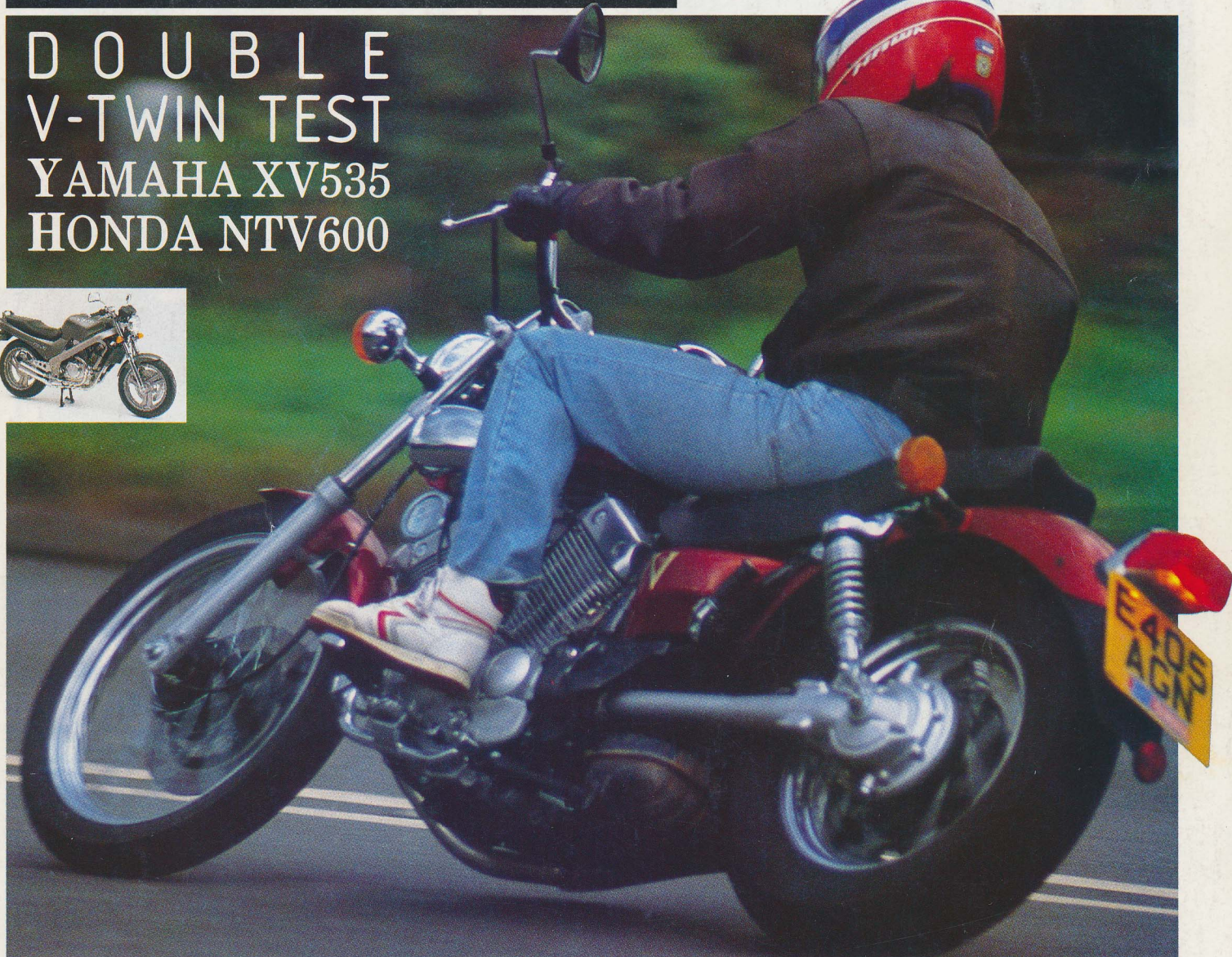


what BIKE?

MARCH • APRIL 1989

£1.75

DOUBLE
V-TWIN TEST
YAMAHA XV535
HONDA NTV600



C O N S U M E R G U I D E
new suzuki and kawasaki prices

- ON TEST - KAWASAKI KMX200
- USED BIKES - YAMAHA RD 500LC
- HONDA CB125 TWINS
- AWARDS - OUR BEST BIKES OF 1988

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... Captain Sensible



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Treasure trailer

Kawasaki's KMX200 is just perfect, reckons Rosie Marston. At last, an alternative to the Paris-Dakar dinosaurs.

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1988 choice

Brian Tarbox singles out his two wheeled choices of 1988.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Yamaha kick-off in our monthly switch for summer!



● Yes, we are going monthly for this summer starting with the May issue and the first of four superb supplements where we test the very latest models. Yamaha are first and heading their line-up will be their new 600cc Genesis (right) and the awesome 1000cc version. Their unique TDR250 (top) and their commuter and learner bikes will be included in the first quarter of a long, hot summer for What Bike? Full details, page four.



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Hot summer!

What Bike? goes monthly for the summer! Norton launch their new race team. Bike sales are up. Neil Murray's news round-up.

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What difference can these measurements make to an engine? What is 'over-square'? John Nutting reveals all.

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It was the closest thing you could get to Kenny Roberts' GP bike. The four-cylinder Yamaha RD500 is eminently collectable today and a pretty good bike to boot.

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of our survey into one piece riding suits and the overall table.



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Young Jim Whitham is 22 but has been on two wheels for 16 years already. The law was not impressed with his first ride on the road, though.

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John Sutton leapt straight from his Honda 100 to a massive Suzuki Intruder and has clocked 13,000 miles since. He's made a couple of mods and just loves his luxurious steed.

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Eternal twin

Honda have been making 125cc twins throughout their history. Buy the right model if you are looking for speed, though.

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More price rises

Suzuki catch up the others with increases across their range; price rises too from Kawasaki; our new-look 'getting on the road' section for new riders; insurance rates; second hand guide.

Editor: Bob Berry.
Associate editor: Brian Tarbox.
Editorial assistant: Margaret Woolley.
Publishers: EMAP National Publications, Orton Centre, Peterborough.

Advertising:
Advertisement Manager: Shaun Collin.
Advertisement Sales Executive: Stewart Green

Editorial office: Bob Berry Publishing Services, Suite G, Deene House, Market Square, Corby, Northants NN17 1PB. Telephone 0536 203003.
Designer: Nigel Parker.

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A brace of Vees



YAMAHA XV535



HONDA NTV600

No,

Fun to ride, the Yamaha handled with surprising panache.

not a two-handed

insult but

our usual

double test on

two v-twin

motor cycles



*A small
Majorcan incident*

set Bob Berry thinking... could this



*little **Yamaha** have more to
it than meets the eye? The bike*

proves him right

A v-sign in the summer

Not to everyone's taste, perhaps, but the neat lines of the XV535 make it unusually attractive for a custom-styled bike.



● Engine and transmission

★★★★★

YOUNGER brother to the 1000cc 'Virago' the XV535's V-twin four stroke engine is its best feature. Just hearing it tick over at a steady and lazy throb is a pleasure. Even when cold it fired up willingly with a little choke and settled into a rhythmic purr with none of that irritating increase or decrease in revs while it leant unattended on the side stand.

The subdued exhaust note could be encouraged to a crackle when under way but those muscular looking open ended exhaust pipes only expend gases after they have been routed through the oval silencer just forward of the back tyre.

The take-up of the 535cc engine was astonishingly smooth — less 'lumpy' than Honda's V4 750 unit in fact. In any gear it never felt hurried so it soon become habit to stick it in fourth or top and adopt a cruising demeanour. Around town or on longer journeys this was the only way to travel — in a relaxed manner — and I envied our Majorcan owner being able to ponce around Cala d'Or in shirt sleeves and without a helmet.

Much of the smooth throttle response is due to the two down-draught carburettors mounted between the 70 degree V formed by the two cylinders and the shaft drive was as snatch-free as that on Kawasaki's 550 four cylinder GT — better, in fact, with the motor's characteristics eliminating that sudden deceleration when the throttle is shut.

Traffic was no problem on the open road either. Despite a lack of top end speed (even the risk of looking a wally and crouching behind the handlebars could not induce the 535 to more than 85mph on the clock) cogging down produced a surprisingly brisk turn of speed for overtaking. Maximum torque of 4.8kg-m arrives at 6,000rpm and maximum power only 1500rpm later when there's around 47 horses on tap.

No rev counter was fitted or was necessary. The bike would go on pulling with no sign of stress until mechanical sympathy took over and the box was snicked upwards.

Two valves per cylinder are thought perfectly adequate along with single camshafts. Bore and stroke is well over-square at 76mm x 59mm and transistorised ignition is operated by the electric start.

Air boxes for the carbs poke out like chromium hernias either side of the front cylinder and add to the custom look. The 8.6 litre tank resides beneath the seat adding to a low centre of gravity while conventional tank merely hides the electrics.

Gearbox is a beauty. Crisp and precise, it's impossible to fault. Neutral was always easily found — no embarrassing delays at the lights trying to find the right cog, either.

● Chassis

★★★★★

WELL, of course it doesn't handle or brake as well as your TZR or FZR but, then again, it does go around corners with a panache that is most unexpected. As dictated by the styling, footrests

are mounted well forward with the gear-change and rear brake pedals almost in a straight line beneath the steering head.

The seat is well humped for the rider with the raised pillion section high enough for fully grown passengers to see over the pilot's head. Not the case personally as my pillion was nine year-old son Richard taking his first ride on the back of a bike. This also, incidentally, is a tribute to the XV535's unassuming appearance. There was little protest from Richard's over-protective Mum about him climbing on the back. Now, if I had suggested he rode on the back of an FZR...

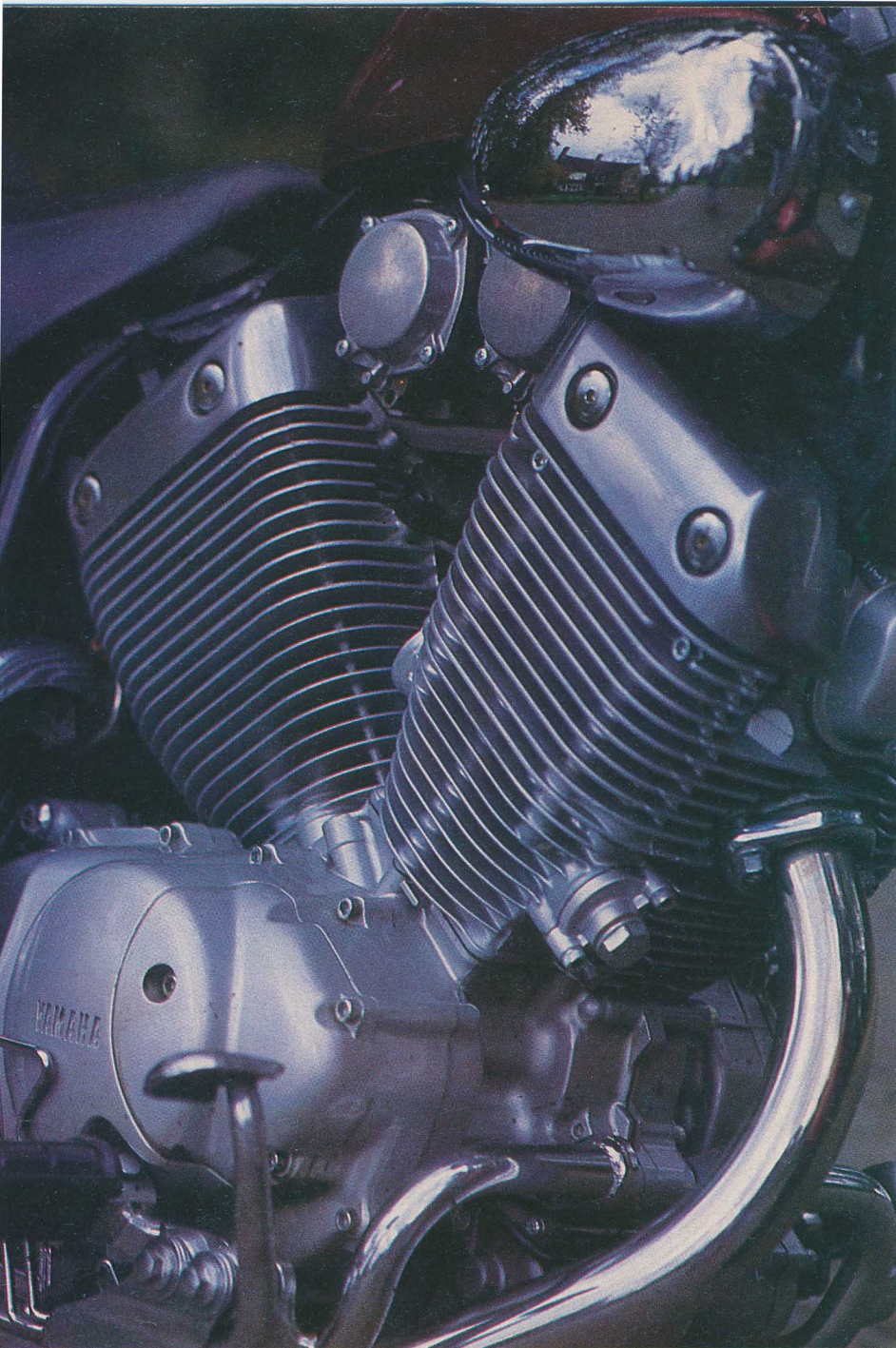
So, the legs slope forward, the handlebars slope up and backwards and the resulting riding position can only be described as 'laid back'. This seems to suggest comfort but that would be an inaccurate assumption. In fact, even on short journeys the small of the back begins to ache with the strain of staying upright. Only when the speed gets towards 65 is the pressure relieved by wind force when the weight is taken more on the arms.

Now I know why all those seventies American chopper riders fitted back rests on their Harleys. Still, if you want a bike with custom styling...

At first glance the frame is non-existent. In fact the engine hangs off two tubes that travel from the steering head, spreading out either side of the engine and dipping downwards behind the crankcases and up again to the tail. Everything hangs down from these tubes and the V-twin engine acts as the lower member. The petrol tank is beneath the seat. What with the seat being only 27 inches off the ground, the whole engine a shade lower, plus the

sunshine





● **Pictures: Patrick Gosling**



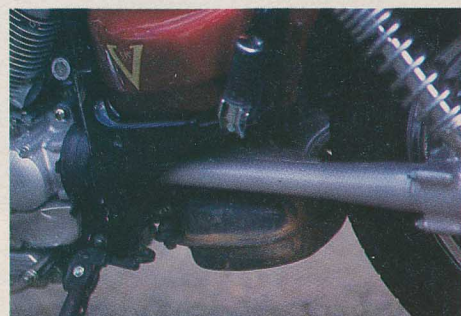
Heart of the matter, the superb 535cc v-twin engine. Rear footbrake at front meant only half a right foot could be comfortably positioned on the footrests causing scuffed boots on roundabouts.

*No frills in the cockpit. Note right handlebar mounted 'reserve' tap. Two of us will testify there was **no** reserve fuel left in the petrol tank when this was operated although Yamaha say they found no fault... gremlins perhaps.*

Long linkage is needed for forward position of gear lever but this did not affect gear changing. Exhaust silencer is mounted behind the engine to allow 'big bore' exhaust pipe styling.

Rear shocks were on the middle setting but could not be altered as our special adjuster was missing, along with the tool kit.

Front brake could only be described as 'adequate' but combined well with rear drum for safe, if unspectacular, stopping.



weight of the swinging arm down there — the centre of gravity is no higher than the hairs on a mole's belly.

Wheelbase of 60 inches or so and ground clearance of six and a half inches seems to add up to a bike that can be flung around with great confidence and (importantly) enjoyment. It's undeniably great fun to ride. You steer with your bum basically. As you lean it over you feel the fat back tyre getting over on the rim and just feed in that smooth power to drive out of the corner. Okay, the footrests are easy to touch down and bumps set up a slight lurch but this (personally) added to the character of the XV535.

The 1989 version of the bike will have the option of straighter handlebars, which should cure that painful back position, and a slotted front disc brake. The latter is presumably to stop the grating noise the single disc emits under light use.

Under heavy use the brake felt lacking but as our man Tarbox said in his GPZ900 test in the last issue, after the brakes on modern 750 sports bikes everything else seems inadequate.

As for you unlucky souls who have not experienced multi-caliper braking actuation coupled with oil and air damped electronically operated front forks . . . the Yamaha's brakes are average but could be a shade better. Used in conjunction with the steady rear drum, the bike would squat and come to a safe, if unspectacular, halt. Even Yamaha describe the brakes only as 'good and reliable'.

Only the two rear dampers are adjustable in the old fashioned way — using a lever to raise the spring tension a cog or two but our bike's tool was missing so it stayed on the middle setting. The toolkit was also missing — who *does* bother pinching this stuff from test bikes?

● Equipment

★★★

YOU don't get a lot, as on most custom machines. A single speedometer, four warning lights up front, a good headlight (Richard and I returned home in the dark after our ride, much to the horror of Mrs. B) usual handlebar controls with neat cancelling indicators on the left and the reserve fuel tap, unusually, on the right hand bar. Choke control was on the side of the carbs, the left.

A tale lies in the provision of a fuel/reserve tap — it's totally unnecessary! When this bike uses up its miniscule load of just 1.8 gallons of lead free (it can use it along with all other Yamahas) the reserve is nil.

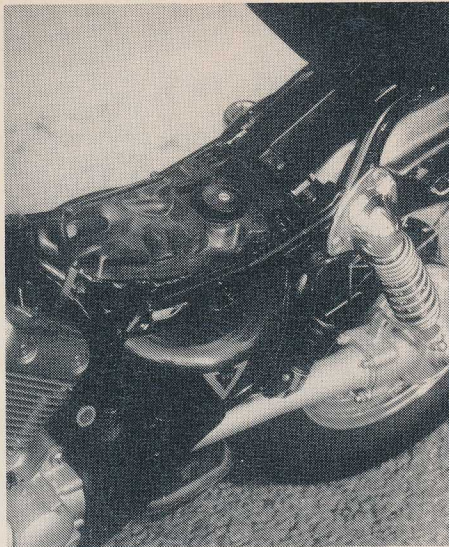
Our resident bike freak Gary was aboard at the time but fortunately was stranded only a few miles from my house on a Sunday afternoon. The lawn mower petrol was taken to him, the tank topped up and away it went. Yamaha's answer to this strange state of affairs was to check the test bike and find the fuel tap was not faulty. We will press for a more satisfactory answer . . .

A missing tool kit can't be assessed, the wheels are spoked and the seat comfortable enough . . . and that's about it on the equipment front.

● The price you pay

★★★★

FOR £2349 this is a bike well worth consideration. Okay, there are no frills, no new tech gimmicks or places to fit the top box and panniers. Looking for a little runabout on those summer evenings when the wife/girlfriend/son/daugh-



Above: Seat hinges up to reveal petrol filler cap. Tank runs vertically behind the engine.

No adjustment on front suspension. Chrome pods hide the carburettor air boxes.

ter/boyfriend can hop on the back for a ride down to that canalside hostelry though, and this bike is perfect.

As for comparisons it's hard to find something in the same mould but Suzuki's GN250 single is only £1549 but with much poorer performance; Kawasaki's GT550 is £350 more at £2699; Honda's XBR single at £2449 and the big 750 custom jobs all over the £3000 mark.

Spares prices, should get you over-enthusiastic with chamfering down the footrests and give the XV a close inspection of the tarmac, are pretty reasonable in today's high-tech market (compared to the top end of the range, anyway).

A speedo will set you back 40 quid (all prices include VAT); fork leg £124; brake lever £3.36; master cylinder £33.76; handlebars £19.48; those shiny air intake covers £11.51 each; indicators £10.35 each; Yamaha brake pads £38.08; and replacement oil filter £4.55.

Insurance for city dwellers of the middle-aged variety (over 35) will cost £184 on average for fully comp cover and £128 for us advantaged country types. Teenagers who can only afford third party will pay £300 in the city (19-year-olds)

and £263 in the country. See our insurance guide for other rates on pages 80-81 and remember to shop around for the best quote.

● Conclusion

★★★★

FIVE stars would be a vote for enthusiasm rather than a pragmatic assessment of the bike so it has to be a genuine four stars for a machine with character, a good turn of speed, exceptional handling ability (given its 'custom' design) and downright endearing qualities.

The XV535 doesn't make demands. It is easy to ride. It looks good. It's well mannered in traffic. Overtakes with comfort. Stops adequately.

In the same area of Majorca during those hols I mentioned at the start was a youth with an FZR1000 Yamaha in blue and white. You could hear him howling about miles away but it was only in first or second. It was over the top — the discerning and understated bloke and his XV535 was the combination that caught my eye.