

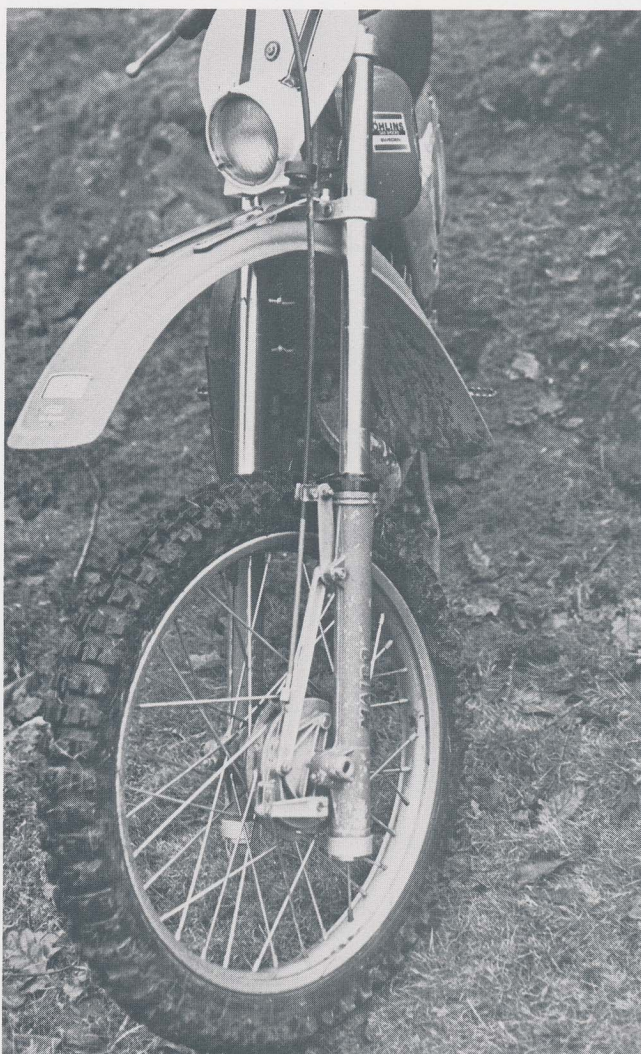
Maico 440

MANY PEOPLE BELIEVE that it is harder to stay at the top than to get there. I would disagree. When a rider has proved himself to have ability, then he inevitably receives sponsorship, and you can be sure that those who help will do everything in their power to make sure his successes continue.

Although I had met Geraint Jones many times prior to this story, I had never spent a day with him and could not claim to really know him. I came away from the Jones's farm most impressed with a talented, ruthless and dedicated rider: just the sort of man I would want riding for me were I a manufacturer.

The Maico factory must also realize what talent they have in their hands, and to their credit they built him an outstandingly good machine. To claim that something is the best is an occupation fraught with danger and one which I only undertake with great reluctance. However, in the case of Geraint Jones's bike, I was quite confident to put it at the top of the list in most of the sub-elements which form any analysis of a racing motorcycle. The motor was the fastest, most flexible two-stroke power unit that I have ever used; the suspension was quite beyond criticism and the brakes were so good that I was left wondering how one could possibly ride with lesser units. Best of all, the whole package was very complete.

Testing bikes is not always fun and throwing a big-capacity enduro bike around in heavy rain, thick mist and near-freezing temperatures could well have been hard work, but, on the Maico, it wasn't! In fact, both Carolyn (who to her eternal credit managed to produce some fine action shots despite the appalling conditions) and Geraint had long since gone back to the farm, while I was still



Maico front forks were uncannily sensitive, so much so that the author was left wondering what other manufacturers have done wrong. Front brake was equally good.

playing about on the hills.

This is the key to the Maico's success. It enables the rider to make the very best of any ability he has. In Geraint's case the bike encourages him to simply destroy the opposition in any event in Britain, whilst, with me, it left me wishing that I was 10 years younger and just starting out doing National events again.



Geraint Jones's brother, Gareth, is a very talented mechanic and produced a host of clever modifications to the works bike. Shown is his centre stand.

It will be interesting to see what comes along to replace the Maico as my personal 'best' enduro bike, but whatever it is I can guarantee that it will have to be a spectacularly complete and successful motorcycle.

Testing the bike which has consistently proved

itself the fastest enduro bike in Britain is not an easy task, since, by its very nature, the bike is supremely successful. Even so, just how good Geraint Jones's Maico was surprised me.

Its great strength lies in its completeness as a racing motorcycle. The frame, suspension, brakes and motor are all the best, or equal to the best, in the world and so its flaws – the heaviness of the clutch and the gearbox – become fairly trivial criticisms by comparison.

The heart of the bike is the works-prepared 440cc engine. It is possible to become really silly in one's praise of the motor, since its soft, crisp and effortless power is what every rider dreams of. Despite its lack of reed valve the German motor pulls from zero revs with a huge spread of really strong power in the mid range.

Geraint's bike was particularly impressive in that not only would it pull in the manner we have come to expect from Maicos but it would also rev on when necessity arose. Thus there were two motors available: one a woofling docile beast on which one, in Geraint's words, 'cruised between checks', and the other a lightning-quick racing engine which could be called upon for motocross special tests.

Many of the niggling little problems which afflicted the earlier Maico enduro bikes have been eliminated from Geraint's works motor, which forms the basis of the 1981 production machines. In the interest of longevity the primary chain is now two single chains instead of a duplex unit and the primary chain case has a nylon block to prevent wear if the chain has to be run slack. Driven as hard as the British enduro champion rides his bike, only two primary chains and one piston have been used in 2600 miles, which speaks well of the motor's reliability. However, there is still a lack of primary kickstarting facility and the clutch action, whilst smooth, is very heavy.

One solution is not to use the clutch, which is how most Maico riders solve the problem. The five-speed gearbox seems not to mind this at all and the changes are perfect, if somewhat heavy. Geraint says that the rider soon becomes used to





The big Maico was the most stable, trustworthy bike at high speed the author has ever ridden. All the time, it encouraged the rider to go even faster.

this action, but I would still expect a sore right foot after a two-day event.

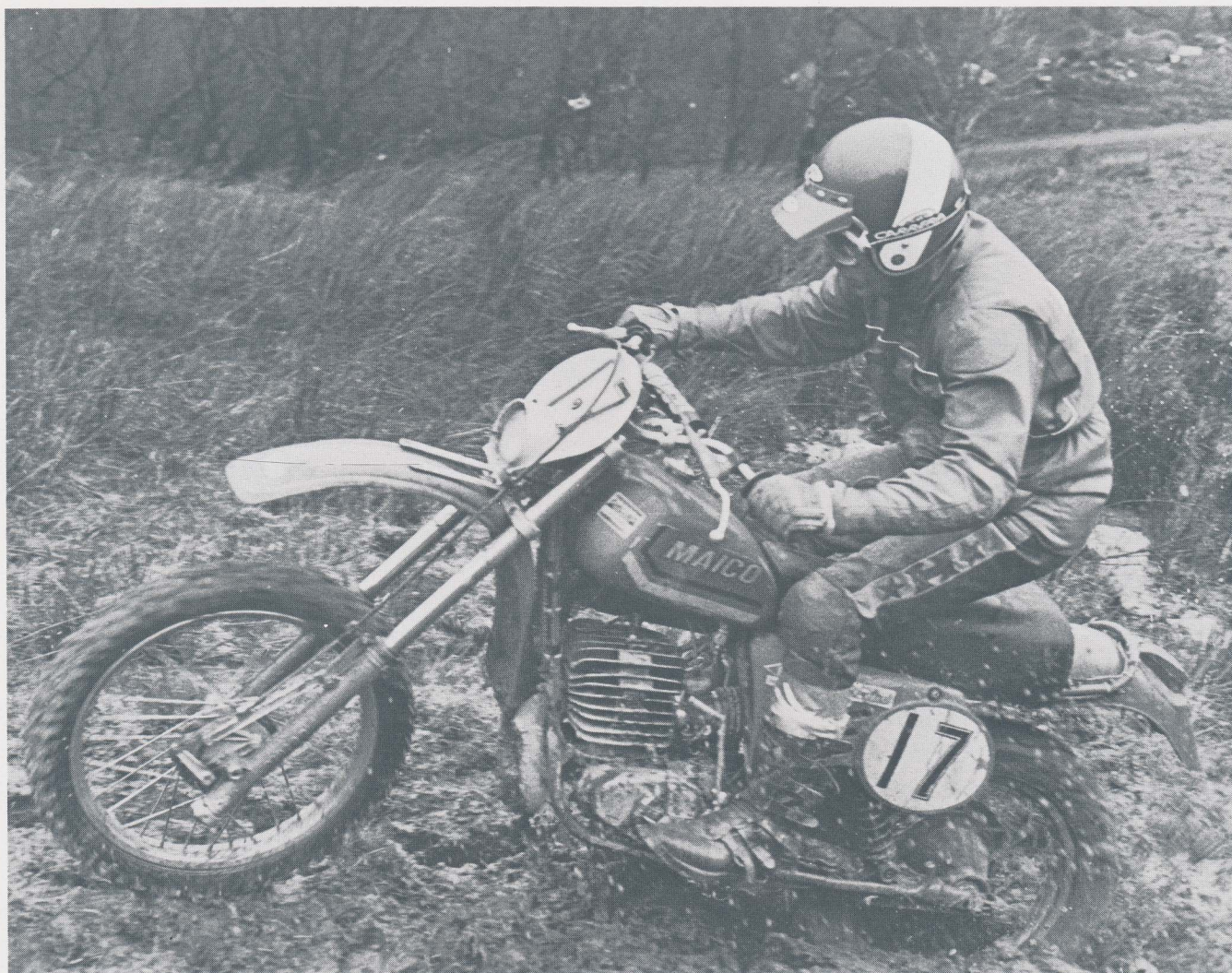
The frame of the works bike is almost identical to the standard product since excessive lightening of an ISDT bike is a dangerous pastime. The design is very conventional, with a simple duplex engine cradle and twin-damper swinging arm. Credit must be given to Maico for coaxing the best out of this traditional concept and arriving at a commendably low saddle height, despite 11in of wheel travel, front and back, and a nice, narrow seat, which permits easy footing.

There are several pleasing modifications to the standard frame, but nothing that a meticulous privateer could not achieve. The footrest mounts are strengthened so that the footrest itself will be ripped off, rather than the mount, if a rock is hit really hard, and the centre stand has been worked on by Gareth Jones so that it swings right up against the swinging arm, well out of harm's way, when trying to rescue the bike from a deep rut or bog. When not in use the legs of the centre stand now rest against two nylon snubbing blocks fitted on to the ends of the rear dampers, which is as high as it is possible to mount any centre stand.

The factory has done a lot of detail work on the bike, much of which will be of direct benefit to the production bikes. The fork legs are knurled to prevent twisting in the yokes and there are a number of lightweight items fitted to the bike. The silencer is alloy, many of the bolts are hollow and the expansion chamber is of thin-gauge metal. All this contributes to a very light 500cc-class bike. Geraint is unsure of the precise weight, but he thinks it is around the 235lb mark, dry.

Inevitably for me, on the day that I got to ride the most exciting enduro bike in Britain the heavens opened and the Jones's farm almost disappeared in swirling mist and pouring rain. It was no day to ride a fire-breathing monster.

I need not have worried for the Maico was one



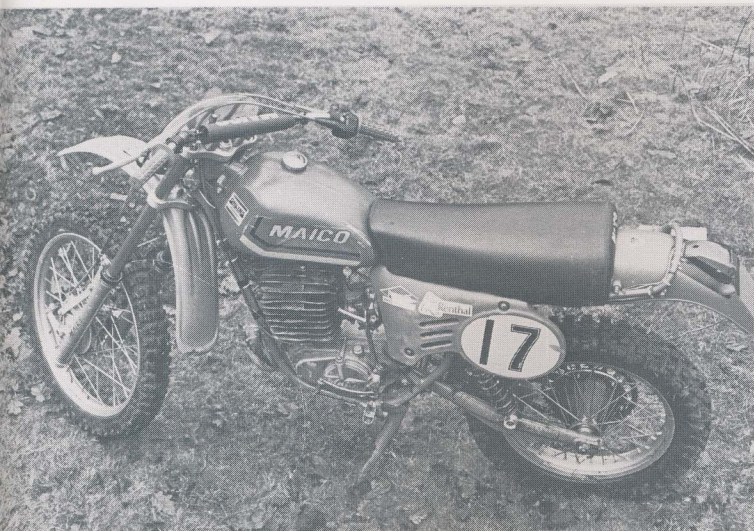
Even when ridden at less than ISDT speeds, the Maico shrugged off obstacles as if they did not exist.

of the easiest bikes to handle that I have encountered. The front forks were superb and transmitted tremendous feel, whilst the rear Öhlin dampers were equally good. This meant that I could push the Maico across the slipperiest cambers and ruts with complete confidence, since I knew precisely what each wheel was doing, yet I could hit foot-deep potholes at 60mph without

feeling the slightest jolt; outstandingly the best suspension I have ever used!

The motor, too, was near perfect, with a complete willingness to pull from zero revs at walking pace all the way up to speeds which were simply dangerous for a rider of my calibre. On Geraint's practice hillclimb, I found that I could get a corner a little bit wrong and the motor was so flexible that it was possible to shut off and then accelerate again without any discernible loss of pace.

Equally comforting were the finest set of brakes



Not the most elegant motorcycle in the world, but the best enduro bike Melling has ever ridden.

I have ever used on any off-road machine. They were dramatically powerful – either wheel could be locked at will with the merest hint of pressure – but were superbly sensitive. On one section of the course I slithered down a steep clay bank towards a stream, crossing with both wheels just on the point of locking. In an event, the section would have had half the riders on their bottoms, but I managed it without putting a foot down simply because the bike was so controllable and responsive.

Finding fault with the Maico is very difficult. To be honest, I could not improve it in any material way other than transposing the kickstart to the

right-hand side – a personal preference – and easing the gearbox action. The biggest problem with the bike is that one can get into a real tangle unless conscious care is exercised at all times. This is because the motor is so quiet and lightly stressed and the chassis builds up such a feeling of overconfidence in the rider. I found myself going far too fast for my own riding abilities on many occasions, and although I never crashed the bike I frightened myself more than I would normally in a track testing session. It is capable of winning the 500cc class in the ISDT, and this needs to be borne in mind at all times!

Without taking anything away from Geraint, the bike enables him to make the most of his abilities. Not only is it the fastest and best-handling enduro bike in Britain but it also permits the champion to get away with things that would hospitalize him on a lesser machine.

Maico 440

Engine: Single-cylinder two-stroke with magnesium side covers

Capacity: 438cc (82 × 83mm)

Carburation: 40mm Bing. Tickler for cold starting

Claimed maximum power: 50bhp at 6600rpm

Transmission: Dual-row chain to clutch with rear-set gearbox sprocket

Ignition: Pointless electronic ignition from flywheel generator

Fuel capacity: 10.9 litres (2.4 imp gal) on works bike only

Suspension: Air-assisted Maico front forks giving 11in of travel in trim tested. Rear: twin-damper swinging arm controlled by Öhlin dampers on works bike giving 11in of travel

Frame: Duplex engine cradle with twin-damper swinging arm

Tyres: 3.00 × 21in Metzeler front; 5.10 × 18in Dunlop rear

Brakes: 6in sls Maico front and rear. Both adapted to be q.d.

Wheelbase: 58in

Ground clearance: 13in

Saddle height: 36in

Claimed dry weight: 235lb