

SWM 250GS

I WOULD BE the first to admit that I am not everyone's favourite journalist, but even I was surprised at the reaction over this particular test.

The SWM importer at the time was Cliff Holden, who also imported Ossa (and still does at the time of writing), and he really went for me.

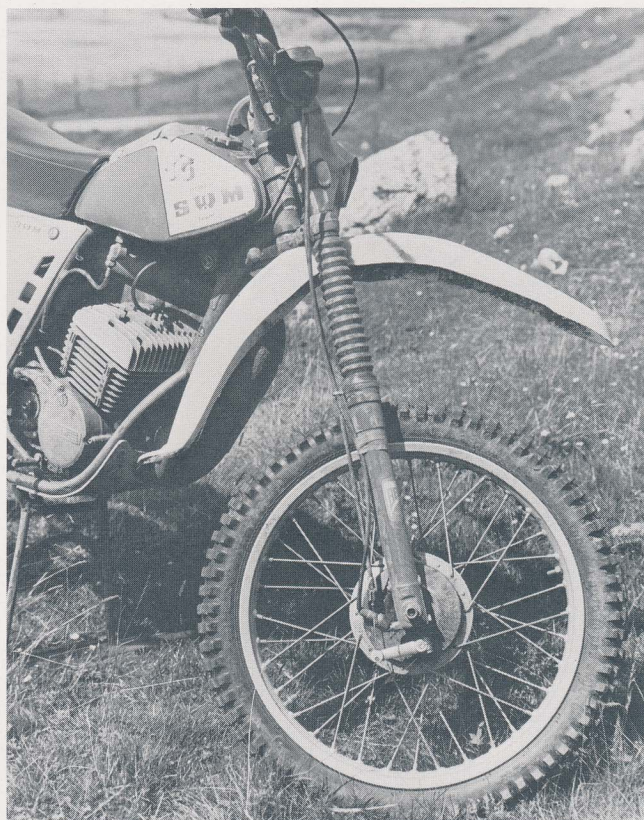
At first I thought that we were discussing a different story. Judging from Cliff's tirade against my journalistic and riding abilities, one would have thought that I had condemned the SWM on every count. In fact, the only points of criticism were that the bike was too fierce – which it was – and that the front forks were not as good as the rest of the bike – which they weren't!

As I pointed out to Cliff at the time, I have written much more damning tests than this one.

Cliff was not to be mollified and threatened that I would never test another SWM. A common enough threat from importers, but one which never holds much water in practice, but which just goes to show that testing has its dangers both on and off the track.

There is an amusing corollary to this little tale. Some two years after I wrote the story I had lunch with Signor Seroni, the owner of the SWM factory. To my surprise he said how pleased his staff had been when they read the story, since they felt it was one of the most accurate and objective tests they had read on the 250GS. I suppose it proves that you can't please all the people all the time or perhaps that testers never know from which side the bullets, or plaudits, are going to arrive. It certainly makes life interesting.

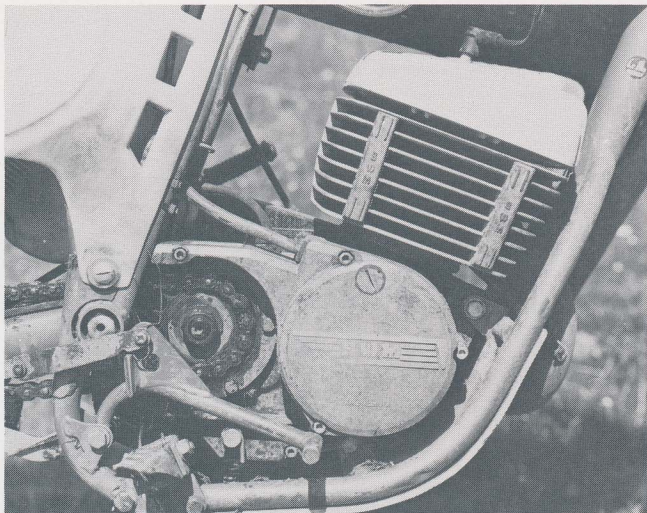
Feeling jaded and bored with life? Has your BMW lost its snob appeal? Is your turbo-charged Kawasaki feeling flat? Does Brad Lackey's GP Honda seem tame? If so, SWM have the Christmas



The SWM front end, the mild criticism of which caused such a furore. The author is still quite unrepentant.

The SWM was always at its best in real ISDT going.





Although in later years SWM's engineers softened their Rotax motors somewhat, the 1978 engine was nothing short of dynamite. Often, it was more of an embarrassment than a help to the rider.

The SWM was well fast enough for motocross as the spectacular ISDT special test times often proved.

present for you!

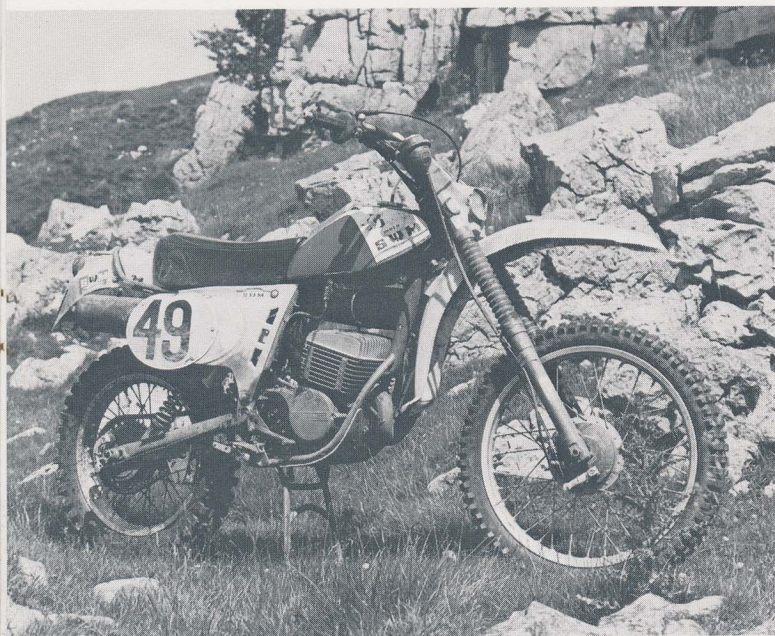
How about a nice little 250cc trail bike with a top speed of about 90mph, off-road acceleration which makes it competitive with a good 400cc motocrosser and the endearing little trick of being able to pull near-vertical wheelies in any gear from one to six merely by the overenthusiastic use of the throttle.

Whatever else the SWM may be, a trail bike it most certainly is not. With a price tag of over £1200 it is an expensive thoroughbred, designed and constructed with the express purpose of winning the 250cc class in the ISDT – no more and no less.

In achieving this aim SWM face certain difficulties. To be an ISDT winner today requires the ability not only to run on standard time throughout the day – this is taken for granted – but there is also a necessity to produce blistering times in each motocross special test. These times are very near to those which a GP motocross rider







Every inch an ISDT thoroughbred.

could manage and obviously require a mammoth amount of horsepower.

SWM's Rotax-produced disc-valved engine is clearly the class leader in the power stakes and tends to be the bike to beat in the quarter-litre class. The amount of power produced is quite stunning for such a small bike – over 40bhp is claimed to be available – and in the right hands it can prove to be unbeatable.

Linked with a six-speed gearbox the disc-valve motor churns out such a relentless amount of urge that there is no obstacle I have seen on an enduro circuit which would pose any problem whatsoever. On our test track there was a long, rough climb of about 1 in 2 gradient and surfaced with power-sapping loose marl. The SWM flicked up it in third gear with so much in hand that it seemed as if someone had levelled the hill for me as I climbed it.

Like all wonders in the world there is a catch. In this case it is quite simply that, whilst the SWM might be the complete answer for Alessandro Gritti and a handful of his fellow superstars, it is certainly not a universal panacea

for every clubman who wants a Gold medal. I for one can't ride the thing half properly.

Although the motor is quite tractable it does have two very distinct power bands. One might be labelled 'trail bike', and ranges from about 1000 to 5000rpm, and the other could accurately be called 'living dangerously', and this goes from 5000 to 9000rpm. Most riders use the former area.

When the motor reaches the power band things just explode. The rear end steps out, the front wheel paws the air and the bike leaps off the ground like a surface-to-air missile. All very entertaining, but not an ideal way of making good time in an enduro unless you happen to be a good enough rider to control the resulting mayhem.

Despite what they might think very few riders can control the excess of urge, as witnessed by the number of SWM riders I have burnt off on my PE (claimed power 24bhp) on fast sections, where the SWMs should just have disappeared into the distance. In addition to producing a plethora of power the Rotax engine unit also has all the other virtues of a good enduro engine. It starts easily, although the choke on the 32mm Bing carburettor is rather difficult to reach, and will restart easily when stalled. The six-speed gearbox is excellent, with well-chosen ratios covering any situation, and changes, with or without the clutch, are faultless. The clutch action itself is somewhat heavier than I would like on any enduro bike, where six-hour riding spells are not unheard of, but 'Bomber' Harrison, who rides with some success for Town & Country Motorcycles of Ashton-under-Lyne, Greater Manchester, uses a very heavy gear oil, which might account for the heaviness of the wet clutch.

Although the motor is the outstanding feature of the bike the chassis is equally impressive. The frame is constructed from small-diameter tubing in a classic duplex design. There is the absolute minimum of gussetting, and support is given to the stressed areas by additional tubes in the style of the old Bianchi space frames. The result is a very rigid and light frame.

SWM's riders insist that the latest leading axle

forks are unstable at high speeds, so the traditional straight-leg Marzocchis are fitted. These are good forks in that they have almost 10in of travel and go up and down like competition forks should, but they do feel dated when compared to the best units on the market.

Marzocchi dampers are employed at the rear and these have a facility for increasing the damping rate with air. They are noticeably better than their cousins at the front and they keep the rear wheel well under control.

Grimeca hubs are used at the front and rear, and these are both excellent. The rear wheel is very q.d. and it is possible for any rider to remove and refit a wheel in under 40 seconds. Matters are helped considerably because the bike has a centre stand, like all serious ISDT machines.

Hard riders find the front hub a little too small for comfort, since hauling an SWM down from its top speed can be hard work for a 5in sls drum brake. However, most clubman riders will be completely safe.

It would be nice to report that all this sophistication leads to the best-handling enduro bike in the world, but sadly it doesn't. Compared with most bikes, particularly those which offer less than 10in of suspension travel, the SWM floats across bumps like a magic carpet, but when a comparison is made with something which really handles on the rough, such as a Maico or KTM, then the SWM falls flat. The steering is often imprecise because the front forks do not respond accurately to the terrain, and the way the front end drifts on corners suggests a fork angle which is a shade too shallow for comfort.

Of course, these faults could be corrected by the rider, but should they have to be? At £1200 one can expect the SWM to be perfect, and yet these bikes have been dogged by silly mechanical worries. First of all, the bikes arrived in the country with petrol taps which could not supply the bike's fuel needs – a 250cc guzzles a lot of

petrol on full song. The result was a spate of seizures. This difficulty has been sorted out by fitting Husqvarna petrol taps, but several riders have also experienced gearbox problems as well as finding that the standard SWM crankcase shield is not all that it might be.

In criticizing the SWM I am conscious of poking my head into the lion's den, since the marque has ardent fans in the enduro world and there have been impressive victories throughout the season.

Regardless of this, I think that the bike fails on two points. Firstly, there have unarguably been lapses in design, such as the petrol taps and fitting of less than perfect front forks, which have reduced the bike's effectiveness. Secondly, and this is very much a matter of opinion, I think that the 250cc SWM is simply too much bike for 99 per cent of British riders.

Having lit the blue touch paper, I now retire to a safe distance.

SWM 250GS

Engine: Single-cylinder two-stroke with disc-valve induction
Capacity: 247cc (74 × 57.5mm)
Lubrication: Petrol mixture 20:1
Compression ratio: 14:1 (geometric)
Carburation: 32mm choke Bing carburettor with oil-soaked foam air filter
Maximum claimed power: 41bhp at 8250rpm
Transmission: Gear primary. Wet multi-plate clutch and six-speed gearbox. Final drive by $\frac{3}{8}$ in × $\frac{3}{8}$ in roller chain (ratio 44/15)
Ratios: 1 – 3.4; 2 – 2.31; 3 – 1.69; 4 – 1.32; 5 – 1.1; 6 – 0.913
Electrical equipment: Pointless electronic ignition and from 55W magneto. 5in headlamp with 21W main bulb
Fuel capacity: 7.9 litres (1 $\frac{3}{4}$ imp gal)
Frame: Duplex cradle
Suspension: Marzocchi telescopic front fork (9in travel). Pivoted rear fork with air-assisted Marzocchi dampers with 10in of travel
Wheels: Spoked type with Akront light alloy rims. WM2 × 21in front; WM3 × 18in rear. Metzlers on test machine
Brakes: 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ in-diameter Grimeca drum type front and rear
Wheelbase: 56in
Ground clearance: 12in
Saddle height: 37in
Handlebar width: 33in (all unladen)
Weight: 235lb dry (claimed)