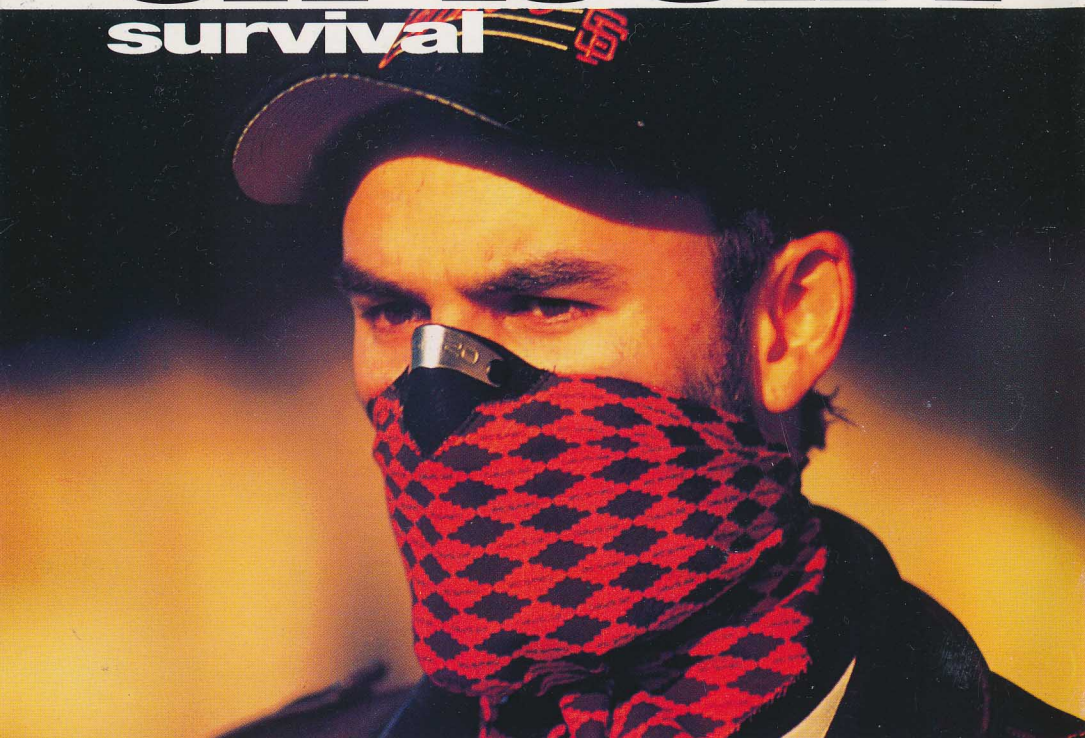


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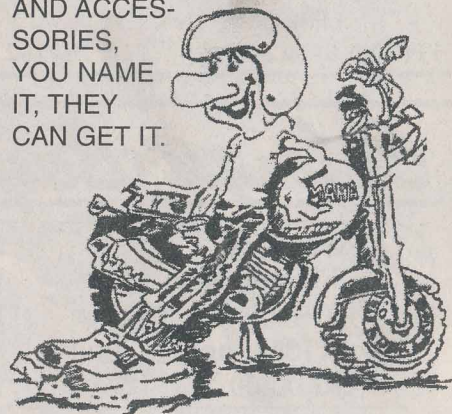
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This week a letter landed on my desk which saddens me a great deal. Apparently there are some people out there (and you know who you are) who would want to exclude trail riders from riding in certain areas simply because they don't like the look of their machines. This is no more or less than blatant discrimination. Mechanical apartheid if you like, and worse still, who's to say that one guy is right and the other wrong? There are those people that have in the past tried to convince me that TrailBike Magazine

should 'lay down the law' on trail riding as it were. In other words we should be telling you just what you can and can't do on your own bikes. Rubbish. TrailBike Magazine exists to let you the reader know about all the things that are going on in the world of trailing and enduros. After that it's up to you guys. I'm no more going to tell you about how and what you should ride than I expect you to tell me.

Sure TBM tries to stick to the right side of the

law and we aim to inform you of the correct way of going about things as well as letting you know what constitutes a legal trail. But I'm

not going to start policing trail riders nor excluding individuals for that matter when this sport is all about individuality.

Let's be sensible about this, if your machine is legal then go ahead and ride it. After all it's not what you ride, but how you ride that counts. Live and let live eh?

Si Melber

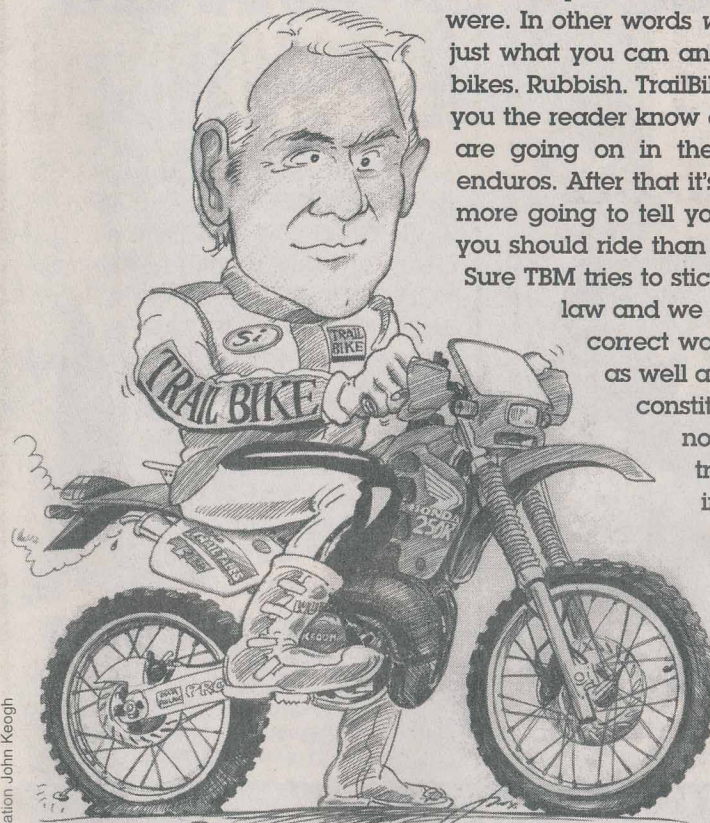


Illustration John Keogh

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...BMW BASIC BREAKS COVER...

BACK TO BASICS

As predicted in last month's TrailBike Magazine, BMW has confirmed it will launch a no-frills trail bike based on the original R80GS in June. The BMW Basic is an updated version of the old GS model which first made its debut in 1980, and utilises the old style, two valve Boxer engine. The new bike which is visually almost identical to the old GS except for the rounded rocker covers and



Original Master: R80GS was the inspiration for the new BMW Basic

Paralever rear end rather than the original Monolever, comes fitted with BMW's innovative cross-laced spoked rims allowing it to use tubeless tyres.

The Basic comes with a 19.5 litre fuel tank, weighs 182kg and produces just 50hp from its 798cc engine. It is designed to appeal to riders who don't need the sophistication of the newer four valve and fuel injected machines. The bike will be launched in Germany first where it is expected to cost

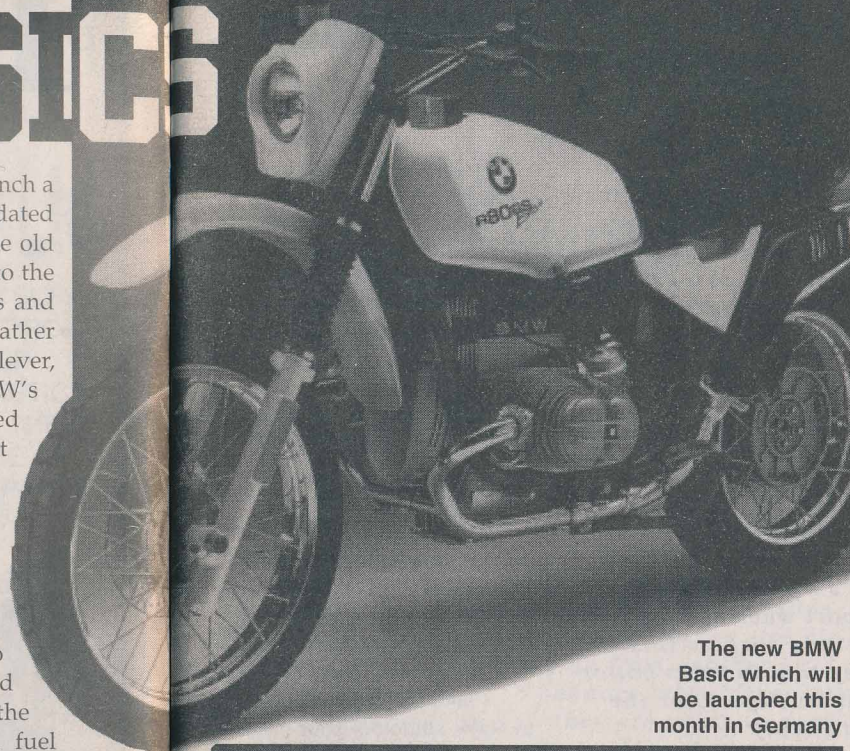
between £6,500-7,000. BMW (GB) have confirmed that they currently have no plans to import the machine, but will review this if there is significant demand for the bike.

Snippets:

Paul Edmondson (250 Gas Gas) has scooped victory in the Spanish Enduro Championship for the second year running. The 26 year old British rider currently leads the World 250 Enduro Championship from Italian Giovanni Sala (KTM), and Australian Shane Watts (KTM).

Bavanar Products Ltd best known as importers of the historic Indian Enfield bikes, have been appointed importers for KTM motorcycles in the UK and Ireland as part of a marketing drive by parent company KTM Austria. Previous importers Dual Sports Motorcycles will continue to be responsible for spare parts sales until May next year. Bavanar have confirmed that they plan to introduce a number of exciting new 'road legal' models to the UK starting with the 125cc electric start LC2, outlined in last month's issue of TBM.

Plans for the next 'Dakar' are well underway with organisers TSO confirming that next year's rally will begin and end in Dakar rather than a European city as has been customary in the past.



The new BMW Basic which will be launched this month in Germany

More Snippets:

Dates have been announced for the four day United Arab Emirates Desert Challenge. The event which forms part of the Rallye Raid World Cup runs from Oct 30 - Nov 2 and costs approx £850. Details from Phil Gunn on 00 353 218 89462.

A little nearer to home, Club Tenere Sweden have announced an international off road day at the Rinkaby military exercise area in the south of Sweden. The event is aimed at big trailies and will take place on a mixture of paved and dirt roads. There's plenty of camping available (with hot showers), and a big barbecue for the Saturday night. Best of all the cost is only £36 all in. Contact Club Tenere, c/o Hakan Persson, N Piggagatan 5, S-296 33 Ahus, Sweden.

Missed from our guide to Trail Riding Holidays (issue 8), were Moto Aventura, a company that organise trail/enduro holidays in Costa Rica, South America using a fleet of Husky 610s! With a maximum of five riders per tour, top quality accommodation, and a mechanic to service your bike every night you can be sure of being well looked after. Details from UK agent Stan Young on 0131 220 4156 (day).

Deacon Weekend

Dakar racer John Deacon is set to run a series of 'off road weekends' in Devon and Cornwall starting in June. The raid-style events will cover nearly 200 miles of trails with riders following directions from a roadbook. The weekend's riding which will include a certain amount of basic tuition from Deacon himself, will cost £145 including luxury accommodation. More details from John on 01752 606888

Numbers Up

Organisers Zembrzusi Motorcycles have confirmed they have received nearly 400 entries for this year's Welsh Two Day Enduro on June 20-21.

Discovering Ireland

The dates for the 1996 Rally of Discovery have been confirmed as 14-20 September. With just 50 places available this event is aimed at adventurous riders of big trail bikes wanting to see some of the more picturesque parts of the Emerald Isle. Primarily a fun event with great emphasis placed on map reading and navigation skills rather than speed, this year's Rally will cover over 1000 miles and includes a night navigation stage. If you want to experience some of that legendary Irish hospitality the Rally costs just IRE300 and details are available from Rally organiser Philip Gunn on 00 353 218 89462

Dear Trail

Home Truths

Dear TBM

It is with increasing concern that I write regarding the growing hostility that seems to be building against riders such as myself and others who ride converted moto-X or enduro bikes on green lanes (see March Issue, Cross Dressing). A few friends and I recently tried to organise a weekend trail riding in Yorkshire and Derbyshire only to be met with disinterest and negative comments once it had been established that we were riding ex-competition two strokes - one of those we contacted advertises in TBM, but I'm mentioning no names since I got into enough trouble last time I wrote to you (*issue four - Ed*), and haven't been to a

TRF meeting since.

If there is anyone or any group who wouldn't mind guiding us around their local lanes, we would be only too pleased to accompany you, and contrary to what seems to be popular belief, our 'type' are no different from anyone else and have as much respect for the countryside as the rest of you.

I have supplied my telephone number to TBM who will pass it on to anyone interested.

Tim N
Northants

It's a sad day for the sport when we receive letters such as this - see this month's editorial on page 3 for the full reply

Numbers Up

Dear Sir

Just a few words regarding your splendid magazine and the image we project. I am a TRF-er and compete at club-men level in local enduros. I recently rode with the TRF on a Somerset run with competition numbers still on my bike from the previous weekend's hare and hounds event. At the following TRF club night I was taken to task by club officials for turning out with competition numbers on as it apparently gives the wrong impression to other green lane users - in fact I was told that it is illegal to display numbers on the road unless one is actually competing.

I note that a photograph in May's edition of your magazine clearly shows competition

Bike...

numbers on the XR250 you tested on a green lane. I was wondering what your thoughts are on this point?

R W Jones
Bristol

Tell them to mind their own business in future - of course it's not illegal

Noise Annoys

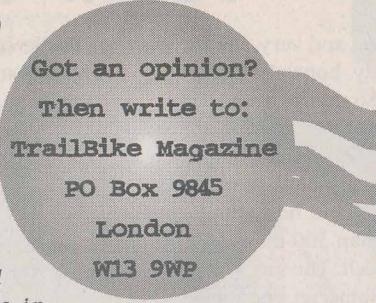
Dear Sir

I am currently converting a 1984 Yamaha YZ490 motocrosser for on/off road use. Obviously the biggest problem with passing the MOT test is exhaust noise. I have been told that the IT490 exhaust not only has a substantial tailpipe, but has drilled baffle plates in the exhaust itself.

Could you please tell me how many plates, holes, sizes and spacings etc are needed to bring the noise down to an acceptable level as my exhaust is only going to take so much experimental cutting and welding!

Declan Ibel
Southampton

Are you for real or what? Declan Ibel or Dec-Ibel for short, asking us about noise? Come-on, I don't believe



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it. Anyway the simple answer is I have absolutely no idea how many holes, plates, or spacings are needed - (did you really think I would?). What you need to do is either fit the silencer off the IT model which just slips straight on, or else use one from another enduro bike. Either way they are going to need repacking if you want to quieten down an animal like the 490. By the way you should aim to get it as quiet as possible if you don't want to attract all the wrong sort of attention from the law when it's on the road - after all you're hardly going to worry about losing a couple of horsepower with that motor are you!

Norfolk 'n' Good

Dear TBMiraculous Cures
Thanks for printing my last



letter (May issue - Ed) anyway what I'm writing to tell you is that in desperation to use my DR350 properly I talked my mate Steve 'King Chill' into buying one too (but he had to sell his CBR600 to do it though). Only problem is he lives in Somerset... but whoosh along comes the next issue of TrailBike Magazine with a detailed route in Somerset for us to follow. So off I set, Lowestoft to Curry Rivel (305 miles) in six hours and a very numb bum - only stopped once for petrol too (thanks Acerbis).

Saturday morning we got to the start point and started loosening levers and removing clothing (perhaps that Melanie whose number you started giving me (bastards) should have come too!), when along comes a car and some scruffy bloke springs out asking 'who are you, where are you going, are you in the TRF, where've you come from?' 'Oh eck' we thinks, trouble already. Anyway it turns out he's the bloke who actually wrote the route we were



Spot the difference: One's a fully road legal trail bike, the other's, er... a fully road legal trail bike. Only difference is that one started life as a motocrosser... but who cares?

Dear Trail Bike...

just about to tackle. He described the route in detail telling us exactly where and what to do - what a great guy. So I want to take this opportunity to say a HUGE THANKS to this guy (sorry can't remember your name) for writing this route, it was superb. Only comments on the route were his quote 'Congratulate yourself if you make it over these interesting rock formations without having to put a foot down.' Yeah, right! Well Steve had more feet down than a centipede, and I managed a pretty impressive wheelie off a rock and fell off (one of many getoffs during the day), hmmm... no congratulating ourselves there! But it was

raining and very, very muddy, honest!

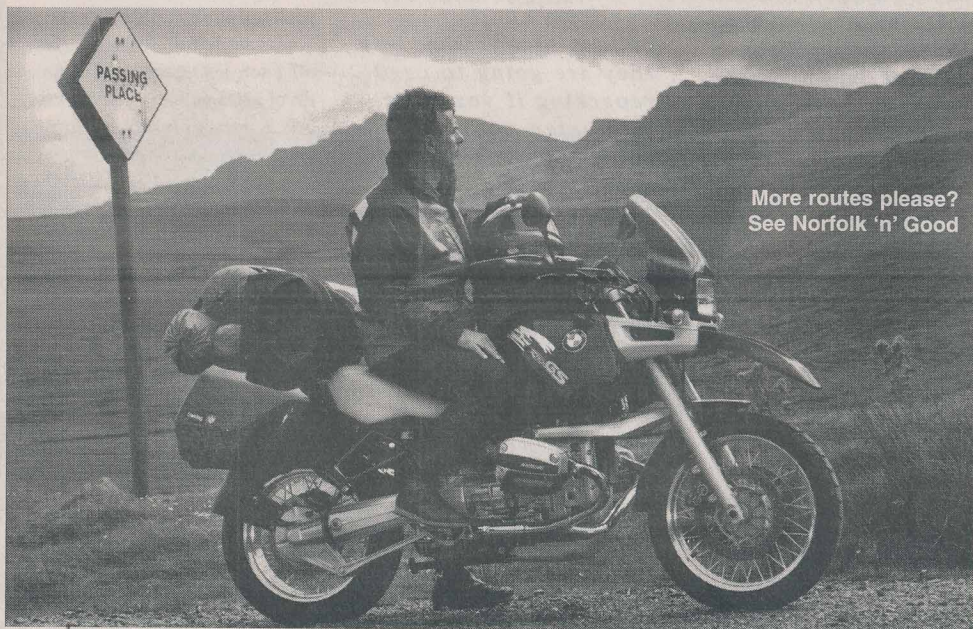
So thanks a wad Trail Bike for printing this route. We're off to Hampshire next weekend. More, more, more please - but how about some less than 300 miles away from Norwich. The guy who wrote this Somerset one was head of his local TRF club, so how's this for an idea? If all the regional reps wrote out routes for their area to be published in TBM it would promote trail riding, and ensure people stick to legal lanes rather than just blundering through the countryside. Thanks also to Somerset Local Authority for putting up loads of signposts clearly showing RUPPs,

Bridleways and Footpaths and thanks a HUGE amount again to the author of this brilliant trail ride, I thoroughly recommend it to anyone.

Ian Greasby
Norwich

PS I was absolutely knackered (but happy) when I got back home after the weekend so I was too tired to ring Melanie - but thanks for the Valentines card Mel. Future contacts can be made via the TBM love letters column.

Er... I think not. Glad you enjoyed the route - more to follow



More routes please?
See Norfolk 'n' Good

WHAT'S TANKS A LOT New

Longer range fuel tanks are now available for a range of enduro- and trail-converted MX bikes. The 13 litre plastic tanks are designed for all post '90 Honda CRs, Kawasaki KXs and Yamaha YZs. The American made Clarke tanks use the standard mountings, and come in a range of colours to match your bike, ie Kawasaki green, Honda red or white etc. The tanks cost £150 inc VAT and are available from Pro Racing on 01327 301322.



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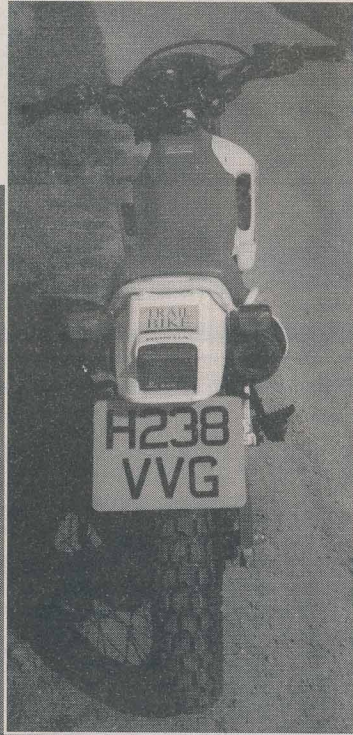


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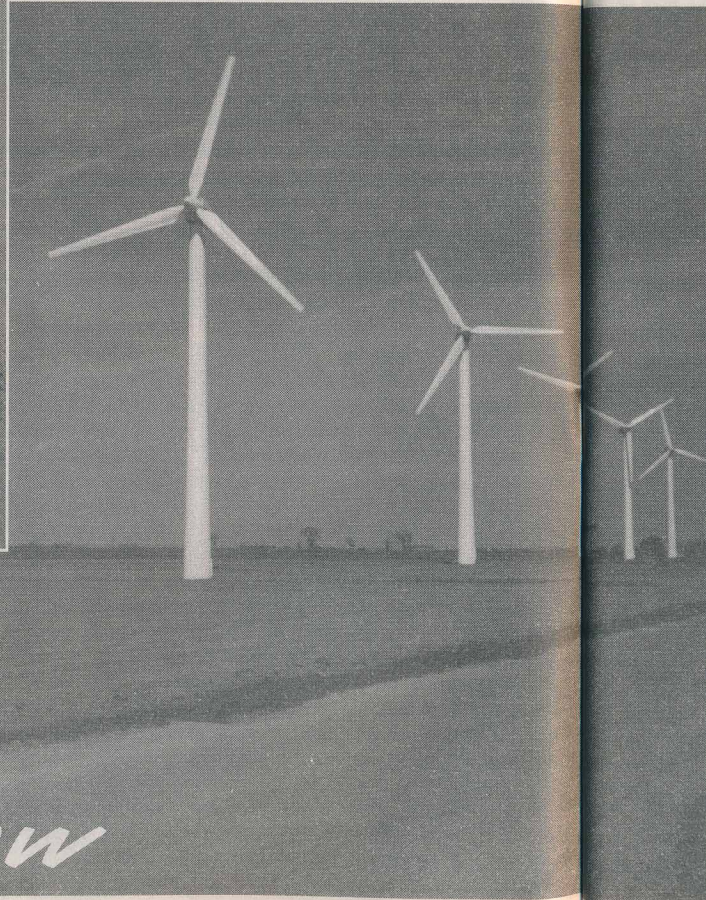
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Smaller than a Serow, Honda's XL250 Degree is the lowest conventionally styled 250cc trail bike we've come across. Resident shortie, Dave 'Compact' Cornish took it out for a ride to find out if the best things really do come in small packages



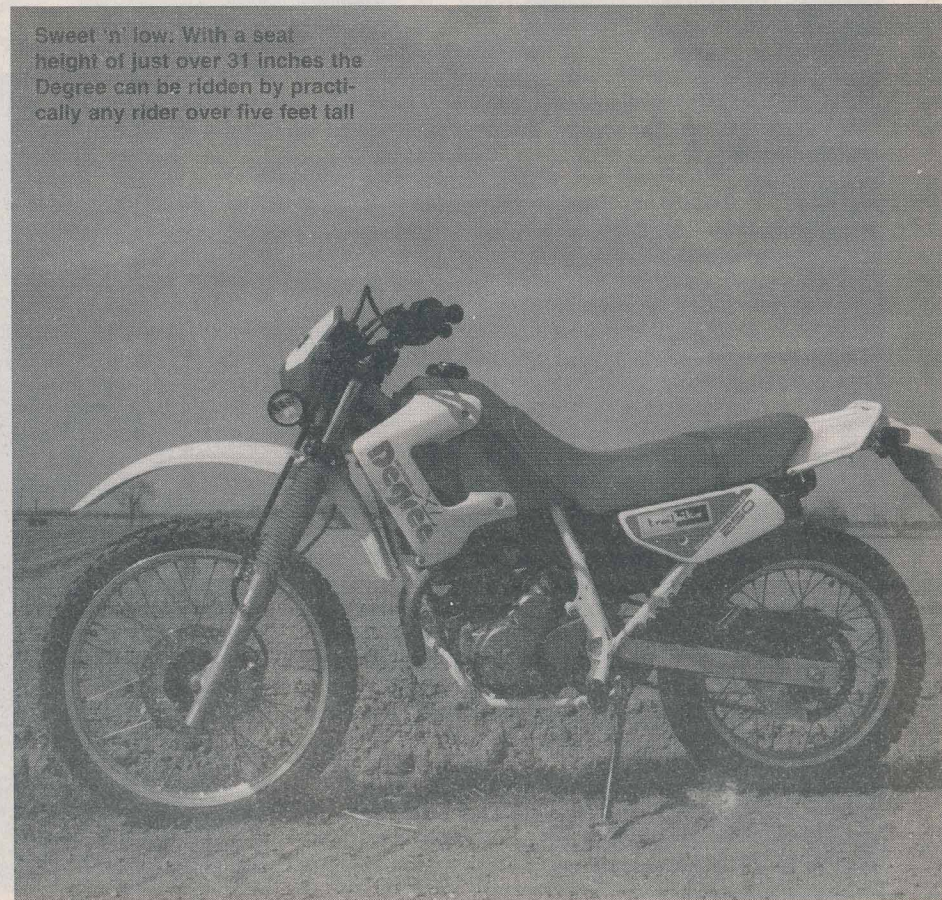
Slimline Tonic: The Degree is a breath of fresh air to anyone after a modern but compact trailie



Ask yourself a simple question; why don't more people choose to ride trail bikes today? Back in the Seventies you couldn't pop down to the local boozier for a quick pint of Double Diamond without being 'buzzed' by any number of Japanese, European or even American trailies zipping around the place. Back then trailies were cheap, plentiful and easy to ride. Motocross hadn't been invented and scrambling only required a set of lumpy tyres to accomplish the job.

Then came the technology race; it went twin shocks and in came monoshock suspension systems with ever increasing amounts of suspension travel. In those

days if someone said they were sporting 12 inches, as often as not they were bragging about their bikes rather than anything else. But longer suspension brought with it taller seat heights, and taller seat heights inevitably meant fewer riders. I'm not for one moment saying that this is the only reason behind what is obviously a rather more complex problem of falling bike sales, but I'll wager that it is still the seat height conundrum that puts the majority of beginners off trying out a trail bike when they come to learn to ride. You can argue till you're blue in the face about the obvious advantages of learning on a slim, lightweight, torquey and versatile



Sweet 'n' low: With a seat height of just over 31 inches the Degree can be ridden by practically any rider over five feet tall

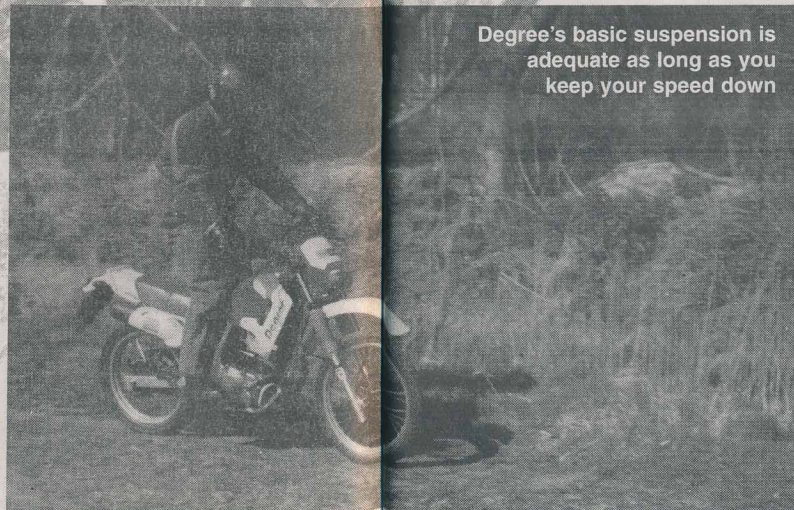
trail machine but unfortunately the potential punter will always point out the fact that with a seat height of over 34" the average trailie is not a viable option for anyone under about 5'7" - which incidentally includes most women.

However by now, most of you will have heard of Yamaha's brilliant little Serow - a trail bike which numbers among its many virtues a low seat height - which we tested (almost to destruction) in issue six of TBM. Most of you will also know that the Serow is an unofficial 'grey' import (clearly the UK's Yamaha importer isn't aware of this type of bikes appeal). There are however another couple of 'grey' bikes in a similar mould to the shortie's favourite. One is the Suzuki DR250 SH with a two position ride height adjuster (which we tested in issue four), and the other is Honda's little known XL250 Degree.

The Honda Degree is a Japanese-market-only trailbike whose neat, dohc, liquid cooled powerplant is designed exclusively for this application. With a claimed output of 25bhp at 8000rpm the four valve single may not exactly set the world on fire but for the novice rider a smooth and progressive torque curve is far more important than any sudden rush of uncontrollable horsepower.

Six relatively closely spaced gears sit inside the degree's compact crankcases (though there's a rather exposed water pump mounted on the motor's right hand side), and as you would expect on a bike of this type, a 'leccy' start is utilised at the expense of any form of a kickstart. In fact the motor was designed from scratch without a manual starter so unlike the Serow, retro fitting a kickstart is not an option.

The Degree's looks are very unassuming. No fancy graphics or MX-derived paint scheme adorns the diminutive Honda's flanks. Just a fuss free livery of traditional Honda red and white. The frame consists of a single box section down tube which splays into a double cradle under the motor, no sump shield is fitted, and a pair of engine bars is the only form of protection deemed necessary. A bolt on rear sub-frame features a handy grab handle, as well as some bungie hooks for strapping on your luggage.



Degree's basic suspension is adequate as long as you keep your speed down

To achieve that commendably low seat height of 790mm (almost a full inch less than the shortie Serow) the suspension's travel has been scaled down from the trailie norm of around ten inches to a rather more manageable six to seven inches. Depending on your viewpoint this is either all you actually need or simply a styling exercise not actually built to take the knocks. Whichever way you look at it (and we err in favour of the former), the net effect is to make a bike that like its 1970's forbears is rideable by virtually anyone over five feet tall. It manages this by utilising a conventional set of Showa forks with approximately six inches of softly damped travel at the front; whilst at the rear, a Showa shock works through a Pro-Link set up on to a steel box-section swinging arm providing nearly seven inches of movement.

This must be the only 'off roader' I've ridden that I can sit on with both feet on terra firma with my knees bent! The Degree will certainly bring confidence to even the most stunted shortie, though of course the downside for the average 5'8 incher like me is that the small distance between footrest and seat forces a knees up, sat further back riding position that'd doubtless be tiresome after a while. Sat astride the lowest trailie on the market the view is typical Honda trailbike. The instruments, switchgear etc will be recognisable to the CRM, XLR, Baja owner and consists of a simple kph speedo flanked by warning lamps for main beam, indicators, neutral and sidestand. A conveniently mounted choke lever sits on the left bar and is reached easily on the move with an outstretched forefinger.

Starting up the liquid cooled motor is a cinch, hot or cold the Degree bursts into life at the mere touch of the button and soon settles down to a pleasingly quiet 'duff-duff' tickover sound. Pull in the light clutch, snick down on the folding tip gear lever and ease out the rather grabby clutch and the Degree responds immediately to a handful of throttle. With only 25 rather tame ponies straining at the leash the litesome Honda is surprisingly swift up to an indicated 100kph. But to achieve a reasonable top speed, maxing the revs out in fourth and fifth is necessary before you shift into top.

Once in the groove the Degree can be hustled along surprisingly well, keeping ahead of the traffic flow as long as you avoid long stretches of boring dual carriageway. It's on main roads like these that the lack of real power becomes apparent and quite

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often the rider finds him/herself throttle on the stop in fifth fighting a headwind and showing less than 110kph on the metric dials - though in this respect it's slightly better than the 225cc Serow.

That said most potential Degree pilots would probably prefer the more interesting and picturesque back road route anyway, and here the bike is great fun to scratch around on. Weighing in at 119kgs the bike may carry a few more kilos than the opposition but as the Degree's centre of gravity is so low, swinging through the leafy lanes it can prove to be a real thorn in the sides of much quicker (on paper) machinery.

Slowing from the relatively mod-

est speeds of which the Degree is capable is a predictable affair, and whilst the front disc/rear drum set up may not be the ultimate set of brakes ever fitted to a two wheeler, at least the novice rider can feel confident in the bike's stopping abilities without the usual beginners' fear of a front wheel lock up.

The same qualities that make the Degree such a fun 'B' roads bike also shine through when entering a snarled up town centre. Splitting traffic queues and generally making light work of a heavily

congested rush hour the little Honda almost makes the daily commute a pleasure (I should know, I've been commuting on this one for two weeks). Quick steering, predictable brakes and the snappy response from the Keihin CV carb means that the sleekly proportioned Degree can find gaps in the traffic where on bigger more cumbersome bikes, none would exist.

Well, yeah okay so it's good in town, but what you probably want to know is what's it like to ride off road? To test our particular 'never been dirty' Degree we decided to take it down some gentle green lanes. The reasoning behind this is that

Honda don't make any exaggerated claims concerning the bike's off tarmac abilities. Instead the Degree is seen as an urban trail style machine with some off road potential. Fair enough I suppose, but as the Honda's main competitor is the brilliant dual purpose Serow I can't help thinking that the big 'H' are slightly missing the point.

A leisurely ride on some of Norfolk's modest green lanes proved that Honda were probably erring on the side of caution when referring to the bike's off road capability. Riding along some dry grassy tracks in the company of KLR650 the small red machine had no trouble keeping it's head in front of the wallowing 'fuel tanker'.

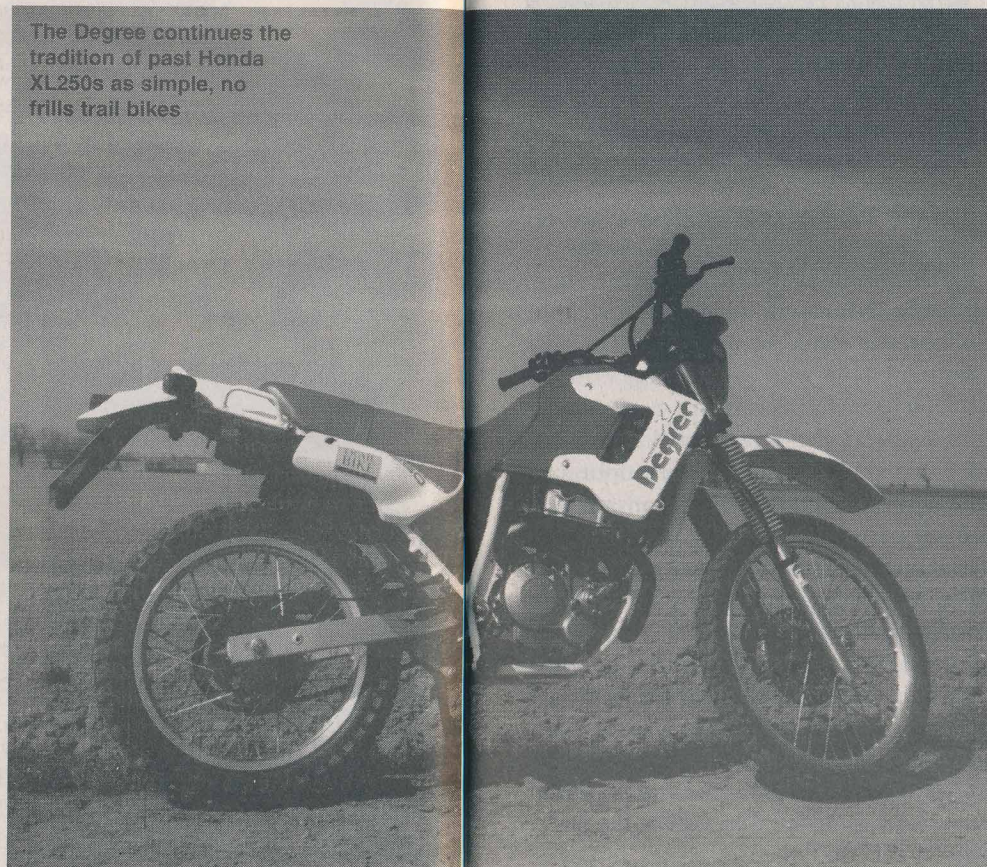
First gear wheelies on the throttle come easy to the Degree and off road the

Easy green lanes are where the Degree feels happiest



TrailBike -16- Magazine

The Degree continues the tradition of past Honda XL250s as simple, no frills trail bikes



TrailBike -17- Magazine

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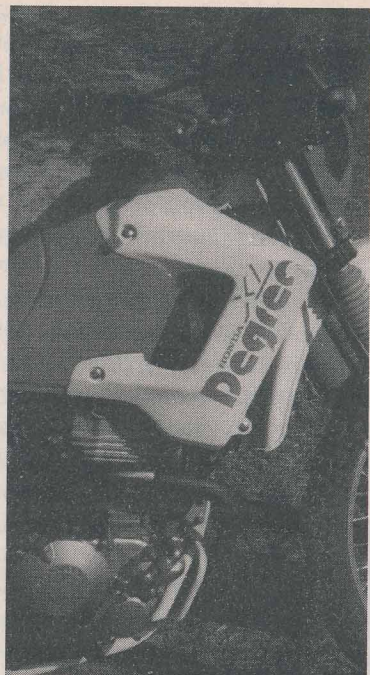
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Power output: 25bhp @ 8000rpm
Fuel capacity: 9.3 litres
Seat height: 790mm, 31.1in
Weight: 119kg, 62.4lbs
Max speed: 78mph (approx)
Fuel cons: 60mpg avg
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- + Low seat, easy to ride, revvy motor, frugal, e/start**
- Cramped for taller riders, off road suspension**

250's revvy motor can still be used to the full. The only limitations to the bikes dirty aspirations is the suspension's lack of rebound damping. Turning up the wick on a reasonably flat section I suddenly noticed some rather deep, rock hard tractor ruts. On a Serow, scrubbing off a few mph and shifting down a cog, this sort of obstacle would be history, but on the underdamped Degree everything bottomed out with an alarming crunch and the back end reared up threatening to pitch me over the bars. As the only form of suspension adjustment available is the rear shock's preload (which would doubtless make matters worse) I'm afraid the only option is to slow down and take it easy. Ridden in this manner the suspension has no problems keeping both wheels in contact with the undulating surface. The Bridgestone TrailWings fitted to our test bike's 21" front and 18" rear alloy rims were perfectly matched to the Degree's limited performance and provided plenty of grip under all conditions.

Rounding a corner on the trail we came across a couple of horse riders who were obviously out enjoying the warmest day since last summer just as we were. The Degree's super quiet exhaust system combined with its noise deadening water jacket showed our horse mounted brethren that motorcycles aren't necessarily a noisy threat to the peaceful countryside. Even after being on the trail for a couple of hours at slow speeds the electric cooling fan never needed to cut in and the bike would still respond

crisply to a handful of throttle.

Stopping to refuel on the return journey, the Degree's meagre appetite for unleaded became apparent. With an average consumption of over 60mpg, the frugal little 250 can squeeze an easy 100 miles out of the 9.3 litre tank before reserve is needed. Clearly the Degree should prove to be a cheap machine to run for the short distance commuter who likes to take in the occasional two wheeled ramble at the weekend.

While ease of handling is the Degree's trump card, having the lowest seat height of any normally styled trail bike has a major part in this. Together with Honda's usual attention to detail such as the neat tool box which can be secured by the helmet locks clasp, the push to cancel indicators and the combined ignition/steering lock, all help to make the bike more user friendly to a beginner.

The Degree is so easy to ride that even complete novices who may be intimidated by most trailbikes' physical dimensions will immediately feel confident swinging a leg over it for the first time. Inevitably comparisons with the 225 Serow, can't be avoided and for most trail riding/off road situations the Degree doesn't even come close to the Yamaha's finely balanced abilities. But as an alternative to a road-bike/commuter the Honda XL250 Degree offers all the advantages of a lightweight street only machine but can open up a whole new world of modest trailing to the otherwise tarmac bound newcomer. This bike will also bring trail riding within the reach of the smaller rider who may have never considered owning a trailie before, which can only be a good thing for the sport.

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HONDA XLV TRANSALP

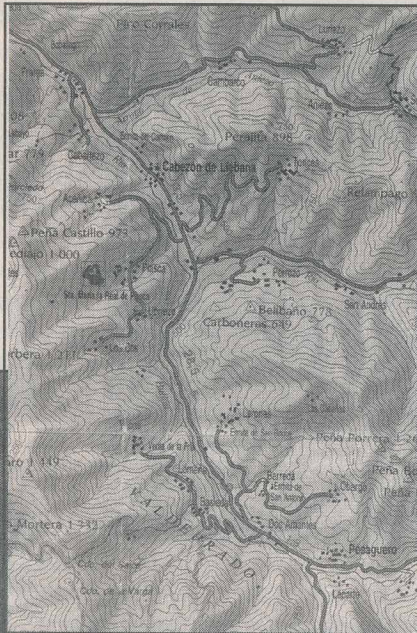
Nearly ten years after its launch, does Honda's Transalp still cut it as a serious touring trailster? Dave 'El Crashero' Cornish took one to the Spanish Picos to find out

When Honda launched the XL600V Transalp back in 1986 (for 1987) they proclaimed that the bike was a 'new concept to broaden the pleasure of motorcycle touring' The Transalp certainly looked like no other trailie before it, with it's toned down 'Dakar' replica bodywork complete with plastic sump guard and bulky silencer finished off with a neat pair of 'shotgun' tailpipes. Over the years changes to the bike's spec have amounted to little more than replacing the troublesome rear drum brake with a more powerful disc and more recently an attempt at updating the rather bland fairing design to something a tad more stylish. Clearly Honda see the bike as a sensible, no fuss, trailster to fill the gap between the 'pretty' single cylinder 650 Dommie and the 'take no prisoners' Africa Twin.

The Transalp's liquid cooled, 52 degree vee twin motor with offset crankpins originates from the road going VT500 with which it shares the same sohc, three valve, twin plug heads. A bore and stroke of 75x66mm takes the motor out to 583 cc and Honda claim 55bhp @ 6000 rpm (three bhp up on the VT) with maximum torque of 39.7 ft/lb at the same revs. Transmission is through a slick-shifting five speed box to an 'O' ring chain which is strange as the VT road bike is shaft final drive and bearing in mind the Transalp's perceived purpose as a 'rally tourer' maybe Honda should have left the shaft in place.

As for the chassis, the box section steel frame utilises the compact engine as a stressed member while up front a set of softly damped 41mm unadjustable forks offer eight inches of travel to the bumpstop, and hold a 21 inch wheel in place allowing a wide choice of dual purpose rubber to be fitted. The rear end is standard Honda Pro-Link which is adjustable for preload only, and offers a soft and comfortable ride with its seven and a half inches of travel - just the job for a far flung continental jaunts.

Which is exactly what we were going to do with it. Invited by Moto-Tours to explore the Picos mountains in Spain, the softly sprung Transalp was the first choice of bike for the trip which would include riding some of the high mountain passes typical of this part of the world. Strapping ten days worth of kit into place was easy thanks to the generously proportioned rack and plenty of bungy hooks and I was soon appreciating the bikes broad comfy seat as we headed off towards Portsmouth to rendezvous



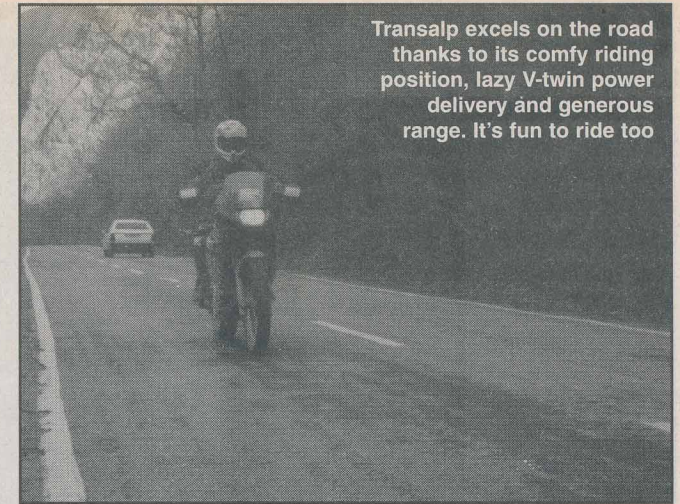
with the lads from Moto Tours. Cruising around the M25 at a steady 85mph, the Transalp's low screen caused an annoying amount of turbulence and wind noise. Ducking down a little helped but the real solution is an after market flip-up extended screen or as I found out, a pair of ear plugs which makes things far more bearable.

At cruising speeds the motor hums along with very little vibration thanks to the offset crankpin arrangement, rubber footrest and a pair of rubber mounted handlebars which can be made to move around alarmingly whilst at a standstill but seem okay when actually riding.

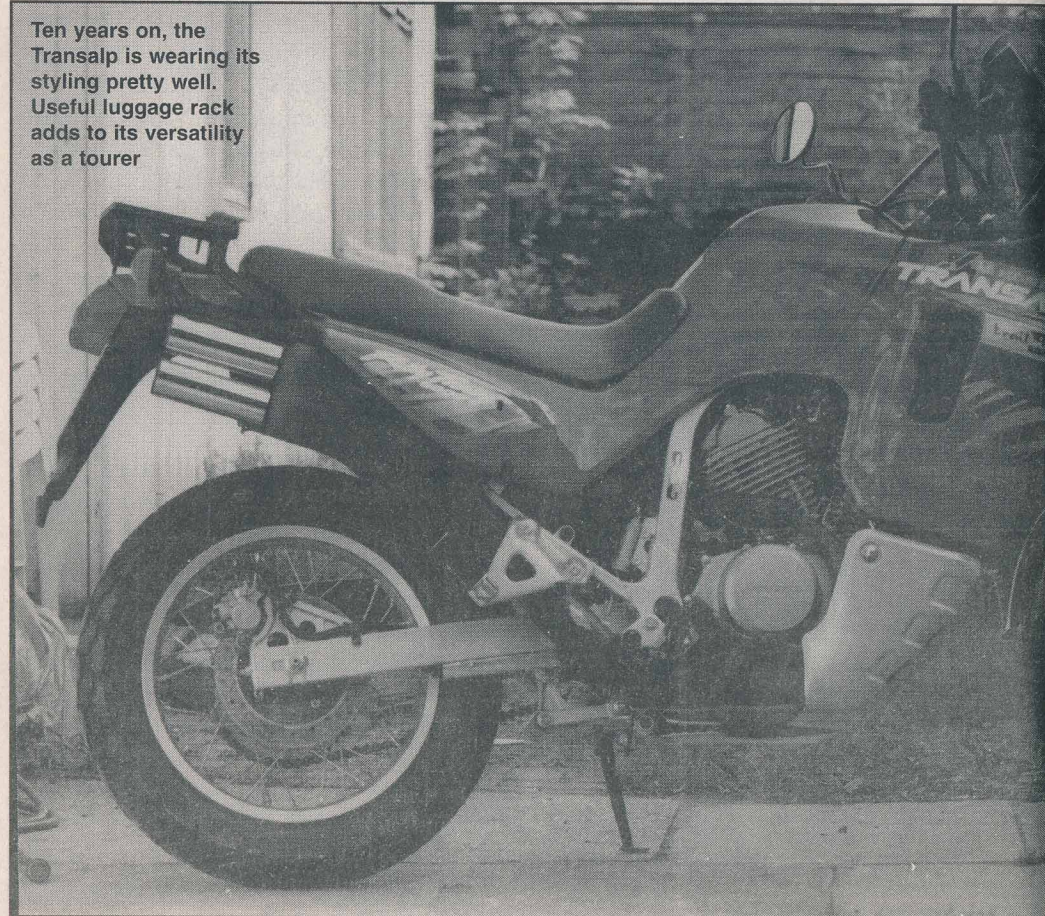
However a slight tingle does make it's presence felt at between 5500-6500rpm which is inconveniently at around 70mph.

Keeping an eye out for unmarked Vauxhall Senator's was simple as the large rubber mounted mirrors gave a good, blur free (and elbow free) view of what's behind you. As you would expect from Honda everything worked in it's own fuss free way; the indicators indicated, the warning lamps warned (and are visible even in strong sunlight), and simple things such as the fairing mounted fuel switch is easy to reach and operate on the move. I mention these seemingly bland observations as a long time Italian bike owner who

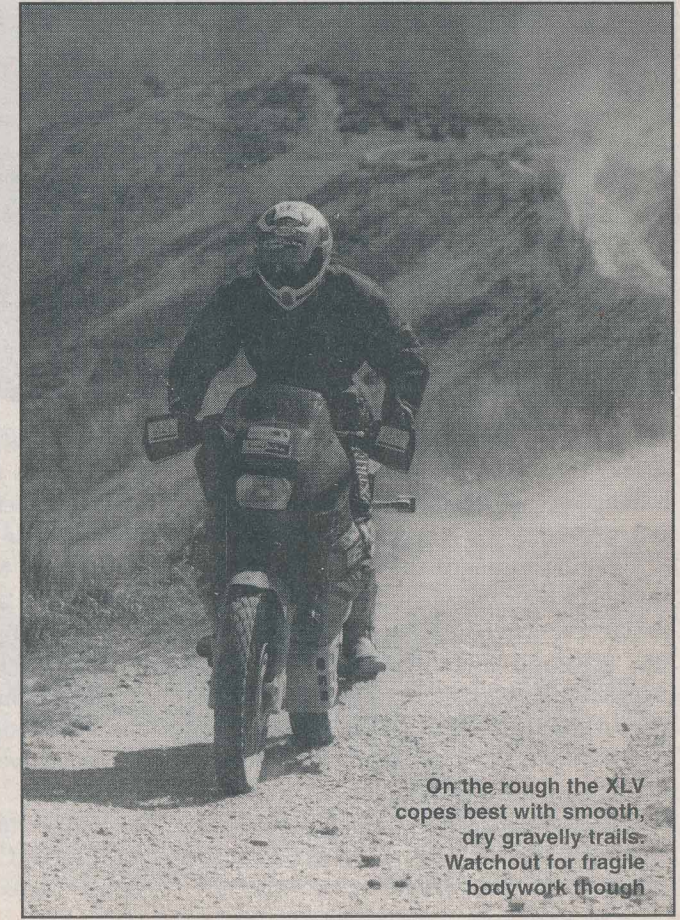
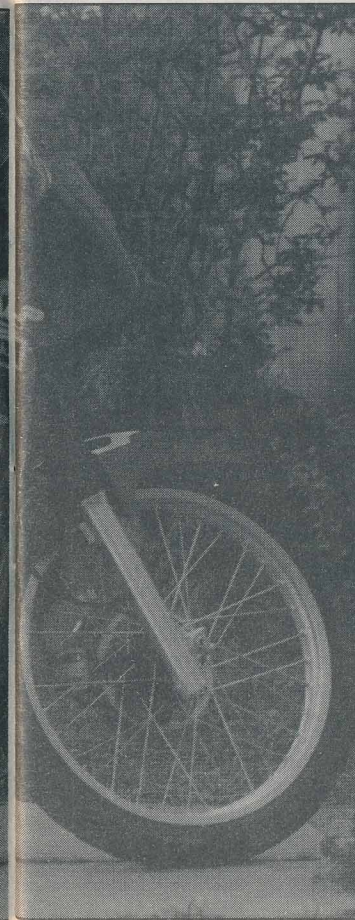
XLV



Transalp excels on the road thanks to its comfy riding position, lazy V-twin power delivery and generous range. It's fun to ride too



Ten years on, the Transalp is wearing its styling pretty well. Useful luggage rack adds to its versatility as a tourer



On the rough the XLV copes best with smooth, dry gravelly trails. Watchout for fragile bodywork though



This is Crasher Cornish demonstrating where he usually ends up after going over the bars

has grown to distrust all manner of auxiliaries that the Italians pass off as switchgear, instrumentation and ergonomics.

Waiting to board the 'Pride of Bilbao' for the 34 hour voyage to Spain I noticed a bunch of amiable Geordie's kitted out with XRs, TTRs and WRs fitted with long range fuel tanks. Had these guys got inside information about the Picos trails? Well no, but I felt a little relieved to be joined by several other big trailies including reader Chris Kelley on a new Suzuki DR650SE, big Paul Farrington who claims to be a freelance shepherd on an KLX650 fitted with an

unfeasibly large tank, and a whole host of other less serious looking bikes (and riders), a quick count up before boarding confirmed me as 'Oh no'... the 13th member of the Moto Tours Picos raiding party!

After a leisurely cruise down through the Bay of Biscay we docked in Spain, sorted out our kit and headed for the hills. Three cold and extremely wet hours later we arrived at Potes the largest town in the Picos. Refuelling the Transalp's four gallon tank revealed that the 600 had returned an impressive 55mpg at a average cruising speed (in the heavy



almost to our destination without touching tarmac.

Riding up the first half of the trail was no problem at all for the Transalp, standing on the pegs using the motor's superb smooth low end torque only the steepest of the many 180 degree hairpins would require a shift down into first. The compliant suspension soaking up the worst of the rocky boulder strewn track only occasionally would the rear bottom out over storm drains dug inconveniently on most corners. Some of the others (wisely) decided that to carry on up the snow bound trail was a bad idea and with visibility almost

rain) of 70mph. This gives a possible range of over 200 miles providing the rider shows some restraint with the throttle. Still cold and wet, half of the riders went the further two hours by road to our hotel in the tiny village of Posda de Valdeon, whilst the more intrepid (read stupid) decided to take the roads end to Fuente De and attempt to cross the Alto de la Triguera trail (alt 2000 metres) which would take us

non-existent due to the low cloud, made the decision to turn back and brave the three hour trip (in freezing fog) to the safety of the hotel.

Determined not to be beaten and dreading the road option, I pressed on following the KLX mounted freelance shepherd and Ian (Village People) Bowes on his specially modified XT600. Despite the conditions (and altitude) the Transalp's carburation remained faultless, even deliberately giving the light throttle a big handful failed to faze the twin CV Keihins. Climbing higher and higher we came across a large snow drift covering the trail to a depth of over six foot. Paul reassuringly said that the main road was only a few short kilometres away and to turn back now would mean a nightmare ride for several hours in thick freezing fog.

SPAIN

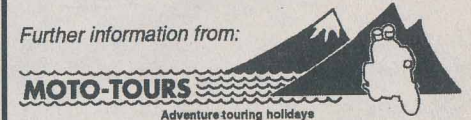
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With our destination almost in sight, I followed the KLX's spinning back wheel down the snowdrift onto what appeared to

nent disaster I tried every trick in the book (and a few that aren't); I considered taking Paul's advice 'jump Dave you're gonna' die' but just as I began to see my short life flash before me, a small tree appeared through the mist. Heading straight for the only piece of flora for miles I somehow managed to hook the Transalp's bars around it's slender trunk and hung on.

With a painful thud both bike and rider came to a halt, and wrapped around the tree I scanned the horizon for my companions who were running towards me laughing. It took over an hour of blood, sweat and tears to recover the bike back onto the trail and after a painfully cold road ride (including a 40km wrong turn) we were finally thawing out in the Hotel, too cold to discuss the day's events for several hours.

be a safe grassy meadow. But as soon as the Transalp's front wheel touched the frozen steeply banked grass I knew I was in big trouble. With its bellypan acting like a ski, the Transalp took off down the snowy slope like a one man toboggan. In a vain attempt to slow the rapidly accelerating Transalp (and terrified pilot) from immi-

XLV

Over the next week the weather dramatically improved and by sticking to the lower altitude tracks the Transalp coped admirably with anything I could throw at it. Long, steep rocky climbs are no problem for a well ridden Transalp, the rear Bridgestone TrailWing only struggling for grip in deep mud. Time and again the bike would amaze with it's off road capabilities and after a hard day's trailing the XLV made a passable canyon-road scratching tool. That same smooth, punchy power delivery that makes the bike so trailable works brilliantly on the poorly surfaced, twisty mountain roads that exist in the Picos. These roads are so twisty that 50mph can only be seen briefly before the next 180 degree, downhill hairpin appears. Hauling on the single 278mm front disc and using the vee-twin's engine braking, the bike can be hustled along at an alarming pace and thankfully slowed just as safely.

For this type of trip the Transalp was proving to be almost perfect. okay, I know a lighter enduro bike is far better (and safer) in real tough off road going, but as long as you respect the Transalp's dirt riding limitations (mainly the underdamped suspension) and keep speeds down off road, the 600 can be persuaded to go almost anywhere.

On the fifth day of the tour 18 year old Phil Wardle (the youngest member of the Geordie 'enduro squad') crashed heavily with the result that his right hand resembled a bunch of overripe banana's. It was obvious that his XR250 would be idle for a day. So with the promise of a much sought after TBM T-shirt, the reluctant Phil cautiously handed

Moto Tours



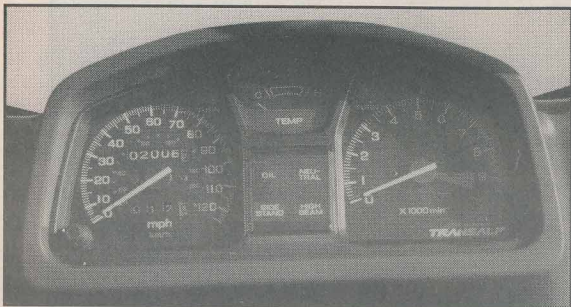
George Cherry has been running Moto Tours trail riding holidays to the Picos de Europa and the Pyrenees for over five years. 64 years young, George rides his KLX250 with more skill and determination than most riders a third of his

age. As well as a keen rider he regularly competes in international canoe events and is a former rugby player for Leicester. George also seems to be single handedly tackling the EC wine lake and freely admits to being prejudiced against all things American particularly fast food joints.

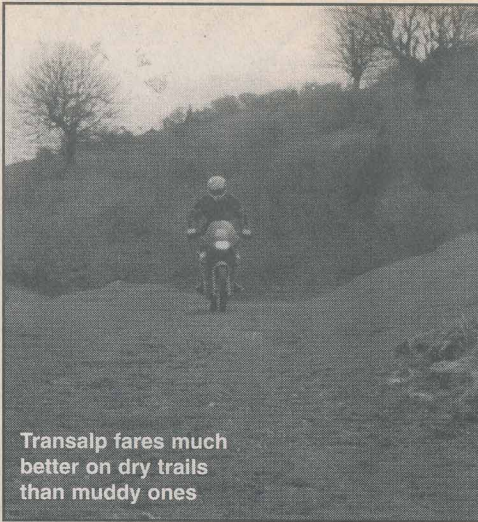
The main aim of Moto Tours is to cater for trail riders of all ages and abilities and to let each rider find their own level at which they feel comfortable. For instance on our particular tour some riders were happy enough to ride the easy tarmac route without getting their tyres dirty whilst others (notably the Geordie 'enduro squad') always took the sherpa route.

All of the riders on the trip came away with a lasting impression of the spectacular scenery the Picos has to offer, however if you banker for the traditional Spain ie Union Jack boxer shorts, 24 hour rave clubs and fish and chips, then look elsewhere. As George says 'This is the most unspoilt region of Spain and at the moment it remains a relative wilderness ideal for trail riding'.

The Moto Tours trail riding trip to the Picos de Europa cost £439 and includes the return ferry from Portsmouth to Bilbao (inc cabin), seven nights accommodation (breakfast only) in well appointed hotels. The tour also includes the considerable services of George himself as guide, translator, recovery/luggage vehicle driver. If you fancy riding some truly awesome trails in (usually) great weather call Moto Tours on 01920 871988.



Above: sensible dials live up to usual Honda high standards - but there's no clock
Below: It may be Spain but snowy trails are typical in the Picos mountains



Transalp fares much better on dry trails than muddy ones

Honda XL600V Transalp

Engine: Liquid cooled, four stroke, 52-degree, sohc, V-twin, 3 valve heads

Bore/Stroke: 75x66mm

Capacity: 583.1cc

Power: 55bhp @ 6000rpm

Torque: 39.7 ft/lb @ 6000rpm

Weight: 386 lbs

Seat Height: 33.5in

Fuel Cap: 4 gallons

Max speed: 105mph

Ave fuel con: 50mpg

over the keys to his pride and joy. This was time for some serious fun, the lightweight XR allowed me to explore tougher trails at much higher speeds than the 'Trannie' but as you would expect the big bike won hands down when the track petered out and the tarmac beckoned.

After a day of off road lunacy I found myself back on the Transalp and far from being disgruntled at the bikes dirt performance, my time with the XR just reinforced what a brilliant allrounder the rather staid looking 600 really is. You name it and the Transalp will do it, scratch, tour, commute, trail ride and even race.

So the XL600V Transalp is as we have always suspected, the unsung hero of the trailie world and for once I must admit that I have to agree with our own Paul Blezard here and state that although there are plenty of bikes which are more capable off-roaders, better tourers, or more accomplished in one way or another, no other bike offers the same allround package as the Tranny. Not only that but the Transalp has proved to have an almost unburstable motor with long term reliability problems virtually unheard of.

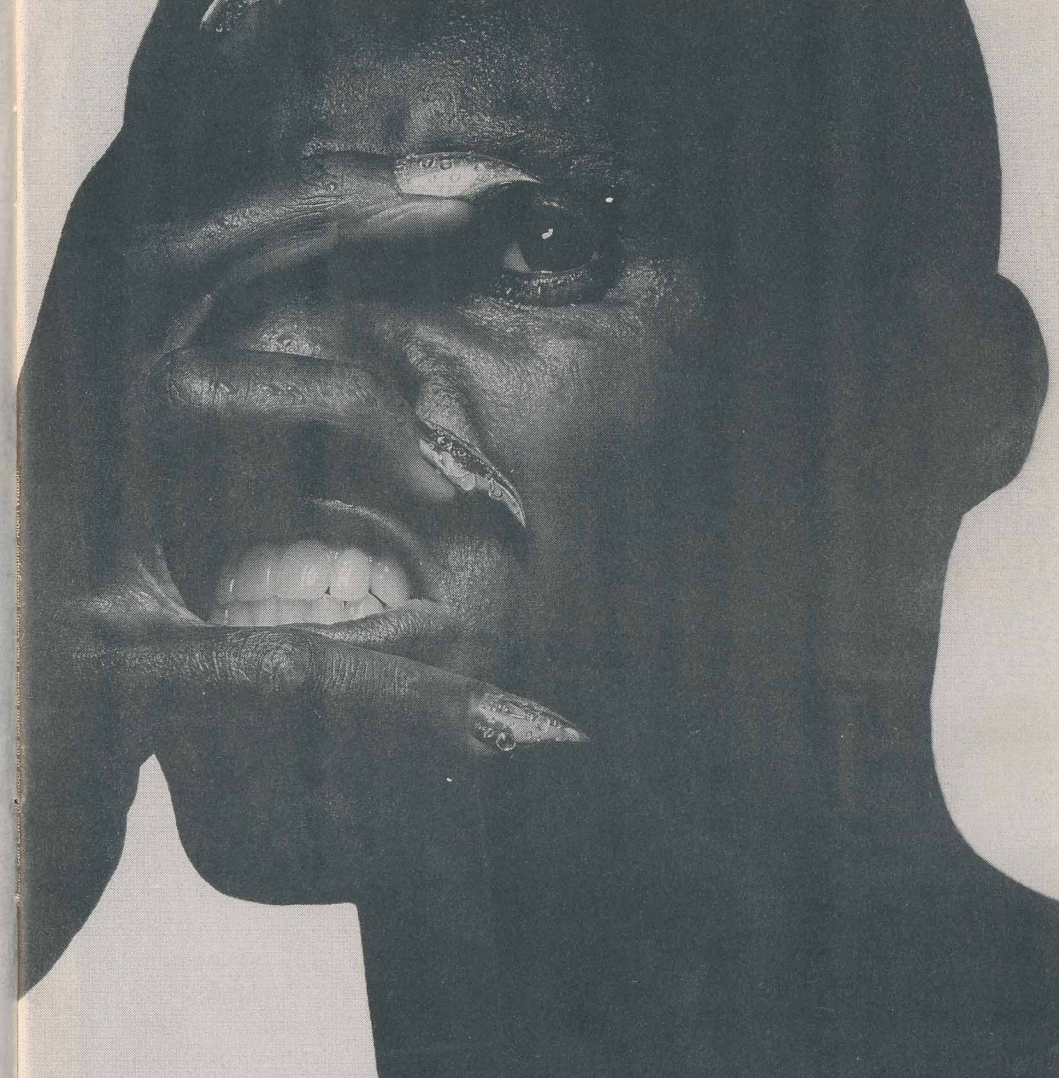
Conclusion

Sensible is the word that springs to mind when summing up the Transalp, though of course you and I both know that people just don't buy 'sensible' bikes. So the Transalp remains what it's always been - a seriously underrated all-rounder, frequently overlooked but none the worse for that.

The only black mark against the bike is the fairing which is both extremely fragile in a low speed crash and fitted with a screen which is too low to be effective. Almost ten years have passed since the Transalp's introduction and the 96 version is proof positive that Honda got it pretty much right first time. The bike has seen plenty of competitors come and go and it still manages to hide it's age well. Perhaps it's time for Honda to take a leaf out of BMW's book and (like the F650), equip the Transalp with a tough and durable fairing - after all they've had enough time to get it right by now.

- +** Versatility, comfort, economy, reliability, throttle response
- Low screen, bland styling, fragile bodywork

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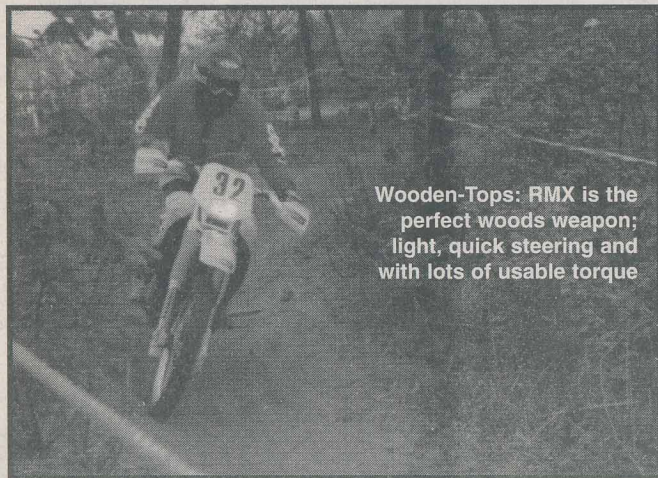
It's a measure of just how good the new Suzuki RMX250 is that the importers have already sold their entire allocation. Why then - you may ask - are we bothering to test a machine you can't get hold of? The simple answer is because you *can* get hold of one - certain dealers are still carrying stock of the new model, but if you want one you'd better hurry because they're selling fast.

RMX

Those of you that regularly ride enduros will know that the RMX250 is Suzuki's specialist woods weapon. Loosely based on the RM motocrosser but designed specifically with the enduro rider in mind, the RMX comes equipped with a wide ratio gearbox, a slightly softer tune motor, large capacity

minium axle clamps and short below-axle protrusions. Like the XR they seem to work extremely well with a nice, progressive action and as you would expect on this type of bike, are adjustable for both compression and rebound damping.

Though the RMX claims to utilise a 'motocross-bred powerplant from the RM' in fact it produces less peak power and much more in the way of usable torque than the RM motor thanks to slightly different porting and a much larger flywheel giving good tractable performance - and since enduros are generally more about tractability than all out horsepower this is a case where less is definitely more. That's not to say that the RMX is at all soft you understand - in

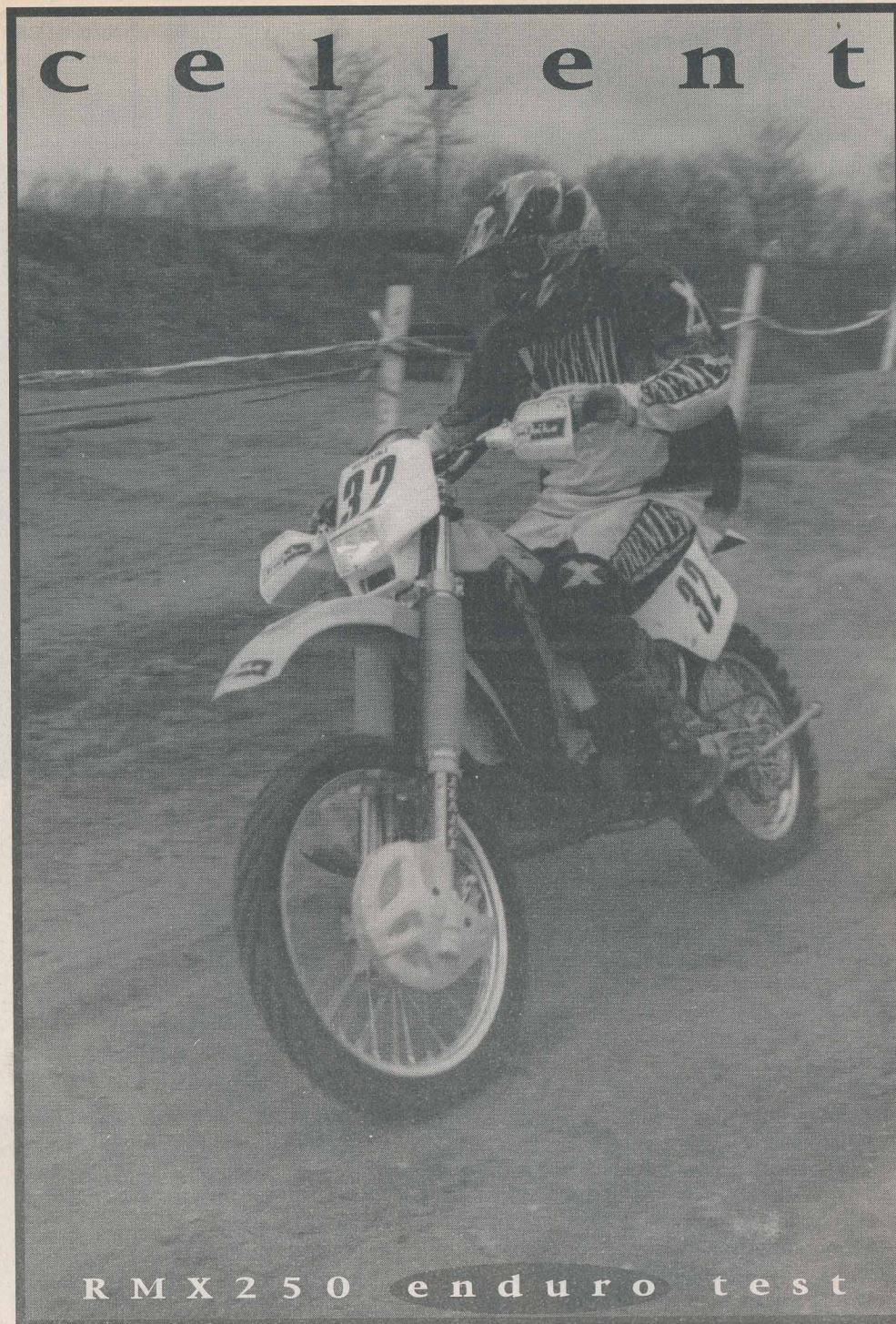


Wooden-Tops: RMX is the perfect woods weapon; light, quick steering and with lots of usable torque

fuel tank and of course a lighting system. New for this year is a return to conventional (ie right way up forks) though there's nothing conventional about the RMX's new cartridge forks which like the Honda XR250R we tested earlier this year comes with forged alu-

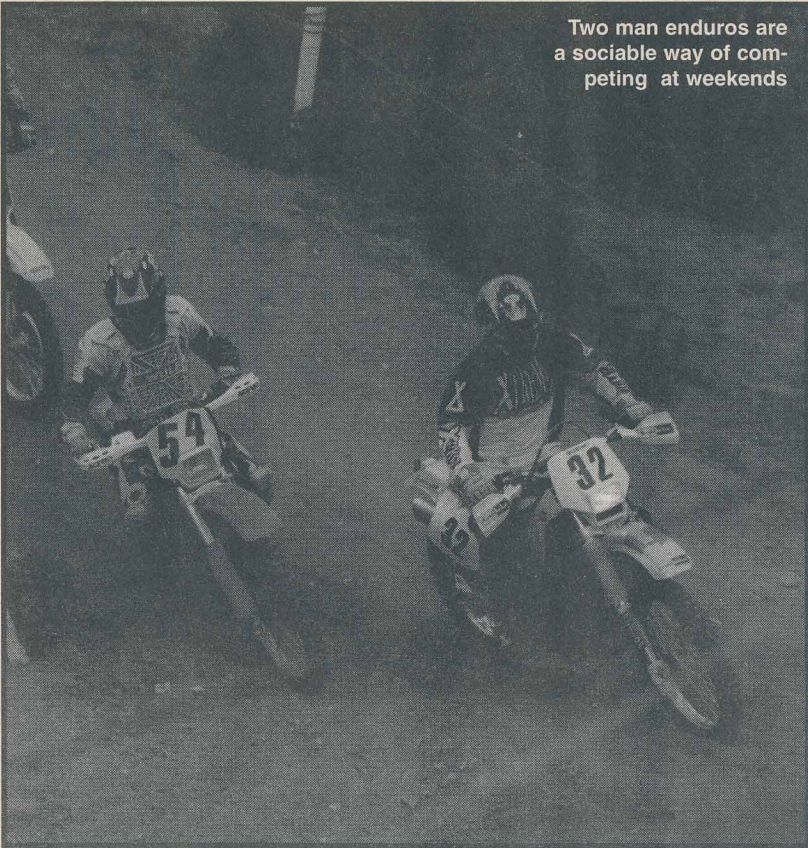
fact the motor responds to the slightest twitch of the throttle by gathering speed at an alarming pace, and there's plenty of top end rush available to exploit if you really want it. The motor itself is an all new design with smooth cast aluminium crankcases with fewer

c e l l e n t

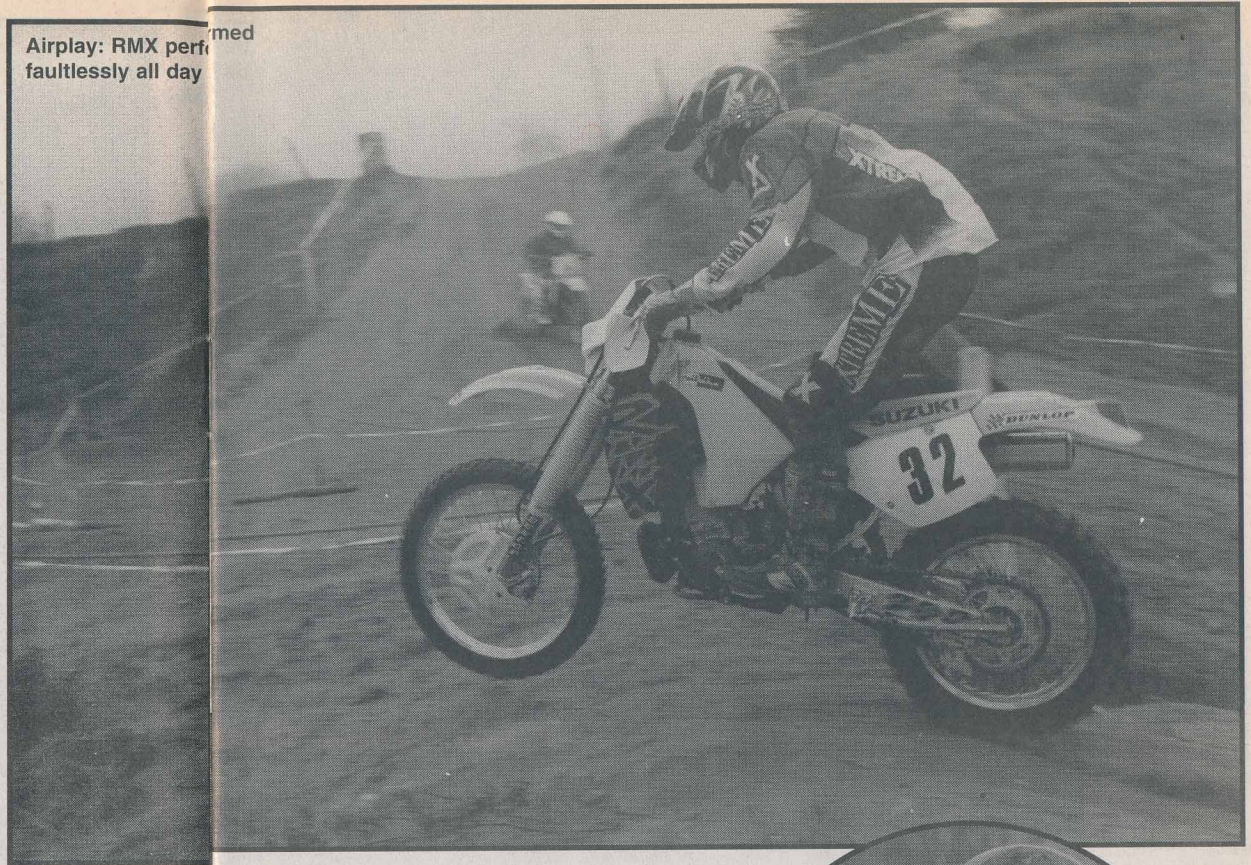


RMX250 enduro test

Two man enduros are a sociable way of competing at weekends



Airplay: RMX performed faultlessly all day



knooks and crannies to trap the dirt than the previous engine. For the technically minded it's a 249cc, single cylinder two stroke, with case-reed induction and a three stage power valve. Juice is imbibed via a 38mm Keihin carburettor and exhaust gases exit via a sensibly muted exhaust system and ally silencer.

Aside from the forks which I've already mentioned, the chassis is a conventional affair: a semidouble cradle Chrome-moly steel frame mates to an alloy bolt on rear sub-frame and is suspended by a link-type, single shock rear end with a piggyback shock absorber

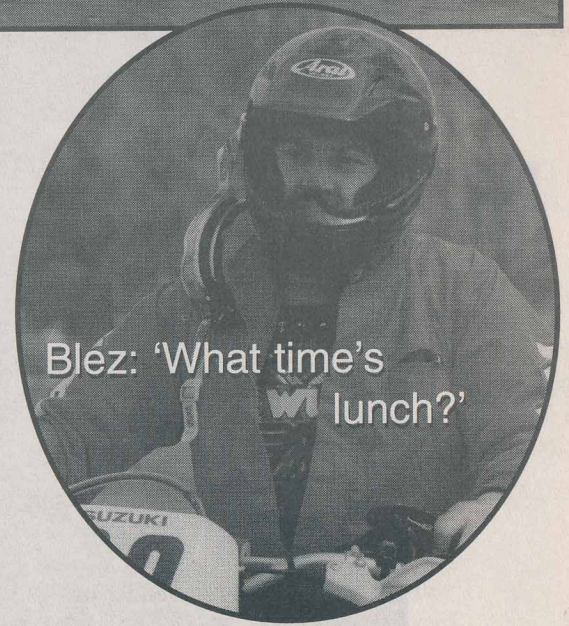
adjustable for preload, compression and of course rebound. Bolted on top of this lot is a stylish set of flush-fitting bodywork with an 11 litre plastic fuel tank, slimline two-tone seat, and neat front and rear lights (with 55W headlamp), which are permanently wired on. As you would expect, discs front and rear provide the stopping ability though in common with a lot of dirt bikes these days the rear is difficult to use delicately - though the front feels rather more progressive. Suzuki claim a dry weight of 108kg for the RMX which doesn't seem far off, but although it feels light to chuck around, shorter riders will have to

contend with a reasonably lofty 37.6in seat height, thanks to more than a foot of ground clearance.

The by now traditional TBM way of appraising any enduro bike is to enter it in a two man enduro so that two different riders can judge the bike's performance before comparing notes.... so that's exactly what we did.

Paul Blezard

I'm not the world's greatest two-stroke fan and I hadn't ridden a 'stinkwheel' in the white heat of competition since the '94 Le Touquet beach race (on a YZ250). Sure, I'd enjoyed the odd trail out-



Blez: 'What time's lunch?'

RMX-
cellent

On the up: The RMX pulled so strongly in the misdrange that climbs were never a problem



RMX-
cellent



Blezard uses a bit of 'body English' to coax the RMX down one of the sandy hills

ing on the ed's CRM 250 but as the Blaxhall two-man enduro painfully reminded me, there's a world of difference between trail riding and actually racing.

There's very little to criticise on the Suzuki RMX250 we had for the occasion apart from the fact that it is a pre-mix two stroke (I know that for many people that's a plus rather than a minus, but not for me). Slinging a leg over the beast for the first time in the parking area it felt 'right' - light and well suspended.

Both the torque and the power are more than ample for enduro purposes and if anything the anchors are too sharp, particularly the rear, in fact the trouble with riding a bike like the RMX is that you can't blame the machinery for your poor performance. Unlike the bunch of 'greenhorn' squaddies

that I found myself alongside at scrutineering. With their bog-standard Harley-Armstrong 350s, complete with indicators, pannier frames and trail tyres.

As our *Chef d'Equipe* handed the Suzook over to me at the end of his first half hour session I had little inkling of the purgatory that lay ahead, but within the first couple of hundred yards I discovered why he'd said, 'Pull the

clutch in if you're gonna' use the back brake', as the merest touch on the pedal brought the bike to an instant halt with a stalled engine. I'd no sooner got the bike going again when I nearly fell off taking a wide line on the first hill to avoid a stranded squaddie. The firm ground of our pre-race pedestrian track inspection had already metamorphosed into soft sandy substrate reminiscent of the dunes at Le Touquet - lawks!

As well as struggling to ride in 'two-stroke mode' I also had to call up 'soft sand technique' from the old memory banks as well. By the time I'd recovered my equilibrium the Harley had got back in front and I was stuck behind it on a narrow section through the woods as the RMX strained at the leash like a lurcher scenting a bitch on heat. Then when I finally did squirt past, the front wheel washed out on a soft corner and I lost another half minute picking the bike up and re-starting - though it has to be said the RMX is dead easy to fire up, even after a tumble!

It was good to get airborne cresting one of the motocross hills and the RMX felt really stable both in the air and on landing - which is more than can be said for its rider. After several more incompetent stalls I finally completed my first lap a disastrous eight minutes after setting out - (The leaders were lapping in just over four). I really was riding like an old woman - the squaddies were just about the only riders I was passing while a host of headbangers left me trailing in their wake.



RMX-
cellent

There were a couple of jumps on a narrow section of the course where I got cocky on the second lap, pulled too hard on the bars and nearly went over backwards - I resolved to calm down a bit and get some more jumping practice in at the earliest opportunity. By the end of my first half hour my fingers had just about seized up and I was dripping in sweat.

I felt a bit better at the start of the second session - for all of half a

lap - then I got barged off by a faster rider and when I got going again there appeared to be something wrong with the RMX's transmission. I struggled to the top of the first hill then stopped to investigate - in fact it was the right handguard that had jammed against the front brake lever and was holding it on.

But after a few more laps I finally started to get into something of a rhythm - the key was riding in higher gears on the RMX's lovely fat

torque curve. No point in screaming the thing through the lower gears when you can hang on to a higher one and simply ride the plumpious midrange. I'd just started to feel vaguely competent when I had another disaster: I got a bit out of shape on the whoops at the back of the circuit near the pond and I swear a tree leapt straight into my path! I hit it square on and came a real cropper - I was expecting signs of serious GBH to the front of the bike but it was barely even marked, let alone damaged. It's a testimony to the strength of the Suzuki that the massive front forks and yokes had taken the impact without flinching, unlike Yours Truly - I'd lost a chunk out of my shin. Ow!

'...I hit the tree square on and came a real cropper'

By now I'd rather lost confidence in my ability - I really missed the engine braking you get with a four stroke single and the rear brake was positioned awkwardly high for me. Boy was I ready for the lunch break!

For some reason I seemed to get on better in the reverse direction in the afternoon, apart from one rutted hill which I never quite got right, although (unlike many others) at least I never got stuck there. Although the berming soon changed to suit the new direction, the whoops got more 'whoopy' and knacking as the event wore on. I know the theory of riding whoops - skim the front wheel from the crest of one to the crest of the next with

Enduro test

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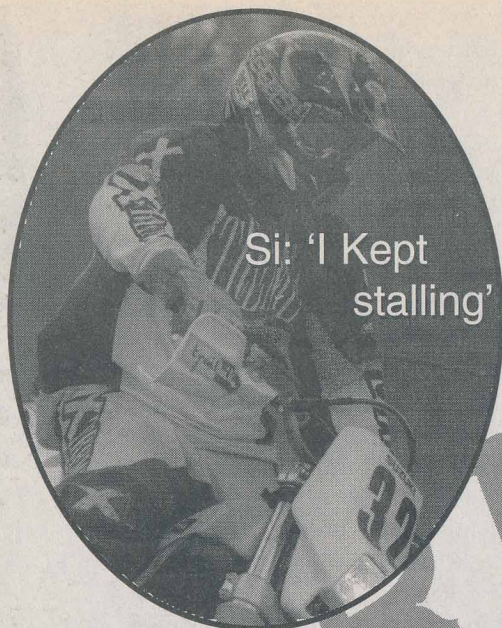
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Si: 'I Kept stalling'

with a '+1' sign (meaning just one more lap). I cranked it up a bit for the final lap but instead of getting the 'In' sign when I next came round, the pit board was showing '+1' again - this showed heartening faith in my ability to put in a quickish lap, but I knew I couldn't afford to stall or fall off. About 200 yards from the changeover area the front stepped right out and I had to strain every muscle in my body to save it, but I just managed to clock in right on my minute and we completed the day with no penalties at all. Phew!

My first experience of a *two-man* enduro left me, above all, with a determination to get some practice and instruction on a motocross track before we tackle the special stages on the Welsh Two Day next month. As for the RMX, any faults were really with the rider - a serious 'crosser or enduro-ist would find it the perfect tool, but from the evidence of this event I suspect that a 400 four-stroke would be more my 'thang'.

Si Melber

I must admit I liked the RMX - even before I rode the thing. It looks purposeful, designed to do the job and the styling is spot on. Fortunately it steered and handled as well as it looked. In the heat of the enduro it felt light, punchy and responsive with the traditional Suzuki slick shifting five speed gearbox making changes a pleasure. The clutch was one of the lightest I've come across and gave no trouble even on some of the testing sandy climbs, and the engine felt more than powerful

perfectly timed blips of the throttle - I can even do it for a whoop or two - but to keep it up for a hundred yards or more, no way! The way those supercross stars do it almost non-stop for lap after lap seems nothing short of superhuman to me.

I caught my foot painfully against the bank on the narrowest

section of the course but also had the satisfaction of holding my line when a faster rider tried to muscle me out of the way on one section of the motocross course and came a cropper in the attempt. I was passing many more riders than I had been in the morning and

was just getting into the swing of things when the pit board came out

'I had the satisfaction of holding my line when a faster rider tried to muscle me out of the way'

RMX-
cellent

enough on the short (approximately 1.5 mile) circuit at which we tried it, punching out of corners with a ferocity to match any of the 'crossers.

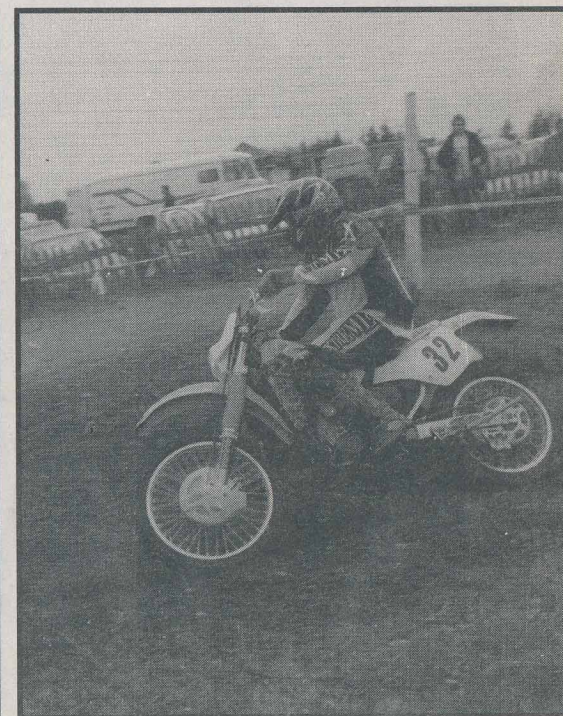
It's really no surprise that the RMX has virtually taken over from where the KDX200 left off as the clubman's weapon of choice: it's fast, easy to get on with and does things in such a predictable manner that you can't help but be impressed with it, and of course it's more powerful than the KDX - and looks better to boot. I initially had trouble with the bike stalling every time I touched the back brake, but speeding up the idle a smidge (a simple twist of the knurled choke knob), soon cured that and it gave no more trouble. I would have preferred a sidestand that swung com-

pletely out the way rather than just back to the swing-arm as I managed to keep getting my foot caught behind it when trailing a leg in slippery left-handers. Aside from that there are no real complaints except to say that £4,399 seems a lot to pay for a two-stroke dirt bike - even one as well designed as the Suzuki.

From an owner's point of view the RMX should be an easy bike to look after, it's sensibly designed, resilient to hard knocks (I particularly liked the sensible bolt-on engine guard bars which could be changed easily if they got damaged), and reports we've had from people who've ridden them on the trail have without exception, all been glowing. Yep, the new Suzuki RMX250 definitely comes recommended.

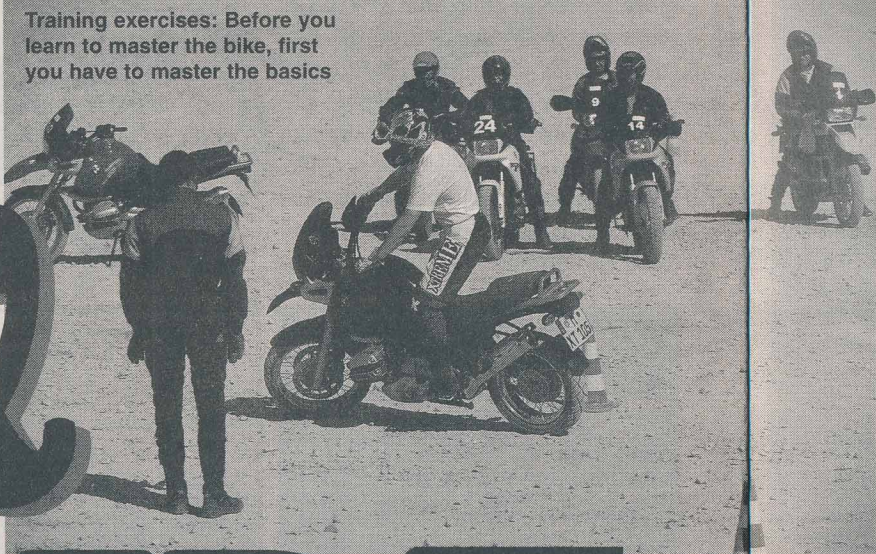
Suzuki RMX250

- Engine:** Liquid cooled, single cylinder two-stroke
- Displacement:** 249cc
- Bore/Stroke:** 67x70.8mm
- Transmission:** 5-speed
- Ignition:** Electronic
- Wheelbase:** 1485mm (58.5in)
- Ground Clearance:** 340mm (13.4in)
- Seat Height:** 955mm (37.6in)
- Dry weight:** 108kg (238 lbs)
- Suspension/f:** Telescopic, adjustable for compression (14 way) and rebound (18 way)
- Suspension/r:** Link type, single shock adjustable for preload, rebound and compression (21 way)
- Brakes:** Discs front and rear
- Tyres/f:** 80/100-21"
- Tyres/r:** 110/100-18"



PARK

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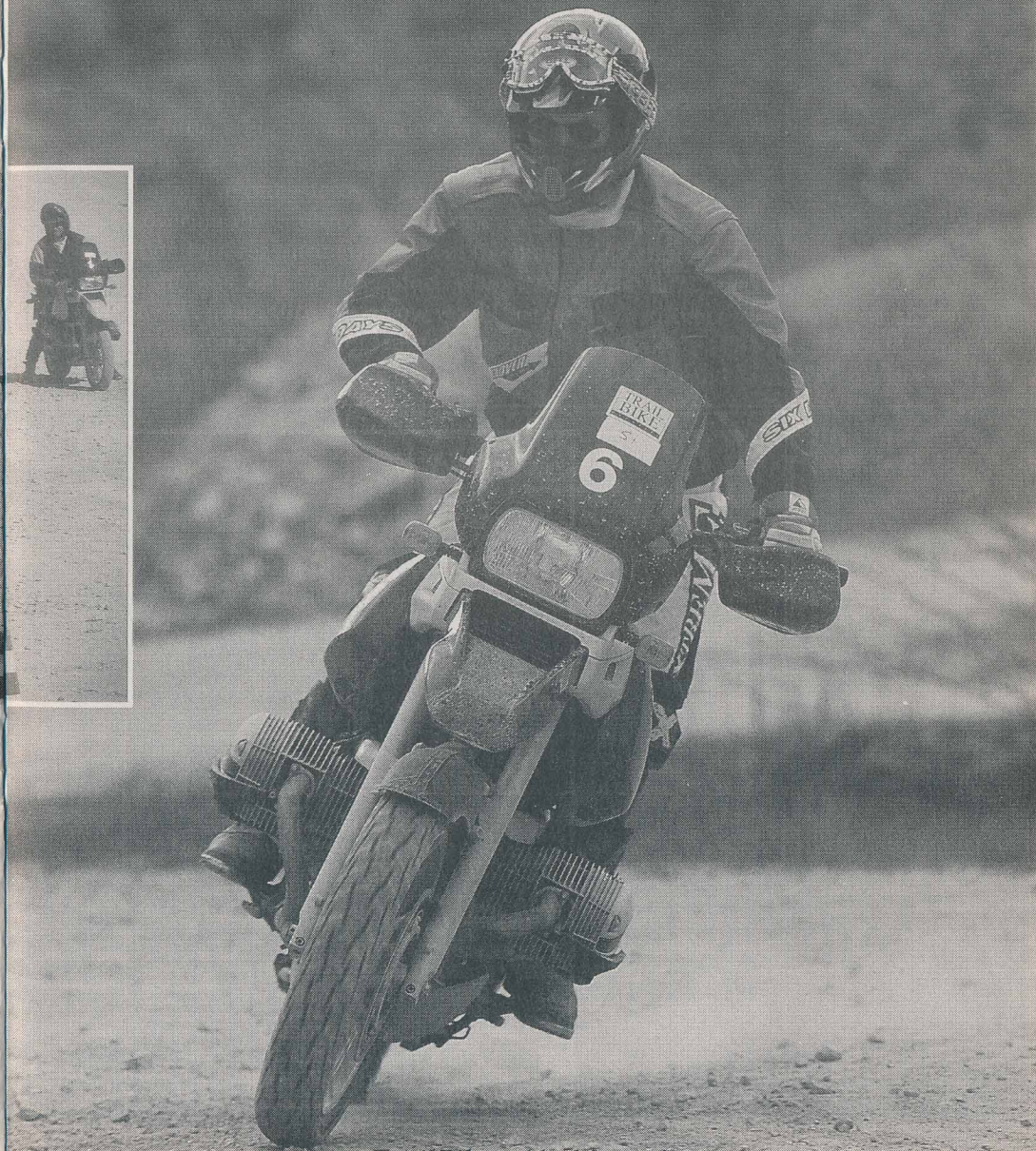


Training exercises: Before you learn to master the bike, first you have to master the basics

RIDE

Photos: Phil Masters

AT BMW's 'Enduro Park' in Germany they teach you how to ride off road BMW-style. Si Melber took up the challenge



PARK & RIDE

Seventy miles north west of Munich in Germany, in the peaceful Altmühltal Valley lies a stone and gravel quarry, that's unremarkable except for a discreet BMW badge on the gate at the entrance. Enter inside and instead of the usual array of earthmovers, bulldozers and tipper trucks there's a line of 40 pristine BMW bikes, freshly washed and glinting in the sunshine, awaiting the arrival of the next contingent of riders. For this is the BMW 'Enduro' Park at Hechlingen, a sort of outdoor classroom where you can put your trail bike through its paces under the watchful eye of a qualified off road instructor.

Though the Enduro Park is sponsored by BMW and uses BeeEmms for its practise bikes, the schools are run by Motorrad Reisen, a German company specialising in off road touring and instruction, run by former professional off roader (and rally-ist) Richard Schalber. In Germany where trail bike sales are ten times what they are here in the UK, there's a constant demand for high quality training courses to educate riders in the black art of off roading. Let's just get one thing straight though; the word 'enduro' doesn't have the same meaning in German as it does in English. They use the term 'enduro' (or 'soft enduro') to mean any type of off roader (ie what we would call a trail bike), and

the term 'hard enduro' to describe a competition machine. Nevertheless BMW's Enduro Park caters for both hard and soft enduro machines as long as they are road legal and of the four stroke variety.

Whether you are a complete novice looking to venture off road in a controlled environment, or a more experienced rider aiming to brush up on your technique, the course aims to cater for you. Riders are split up into groups depending upon ability and then instructed in various aspects of riding technique. To begin with this entails completing a sort of off road CBT (compulsory Basic Training); instructors first explain, then demonstrate the techniques required to negotiate a particular hazard before getting the group to repeat the technique till they've well and truly mastered it. This begins with relatively simple tasks like turning the bike around in a confined space while standing up on the pegs and learning the correct way to pick the bike up after a tumble, before moving on to more advanced technique like riding ruts, fording deep water, negotiating gravely climbs or just blitzing through soft sand.

Armed with a virtually brand new R1100GS I was all set to storm up a few hills and barrel along some fast gravel roads, but the instructors had other ideas, so it was off to the main part of the quar-

'Most of us learn by encountering hazards and dealing with them as we go along'



Gripping Stuff: Stopping a GS on a slope like this isn't easy, but it is possible.... just

PARK & RIDE

ry to practise riding slowly around a series of cones. It has to be said that if you've done some off roading before then the thought of a cone slalom - even a one handed one - may not hold any great attraction, but it's amazing how much you can learn by first practising a technique slowly then repeating it time after time, building up speed as you go.

If you think about it, how often do you get to practise your off road tech-

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nique? Most of us learn by encountering hazards and dealing with them as we go along - though of course this means that you're never sure whether there may be a better technique than the one you're using. What the Enduro school aims to show is the correct way to approach certain hazards, then they leave it up to you to develop your own style. For example steep, loose surface descents are (in my case) usually tackled with the throttle pinned wide and without touching the brakes, but what if you have to stop to avoid a fallen rider? Having chosen a suitable 45 degree slope, instructor Gregor set the group the challenge of stopping on it. Not the easiest of tasks but a satisfying one to master. Likewise braking from speed on gravel. Most riders only find out how quickly they can stop in an emergency situation but with a little tuition, plenty of run off and enough practise it's possible to quickly find both your own and the bike's limits - with and without ABS.

While beginners are instructed in the basics of keeping control on a loose surface the advanced group have moved on to tackle bigger hazards, sharper descents and more challenging terrain - powersliding their way around the quarry on 220 kilos of Teutonic trailie. After a weekend spent learning, practising and then perfecting new techniques, riders are taught to string it

all together on a long trail ride around the surrounding roads and tracks, culminating in a return to the quarry and a sort of feet up ride around all the man-made hazards.

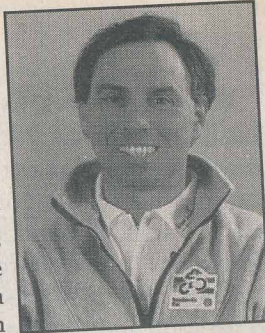
Ultimately the BMW Enduro Park is most likely to appeal to existing BMW owners who may or may not have taken their machines off road before. With the customary levels of attention to detail you associate with the marque, plus certain weekends reserved specifically for rally preparation and the like, the Enduro Park is well worth a visit if you can get out there - or perhaps worth considering if you're touring in the area. The cost of the course which includes lunches on both days and an evening meal (but not your overnight accommodation) is approximately £312 using your own bike or £460 if you hire one of their GS's. It really is amazing how much you can learn in a quarry. →



Main pic: The R1100GS is a heavy bike to muscle through soft sand. Above: Oh dear. Proof that even the editor gets it wrong sometimes

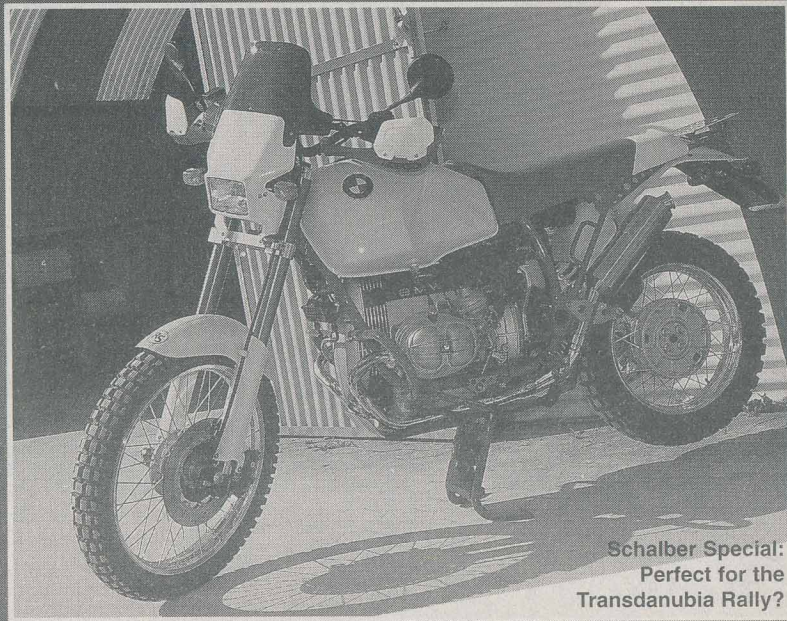
PARK RIDE

Apart from overseeing the running of the BMW Enduro Park, Richard Schalber is one of the organisers of the Transdanubia rally; a 3000km, seven day event which takes competitors on a ride from Munich through Austria, the Czech Republic and finally Slovakia. The Transdanubia is primarily a fun event aimed at big roadgoing trailies, so the route is challenging but not impossible and there are always plenty of helpers along the way to give you a push if you need one. The rally has separate classes for all different types of bikes, and anyone on a serious enduro iron or with a competition licence rides in a separate class to the roadgoing bikes - there's even a class just for BMWs. This year the event takes place between September 1 - 8 and costs £870, which includes all your meals, bivouac and anything else you might need except for fuel.



The perfect machine for the Transdanubia is presumably the BMW R100GS 'Schalber Special', designed by the man himself. It weighs just 184kg, comes with White Power suspension (including USD forks), and includes a whole host of trick parts such as carbon fibre bash-plate, mini indicators, light-weight Acerbis plastics, stubby stainless exhaust and uprated brakes. For the touring rider there's the 'Schalber Touring which dispenses with the WP suspension and instead

comes with standard BeeEmm running gear, a shorter single seat, 45L fuel tank, taller screen and fitted panniers. For further information on either the Rally or the Schalber bikes try phoning Richard Schalber on 00 49 83 24 28 76.



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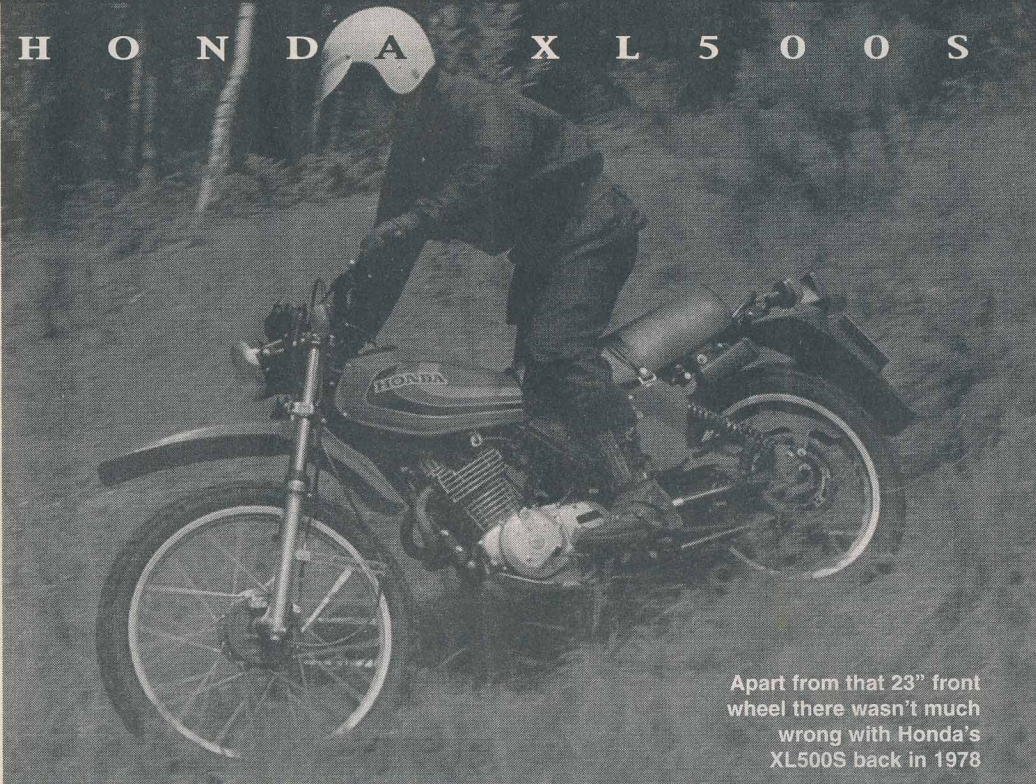
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ONE CARE-LESS OWNER

H O N D A X L 5 0 0 S



Apart from that 23" front wheel there wasn't much wrong with Honda's XL500S back in 1978

In the summer of 1984 I swapped my blown XR500 plus a wad of cash for a much healthier XL500 because I was just fed up with spending hundreds of pounds re-building the XR engine only to have it blow up on me again a few weeks later. The XL was a white 1978 'S' model owned by a bloke who was looking for a cheap 500 Honda motor to shoe-horn into an RS250 road bike. I happily handed over £350 plus the dead XR500 and rode off lickety-spit on the XL.

UGK 669T felt as quick as my XR although on paper it was supposed to have 6 fewer bhp (32 instead of 38). The owner had fitted a Supertrapp exhaust and converted the front wheel from 23 inches to

21, added Renthal bars, Sebac shocks and an 'unbreakable' front motocross mud-guard. Shortly after acquiring the beast I fitted an RS250 flywheel, alternator, and crankcase cover and 12 volt electrical ancillaries to ensure decent lights, just as I'd previously done with my XR.

On 25 August 1984 I got a fresh MOT and the next day took part in my first ever enduro with my mate 'Roderick the mad Mick from Limerick' who had the later XL500R Pro-link model. This 'hare and hounds' event was one of a whole series that year organised for the AMCA by Nigel Collingwood and it was mainly aimed at AMCA motocrossers who fancied a bit of a change. Rod and I were the

Back in the early 'Eighties Honda's XL500 was still a good middleweight trail bike. Paul Blezard owned two of them and this is what happened...

only two entrants who actually rode our trusty steeds to the event on the Queen's Highway - and we very nearly didn't make it. First my panniers caught fire on the M25 and then Rod ran out of petrol - but we made it to Turk's Farm near Tunbridge Wells just in time for the start.

The conditions were really dry and dusty and it came as a shock to be comprehensively 'roosted' by the faster riders who took no prisoners. My notes of the day say, 'Special test nearly killed us - squashed my balls on a post; took an hour off for lunch; one impossible bog - definitely need a trials tyre and lower gearing for the next one' - in my ignorance I had been using a well-worn Michelin T61 trail

tyre and the standard, 100mph gearing. .

Less than a week later I was thrashing the poor XL flat out down the A2 trying to catch a ferry to France. I missed the boat but was impressed by the bike's ability to maintain an indicated 90-95mph without any apparent distress. Over in Paris the XL made an excellent learner bike for my French girlfriend to whom I gave a lesson at a public training area in La Defense; like Yamaha's XT500 before it, the XL500 had a much lower seat height than the subsequent generations of Paris-Dakar-inspired monsters and so felt much more user-friendly for inexperienced or short-arsed riders.

Back in Blighty the following weekend I rode up to Birmingham with Rod for a 'Superstars weekend' at the newly opened National Motorcycle Training Centre which was located on the hallowed ground of the old BSA test track at Small Heath. (The grandiose title was nothing to do with the quality of the competitors but came from the TV programme of the same name and included a whole variety of different tests, both motorcycle-based and others). One of the trickier exercises was a sort of arena trial with a whole variety of obstacles which definitely were *not* designed with XL500s in mind..... I remember being astonished when I actually managed to ride over a car, despite the bike's standard gearing.

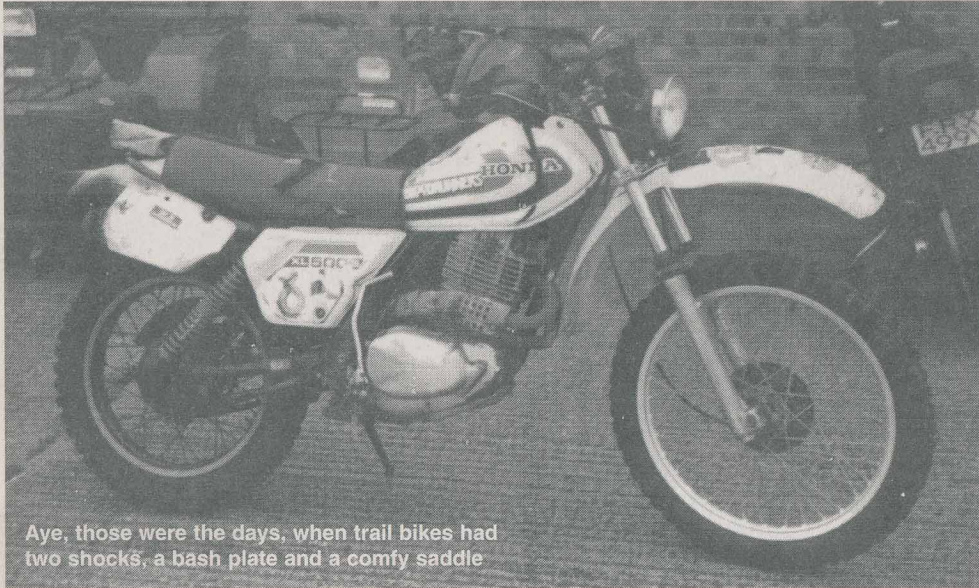
The Superstars event continued on the Sunday but Rod and I decided that we'd rather do an AMCA enduro down near Bath instead, so headed down south on the Saturday evening. Unfortunately Rod's usually reliable bike broke down on the way but I managed to do 14 laps in

ONE CARE-LESS OWNER

the event the next day, which for me was a good result.

Three weeks later Rod and I set off for another AMCA enduro near Conover in Shropshire. I had left my XL-S at Quasar-builder Malcolm Newell's place in Wiltshire so the first 80 miles or so were done perched on the pillion of Rod's XL-R. He never made any concessions for pillions, no matter how inexperienced, but he was a bloody good rider; (earlier in the year he had taken my girlfriend pillion

Gung ho as ever, Rod shot off like a lunatic in the enduro next day but hurt his foot really badly on the second lap. Going a bit more steadily I managed to put in an unprecedented and enjoyable 19 laps. But to put this impressive-sounding achievement in perspective I should mention that I was comprehensively beaten by a precocious 16 year old on a 50cc machine. Then again, his name was Paul Edmondson and he outrode most of the field, coming past us like an



Aye, those were the days, when trail bikes had two shocks, a bash plate and a comfy saddle

when we went trail riding and she refused to ever ride with him again). Suffice to say that it was a high-adrenaline ride down to Calne, matched only by the white-knuckle solo scratch up the A-roads of Herefordshire in the dark. (It always irritated me that Rod's XL-R was not only faster than my XL-S and had better lights, but that it always required less petrol when we stopped to fill up.)

angry wasp with a 'yip, yip, yip,' from his screaming little stroker.

Less than a fortnight later Rod and I set off for Harwich, Holland and the Veronica beach race at Scheveningen, just outside the Hague. We were the object of some astonishment from the organisers as the only competitors daft enough to have ridden there on our race-bikes, but I didn't worry about that as I



was too busy fitting a secondhand motocross tyre I had just bought for £1.50 in the paddock. I'd brought a smaller front sprocket with me but as it turned out it didn't fit, so I was left, as ever, with my tall gearing - fine for a brain-out motocrosser, not so great for a tentative trail rider on a road legal XL500S. I doubt whether a more unsuitable combination of bike and rider has ever competed at Scheveningen in its entire history.

I decided to treat the man-made barriers as sandy trials sections rather than the MX jumps they were meant to be and got over most of them quite well until my goggles steamed up and I fell off. After that I was struggling and had barely got half way round the first lap before I was being lapped by head-bangers on 500cc 'crossers, and I'd only just started my second lap when the chequered flag came out and I was forced to finish!

The course was really quite hairy; apart from the nasty great jumps along the seafront wall the return blast along the water's edge included riding between

October 1984 and the be-permed Paul Blezard awaits the start of the Scheveningen beach race in Holland having ridden there on his race bike!

the legs of the pier followed by a dodgy chicane in which you were in severe danger of hitting the lunatics coming the other way, especially after the tide started to come in!

After the first race the trusty XL was making some nasty noises so I missed the second race in order to investigate. Everything seemed okay though so I put the crankcase cover back on and returned to the fray for the third 20 minute sprint and did somewhat better, completing almost two whole laps before it ended.

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ONE CARE-LESS OWNER

Frankly I was relieved to survive Scheveningen with bike and bod still in one piece. To top the whole thing off we had the roughest crossing back across the North Sea that it's ever been my misfortune to encounter and I had to interrupt my residency at the bar in order to take an urgent call on the 'big white telephone' in the gentlemen's facilities. Of course my rear tyre started to deflate as soon as I got back on terra firma and after riding from Colchester to Brentwood with a flat, I just made it back to Barnes in London with the aid of a can of Finilec. (You didn't imagine for one moment that I would be carrying a spare tube or levers did you?).

In November '84 the XL started conk-

ing out for no apparent reason and also developed a mysterious misfire which defied all attempts at investigation but it was running well enough for me to ride down to Didcot with Roderick for the final round of the 1984 AMCA enduro series, appropriately called 'The Gamblers'. This time Rod's XL-R dropped a valve after 6 laps, whereas my trusty XL-S kept going for the duration to complete a heady 11 laps in 'impossibly slippery' conditions. By the end of the day I'd crashed heavily several times, smashed the lights at both ends and twisted the forks, but I managed to patch things up sufficiently to ride the 90 odd miles back to London.

I finished the year with my most heroic (or hair-brained) ride so far - an AMCA enduro near Aberystwyth, which was about twice as many road miles away as Scheveningen. I set off from London on the Saturday afternoon but had only reached Oxford when my usually trusty beast broke down. Fortunately I traced the problem to a loose earth wire bolt and was soon heading west again as the sun set and the rain came down. I was amazed at how well my motocross rear tyre gripped in the rain, and I actually had a thoroughly enjoyable thrash up the A44 to the wild west coast, arriving in Aberystwyth in time to get a couple of pints down me in the university bar. I stayed the night with a friend on the campus and got to the start of the enduro the next morning with minutes to spare. However, all the road miles had not done much for the knobbles on my motocross tyre - there was one really slippery uphill climb where my now practically worn out rear tyre just spun uselessly - and I had no option but to get

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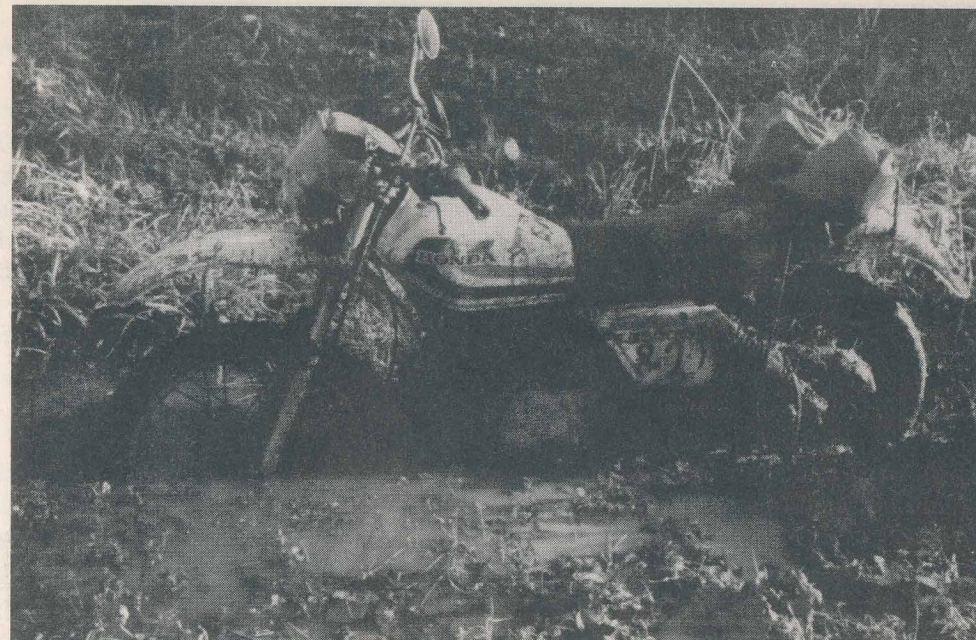
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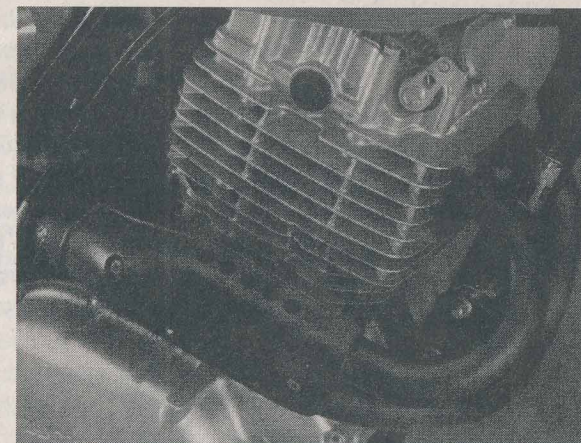
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Above: Bugged down, during a solo trail ride in Sussex

Right: XL engine was visually identical to the more powerful XR lump



off and push. Needless to say all the other competitors thought I was completely bonkers, and at the AMCA prizegiving at the end of year, I was awarded a special prize for riding to all the events on the bike.

By now the XL's top end was sounding distinctly rattly but that didn't stop me taking it trail riding down in Sussex the following weekend. I managed to get it stuck up to the axles in mud and had a fairly energetic time extracting it before the chain broke - though I managed to bodge that back together with a rusty old spring link that I found in the lining of my Barbour jacket.

In fact chain breakages became a recurring theme for a while until I sussed out that you couldn't get away with leaving out the outer O-rings from a spring-link, just because they were a bugger to fit!

The chain broke again during a snow-filled trail ride with my trail riding

ONE CARE-LESS OWNER



It's 1985 at the TT and Blez stops to catch his breath after struggling up a slippery grass slope on the trusty XL - note front fork brace to try and stop the skinny front end from twisting when braking hard on the road

mentor Alan Seagrave, who, like Rod, had an XL500R. Rod broke his wrist sand racing his XL-R the following week and I fell off the XL-S for the first (and only) time on the road while thrashing round a slick Hammersmith Broadway. Then to add insult to injury, some local toe-rags stole the bike from outside my house, but abandoned it only a few hundred yards away. (*Do you think they were trying to tell you something Paul?* - Ed). The ignition switch was broken so I just hot-wired it after that and it never gave any trouble.

By the time I thrashed back to Paris in April the XL-S was starting to get a bit thirsty, recording a fairly unimpressive 35mpg on the run, and I got stopped by the 'Service des Douanes' on the N1 for good measure. In May when I checked it, the oil filter was full of large pieces of metal and the oil looked as if it had been mixed with mercury, but I've got no

record of replacing any actual parts (*or even the oil?* - Ed). My mate Alan helped me do some basic maintenance on the beast before I thrashed it up to the Isle of Man in the company of four French representatives of the FFM (the Frog equivalent of the BMF/MAG). They asked me to slow down after a spirited run up the old A41 to Birmingham, despite being mounted on a variety of shiny and expensive new test bikes with much more power.

The XL was also entertaining to ride around the TT course with the throttle nailed hard against the stop. It made short work of dithering poseurs on sports bikes even though it could barely crack the ton on the run down to Creg ny Baa. Trail riding with Dave Taylor and friends proved more difficult and I suffered on steep, slippery climbs with my high gearing and T61 rear tyre. Nevertheless it was enjoyable enough to convince me that if you can

only take one bike to the TT, a big trailie is the thing to have.

Astonishingly, the trusty XL-S was still running more than six months later when Le Touquet time came around (Feb '86). I made a concerted effort to blag more suitable machinery off all the importers, but for some reason none of them had anything available for that particular weekend! (*Surprise, surprise* - Ed). I was determined to have a crack at the world's

biggest beach race regardless, so while Rod went out and bought a spanking new and infinitely more suitable YZ250, I merely splashed out on a new chain and sprockets for my trusty Honda thumper and headed for the ferry.

Can Blez survive Le Touquet on the long suffering XL-S? All will be revealed in next month's TrailBike Magazine - on sale 1 July.

XL500S

Eng: Air cooled, sohc, 4-stroke, single
 Bore/Str: 89x80mm
 Displ: 498cc
 Comp: 8.6:1
 Carb: 32mm
 Power: 32bhp @ 6250rpm
 Trans: 5-Speed, 14/39 T
 Frame: Steel cradle
 Forks: 8" travel
 Shocks: 7" travel
 Wheel/f: 3.00x23
 Wheel/r: 4.6x18
 Brake/f: Expanding shoe
 Brake/r: Expanding shoe
 Lighting: 6V
 Length: 85.6in
 Width: 33in
 W/Base: 54.7in
 S/Height: 33.8in
 G/Clear: 10.2in
 Fuel Cap: 2.2 gallons
 Dry Wt: 130kg, 286 lb
 Curb Wt: 141kg, 311 lb
 Colours: Red or white

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BACK TO

SKOOL



They say you can't teach an old dog new tricks, but could Crasher Cornish be taught how to stay upright at the Team Green MX School?

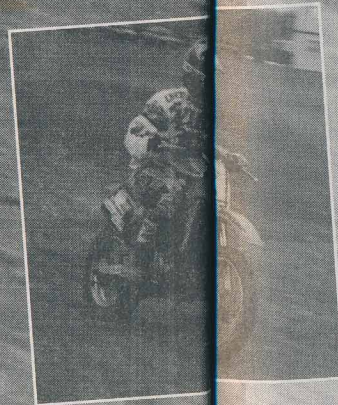
You may find this hard to believe, but recently several unkind wits have accused me of spending more time going over the bars than sat holding them. Now I know that sometimes in my eagerness to impress anyone who happens to be looking (even the odd Welsh blackface long-horn) I have been known to get a little out of shape and bin the odd test bike, but it was only when GruppenFuhrer Melber ordered me off to Geoff Mayes's 'Off Road Try Out' for novices and complete beginners that I realised my riding skills may need a little tidying up.

Geoff Mayes has been running his mobile training schools for several years and it's really aimed at riders who have little or no off roading experience. In fact total newcomers to two wheels are also welcome and with anyone from eight years upwards being catered for I was just hoping I wouldn't suffer the ultimate humiliation of being blown into the ropes by a ten year old psy-

ched up Power Rangers clone. Arriving at the Wild Tracks moto park on a uncharacteristically sunny Sunday in

April we were welcomed by ex-professional motocrosser Geoff, and after a quick introduction to the way in which the school was run it was time to get 'kitted up'. To you or me this simple ritual is second nature, but to most of the class of off road 'virgins' the complexities of body armour, kidney belts and ski-type boot straps took some getting used to. Wow, we hadn't even got onto the bikes and I was top of the class already.

Once kitted up Geoff went through a safety briefing familiarising everyone with the bikes which included a Kawasaki KLX250, KX125, KX100 plus big and small wheeled 60s and 80s for the kids. Though best of all there was a spanking new '96 model KDX200 which I grabbed before anyone else could get their sticky mits on it. As each pupil shares a bike between two, we were all paired off according to our respective abilities and headed off to a flat dirt track style oval to get the hang of our chosen mounts, before changing to the schoolboy MX track. Soon Geoff was busy shouting out instructions to those who needed it and spending time showing novices the ropes while the more experienced riders among us swapped bikes and



Young or old, big or small, hair or no hair there's plenty of fun to be had at the Team Green MX School

BACK TO SKOOL



High flyer: Learning to handle jumps is all part of the fun



'96 model KDX200 was Dave's to play with for the day

generally pleased themselves.

After a while and with class confidence running high we all took to the main motocross track, though mixing it with the adrenaline-pumped Jeramy McGrath wannabees proved a little too much for some of the pupils and they retired to the relative safety of the school-boy track. That's the beauty of this type of training day, everyone can find their own level and ride at their own chosen pace.

Geoff says that all shapes, sizes and abilities of rider are welcome, with the main emphasis being on fun in a safe environment. My classmates included an eight year old lad who's mum wanted to see if it was worth shelling out for a bike and all of the relevant gear; a young lady that had only ridden road bikes and wanted to show her boyfriend how to ride off road; and a bunch of Geoff's regulars from



Crasher Cornish just managing to stay ahead of an eight year old novice, experiencing his first ever ride on a dirt bike!

Derby who don't want the hassles of buying and running their own MX bikes.

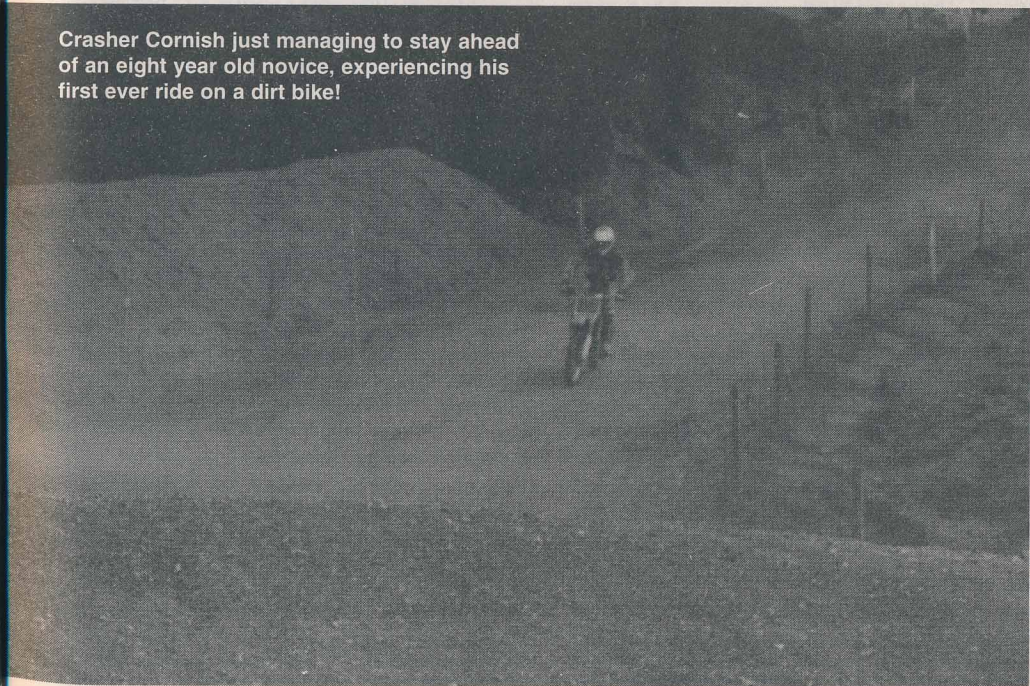
By the end of the day everyone was fired up for another crack at off roading. Several punters were already sorting out finances to purchase their own bikes and each rider had vowed to return to Geoff's school

and maybe try out another track. Let's face it without a steady flow of youngsters into our sport the future would be grim indeed, but thanks to training days such as Geoff's, more and more newcomers are tasting the delights of off roading which can only be good news for everyone concerned

Did I actually learn anything enquired a curious Ed on my return? Yeah I certain-

ly did. Whatever you do, DON'T stop at the side of a motocross track waiting for the photographer to set up their gear. I did just this and almost got my left arm torn off by a psychotic eight year old, out of control and flat stick in fourth gear. As for correcting my riding errors however, I guess I must already be pretty good because when asked for some tips to help me improve my style Geoff simply shook his head and muttered that he 'Couldn't do anything for me'!

GEOFF MAYES runs his motocross/off road 'try out' days at various venues throughout the year. Prices start from £35.00 which includes bike hire, protective clothing, petrol, insurance and tuition - in fact everything for a cracking day out. Geoff can be contacted on 01449 673140 and tell him 'CRASHER' sent you.



the TRAILBIKE GUIDE

We don't claim this to be the definitive guide to all the trailbikes ever made, merely the sum total of our collective knowledge, trawled from the depths of dim and distant memories and assembled in some sort of order that you may find useful. What we do know is that no-one produces a guide to trail bikes that is as comprehensive as this. This month we have once again split the guide into two parts to allow more space in the magazine for features. This is part two.

LAVERDA

DR650 Atlas: a/c, 4-str, sohc, twin. Strange overweight trailie produced from the dying embers of the Italian Laverda concern. Using the Montjuic engine as its source the Atlas' only claim to fame is the inexplicable 'Soft Ramble' sticker that graced the swingarm. *Verdict: Rare with reason.*

MORINI

Camel: a/c, 4-str, ohv, V-twin. Oddball twin shock, V-twin trailie utilising the heron-headed Morini lump. High saddle and limited spares can be a problem, but otherwise quite robust and great fun if you can master the left-handed kickstart. Not very plentiful, but fairly cheap. *Verdict: Eccentric transport.*

Kanguro: a/c, 4-str, ohv, 344cc, V-twin. Looks like an accident between an XT350 and a Transalp. Lovely engine is a bit dated really, but the Kanguro (couldn't they spell Kangaroo?) is definitely worth a look if you're after something a bit different and don't mind the left-hand kickstart. Sold very slowly and remained in production for a number of years, so it's possible to still find new ones, and they're very cheap for an Italian bike. *Verdict: Strangely alluring.*

MOTO GUZZI

350TT: a/c, 4-str, ohv, V-twin. Middleweight Guzzoid with all the attraction of chicken pox. *Verdict: see below.*

V65TT: a/c, 4-str, ohv, V-twin. Middleweight Guzzi trailie of average ability. Hard work on the dirt... and on the road. Not many around. *Verdict: Masochists only need apply.*

Quota: a/c, 4-str, ohv, V-twin. Big Guzzi that like Triumph's Tiger is really just a road bike in trail bike clothing, but without the Triumph's impressive on road performance. A truly monstrous beast with a seat-height that requires a ladder if you're under 6ft. It makes even the Tiger feel small by comparison. Agricultural engine with torque reaction from the shaft and dangerous lack of ground clearance both on and off road. Good fuel consumption thanks to fuel injection and high gearing, are about all it has going for it. Incredibly expensive when it was launched, but prices did come down. Strictly for straight dirt roads and motorways. Should come with a government health warning. *Verdict: Proves that big is not necessarily beautiful.*

MZ

Ex-East German manufacturer with a reputation of making stodgy but solid bikes. A few a/c, 2-str, 250 ISDT specials around, though most road MZs are robust enough to be 'trailified'. Cheap and cheerful. *Verdict: Worth a trip around the Bloc.*

500 Saxon Country: a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, Rotax-powered single. Old-fashioned looking trail bike, that's really

just a roadster with a set of trail clothes on. Expensive for what it is. *Verdict: Obsolete.*

ROKON

340RT: a/c, 2-str, Sachs-engined, 340cc, single. Obscure US bikes using a snowmobile engine with a pull start and an automatic gearbox. Manufactured during the seventies with a twin shock chassis. *Verdict: Bizarre but wild.*

SUZUKI

TS = a/c then w/c, 2-str, trail.

PE = a/c, 2-str, enduro.

SP = a/c, 4-str, trail.

DR = o-a/c 4-str, trail.

RV125: a/c, 2-str, single. Strange looking fun bike from the seventies with small wheels and balloon tyres designed for riding on sand. Looks a bit like a full size monkey bike. Quite fun, but rare and more than a bit odd.

TS120 Trailcat: a/c, 2-str, single. One of the first purpose built trail bikes to come into the UK in the early Seventies, with unusual, Land Rover style high and low ratio 3x2 gearbox. Lightweight and easy handling twin shock chassis. A bit of a collector's item if you like that sort of thing. *Verdict: For anoraks only.*

TS125/185: a/c, 2-str, single. Early seventies twin shock trailie with distinctive high level pipe which was unusual at the time. Not many left now.

TS125/185ER: a/c, 2-str, single. Peaky learner bike from early Eighties still with 'twin shocks' *Verdict: Not bad considering.*

TS250: a/c, 2-str, single. Much the same as the early 125 but with punchier 250cc motor, and low-level chrome front mudguard.

TS250ER: a/c, 2-str, single. Early Eighties trail bike that's a bigger version of the 125 with twin shocks and electronic ignition.

TS50: a/c, 2-str, single. Undistinguished twin shock trailie.

TS50ER: a/c, 2-str, single. As above.

TS50X: w/c, 2-str, single. Modest trail moped with a roaring 3bhp on tap, and 'full floater' monoshock suspension. Good for a 50 though.

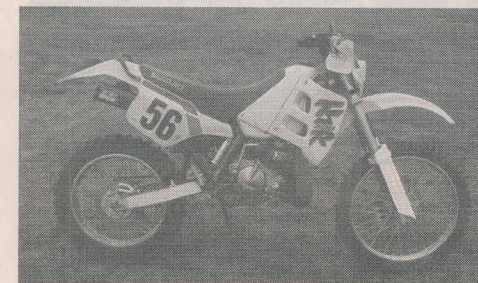
TS125X: w/c, 2-str, 124cc, single. Very competent learner legal trailie. Better

TRAILBIKE GUIDE

than the equivalent DT at the time. *Verdict: Good secondhand buy.*

TS125R: w/c, 2-str, 124cc, single. Latest version of above with power valve fitted that just needs connecting up to get full power.

TS200R: 112kg, w/c, 2-str, 195cc, 35bhp, single. Grey import with its own French championship. Higher spec than UK 125s includes USD forks. Excellent stroker trailie that's not too expensive. Reasonable availability for a grey import. *Verdict: Good value trailie.*



PE175: a/c, 2-str, single. Basic twin-shock clubman enduro bike from the seventies, styled on the RM motocrosser. Poky at the time, but not by today's standards. Last ones had 'full floater' suspension. Reasonable number of tatty ones still about that can be had for not much money.

PE250: a/c, 2-str, single. Similar to 175 but with a better spread of power. Lots of fun, but noisy as hell.

PE400: a/c, 2-str, single. As above but with more power than most people could use in this chassis off-road. *Verdict: Wild.*

SP370: a/c 4-str, sohc, single. Early eighties twin shock trailie that seemed to go on and on. Frugal, robust and reasonably reliable despite lack of balancer shaft. Good, cheap hack.

SP400: a/c 4-str, sohc, single. As above.

DR125: o-a/c, 4-str, sohc, single. Small and not very powerful trailie but with the benefit of being robust, reliable and frugal. *Verdict: Slow but solid.*

DR125 Raider: o-a/c, 4-str, sohc, single. As above but with false header pipe and (marginally) bigger P-D style tank.

DR200: o-a/c, 4-str, sohc, single. As above but despite bigger motor, still a bit

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underpowered. Not sold as street legal. Beware rear wheel collapse on early ones. **DR125/200 Djebel:** o-a/c, 4-str, sohc, single, e/s. Japanese home market version of above with more street mods (including electric boot). Later ones had big single headlamp with surrounding protection bar.



DR250: o-a/c, 4-str, sohc, single. Grey import baby brother of the 350 we get here in the UK, only with USD forks and a brilliant ride height control making it more accessible to little people. *Verdict:* Worth searching out.

DR350: o-a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single. Superb little trailie with dry-sump motor, excellent suspension, but tiny petrol tank. A bit cheap in places, but lightweight and fairly robust. Better off road than on it. Front disc brake not very powerful and wears out rapidly. Can look tatty quite quickly. Unfortunately kickstart only (until 95), and high seat height rules it out for sub six footers. Engine feels unburstable and will rev and rev though some have been known to drop valves occasionally. *Verdict:* Great trail bike.

DR350(E): o-a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single. Enduro version of above which is slightly 'harder' all round. Available in the UK but very few sold, and no 'leccy' start available. *Verdict:* Rare but good.

DR400S: 287lbs, a/c 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, 396cc, single. Updated SP400 from the mid-Eighties with alloy petrol tank, but still twin shock and 6-volt. Beware camshaft rattles at high mileages. Very economical, but without the benefit of balance shafts. Watchout for things shaking loose like engine bolts or perhaps your leg. *Verdict:* Shake, baby shake.

DR500S: o-a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, sin-

gle. Foreign market, bigger-bore version of the 400. None known in the UK.

DR600S: 136kg/299lbs, o-a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, 589cc, single. Classic big banger with modern monoshock rear end and balancer shaft motor. One of the best (and most sensible) of the DRs, but a bit overgeared and heavy. Can be a bugger to start when hot till you get the knack. *Verdict:* Good secondhand buy.

DR650RSE: o-a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, 640cc, single, e/s. More road than trail bike, longer, heavier than earlier DRs and with civilised half fairing and twin silencers. Good road bike, but first gear very high for trails and despite half decent suspension, still a bit of a handful on the dirt no thanks to its seat height. Engine sounds like a tractor and vibrates like one. Carbs can give iffy running at low revs. *Verdict:* Okay I s'pose.

DR650: o-a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single, e/s. Latest version of above without the half fairing or twin exhausts. Still overgeared, still rather tall, but with the best suspension in class. Not very refined and feels a bit cheap, but definitely heading in the right direction.

DR750: o-a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single. The original 'Dr Big' - Suzuki's first attempt at a Paris-Dakar style big trailie. No-one has built a bigger single - except Suzuki themselves. *Verdict:* Not for the faint hearted.

DR800: o-a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single. The ultimate ultimate. Monstrous single with gargantuan tank, massive seat height and weird styling. Could win awards for ugliness, but pretty good handler and surprisingly nimble. Massive tank gives good range. Dropped from the UK range in about 1993, suffered badly from Norwich Union's capacity-based insurance grading, but should be much cheaper to insure now. Many engines found their way into singles racing. But there's a few around if you really must have one. *Verdict:* Why bother?

TRIUMPH

Tiger: w/c, 4-str, 12-valve, dohc, 885cc, triple. Brilliant but expensive road bike from the new Triumph factory, styled to look like an off roader for the German market. Grunty engine makes it quick on

TRAILBIKE GUIDE

the road but don't bother venturing off road, as suspension leaves a lot to be desired. Rear linkage hangs down below frame rails and catches on practically everything. Tall seat height makes low speed manoeuvring tricky. *Verdict:* A trailie in name only.

YAMAHA

DT = a/c & w/c, 2-str, trail.

IT = a/c, 2-str, enduro.

WR = w/c, 2-str, enduro.

XT = a/c, 4-str, trail.

TT = a/c, 4-str, enduro.

TW = a/c, 4-str, trail/fun.

BW = a/c, 4-str, trail/fun.

DT125/175: a/c, 2-str, single. The DTs are the bike that brought trail riding to the masses! Started out as a basic twin shock trail bike back in the late Seventies before adopting cantilever rear ends. They built up a reputation for being an extremely competent trail tool and taking an amazing amount of punishment. The 175s were dropped when the 125 learner laws came along in 1981. *Verdict:* Still one of the best trailbikes ever.

DT125(LC): 1987-on, w/c, 2-str, single. The DT came of age with the adoption of watercooling, motocross styling, and most important of all, a power valve. Lost some of its torque but gained a revvier motor and lots more top end together with sophisticated suspension front and rear. In 12bhp restricted form they're as flat as a pancake, but unrestricted make a capable 24bhp. Although in the fashion stakes they've been overtaken by trickier looking tackle, they still top the sales chart because of their hard earned reputation. still good at off roading though they're taller and peakier than ever. Stripped down and tuned up they will pass as a good clubman enduro mount. *Verdict:* The king lives on.

DT200(R): w/c, 2-str, single. Grey import big bore version of the 125. Extra oomph makes it easier to ride. *Verdict:* Competent all rounder.

DT200(WR): w/c, 2-str, single. Japanese-spec trail bike version of the WR enduro bike. Visually almost identical, but with usual trail bike refinements.

DT250: a/c, 2-str, single. Late Seventies cantilever shocked version of the smaller

bikes, more power but less agility.

DT400: a/c, 2-str, single. Hairy chested version of above, not many left now.

IT125/175/200: a/c, 2-str, single. Early eighties enduro tool. Useful off road, but a bit hairy on it no thanks to drum brakes. Use of premix is a bit of a pain, 175 is the better bet if you can find one.

IT250: a/c, 2-str, 246cc, single. Less peaky, bigger bore version of above with enough power for any off road activity. At the time it boasted more power and much less weight than the equivalent water-cooled RD250LC twin!

IT425/465/490: a/c, 2-str, single. Fire-breathing, hard to tame, monster stoker for serious enduro freaks. Only for those with lots of skill or very large gonads. Not the most reliable bike in the world. *Verdict:* Melts visors at 50 paces.

WR200: w/c, 2-str, single. Brilliant clubman enduro bike with lightweight chassis and 'soft-tune' engine, but plenty of power. Rear suspension oversprung, and they need gearing down for low speed trails. Good if you like your bikes tall. Easy to ride with a nice light front end. *Verdict:* Modern classic.

WR250: w/c, 2-str, single. As above but with 'hard-tune' engine. Essentially the enduro version of the YZ motocrosser but with wider ratio gearbox and more fly-wheel. It also came with a lighting coil, but no lights! *Verdict:* Peaky and poky.

WR500: a/c, 2-str, single. As above but using air-cooled YZ motor.

TDR 250: w/c, 2-str, parallel twin. A TZR250 in trail clothing. Great road bike with demon brakes thanks to dinner-plate sized front disc, and all or nothing powerband. Peaky motor makes it difficult to



TRAILBIKE GUIDE

use off road apart from on fast fire roads, supermotard or competition road rallies for which it is ideal. A thoroughly uncivilised motorcycle - raucous, peaky and excruciatingly uncomfortable with an unquenchable thirst for fuel - and absolutely fabulous. Beware seizures on left hand cylinder, and high speed wobbles on the road. Has a few passionate and delinquent supporters. *Verdict: For petrolheads everywhere.*

XT125: a/c, 4-str, single. Learner legal motorcycle without the need for restriction! *Verdict: Reliable but intensely boring.*

XT225 Serow: a/c, 4-str, sohc, single. Small but perfectly formed grey import trail bike with kick and e/s versions, but sadly not both together, although retro-fit kick is possible. Light, manoeuvrable, and easy to ride. Brilliant attention to detail such as mini indicators and sensibly placed grab handles marks this out as a superb green laner. Small engine needs to be worked hard especially on the road to get decent performance, but its a small price to pay for such a good bike. Reasonable numbers brought in so far. *Verdict: Makes sense.*

XT250: 248lbs, a/c, 4-str, 249cc, sohc, single. Early Eighties Cantilever shock trailie of some note. Light and strong with balancer shaft engine, they can still be found for not much money and make an excellent secondhand buy if in good condition though occasional early ones suffered valve problems. Nice and low though not very fast. *Verdict: Good all-rounder.*

XT250T(R): 113kg, a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, dohc, 249cc, 27bhp, single. Foreign market mini XT350 with all the benefits but slightly lighter. *Verdict: Rare.*

TT250-R: a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, dohc, 249cc, 30bhp, single, e/s. Modern lightweight trailie/enduro that is Yamaha's version of the Honda XR250. Revvy motor and a reasonable spread of power, but rather expensive. Unusual electronic dials, and other neat touches. Now officially imported.

TT250-R RAID: 121kg, a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, dohc, 249cc, 30bhp, single, e/s. As above but with large, single, (Baja-style)

headlamp and protective guard, bigger tank and slightly different styling. *Verdict: Appealing.*



XT350: a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, dohc, single. Plain Jane trailie that's better than it looks. Early versions boasted 31bhp, but later ones emasculated to 17bhp due to noise regs. Chassis and suspension a bit limited but nevertheless still pretty competent. Plenty of bottom end, not too tall in the saddle, and excellent economy (80mpg possible if you try hard). Long production run means it must be good, but demand for secondhand ones ensures prices stay fairly high. *Verdict: Carry-on trailing.*

TT350: a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, dohc, single. Grey import enduro version of above, with improved suspension, more power, and more basic instrumentation and lighting. Not that scarce considering, they make a nice trailie with similar reliability to the XTs. *Verdict: Nice one.*

XT500: 304lbs, a/c, 4-str, sohc, single. The original big banger trailie that started it all. Produced for years and years, even when superceded by later versions. Twin shock, 6-volt, character building bike that could often get into more trouble than it could get out of. All sorts of special parts were produced for it for the would be overlander over the years. Vibrates like a jack hammer, and very basic by modern standards but the lack of sophistication is part of its charm, and the low seat height makes it much easier to 'paddle' than some of its more monstrous successors. Can be horribly unreliable and a pig to start, but its easy to work on and plenty still around. Classic buffs have inflated the prices, but don't pay over the odds.

TRAILBIKE GUIDE

Verdict: Your dad would love it.

TT500: a/c, 4-str, sohc, single. More serious off roader version of the above. Much lighter and with a punchier motor, but still with 6-volt electrics. *Verdict: Rare.*

XT550: 1982-on, 292lbs, a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, 558cc, single. Updated version of above with 4-valve engine, twin carbs and cantilever rear end. Smoother than 500 but hard to get excited about, and some had gearbox problems. Not many around now. *Verdict: Not as good as the original.*

XT600 Tenere: a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single. Superb Paris-Dakar inspired big trailie with unburstable engine, supple suspension, mammoth tank and comfy saddle. Loved by overlanders the world over. Huge touring range, and clever attention to detail (for instance air filter positioned under tank to avoid being clogged by sand and dust). Later versions inherited a full fairing but lost some of the attention to detail. Feels like riding a great big cosy armchair, and regardless of Yamaha's claims to the contrary seems to have more power than later 'cooking' versions. Real off road ability in most hands. *Verdict: Best of the big Yams.*

XT600E: a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single. No frills version of the much loved XT. Heavier and more sluggish than the original thanks to steel rims and generally lower spec. Unsophisticated especially in the suspension department, but thoroughly crashable and a respectable plodder. Heaps of grunt. Updated in 95 with more modern looks. *Verdict: Not as good as the original.*

TT600: a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single. Grey import enduro version of above, with improved suspension, more power, more basic instrumentation and lighting, and plastic tank. A few around, they make a more suitable serious trail bike than an XT. *Verdict: worth looking out for.*

TT600 (updated): a/c, 4-str, 4-valve, sohc, single. Latest version of the above now available with an electric start. Much more modern styling includes USD forks, still only available as a grey import.

XTZ660: w/c, 4-str, 5-valve, dohc, single. Another attempt at making a long-distance overland/road version of the vener-

able XT. Heavier, with less range and not much more power than the original. Less crashworthy than the first and the taller saddle may put some off. Nevertheless it's had a lot of succes in desert racing form and with some mods is eminently trail-able. *Verdict: Another good Yam.*

XTZ750 Super Tenere: w/c, 4-str, 10-valve, dohc, parallel twin. Yamaha's answer to the Africa Twin. Cheaper build quality makes it a good value, comfortable all-rounder on the road with plenty of touring potential and 200 mile tank range. Engine is strong but lacks a little bit of bottom end, and gearbox is atrocious to use. Genuinely fast and not too bad off road especially in the dry, but the standard exhaust is rather wide (catching on ruts). Decent suspension, but a bit bouncy on the road. *Verdict: A good try.*

TDM850: w/c, 4-str, 10-valve, dohc, parallel twin. 'New sports' road bike with trail styling developed from the XTZ750 but with much grunter 850cc lump. Lower seat height, much torquier engine and better brakes and handling. Early versions had appallingly clunky gearbox and exhaust collector box rules out an after-market centre stand. Not really a trail bike unless it's high summer nice and dry and the trail is easy. Soft suspension limits speed off road. *Verdict: Brilliant trail influenced roadie.*

TW200: a/c, 4-str, 18bhp, single, e/s. Fattish-wheeled fun bike which makes a brilliant and economical (though odd-looking) trail bike for the short of leg, with both electric start and kick. Surprisingly good on the road, and makes a competent commuter (70+mpg possible), but let down by lousy SLS front drum brake and needs an extra gear. Suspension a bit basic and tyres can be expensive. Gearbox sprocket a special part due to outrigger bearing. Will embarass pukka trail bikes in the right hands. *Verdict: Strangely attractive.*

BW200: a/c, 4-str, single, e/s. True beach balloon-tyred version of above but not street legal. Not recommended for anything other than sand. *Verdict: Sand sled.*

BW350: a/c, 4-str, single, e/s. Hairysed version of above. *Verdict: Get out the bull worker.*

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BIKES

Honda XR500, 1979, twin shock. £700. Fitted hop-up piston and cam (Honda kit). Also TL125S Trials, 1976, hardly used, £550. Tel 01268 729573 (Les - Essex)

Aprilia RX125 M-Reg, 1600km, good condition, very quick, ideal trail class Enduro bike, £1,650 ono. Tel 01296 87350 (Eves) 01327 300777 (Day)

Honda XR250 1985, T&T, new plastics, chain, sprockets, bark busters, handguards, good condition, only 3 owners, green lane use, £1,050 ono. Tel 01524 847172 (Lancaster)

Kawasaki KX500 Road legal, T&T, loads of new parts, not raced since rebuild, only done 800 miles, v fast machine, will swap or sale for DR/XL type bike, £900. Tel 0468 233690

Kawasaki KLX250R Enduro model L-Reg, T&T, 25,000 miles, green lane use only, excellent condition, £2,250. Tel 0117 9732103 (Bristol)

Kawasaki KLX250 M-Reg, T&T, Datatag, excellent condition, £2,600 ono. Tel 01527 543603

Project bike YZ490 with Rotax 500cc 4 stroke engine, frame and bits and log book for donor bike, needs work, £500 ono. Tel 01323 832475

KTM 350 H-Reg, 10 months MOT, never raced, good condition £1,600. Tel 01663 743129 Tony (Days) 01663 741551 (Eves)

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Yamaha XTZ660 L-Reg, 9K, crashbar, off

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XT600 Tenere, 1987, recent engine rebuild, 2 new tyres, MOT, £1,100 ono. Tel 01276 683421

Yamaha DT125R M-Reg, '94, 5,500 miles, new chain/sprockets/tyres, good condition. £1,750. Tel 01280 704215 (N'thants)

Suzuki DR650RSE K-Reg, 18,000 road miles only, vgc, p/x for larger trailie. Tel 01282 844668

Suzuki DR350S 1991, J-Reg, T&T, only 5,000 miles, Acerbis plastics, excellent condition, not the usual rubbish, spare tyres etc, £ 1,950. Tel 01740 631170 (After 6pm Stockton)

Montesa-Honda 349cc gold rims, twin shock, 1986, excellent runner and condition, ready to trail, bargain at £550 ovno. Tel 01942 262524 (Leigh)

Honda XR600R 1986, MOT, new chain and sprockets, tyres, vgc, green lane use only, fast, very reliable. £1,550 ono

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Yamaha XT350 1994 M-Reg, 7,700 miles, manufacturers warranty till October, mainly road use, very clean condition, Datatag, taxed £2,300. Tel 01303 265031 (Hythe)

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KTM 350 Enduro, 1981 Registered, seized engine, 38mm Marzocchi forks, 420mm Ohlins, twin shocks, rebuilt by MHR, project or breaking depending on interest £200 Tel 0973 374180 (Leics)

Yamaha DTR125 1988, F-Reg, needs work for MOT, £550. Also PW80 3 years old, perfect, £600. Swap either/both for dirt bike for 12 year old, cash either way, breaking DT125LC, no engine. Tel 0181 301 2913 (London)

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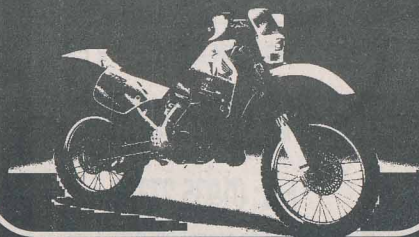
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Suzuki DR200 1991, Q-Reg, T&T, Renthals Acerbis bark busters, £1,100 ono. Tel 01527 404867 (Redditch Eves)

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WANTED

Wanted urgently DT175MX engine, must run and be in Leeds area, any other parts considered. Tel 0113 2530736 (5 - 6pm)

Wanted DTR125 frame with log book, no silly money please. Tel 01524 847172 (Lancashire)

Honda XL250S exhaust system. Tel 01952 260420 (Chris)

Wanted XT600Z Tenere 1984-87 with kick start and electric start. Tel 01565 722692 (John)

Kawasaki KT250 1976, twinshock trial bike spares, manuals or just information, do you own one of these bikes? How do you get parts? Tel 01993 845939 (after 6pm Dean)

Beginners Trial/Motocross bike wanted, not for racing just a bit of fun, will pay up to £300, and will collect. Tel 01926 881304 (Gavin)

Honda XR250 1989 wheels, rear drum and front disc type, complete if possible. Tel 01604 454792

Advice, assistance etc for idiot off road novice XL500R rider leaving Cairo for Uganda via Ethiopia August 1996. Anyone with experience of 'Nile Route' please ring 0171 955 500 x 5193 (Andrew)

Honda XL600 front end including m/cyl, will consider CR500 parts, also Acerbis tank for XL500R anything considered. Tel 0171 955 5000 x 5193 (Ansaphone)

DR800SL hubs or wheels front and rear,

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any condition, also discs if good, will collect. Tel 0171 708 5565 (after 7pm)

Transalp or KLR or DR600 plus or similar intimidating bike within reasonable distance, private buyer, cash awaiting up to £1,800. Tel 015395 68752 (Jez, Kendal)

Suzuki TS125R frame with V5 ie fire damaged, any condition will do. Tel 01676 533542 (Mark)

Wanted Honda XR250 late model, road legal, good condition. Tel 01604 643780 (Eves)

Honda Dominator parts, workshop manual, Baglux harness and tankbag, good prices paid. Tel 0171 613 5052 (Dean)

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TRAIL TALES...

LIFE'S A BEACH AS RICK KEMP LANDS A WORKS RIDE AT LE TOUQUET

Going across the channel to ride is always that bit more exciting than yer average South Eastern Centre event don't you think? Apart from the fact that its a bit like going on holiday, the Frogs, for all their failings, have a very healthy attitude towards motorcycles in general and dirt biking in particular.

So when I was asked if I'd like to ride the Le Touquet beach race on a new bike set up just for me, all expenses paid, as Terry Stamp puts it in the Virgin Airways commercial, 'we've all had to make harder decisions'. Before you go jumping to conclusions, It has to be said that this offer was made based on my Press credentials rather than on my prowess as an international sand racer. That said, I did get the top journo prize at the inaugural Weston-super-Mere beach race.

At the time it was Yamaha, under the guidance of Off-Road Manager, Pat Wills, which was the brave, thrusting, company prepared to go out on a limb in promoting its off-road machines. Some said we were just having a good time at someone else's expense, but what did they know, why else was Yamaha's DT125 the top selling learner trailie? The Le Touquet tackle included two YZ250s, an IT465 and an IT250, the latter for your scribe. The biggest problem for machines at this event was seizing up on the long beach straight. The old air-cooled motors couldn't really cope with getting cooked-up in the dunes where there is loads

of wheelspin and relatively little air flow then being thrashed down the beach. All the bikes were fitted with handlebar mounted choke levers so we could richen the mixture. Apart from this it was just the usual fettling and adjusting suspension and bars to suit each rider.

We left for the ferry in the Team Yamaha truck for our rendezvous at the Hotel Splendide later that evening, but on the other side of the channel we discovered that the French lorry drivers were about to play up and start blockading the port for le weekend, protesting about lamb imports or something. We managed to scrape through and made our way to scrutineering and that was when we realised just what we were getting in to.

The queue for processing the paperwork looked like as much of a challenge as the race itself and by the time we'd got round to getting the bikes sorted, tempers were beginning to rise. I was in the queue behind sidecar hard man Jack Matthews when a six foot Swede also with an outfit tried to get in front. Jack soon sorted him with some anglo-saxon invective plus a quick right to the chin - a none-too-subtle bit of psyching-out. Things got more out of hand as many of the Brit contingent who'd been caught by the blockade started arriving and were only too eager to take on French bureaucracy Matthews style.

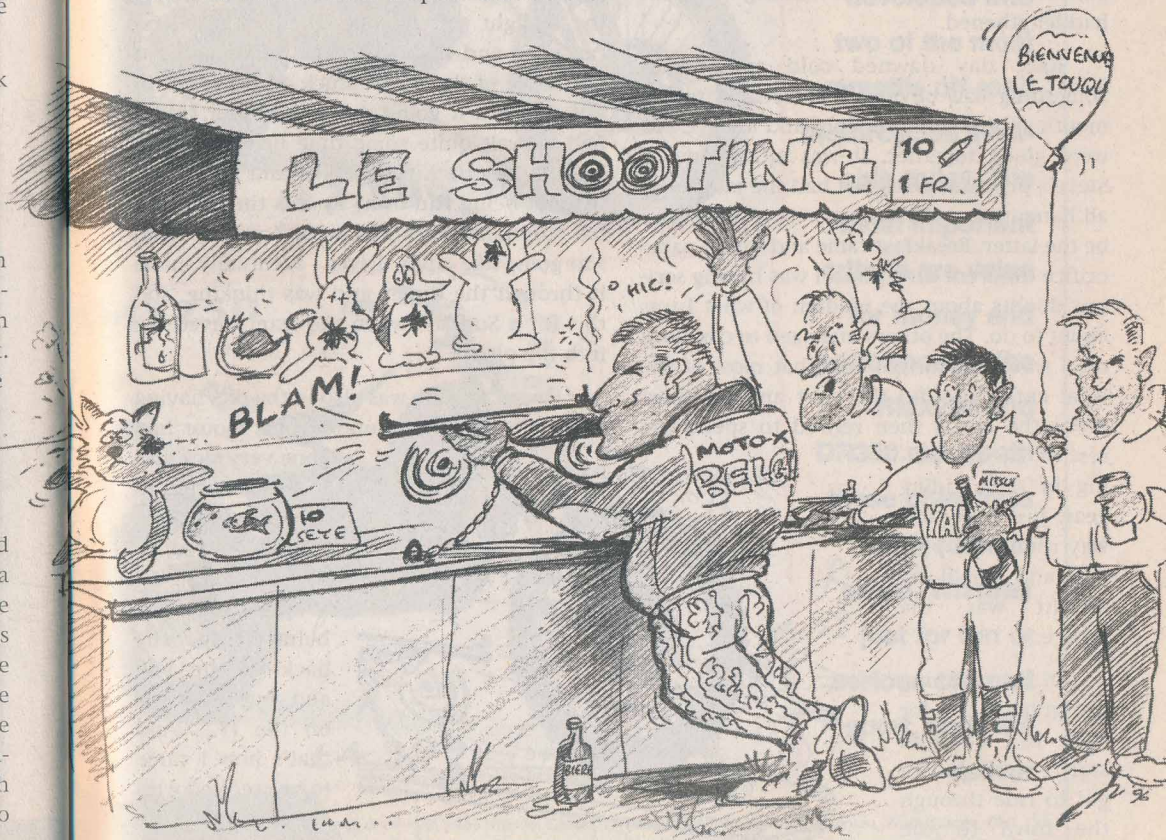
Scuffles were happening in the crowd and the atmosphere was very tense. Then a literal flash point occurred when one of the out-buildings near the scrutineering hall was set alight, the police were called and the organising body threatened to cancel the whole event. This temporarily calmed some of the nationalistic fervour and led to meaningful dialogue taking place, the gist of which was that the organisers should go and do

unspeakable things to their Grandmothers and that upwards of 1500 riders were going to have their day at the beach come what may. Eventually the situation was sorted and all the machines were put in the Parc Ferme outside the Hotel de Ville. In typically British fashion, Team Mitsui Yamaha retired to the hotel bar to discuss more important things like what a bunch of poseurs the Sonauto Yamaha Team were, and how come we didn't have a bevvly of bimbettes in matching team paddock jackets.

For this one night in the year the somewhat faded seaside town comes alive, the local lads wheelie their mopeds outside the

THE RAT-ARSED BELGIAN, WAS ARMED WITH A RIFLE AND BLASTING AWAY AT ANYTHING THAT CAME WITHIN HIS UNFOCUSSED SIGHT

cafes on the promenade and there is a funfair with 'live' music. This is usually provided by some very dodgy local thrash metal bands - who was it who said, 'give a Frenchman a bar of soap or a guitar and he won't know what to do with either of them'? This night was particularly high spirited, perhaps because of the day's activities. Competition drinking was well under way and I was more than holding my own in the UK versus Holland Press section. Speculation about the following day's race led to debates on whether the winner was more likely to be a moto-cross or enduro rider, and we reached a consensus that favoured a certain famous Belgian moto-crosser. As it was getting late



TRAIL TALES...

and we had to be up in the morning, I suggested one final lap of the funfair to which all agreed.

Fairs are similar the world over but France seems to have a more casual attitude toward health and safety than most. The shooting gallery which, in this country would provide air-rifles at best, in France boasts semi-automatic .22 calibre jobs 'secured' with a length of flimsy chain. We heard the screams first, then people were running in all directions, as the same Belgian M-X star that we had been discussing, but now completely rat-arsed and armed with a rifle, was blasting away at any cuddly toy or plastic duck that came within his obviously unfocussed sight. Suddenly the odds on him winning the event had lengthened.

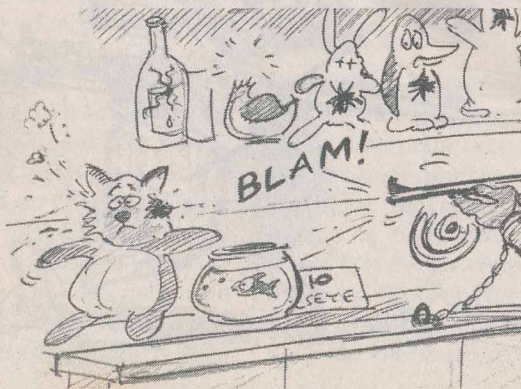
Race day dawned cold and misty. Something had obviously crawled in to my mouth and died in the night and my eye lids were glued together. It was either one of Steve's practical jokes or I had the mother of all hangovers, unfortunately it turned out to be the latter. Breakfast came and went - same orifice different directions. I was having serious doubts about the wisdom of what I was about to do. The others managed to convince me I would be alright and that most of the local entry just did the start and the blast down the beach then retired to spend the rest of the day posing in their riding gear. Just pick your way round the pile-ups and you'll be alright was the advice.

In fact nothing can prepare you for the Le Touquet start. First you've got to ride through the town to the

beach and it's first come first served for placings on the sand. The fumes are unbelievable going through the narrow streets with hundreds of bikes on choke. I tried to throw-up but fortunately for the rider next to me, there was nothing left in my stomach. By the time I hit the beach the first row was full and I found a slot where I thought I wouldn't get roosted and stayed there. We were supposed to be started by a gun but I heard nothing I just went when the bike in front moved, there's no such thing as a false start at Le Touquet.

The noise was incredible and I have to admit it was pretty exciting. As the bikes thinned out the noise got worse and I thought my exhaust had come loose but it was only a passing media helicopter - as if we didn't have enough to contend with. At the end of the straight I remembered my advice and ran wide and high in to the dunes and got past most of the traffic stuck on the first hill but dumped it going down the other side. I had to wait quite some time before I could actually get back to my bike and pick it up without being run over. By this time the initial adrenaline rush had passed and my head was going like a pile driver I eventually made it through the dunes and was thinking 'sod this for a Sunday' when the team waved me into the pits.

Our main man was also in the pits having done two laps to my one but his motor had gone very sick and I was instructed to give up my ride to which I offered little resistance. We swapped bibs and helmets in the back of the van and out he went on the IT... And that's how I came to be credited with 32nd place at Le Touquet.



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