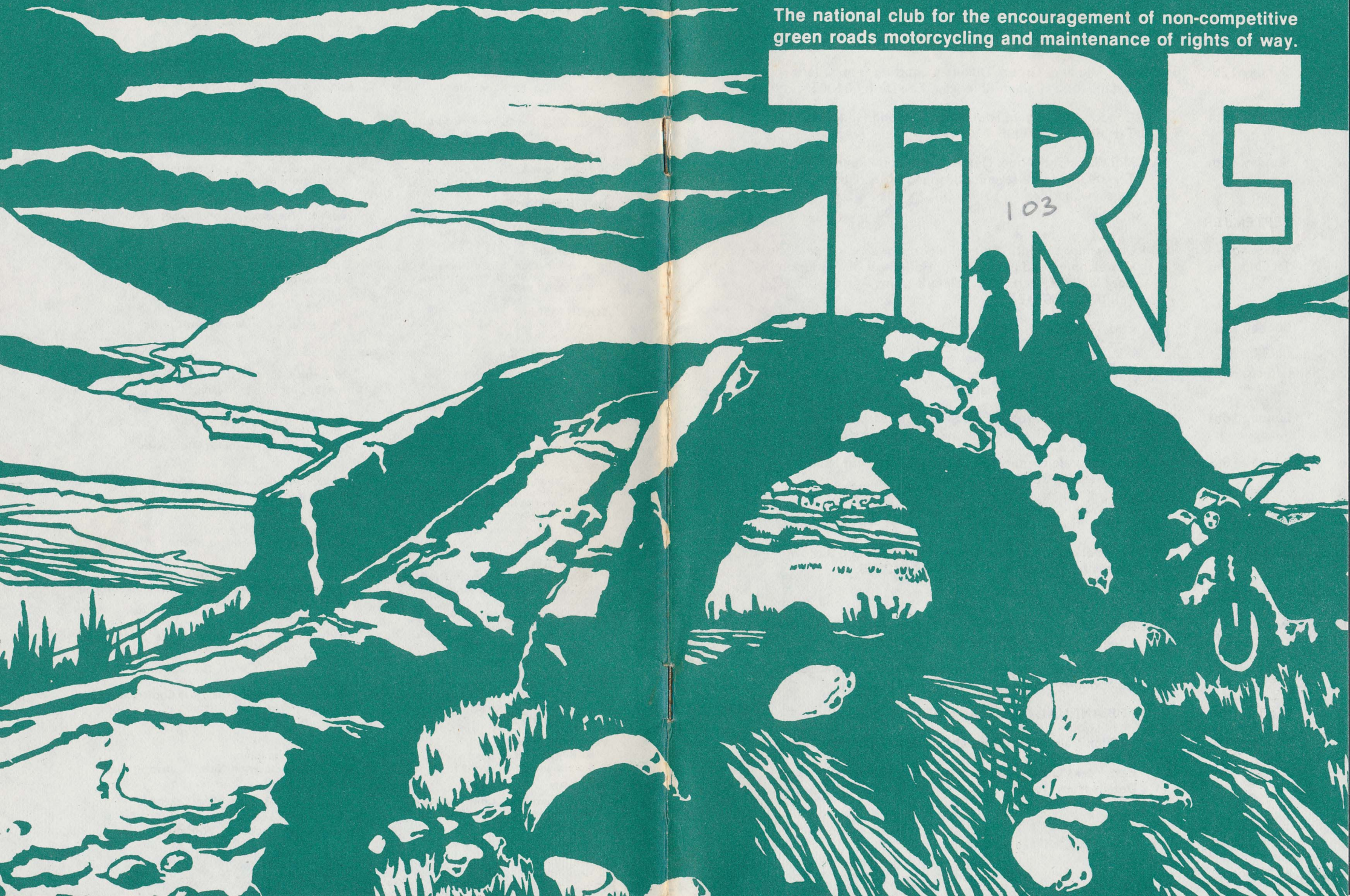


The national club for the encouragement of non-competitive green roads motorcycling and maintenance of rights of way.

TRE

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Yamaha have done well out of trail riding by coming up with the right bikes at the right time. They were not the first, or even the first of the Japanese. Suzuki produced the first trail machine and Honda followed, but both with smallish bikes. Yamaha made their trail bike name with the heavy, ponderous XT500. Now there was a bike to prove that you were a man, even with a truss! When others followed with bigger bikes, the SP370, XL500 to mention a couple, Yamaha turned to the smaller market and introduced their winning little DT175, followed by the DT100, DT250, neither of which were as fit for their purpose as the 175 which had just the right blend of low weight and sufficient power.

So, the problem was, follow that, and with American legislation making it look as though two-strokes would be banned altogether, they had to look to a four-stroke machine. Unfortunately, this time they did not produce a sales winner. Somehow it did not catch the imagination like its' predecessors; even when marketed with the same colour scheme as the XT500. However, with Yamaha's experience in producing winning machines they have none the less produced a pleasant and likeable bike with good manners, good economy with only one or two faults which are sometimes quaintly described as 'character', other times as faults.

So now, after a number of members have paid out their hard earned cash for this model, what do they think? Has it lived up to their expectations? Does it have hidden talents?

Every member stated that they had bought this model because of the need for a truly dual purpose bike to enable them to get to work in all weathers, with a civilised exhaust and good lights, and which would also make a reasonably competent green laner. The main reason given for choosing this model was that it was the lightest four-stroke available in this engine capacity, which pre-supposes that lightness is a virtue and that a four-stroke is preferable. Apart from picking it up out of the mud, a lighter bike will make you less tired and therefore less liable to drop it in the first place. However, the theory is that a four-stroke has more traction in difficult circumstances and has the added bonus of being more economical on fuel – both petrol and oil than a two-stroke and the consumption figures given bear this out. Dave Capel of the Exmoor Group gets an average of 80 mpg whilst Mark Kirby claims 94.7 mpg and with a figure taken to such decimal points he must have kept accurate records. Ian Thompson gets about 95 mpg at a steady 55 mph with a drop to 90 mpg when trail riding.

So, what is wrong with the bike as supplied box standard?

The decision on this was unanimous – the mudguards, and in particular the front one, which is most efficient at throwing water back at the rider from the leading edge.

Secondly rear wheel grip, or rather lack of it, which could be improved considerably by fitting wider tyres. Unfortunately, the earlier model came with a 17" wheel which rather limited the choice of tyres. So, if buying secondhand check the rear wheel size.

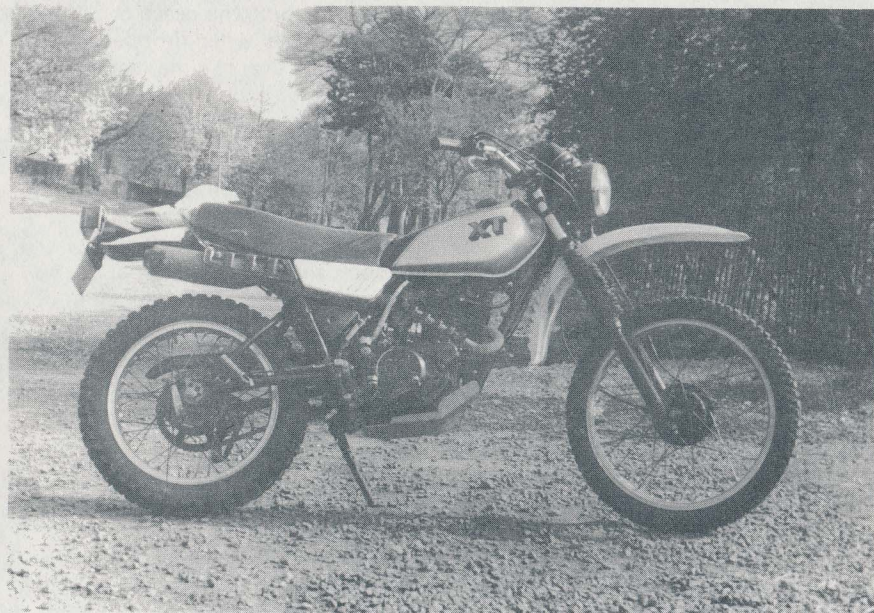
Thirdly, and not at all surprisingly, the gearing is wrong. No manufacturer seems able to gear a trail bike to be totally suitable for its dual purpose role, nor to suit different terrains. The main complaint is that the gearing is not wide enough to cover climbing steep hills and motorway cruising. Some owners have lowered the gearing: Mark Kirby took his down by one tooth on the gearbox sprocket and

two on the rear, but then improved his engine performance and returned it to standard. The gearing, of course, is entirely dependent upon the power characteristics of the engine, and Mark considered that there was no power over 6500 rpm even though the engine would rev higher, so he cleared out the exhaust pipe and silencer and drilled holes in the baffles and found noticeably more power both lower down and at the top. To answer your inevitable question, he claims that there is a lowering of pitch of the exhaust, but no increase in noise, to coin a phrase – well, he would, wouldn't he! All in all, he managed to gain a freer revving engine that overcame his problems.

Although Mark Kirby designates his machine 'The Ultimate Weapon' he doesn't specifically say for what, but all reports mentioned the docile nature of the engine which gives out 21 bhp and is very flexible.

Very little seems to have been in need of replacement in the engine and Ian Thompson is the only one to be very specific. He has adjusted the cam chain three times and reckons the third was the last. The exhaust can last to 15,000 miles although many are replaced earlier by choice. Many reports mention that the lights could be better, but for general use are sufficient. The chain, as usual, wears out very quickly when trail riding, but these bikes tend to be used on the tarmac more than average. The addition of a chain oiler can increase the life from 2000 to 6000 miles, says Denis Bannister; Mark Kirby reporting similar results.

The front suspension is generally regarded as being quite light and where there has been a problem of bottoming out, thicker grade fork oil has helped. Rear suspension is regarded as pretty good for both rocks and ruts. Dave Capel reported squeaks from the suspension pivots which must be lubricated, particularly at the lower end of the spring/damper unit and swinging arm joint.



Yamaha XT250

What about spares?

Some spares are stocked by the local dealers, consumables such as cables, levers, chains, etc., but most other items have had to be ordered and waited for. Gambier Reeks, of Kings Road, Chelsea are reported to have a return of post service, but there is the additional cost of postage. Lack of availability of spares seems to be a general comment for most of Yamaha's range of motorcycles both road and trail; I think the only exception must be the DT175 for which many after-market parts are manufactured and the owner is not tied to buying Yamaha parts.

In the comfort department there are differing reports, probably attributable to the weight of rider. One reports copious padding on the seat and yet another reports that it is a trifle too hard for long rides, so take your pick (said the navy!).

Reading through the reports certainly gives an idea about what you wanted in this bike. A smooth, economical, docile road and trail machine that is long lasting, but there are also, interestingly, gaps or omissions that no-one mentions. The main area is brakes, not a mention, so they must be adequate. Another area is the petrol tank, and since many mention the good petrol economy I presume that the capacity is sufficient for an average day's trail riding. The third noticeable omission is the area of final drive chain sprockets. Apart from Mark Kirby, who has now restored his machine to the original gearing, sprockets are not mentioned and must have become so routine a replacement or the docile engine gives them such an easy life that they last a long time.

Conclusions. Yes it meets and even exceeds the expectations of the owners. Denis Bannister, who has previously owned an SP370, TS250 and an XL250 reports that it is easily the best trail bike that he has owned, and he lives in Cornwall, full of long hills and deep bogs, with an absence of dealers and filling stations. He adds that it is quiet, light and flexible. Other reporters say that it is undemanding to ride and keeps going for 20,000 miles without disturbing the peace or burning a hole in your pocket. Finally, it is reported that even when dropped it is a 100% first time starter and that must be worth a gear deal in time, temper and trouble.

The feedback I received from owners as the compiler of this report was that the bike unfortunately has little glamour and that there will be few around in even, say, five years time, since built in obsolescence and legislation have cut its marketable life to barely three years. Certainly it has the respect and grudging admiration of all its owners and will become one of the forgotten models that owners look back on and tell their children "they don't make them like that any more".

Current average selling price for the XT250 is: £350

'MAKE YOUR OWN PRO-LINK XL185'

This article appeared in the June/July Bulletin (No. 101) unfortunately anonymously. The author has owned up and was, in fact, Pete Wildsmith, Southern TRF Group Representative. He says that should anyone be interested in carrying out the same modification to their bike, he would be more than willing to give them help or advice. — Rosemary

SEBAC MOTORCYCLE REAR SHOCK ABSORBERS —

Report by Rosemary Swindells

When these shock absorbers came onto the aftermarket scene, after having been fitted as standard equipment to some Italian machines in the 1970s, it was around the time that Girling had ceased production of their motorcycle shock absorbers. Thus, with a gap left in the cheaper end of the replacement range, SEBAC had a ready-made market and place to step into.

The SEBAC range of rebuildable motorcycle shocks covers around 500 different motorcycles including Italian, Japanese and British machines (from 1969 models onwards), trail bikes and some trials machines.

In 1983 the trail/off-road shock absorbers — the 'Dromo' model, were selling for around £40, which was not only a very reasonable price to pay, but belied their quality as they are very strong and well made units.

Over the past 9 months I have been testing a pair of Dromo shocks on a Honda XL185S. With such a vast range of motorcycles covered I was interested to see just how much care had been taken to tailor the units to fit each individual model. However, over the fit I was pleasantly surprised as they fitted on perfectly — albeit a little hammering was necessary to the non-standard exhaust system to give clearance for the travel on 'full bump'.

On the 185 use of all the travel has rarely been achieved, even when riding two-up as the springs fitted on these suspension units seem rather heavy for such a light-weight machine, and in fact are the same springs as fitted to the units used on the XL250/500 and DR400 machines, which are much heavier motorcycles. Subsequently, the rear of the bike is very firmly sprung and road handling is very taut. The seat height has also been raised by a couple of inches and the bike no longer sinks down very much when you sit on it. (The front suspension could almost do with harder springing to balance the bike up.) On the trail, the heavier damping and lack of softness causes the back wheel to kick about rather than ride over any rough ground. Here again, a heavier machine such as the XL500 would probably handle well given this heavier than standard damping and springing.

The KE175 and XL125 machines have lighter-weight springs fitted and as these are two similar weight/sized machines to the XL185 I feel it would be worth having the lesser rated springs fitted to the XL185.

The finish on the shock absorbers is excellent — even the Italian chrome is still good on the bodies. The red finish on the springs is also of good quality with no rusting apparent, despite a ravaging by salt, mud, sand and 'careful neglect' over the winter months.

The units have 5 pre-load settings and a 'C' Spanner for adjustment is included with the set.

Unfortunately, M.R. Holland, the importers have recently had to increase the price of the SEBAC range and the Dromo model now retails for around £52.30. However, in view of the quality, they are still a good buy, especially if you own a heavyweight machine.

Additionally, unlisted bikes can still be catered for by simply specifying the length of the existing units when ordering.

Finally, when I contacted SEBAC's importers — M.R. Holland Ltd., about the possibility of different spring ratings, Director, Mr G. Daubney, replied: