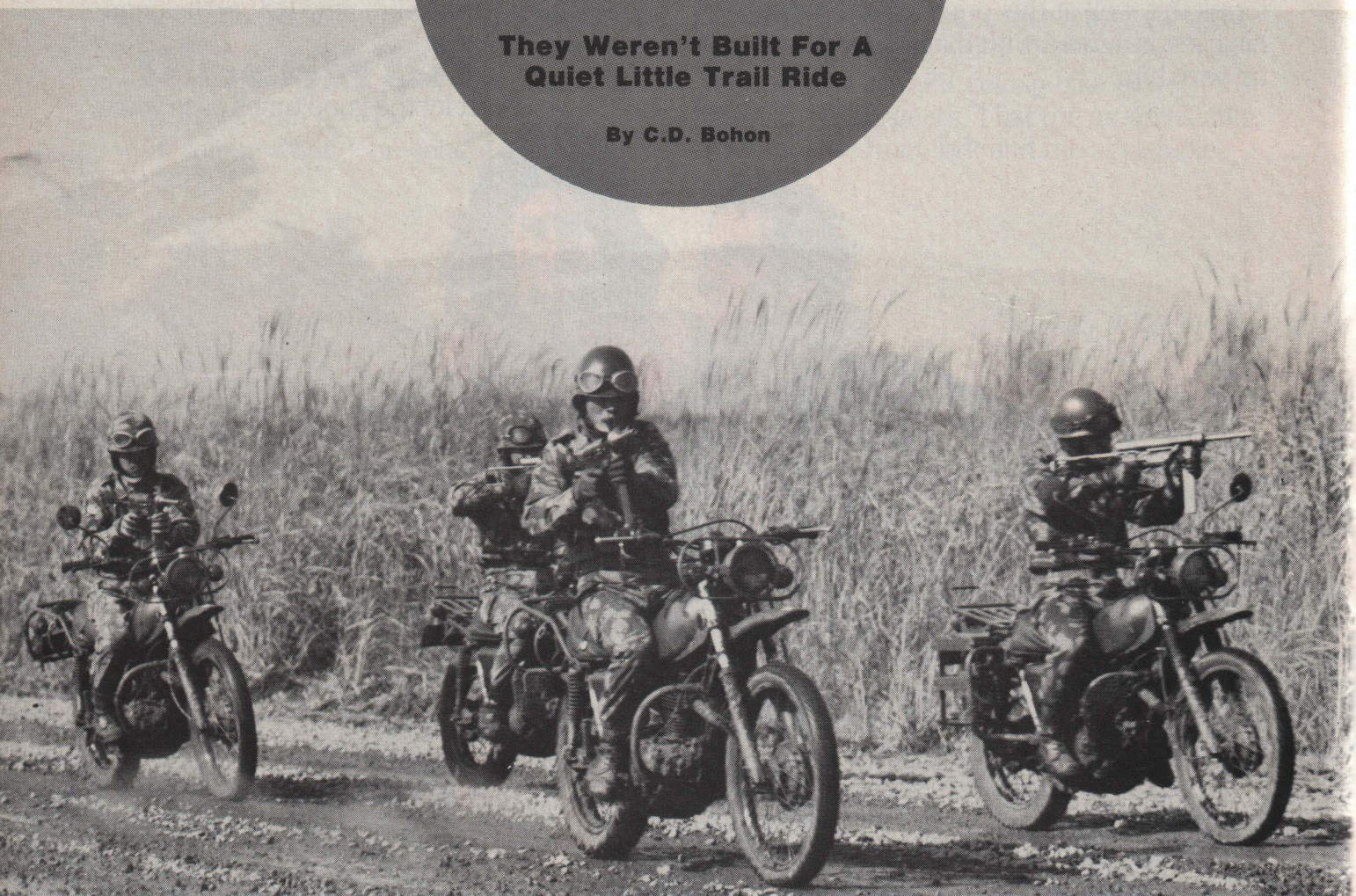


THE WARBIKES

They Weren't Built For A
Quiet Little Trail Ride

By C.D. Bohon



You don't see them at first as you scan the dun hillside, its slope broken by steep-sided ravines and copses of maidenhair trees. Then a flicker of movement catches the corner of your eye and you shift your gaze and raise the binoculars. Yes. There's one. A Honda XL250, olive drab, is picking its way carefully but rapidly down a boulder-strewn gully. There should be another. Where is it? Ah, there. A little higher up the slope. The camouflage fatigues of the riders, the dull paint scheme of the bikes, make them difficult to spot.

At the foot of the ravine a soggy dirt road slogs around the skirt of the hill. Along it toil two 2½-ton trucks

filled with troops and, leading them not quite far enough ahead, a quarter-ton truck mounting a heavy machine gun. The men in the point vehicle are alert, scanning the hillside and ditches beside the road for signs of ambush. But they don't spot the bikes. Nor have the motorcycle riders caught sight of the patrol.

The bikes break from the ravine just as the quarter-tonner rounds the elbow of a turn. Surprise is mutual but the bikers react the swifter, just as they've been trained to. The lead rider lays his Honda down in a quick spray of mud, the tires toward the truck, unslinging the automatic rifle from his back as he does so. The following rider rears his bike up on

the rear wheel and quickly scans the patrol, noting precious details. As he spins around and full throttles back up the ravine, bounding up the slope like a gazelle, the first rider is already down on one knee behind his bike stitching brief bursts of well-aimed steel-jacketed 7.62mm slugs into the lead truck. From your position you clearly hear the sharp rapping bark of the Howa automatic rifle and the faint snarl of the wide-open Honda already well up the slope and out of danger. You know rider No. 2 has already raised an artillery battery with his helmet mike and within minutes the self-propelled 155s dug in a few miles away in the mountains will make the road a hell of exploding



Left—Recruiters visit local motocross events to enlist skilled riders into the ranks. They practice year 'round in mud, snow and deep sand. **Above**—Weapon and ammo, radio, fuel, spares and bivouac gear load a bike and rider down as he prepares to disappear into the boonies for several days of practice skulking and spying. **Below**—Helicopters can put a squad of bikers far behind enemy lines quickly.

scout company for reconnaissance security.

Each company is equipped with 18 motorcycles, Honda SL or XL250s, and six support jeeps armed with heavy machine guns and recoilless rifles. The scout company is divided into three platoons, each with six bikes and two jeeps. A normal patrol consists of two or four motorcycles, depending on the objective. A jeep may accompany the patrol if the bikes will be traveling far enough afield to require refueling or if they're likely to need some fire support. The jeeps also carry spares and an extensive array of tools to handle any breakdown.

The Japanese military began working on developing motorcycle scout forces back in 1963, and, after discarding a number of strategies and motorcycle models, engaged Honda to develop a bike specifically to fit their needs, and arrived at the present mission function, the only weak link in which is the jeeps: the Japanese would like to replace them with American Sheridan light tanks. But the bikes work fine. Honda designed its XL250 to meet the requirements of the Japanese military and only afterwards marketed a civilian version, which was received with a storm of acclaim in America for its many technical innovations, none of which were suspected to be military in origin. According to officers of the Ground Self-Defense Forces, the army decided it needed a quiet,



shrapnel and white phosphorus. Before that happens rider No. 2 will have flung himself to the ground and opened up covering fire for No. 1 so he can scramble back on his bike and sprint to safety. Later they will make a complete verbal report of the encounter to HQ.

It's an exercise, of course. Practice. The motorcyclists were firing blanks. No artillery rounds will come crashing down onto the road. But performance is carefully noted, scores tallied. The bikers did well. Everyone is satisfied.

The motorcycle troops you just saw in action were a unit of the elite motorcycle scout corps attached to every one of the 13 divisions of Ja-

pan's Ground Self-Defense Forces—the eyes and ears of the new Japanese army.

Motorcycles form an integral part of Japan's small but well-equipped and highly trained military forces, not as messenger carriers but as the mounts for armed scouts whose mission it is to search out the enemy and fix his numbers, equipment and position for the main battle forces. It is a vital role which the Japanese feel can best be accomplished by taking advantage of the all-terrain capacity and speed of the motorcycle. Today each of the Japanese army's divisions, including the tough 7th Armored facing the Russians in Hokkaido, depends on its motorcycle

quick-moving ATV for forward scouting light enough and compact enough to be carried to the front in an Armored Personnel Carrier, or helicoptered behind enemy lines. The motorcycle was the obvious choice. But not just any motorcycle. They wanted a bike that was at home on paved highways, bounding along cross-country at high speed or picking its way through a muddy woods. They also wanted one that was dead reliable, easy to maintain and, above all, quiet.

Honda designed their four-stroke thumper with these needs in mind. The bikes the scouts use differ from civilian models in having a more robust frame, a motor tuned to turn out 22 horsepower, a second muffler aft of the standard silencer, crash bars, folding leg mud guards, large metal tool box, luggage carrier, radio and, of course, olive drab paint. The camouflage paint extends even to the fork tubes and wheel hubs. The engine is black. No part of the bike is left to twinkle a tell-tale flash of light from the sun to enemy field glasses.

The U.S. Army rather half-heartedly operates a small motorcycle scout team equipped with aging Suzuki TS185s, but the American military has shown little interest in exploiting the special merits of the modern off-road motorcycle. The chief complaint of the American army has been noise, or as the army typically puts it, the "distinctive audio signature" of the motorcycle. The Americans were also unsatisfied, back in the late Sixties when they were examining seriously the possible roles the motorcy-

THE WAR BIKES



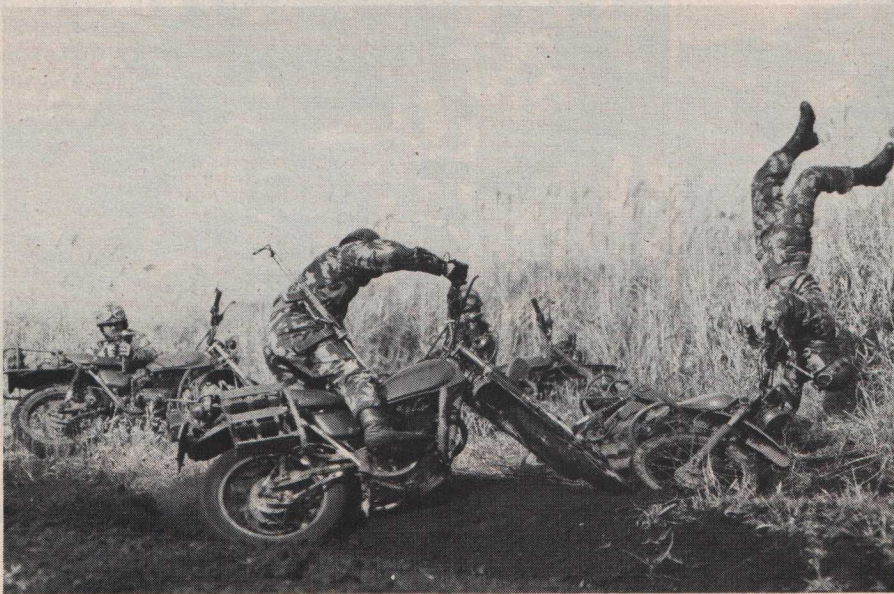
cle could play on the battlefield, with the machines then available.

The Japanese military had the same objections, but they had the advantage of a vigorous native motorcycle industry fully capable of developing a motorcycle to fit the needs of the army. America, having relinquished that industrial option, had no contractors with the know-how or facilities to design a motorcycle to suit, so the two-wheeler over here has been brushed aside.

But the Japanese are enthusiastic about the motorcycle's possibilities for swift and accurate reconnaissance of enemy forces, perimeter patrol of division field positions and, in the not-too-distant future, behind the lines harrying enemy columns. With the coming on line soon of light, one-man "fire and forget" anti-tank guided weapons, the motorcycle scouts could become deadly tank killers, striking the enemy where they will and retiring swiftly to the cover of forest and mountain.

In fact, the Japanese Ground Self-Defense Forces' role is very similar to that of the U.S. Seventh Army in Europe: to repel a Russian armored invasion of most definitely friendly territory. With the recent switch in Soviet tactical planning from broad front invasion to highly mobile deep-thrust penetration and encirclement, the need for just the type of stay-behind or infiltrate and observe capacity the motorcycle offers has increased dramatically. Japanese officers speak confidently of their motorcycle teams' ability to operate effectively, undiscovered, for weeks be-





Oops, crash. While this shot may appear to show all the organization and skill of an, ahem, Chinese fire drill, what with Roscoe Bermblyaster about to shoot himself in the forehead whilst executing a magnificent endo, and his pal in the background about to rip off a magazine of slugs straight into his comrades, everything is completely under control, according to a Major overseeing this free-for-all. They practice crashes on purpose. He says.

hind enemy lines, taking advantage of their country's rugged landscape and lush vegetation for concealment and nurture.

Motorcycle teams are trained in how to use terrain features for concealment while on patrol or scouting missions. They avoid roads and open spaces to hug hillsides just below the crest, follow stream beds or the many footpaths criss-crossing the mountainous backbone of the country. In the valleys the motorcycle's ability to navigate along the dikes separating rice paddies is a tremendous asset. Conventional wheeled and even tracked reconnaissance vehicles are always slowed and often stopped entirely by the rice paddy combination of dike barrier and swampy muck. Motorcycles scarcely slow down crossing rice paddies, wet or dry.

The army the motorcycle scouts work with has the best equipment Japanese industry can build, and that is pretty good. On the ground it includes the Mitsubishi Type 74 tank, a 38-ton monster armed with a 105mm high-velocity cannon equipped with laser telemetry, trajectory calculator and gyro gun stabilizer system. The beast has a hydraulically variable profile and is capable of sustained rapid, accurate fire while on the move. In the air, if the Honda scouts get in trouble they can call on the Kawasaki-powered F1 all-weather supersonic support fighter, the equivalent of the U.S. Marine Corps' A7, except it goes twice as fast.

The motorcycle troops themselves are armed with either the 9mm Shin Chuo Kogyo submachine gun, or

more commonly, the Howa Type 64 gas operated selective fire automatic rifle, which handles a 30-shot magazine of standard NATO cartridges. The bike-soldiers are trained to operate their motorcycles hands off and fire their weapon with both hands. As a result there's no wild spraying of lead over three counties and it's actually worth the trouble to freight the rifle along: the troops hit what they shoot at even while bounding along at 30 mph.

But the scouts consider their most important weapon their Nikon binoculars. After all, they are scouts, and locating and reporting the enemy is their chief goal. Their training is concentrated on finding the enemy undetected. The classrooms at the Fuji training grounds are filled with military reconnaissance homilies: One step up is better than 100 down; Accuracy, speed, completeness; Invisible scouts return the best information; Scouts defeat the enemy not by fighting him, but by finding him; Report what you see quickly, but make sure what you see is correct; Risk your life to get your report to headquarters, but don't throw it away trying to get news—a dead scout passes on no information.

Stealth, caution, silence, are the by-words of Japan's two-wheeled spy-glass and notepad men. In a typical 100-kilometer patrol loop, as much as one-third or more of the ground covered may have been traversed with the engine shut off, the machine coasting. A great deal more ground will have been covered at low revs, with only now and again a judi-

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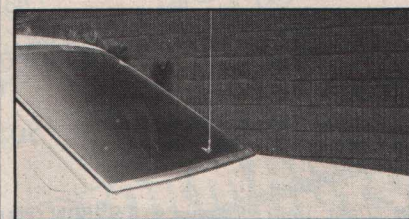
Auto Sound AM-FM Antennas

By Scott Larkin

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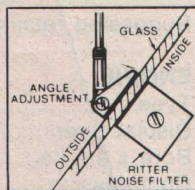
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THE FUTURE

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motorcycles with airbags and dummies and apparently sees in the results a way to extend their red tape. Imagine having your airbag go off in your face when you land your dual-purpose bike after a jump.

—GOVERNORS limiting top speed can't be too far behind 85-mph speedometers (now fitted to all new bikes). Harley-Davidson has proposed that the major manufacturers voluntarily limit horsepower or top speed, but doesn't seem to be finding much agreement from other firms.

—HELMET LAWS will make many more laps through state legislatures. The issue is whether making the individual protect himself is more important than personal freedom and choice.

—LICENSING PROCEDURES will get tougher for bikers, which is good. Better tests for bikers have recently been put into effect in California and other states (although the California written test still contains some glaring misconceptions). Unfortunately, car drivers, who are usually at fault in car/bike collisions, won't have any more trouble getting licenses and they won't get much more education on watching for bikes. So we'll continue to be run off the roads by drunks, by people who couldn't be troubled to look and by hit-and-run drivers, none of whom were properly educated and never should have had a license in the first place.

Ultimately, government presents the biggest challenge to motorcycling in the 1980s. Technology will give us a smooth ride over the other obstacles. **M**

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cious application of throttle to negotiate a particularly testy bit of ground. As a result the scouts can pass within a dozen yards of farmers in a field or a holiday group of picnickers in the woods totally undetected. They raise no suspicion of their approach, leave no trace of their passage.

The purring quiet of the double-muffled four-stroke engine, the skilled manipulation of throttle, the careful camouflage and Apache-like use of the lay of the land assure the motorcycle scouts a high degree of success in carrying out their reconnaissance undetected and at their own leisure. They can locate the enemy, identify his numbers and equipment, taking their own sweet time to make sure their info is accurate, then withdraw undetected. With such complete and trustworthy reports in its hands the Japanese army considers that should some unnamed northern enemy with a fondness for 130-proof vodka choose to barge in on their garden island and try to trod their independence under his hob-nailed cavalry boots, he would, to quote from the sayings of Jimmy Carter, get his backside whipped most soundly. **M**

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