



YAMAHA XT500 & TY50P TAKING TO THE TURF WITH THE NEWEST YAMS.

When BSA cut the 500 cc Victor off their catalogue in 1972, it seemed that the lid had finally been nailed on the big single. The Victor's engine had enjoyed an almost indecently long run, first tasting petrol some two decades earlier, as a rather soft 350 roadster.

As the British 'bike industry quietly collapsed during the 'sixties and early 'seventies, BSA continued to develop their push-rod thumper, answering the need for what the Americans called a "street scrambler" and what BSA called the B44 Victor. With its oddball 440cc capacity and curiously styled alloy tank, this early Victor was not match for the whining 2-strokes that were starting to dominate the world's moto-cross circuits, but they were street legal and a lot lighter than the big 4-stroke twins that were just about the only other thing the British industry could produce during its protracted death throes.

However, the 500cc B50 version introduced in '71 was both good looking (except for a horrendous slab-sided muffler) and tolerably fast (the factory fielded a full works team on moto-cross versions of the 'bike), and it began to sell very well indeed, especially in America where clout is king and British



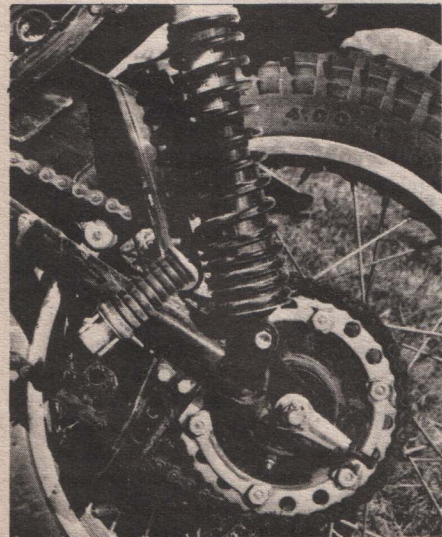
clout is still revered. Indeed of all the machines produced by BSA/Triumph during the early 'seventies, it had perhaps the best chance of long term success — not because it was on a par with the sort of technologically advanced machines the Japanese were then producing, because it plainly wasn't — but because it was in a class of its own, and a class with a future.

Off-road machines, particularly in America, were taking off in a big way and whilst the Japanese factories were producing smaller capacity machines ideal for this growing market, they offered nothing suitable beyond the 350cc mark. But Britain had the Victor. And the Victor had charisma drawn from 35 years of Gold Star, Matchless, AJS and Royal Enfield competition dirt 'bikes. And charisma allied to clout is a very strong sales pitch.

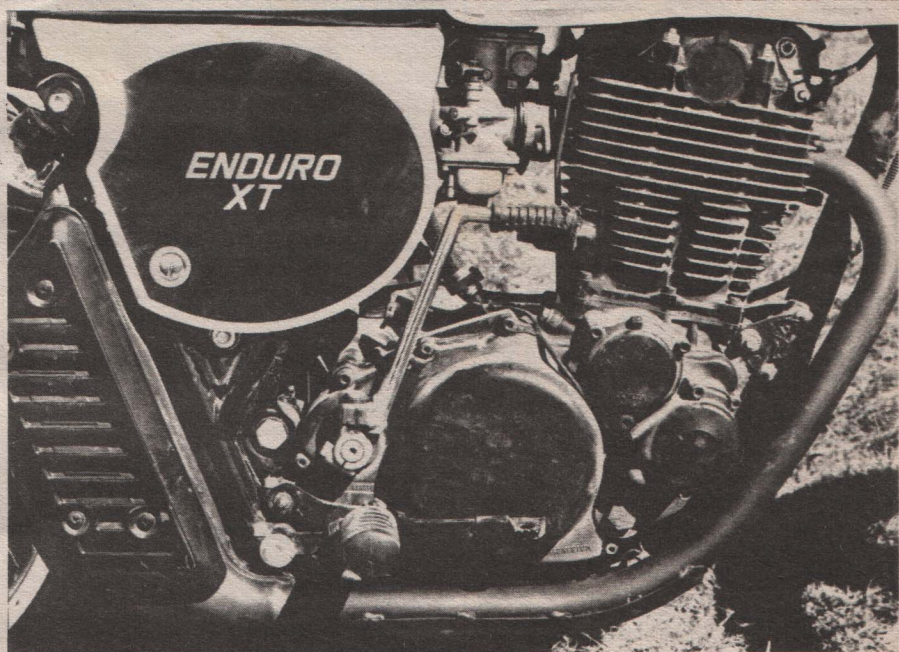
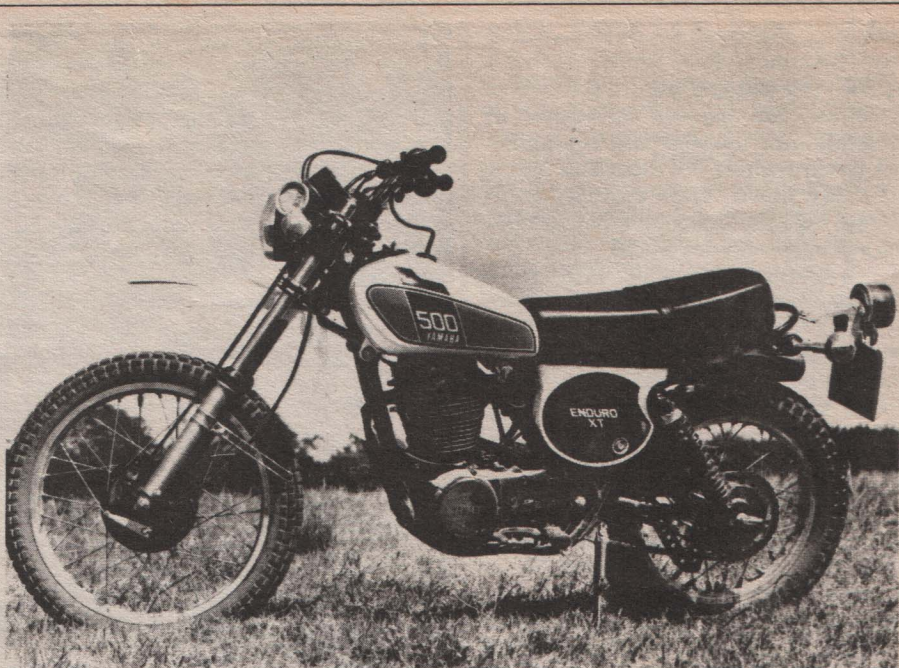
The final collapse of BSA/Triumph meant the demise of the Victor, and although Alan Clew's CCM factory produces a B50 based single which is still a competitive force in world motocross, it's an expensive and temperamental hybrid unsuited to the domestic trail/enduro market. So with the field wide open it was hardly surprising to hear rumours that this or that Japanese company were busily developing a big thumper and that once again oriental engineering and production techniques would soon be applied to a motorcycling tradition that had until then been enduringly British.

And having already shown the way with their version of the classic 650 twin, Yamaha have finally cracked it with a 500cc 4-stroke trail-bike, the XT500. It's got a long stroke, high compression engine, and it's a bitch to start until you've learnt the knack, but that's where the similarity with the Victor ends. The XT500 boasts design features that we've come to expect from Japanese 4-strokes, whether for road or trail or both, features that cunningly endow it with serious enduro potential whilst nonetheless ensuring that it's perfectly suitable for Mr. Everyman.

Mitsui Machinery Sales, the UK



ABOVE: De Carbon rear shocks are fashionably mounted in 'lay-down style.'



importers of Yamaha motorcycles, and a company long noted for their low approach to new model launches, chose to announce the XT500 with a press reception-cum-test day that was only just on the subtle side of lavish. Hiring Hickstead scrambles circuit in Sussex and laying on a bevy of XT500s for pressmen both expert and naive in the business of off-road riding exhibits a commendable panache rarely seen in the British motorcycle trade, but at least they got as much mileage out of it as possible by simultaneously unwrapping a brand new "sixteener special" with off-road aspirations, the TY50P, more of which later, and unveiling one of the more seductive sales ploys heard of in this country. Briefly, this is the creation of the 'Yamaha XT500 Elite' which, as it implies, is a sort of unofficial club open to the first two thousand European buyers of XT500s. You buy your 'bike, send off the special registration form to Yamaha in Amsterdam, and back will come a classy ownership certificate,

cloth patch and stickers, a beautifully printed poster showing a cutaway drawing of your beloved machine, and the first of two free copies of *Club Circuit*, a Yamaha produced magazine for motorcycle clubs throughout Europe. You also get a letter from General Manager T. Konomi which explains that his company are doing this to ensure that you're being honoured in this way as recognition for your foresight in being amongst the first to purchase what "is going to be one of the most popular machines of all time".

By hogging an XT for a couple of hours we managed to glean a pretty good impression of its off-road capabilities, and we'll come straight to the point and say that we were impressed. Soon as you set eyes on the XT500, you get the message that this machine has promise. It's a well proportioned 'bike, for despite its capacity Yamaha engineers have created a compact engine unit that fits snugly into a well organised chassis. The red, white and black colour scheme compliments the matt black engine

cases and the general visual appeal is more functional than flashy. Throw a leg over the seat and you find the 'bike is neither too big for confidence of operation, nor too small for its purpose. The weight, whilst not especially low, is well distributed and the centre of gravity feels as though it's in the right place — between your ankles.

The controls all fall into place naturally enough and there are no obtrusive engine or frame parts that deter your legs from staying on the folding, serrated edge footpegs.

The XT500's trump card is torque, a whole barrel full of it. The factory claim 28.2 ft. lbs. at 5400 rpm, but that's a little academic because you can feel the 4,00 x 18 Bridgestone knobbly clawing manfully into the ground from below 1000 revs. And although there's an endearing "thump-thrump-thrump" from the XT500's motor that makes sure you know you're aboard a gutsy big single, the power delivery is so smooth and rapid that you can find yourself approaching the 8000 rpm red-line (that's right, 8000 rpm!) without really knowing what speed the engine's turning at.

However, before you take off for the turf with the XT, you have to start it. Anyone who's owned a Velocette or Goldie will quickly master the business of easing the piston over compression, using a lever on the nearside handlebar to lift the exhaust valve, before plunging down on the kickstart lever. But for the rest it may prove a frustrating series of bruised insteps as they jump bodily on the lever and hope for the best.

Once you're rolling, however, the XT500 is one sweet trailbike, especially when you consider its capacity and its weight (quoted by the factory at 317 lbs. dry, but we'd add a few more pounds if we were guessing). It rolls along incredibly smoothly, the inverted,

forward-angled rear shock absorbers matched to a brace of long-travel forks which soak up bumps as a dry sponge soaks up water. The only trouble with this suspension package is that whilst it's beautifully balanced for average trail riding, anyone who decides to play amateur moto-cross on the XT500 is going to find himself on a fire-breathing bucking bronco.

Winding up the motor and driving the machine hard around the test circuit soon had us trying to uprate the rear shocks (which proved impossible because the right tools weren't available) and wondering what grade oil Yamaha specify for the front teles. The trouble was basically two-fold. Firstly the forks bottomed every time the 'bike descended from even a halfway respectable jump, and secondly the rear end wasn't taut enough to permit power slides round the bends. There's absolutely no doubt that the XT500 could be set up to overcome such obstacles to rapid off-road transit, but as it was I found myself frustrated with so much power on hand and not enough suspension to deal with it adequately.

In fact although Yamaha claim a healthy 39 bhp in standard tune, there's obviously even more power available for anyone who wants to win enduros. For starters there's an elaborate and very restrictive exhaust system which could be replaced by a straightforward absorber system, and uprating the valve gear and carburation would naturally follow such a move.

The 'bike's weight would obviously diminish as a result of such modifications and it could be further pruned by the diligent home mechanic. (Actually Yamaha have gone to some lengths to devise an acceptable compromise between functionality and sanitation. There are alloy wheel rims, conical hub brakes and oil bearing frame, an oiled

foam rubber air-filter, trip mileometer, soft rubber handgrips and lever shrouds and Q/D plastic sidepanels which cover various electrical components, toolkit and air filter. All of these are concessions to the serious off-roader, but the XT500 will surely find itself covering more tarmac than turf in the hands of most of its British owners and therefore the 'bike is strong on such things as lighting equipment, upholstery and, as we've already mentioned, exhaust silencing.)

I came away from Yamaha's press launch sufficiently impressed and intrigued with the XT500 by the XT500's promise of classic big single status to arrange a longer relationship with the 'bike.

YAMAHA TY50P "The introduction of Yamaha's TY50P to the UK market ... is a significant sign of the direction in which the motorcycling market is turning."

Thus read the press release announcing the entry of the first Japanese manufacturer into a market long catered for by just about every European producer of 'performance' mopeds, namely those whacky 50cc trail/enduro 'bikes endowed with pedals as a rather transparent gesture to licensing laws.

The blurb went on to explain that here at last was a machine that could satisfy the needs of the teenager with off-road aspirations but a restrictive licence and/or bank account, ignoring the fact that Messrs. Garrelli, Fantic, Malaguti, Gilera etc., etc., have been producing such machinery for some years. So one could perhaps assume that with the TY50P, Yamaha have taken the time to develop a machine of such overwhelming superiority in its field that they could afford to ignore the existence of the the established opposition.

After taking the TY50P around the same test course as its considerably heftier big brother, I'm afraid that this is manifestly not the case.

The TY50P's power unit is, we were told, a derivative of various engines used in 'bikes unavailable in the UK and shares few components with Yamaha's highly successful FS1E 'sixteener specials'. It's a reed valve induction, conventionally ported 'stroker with almost exactly square dimensions of 40 x 39.7 mm and a low-ish compression ratio of 6.8:1 which shoves out 2.9 bhp @ 5500 rpm. (The current FS1E, by comparison, develops 4.8 bhp @ 7000 rpm from exactly the same bore and stroke and a 7.1:1 compression ratio, so we can at least assume that the piston and con-rods are identical.)

Now compared with the Italian enduro-peds, the TY50P's power output is somewhat diminutive, even allowing for a little Latin exaggeration (e.g. Malaguti Cavalcione 6.5 @ 8500, Cimatti Kaiman 6 @ 8500). Yet it has one less

