

# Which Bike?

**JUNE 1979**

**No.35**

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Published by  
Sportscene Publishers Ltd  
14 Rathbone Place  
London W1P 1DE  
England  
Telephone 01-580 6104  
01-637/7991/2/3

VAT No. 234 6363 1  
Company registered in  
England No. 121 8996

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BIKE? is Copyright  
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Printed by  
Southernprint Ltd  
Branksome,  
Pool, Dorset

Distributed by  
Moore Harness Ltd  
Corsica Street  
London N1  
Tel: (01) 359 4126

**Cover Photography:**  
Suzuki GS1000S by  
Jerry Young.

**2**

**New Bike Buyers Guide:** All you wanted to know — now in a new easy-to-read format.

**16**

**Your Letters:** It's GS425 Suzuki backlash this month.

**17**

**Two Wheel Gazette:** Did you hear about the...

**22**

**A Mug's Game:** So you wanna be a £100-a-week messenger biker.

**26**

**Less Means More in the 250 War:** How does Kawasaki's Scorpion score against the XS250 and CB250N twins.

**36**

**Diversion Tactics:** Is Suzuki's GS1000S a stop-gap range leader like the Z1R Special. We compare them.

**45**

**On The Rough: Off-Road Rambles:** News dirtwise.

**47**

**A Bigger Bang:** Honda's XR500 enduro, a dirt bike with clean manners.

**52**

**Mini-cross Buyers Guide:** Specs and prices of bikes in the schoolboy classes.

**57**

**Riding the Range:** Will specials like Yamaha's XS750S catch on here? A Stateside Quickspin.

**62**

**Golden Oldies:** We meet an Inter rider who actually rides his classics.

**65**

**Back Issues:** Find that road test on your bike.

**66**

**Help!** The technical questions and answers department.

**67**

**New Bike Price Guide:** What you can get for your money.

**68**

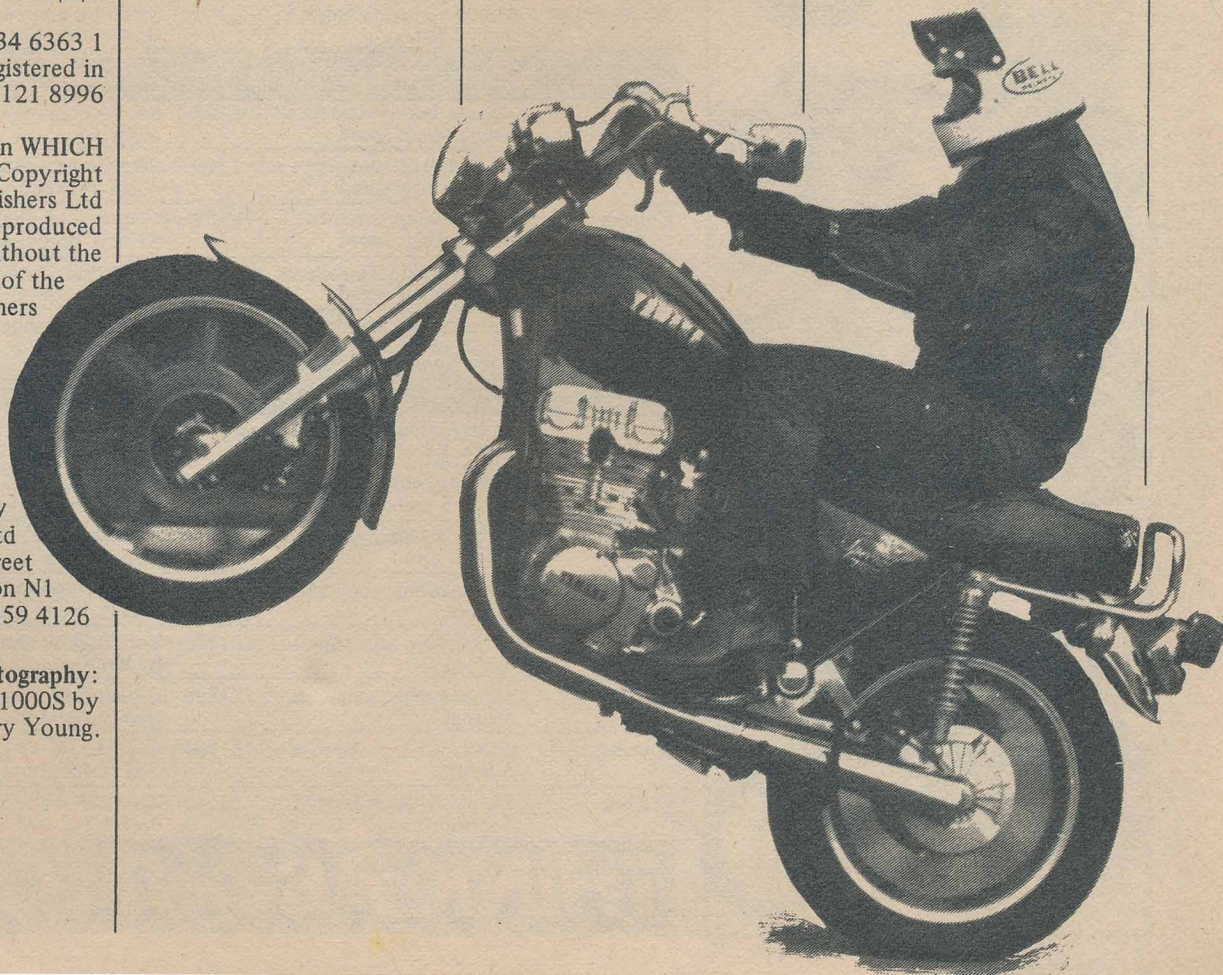
**New Bike Buyers Guide:** Part two.

**72**

**Used Bike Buyers Guide:** Up-to-date prices on second-hand models.

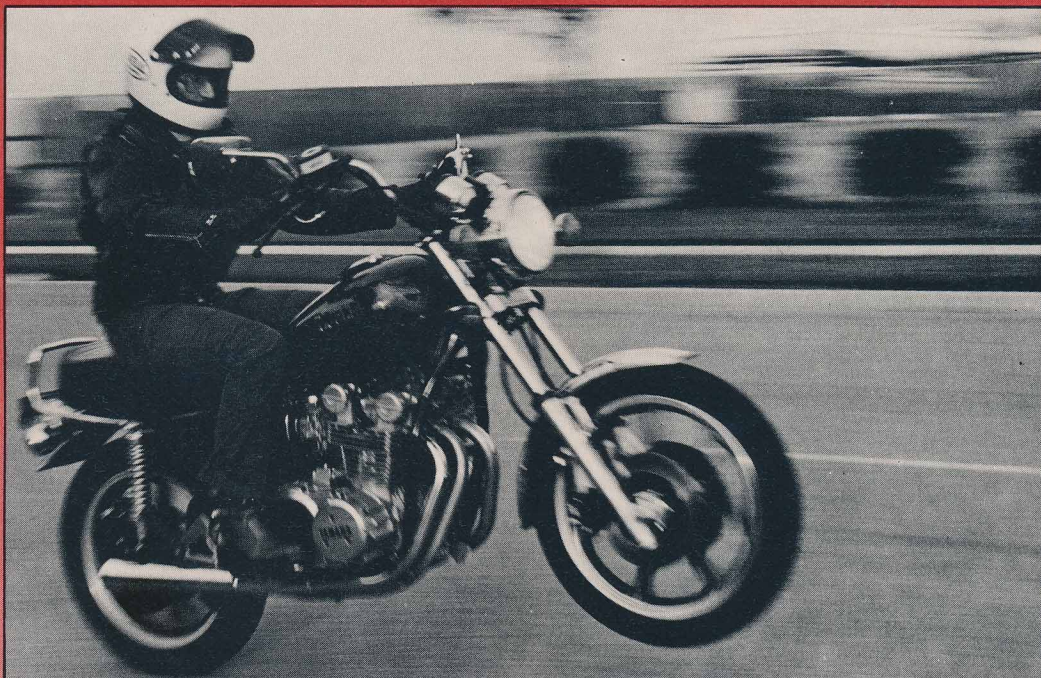
**80**

**Test Index:** Which test was in which issue of *Which Bike?*





# RIDING THE RANGE ON SEMI-CHOPPER "SPECIALS"



Specials, LTDs, Low Slingers, SRs, Deluxes. No matter what they're called, semi-choppers are the hottest selling motorcycles in America right now. Customers are lining up to buy, dealers are screaming for more bikes and manufacturers can't even begin to keep up with demand.

*John D Ulrich tests the bike that could make it happen here,  
Yamaha's XS750 Special.*

Kawasaki was the first Japanese manufacturer with anything like the current crop of semi-choppers, introducing the KZ900 LTD into the American market in 1976. But it took Yamaha's complete, integrated styling treatment and intense marketing and advertising push to show the sales potential that Specials held.

The XS650SE Special was the first of the new line, featuring a fat 16 inch rear tyre, pull-back 'apehanger' handlebars, a step seat with chrome passenger grab bar, small tail light, cast alloy wheels, teardrop-shaped gas tank, short and throaty megaphone exhaust pipes and chrome engine mounts and instrument housings. The machine set a new record for pre-production dealer orders after its introduction at the Yamaha dealer show in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1977. The XS750SE Special had much the same treatment, differing from the standard XS750E by virtue of handlebars, forks, mufflers, silver engine, stepped seat, extra chrome and small tail light.

By the time the machines had actually reached dealer showrooms and the sales figures recorded for the first six months of 1978, Specials had sent Yamaha's share of the American market to within 0.1 per cent of traditional market dominator Honda, an increase of more than 20 per cent in less than one year.

Suddenly it was Honda's turn to catch up on the marketing homework and turn out its own batch of chopper-styled machines, including a particularly gaudy version of the CX500. Kawasaki's SR series had already closely

followed the Yamaha Specials, and now even staid and conservative (a market stance motivated by days of innovative motorcycles and sales flops; i.e. the RE-5) Suzuki had introduced semi-choppers known as the "Low Slingers."

It is obvious that Yamaha pushed the right button to make the American motorcycle buyer reach for his wallet and vote with his dollars. The great sales success that bred instant imitation from the other Japanese giants certainly wasn't generated by press reports, for the editors of the major American motorcycle magazines looked askance at the Specials, shook their heads in wonder and disgust, and worried what the country was coming to. The editor of the largest magazine in America flatly refused to have anything even resembling choppers in his magazine for over a year after the introduction of Specials, only yielding his position after the announcement of the XS11 Special and the presentation of overwhelming sales figures for the stylish machines.

The fact is, there was a time when even the Japanese in charge of Yamaha's U.S. distributorship refused to have anything to do with Specials. The Yamaha Motor Co U.S. (formerly Yamaha International) market research department had presented evidence that Specials would sell as early as 1970, only to be told by the Japanese president of the firm that 'Yamaha will never build choppers!'

But when the top executive returned home and was replaced by another man in 1974, the market research department men made the pitch again and scored a victory. Yamaha



## The safety & professionalism of Kangol means a lot to Ron Haslam & Len Phillips...



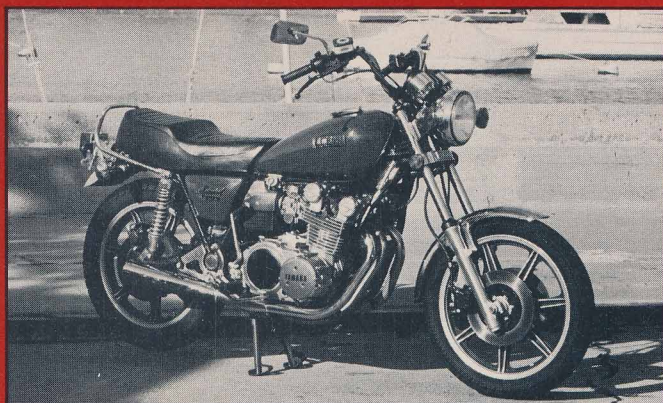
Ron Haslam now wears a Kangol Falcon Helmet. After just a few meetings he's found it to be a very good helmet. "Really good fit with good all round vision that lets you see anyone sneaking up alongside, and somehow it doesn't steam up as much as others I've worn."

Len Phillips is the Chief RAC/ACU instructor for the Bristol area and an IAM Examiner. He's been riding bikes for 33 years. "The Kangol Falcon Classic is superior to many other helmets I've inspected. In my experience, it's an attractive, thoroughly comfortable and trouble free helmet."

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dealers had long reported that the first thing customers did — especially customers in the large metropolitan areas of the country — after buying an XS650 was to bolt on short, loud megaphone exhausts, a stepped seat, pullback bars and a custom paint job. Consumer-level research surveying over 1000 owners of various brand and size bikes — as well as non-owners — in large and small towns across the nation revealed that motorcycle buyers (recruited for the surveys by direct-mail offers of money for their time) preferred 'round' motorcycles to 'square,' or 'angular' motorcycles. Most people surveyed felt that prototype mockups and drawings of the Specials 'looked like motorcycles should.'

Exit XS500, perhaps the most angular of the then-current Japanese motorcycles (*the XS 500 twin remains for 1979 in Europe — Ed*). Enter Specials, followed closely by big-number sales increases for Yamaha. Give the public what they want, and you'll sell a million. . .

The XS750SF, as the 1979 750cc Special is known officially, is a good (read, 'popular') example of the breed — Yamaha expects the 750 to be the biggest selling Special in 1979. The differences between it and its more conventional brother are more than purely cosmetic. The gas tank is reshaped, although it holds the

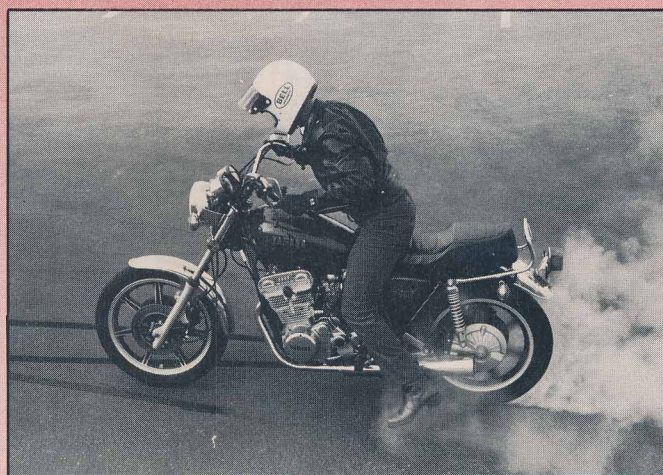
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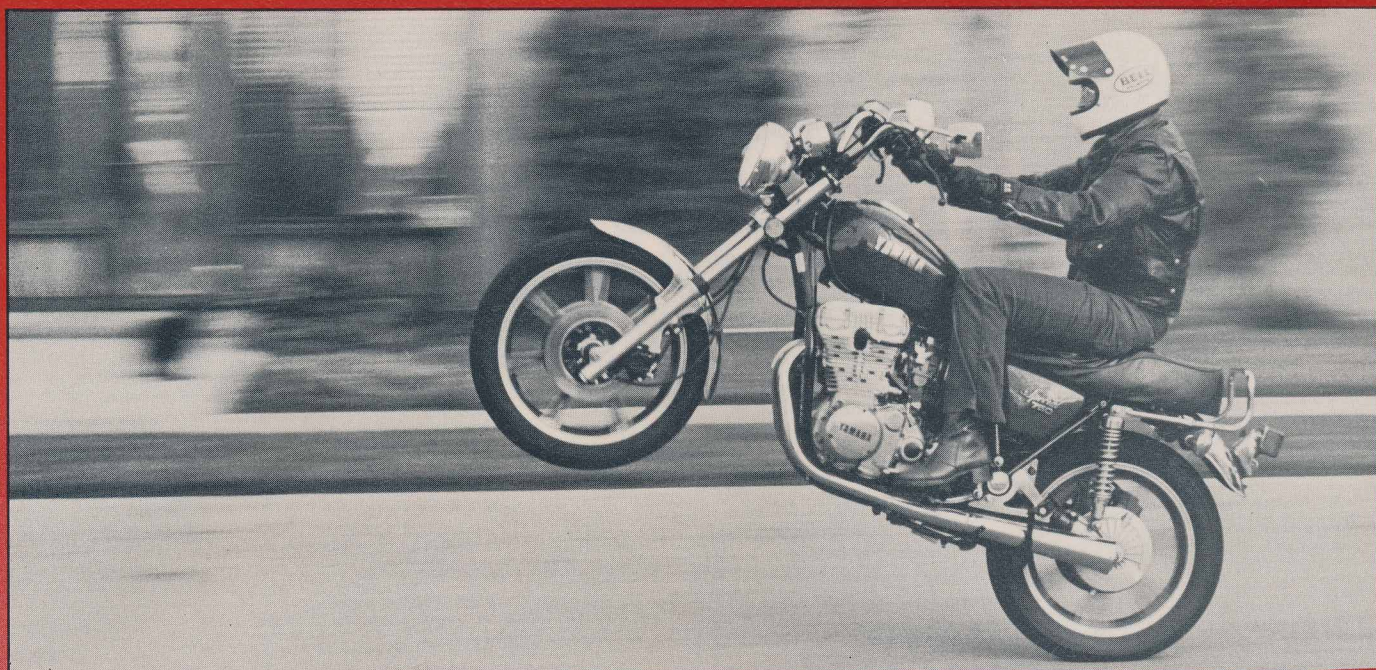
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same 3¾ gallons as the tank on the standard model. But the Special is lighter (507lb versus 522lb for the standard); longer (59.3in wheelbase versus 57in); lower (32.1in seat height versus 32.3 in); has more ground clearance (61.5degrees versus 63.5 degrees) to give the front end the desirable 'kicked out' appearance. At the same time, the leading-axle front forks fitted to the Special keeps the steering geometry from getting too out of hand, the Special actually has less trail than the standard, 4.05 inches to the standard's 4.8 inches. While the XS650 and XS11 Specials come with 16 inch rear wheels, Yamaha engineers couldn't fit a fatter rear tyre inside the XS750's drive-shaft-incorporating swing-arm, so the XS750SF has the same 18 inch tyre as the standard XS750F. But even though they couldn't change the rear wheel, the designers did jazz up the colour, offering the Special 750 in a choice of Carmine Red, Indigo Blue or Black Gold.

Riding the XS750SF Special takes a little getting used to. The 'bars seem hopelessly odd at first, reaching way too far up and back — weaving through traffic jams at slow speeds is like trying to navigate a very heavy, unweildy, powerful wheelbarrow around stepping stones. The snappy rectangular rearview mirrors stick out from the already-wide bars to make cutting between lanes of traffic stalled on American freeways a knuckle-whitening (and mirror-scraping) experience. And travelling down the road at speed with the body straight upright and the arms spread wide and high to meet the bars is a great form of isometric exercise — fighting the wind to hang on while assuming the posture of a well-set sail is harder than one might think. No wonder Barry Sheene and company sit upright when braking for a turn!

But the Special's seat is comfortable, the fuel tank delivers as much range (as much as 200 miles on the highway at an indicated 65 mph) as the standard version, and the exhaust note is a pleasant rumble. Once the rider gets used to the bars and steering, the Special can be ridden and flung about as hard, perhaps even harder than the stocker. American touring types like the fact that the shorter mufflers allow easier mounting of larger saddlebags, and many riders praise the seating position afforded by the handlebars when wind pressure isn't a

problem, as when the bike is fitted with an American-style touring fairing or windscreen.

And for 'styling', cruising the boulevard or riding to the local drive-in hamburger joint, the Special's appearance and effect on the rider's self-image over-rides its wind-cutting function (or lack thereof). In fact, style *is* the Special's function.

As for performance, there's no doubt that the Special will be able to duplicate the stocker's figures. That means it's good for a top speed of 120 mph and be able to rip through the quarter mile in a shade under 14 seconds. But that's hardly of significance to the buyer of this bike. More important is the throttle response from medium freeway speeds, which the three 34mm constant velocity Mikunis provide in ample measure on a fairly light twistgrip.

The engine remains unchanged. It's a 120-degree in-line three with double overhead camshafts developing 68 bhp. Transmission is through a Hy-vo type chain to the clutch and five-speed gearbox. The ensemble is tough and bulletproof — and looks great.

There's no telling whether or not the Specials will be as well received in Great Britain and on the Continent as they are in America, even though initial Yamaha research indicates that they will be. But one thing is known among its other appeals, the XS750F without a doubt delivers the best, loudest, and most explosive exhaust backfires this side of the bazooka, all upon rider command. All it takes is running a warm engine up to about 6000 rpm, slamming the throttle shut and hitting the engine kill switch, coasting along (in gear, clutch out) for a few hundred feet, and then switching the kill switch back on with the throttle closed. Pumping the throttle a few times with the switch off adds to the effect, but even without the extra effort the rider is rewarded with a loud 'BANG!' and, at night, a clearly-visible 18-inch blue-and-yellow blast of flame out each of the twin mufflers. Imagine the effect *that* would have if you pulled up and blasted off next to the old biddy in the Rolls who almost rammed you at the last intersection!

And if that isn't enough redeeming social value for the Yamaha Specials and all other semi-choppers, then nothing is.

#### YAMAHA XS750 Special

Price	To be announced
Engine	Dohc three
Capacity	747cc
Bore & Stroke	68x68.6mm
Lubrication	Wet sump
Comp. Ratio	9.2 to 1
Ignition	CDI
Max Power	68bhp at 8,000rpm
Primary Drive	Hy-vo chain
Clutch	Wet multiplate
Gearbox	Five speed
Final Drive	Shaft
Mph/1,000rpm	14.5 in top
Electrics	12v 14ah battery, 3-phase alternator 50/40w head-lamp
Fuel Capacity	3¾ gallons
Frame	Duplex cradle
Suspension	Telescopic front fork (f) Swing arm, 5-pos adjustable (r)
Wheels	3.25x19in (f) 4.00x18in (r)
Brakes	Two 10½in discs (f) 10½ disc (r)

<b>DIMENSIONS</b>	
Wheelbase	59.3in
Seat height	32.1in
Grnd Clrnce	6.1in
Rake/trail	61.5deg/4.05in
Weight	507lbs

<b>PERFORMANCE (est)</b>	
Top speed	120mph
St ¼-mile	13.9secs
0-60mph	5 secs
Fuel consumption :	45mpg
Range	200 miles
Importer	Mitsui Machinery Sales, Oakcroft Rd, Chessington Surrey KT9 1SA