

YAMAHA XS250 BIGGER YES, BUT BETTER?

Yamaha's new XS250 four-stroke twin follows the latest trend for two-fifties to become as big as their larger capacity stablemates. But does it make it better asks *John Nutting*. Photography by *Ian Dobbie*.

How come Honda's CB250N Super Dream is the biggest seller in the 250cc bracket? It must be a vexing question for all the other manufacturers, particularly as the quarter-litre market is the most lucrative segment of UK sales.

Other bikes may be quicker off the mark, or lighter, or cheaper, but it doesn't seem to make any difference; Honda's dealers are pumping



them out of the showrooms as fast as they can get them.

In May of this year, the boom month for sales, the CB250N outsold every other two-fifty put together, incidentally making it the biggest money-spinner in the UK market. Yet similar machines like Yamaha's XS250 twin sold less than a quarter of the Honda's 1,843 sales. Even the sporty GT250X7, the fastest bike in the class, only sold a third of the Honda's numbers.

So what's the secret? The only one that we could figure, and which we mentioned in passing during our 250 super-test earlier this year, was that the Honda looked big, it looked value for money on the showroom floor.

It seems to be a conclusion that both Suzuki and Yamaha have latched on to. Suzuki's Maurice Knight must have been enviably looking at Honda's sales and wishing for the days when the GT250 was the best seller, for now there's a four-stroke GSX250, with eight valves, high-performance, big-bike looks and all. If the speculation is right, it could be a winner.

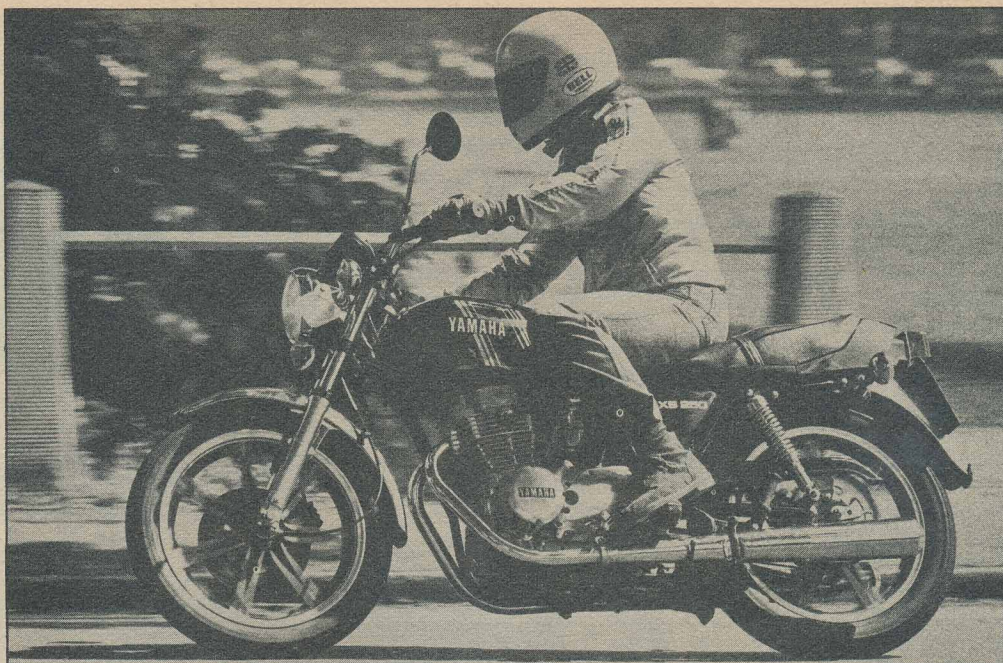
Yamaha, too, have introduced a new 250 model, but in this case it's just a revamp of the familiar XS250 twin. But it achieves the same objective; that of giving the motorcyclists more value for money.

What they've done is taken the original 250cc parallel twin's power unit and placed it in a slightly larger chassis. At first glance the bike looks very similar to the old one, but there's enough in the new version, still called the XS250 and still selling at £920 inc VAT, to make it a better seller than before. Whether, of course, Mitsui's marketing tactics are up to the challenge of hitting Honda's share is open to question.

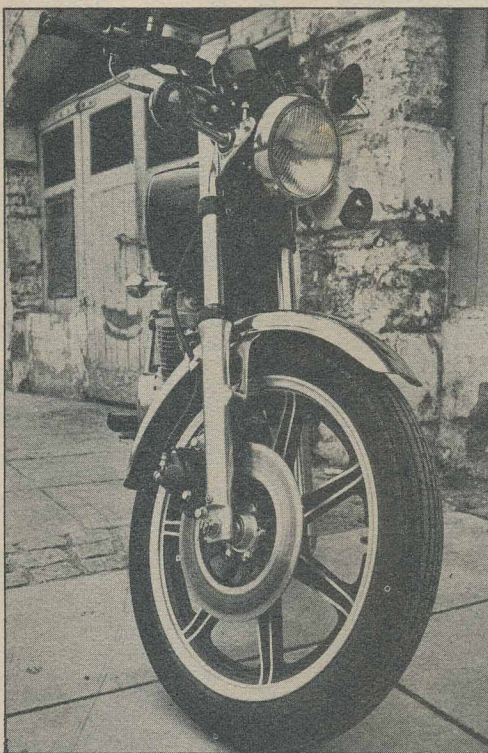
The most significant change to the XS250 is the restyling, which includes upping the fuel tank capacity from 2.4 to 3¾ gallons. The Yamaha offers typically four-stroke frugality of between 60 and 65mpg and with the larger tank now gives a useful range of up to 240 miles.

Having a bigger tank improves the lines of the machine and there is a sleeker dual seat with added padding, a broader perch for the passenger and a bigger toolkit box under the rear fairing.

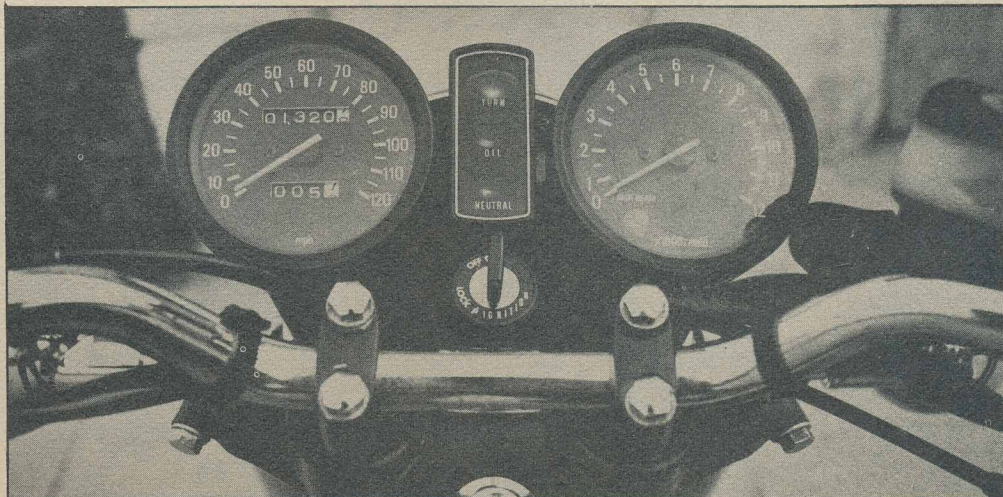
The old XS250 wasn't too good a handler compared to other machines in the class,



Top: like the big sellers in the 250cc class the new XS250 Yamaha is as big as five-hundreds and six-fifties of yesteryear; wheelbase is 55 inches, dry weight 370lb.



Above: Steering geometry of the Yamaha has been changed, but with little effect on the bike's handling. Right: Yamaha have gone back to a drum rear brake – fashion or prudence? Below: Instrumentation of the XS250 is restyled, but why the revmeter redline should be at 9,000 when the maximum power of the engine is delivered at 9,500rpm escapes us. Ignition and steering locks are combined.



so the increase in the wheelbase from 53½ to 55 inches should provide a marginal increase in the straight-line stability of the bike. As before, the Yamaha's suspension is soft and luxurious, designed more with comfort than hairline steering in mind.

The frame, which is virtually identical in appearance to the former version, also provides revised steering geometry, reducing the rake by a small amount from 63.5 to 63.2 degrees and lengthening the trail from 3.2 to 3.25 inches. But it's not enough to provide much of a change and the bike still drops into corners at low speed.

Overall performance of the bike is unchanged. As before the engine is a simple overhead camshaft 180-degree parallel twin with two valves per cylinder and plain bearings developing 27 bhp at 9,500 rpm.

To get a useful open road performance it needs to be revved hard, so it seems strange that the rev limit shown on the tachometer is down from 9,300 to 9,000 rpm on the latest model. In town though, the Yamaha is flexible and the exhaust makes a rorty warble.

Overall gearing remains much the same too. This is despite changing the rear wheel sprocket from 43 to 44 teeth. This is compensated for by a larger rear tyre, 375 x 18in instead of 350 x 18in, which has a slightly larger rolling diameter.

Top left and right: New frame and styling give the XS250 big-bike looks. Right: Ignition is still by two contact breakers and coils. Below: New footrest positions mean having a gear-change linkage. But it makes the already vague six-speed change worse.

As in our test last June, the Yamaha will clock 86mph flat out and crawl through the standing quarter mile in just under 18 seconds, so it can ill afford the increase in dry weight from 365 to 370 lbs.

Maybe the overall feel of the bike will boost its sales. With more rearward positioning for the footrests (by 4 inches), the rider's stance and balance are better, though the gearchange linkage now lacks enough feel for stirring through the six ratios.

Certainly the use of a seven-inch drum rear brake

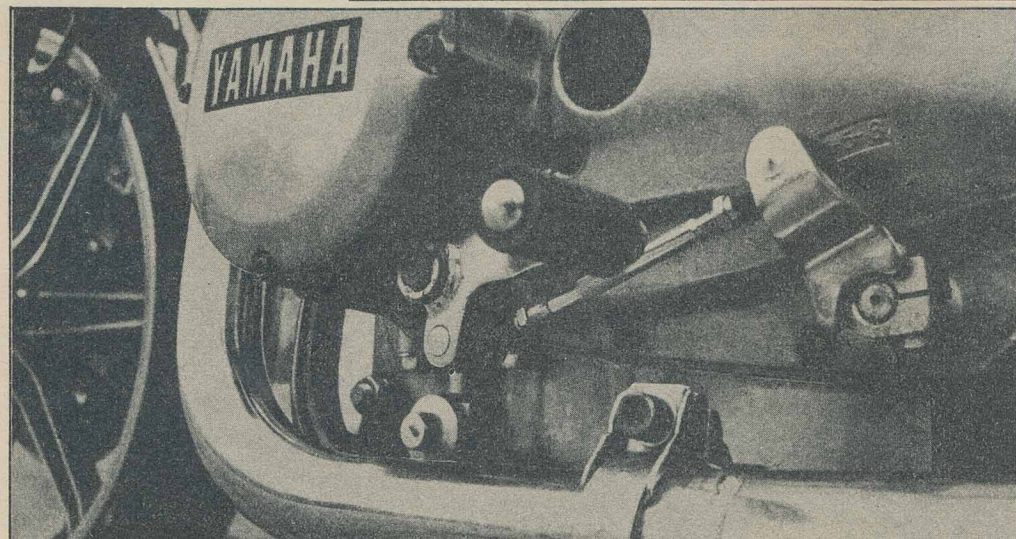
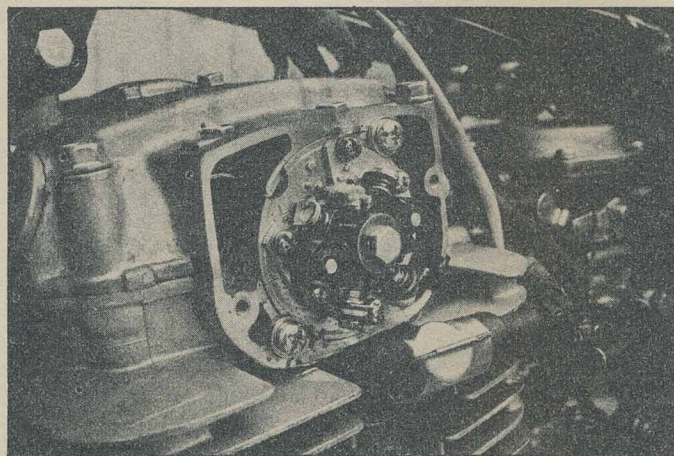
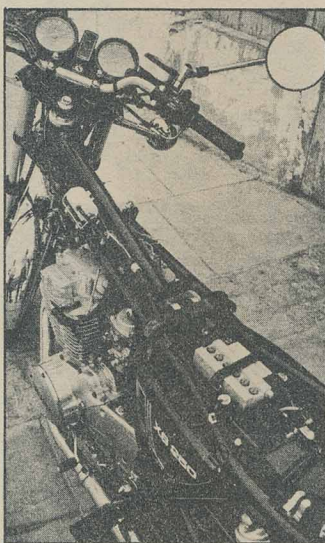
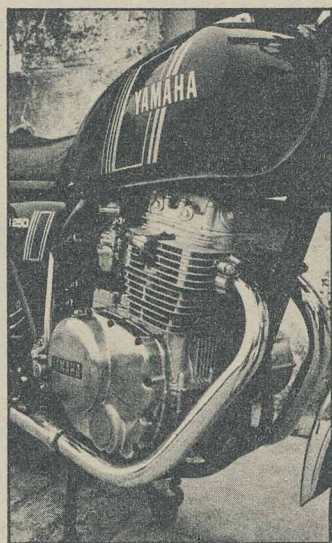
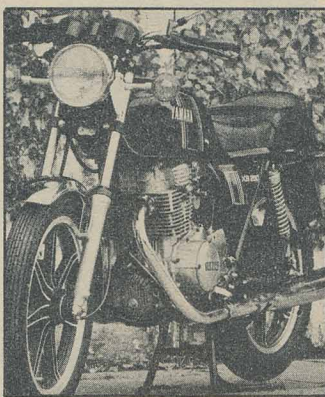
will be welcome by those wanting surer stopping in the wet than a disc can provide.

The worst drawback of the

Yamaha is however its vibration at high revs. Without rubber engine mounts or counterbalancers there is more buzzing than the rubber mounted handlebar and footrests can absorb.

It will take improvements in this area, and not the provision of features as self-cancelling trafficators, rubber boots for the controls and vacuum fuel taps, which are more appreciated on bigger bikes, to woo riders away from other manufacturers.

We think Yamaha will have to try harder.



YAMAHA XS250

Price inc VAT:	£920
Engine:	Ohc 180deg twin
Capacity:	248cc (55 x 52.4mm)
Lubrication:	Wet sump
Ignition:	Coils and cbs
Comp. ratio:	9.6 to 1
Carburetion:	Two 32mm CV Mikunis
Max. power:	27bhp at 9,500 rpm
Max. torque:	15lb-ft at 8,500 rpm
Primary drive:	Gear
Clutch:	Wet multiplate
Gearbox:	Six speed
Final drive:	530 roller chain
Mph/1,000rpm:	9.07 in top
Electrics:	12v 12ah battery 190w alternator 40/30w headlamp
Fuel capacity:	3.75 gals
Frame:	Duplex cradle
Suspension:	Telescopic fork (f) Swing arm, 5-pos spring preload adj. (r)
Brakes:	10.5 inch disc (f) 7in drum (r)
Tyres:	Bridgestone 300S18 (f) 375S18 (r) on cast alloy wheels

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase:	55in
Seat height:	31¾ in
Handlebar width:	28in
Grnd clnce:	7in
Rake/trail:	63.2deg/3.25in
Dry weight:	370lb

EQUIPMENT

Mirrors, self starter, 12,000 rpm rev meter, 120mph speedo., locking fuel cap, locking seat, lockable steering, tools, trip meter, self-cancelling trafficators, vacuum fuel tap.

PERFORMANCE

Calculated speeds in gears at max. power revs.:	6th: 86.2 mph 5th: 77.7 mph 4th: 66.5 mph 3rd: 54.1 mph 2nd: 43.2 mph 1st: 29.3 mph
1st. ¼-mile:	17¾ secs appx
0-to-60mph:	11½ secs appx
Av fuel consumption:	60-65 mpg
Tank range:	225-240 mls max.
Importer:	Mitsui Machinery Sales, Oakcroft Road, Chessington, Surrey KT9 1SA