

Yamaha in Germany - A Market Leader

The obvious Yamaha ambition in Europe is to establish itself as the biggest-selling brand of motorcycle on the market....an ambition that has already been realised in several individual countries.

A key market in Europe is the large German one and, therefore, it was with some joy that Yamaha's European marketing men greeted the news that, for the important summer season last year, Yamaha had pushed Honda out of the top sales spot in Germany.

Competition at the top is fierce and the battle see-saws back and forward between the big two, with their nearest challenger way in arrears. Machine availability, in fact, has played a crucial part in the overall sales position and at one point towards the end of 1977, Yamaha's German importers found that it was only the lack of available 360cc twins that kept them from pulling further into the lead!

German importers of Yamaha are Mitsui Maschinen GmbH, based in Meerbusch under the direction of Hiroshi Kawada. Main force behind the emergence of Yamaha as a market leader in Germany last year is the Sales Director, Hans-Ulrich Schmitz, while other important personnel are Publicity Director, Peter Gasche and Manfred Wehe, Mitsui's Service Director.

Mitsui took over the German importership of Yamaha in 1971 and since then have steadily built up a solid share of the market. An examination of the previous three years German registration figures will show how solidly.

In 1975, Honda had a stranglehold grip on the market with a 38.9% share of total sales. Yamaha were next but with only 18% share...less than half that of Honda. Next came BMW with 12.4%, Suzuki with 10.3% and Kawasaki with 5%.

One year later, things weren't a lot better. Honda had expanded their market

share to 40.2% and although Yamaha had also increased, it was only to 20.8%. BMW had dropped a little to 11.7% while both Suzuki and Kawasaki had made marginal gains at the lower end of the market....to 11% and 5.1% respectively.

But what a different story for Yamaha in 1977! Honda still led the year overall but their share of the market had been cut by over 25%. Now they held a 29% market share with Yamaha right on their shoulder at 28%! In fact, only the fact that Mitsui had sold their entire quota of the more popular machines prevented them from moving into the Number One position for the entire year. As it was, they led Honda for the big-selling April to August period and then only slipped back slightly behind as they ran out of machines!

Of the other competitive brands, Suzuki had made a slight increase to 14% and Kawasaki to 8.1% but BMW had slipped to a 9.8% share.

To all intents and purposes, however, these are all out of the running. Up front it is Yamaha and Honda battling it out for the sales lead.

One of the keys to the Yamaha success was the introduction of a specially detuned version of the XS360 to the German market. Its power had been cut to 27PS to enable riders to take advantage of favourable insurance rates for machines of this power output or less.

The decision by Yamaha's marketing men in Germany to offer a "low power" version of the XS360 was proved by the fact that, over the whole year, the XS360 captured 60.2% of the sales in the 27 horsepower category!

Actually, from January to August, the Yamaha four-stroke twin held a staggering 68% of the 27hp bracket and it was only the fact that Mitsui had by then completely sold out of XS360 models by September that pegged the share back to a still highly-creditable 60%.

For 1978, the Yamaha strength in the 27hp area has been boosted even more by the fact that special versions of the XT500 and SR500 single cylinder models have been produced with 27hp engines. The XS360 has been expanded in size to become the XS400 and there is naturally a 27hp version of this machine for the German market. So German riders have the choice of either a 400cc twin or two single cylinder five-hundreds in a section of the market that, up until Yamaha's intervention with the XS360 last year, had seen them restricted to two-fifties or less.

Naturally, rival manufacturers have followed Yamaha's lead and jumped on the bandwagon with their own 27hp four-hundreds but the addition of the SR500 to the 1978 range has made Mitsui confident of keeping the lead in this important category for 1978.

One of the ways they aim to do this is by some aggressive promotion within the 400cc capacity bracket to make potential customers even more aware of the XS400 twin and its merits. For example, the XS400 Cup (outlined in the accompanying feature) will help prove to would-be

A New Clubman's Series - Germany's XS400 Cup

There's a new breed of Yamaha road racer on the German tracks this season and it's the first production Yamaha road racer that hasn't featured a high-revving two-stroke engine.

The new breed of clubman racer is based on the XS400 twin, one of the most popular machines in Germany, and its performance and handling emphasise the sporting qualities that have made the XS overhead camshaft twins such popular machines throughout Europe.

Obviously, the German series is intended for the novice, or relatively inexperienced riders, and it is a class of racing that other countries would do well to copy as a means of introducing a rider to road racing. The XS400 handles well, has good brakes and a smooth engine that is easy to cope with. In addition, even mildly-tuned versions of the engine will give over 100mph speeds, plenty high enough to help a rider learn the road race game.

A standard XS400 in

Germany will run at 140km/h (87.5mph) while the race-prepared machines that will be used in the series are capable of 180km/h (112.5mph). Power output is up from 27bhp to 38bhp.

The series is made up of eight races. At Kassel-Calden in the north of Germany on April 23rd and again in the north at Wunstorf on May 28th. Then the series moves over to the west and actually crosses the border into Belgium, where the German Aachen club will run their round of the series on June 24th at the Zolder track.

From there it is back to the north of Germany and the Schottenring on July 2nd and then west again to the famous Nurburgring two weeks later on July 15th.

On August 13th there's a change of style, with the XS400 riders tackling the famous Freiburg hillclimb in the south of Germany and a week later the riders can run in still more exalted company as part of the program on the German Grand Prix bill at the Nurburgring on August 19/20

buyers that the machine has all the sporting attributes that Yamaha's racing heritage can provide.

As important as promotion, feels sales manager, Hans-Ulrich Schmitz, is customer service. And Yamaha score heavily in this department.

All of the administrative work is handled from the Meerbusch office but Mitsui's spare parts division is totally separate and self-contained. So separate that it is at Loehne, 200 miles away from

the main office. Manfred Wehe, one of the original Yamaha importers, now handles the spare parts division at Loehne and has over 18,000 different spare parts in stock.

The Loehne plant handles nothing but the supply of spares to the Yamaha dealers, as does another warehouse (under Mr Wehe's overall direction) in Munich. Handling the Munich facility on the spot is Mr Spree, who is responsible for the supply

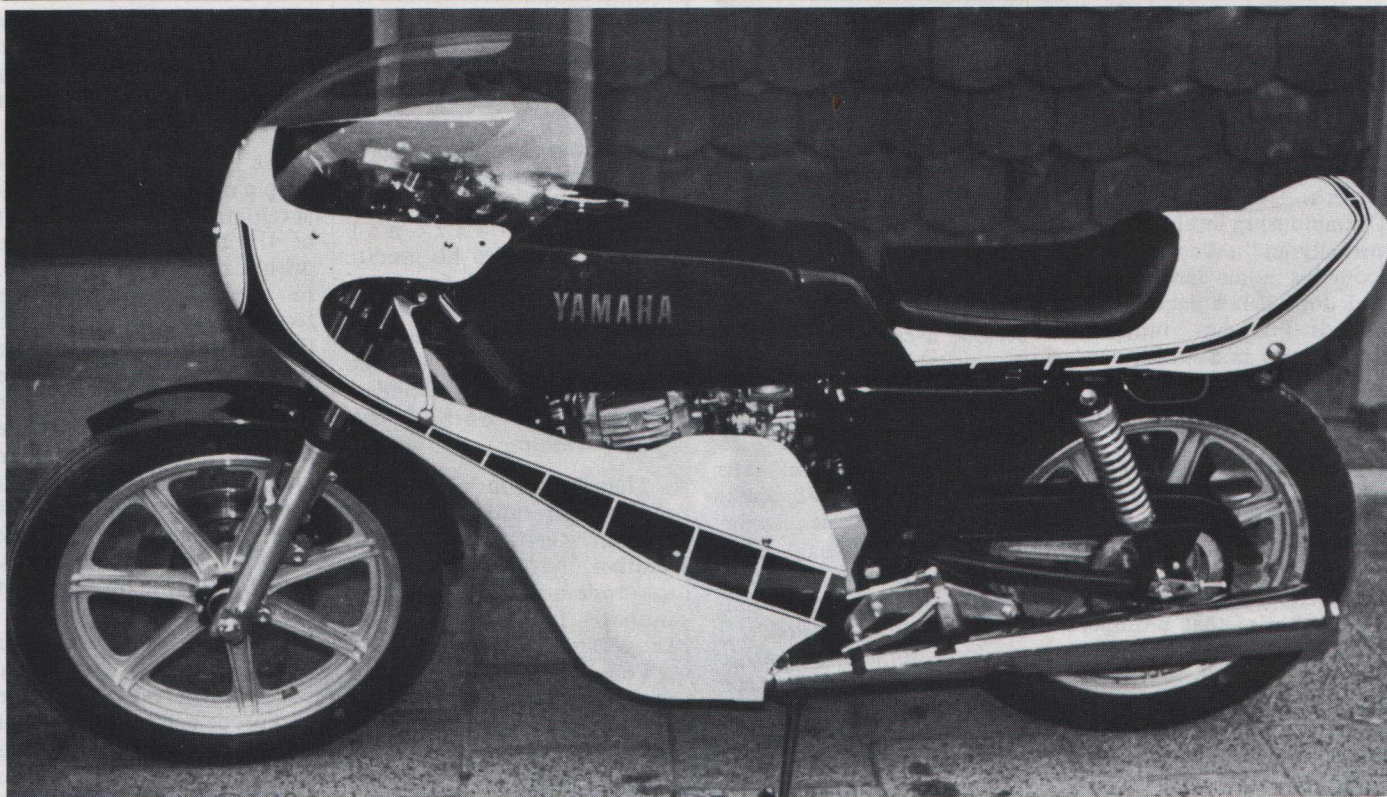
of spares to all dealers in Southern Germany.

Mitsui also have a giant warehouse in the port of Hamburg, from where complete machines are shipped direct to dealers all over Germany.

Mr Schmitz feels that this decentralization of activities is one of the reasons why Yamaha are recognised throughout Germany as being the best of the Japanese

manufacturers when it comes to the speedy and efficient supply of spare parts.

It is this sort of attitude to the customer, plus an innovative and forceful marketing program that has seen Mitsui take Yamaha from merely being one of the "also-rans" in Germany to that of a strong and competitive market leader in one of Germany's most important horsepower categories...and well on the way to that Number One position overall.



The XS400 Series closes on September 19th with the final event in the south of Germany organised by the Augsburg club.

Mitsui Maschinen GmbH, Yamaha importers for Germany, are presenting a handsome gold cup to the series winner as well as sponsoring the series in terms of prize money.

The XS400 Cup is restricted to young riders in the 19-24 years old age bracket and Mitsui prepared 50 identical racing versions of the XS400 which went to selected dealers all over Germany. First priority was given to exclusive Yamaha dealers, next to those stocking only Yamaha and non-Japanese brands, then to general dealers based on their geographic locality.

Dealers purchased the machines and could either sell them to prospective riders in the series or sponsor them for

publicity purposes. Riders interested in the series had to make the initial approach through their local Yamaha dealer, who would then select them on the basis of riding experience and skills.

Forty seven of the 50 XS400 racers came to the line for the first race at Kassel, where German Grand Prix driver, Jochen Mass dropped the starting flag (and later presented the trophies to the winner and other leading riders).

Jochen is a Yamaha enthusiast, riding an XS1100 in his leisure moments.

By the time of the first race, Yamaha's sponsorship had been boosted by support from the Valvoline Oil Company and Greyhound-FLM leathers. The series was already becoming established as one of the premier German events for novice riders.

Winner at Kassel was Hans-Georg Buhler, a 21 year

old student from Bad Homburg. He was followed by Wolfgang Mockel (20) of Erzhausen bei Darmstadt and 20 year old Franz Stampflmeier from Rosenheim.

During the course of the Kassel event, the 47 Yamaha XS400 twins covered a total

of 2,560 kilometres (1656 miles) around the track at racing speeds without any problems. For any young rider, a reliable racing machine is just as important as a fast one...and the new breed of Yamaha racer obviously has both of these attributes.

Swiss Ski Team Train On Yamaha

As part of their summer training program, the Swiss National Ski team will be using Yamaha motocross machines! Prior to this five of the team had previously been using motorcycles as a way of keeping fit and of improving their balance and reactions during the off-season.

Yamaha's Swiss importer, Hostettler AG, provided five machines for the use of the team and these were received

recently by top Swiss mountaineer, Rolf Heft. The machines were introduced to ski team members by Swiss moto-cross champion, Fritz Graf and national trials champion, Gody Linder.

When the Swiss men's ski team have become familiar with the machines and integrated off-road motorcycling with their training program, then it is likely that the women's team will also take to two wheels!