

two wheels

\$1.50*

NZ \$1.75*

AUGUST, 1980

DIRT SHOOTOUT!
Honda XL, Yamaha XT
& Kawasaki KL Thumpers

TONY HATTON
Profile of an
ever-cool maestro

Bathurst Violence
Facts against
the fantasy!



two wheels

Volume 22, No. 6, AUGUST 1980

NEWS & TESTS

- 10 **FOUR-STROKE FIREPOWER COMPARO**
Kawasaki KL250A3 • Honda XL250SA • Yamaha XT250G
- 20 **YAMAHA XS850G**
Life ain't easy as you get older!
- 58 **YAMAHA IT125G**
Baby Blue joins the IT queue

FEATURES

- 36 **HOPELESS & HELPLESS IN THE ARMS OF FATE**
Lester Morris talks "Motorshow Mania"
- 39 **BYE BYE BMW — FOREVER**
Kaleidoscope spreads an R90S over a long distance!
- 67 **THE NIGHT BATHURST "BLEW UP"**
Facts to spoil the fiction

TOURING

- 54 **FURTHER THAN BEFORE...**
Portugal, Spain and Morocco under The Bear's paw
- 74 **HIGHWAY 31 TEN YEARS ON**
A tough traveller in tougher territory!

SPORT

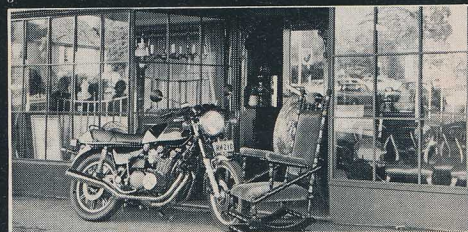
- 26 **TONY HATTON PROFILE**
A true racer never sweats

ODDS & SODS

- 46 **KEEP IT SPRUCE, BRUCE**
Dirt bike hose-off!
- 50 **WAR BIKES**
Dirt bikes for dirty tactics
- 64 **PRIDE AND PREJUDICE PREVAILS**
Owner's report: BMW R90S
- 70 **QUASAR: AN EARTHLY ODDITY**
Motorcycling of the future takes shape?
- 78 **ON THE WINGS OF ECONOMY**
A 25-year commuter thingo

DEPARTMENTS

- | | | |
|----------------------|---------------|------------------|
| 5 It's All Happening | 44 Gizmo File | 86 Club Register |
| 32 Cruisin' | 49 Socket | 90 Wrap-On |



Remember when that strange, original XS750D was called "years ahead of its time". It might well have been true — then! Many models later it's bigger and still with us. Even innovators are allowed to trail the slip occasionally. . . on page 20.

Editor

Mac Douglas

Assistant Editor

Mark Camm

Back-up and Legwork

Julia Cullen

South Of The Border

Kel Wearne

Road Test Chief

Col Miller

Leprechaun Still At Large

Lester Morris

National Advertising Chief

Les Edwards

Our Artist

Kerry Loss

Production Chief

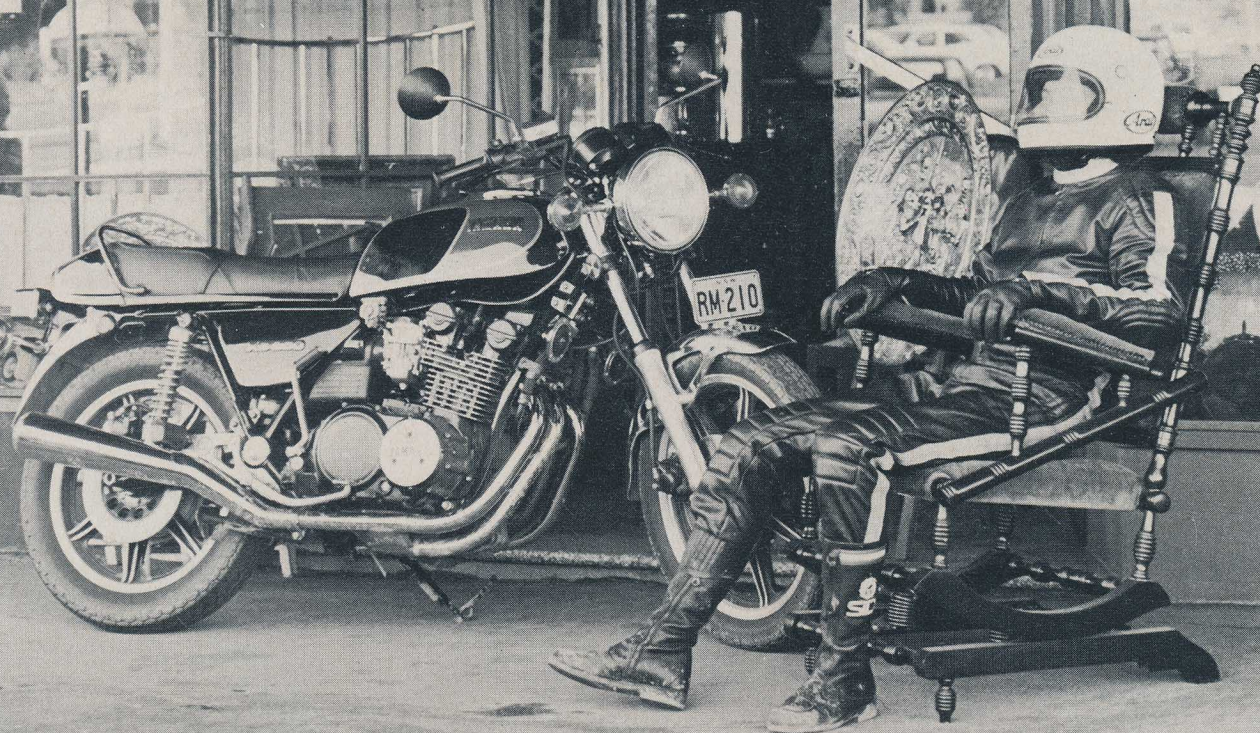
Bob Bowie with Steve Pickells

Freelance contributions are welcomed by this magazine and submissions should be addressed to The Editor, TWO WHEELS, 142 Clarence Street, Sydney, 2000. Submissions must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope for their return. The editor accepts no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts, photographs or transparencies. Annual subscription rate to addresses in Australia \$21.00. Other countries \$A22.20.

Back copies: 5th Floor, 168 Castlereagh St, Sydney, 2000. Advertising: National Advertising Manager, SHARON LIGHTNER, 142 Clarence St, Sydney, 2000. Phone 29-3761, 29-5606. Melbourne: 150 Lonsdale St, Melbourne, 3000. Phone 662-1222. Adelaide: THE ADMEDIA GROUP PTY LTD, 24 Kensington Road, Rose Park, 5067. Phone 332-8144. Brisbane: GEOFF HORNE, 57 O'Connell Terrace, Bowen Hills, 4006. Phone 52-8566. Perth: CLIFF THOMAS, ADREP Advertising Representatives, 62 Wickham St, East Perth, 6000. Phone 325-6395. New Zealand: ROSS QUAID, 17-19 Fitzherbert St, Petone, Wellington. Phone 68-8974. London: PETER HOLLOWAY, Ludgate House, 107 Fleet St, London EC4A2AL. Printed in New Zealand by Comprint. Published by Murray Publishers Pty Ltd, 142 Clarence St, Sydney, 2000. *Recommended Price.

DISTRIBUTORS: GORDON & GOTCH (A/SIA) LTD, MELBOURNE. MURRAY PUBLISHERS PTY LTD, SYDNEY.

ANTIQUES



YAMAHA XS850

What's A Nice Old-Fashioned
Bike Like You Doing In
A World Like This?

WHEN TWO WHEELS tested Yamaha's XS750F in March we concluded the big triple needed a major redesign to return it to an even footing with most of its rivals. The Yamaha's sole advantage lay inside its left swingarm and even that went by the boards when Suzuki gave its 750 a shaft, added a few cm³ and announced the GS850.

With the XS750 begging for a proper update and Yamaha's excellent XS1100 in mind, we were keen to throw a leg over an XS850 as soon as possible. The new model's displacement increase aimed it fairly at Suzuki's GS850 — a heavyweight opponent and joint winner of TWO WHEELS' BIKE OF THE YEAR award for 1979 — and Yamaha would surely have equipped the XS850 with the necessary armaments to give the GS a run for its money.

An hour in the saddle is more than enough to confirm that Yamaha has done the unthinkable — released little more than a bored-out XS750 to do battle with the brilliant and very capable Suzuki. The move leaves the ultimate future of the big triple in jeopardy; the forthcoming Yamaha/Suzuki confrontation in the 850 cm³ arena looks to be more a slaughter than a battle. The GS850 has the fangs of a wolf...

At the outset, a full roadtest of the XS850 was our intention, but in view of the new model's similarity to the recently-tested

stroke remains 68.6 mm and the triple's new capacity is 826 cm³.

In most other details the engine is unchanged — it is a double overhead cam, three-cylinder four-stroke running two valves per cylinder and a plain bearing lower end. Still red-lined at 9000 rpm, the powerplant remains very responsive and free-revving although its real forte is the gutsy low and midrange performance it provides. Changes were made to the cylinder-head and cylinder block, and claimed power is up from 50.7 kW to 54.5 kW at the crankshaft. The clutch and primary chain (a Morse Hy-Vo) were beefed up to ensure trouble-free operation and an oil-cooler added to keep lubricant temperature moderate under extreme conditions.

This year the engine breathes through a trio of 34 mm constant-vacuum Hitachi carbs and exhausts spent gases to the at-



"The rider perches on top of the 850, which almost feels like a log underneath him. It feels and behaves the way big bikes did years ago — up-to-the-minute heavyweights can do a good deal better".

XS750F, we changed its report to a comprehensive review rather than a full test. Most of what we wrote about Yamaha's 750 triple last March applies to the latest, biggest version (excluding, of course, those comments amended by this review) and intending purchasers should read that test as well for a total picture of the XS850.

In case we have given readers an unduly harsh portrayal of the 850 Yamaha it's important to point out that the new XS is not a bad motorcycle by any means; it is solid, durable and reliable in true Japanese fashion. It is, however, a new model, incorporating the most substantial changes ever made to Yamaha's triple, and must compete with a particularly fine bike in Suzuki's 850.

Quite frankly, we expected a lot more Yamaha than we got. In spite of the XS850's undeniable strong points (it has extremely good low and mid-range torque for example), we basically found it staid, uninteresting and dated, and nowhere near as much fun to ride as the GS850. Others may disagree.

The package

The XS850 is basically an XS750F with a slightly larger motor. Bigger pistons working in wider cylinders give the extra displacement; bore is up 3.5 mm to 71.5 mm,

The bike's superb Koito H4 halogen headlight is one of the best standard units around and better than most Japanese QIs. The XS11 dual horns are good too. Instruments are steady and easily-read though binnacle could do with modernising. Bike does not have modern steering lock position.

mosphere from two very attractive, upswept silencers. The mufflers not only look good but sound pleasant as well, the only trade-off in their design being that pillion passengers now have slightly higher footpegs. The entire exhaust system is better tucked-in and with better ground clearance cornering is significantly improved, although the model sets no new records in the area. Internal ratios in the gearbox appear to have been revised (at last) and the almighty clack which used to accompany one-two and two-one changes is much diminished. Precise details were not available but we would guess first gear is eight to 10 percent higher than previously.

The XS750's frame and weight continue unaltered, but the earlier model's 24-litre

fuel tank, excellent brakes and very comfortable seat make the transition to the 850 as well and ease the disappointment. Other features of the 750 we liked which carry over to the updated version include the low-effort controls, the comfortable riding position (it's just a shade too upright for sustained high speeds) and the elements of character in the engine.

The superb Koito H4 halogen headlight ranks among the best standard headlights around (it's better than most Japanese QI units) and the dual horns pinched from big brother 1100 are well up to the job of putting errant motorists in their place.

Finish is excellent; the paintwork is a dark, burgundy-brown with contrasting red slash and the engine, black-painted with polished fin ends in the Yamaha tradition, adds to the overall pleasing appearance. To our eyes though, the XS850 is still a little too bulbous in the flesh to be a truly handsome bike.

All the usual Yamaha street-bike niceties appear on the XS850 — self-cancelling blinkers, highly visible tail light and blinkers, transistorised ignition and easily-read, steady instruments (though the binnacle could stand a bit of modernising). One bummer which points up the age of the frame is the steering lock location, it's right where it used to be back in the dark ages — in the middle of the steering head.

"Signs of ageing are apparent in the 850's handling and suspension. Neither damping nor action came close to standards set by Suzuki's GS850. In fast, twisting road sections the bike is straining and needs to be ridden forcefully".

The riding proof

Sitting on an XS850 and rocking the bike from side to side reveals two characteristics of the model straight away — it has a high seat and a high centre of gravity. Neither are particularly desirable traits in a modern motorcycle and they make the XS feel heavier than it really is in everyday riding. Yamaha claims a dry weight of 236 kg for the 850, 17 kg lighter than Suzuki's 850, yet the XS always felt weightier than the GS, the lower saddle and (more importantly) the lower centre of mass reversing reality. Of course, the Suzuki's fine steering geometry helps as well.

One settles into the Suzuki and feels part of a rider/bike combination whereas the rider perches on top of the XS850 and somehow feels more removed from the bike, which almost feels like a log underneath him. This is not to say the bike feels terrible to ride and is totally dissociated from its rider, rather that the Yamaha feels and behaves the way big bikes felt and behaved six or seven years ago, and an up-to-the-minute heavyweight can do a good deal better.

Similar signs of ageing are apparent in the XS850's handling and suspension; meet any undulations mid-corner while pressing on and the bike will wobble slightly — not

enough to cause the rider to back off, but sufficient to tell him the bike is straining under the circumstances. Bump absorption too, leaves something to be desired. The slightly too soft suspension of the XS750F has been stiffened up for the 850 and the new rates are overly hard, especially for touring.

The rear units are the worst offenders and it's just as well the 850 has a good seat to lessen the jarring. We found preload position one adequate for all but the hardest two-up riding. Neither the damping nor the action of the forks or shock-absorbers came close to the standards set by the units on Suzuki's GS850. It was necessary to ride the XS850 very forcefully if fast point-to-point times were required on twisting country roads.

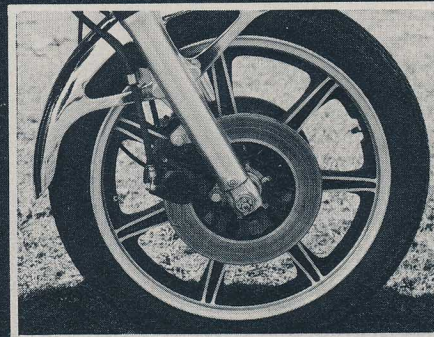
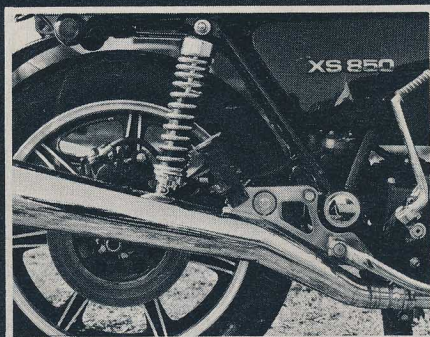
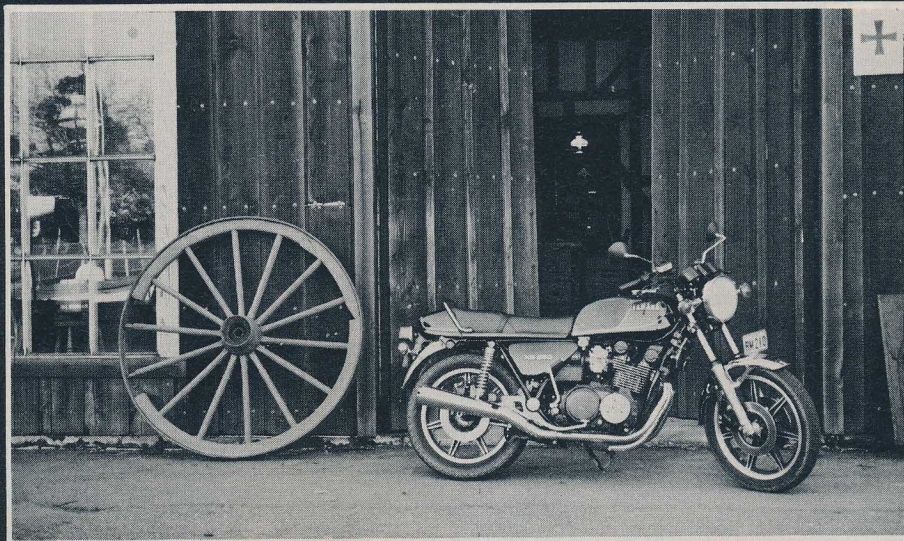
The big triple showed an affinity for following longitudinal road irregularities like the edges of asphalt runs or uneven joints in concrete road. It was also noticeably unhappy when throttled off or braked midcorner; picking a line and sticking to it resolutely was essential for really fast motoring on the XS850. The raising and lowering of the rear suspension as power is applied or removed, which is common to most shaft-driven bikes, is present with the XS850 as well — it seem-

"Revision of the internal ratios has at last eliminated the almighty 'clack' accompanying changes in and out of first gear. The engine manages the taller first with no difficulty and the change makes city and suburban riding far more agreeable".

ed no better or worse than others in this regard.

The engine of the 850 is significantly punchier than the old 750 cm³ job and is quite willing to spin the rear wheel (in spite of the taller first gear) without the banzai efforts necessary to induce wheelspin in the old model. We'd estimate standing 400 m times in the 12.9 to 13 seconds range with terminal speeds of 163 to 164 km/h — about four-tenths of a second quicker than its predecessor could achieve. Top speed would be in the region of 195 km/h. Overall gearing remains fairly tall with sizable gaps between ratios and second and third gears get a lot of use in suburbia. The torquey engine and gearbox combine well on the open road and downchanges are much less frequently resorted to than on Suzuki's peakier 850 for example. Fuel economy seems only marginally affected by the extra displacement, our touring figure of 17.4 km/l (49.5 mpg) is only slightly down on the XS750F's 18.3 km/l (52 mpg) and is well ahead of the 13.4 km/l (38.1 mpg) returned by our early model test GS850 (later GS850s with vacuum carbs may be more economical).

Only one other point about the XS850's engine needs mentioning — it vibrates a whole lot more than the old 750 ever did! The 850 suffers a band of the shakes between 4000 and 5500 rpm which is com-



Engine power is up eight percent on the 750. Changes include bigger bore and slightly different head pattern. Bike now runs 34 mm Hitachi carbs and clutch and primary drive have been strengthened. The new upswept-muffled exhaust system is better tucked in, though the model is far from outstanding in ground clearance — or suspension. Brakes are good, but at cruising speed the engine is a disappointing vibrator.

pletely out of character with its smoothness elsewhere in the rev range, ignoring the throbbing at idle and very low engine speeds. Unfortunately, these vibes occur at the most commonly used touring speeds in top gear (105 to 125 km/h indicated) and are a pain in the neck when cruising at reasonably legal speeds. The engine cries out for rubber mountings like the XS1100 has, but until it gets them keep running a spanner over any bolts that might loosen every month or so.

Conclusions

In many ways it's a shame when such a mediocre bike as Yamaha's XS850 meets such an outstanding bike as Suzuki's GS850 head-on in the marketplace. One can't help but compare the two shoulder to shoulder, and sadly the Yamaha doesn't rate alongside the sweet Suzuki.

If you're a dyed-in-the-wool Yamaha freak who wouldn't piss on a Suzuki if it was on fire, see if Yamaha's far more modern shaftdrive 650 four would do the job.



Second Opinion

Hitting It On The Nose With A Newspaper Won't Help

MARK CAMM discovered the XS850 behaves like an untrained puppy — apt to do what it wants anywhere — but it makes up for it by being persistent, loyal and, in the final analysis, quite loveable.

DID YOU ever have a dog that kept piddling on the carpet, and when you went over to kick it in the groin to remind it of the error of its ways, it'd look up at you with its brown, innocent eyes, wag its tail and lick your hand?

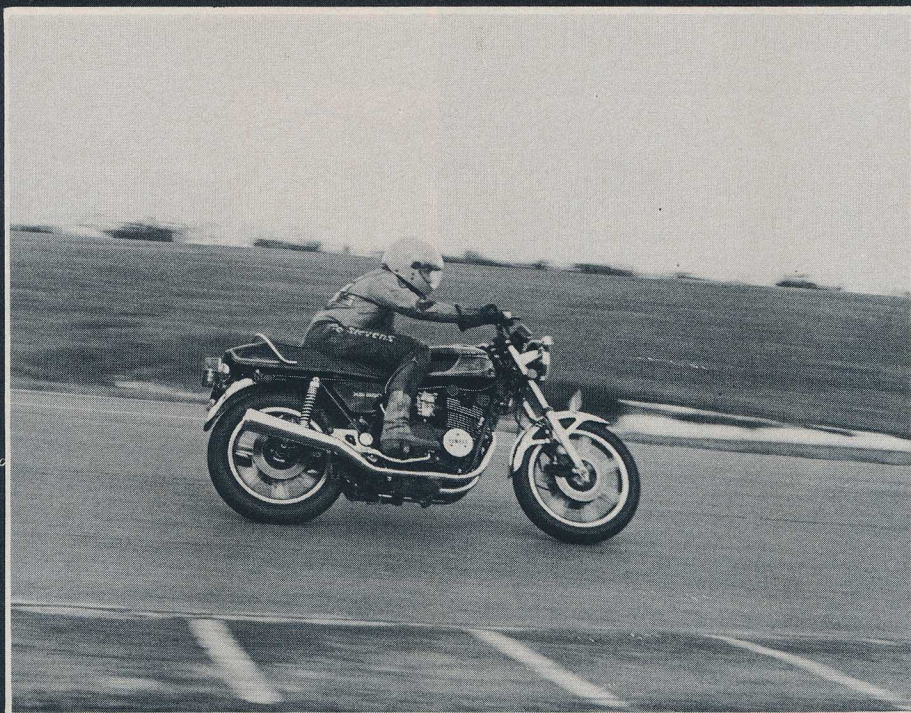
No person could punish a dog after an act like that — its more endearing qualities overtake its tendency to piddle in the corner, and you're left with a marshmallow heart and a lump of emotional appreciation in your throat — not to mention a soggy carpet.

I'm not about to accuse the test Yamaha XS850 of wandering blithely into my lounge room and squatting on the shag pile, but I am about to accuse it of being infuriatingly pleasant to ride — regardless of the fact that very few things on the machine do anything particularly well.

If the bike had a tail (as in furry, with bone and flesh) it'd wag it, perpetually. It really does want to do what the rider commands of it, but more often than not doesn't, and after it's done its metaphorical piddle-on-the-carpet-act while you're riding it, there is every reason to believe that the bike actually apologises and does its best to clean up the mess.

Many moons ago, when I was still wearing nappies and choking on baby rice (right, last year) I was the owner of a good-looking but pathetic bit of machinery called a Yamaha XS750 2D — I had bought it a year before that after trading my lovely and very nice Suzuki GS750; I was attracted to the Yamaha, I think, because it had alloy wheels and the GS didn't. The Yamaha wasn't a patch on the Suzuki, then, and when the 850 rolled into my sights recently I thought it'd be good to renew some old aggressions — it had to be as bad as the 750 in my opinion.

I was the poor lamb that picked up the test bike from NSW Yamaha distributors McCullochs Pty Ltd, and the initial ride back to the office had me wishing that it had been a chainsaw I'd picked up. What a bloody awful bike, what a sham, it was worse than my old XS750 and a mountain of time behind every other 750-plus Japanese bike on the market. I was appalled by just about everything it did, or didn't do as the case may be, and with a sadistic chuckle in my throat passed it on to road tester Colin Miller.



The impression of the XS850, my virgin impression so to speak, was the same I think anyone would have if taking it for a demo ride trying to decide whether or not to buy it. If first impressions are important, the bike is guaranteed to disappoint.

And then a strange thing happened. I took it for a long ride. The more I rode it, the more I pushed it, the more familiar I became with it, the more I liked it. It's certainly not a marriage of rider and machine, more a *de facto* thing, but if you can have a deep and meaningful affair without really committing yourself to a permanent relationship, there's no reason why you can't own, ride and enjoy the 850.

But the specifics. What is the 850?

My little ride took me south out of Sydney, through Royal National Park, through Wollongong (as quickly as possible) up the Macquarie Pass — with an hour or two spent wandering around the national park there. Very beautiful — then through to Bowral and back to Sydney by way of the Hume. There was hardly a road condition I didn't encounter.

The first thing I learned was to give the 850 a written invitation before taking it through any tight corners. It does not like the unexpected, and the only way to alter a line in a corner is to wash off speed or brake, heavily. Otherwise, you select the line, and once that's done, you're committed. The road through Royal National Park is no place to muck up.

A prehistoric feel

The steering is very slow, extremely heavy, and with the bike's self-steering characteristics (a point with all Yamaha road bikes?) the rider must be in firm control of the bike at all times. Become lazy, and there is nothing inherently good in the bike's steering and tracking to save you from some untidy moments.

The only way to conquer the problem is to be unafraid to force the machine. It has to be pushed over into a corner, it won't fall into it by itself, and when it begins standing up halfway through the bend, you have to be ready to throw your shoulders closer to mother earth and get your entire weight moving the bike over. Do that and you're surprised just how well, if reluctantly, the bike then behaves.

If you're half-hearted, timid with it, the 850 will simply roll on in its lacklustre way. To make it sparkle, it has to be dominated.

The handling is the bike's sore point. It is certainly no better, and probably no worse, than its 750 predecessor. The front end is spongy and vague in response and it seems to know nothing about rebound qualities, although it does soak up most potholes and such — but the bike is so easily thrown off line and the handlebars made to quiver and shake in your hands by hitting the hard stuff at speed. However, never did I feel as though the bike was going to lose control. I did not feel one tank slapper coming on, and what wallowing there was remained controllable, if a little annoying.

The rear feels dead. You're never really too sure if it's working or not. The tail will sometimes flick uneasily, sometimes it will wallow and other times it won't. Most peculiar. For open road touring, on good surfaces, with not too many surprises thrown into the bargain, the 850 settles into an acceptably fast, acceptably safe and secure and acceptably pleasant lope. It does have that heart of the faithful family dog that wants to do its very best at all times, but only if it has come to an amicable agreement with its owner first.

The engine is going to surprise many people.

At first it feels as if the three-cylinder four-stroke has been accidentally left out of the frame, replaced when the omission was

noticed with a cardboard replica. Where's the power? Why won't it move?

I doubt that power output is very much greater than that of the 750, but torque, that's a different matter! With a very tall first gear it's hard to determine that the engine hides its light under a bushel. It putters around town nicely, but its tour de force is the open road. Between 3500 and about 4500 rpm the engine sets up a god-awful vibration throughout the bike (bad enough to keep rattling loose the tach cable from its engine possey) but above that, using the gears for maximum advantage, and the bike will fly and fly fast. At 7000 rpm there is a definite surge of guts being transmitted to the rear wheel and as the power curve drops the torque helps keep things spinning; the engine at 7000 is still revving freely, indeed it does all the way past the redline, and it simply goes faster and faster and faster.

I have no idea what the speedo error is, but at just under 9000 rpm in top gear, with a slight tail wind and a good road underneath, it was indicating 210 km/h and still going. And what surprised me more than anything was that the bike felt completely stable — there was no slight wandering, no minute shakes of the handlebar, it was smooth, tackled the long sweeper I was going through with confidence and when I backed off and took my chin off the fuel tank, the bike, as against what has happened to me with so many other machines, did not shake as it washed off speed. There and then I decided that the 850 was not the prize cow I originally thought it to be.

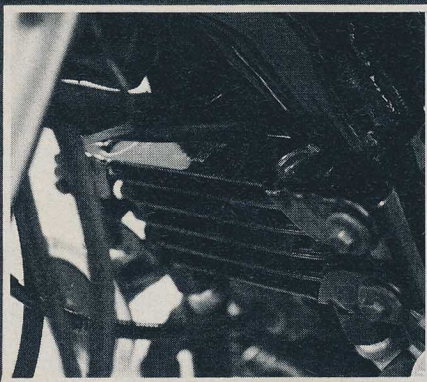
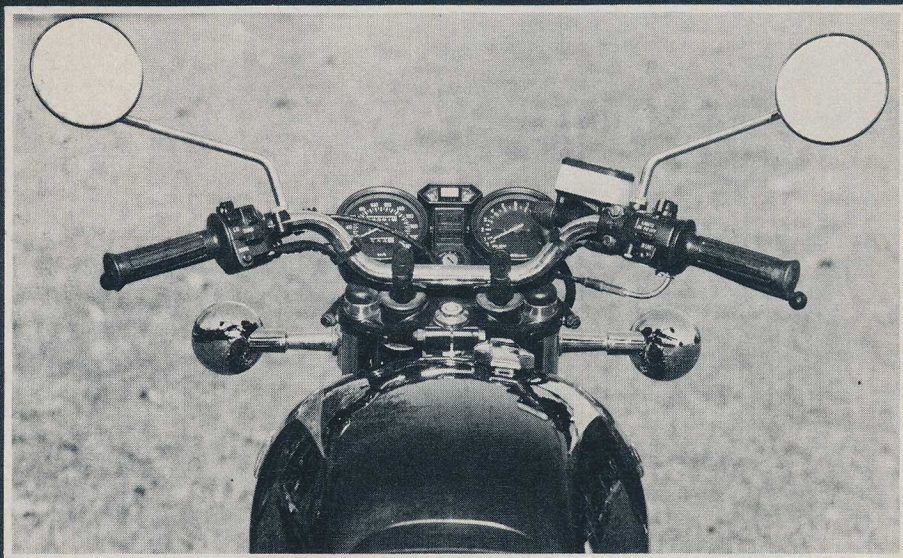
At touring speeds of between 100 km/h (which carries with it the awful vibrations) to about 140 km/h the bike feels good, and even if there's not enough power to make it a top-gear blaster past'er (using the gearbox is the secret to getting the most out of the motor) there is more than enough useable torque to make up for it.

Good fuel consumption

Comfort is excellent, and the seat — a generous affair — allowed the blood to circulate through my bum and thighs to its heart's content. My back hurt like crazy after a few hours, and with a headwind forcing my helmet back my neck soon felt as if it was going to separate — but then those two things always happen to me on a long ride, no matter what bike I'm on.

A point with the 850 that did surprise me was the Bridgestone Mag Mopus tyres. They were very good in the dry, I didn't feel them slip at all — although with the dead rear end I might not have noticed — and generally they gave performance far above my expectations. I have no idea how good they are in the wet (although I can tell you they're bloody hopeless in clay and mud, evidenced by the ride through Macquarie Pass National Park) because I never push a bike when the road it's hurtling over is soggy. Sometime ago, in a land far, far away, I did myself some damage by losing control of a bike in an oil slick; since then I've never ridden confidently on a slippery road, or even one that looks slippery...

The handlebars are set at a comfortable angle, and the seating position remains good, even though it is a compromise be-



tween city and highway riding. The grips are far too hard, and small, and combined with a tough, strong clutch action induced finger cramps in my left hand. Throttle action was light, and to get the bike rolling smoothly usually meant being in one gear too high to take advantage of the engine's torque — one gear too low had the bike stuttering if revs were high.

Instruments, while not innovative, were efficient enough, and I have to pass on my preference for Yamaha's switch gear, especially the turn switch.

The fuel tank is huge (more than 22 litres capacity) while fuel consumption is not. I averaged 14.4 km/l, and had a best of 17.85 km/l (between 40-50 mpg). Considering the hard work the bike was put to, I consider them to be excellent figures — and at those figures you have a touring range well in excess of 300 km. If you ride to save fuel, the figures should increase significantly.

Styling? Well, each person has his or her own preferences. The overriding impression of the 850 is size, massive size from its large fuel tank, to the enormous H4 headlight (it works, and it's good).

Having been intimately involved with the XS750, I know for a fact that styling changes for the 850 are minimal — new paint scheme, one or two things changed here and there, and that's it. But is it a better bike than the 750? Yes and no.

I never came to terms with my 750, never liked it and was only too glad to get rid of

The smaller, earlier model's 24-litre tank and excellent seat make the 850 transition well. Riding position is quite versatile and comfortable. Part of the new equipment for the 850 (left) includes an oil cooler.

it. The 850 is a different matter. I hated it to begin with, but grew to like it more the more I rode it. I think I have come to terms with it.

There's the 850's slow steering, its ponderous feel, its weight (it is too heavy) and its below-average handling. There are many things to complain about, and to wonder about — the brakes, for example, have almost no feel, yet they're precise, progressive and without any nasty vices. They can be slammed on in corners, but not to the detriment of the bike.

The 850 is almost a contradiction. Various areas looked at in the cold light of analysis come out looking grubby and below par, but overall the bike is as willing and forgiving a bike as I've ever ridden.

The pleasant and throaty growl from the three-into-two exhaust, the gearbox that gets you mad because it sticks and is stiff, and then you forget all about it, the way it won't lean and then will because you've mastered the art of getting it over and keeping it there, the entire bike is full of things you have to get used to before you can ride it and like it.

It's like having a backward relative in the family. There are so many things that person can't do properly, yet their attempts to get it right, far from being frustrating because they're miles from success, are endearing and should be greeted with pride because from sheer persistence and trying their faults are easily forgiven, and indeed soon forgotten. You've learned to live with them and accept them for what they are — not quite there, but not that far away either.

Stacked against Suzuki's 850, or the Guzzi or the other 850s on the market, friend Yamaha 850 does indeed look second string-er. But don't be fooled, the other bikes are arrogant in their excellence, while the Yamaha is persistent, honest and 100 per-cent loyal in trying to make up its deficit.

—Mark Camm