

# Which Bike?

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SEPTEMBER 50p

**WORLD'S MOST  
EXCLUSIVE  
TRAIL BIKE;  
THE LAVERDA  
250T—IS IT  
WORTH £800?**

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LAVERDA 250T

# IS EXCLUSIVITY WORTH £800?

LOGO/ILLUSTRATED/MIKE WADE

The prestige motorcycle market has always been the domain of tarmac scorching roadsters, and large capacity ones at that. Or at least that is how it was up until now.

For with their 250T, the Italian Laverda company have, in one fell swoop, created the luxury end of the trailbike market. Behind the inception of this 250cc 2-stroke single lies a very shrewd rationale, namely that self indulgence is a highly personal thing and as the attraction of off-road riding — either real or vicarious — has now spread to those who can afford to indulge themselves in a big way, relatively commonplace Yamaha and Suzuki trail machines are not always going to satisfy their discerning tastes.

Certainly there are already a number of quite exciting off-road machines in the same price range as the £800 Laverda, but these are the hot-shot KTM, Jawa and MZ enduro machines of this world. Such vehicles are designed for outright competition work, not for a casual jaunt across the moors or a quick trip down to the pub on a summer's evening.

Realising this, Laverda have designed a trailbike that is docile enough for the novice off-roader, yet is capable of delivering the sort of performance that serious enduro riders demand. But above all they have built a machine that is uniquely sophisticated and beautifully finished — given the limitations imposed by this type of usage. And it's important to remember just what these are when judging the 250T as either a trailbike or a limited edition prestige 'bike.

As a dirt 'bike, the little Laverda appears to have been properly and painstakingly designed. The frame is constructed in lightweight steel to a narrow twin downtube design with conventional rear suspension. However, the q.d. fuel tank removes to reveal the 250T's ace card — adjustable steering head geometry. The steering head is bolted to the headstock in whichever of three positions best suits the rider and the terrain. It's a simple operation as our photograph shows and means that, if he wanted to, the 250T owner could reduce the trail for the odd club trial or extend it if he found himself with a lot of roadwork to do.

Another businesslike feature is the totally enclosed rear chain unit which



utilises a magnesium alloy rear sprocket cover (with removable inspection cap), linked to the engine by two rubber gaiters.

The engine unit itself is as neat and sturdy as the meaty four-strokes the company has established itself with. The conventionally ported 2-stroke with its exactly square dimensions of 68 x 68 mm designed by the same team who also created several of Husqvarna's motocross engines. The crankshaft sits in large roller bearings whilst the big end rests in a needle race and primary drive to the multi-plate clutch is by gear.

The gearbox itself contains five ratios and a rotating drum-type selector mechanism. For some reason I always find this method of gear selection provides extremely positive changes, but at the

expense of easy neutral selection, and the Laverda's transmission is no exception to this. Clutch action was extremely smooth though and the whole transmission package showed no signs of strain even after repeated thrashings up and down a favourite (and punishing) test course.

An ultra compact Bosch solid state unit fires two plugs simultaneously, this is mounted behind a "rip-off" plastic side panel on the offside and fed from a rather large 12 volt Yuasa battery which sits behind another competition-style panel on the nearside. The battery is charged from a flywheel magneto and provides current for lighting and horn as well as ignition. So not only is the 250T unlikely to let its owner down through ignition failure in some remote neck of the woods, but it will provide him with decent lighting to see his way home with after an enjoyable day there.

The electrical components are in fact bolted to a very capacious air-box, filters for which are sandwiched behind a quickly detachable wire retaining handle that's revealed once the seat is removed. It's through this that the generous 32 mm Dellorto carb gulps in air to help produce the 27 brake horsepower quoted for the Laverda.

Each of the alloy Borrani rims are shod with a Metzeler knobbly, although it seems curious that Laverda omitted to fit a security bolt to the rear wheel. Like the engine cases and the rear chain enclosure, the narrow brake drums are cast in ultra light magnesium alloy. These drums are fluted around the circumference for better cooling and off-road they provided just the right degree of "feel" one needs for steep and awkward descents, whilst nonetheless effecting a sudden stop if it was required. They also seem to be fitted with water resistant linings. Only when pulling the 250T to a halt from high-ish road speeds did the brakes exhibit any weakness, but one soon learnt to brake earlier for corners and the like so it really wasn't too much of a problem.

So just from a cursory resume of the specification, the 250T looked like a highly adequate off-road machine — and our observations concerning the 'bike's performance certainly justified such speculation. But it's only when you look beyond the facts and figures that the superb but always understated quality of the little Laverda becomes apparent.

## LAVERDA 250T

### Brief Data

Capacity	.....	249cc
Bore & Stroke	.....	66 x 66mm
BHP	.....	28
Gears	.....	5
Clutch	.....	Multi-plate, wet
Ignition	.....	Electronic
Maximum speed	.....	74 mph
Average MPG	.....	43
Brakes F & R	.....	Dr/Dr
Wheelbase	.....	55 (Adj)
Seat Height	.....	32 ins
Dry weight	.....	n/a
Warranty	.....	According to Trade Descriptions Act
Price	.....	£800.00

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PHOTOGRAPHS/RICHARD COOK









If one just notices how carefully the frame welds are applied and finished, or inspects the depth of the scuff-resistant paintwork and the quality of the chrome, one begins to appreciate the care with which this machine has been produced. Even less obvious features continue the story — the abundance of self-locking nuts, the splined shafts that permit extensive adjustment of both gear change *and* foot-brake lever, the comprehensive and heavily fabricated tool-kit, the Thomaselli control levers and silky smooth twist-grip, the uncharacteristically accurate Veglia tacho and speedometer, carefully rubber mounted, as are the lighting components, to insulate them from vibration and off-road shocks.

It's this abundance of quality that elevates the 250T from its Japanese and European contemporaries, and it's this that will appeal to the discriminating buyer as much as anything else.

But if the impecunious potential customer wants proof that the 250T has clout as well as class, he has only to climb aboard the bike, fire it up and head for the hills. However, in so doing he'll encounter the only serious criticism we can level at the machine — the kick-start mechanism.

For some reason — probably a need to keep things compact — the kickstart assembly is mounted above and to the rear of the clutch unit, and so one finds it necessary to raise one's foot 26 inches above the ground in order to connect

with the lever. Even those blessed with long legs will find this a problem which can hardly be overcome by standing on the left hand footrest of a machine fitted only with a sidestand (although provision is made for a centre stand). Fortunately when you have found a way of effectively prodding the kick-start, the Laverda usually fires immediately — and it can also be used in gear with the clutch pulled in, which is especially useful in view of the problem of selecting neutral. Hot or cold, the electronic ignition ensures smooth

running even if you leave the choke on for more than the thirty second or so that's needed on cold mornings.

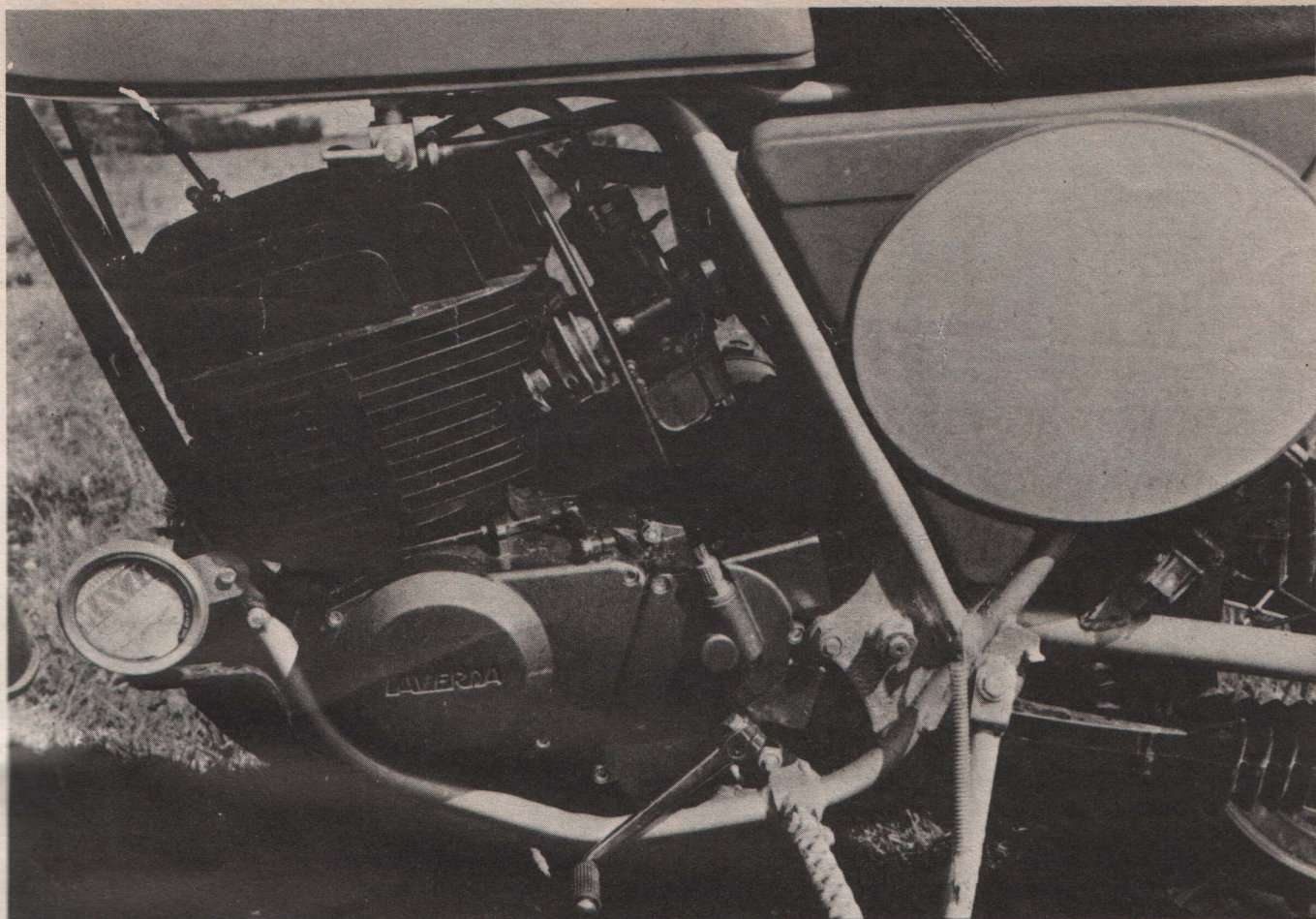
Snick it into first, wind on 2800/3000 revs and the 250T pulls away strongly. In fact bottom is unnecessarily low for road use, although it's a useful ratio for the rough stuff, and you can accelerate away from less than 4000 rpm in seconds, should the mood take you. The power continues to pour in right up to 7500 revs, although there's a yellow band starting at 7000 which precedes the 8000 rpm redline.

It's easy to keep the motor running above 6000 rpm and this permits very rapid progress through the gears. Off-road, the Ceriani suspension soaks up most of the bumps and enables the rider to use this sort of performance to the full. Unlike the Yamaha XT500 tested elsewhere in this issue which, although a heavier machine, is set up for a comfortable ride at moderate off-road speeds, the 250T will hold a line across rough terrain at quite high speeds. The rear-end may jolt the rider's backside (if he isn't already standing on the 'pegs), but the whole package goes exactly where you point it, at least if the steering head is fixed in the middle of its three positions.

Should you wish to slide around a loosely-surfaced corner like Roger de Coster, an appropriate application at rear brake as you lean in toward the apex will get you round in style and there's instant response from the motor







**TOP:** Potent engine is beautifully finished with gold painted magnesium cases. **BOTTOM LEFT:** Magnesium brake works well wet or dry. Forks are by Ceriani. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Enormous air filter sits under this cover.

when you decide to pull out and get going again. Although I found the footrests set a little far back for my long legs, a fair degree of control could be exercised by pushing on them as one dove into a corner.

The footrest location also made power-on jumps fractionally more difficult than on certain other machines, but with a light front end and a sensitive throttle, the knack soon came.

Built into the cylinder head is a decompressor valve, something we found invaluable in the Greeves and Cottons of the early 'sixties when a motor would juice up at the merest hint of a downgrade, but due to the efficiency of the ignition/carburettion set-up, the decompressor on the 250T was mainly used as an engine cut-out.

Having already covered the braking qualities of the 250T, as far as the 'bike's off-road performance is concerned, there's little more to add other than to express my admiration for a machine that you don't have to wrestle with to do your bidding. Riding it hard across familiar territory, the 'bike soon became an extension of my mind and body, and when I ventured into pastures new, I found I could rely on its behaviour and performance to a reassuring degree.

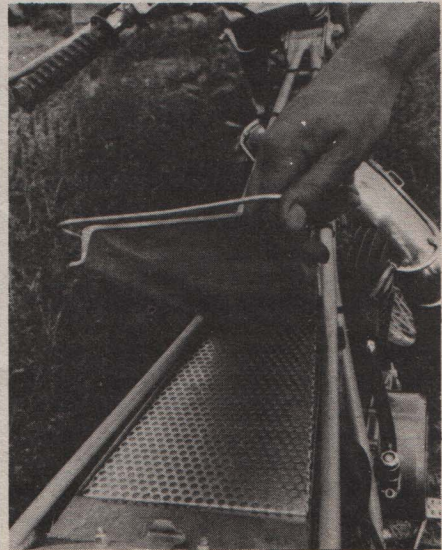
Whilst it's true that not all potential 250T owners will want to ride it really hard through the dirt, they may very well want to push it to its limit on the road. Nudging the yellow at 7000 revs in top, the 'bike will be travelling at an

indicated 130 km/h (the speedo isn't yet calibrated in mph) which works out at 80 mph. However, I timed this as a more realistic 74 mph — but even that's damn good for a machine that can also honestly call itself a trailbike. Particularly if you extend the trail of the steering angle, the 250T handles very well on the road, with little of the front-end nervousness one associates with this sort of compromise. The only serious concession to off-road performance that one notices is the exhaust note from the underslung expansion chamber-style system. In short, it's pretty loud, something you're aware of as the heads turn when you rush through some sleepy

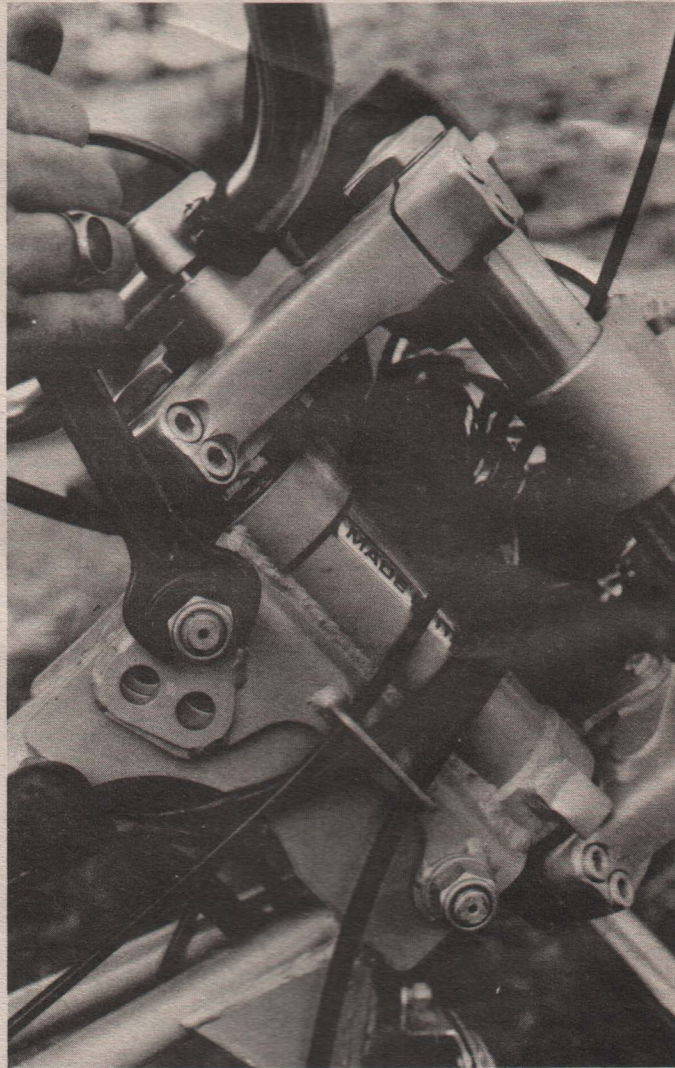
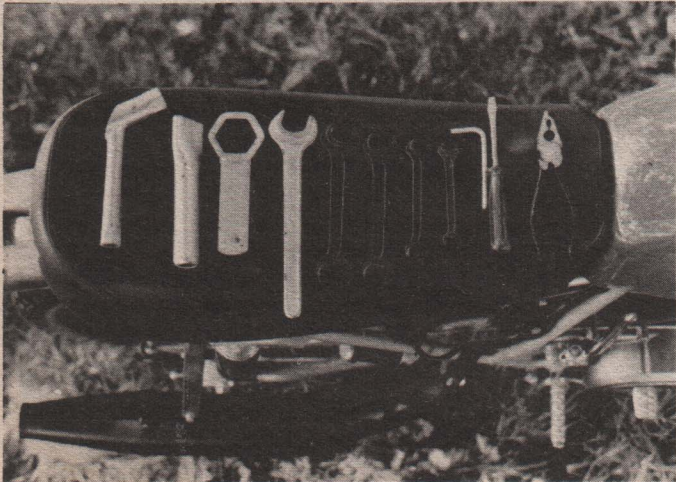
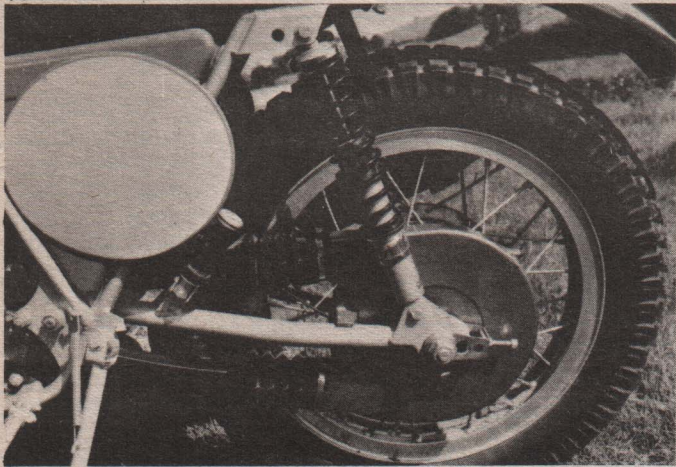
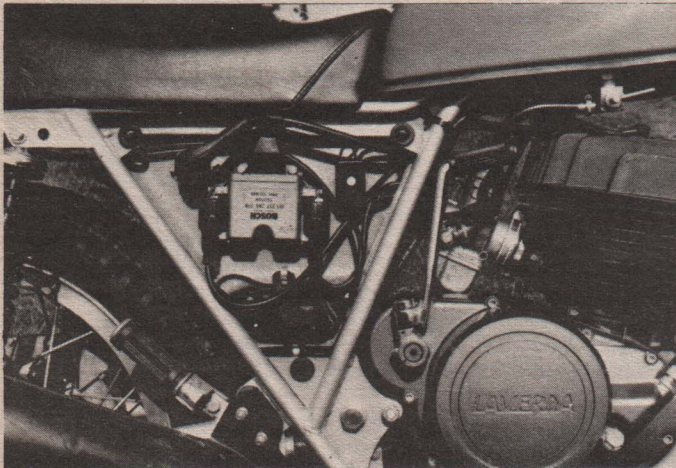
rural township on your way to the dirt. Living and riding in the city might present the 250T owner with a few social problems, but an ancillary "stinger" muffler could be fitted to obviate such things.

All in all then, the 250T with its excellent dual-purpose performance, its high quality finish and its extensive and well-executed level of standard fittings, is a highly desirable machine. For the rider who wants something different, but something that won't intimidate him and his riding ability, the 250T is a great choice. And for the time being, perhaps the only one.

*Mark Williams*







**MIDDLE LEFT (TOP):** No shortage of sparks with this Bosch Electronic Ignition firing two plugs. **MIDDLE LEFT (LOWER):** Fully enclosed chain is a must for enduros. Sensitive Ceriani shocks control the back end. **LEFT:** The high quality tool kit is typical Laverda; it lives below the Bosch ignition. The banana-shaped expansion box is loud. **ABOVE:** Adjustable steering geometry is an unusual bonus. Road going stability or super-sensitive trials steering at a twist of the spanner.