

Jawa 250ME 1980 ISDT

THERE ARE SOME articles which are hard work from their inception. The Jawa was one of them. However, despite the problems which this story caused I still feel that it was one of the most worthwhile I have ever written.

To deal with a factory in the Eastern Bloc is not an easy task at best. There are always numerous difficulties. The simplest of these is the language barrier whilst the most serious, and at the time most difficult to quantify and appreciate, is that of politics. We in Britain simply do not think about the political connotations of a given act. We may react to some political opinion held by someone with radically different views from ours, or express frustration when an extreme end of our political spectrum takes some action which inconveniences us, but very few people ever go about their daily work wondering whether their actions are politically sound. In Czechoslovakia politics and daily life are inextricably combined.

I have probably ridden more factory Jawas than any other journalist and this was the first vital step towards visiting the Jawa factory. The first one I rode was that supplied to American Bran Moran who rode it in the 1971 ISDT held in the Isle of Man. The bike was then to go on exhibition in Britain and I simply arrived at the Jawa dealer where it was being stored, bent the truth a little and left with the bike. When I returned with it I discovered that I had been refused permission to ride the bike which was rather late since the story had been written and was already on its way to an American magazine. As it happened the bike was very impressive and the story favourable, so Jawa forgave me.

Later I rode one of the machines supplied to the British Trophy Team and this too earned a favourable report, again purely on merit, but once more the factory noticed.

All this time, I had been petitioning the British Jawa distributors for permission to visit the factory but to no avail. Then in the spring of 1979, I was finally given the go-ahead and I arranged my visa and air ticket. Unfortunately, a week before I was due to leave I had a bad accident racing in an enduro and the trip had to be cancelled. I felt sure that I would hear no more of it.

Surprisingly Jawa agreed that I could visit the factory the following year – some eight years after I had made the first enquiry. I obtained a visa and set off clutching my riding gear.

We flew from Amsterdam in a Tupolev of PAL, the Czech state airline, and I remember sitting on a near deserted plane with a distinct feeling that I was entering another world.

The Tupolev touched down at Prague airport with one of the best landings I have ever experienced but I felt sure we were in the wrong place. Everywhere was deserted! The frenetic scurrying of people and service vehicles which typifies the normal Western airport was nowhere to be seen. Instead there were several rows of PAL planes neatly parked, two or three airport workers and a healthy sprinkling of armed guards but nothing else. I was beginning to experience a culture shock.

The half-dozen passengers clip-clopped through the empty arrival hall and filed singly through the customs booths whilst the polite, but very firm, officers asked us the pertinent questions and then out we went in to the spotlessly clean concourse.

I looked round for someone from the Jawa factory but there was no one to be seen. I felt quite lonely and was beginning to wonder whether the whole idea was such a clever one after all.

After something of a struggle I contacted Motokov, the export agency who are responsible for Jawa world sales and who were supposed to be looking after me. I was told to wait at my hotel and I would be contacted.

Looking back I felt more than a little upset at being ordered to a hotel to await instructions when no one had even the good grace to collect me, but I ought not to have been. The concept of public relations as practised by most factories does not exist in Czechoslovakia.

I got a taxi and immediately found some common ground. The driver quoted me three rates. One for Czech crowns; one for Deutschmarks and a third for pounds sterling. The one for Czech crowns was extortionate whilst the other two were very attractive. I had £5's worth of sterling taxi ride. Private enterprise was obviously alive and kicking!

This little exercise summed up the Czechs as I found them. They are bound hand and foot by rules and stick to them wherever necessary. Where it isn't, they go their own way, always striving to make the best of a situation rather than struggling to overcome it.

Throughout my short stay I found my Czech hosts to be friendly, very anxious to do what they could for me within the system and possessed of a resilience of spirit which comes, I feel, from being on many a conqueror's route.

My visit to the Jawa factory was eerie. There were long negotiations between my guides and the Jawa gatemens before I was allowed into the main building and then only after having been relieved of my passport. Once inside everyone did as much as possible to meet with my requests, but when I wanted to take photographs of mechanics working on the ISDT bikes there was a real panic and I was hurriedly escorted from the building. Only later was I to begin to understand the full importance of why no one wanted to be photographed.

My trip was at its best when riding the works bike. To be quite honest I caused some amusement amongst the Jawa people by my lack of riding ability. The sort of riders who normally use factory bikes in Czechoslovakia are ever so slightly more competent than I – probably four or five times more! Still, at the race track I was conscious of a great barrier being lifted. Free of all the usual constraints it was just a group of motorcycle people working, and playing, together.

Motokov provided a photographer to record my antics for posterity and he proved to be rather less than ideal. To begin with he didn't speak English – which is no real criticism since I don't speak Czech. However, when rather complex discussions regarding setting up a particular shot had to be done through an interpreter, matters became complicated in the extreme.

Further, my photographer didn't trust my riding ability. Now since I have yet to hit a photographer in 13 years of testing I thought he was being a little unfair, but I still couldn't budge him. This meant that he cowered behind some solid object about 50 yards away from the shot whilst I pleaded with him to come nearer – unsuccessfully too, I should add.

Throughout the job, I was at pains to emphasize the need for colour since this was essential if the article was to receive the sort of prominence both Jawa and I wanted. The Jawa people were very conscious of my wishes and everyone assured me that colour was being used, and sure enough, a selection of colour shots was eventually produced. Unfortunately, it was colour print – the type of film used to make holiday snapshots – rather than colour transparency, which magazines need. This was the first time anyone had asked for colour shots and so the Motokov people did their best, not knowing any different. This was just one example of the problems which my visit posed for both parties.

I left Czechoslovakia with a great fondness for the many Czechs I had met and who had been so kind to me, but without any great longing to remain in the country. However, I was confident

that I had a good story – and a very exclusive one too. I was being too optimistic!

The first problem was that Motokov refused to send the photographs of the factory we agreed I should have until they saw the story I was going to write. Normally I would not have acceded to this request since what I write, provided it is truthful and accurate, is not open to negotiation. However, realizing that this concept is unfamiliar, if not completely unknown to my Czech friends, I sent a copy of the story.

Immediately there was a furore. I was told that I could not publish the story as it stood. Exception was taken to the fact that I said Czech riders were no more interested in politics than their British counterparts; that they got paid bonuses in kind and that I mentioned Jawa and Motokov officials by name, attributing statements to them.

I wrote back and asked if anything I had written was untrue. No, I was told, it was not untrue but it could not be officially recognized as being true.

I was then faced with a major moral problem and one which cost me much sleep. If I gave way I would have allowed myself to be blackmailed by forces which sought to abuse the freedom of the press, which is one of the cornerstones of democracy. Should I stand by my beliefs then I would punish many enthusiastic motorcyclists who had done nothing more than come into contact with, and try to help, me.

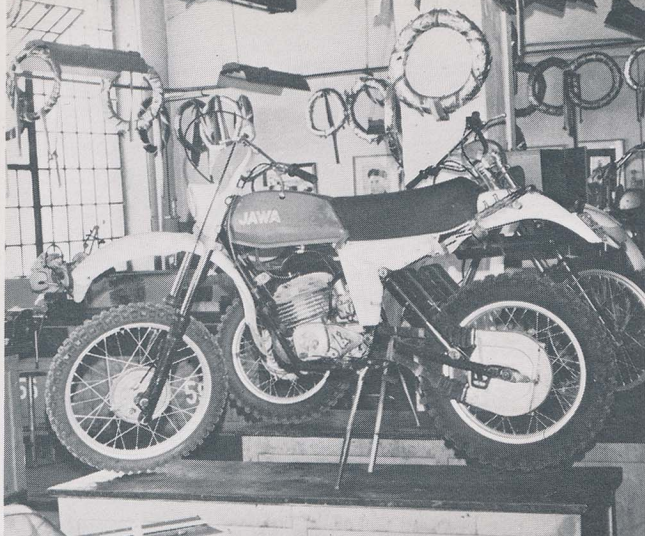
Reluctantly, I deleted the offending paragraphs or re-wrote them in less explicit terms. The story was not changed markedly. More Britons ought to enjoy the same experience before they espouse political philosophies which they understood only in the abstract. The practical manifestations of such abstractions are often very unpleasant.

The reason that there are no thanks to individuals recorded in this article now becomes clear. Everyone lived in terror of being named in a Western journal for fear that their intentions could be misinterpreted. The delays caused problems with schedules and *Motor Cycle Weekly* could not take the story so *Trials & Moto Cross News* ran it. From the interest it generated, I feel that it was all worthwhile – but only just.

THE DREAM OF any enduro rider must be to wander through the Jawa race shop, and I must confess to a certain degree of pride in being the first Western journalist ever to enter this hallowed sanctum. Not only was I allowed into the holy of holies but I had the very best of guides – Pavel Husak, the head of Jawa Technical Services, and his vastly experienced colleague Jan Krivka, sometime Czech Trophy Team Manager and the designer responsible for most of Jawa's racing engines.

Jawa often shop outside Czechoslovakia for the best Western components. Front fork is by Marzocchi whilst Preston Petty supplies the front mudguard. The superb front brake comes from the rival CZ factory.





The Jawa race shop – a site of the start of so many crushing ISDT victories.



Jawa mechanic – himself a guaranteed member of any British Trophy Team – reveals the unique Jawa frame. Unique is the word which has to be frequently applied to Jawa designs. The kick-starter is forward acting – again a Jawa special – and very effective. The clutch is dry and is housed in its own compartment. Placement of expansion chamber suggests that Czech riders also have asbestos knees.

The main purpose of my visit to the race shop was to discuss the factory ISDT bike I was to test the following day, but our discussions about enduros ranged far and wide. The Jawa factory is in something of a state of flux at present with a brand new disc-valved 175cc about to make its debut, whilst existing models continue their development programme. However, all the bikes reflect Jawa's very special concept of long-distance racing, which demands above all else that each bike is a complete and very harmonious motorcycle.

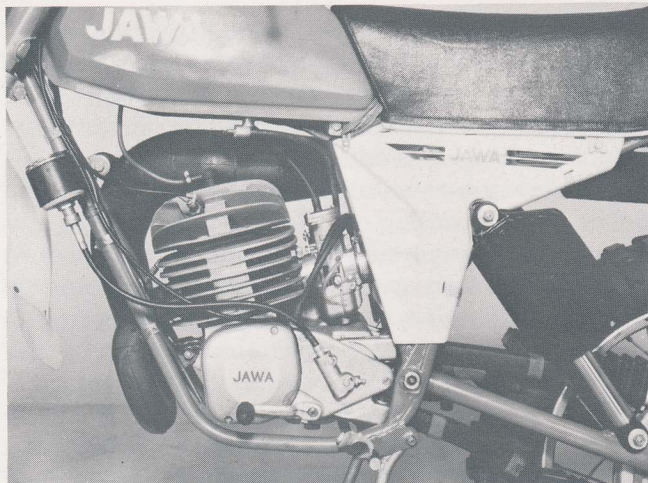
To understand the ME series, or any other racing Jawa for that matter, the single-minded approach employed in their design must be appreciated. The Jawas are not enduro bikes nor are they modified motocross machines or any other commercially expedient answer to producing an ISDT bike. They are, first and last, specialist tools produced with the specific aim of winning the ISDT – nothing more and nothing less.

Being freed of many of the constraints faced by other designers (but still having to face the problems of a very finite budget), the Jawa factory have come up with some very interesting answers to the ultimate question: How best can we win the ISDT?

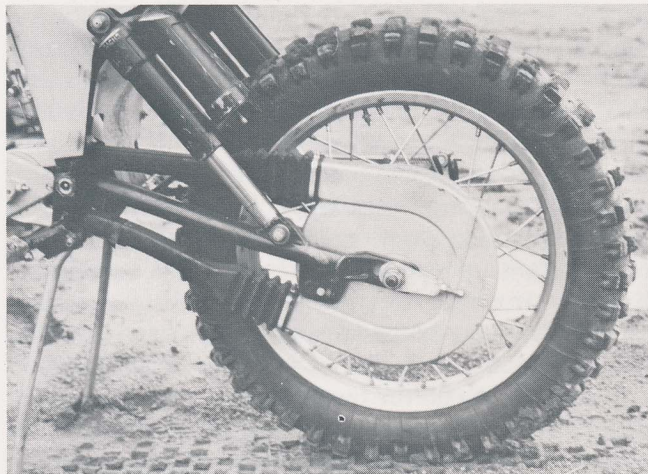
The foremost need for any potential ISDT winner is to finish the whole six days. This might sound like stating the obvious, but the number of retirements in any enduro due to mechanical failure shows that reliability is too often sacrificed by either the rider, due to poor preparation, or the factory, because of inadequate design. Any works Jawa WILL finish the ISDT – that is for certain.

However, the clever trick is getting the equation of reliability versus over-engineering very finely balanced. Critics of the Jawa team will say that whilst their bikes are ultra-reliable they are too heavy and not fast enough.

There is probably some truth in this argument – one which reflects the conservative attitude of the Jawa design team. Against this must be put the number of Czech ISDT victories. It simply does not hold water to point the finger of failure at a team which is winning.



The 250 Jawa engine is both very conventional and quite radically unconventional at the same time. Crankcases are one piece and the speedometer is driven from the gearbox sprocket but the barrel porting is most conservative and lacks a reed-valve. Note use of decompressor in the cylinder head. Bing or Mikuni carburettors are used according to rider preference.



Jawa designers still favour the use of fully enclosed rear chains, although there has been a minor revolt amongst the factory's riders. The thought is that the saving of 4 or 5lb does not warrant the extra risk the rear chain and sprocket are exposed to in the ISDT. Rear dampers are Sachs Hydracross, the Jawa factory being heavily involved in development of these units.

The 250 Jawa was an ideal bike for me to ride in many ways. It is probably the easiest of the range to ride – a good point from Jawa's angle, since it saved a lot of potential trouble visiting me in hospital. Also, since I rode a 250 Moto-Gori myself, I had a relevant yardstick for comparison.

In some ways the Jawa is very clever, whilst at the same time being ultra-conservative. The practical explanation of this enigma is that the Jawa designers are not afraid to break new ground if there is some return to be gained in terms of performance or reliability. However, they have no need to produce technical innovation to impress prospective buyers since the bikes are not for sale – it is as simple as that.

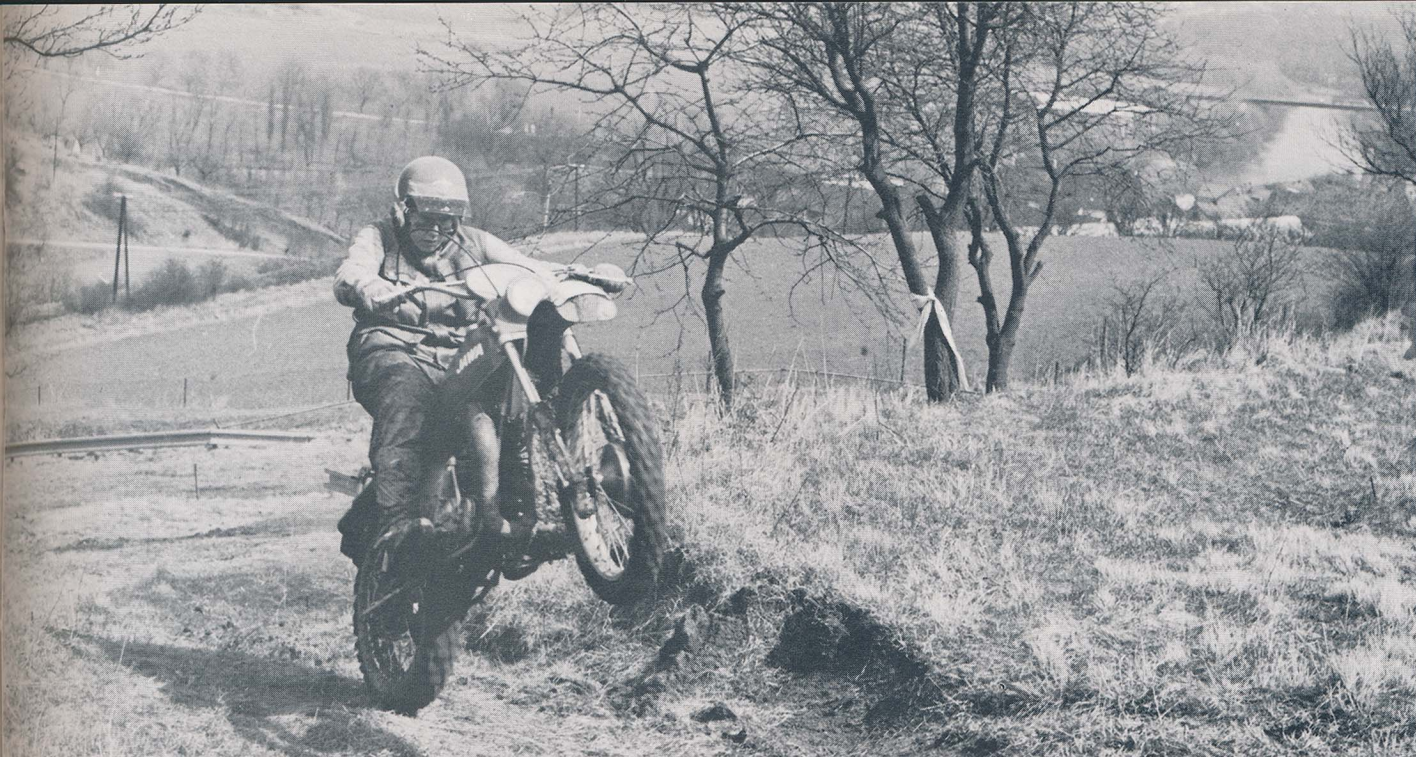
The motor demonstrates these two facets of Jawa's thinking very well. At one end of the motor there is a forward-acting kickstart, which to the best of my knowledge is unique, whilst at the same time the motor lacks any reed or disc-valve aid to induction.

The motor in the 250 is a development of a long-standing Jawa design. All the bottom end is cast from magnesium and the crankcases are in one piece – the crankshaft being fed to the motor through a large dished plate on the left-hand side. The object of this arrangement is to remove the large seal area, which exemplifies the standard split-crankcase two-stroke.

The gearbox is a six-speeder of truly superb action. I cannot remember ever using a better gearbox or one with a more finely judged choice of ratios. The clutch action is very light, with the actuating arm being mounted safely out of harm's way on top of the crankcase. The clutch itself is dry and lives in its own dust- and debris-free case on the right-hand side of the motor.

The crank arrangement is new for 1980 and was on the secret list, so just what Jawa is thinking on this aspect of the motor must remain a mystery for the moment. However, at the other end of the con-rod is a needle roller bearing supported by a forged piston carrying two chrome rings.

The barrel, as I mentioned, is completely conventional and very conservatively ported too,



by Japanese standards. I saw one of the barrels in the race shop and the ports could well have been from a trail bike rather than a world-class ISDT mount. The cylinder liner itself was finished with Niresist for good heat conduction.

Carburation varies from bike to bike, with the choice lying between Bing and Mikuni instruments, always with a 34mm choke. Jawa also go outside Czechoslovakia for the 55-watt Motoplatt ignition, which supplies the single spark plug.

A final point of interest is that the speedometer

Despite many riders' dreams, the Jawa was not an automatic Gold medal winner in the ISDT. In truth, most Western riders would probably prefer their own bikes. Nevertheless, it was a delightful and very complete racing motorcycle.

is driven from the gearbox sprocket rather than the front wheel, as is the case with most enduro bikes. The reason for this is to aid fast wheel removal.

Like the motor the Jawa frame is a development of ideas proven for many years. It still retains one of the best ideas in frame manufacture – that of running the headstock THROUGH the frame tubes rather than butting up against it – but, with a single back spine, it is now much lighter than previously.

At the front, leading axle Marzocchis with some 10in of movement are fitted, whilst Sachs Hydracross units look after the rear. These are pneumatic units which have found favour with the Jawa team not only for their good action but also for their strength and durability. Interestingly, despite the 245mm of travel (almost 10in) at the rear wheel, Jawa still opt for a straight swinging

arm fabricated from round tubing, scorning the complications of aluminium extrusions as unnecessary cosmetic engineering.

The bike abounds with beautiful little examples of thoughtful engineering which show the factory has spent a long time in ISDT racing. Both wheels are very q.d. as might be expected, but the bike balances on its centre stand so well that as soon as either front or rear wheel is removed, the Jawa settles down gently on to the remaining wheel.

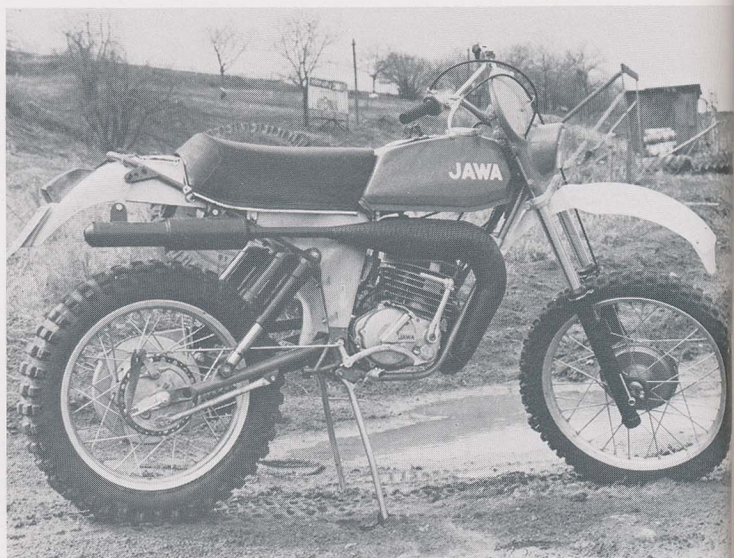
The stand itself flicks up and, what is more important, stays up. The mudguards are excellent, being wide and yet unobtrusive, although credit should go more to Preston Petty than to Jawa for this. Finally, the ergonomics of the bike are first rate. The tank does not smash into one's vital organs under heavy braking, the relationship between the saddle, footrests and handlebars is perfect for a rider of my height – some 6ft in racing boots. Altogether, a bike on which I would happily compete in any enduro.

Even with over ten years of testing experience, I must confess to a certain nervousness when I was confronted with the task of actually riding the Jawa. Despite the affability of my hosts, I was conscious that, at the very least, they expected me to put up a competent performance on a bike.

The problem is that viewed against the average Czech ISDT rider (is there such a beast?) whatever I could do was going to be pretty mediocre. Things were not helped when the Jawa mechanic warmed the bike up with a series of devastating wheelies and lurid power slides. I would have thought that he would have been a certainty for the British ISDT team. I mentioned this to my Czech friends and they thought this was a huge joke. 'Oh, he can't ride – he's only a mechanic! He's not even good enough to ride at club level!'

That wouldn't have been my judgement, but it didn't do my confidence any good.

The test track we used was part of the Vlášim motocross complex and I managed to lay out an interesting little track using part of the motocross circuit itself, the tarmac and shale access road and the rough scrub land surrounding the whole area. It wasn't exactly the European Two Day



The 250ME – unmistakably a Jawa.

Championship venue, but it provided the Jawa with an opportunity to show its paces without killing either of us.

From the moment I threw a leg over the bike I was at home on it. The forward-mounted kickstart proved to be no problem at all and the motor revved cleanly as I warmed it up in neutral. Interestingly, the Jawa is very quiet – which rather confounds those critics who insist that a top-class enduro bike has got to be noisy. The clutch action is very light but errs on the fierce side in its take-up – a common characteristic of dry clutches. Gear selection was perfect either with or without the clutch and I never once missed a change.

The Jawa's bottom end power was not impressive, and although it would pull from very low revs, it was easy to choke the motor through careless use of the throttle. In this respect it was not forgiving, and Jawa are clearly paying the penalty for not using a reed or disc valve. First gear in the six-speed cluster was essential for ultra-tight going, and if I rode the bike in a really tough event, I feel that I would have to resort to clutch slipping in some of the tighter sections. Negotiating traffic jams or rocky trials-type going

are two examples which spring to mind.

Equally, the top end power lacks that scintillating zip of a KTM or SWM. Where the Jawa scores is in the mid-range power. There is a fat lump of good slogging power at mid-throttle which is equal to anything in the enduro world and, provided the rider uses this area, progress should be quite shatteringly fast.

The bike also pulls tremendously high gears, which can be quite deceptive. I took the Jawa out along the tarmac and shale access road and was initially disappointed with our progress, since we seemed not to be going very quickly. My opinion changed when we managed to jump a level crossing quite effortlessly and I still had two gears left. In sixth the bike is certainly a 90mph projectile and, more importantly, is quite at home at these speeds.

We had a few initial problems with the Sachs Hydracross units, but once these were set up for my weight the bike was a dream to ride. Provided use was made of the mid-range power, it was quite effortless and completely trustworthy.

The somewhat limited suspension movement meant that the bike could be legged about in tight sections and was also much easier to power slide. I had several 'moments', but soon gained confidence in the bike. One felt that it was always there on your side rather than waiting to punish your errors, à la KTM.

Everything about the bike made life easy. The Marzocchis were as good as ever and I was very impressed with the Sachs Hydracross units. The brakes were superb, with the front one – a derivative of the old CZ motocross anchor – being one of the best stoppers I have ever used.

Only the expansion chamber made life difficult, with a scorch mark on the right knee of my leathers showing just where it juts out.

In the final analysis, just how good is the Jawa? The question is not completely straightforward in that the riders of these bikes are tuned in to them in a way few British riders would ever be. In the hands of a Czech Trophy man who automatically made use of the bike's super mid-range power the answer would be 'excellent!'

For lesser mortals it would not be the automatic solution to all their problems. The heart of the Jawa's problem lies in the motor, which is not as good as that of the opposition.

I feel sure that we shall soon see the 175 disc-valve motor grow up into a 250 and this will put Jawa right back at the top of the tree. The chassis is excellent – if a trifle portly – and given a motor with a little wider power band the bike would be a world beater.

As it is I cannot see it being the equal of an SWM or KTM on the motocross special tests, as is my own Moto-Gori. Whether Czech riding ability can make up for the deficit, I am not sure. I certainly hope so, for when a factory puts as much effort and money into enduros as Jawa does then it deserves success.
Suzuki PE250N

Jawa 250ME 1980 ISDT

Engine: Single-cylinder two-stroke
Bore and stroke: 246cc (70 × 64mm)
Piston port induction
Petrol lubrication
Claimed maximum power: 35bhp at 8000rpm
Carburation: 34mm Mikuni or Bing according to rider preference
Primary transmission by straight-cut gears with crankshaft-mounted clutch
Dry clutch with four plates
6-speed gearbox
Ignition by Motoplatt. CDI ignition unit
Flywheel generator by Motoplatt of 55W output supplying ignition power and DC lights
Front forks: Leading axle Marzocchi with air assistance giving 250mm (10in) of travel
Rear dampers: Sachs Hydracross giving 245mm (9.8in) of rear-wheel travel
Wheelbase: 1430mm (57.2in)
Saddle height: 880mm (35.2in) (bike free standing)
Brakes: 160mm (6.4in) front and rear. Magnesium hubs and brake plates in both cases.
Wheels: WM2 × 21in front; WM3 × 18in rear
Tyres: Barum 3.00 × 21in ISDT front; 4.75 × 18in rear
Claimed dry weight: 106kg (233lb)
General features: Frame; Duplex with single top spine fabricated from chrome-moly tubing
Fibreglass petrol tank with 13-litre capacity, including 1-litre reserve
Petrol consumption approx. 9 litres per 100km
Foam air filter element
Rubber gaiters and magnesium sprocket fairing giving fully enclosed rear chain
Bike not for sale. Total production of type approximately 20 units before new type introduced