

ENDURO MOTORCYCLES

TRACK TESTS
OF THE
WORLD'S
GREATEST.

FRANK
MELLING



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Yamaha IT425G

ANOTHER TRACK TEST which was difficult to write was the IT425G. Every writer is biased for some reason or another, even if it is only a preference for one colour or another.

In my case I would openly admit wanting to help northern dealer Colin Shutt. Shutt is a friend of mine; he has sponsored me and helped on numerous occasions by supplying test bikes.

In 1980, Colin took on the northern distributorship for the Yamaha Enduro range and sank a lot of money into the venture. Colin never, ever, abuses our friendship, but obviously the chance to promote the new range of bikes was greeted with enthusiasm.

Things tied in nicely when Yamaha's British off-road co-ordinator agreed that I could have the first track test of the new 425.

The bike duly arrived and turned out to be a minor disaster. It was overweight, underpowered and didn't handle very well. However, it was cheap, easy to ride and reliable, so I made the most of these points when I wrote the test.

Unfortunately, many people with Yamaha connections viewed the test with some displeasure. Shutt, to his credit, bore the results stoically, but even he was less than delighted.

Of course, my judgement, riding ability and even parentage were called into question, but I maintained my stand and I feel that I was vindicated. No one did anything of note on the big IT all season and not even Mick Andrews or Andy Robertson could mix it with the best enduro aces.

This did not make me feel that I had scored over Yamaha, but I must confess to feeling justified, which is perhaps a purer and more noble version of the same trait.

I am going to begin this test by reminding everyone, including myself, that the IT425G costs £1250. This is an important fact to remember, since it puts the IT some £400 cheaper than the top big-bore enduro bikes, which is an awful lot of money, even today.

Despite the strident shouts of committed Yamaha fans, the IT is not the ultimate answer to European enduro racing. It is not even a near miss. But it is astonishingly good value for money and an excellent raceworthy enduro bike straight off the showroom floor.

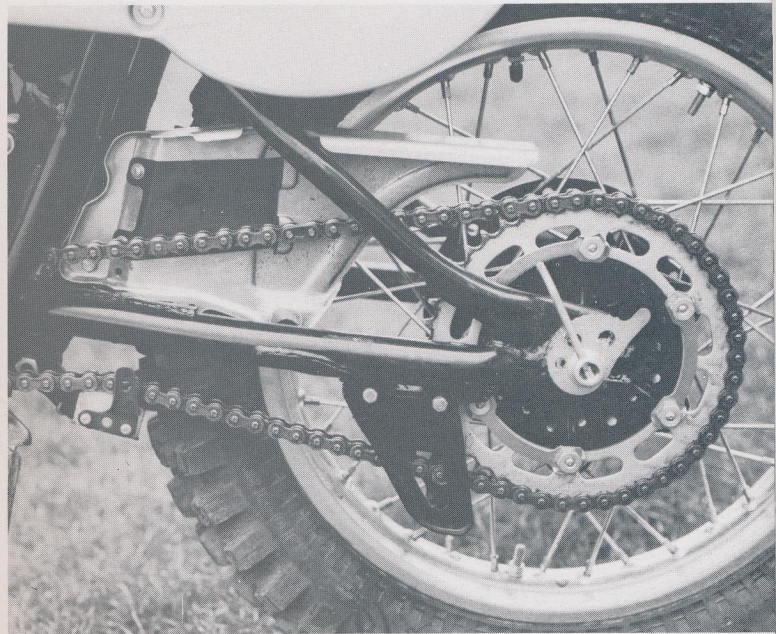
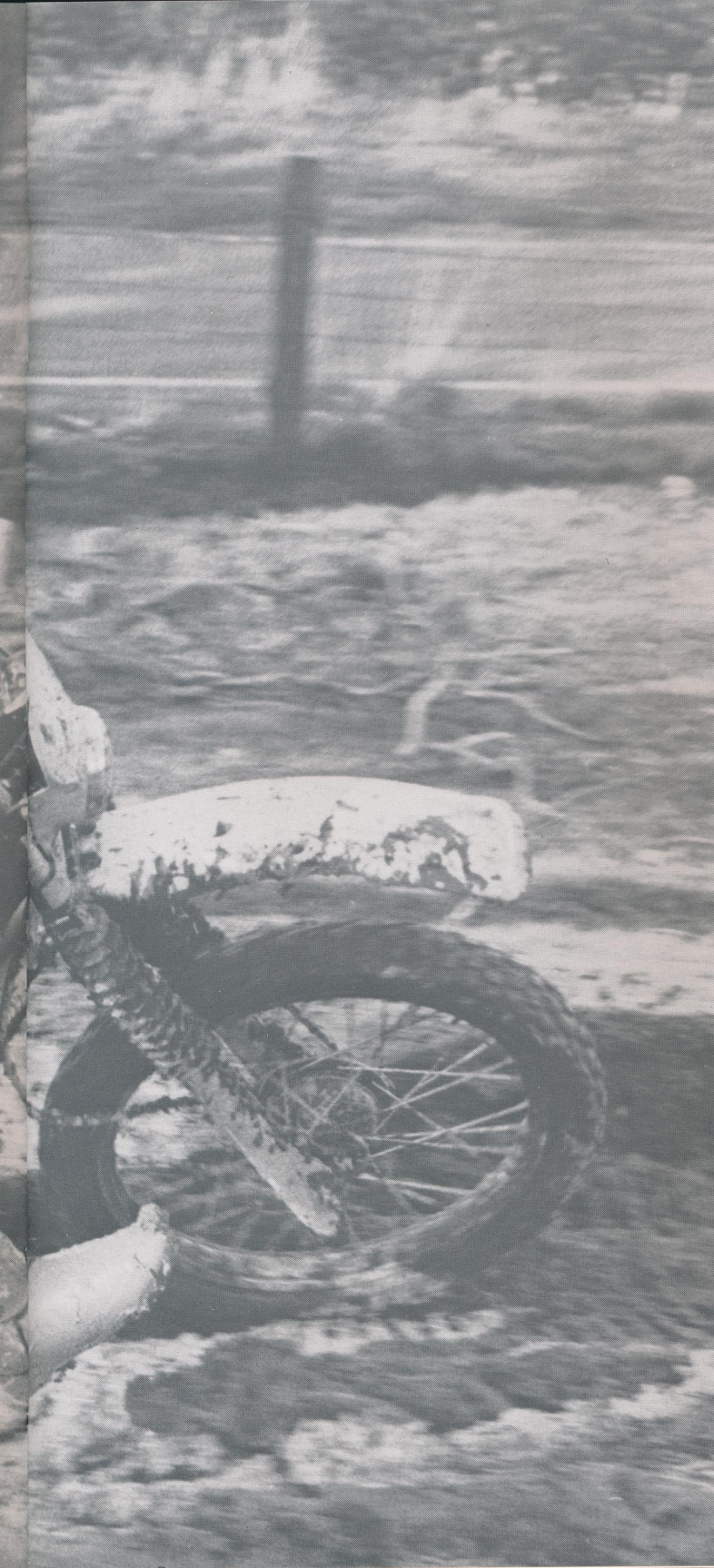
Any competent rider will be able to take the IT straight into a National enduro and win a medal in his class without laying a spanner on the bike. A top-line rider will be right there challenging for a Gold medal. However, having said that, given two identical riders with one on an SWM or KTM and the other on the Yam, the Yamaha man will get slaughtered.

The best thing about the IT is that the whole package is very complete, and at the risk of overstressing this point, very good value for money. The bike comes complete with brakes which work, a delightful motor, sensibly sized fuel tank, tool bag, q.d. wheels and virtually everything else the most discerning rider could ask for. Even I, with more than a passing reputation for being fussy, couldn't find much to do to the bike except wire a few critical nuts into place.

Everything is beautifully made, showing some of the highest-quality components I have seen on a Japanese bike. Looking at some of the sub-assemblies – the headlamp for example – one could be forgiven for thinking that Yamaha had borrowed the bits from a BMW road bike.

Despite the motor's large capacity, it is a dream





Nice touches abounded on the IT, with Yamaha making a genuine attempt at a q.d. rear wheel and fitting snail cams to fast-rear-wheel adjustment. However, the steel swinging arm had long since died out on the motocross range and was well obsolete on the enduro bikes. Note the tin chain guide and flimsy chain tensioner, both of which lasted only minutes in hard usage.

The IT ploughed through tough going in glorious style, but simply was not fast enough for serious racing. Not even Yamaha's best British riders could ever get the fat IT to perform well.



Although not very competitive, the IT425 made a super trail bike which ate up heavy going in a very easy fashion.

to start from either hot or cold. From cold, the enriching lever on the Mikuni is best employed, and, when hot, a good handful of throttle, but the big piston spins easily and there was never a hint of kicking back.

First gear engages noiselessly and the clutch is feather-light to operate and exquisitely progressive. One's immediate reaction is that the IT is one of the most pleasant motorcycles ever built.

This idea is strengthened when riding around at practice speeds. The big motor pushed out almost infinite torque at any point in the power band, which makes riding quickly quite effortless. For example, the IT will pull from 15–80mph using only top gear in one, smooth movement, just as if bike and rider were being sucked along by a giant vacuum cleaner. Hillclimbing is merely a matter of aiming the bike and opening the throttle.

The chassis is equally good when riding in a relaxed style. The latest monoshock is much better than its predecessors and under most conditions gives as good a ride as other Japanese enduro machines. When hitting big bumps square on it is extremely good, and ditch-jumping on the IT will be a pleasure. Where it struggles is on the small ripples, particularly when the bike is cranked over.

In these conditions the rear wheel can be felt skittering about and this loses a lot of traction.

So far I have had nothing but praise for the bike, so the question arises as to why it fails to be a top-class bike. The answer is quite simple. Whilst it does everything well, it doesn't do anything well enough.

The suspension, which is excellent for fast trail riding, gets awfully confused when the rider starts to really press on. When the air-assisted forks start to bottom out they do so with an arm-wrenching clang, and yet their initial action is already on the limit of hardness for sensitivity.

Similarly, the woofly motor, which is such fun to ride at green lane speeds, begins to lose its



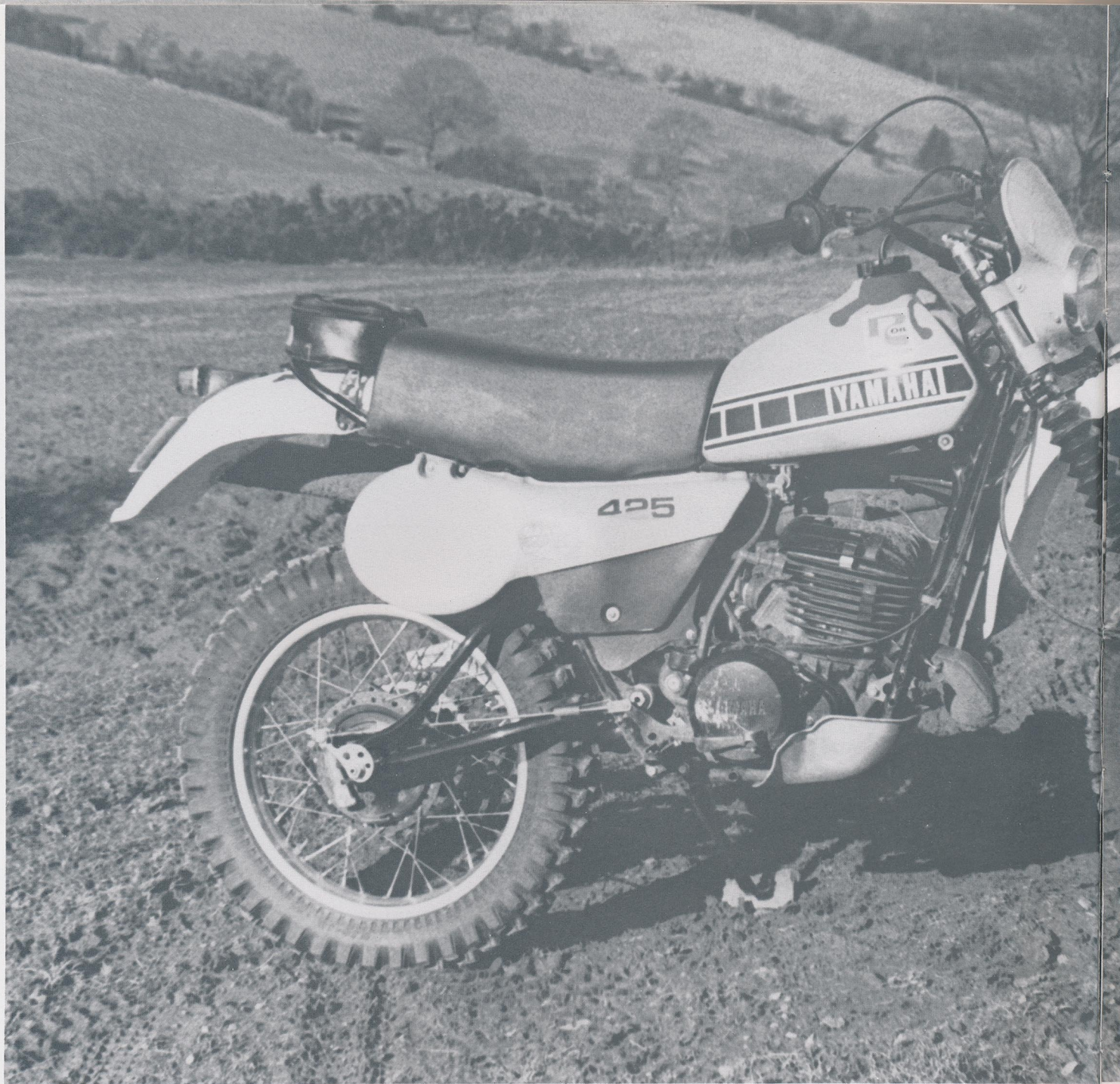
Riding the IT in this vein was courting disaster.

attraction when one discovers that it won't rev on. On numerous occasions we found that the IT just wasn't as fast in practice – that is when it came down to the nitty gritty of actually catching the bike in front – as we felt it should be. On one occasion I struggled to catch a 1979 175 Can-Am across a fast grass field which required nothing more from the rider other than whacking the throttle flat against the stop.

After an hour of thrashing the IT the core of its problems becomes all too apparent. It is simply too heavy. On certified scales it weighed in at 251½lb, without tools in the tool bag but with half a gallon of petrol in the tank. Look for a ready-to-race weight of around 265–270lb – which is a big lump of motorcycle to drag around the countryside.

The weight makes the IT hard work to ride, it causes all sorts of unnecessary problems for the suspension and knocks the edge off the motor's performance.

Yamaha are conscious of this problem and one wonders why they have not gone for its throat.



The 1980 IT425 – well off the mark by Yamaha's high standards.

The YZ465 motocross machine is much lighter, having a tubular frame instead of the IT's pressed-steel design and an alloy-bodied monoshock damper instead of the IT's steel unit. The YZ's alloy swinging arm would also be very nice, but



perhaps this would be too much to ask.

To summarize, I liked the IT425G very much. There was nothing it wouldn't do well and some things it did very well, like running through tank-deep water without a cough or splutter. It is

comfortable, easy to ride up to its limit (above which the rider is very much on his own) and has probably the best set of brakes in the off-road world.

The running gear, too, is exemplary, with an excellent saddle, good mudguards and much attention to detail. Our bike was excessively noisy, but I am assured that this was just a one-off problem and the production bikes will be much quieter.

Unfortunately, it didn't do anything well enough. If you want a reliable, fuss-free ride then the IT is probably the bike for you. Certainly it must be one of the best value buys around today. However, the best marques offer a lot more in every direction. They are lighter, handle better, faster and are less effort to ride. They are also more expensive. Yer pays yer money and yer takes yer choice!

Yamaha IT425G

Engine: Single-cylinder two-stroke with reed-valve induction

Capacity: 425cc (85 × 75mm)

Compression ratio: (corrected) 7.3:1

Carburation: 38mm Mikuni with enriching lever

Maximum power: In excess of 40bhp at 6500rpm

Transmission: Wet multi-plate clutch with geared primary drive

Primary kickstarting

Ratios: 1 - 2.666:1; 2 - 1.750:1; 3 - 1.315:1; 4 - 1.000:1; 5 - 0.785:1

Electrical equipment: CDI electronic ignition

Fuel capacity: 12 litres (2.6 imp gal)

Suspension: Front, Yamaha air-assisted telescopic forks giving

250mm of travel. Rear, Yamaha/De Carbon system monoshock with adjustable damping and pre-loading giving 250mm of travel

Brakes: 5in sls front and rear

Frame: Duplex engine cradle with pressed-steel spine

Wheels: WM2 × 21in front; WM3 × 18in rear. Dural rims in both cases

Tyres: 3.00 × 21in MotoCross GS45X front; 5.10 Volcanduro VE21 rear. Both with rim-saving beads

Wheelbase: 56.3in

Ground clearance: 11.25in

Saddle height: 36.3in
(all unladen)

Weight: With full tank of petrol 266lb