

YAMAHA SENEGAL



Geoff Carless travels 3000 miles to sample the two new Yamahas — the XS1100 and the SR500, on the roads of Senegal, West Africa.

Aspectacular display of music, dancing and general gaiety greeted our arrival at the Club Mediterranee in Dakar. I was one of some sixty journalists from all over Europe who had the pleasure of being Yamaha's guests for the week. It was to be five days of sun, sea, sand and bikes. The music lasted until we reached the swimming pool where we were to have our first glimpse of the two new machines. An impressive display of bikes picked out of the darkness by powerful spotlights. My first foreign assignment for *Motorcycling Monthly* was to be one I shall remember for a very long time.

DAKAR

Monday January 23

With the party of journalists split

into six groups, I was pleased to find we had Monday morning to get our bearings, before setting out on the XS1100 after a magnificent lunch.

The prospect of losing a few riders in not so Darkest Africa must have been in the minds of the Yamaha staff who organised the trip. We had a Police escort (he was riding a BMW) all the way round the prescribed route. After posing for a few photos we were escorted out of the hotel grounds, through Dakar, and out on to the open roads. An experience in itself.

So what of the Yamaha XS1100? I have to go on record as saying that it the best multi-cylinder motorcycle I have ever ridden. Powerful, comfortable and easy to handle. What more could you ask?

The XS1100 looks massive until you are actually sitting on it, and then it doesn't feel much bigger than the average 750. The steering seems heavy at first but this becomes unnoticeable after a few miles, and I soon settled down to my normal riding pattern.

The bumpy African tarmac would have you closing the throttle on many a machine, but not on the 1100. It was possible to ride at high speeds with the suspension soaking up almost all of the bumps and potholes. Only the biggest of bumps (on a road that would put Blackpool's big dipper to shame) had my backside actually separated from the seat. I now know what it is like to ride a street bike across a frozen ploughed field!

The 1100 stayed perfectly on line. Bumpy bends could be taken at over 100mph in complete safety, and there were no signs of weaving or any other handling faults. Tyres, suspension and frame were all beautifully

matched for perfect roadholding and excellent handling. Mind you, these comments only apply when the bike was ridden properly around the bends. Keep the power on and all was fine: shut off half-way round and things got a little unnerving, although never out of hand. This was the only way I could cause the big Yamaha to weave.

The riding position was very comfortable, all the controls being well placed in relation to the rider. I was sorry that our journey was only 220km (137 miles). I would have liked about 500km, but then the time available was limited.

How about the power, you must all be asking? Well, 95bhp has got to be exciting by anyone's standards. On a fairly flat, smooth road (the only one I found) it was easy to cruise at 200kph (125mph), and at one point I found the speedo showing 220kph (137mph), with the rev. counter only just into the red band. It was not practical to make any speedo corrections, especially at high speeds, but the bike did seem to be travelling very fast indeed. Yamaha personnel estimate that its top speed is about 140mph, and I am inclined to agree with them.

Acceleration has you hanging on to the 'bars as the back wheel stops spinning and bites hard to propel the bike forward. Change gear at 7000rpm and watch the world flash past. Overtaking is so easy, even at speed, making this a very safe bike in the right hands. When we eventually take one of these 1101cc giants to MIRA I would expect to see a standing start quarter mile time of about 11.8secs, with a terminal speed of over 110mph.

Following the lines of their successful XS750, Yamaha have installed an updated shaft drive on their 1100. My only criticism, if it is one, is that it makes the gearbox a little slow and clunky (like all shaft driven bikes), but it's something you soon learn to live with on the road.

The square headlight of the Yamaha XS1100 will soon be a very familiar sight on our roads as for £10 under £2000 it is a front line contender for maximum sales when you consider the alternatives.

Tuesday January 24

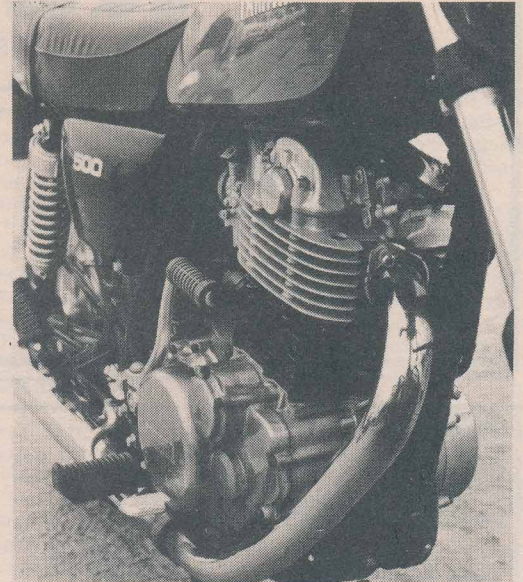
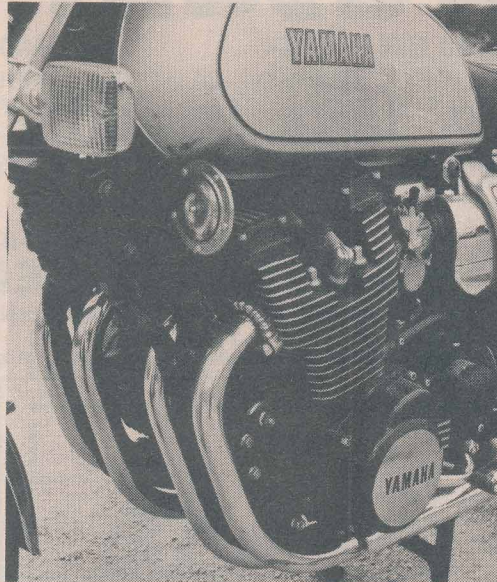
No riding today, so we were all reluctantly forced to sunbathe by the pool, and walk around the local street markets looking for souvenirs and 'bargains'. Ain't life 'ard...?

Wednesday January 25

Up early and out on the SR500s was the order of the day. We were to travel almost the same route as on Monday, but with the addition of a section of dirt roads.

Left: the XS1100 power plant which develops a claimed 95bhp at 8000rpm. The standing-start quarter mile is expected to be under the 12 second barrier. Watch for our Road and Track Test results

Right: Yamaha's answer to the big British single - the SR500. A dual purpose machine at home on tarmac or dirt track



Starting the big singles was not an easy task. The recommended method is to turn the engine over using the valve lifter until an indicator in the sight glass at the end of the camshaft was showing. A hefty kick, and bingo — nothing. I found it much easier to feel the engine over compression and then give it the iron wellie. First time, every time. Choke was nearly always needed for a cold engine, even in Senegal, and when the engine is hot you are advised to use a small button on the carburettor to set the correct throttle opening. Again I found it better to feel the right amount of throttle. I wasn't at all happy with these 'gimmicks'.

With my right leg aching I set off

leaving some of my boot leather on the road surface.

Power thumps in when required, and was enough to keep the bike moving at an indicated 150kph (93.75mph) for most of my journey. At one point the speedo was indicating 160kph (100mph), but I must emphasise that these were not corrected speeds.

After refuelling at Thies we were directed on to a dirt road, and I was delighted to find the machine more than capable of coping with the rough stuff. It makes a change to find a street bike that can be used off the road, rather than a trail bike that can just about be used on tarmac.

Anyway, five or six inches of soft sand constituted the road surface, and there's only one way to cope with that — by keeping the bike under power in a responsive gear. I did, and really enjoyed myself. At times I found myself travelling at over 70mph, pulling the occasional wheelie, and taking bends speedway style. I was more than sorry when the dirt road ended and I was back on to tarmac.

The SR500 is a mild, well-mannered machine that must be destined to be a best seller in this country due to its dual purpose ability.

Braking on both machines is very good, and adequate for the power and weight to be controlled. It was a comforting fact to know that the bikes would stop if a camel or goat decided to wander across the road at just the wrong moment.

Both the XS1100 and the SR500 are fitted with anti-theft alarms as standard. With the alarm switched on a loud buzzer sounds if the bike is moved in any way. It can only be switched off by the ignition key, and is almost tamper proof — the wiring being very well routed, and inaccessible.

Yamaha will be offering a

sports-touring fairing as an optional extra for the XS1100. Designed by John Mockett it is said to reduce drag, over the unfaired machine, by 15%, and reduce front wheel lift by 32%. In practice it worked well up to 110mph, but became a little unsteady above this speed. No price has yet been fixed for the fairing, but I would expect anything up to £200.

Thursday January 26

Our day for photographs, so it was out into the wilds with bikes and cameras. Not an easy task in a country that doesn't often see much out of the ordinary. Every time a spot was chosen we were crowded out by hundreds of little Sengalese kids. Even in places that seemed miles from anywhere it only took them a few minutes to find out about us and pass the word around. They seemed to appear from nowhere!

With the photo' session over, yes, you guessed it, back to the

sunbathing by the pool, or a no rules game of water polo.

Friday January 27

Once again we were reluctantly forced into lounging around the swimming pool, plastering our bodies with suntan lotion, and drinking champagne. It really is a hard life being a motorcycle journalist!

We left that night to the sound of the same band that greeted us a week before. Home to the ice and snow we had all forgotten.

All in all Yamaha are to be congratulated on the launch of their two new bikes. They are very different machines, aimed at different sections of the market, but both will be leaders in their classes when they are released here shortly.

So now it's back to the old routine, wondering how long my suntan will last. Great Yarmouth will never seem the same again.

Geoff Carless

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Send your ads to: Shop Window, Motorcycling Monthly, Westover House, West Quay Road, Poole, Dorset BH15 1JG.

on my second ride of the trip. The SR500 felt no bigger than the average 250, and proved as agile as one as well. The wide bars and flat seat gave it the feel of a long tracker, and I made use of every opportunity to use its handling to the full. Even when taking left and righthand turns in the towns I was

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