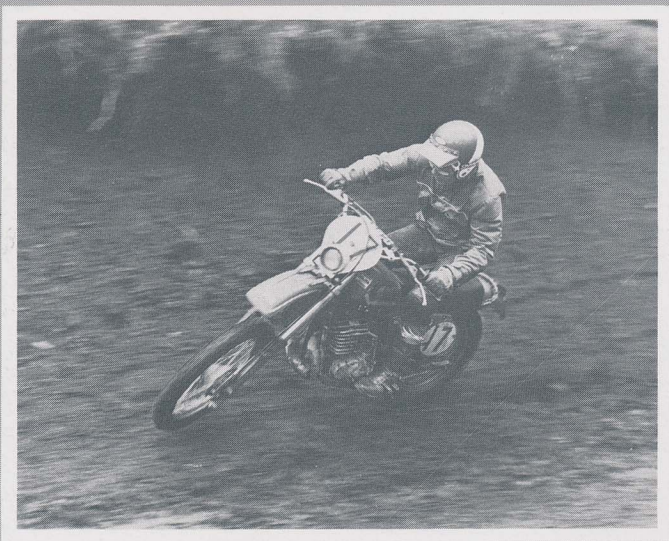


ENDURO MOTORCYCLES

TRACK TESTS
OF THE
WORLD'S
GREATEST.

FRANK
MELLING





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OSPREY

Published in 1981 by Osprey Publishing Limited
12-14 Long Acre, London WC2E 9LP
Member company of the George Philip Group

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Melling, Frank
Enduro motorcycles.
1. Motorcycles
I. Title
621.2'272 TL443
ISBN 0-85045-406-9

Editor Tim Parker
Printed in Hong Kong

About the author

Frank Melling is perhaps the best-known 'off-road' tester of motorcycles resident in England. His forté is an ability to ride each machine with considerable competitive skill, analyse its qualities and then report in an entertaining and meaningful way. Frank now has over ten years of such testing behind him.

He has three other motorcycling books in print, two on motocross and one on trail bikes, all of which have become standard reading in their fields. Currently he enjoys 'special guest' status with most enduro motorcycle factories and importers.

Introduction

The first problem I faced when writing this book was in choosing the contents. Immediately the word, 'great' is applied to a bike, one can guarantee that there will be a small army of objectors who will provide ample evidence that the motorcycle in question was so bad that it didn't even qualify for the title 'mediocre'. Therefore, I would like to make it clear that I understand 'great' in the context of this book to mean 'interesting', rather than successful in racing terms or of technical brilliance.

Not every bike I have tested in the last four years has been great. Some have been bland nonentities which were successful neither in terms of sales nor racing success. Others were more successful but lacked anything which made them noteworthy when compared with their contemporaries. Astute readers will soon work out which marques, by their absence, fall into these categories.

Looking through the contents list I am surprised at the variety of machinery represented. Not only are there examples of almost every capacity of enduro motorcycle produced but the range of manufacturers goes from the miniscule to the mighty. Not every maker of enduro machines is represented, but I hope you will agree that those which are here show the whole spectrum of competition engineering skills.

The final choice of the bikes to be included has been mine and I would acknowledge that this involves a certain conceit. However, for better or worse, I have made my selection and stand by it.

By way of mitigation may I say in all modesty that I don't think any other single journalist has ridden a greater range of enduro bikes. I would concede that some of the American writers may have thrown their collective legs over more bikes numerically, but I feel there will be precious few who have had the experience of riding bikes ranging

from 50cc to 870cc and produced by most of the major motorcycle manufacturing countries. In view of this experience, and 14 years of racing behind me, I hope that I may be forgiven for indulging myself on this occasion.

All the tests are my own work and this in itself is probably unique. I began writing in 1969 when off-road journalism was very much in its infancy. In those far off days when there were half a dozen British motocross manufacturers in series production, and Jeff Smith was still on the Grand Prix trail, very few magazines carried much in the way of track tests on any off-road bikes. There was the odd article in both *Motor Cycle* and *Motor Cycle News*, but the reporters producing the articles were not off-road specialists and neither tested nor raced regularly.

In Britain a very cold reception greeted a young motocrosser who wanted to write track tests but who had no journalistic experience, so I turned to America. I took to our US cousins very quickly, for they were interested not in what one claimed to be able to do, or what one had done previously, but only in what a writer could produce at the time. In a very short while, I found myself writing regular articles for *Motor Cycle World* and *Cycle Illustrated*, and soon rejoiced in the grandiose title of 'British Editor' – not that it meant much since every contributor to the magazines had the magic word 'editor' incorporated in his by-line.

The fact that my 'home office' was 3000 miles away across the other side of the Atlantic developed in me a sense of independence which is not likely to be repeated today. I was completely responsible for the whole story, including obtaining a particular bike, arranging a suitable test track, hiring a photographer and doing the actual riding. On many

occasions I would have liked to fall back on the support, both tangible and intangible, which a home-based magazine could offer its staffmen, but I couldn't, so I soldiered on independently.

There were, and are, advantages to the system. First and foremost is that to stay in business, the independent freelance has to be able to produce the goods. Since I did not have a technical editor to help me I simply had to learn what made a bike behave in a particular way. To understand what a Grand Prix involved I had to get into a Grand Prix paddock and listen and learn. For many years our annual holiday was spent in some remote corner of Europe watching and reporting on the world's best motocross riders and loving every minute of it.

Finally, although I have never been anything other than a mediocre rider, I was still better than 99 per cent of journalists and so I could ride a bike half-competently and report on what I was experiencing as a rider and racer. This, above all else, gave me an advantage over all my opposition. It also gave me access to factory bikes which were barred to non-riding journalists and so led to many unique insights into technical and political trends which were later to have a major influence on the machines sold to the average rider.

The strengths and weaknesses of the one-man system both pivot on the same single factor. If the man doing the job is good the whole product can be first class. If he isn't the exercise will be a shambles. The group test produced by a team of riders and writers produces a more balanced story but with less insight. From a publisher's point of view I would have thought that the group test gave a more reliable product, which is one reason why the day of the freelance tester is limited.

I would be very sad to think that there would be no room for someone like myself to begin from

scratch. But looking at the matter objectively I can see the chances of this happening getting increasingly remote if only because the expenses incurred in producing a decent track test are now horrifically high. Also, importers and manufacturers are becoming increasingly magazine-orientated in their approach and sometimes show a distinct reluctance to deal with individuals.

The track tests in this book are the result of a very happy relationship which I have enjoyed with the editor of *Motor Cycle Weekly*, Mick Woollett. It is thanks to his interest in off-road machines that the tests appear at all, since he is willing to provide the funds necessary for the production of expensive articles, such as that of the BMW GS80, and provide the sort of coverage in his journal which off-road sport deserves.

Equal thanks must go to my long-suffering wife Carolyn, who not only acts as my secretary and book-keeper but also produced most of the photographs in this book. Some of the jobs have been done in appalling conditions and one wonders whether this sort of wife is a dying breed too.

Already, those relatively few people who know about the book are pressing me for my choice of the very best bike. Without wanting to fudge the issue I cannot honestly give an answer. There are a number which stand out as being particularly interesting, but every one is, as I have already noted, included because some aspect of the machine is noteworthy. The truth of the matter is that all the bikes were fun to ride. I suppose I should support the idea that testers are dedicated professionals, who selflessly slave away in pursuance of their art, but personally I enjoy writing about and riding bikes for the great majority of the time. I hope you have as much fun reading about these bikes and matching your opinions against mine.

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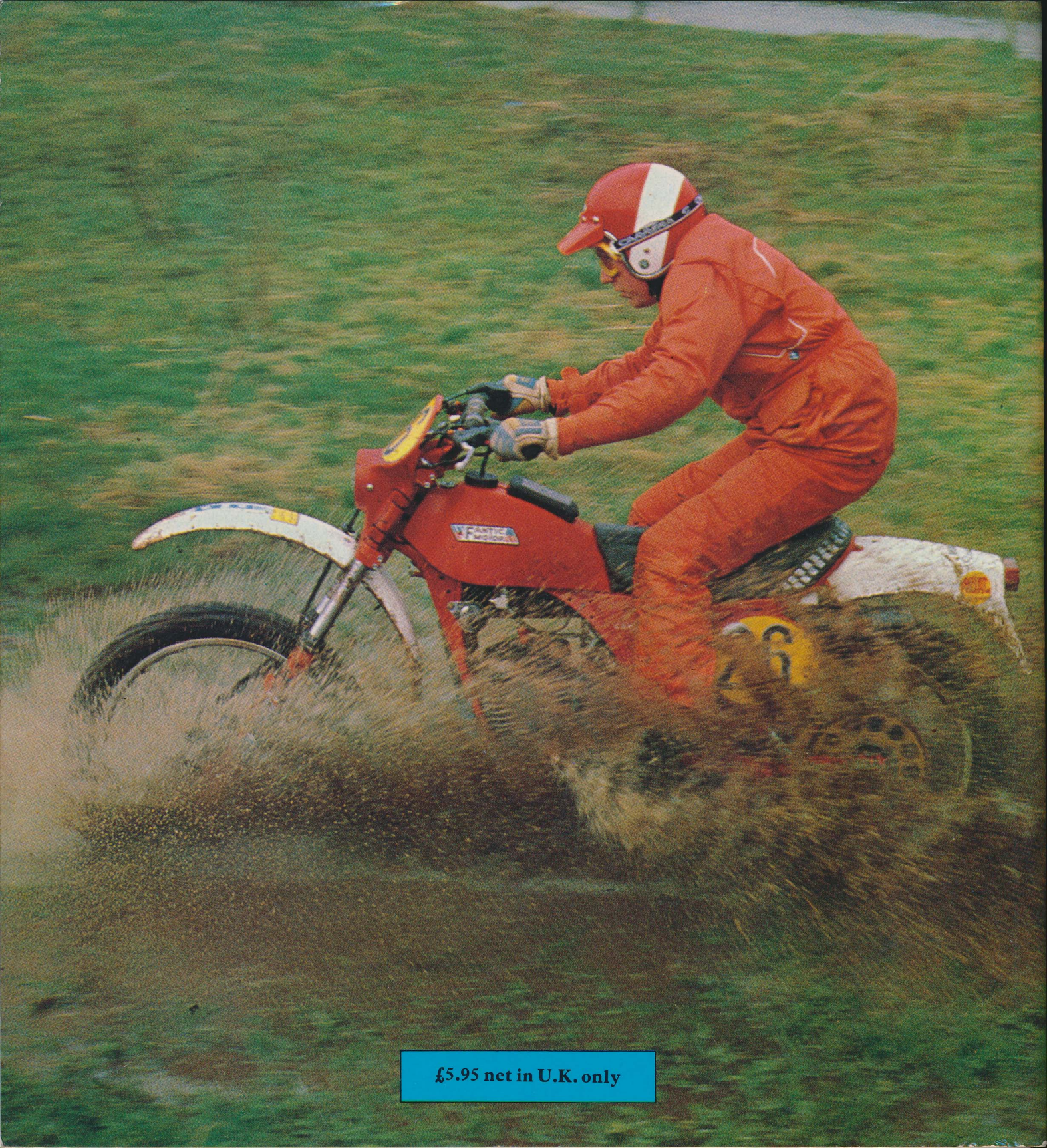
Acknowledgements

Assembling this quantity of test machines has been no easy task. I cannot adequately thank, even mention, all those enthusiasts who have helped me. All I can say is 'thank you'. The owners or sponsors who helped with the individual bikes in this book are as follows.

Michael Jones (Fantic 50RC Caballero); Alan Brick (SWM 125GS TF1); Vernon Leigh (Fantic 125RC Caballero); Gethin Evans and Malcolm Grassie (Kawasaki KDX175); Mitsui Machinery Sales (UK) Ltd. (Yamaha DT175 MX and IT425G); Tony Winder and Colin Shutt (Suzuki PE175); Comerfords Ltd. (KTM GS175); Honda (UK) Ltd. (Hondas XR200A and XR500); Russel Foulkes (Honda XR250); Paul Harrison (SWM 250GS); Motokov Aussenhandelsunternehmen (Jawa 250ME 1980 ISDT); Eddie Crooks (Suzuki PE250N); Jim Jones (Moto-Gori TR250/81); Keith Thornton and Paul Ludlam (Montesa 360 Enduro); Graham Foster and Colin Shutt (Husqvarna 390 Enduro Automatic); Geraint Jones (Maico 440); Richard Brown and Alan Clews (CCM 500 Super Sports T/E); Ian Catford of BMW AG (BMW GS80).

All photography by Carolyn Melling, except for certain black and whites from Motokov Aussenhandelsunternehmen, Prague, Czechoslovakia, of the Jawa 250ME 1980 ISDT, and Bayerische Motoren Werke AG, Munich, West Germany of the BMW GS80.

I am indebted to the editors of *Motor Cycle Weekly* and *Trials & Motocross News*, Mick Woollett and Bill Lawless respectively, for their acceptance that certain of the tests rewritten for this book once appeared in one or other of their respected journals.



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