

# Pride and Prejudice

Yamaha XS850

## Weighty Satisfaction

**"What can possibly be wrong with a bike that does everything unspectacularly, but exactly as required?" asks LAWRENCE NAGY. He bought one of Yamaha's most unspectacular models very cheaply and found it a drama-free top tourer!**

**F**ROM the beginning, the Yamaha XS850 was damned with faint praise. Condemned to mediocrity — and no-one noticed. Not for a run-of-the-mill bike inspirational road tests of the Z650 or GS750 genre. And then no letters of protest, no wild counterclaims, no rebuttal from dealers . . . nothing.

Having owned a XS750E for almost a year I knew what I wanted in a bike, and that machine fitted my needs with only two exceptions. Firstly there was the excess weight; and secondly the hopeless inability of my particular bike to start on cold mornings, despite much probing, tuning, testing and cursing. I never solved the starting problem and eventually sold the machine in frustration.

I bought a new XS850, full knowing the criticisms levelled at the bike. In fact, some of these aspects of criticism were, in my case, happily desirable. For starters, I'm over six metric feet tall and find myself cramped for room on the XJ650 and the CX500, both of which I had seriously considered as replacements. The large physical size of the bike not only leaves plenty of room for the rider and pillion, but also makes it easy to tie gear onto, especially on the large, flat tank.

The engine has proved to be lightly stressed, aiding fuel economy and reliability. There are only six valves to shim and three carbs to play with, while the cam chain and CDI are

easy to set. There is no drive chain to worry about and the smooth power delivery extends the life of the clutch and rear tyre. The motor is very torquey, though a bit less so than the 750. It vibra . . . er . . . pulses less than the 750 below three grand and is just as smooth at higher engine speeds. And no-one can criticise the 24-litre tank which allows 320-350 kilometres *before* reserve is needed. The actual fuel consumption is around 19 km/l (53 mpg) at a steady 100 km/h while 140 km/h drops this to 16.5 km/l (46 mpg). Pillion and camping gear makes no

difference to either the fuel economy or mid-range performance.

The large mass and heavy self-steering effect make the bike stable over choppy surfaces and the traction makes the bike an excellent device on sand or dirt. Handling also benefits from the revised muffler on the model, which dramatically increases ground clearance. The new exhaust system also allows you to replace just the mufflers when they rust out, unlike the 750 which needs the entire rightside muffler, balance pipe and header pipes replaced as a unit.

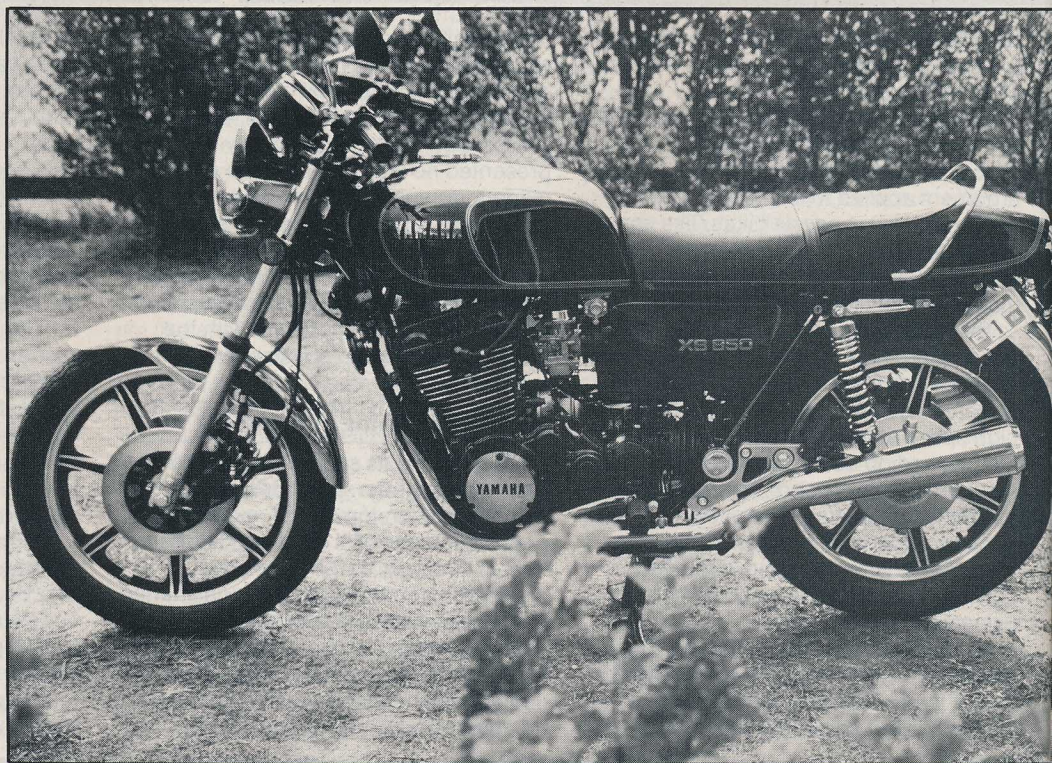
### Everything works!

Overall that's why the 850 feels so much better than the 750; every change is an improvement — and that's a

pleasant change!

My choice of tyres is Metzeler, after a brief try of the standard Bridgestones and Pirellis. The front tyre is a block pattern and the last one lasted close to 30,000 km. I originally used a C66 on the rear, but replaced this with a Perfect, which lasted about 15,000 km (slightly longer than the C66). The Perfect also handles the bitumen better in the dry or the wet, but loses out when the road turns to dirt, mud, gravel or sand. The wear rates are to the legal limit. Using tyres beyond that is definitely false economy — the bike's scratched fairing is testimony to that!

The fairing is a Cyclestyle Nullarbor, and it's an excellent design for the 850, keeping the wind and rain off me at highway speeds without





adverse effects on handling or stability. It is heavy, but strong, surviving an 80 km/h drop with only a few scratches. The only other accessories I've fitted are the rack and Koni shocks.

For me it was a good thing the bike was never considered better than mediocre when introduced. Dealers couldn't sell them and I bought a brand new one on the road for \$2650 — \$50 less than the CX500 Honda and \$300 less than the XJ650 Yamaha.

I could bore you to tears with the uneventful but satisfying trips the bike has taken me on. The only black spot in the record was the Bikers Ltd rally at Dubbo when I got a bit overconfident in the mud and layed it down — twice within a few minutes would you believe?

Six hours straight in the saddle are no hassle for me or

pillion. A typical trip, and one I've done often, is Sydney to Nambucca Heads which is 538 road kilometres. It is a pleasant six-hour ride at a steady 100-120 km/h cruise with only one stop required at Bulahdelah for fuel.

Once you come to terms with the weight, which is about that of a chain driven 900 or 1000, and you know how to ride the beast, Yamaha's 850 makes a damn satisfying touring mount. Just the right balance of Japanese practicality with European character.

As The Bear himself said after a tour on one, "The best alternative to a certain German horizontal twin . . ."

What more can you say about a bike that starts first stab every time in winter and does everything you ask of it?\*



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