

With seven crossings of the Sahara Desert already behind him (including trips with both Yamaha DT400 and SR500 machines), the French journalist, Fenouil, can lay a solid claim to being the motorcyclist with more trans-Sahara kilometres under his wheels than any other.

For his eighth crossing of the fearsome North African wastelands, Fenouil chose what, to many people, was rather a strange machine to use in the desert ... the big four-cylinder Yamaha XS1100! But Fenouil had his reasons for choosing one of the big sports/tourers for his attempt during the scorching hot, high summer of 1978. His aim was to blast the 2000 kilometres between Tamanrasset and Algiers "quicker than the sun" ... a dawn to dusk dash from the very heart of the Sahara to the southern coast of the Mediterranean. For that Fenouil needed a big, fast bike, capable of high speeds even when loaded down with extra fuel tanks and an emergency water supply. The big, smoothly-swift Yamaha XS1100 with its shaft-drive was, felt Fenouil, perfect for the task.

Just how perfect it was, he was to prove by completing the 2000 kilometres in a staggering 12 hours 34 minutes, despite having to contend with temperatures that soared to 50 degrees centigrade in the shade (except that there never was any shade!) as well as roads obliterated by shifting sand dunes!

The standard XS1100 was prepared for the trip by Messieurs Soler and Hosotte, technicians employed by Sonauto, the French Yamaha importers. A Sonauto head fairing was fitted to save Fenouil from being buffeted by the wind and three special aerodynamic jerry-cans were bolted to the rear of the machine, giving a total petrol capacity of 48 litres. In addition, there was a special 5 litre jerry-can of water in case Fenouil struck trouble out there in the desert.

For the first 350 kilometres, from Tamanrasset to the oasis of Arak, Fenouil averaged 175km/h (105mph) but more was to come! Over no less than 700 kilometres of the road after Arak, Fenouil pushed the average speed to a staggering 201km/h (120mph)!

After the halfway point at El Golea, sandstorms had blown the Sahara dunes across the road and curbed the progress of the XS1100. But Fenouil was not about to be beaten in his attempt to reach the Mediterranean before the sun had set. He arrived in Algiers with the sun still above the horizon, having seen it rise 12 hours and 34 minutes earlier, 2000 kilometres away in the desert oasis city of Tamanrasset.

Following a road that has been one of the trans-Sahara trade routes for centuries, Fenouil completed the trip 40 times faster than the camel trains of long ago. It was the birth of a new era!

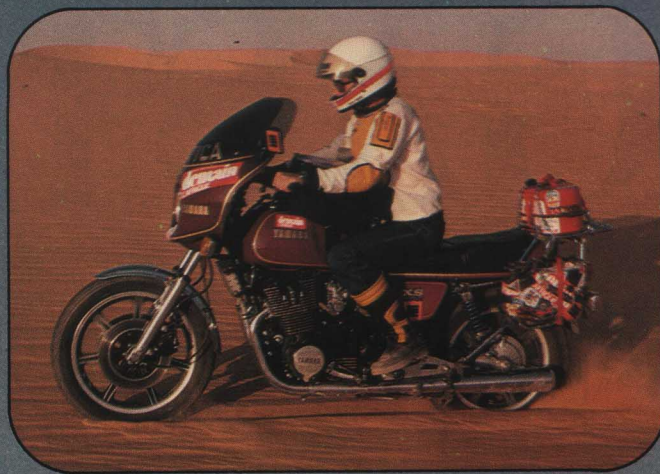
And, as Fenouil said on arrival in Algiers, "I was able to establish the record thanks to the extraordinary capabilities of the Yamaha XS1100 at high speeds and to the fact that, in the whole 2000 kilometres, I had to do nothing to the machine other than put petrol in the tank. It arrived in Algiers looking like new".



QUICKER

A dawn to dusk dash across the Sahara ... by Yamaha XS1100





ER THAN THE SUN!

