

# MOTOR CYCLING

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50p

## Road Tests

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# DIRTY Weekend

Five guys and one girl rough it on  
Salisbury Plain to test  
six off-road runners . . .

## Riding those green roads...

DID you know that there are 208,453 miles of motorways, principal routes and other roads in the UK complete with tarmac, traffic lights and millions of other motorists?

But, did you also know that there are another 3,000 miles of comparatively untouched Roman roads and ancient highways which form intricate networks throughout the countryside just waiting to be ridden on and explored?

These aged trails are part of our natural heritage and feature some of the most scenic routes in the British Isles.

Trails, or Green Roads as they are known in this country, are officially Unclassified County Roads, or Roads Used as Public Paths (RUPPs) or Byways, and are only accessible to walkers, horse riders and motorcyclists.

Trail riding is an expanding pastime which gives a rider the chance to make the most of his trail machine in an atmosphere of fun, excitement and adventure, without the unpleasant tensions of hard and smelly urban traffic.

Riders can feel a real sense of freedom, riding through the mud and bracken, attempting new skills and maybe falling off occasionally, meandering their way through the countryside without getting in anyone's way.

Deciphering the old routes through the undergrowth can sometimes cause problems, particularly when faced with unmapped obstructions such as barbed wire, prickly hedgerows or even worse, an irate farmer. In these situations, a rider could find himself in trouble for causing a nuisance, but quite often, it is the obstruction itself that is in the wrong. And this is where the TRF comes in.

### Trail Riders' Fellowship

For anyone who is a keen trail riding enthusiast, membership of the Trail Riders Fellowship is a must.

The TRF is a national club for green road motorcyclists, run by a democratically elected executive committee. It was formed in 1970 by a group of enthusiasts and its aim is to preserve the vehicular status of green roads and retain the right to ride them. It is a non-competitive club, which means riding is strictly for pleasure and members receive a free bulletin every six weeks, which provides a means of keeping in contact with other trail riders from all over the country. It also gives details of other group activities as well as Rights of Way News.

The TRF has a Rights of Way Fighting Fund which relies on subs and donations and is used for research and legal expenses in defending the threatened loss of old roads to vehicular usage. Their main opposition are organisations such as the Ramblers Association and, of course, local councillors' unfortunately powerful elbows. But to their credit, they have fought and won numerous court battles to keep tracks open and their experts will fight on behalf of any TRF members.

### Code of Conduct

One thing the TRF stresses is the importance for people taking to the trail of abiding by a simple code of conduct.

They advise riders to stop and switch off engines for horses (equestrians are pretty much on our side anyway apparently, so it pays to be considerate), slow down and give good clearance to walkers or cyclists. Say hello or smile and wave at them, so that they know we're human beings appreciating the countryside as much as they do. Try not to make more noise than is necessary and above all, follow the Country Code, which means closing field gates and so on and be as diplomatic as possible in the face of complaint.

It may sound petty, but a little bit of effort like this goes a

## Honda XLS 185 Four-stroking on the Trail...

**THERE'S** no mistaking the distinctive styling of the well-established XL range with its long travel front forks, XL down rear suspension and small bulbous tank with the triple stripe design.

The Honda XL185S was the only four-stroke among all the buzzing two-strokes we took on our week-end jaunt across the Wiltshire countryside.

The 185 engine is the small bore version of the XL250S at 63mm compared to 74mm, but the stroke is the same at 57.8mm with a maximum power output of 16bhp at 8,000rpm.

The joy of riding this four-stroke compared to the two-strokes was making use of the gentle flexibility of the motor which starts at tickover and continues steadily to the red line at 5,500rpm. At first, the motor felt rather flat and sluggish with its dull thumping exhaust note and it needed to be wound up in each gear to maintain a good pace over the fast, bumpy sections, where it appeared to struggle compared with its frivolous buzzing companions.

But on the slow sections, which included ploughed tracks and the occasional boggy mire, it was by far the most obliging, digging out lessons in slow speed control to the wheel-spinning two-strokes.

The facility of engine braking was also a pleasant relief on tricky downhill jaunts, where misuse of the brakes — or simply touching them at all — could spell trouble. The amount of control felt by the rider encouraged all sorts of antics over logs and grassy mounds, with wheelies being popped from 2,000rpm. The XL185S engine characteristics made it a more suitable mount for trials type going than the peaky lightweight two-strokes.

Another advantage with the four-stroke for trail riding is, of course, the exhaust noise, which is much quieter and potentially less nauseating to other country goers than the

high-revving two-strokes.

For anyone wary of kicking over four-stroke singles, the new XLS mode is a doddle compared to previous XL's. Similar to the 250, the 185 is blessed with a cable that runs from the exhaust tappet cover to the kickstart crank. As the engine is kicked over and reaches maximum compression, the cable mechanism opens the exhaust valve slightly so that the engine eases into its compression stroke. Consequently, the process takes comparatively little effort on the kickstart.

The frame is diamond-type to reduce weight and incorporates the engine as part of the frame member. Ground clearance is similar to the XL250S at over 10in. with a very solid bash plate to protect the crankcases when even 10in. isn't enough. The leading axle front forks have very long travel and are well-damped. This gave excellent control over rough terrain, where the front units would absorb the shocks without reaching the end of their travel and without throwing the steering out.

The inverted moto-cross style shock absorbers also made an easy going ride and it was possible to actually sit down when leg muscles couldn't keep pace over some incredibly pot-holed tracks without feeling pumelled from beneath.

Travelling at a fast pace on a bumpy terrain, where the only way to survive was to stand up and clench the tank with your knees, the rear end jumped about a lot, but this didn't affect overall control. As long as the front wheel was pointing in the right direction, everything else had to follow, though not necessarily using the same route.

The five-speed gearbox was not the bike's best point. As far as gearchanging was concerned, clutchless changes were dubious with the occasional false neutral, but using the clutch, the gear lever had the same stiffness and the chain lost tension quickly. The clutch needed two minor adjustments in

35 miles of hard use.

The wheels are shod with Honda's special dual-design tyre, which are much more suited to the tarmac than off-road but nevertheless provided reasonable grip most of the time.

The Honda was dropped five times in 100 yards of mud and the fact that at 240lbs it is only 6.5lbs heavier than the XL125S was kindly appreciated — though after the fifth time, it seemed to weigh a ton.

The XL185S is equipped with full instrumentation and lighting and makes a pleasant ride on or off the road. Fuel consumption over the two day run averaged out at 56mpg — a middle of the road machine for the middle of any road.



# 8 Page Trail Bike Special

long way to creating a good relationship with other country users. It doesn't take much to cause aggravation and lose any kind of country privileges we have.

The TRF has numerous Area Group Reps dotted around the country who are available to their members with information and advice on local routes, so that riders know when they're in the right or wrong.

Preparing a machine for the trail is not an arduous task just as long as it's in good running order. It's wise to remove flimsy protrusions such as wipers and mirrors, and be sure to check chain tension and oil levels.

Make sure the petrol tank is topped up and carry a small can with some spare fuel if possible. Other necessities are Finilec and chain lube.

As far as riding gear is concerned, again there should be no great expense. All that's needed is a pair of stout boots, such as ordinary bike boots or trials wellies; a good jacket, gloves, an open face helmet and goggles. This may sound rather overdone, but once you've been hit by a bramble at 30mph a couple of times and fished out a few insects from your eyes, you'll be glad of the protection.

Beware of taking any valuables that may easily fall off — as one of our staff learned the hard way, when he lost his watch. A compass makes a good companion for those whose map

reading is not up to scratch and, of course, don't forget the map. An Ordnance Survey map of 1:50,000 scale is the norm which has the RUPP's clearly marked in red.

It is not advisable to go trail riding alone for any mishaps that may occur, such as running out of petrol, breaking down or falling off and suffering a minor injury, could become hazardous out in the wilds in cold weather where the long lost trails are not frequented.

Six is probably the ideal number of riders — enough to have fun and not too many to cause frustrations.

So, tempted by the sun and countryside and too much work in the office, we set off to the Salisbury Plain armed with six trail bikes and a map. We spent two days following the red dotted lines (which represent roads used as public roads) and, under the boisterous leadership of Bob Goddard, we went where we might not otherwise have gone.

Up to our ears in stinging nettles and down to our knees in brambles, we covered over one hundred miles of green lanes and learned to keep our mouths shut (or spit the flies out) and also how to communicate with cows (all words begin with m and end with oo).

We suffered a broken chain, one puncture, a few bent bits, several bruises and we didn't look too clean afterwards, either. Ah well, that's the price of a dirty weekend in the wilds — at least everyone went home with a smile on their face...

## USEFUL ADDRESSES

**Trail Riders Fellowship,**  
Bruce Roberts, 36 Rosemary Drive, Bromham, Beds.

**The National Trail Riding School,**  
22 Meadow Close, Kettering, Northants.

**The Welsh Trail Riders Association,**  
Chris Friis, 29 Caenewydd Close, Culverhouse Cross, Cardiff CF5 4TS.

**The Mid Wales Trail and Green Lane Association,**  
Vic Madaley, Greenfields, Kerry, Newtown, Powys.

**Ordnance Survey 'Flat-Folded' Maps,**  
Rally Navigation Services, 12 Tintern Road, Devizes, Wiltshire.

**Route Use Preservation Society,**  
J. Bevan Hogg — President, Tel: Bradford 61709.



## Yamaha DT 175MX The trail bike's trail bike...

FOR years the Yamaha DT175 had been, arguably, the best trail bike in its class. Last year, it was reformed to give increased suspension travel at both ends and include monoshock rear suspension. The engine was also given greater mid-range and top-end power, and its hold on the market moved towards strangulation point.

Although the rear suspension is the bike's most radical feature, it was the behaviour of the front end which impressed us most about the off-road handling. This bike steers beautifully. Large boulders and other objects, which on most bikes would take the front wheel where you don't want to go, are no problem.

### 'Accidental' welcome

Probably the most demanding sections of our two-day ride were the green lanes that had been freshly ploughed as a sort of 'accidental' welcome by the local farmers. Most of us ended up legging it for hundreds of yards, pausing frequently to haul the front end around because the bike was no longer pointing in the right direction. The lucky person who was riding the Yamaha when we came to these sections still had a lot of tiring arm work ahead — but at least it was possible to do the whole stretch standing up, with only an occasional one-legged prod and on a line

chosen by the rider rather than the whims of the clods of earth.

All it took was a rearward shift of weight to let the front end cope with really severe stuff. The forks topped out rather a lot, but this wasn't a problem.

### Silent praise

The rear suspension drew very few comments. Since everybody had something complimentary to say about the rear ends of some of the other bikes, this was silent praise for the Yamaha. Bumps came and went without drama. The single De Carbon-type unit seemed able to keep working under the most severe conditions, giving maximum traction. Although we don't feel any need to play with them, there are seven spring preload settings. Access is poor.

There was no shortage of comments about the engine. It was tractable enough to pull from as low as 1,500rpm up a steep hill — in third gear. In any gear it was pulling usefully from 2,000rpm and power was flowing in fast from 4,000. This flexibility, combined with the ability to pick up revs quickly from almost any engine speed, means that the rider is rarely stuck in the wrong gear. Little wheelies became routine for stepping over logs.

The engine wasn't very good for buckling along on a closed throttle — it hiccups and dies if you don't open up or declutch. For this reason, a lower first gear would have been useful in the tricky bits.

The riding position is excellent. The bars are wide enough to give plenty of leverage and low enough to make steering accurate. Standing on the pegs, the front of the deep seat is just right for gripping with your knees and the rest of the bike is tucked out of the way.

Gearchanges were a little stiff, but this could be an asset because it prevents unwanted changes after jumps. The gear lever was nicely placed and clutchless changes were always positive. The clutch was light, but it needed adjusting a couple of times.

### Security bolts

Other than the Kawasaki, the DT175MX was the only bike in our group equipped with security bolts in the rear wheel. At 15psi, the rear tyre found plenty of traction, even in small patches of slushy mud.

We thought the Yamaha was a very nice motorcycle on the road, too. Excellent handling and roadholding, suspension that laughed at tarmac bumps and the very flexible motor made for a relaxing ride. Top speed was about 70mph at the 8,000rpm red line. The switchgear was as good as most small road bikes and the rubber-mounted wipers were very practical.

Fuel consumption for the two dirty days averaged out at 55mpg. This was only seriously beaten by the smaller Suzuki and the four-stroke Honda.

## NVT Rambler How to make a great bike good

IT is hard to see any sense in the NVT Rambler. It uses the Yamaha DT175 engine/gearbox and instruments (even the ignition key is Yamaha) but NVT assemble their own frame, mostly from Italian components. To justify its existence, therefore, its frame has to be an improvement on the one of which Yamaha can be very justly proud.

One of the most obvious changes and one that looks like an improvement, is that the NVT frame's engine cradle is very high slung. But, for some illogical reason known only to themselves, NVT have chosen to route the exhaust pipe underneath the bike. Not only does this throw away all the extra ground clearance, but the exhaust pipe is completely unprotected and consequently, tackling logs is out of the question.

The high-slung frame automatically puts the footrests higher, leaving them clear of the ground when riding in ruts. It also means a knees-up riding position on the road, but only one rider found this uncomfortable. The high pegs mean that your knees are gripping thin air when standing up, so low-speed control suffers a little. Like the Yamaha, the Rambler has a monoshock rear end — but the suspension unit is undersprung and overdamped.

Even on fairly mild terrain, the rear tyre would frequently hit the mudguard and the number plate soon looked like a used sardine can lid. NVT say that they have now





## Gilera 125 GR1 Not even as good as it looks...

GILERA'S entry in the competitive small trail-bike market failed to impress any of us, right from the start. As a road bike it is slow and somewhat crude. There is no ignition key and on a couple of occasions the bike was parked, locked and left with the wipers going. The rest of the switchgear is up to the standard that nobody missed when the British bike industry died and the seat, though basically well-designed, has an uncomfortable strap in exactly the wrong place.

The 53mpg figure obtained overall on road and trail makes it thirsty for a 125 and it had an annoying habit of going on to renege after only 30 to 50 miles. The Gilera was also the only bike on the test which didn't have oil-injection lubrication. But we were assured by the importers, Douglas (Sales and Service) Ltd, that we would love it off the road.

We didn't. The first thing everyone noticed was that the engine is inflexible. It had to be revved high in each gear. Climbing a chalky hill that the other bikes could walk up in 2nd or 3rd, the Gilera had to be red-lined as first — the engine died if second gear was engaged. There wasn't much pull below 4,000rpm, and 5,000rpm were needed to get any bite. When things got to be too much for the engine, it was often necessary to change down two gears!

Gear selection and the clutch were heavy. After a while, the clutch overheated, making

changes difficult. Finding neutral was always a chore. With the inflexible engine, stalling was common. The kickstart engages the secondary side of the transmission, and consequently, neutral had to be struggled for before the bike could be restarted.

While standing on the pegs, your left foot cannot be placed square on its rest because the gear lever is too short and therefore too close to your foot. Accidental selection of neutral was more common than finding it deliberately. The standing-up riding position is made worse by the silencer, which gets in the way of the rider's right leg. This is uncomfortable and hot, and prevents the right knee from gripping the seat.

Like most of the other bikes, the Gilera's forks topped-out constantly, but unlike most of the others, they seemed unable to cope under compression.

The bike's most sophisticated pieces of equipment were the Marzocchi gas shocks at the rear. These bottomed easily at first, but the problem was cured by upping the spring pre-load setting. They then worked well.

Probably the worst item in the Gilera's design is the stand. A centre stand is an unusual piece of equipment on an off-road bike — where do you find a level-enough piece of ground? But the Gilera's stand is most annoying because it uses up valuable ground clearance. When Merril tried to get the GR1 over a log, the stand dug in where the wheel should have ridden over. There is no side stand.

repositioned the number plate to keep it away from the tyre, but not so the mudguard. Despite being far too soft to take big bumps, the monoshock unit was too heavily-damped to react quickly to small irregularities. This gave a harsh ride on the road and led to some pattering off the road. The rear suspension is not adjustable.

### Harder work

The Rambler steered well, but not as well as the Yamaha. There is less straight-line stability and this made for harder work on the ploughed sections. The Marzocchi forks had rather limited travel and seemed bouncy; they would steer off at a tangent after big bumps and jumps. One fork tube was bent after failing to react to a large piece of flint encountered at about 5mph. They constantly topped out, like the Yamaha.

Another inexplicable annoyance at the front end is that, although the bars will turn nearly as far as the tank on lefthand lock, righthand lock is restricted. Presumably, this is to protect the tachometer drive cable, but it is a serious off-road limitation in the low-speed tricky bits.

The front mudguard is too close to its tyre and so gets jammed with mud when the going gets sticky. Stones get trapped, causing some unwanted braking, and tyre damage.

Add a side stand that is so upright as to be nearly useless on rough ground and a rear wheel without security bolts, and NVT's design philosophy becomes even harder to comprehend.

On the plus side, everyone liked the brakes. Even the disc front brake got compliments on the dry test days. NVT now make a drum-braked version, but the disc was powerful and had as much feel as most drums.

The engine, of course, is every bit as good in the Rambler as it is in the Yamaha. Gearing is unaltered and consumption is identical.

The Rambler is a good off-road bike — but the Yamaha is a better one.



## Kawasaki KE 125

## Unpretentious stroker with peaky performance...

The KE125 is in the same class as the Suzuki 125ER, though generally it was the less favoured of the two. It was visually less striking, in the same style as Kawasaki's other trail machines — neat but unpretentious.

Anyone who likes the KE100 (Tested July 79 ish) will favour the virtually identical 125 for apart from the overall length, other increases in dimensions are marginal. For example, overall height is only a 1/2in. taller and ground clearance is a 1/4in. greater.

The seat is very long, slim and uncomfortable to sit on for any great length of time. The tank is also very slim, which meant that when standing on the foot pegs, the rider could grip firmly with his knees and encourage a very secure and manoeuvrable riding position. Somewhere along the line though, the tank has lost out in fuel capacity at 1.4 gals compared to 1.7 gals on the KE100 model.

## Peaky performance

The two-stroke rotary disc valve single cylinder engine offered a very peaky performance with a maximum horsepower of 11.5bhp at 6,000rpm, red lining at 8,000rpm. It had superb acceleration, whizzing over the rough tracks, that is as long as the motor was kept on the ball.

The rider had to make maximum use of the gearbox in order to keep the engine primed to cope with changes in surfaces. For example, from a fast, dry run into a wet, boggy pit,

necessitated notching down through the six-speed box, to maintain power and stop the engine stalling. Keeping revs between 6 to 8,000rpm was where the action was and that's where it stayed most of the time, creating a rather unimpressive overall fuel consumption of 56mpg. The KE125 would cruise comfortably at around 55mph on the road, but was good for 60mph when overtaking.

The Kawasaki was difficult to start from cold, and this was particularly tiresome as the footrest was positioned exactly to hit the shin at the bottom of the kickstart stroke. Once the engine had been started and run there were no problems firing it up again.

A good point about the starter is that it works off the primary drive shaft, so the engine can be started in gear.

Comments about the handling were rather conservative, although the KE stayed with the other bikes and coped with the varying terrains easily enough.

The main problem was the steering, for everybody who rode it commented afterwards that it seemed to have a mind of its own. On hard, grassy lanes, where previous wheel or horse tracks had dried into hard uneven ripples, the KE had trouble maintaining direction. It was easily misdirected into the side verges, more so than the other machines. Riding the bikes one after the other as we did, allowed us to make immediate comparisons so that the firm, positive steering of the Honda 185, accentuated the more sloppy, less positive feel on the KE125. Most of the time the suspension coped well with all the ruts and ditches at speed, but on the odd

occasion, the rear units in spite of their dual-rate springs, managed to bottom with a protesting clunk.

## Extra traction

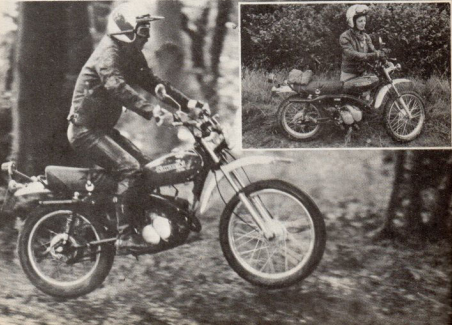
However, the tyres on the KE offered much better grip in the mud than the Honda and even though the 185 had torque on its side in the boggy mud, the KE coped well because of the advantage of extra traction. Also, it had a tyre security bolt in the rear wheel rim, so it was possible to let the tyre pressures down for extra grip in the mud if needed. However, unless you're carrying a pump, it's not such a great idea to ride soft tyres on thearmac stretches in between green lanes!

The short, stubby footrests were rubber-covered, which became very slippery when the going was wet, but in the predominantly dry conditions, nobody commented seriously about a lack of grip for the feet.

The brakes were good, but the rear brake pedal was vulnerable in the event of a fall and was bent beyond use at one point, although it was easily straightened.

At 220lbs, the 125 was no trouble to drag out of the bushes and one very helpful accessory to this end is the grab rail at the rear of the seat.

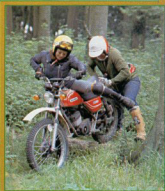
Towards the end of the first day, the Kawasaki suffered a rear tyre puncture courtesy of a large nail, which Finlec failed to cure. The rear wheel was easily removed using the tools in the kit provided, but the rest of the operation was down to a friendly local dealer in Downton.



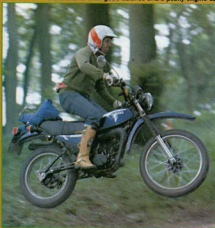
# 8 Page Trail Bike Special



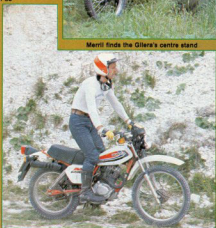
Steve shows what good balance and a peaky engine can do



Merril finds the Gillers's centre stand



Geoff turns trail riding into moto-cross



Neil relaxes on the supersoft Honda XL185S





## Suzuki TS125ER New trailster from Suzy takes off...

**SUZUKI'S** new model trail machines are positive to arouse any sagging interest in green laning. Their new ER range, which includes the 100 and 185 have improved looks and styling, plus features which should make them tough competition in the trail bike market.

### Moto-cross style

The ER machines come very close to moto-cross styling with the short, squat tank, mudguards and side panels echoing the contours of a hairy competition machine.

The TS125ER was one of the great favourites of our escapades around Downton and judging by the undergrowth sprouting from its midst, it appeared to have been enthusiastically ridden.

Apart from the obvious styling changes, there are modifications to the front end in the form of leading axle forks. This means altered steering geometry with a shallower fork rake and increased trail.

The frame has not been altered, but the rear swinging arm is now a stronger box section design.

More grip is provided by a wider section 4.10 x 18 rear tyre; and both front and rear tyres feature a new tread pattern which is the Suzuki equivalent of the Honda road/trail compromise.

Neutral, high beam and indicator warning lights surround the ignition switch/lock positioned just below the new handlebar instrumentation, which includes rectangular-shaped rev counter and speeds with trip meter.

The matt black, two-stroke single-cylinder engine is unaltered in specification, it needed a good kick to start it from cold, but once fired up it was raring to go. It is a very peppy motor red lining at 7,500rpm at an indicated road speed of 65mph. The maximum power band is between 5 and 7,000rpm and if the revs fall below 4,000rpm, the engine will not pick up without changing down through the six-speed gearbox as on the Kawasaki. In fact, engine characteristics were very similar on these two machines, although the Kawasaki seemed slightly more peppy with better acceleration. However, only a set of timing lights could confirm this. Again this type of engine was not so good in deep, slow going, but overall the power is a good compromise.

### Lighter

The Suzuki felt light and manageable to handle and at 207lb is 13lb lighter than the KE125. Ground clearance is less at 9.1in. The front suspension was really excellent, giving very precise steering and, with the very resilient rear shocks, the Suzuki made easy going of the rough tracks.

The riding position was very good. Standing on the serrated metal footrests, meaty knees could be clonched tightly round the tank without scorching jeans on the exhaust pipe. The bars were also at a good height in relation to the standing rider and as you can see from the colour photograph of Bob Goddard, the Suzuki was very conducive to wheelies.

### Chain problems

Unfortunately, it was the Suzuki that caused, us major problems when the chain broke on the first afternoon. It appeared we had been too eager to adjust it when it felt slack. After adjustment there still seemed to be plenty of slack in the chain, but out on the rough it proved obviously too tight to cope with the sudden, complete depression of the rear shocks and it snapped. So beware... adjust the chain with suspension compressed!

The final note of appraisal of the Suzuki 125ER was that it had the best fuel consumption of all the bikes tested — 88mpg after the first day, 87mpg when we finished on the second (we were well into the groove by then) giving an overall average of 78mpg — and as that's on rough going, there's no telling what it might do on gentle daily commuting.

The Suzuki TS125ER offers a big chunk of what's good about trail riding.