

MOTORCYCLE SPORT

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Law Breakers

MOPEDS and under-50 cc motorcycles ridden on the road by 16-year-old provisional licence holders are restricted by law to 30 mph maximum speed but are being ridden at speeds of up to 60 mph after being fitted with tuning kits brought in from Italy.

The easy-to-bolt-on kits consist of a cylinder barrel, a big-bore carburettor and a high compression head and sell for £80. It is a quirk of law but they are legal both to sell and to fit to machines but it is when the user, usually an inexperienced and untrained rider of 16-17 years, the age group highest in road accidents, takes a machine fitted with "hot" parts on the road that he could run foul of the law for exceeding speed restrictions, having no insurance (as no company issues cover for the tuned tinies), creating noise offence and risking disqualification for up to 12 months for a black stamp conviction on all three offences.

The man importing and selling the kits is Bernie Adey, from his business at Watford, who showed the tuning parts at his shop and at the Earls Court motorcycle show.

Police who have worked hard to improve road safety of motorcyclists are angry that the high-speed components are being sold at all. A spokesman said, "It is totally irresponsible to pretend to sell these tuning parts only to boys who say they will use their machines only in off-road events organised by clubs. Some undoubtedly will, but there are ready made and tuned specialist off-road bikes available and these could not be beaten in a scramble by souping up an ordinary 50 cc road bike or moped, which is what the imported parts are made for".

The police warn that riders using tuning kits render themselves liable for prosecution when caught on the road. Bob Ainsworth, head of Devitt (DA Insurance) Ltd, Britain's leading motorcycle insurance company, has said, "A policy issued for a moped or mini bike is null and void if the machine is made illegal by the fitting of a tuning kit. We could only insure such a bike if it was ridden by the holder of a full motorcycle licence and the bike's technical changes had been declared to us". Devitts have withdrawn their agency from Mr. Adey's motorcycle shop in consequence of his sales of tuning kits.

Manufacturers' guarantees are invalidated if tuning kits are fitted during the guarantee period.

Mr. Adey is unrepentant, however, and says, "We have no control over what buyers do with the kits but I try to warn all boys not to use them on the road". He expects to sell about 100 kits this year. We hope he will be proved wrong.

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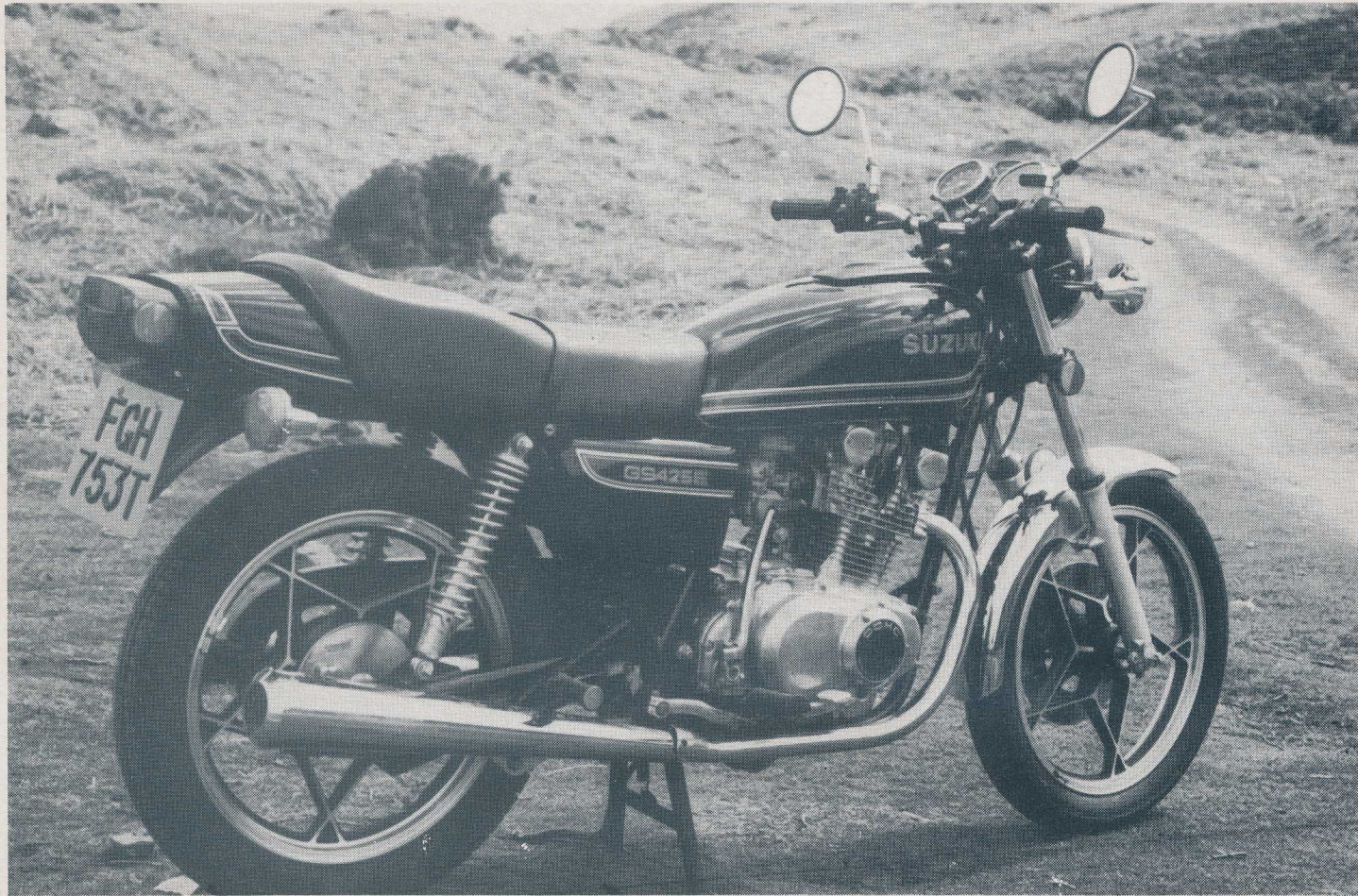


Mike Hailwood, who seemed to be a special guest on almost every stand during the opening day of the Earls Court Show, poses with Scott on the VMCC display

Front Cover Picture

All-rounder Phil Read moto-crossing in a Super Six competition at Donington. The one-time road-race champion talks about his liking for the "music" of a four-stroke — preferably MV Agusta — in "Some People" in this issue

SUZUKI GS 425 EN



The Japanese are aiming at total all-round competence, and in this respect the Suzuki succeeds as well as any — but, inevitably, a by-product is in-built “blandness”

WITH THE £1.20 gallon, extra attention is certain to focus on the 400 cc light middleweight motorcycle. In practice, as we have said before, a good four-hundred can do a lot that a 750 can do, and for less outlay and running costs. We cannot see the fuel “crisis” knocking out the big bikes, whose riders are still saving more than their share of the “national 5 per cent” compared with most car drivers, but there is a law of diminishing returns and it operates most steeply up to 500 cc; above this, fuel consumption deteriorates less as capacity increases, sometimes scarcely at all.

Manufacturers take the 400 cc class seriously enough for Honda, Yamaha, Suzuki and Kawasaki all to compete in it, and except from Honda one can still buy a two-stroke as well as the modern four-strokes. Of the latter, the Kawasaki Z400 is the oldest, the Honda Super Dream the newest and arguably the most advanced in specification. (Our apologies for references in a previous article to an eight-valve and even a five-valve head. The *MCS* Errors Editor must have thought a three-valve head sounded too ridiculous.)

Interest in the original GS 400 came chiefly

because it was only the second-ever four-stroke from Suzuki. It was a refined little machine, but technically it was neither adventurous nor modern save for the automatic cam chain tensioner and the balance shaft. We are still not fully convinced about twin-overhead cams in “cooking” road bikes, when Honda have proved their sohc layout at higher revs than this Suzuki is allowed and can improve breathing with a third valve as well. Whatever they say, shim clearances don't always stay the same over high mileages and are less easy for the owner to adjust.

The GS range has acquitted itself well on reliability in its first three years, but overall the seven-fifty and thousand have made the biggest impact. The first GS 400 had inadequate torque — a bit of a “gutless wonder” unless revved as hard as the two-strokes it was meant to better. The GS 425 EN is not a direct enlargement of the initial model; there was an intermediate GS 400 C with alterations to valve timing (less overlap to improve low- and mid-range torque and higher lift to preserve peak performance), different carb settings and a modified exhaust system but retaining twin contact-breakers. All

these changes are preserved in the enlarged motor. There are a number of other little updating changes throughout the motorcycle, but the two most obvious are the alloy wheels and a thick layer of striping (a little overdone) making amends for plain looks. The test bike, finished in black with red and gold lines, was smart but the GS 425 fails to stand out convincingly from the rest of the middleweight pack. This remark summarizes the Suzuki's problem generally; it is an efficient and highly practical machine, but still seeks the distinction it needs to excel in a hotly competitive class.

Physically, the GS 425 is small with a low seat height on which a rider just out of L-plates will be quickly at home. The weight, dry, is 375 lb — almost identical to the GT 380 that it is intended to replace. Although the Honda Dream feels taller and heavier, the weight difference is a mere 2 lb.

The riding position is a Japanese compromise (what about a Euroversion?) and there is a generous-size dual-seat. Instruments are “glow pink”, smaller than on the other GS machines, and the headlight is yesterday's with a 35/35 watt unit. The digital readout for gear position has

changed from the LED type to a more conventional display of figures which are easier to read in bright conditions and useful to a newcomer. Even after several hundred miles we still found ourselves referring to it, particularly between fifth and sixth gears.

The motor fires quickly on full choke, but has no fast idle and any attempt to rev it for the first few seconds kills it off. Once the engine is warm the tickover might appeal to big single enthusiasts — a reliable 500 rpm tick-tock. The extra power of the engine is more than a mere 25 cc increase suggests. It also sounds better silenced, with less sharp beats than the original GS 400, due to a balance pipe between the exhausts. This masks what has become stout low-speed pulling, even in sixth gear. Mid-range torque is improved too, and while there remains an upward kick at around 6,000 rpm it is less obvious than before.

Although a four-twenty-five, the bike has not escaped from the 400 class. We would assess its performance as well up with its rivals, faster than the Kawasaki Z400, maybe a shade faster than the Yamaha XS400, although it would take a stopwatch to prove it. The Suzuki feels stronger than the Honda Dream at low and mid-rpm, but once the Honda turns the heat on we would think it still heads the group, although these impressions are subjective. Maximum speed is just topsides of 100 mph and only in this respect is the GS 425 scarcely quicker than its predecessors, despite a claimed 40 bhp.

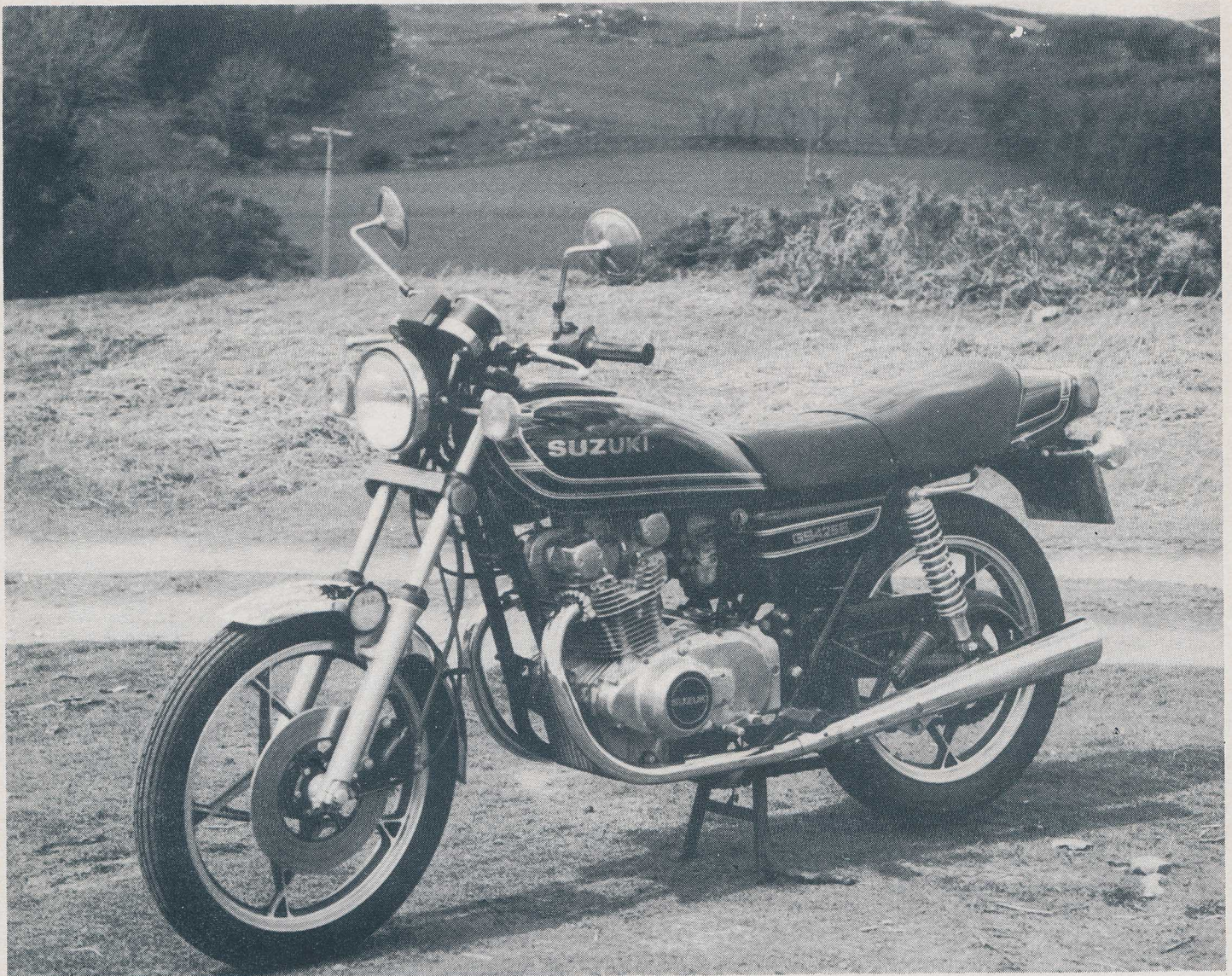
Looking down from the class higher, though, there is more than 75 cc worth of difference between this one and the Honda CX500. The mid-range performance of the vee-twin is notably stronger, and physically the Suzuki feels only around two-thirds the size. This has its advantages. We are not trying to belittle the Suzuki twin when we say that a novice lady rider found it easier to manage than her own trailbike.

One area where the GS 425 EN convincingly leads its group is in smoothness, and its effortless willingness to sustain high revs. Cruising speeds indicating 90 mph are quite natural to the engine (the speedometer was hopeful, however) when with wind roar obliterating the engine note and no vibrations to speak of the rider would be pressed to distinguish this from a four-cylinder machine. Another excellent feature was the fuel consumption. Close to 60 mpg at a constant 70 mph and an overall 65 mpg during a working week ridden without much mercy.

Collecting the bike from Chobham, still with the perspiration of the track test day upon it, the drive chain (not of the sealed grease type) needed 13 flats of adjustment to bring it back into business. Its subsequent stretch rate was no higher than average, although more regular small adjustments than usual are necessary to keep the transmission from becoming sloppy. There is some play in the primary gears and any extra slack from the drive chain makes progress jerky. There is no backlash reaction (a weakness in some Yamaha XS 400s) and, unusually for a 180° crankshaft twin, the bike will pull from as low as 1,500 rpm without snatching. The clutch and gearbox are to Suzuki's usual high standard.

Few owners will find difficulty with the handling. It is easy and effective, steers accurately and is well able to hold its own with its rivals in a competitive scrap. A single front disc is enough for solo work. Only the Honda Dream uses twin front discs at the moment, and *Novice lady rider found the Suzuki easier to manage than her own trail bike; top — useful cubbyhole*





Double-overhead-camshaft valve operation enhances a notably smooth engine with a liking for high rpm

they require careful handling, but with a pillion aboard more braking at the front would be welcome on the Suzuki. As with most 400s, a pillion passenger subdues the performance considerably as well as sitting heavily on the suspension.

Dare we say it . . . but the brakes appear to lose nothing in severe wet. More than a pint of oil was required to show a level in the sight glass after Chobham, but thereafter the consumption was less than 1,000 miles per pint.

The Suzuki 425 is not an easy motorcycle to criticize. It is easier to commend than to rave about. A criticism of the class rather than the individual? Not so. We think Moto Morini owners rise to greater heights (and maybe sink to greater depths too). The Japanese are aiming at total all-round competence, and in this the Suzuki GS 425 EN succeeds as well as any, and is in some respects the most likeable of its compatriots with an impressively smooth engine. Nevertheless as the side-by-side twin creeps closer to perfection, it is inevitably becoming more a piece of efficient machinery, less of a motorcycle.

Bring back the vibrations? We think not; but how do you engineer character? R.P.

