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Greeves 380cc Griffon (1969)



Enter a brand-new contender for the motocross prize and hang on while it flattens the nastiest of tracks.



► New England is one of the two or three real hotbeds of motocross racing in this country, and during the 1969 season in New England, the battle in the 500cc class was strictly between CZ and Bultaco. The 360cc CZ would keep slogging no matter what; the Bultaco had an edge in power. Given a short stretch of good ground, the Bul' was long gone. But what the 1970 CZ and But' models will do on the tracks next year is—at this writing—anybody's guess. Burt Greeves has thrown his hat into the 1970 ring with the new 250cc and 380cc Griffons.

The British are well accustomed to nasty motocross tracks, and the Griffon has been evolving steadily at those tracks for some time. It is not one of those yesterday-inspired machines, and it should have far fewer bugs than the average new model on the market. In fact, a couple of prototypes of the Griffon have been doing spectacularly out on the West Coast this year.

Randy Wilson, the eastern Greeves importer, had one of the first production 380cc Griffons sent ahead to him by air freight and we went



production 380cc Griffons sent ahead to him by air freight, and we went up to his shop in Massachusetts to look the bike over. With us went Charlie Vincent, whose name will be familiar to anybody even faintly interested in New England scrambles during recent years.

The new motorcycle is definitely a Greeves, in that its designers haven't taken any pains to copy what the other motorcycle designers are doing. But the Griffon doesn't look like any other Greeves that has ever seen service on these shores. The machine is incredibly light. Dry, it may even weigh what the specs say it weighs: 227 lb. But it doesn't look fragile; to our knowledge no Greeves has ever been fragile.

The frame is made of Reynolds 531 tubing, bronze and arc-welded. The front downtube, heavily gusseted, drops from the steering head to the bottom of the engine and then becomes a duplex cradle. At the rear of the engine, the cradle tubes swing upward and forward, and are welded to a short length of large-diameter tubing that is in turn welded to the steering head. There is no central rear-downtube, but the cradle tubes are cross-braced next to the swingarm mounts. The swingarm mounts are welded to the junction of the cradle tubes and the shock-carrier tubes.

The swingarm is massive, well-braced, and rugged looking, but there is no central mounting-bolt. Both sides of the swingarm are mounted separately to their frame lugs. We were curious as to whether the swingarm would flex during our test.

The front forks are Ceriani, built for Greeves; the rear shocks are Girlings. The conical wheelhubs are small in diameter and light in weight. The tires on the test bike are the new Dunlop K-88s: a 3.00 x 21 in front, and a whopping 4.60 x 18 in the rear.

Beneath fiberglass covers are two Fram paper-element filters feeding air into a central chamber. From there, the air goes into a 32mm concentric Amal. The engine castings are ultra-clean. The separate gearbox cases are bolted to the compact engine cases. The strain-relieved aluminum cylinder, with nine huge fins, has an iron liner. The cylinder is mounted to the cases with eight studs and the cylinder head is mounted separately to the cylinder with six studs Greeves doesn't want to worry about seizures.

Twin exhaust pipes curve overhead (yes, it's a single with twin exhaust ports) and are siamesed into a small expansion chamber with a large-diameter stinger. The Griffon engine—like its immediate predecessors—is fitted with the superb Stefa energy-transfer magneto, an item of which Swedish industry may be proud.

The Griffon was a good-looking bike, but would it do the job on a motocross course? For that matter, what should a motocross bike offer its rider?

World champion-class works riders who can practice every day have their own kick going and need bikes tailored especially for them. Most other motocross riders want a machine with soft, long-travel suspension that will keep both wheels on the ground. The front end should be light enough so that the rider can lift it over obstacles, but it should be stable and predictable in its steering; the steering should be just fast enough to get the rider around obstacles, but not fast enough to be too sudden. The bike should have a wide powerband—as opposed to being "pipey"—for two reasons. If the power comes on suddenly and uncontrollably when the bike is all out of shape, the rider will go on his head. In addition, there needs to be enough midrange power so that it won't bog down in mud or sand. But, the engine needs to deliver enough top-end so as to be competitive on the short stretches of fast ground too. Finally, the bike should be laid out so that the rider can fit himself to it and climb all around on it during an event, without hindrance. How does the Greeves measure up?

The first hurdle, in testing something with a 380cc racing engine, comes in lighting its fire. We tried it. The engine started on the second kick. It continued to do so all day long; it was easier to start than many street bikes.

We rode the bike and then handed it to Charlie Vincent. Charlie improvised a motocross course and sailed down dirt roads, flew through washboard, jumped hills, crossed ruts, went over logs, plowed through mud, and tore through sand with Randy Wilson's new bike while Randy stood around and looked unconcerned.

On the way home that night we compared notes with Charlie and found that we were in agreement about the bike. Said Charlie: "The seating position is really good. That's the first scrambler I ever saw come out of the crate with a saddle that was long enough. You can slide right on back there in sand or mud. The seat is also narrow, and so is the gas tank. You can stand on the pegs and move all around without having the bike



Price, suggested retail	Coast, POE \$250
Tire, front	3.00 in. x 21 in.
rear	4.60 in. x 18 in.
Engine type	Piston-port two-stroke single
Bore and stroke	3.23 in. x 2.83 in., 82mm x 72mm
Piston displacement	14.97 cu. in., 380cc
Compression ratio	10.7:1
Carburetion	(1) 32 mm, Amal Concentric
Air filtration	(2) Paper element
Ignition	Energy transfer
Bhp @ rpm	39 @ 7000 rpm
Mph/1000rpm, top gear	8.89 8.89
Fuel capacity	1.8 gal.
Gear ratios, overall	(1) 17.7 (2) 13.6 (3) 10.6 (4) 9.0
Wheelbase	55 in.
Seat height	32 in.
Ground clearance	10 in.
Curb weight	238 lb.
Test weight	403 lb.
Instruments	None

◀ "The brakes work well.

"The exhaust pipe is okay; it never did burn me.

"The bike is not hurting for suspension at all. The oil in the forks was too light, and I bottomed them a few times, but heavier oil would solve that. The shocks are okay like they are, but if the bike were mine, I'd take off the springs and put on progressive-wound springs. Wonder why Greeves didn't do that? Anyhow, the suspension just like it is comes out better than on most motocross bikes.

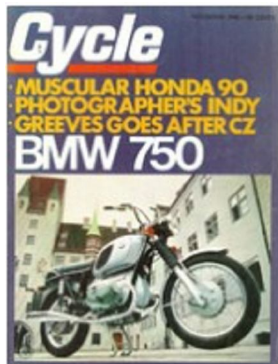


Will it really be

"The steering is just right—not too fast and not too slow. The swingarm

get in your way. And the gas tank is low enough so that it doesn't try to maim you when you put on the brakes, either.

"The layout of the controls is good, but I don't like the handlebars. They don't have enough rise to suit me. The clutch lever is too stiff, but then I never bothered to use it. I don't like the shift lever; it's too short. The gearbox is funny. You can't feel it shift, but I never missed a shift with it all day long. ▶



competitive? You bet. Says Charlie Vincent: "I'd never be afraid to take it out on a Sunday."



doesn't flex at all. The balance is good, too. If you want the front end to come up, it will, but otherwise it stays down. I could make it go as high as I wanted. Usually it takes me a while to figure out how to do wheelies on a strange bike, but this one didn't

give me any trouble at all.

"Those new Dunlop K-88s really help. That 4.60 rear is just what this bike needs. It's not a 250; you're getting another 10 horses with this bike, and you need something wider to get a bite." Charlie grinned, thinking about the afternoon's ride. "That dirt was flying."

"Power? It's got enough power. Most enduro bikes don't have as wide a range of power as this bike. I could grab a handful at just about any speed, and it would come on strong, but s-m-o-o-t-h. I lugged it way down in some mud and then turned it on to see what would happen. It got going. And it's got plenty of top-end, too."

We asked Charlie if he thought the 380cc Griffon would be a competitive bike. He thought for a moment, and then said, "I'd never be afraid to take it out on a Sunday." If we translate that correctly, it means that the Bultacos and CZs will have some fast company on their way to next year's motocross victories. ■

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