sport bike originating with the 1972 Suzuki RV-90 Rover. Given that there's no competition for the TW—at least not in the U.S.—we don't have to wonder if the TW is the best bike in its class, but only if it's good enough.

LET'S GET STARTED

In many ways, the TW200 may be the perfect beginner bike for someone who requires a street-legal machine. Virtually every aspect of the 200's design focuses on ease of use.

The motor is a novice's dream. An

electric starter means no frustrating kicking, and the power wouldn't intimidate a French soldier. The rider will have to learn the intricacies of a clutch and five-speed gearbox, though the light-touch levers helps matters along.

Thanks to an ultra-low seat height of just over 31 inches (about six inches less than a DRZ400!), the rider's boot soles will be on a first name basis with the dirt. The 200 isn't a lightweight, but the center of gravity is low enough that its 280 pounds rarely overpower the rider.

SHORT AND SWEET

There are two factors that keep the TW's seat height so low. First, the suspension is short—only about six inches at each end. Second, those fat tires have a mini-size diameters—18 inches up front and 14 inches in the rear.

The Bridgestone tires work far better on the trail than you might think. They slow the handling down to a beginner-friendly pace, plus they're more than happy to climb out of ruts and find traction where standard dirt tires will spin. If mud or sand is on the menu, the TW gob-

bles them up nicely, as it's capable of putting a lot of rubber on the terrain.

We can't muster up quite the same enthusiasm for the suspension. It's harsh and short. You'll get on a first name basis with every pebble on the trail and every ripple in the pavement. Still, if you're patient and persistent, the TW can take you almost anywhere. It does have something of an all-terrain pedigree thanks to the tires and anywhere you can't ride it, you can easily hop off and push it! We were certainly surprised at where the little 196cc motor was willing to take us.

DOWN BY THE CORNER

A bonus feature on the TW is its streetability. It's really a fun canyon and neighborhood machine. Keep it off the freeway, as it's not thrilled about cruising above 55 mph and tops out around 70. Again, it's the fat, round-profile tires to the rescue as the 200 will lean into a turn at angles that would send a traditional dual sport bike sliding. Street acceleration isn't staggering, but an aggressive turn of the throttle will put some space between you and the cars coming off a red light.



It doesn't have much power anywhere, and anything over 55 mph on the highway produces quite the buzz. Off-road, if you're patient, it's the "little TW that could" thanks to low gearing and plenty of traction.

NEWBIES REJOICE

In a world where wives, girlfriends and daughters (no, you shouldn't have all three) are getting into off-roading, the TW200 offers a street-legal option that goes out of its way to accommodate the rankest of beginners. It certainly won't get you off your WR450, but if you are forced to take a spin on it, you may hand the TW back to your significant other with a smile on your face.

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FAT-TIRED GIRL BIKE

2004 YAMAHA TW200

Engine typeAir-cooled, two-valve,
SOHC 4-stroke
Displacement.....196cc
Bore and stroke.....67cc x 56cc
Carburetion.....28mm MV Teikei
Fuel tank capacity.....1.85 gal.
Claimed wet weight.....280 lb.
Wheelbase52.2"
Ground clearance10.4"
Seat height31.1"
Tire size and type:
Front.....130/80-18 Bridgestone TW31
Rear.....180/80-14 Bridgestone TW34
Suspension:
FrontKYB telescopic,
non-adjustable/6.3"
Rear.....SOQI shock,
non-adjustable/5.9"
Country of originJapan
Suggested retail\$3699
Distributor/manufacturer:
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