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JANUARY 1986

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# bike

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THE  
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SEASON  
SPECIAL**

**Silly bikes  
silly stories silly pictures**

(including terrifically  
silly **Moped Mayhem** race reports!)

## MESSAGGIO DA MILANO

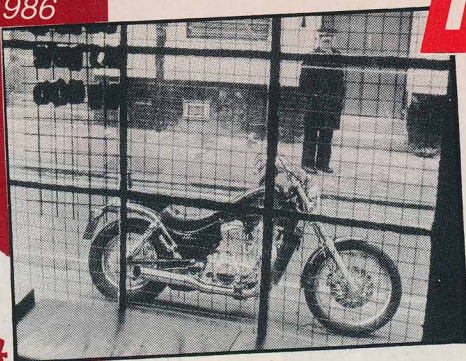
For once, the Italian show was worth going to. New generations of wop screamers, plonkers and chuggers take on the Nips

## KINGMAKERS

How Kel Carruthers and Erv Kanemoto keep pushing those damn Yanks to the top of the pile

## CLONE ZONE

A goodly ogle of the Harris answer to Yamaha's factory Genesis chassis. Stavros Parrish is probably going to race it, too, if he can find time between Truck GPs



## THE 1985 BIKE MAGAZINE AWARDS

Forget Oscars, Humphreys, Grammys and Egberts, as we make prestigious presentations to the fairest — and the foulest — in the land

## BARK AND BITE

Two versions of Frankenstein's monster's dog lurking down in the depths of funny farming territory. A Norton-engined Gilera crosser faces off against the only Honda 400/4 in a Yam DT chassis (fortunately)

## ANYTHING GOES

The bike, you sweet young boys, not the contact pages. Suzuki's cryptopog, the Intruder, goes mincing round leather bars

# ROADTESTS

## THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

Suzuki RG500s as Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee. One's the Gamma road bike and the other's a full-blown Skoal Bandits GP tool. Both the same? I don't think so . . .

## ARABIAN NIGHTS

If Paris-Dakar posing pedestals are nicer to look at than ride, why bother getting cold and wet? Dashing desert doobries from Honda, Cagiva and BMW. (We've heard some dodgy excuses for not riding testbikes in winter and leering at photographer's models but this is ridiculous . . .)



## MOPED MAYHEM

Hold the front page an' quite a lot more inside, too, 'cos this is the not-so-awful truth in all its gory detail

## ON-LINE

To be perused at the reader's own risk . . .

## LIFE IN THE PIT LANE

Scotty tells it like it might be

## FOULKES OFF

Still telling tales out of skool

## AGONY COLUMN

Letters pray (Let us pray? geddit? Jesus, I wish the pub was open)

## STAFF BIKES

We don't really believe he bought it

## LAST PAGE

Till next month, anyway

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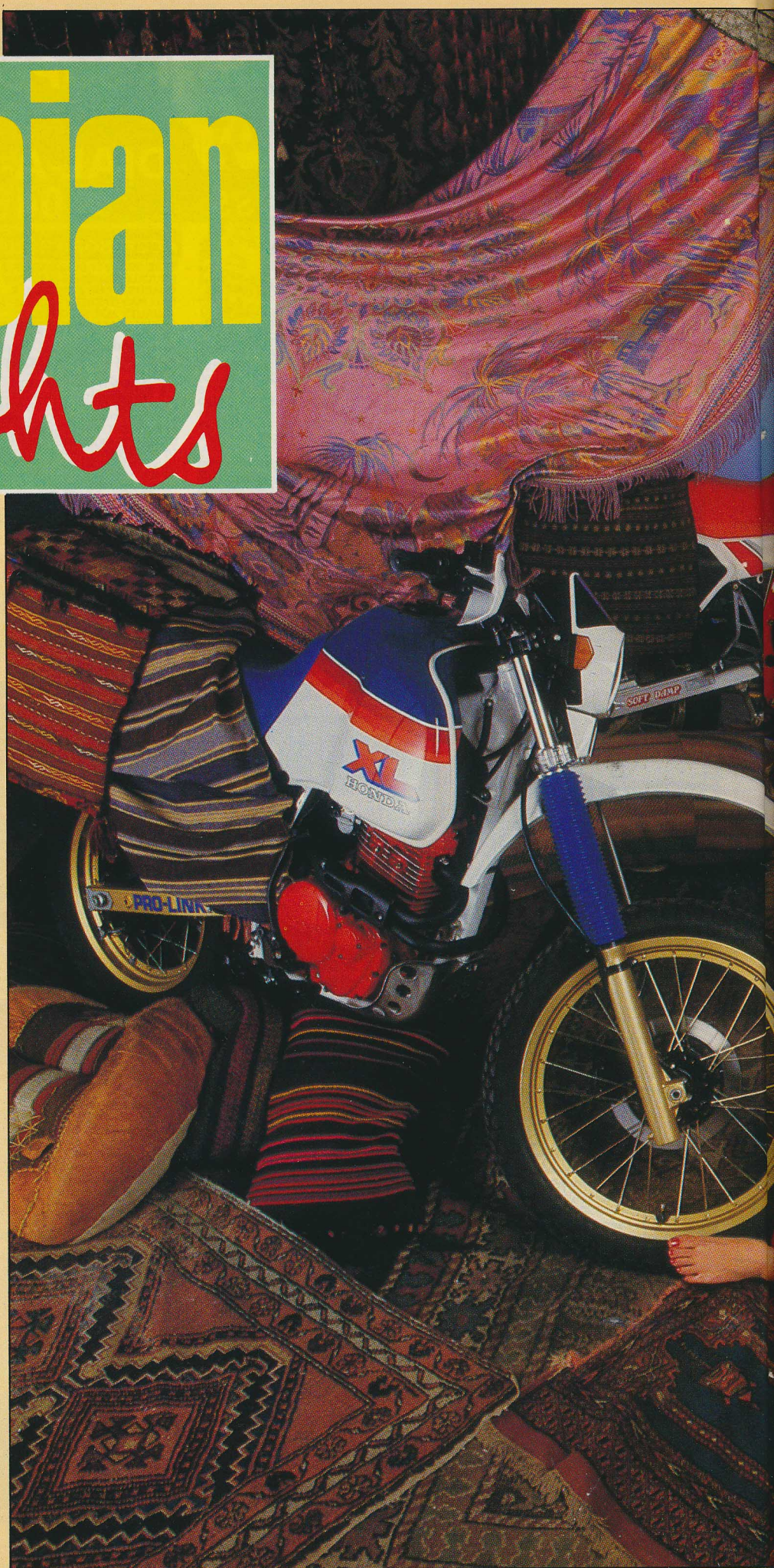
# arabian Nights

**Bikes ostensibly designed as trans-Sahara battlewagons are selling faster than white virgins on the Cairo slave market. Roger Willis sniffs the merchandise**

**D**agenham, Dorking, Digbeth, Durham and Dunfermline being noticeably short on rolling expanses of desert, The Great British Buying Public seems to agree that a harem of Dakar replicas is best left tucked up in Fatima's boudoir — but the bikes keep on coming. Using them as posing props whilst popping a succulent sheep's eye and working up to giving the nearest dusky wench another dose of the ol' Abdulla is a luxury reserved for Valentino lookalikes, though, because the manufacturers intend us to ride them and a large fraction of Europe's motorcycling population already does. The more worldly of you will know, too, that the backstreets of Dijon, Dortmund and Dusseldorf aren't exactly overwhelmed with sand dunes either, but this piffling fact hasn't stopped Yamaha's Tenere from becoming the top-selling bike on the continent, closely followed by offerings from other Jap and Euro factories. It's enough to make the hair stand up on a camel's back.

The 1986 Tenere will have been expensively launched to the European press in (hopefully) sun-kissed Sardinia by the time you're reading this. The poor old Brit journo contingent gets to jump on the junket bandwagon — and ride the rest of Yamaha's '86 range — purely because of largesse generated by huge advance orders for this desert poseur tool from mainland Europe. British importer Mitsui, though, has sold relatively few of the previous two years' models and is unlikely to risk cranking many more of the blue bombshells debuted at the Paris Show into a market that clearly doesn't exist here in volume terms — yet. Nevertheless, there are signs that something's stirring, because other manufacturers are dipping their toes into fictional British sand.

When next year's Yam arrives, it will have





an uprated chassis verging on the luxu side of specification promises, an uprated 600cc donk now claimed to be producing 46bhp compared with last year's 44 and, more significantly, the motor will be dragged out of that special ghetto reserved for large capacity four-stroke singles by the civilising installation of an electric foot. But Yamaha won't have got in first with streetability-orientated gentle poseur's aids, because the Honda XL600LM is already here, matching it gizmo for gimmick, and, to a lesser extent, twin-pot weirdies from BMW and Cagiva are quietly carving the odd niche.

In some ways, the Germans have pulled the cleverest stunt by not actually producing a new, or super-trick, bike at all. Their R80 G/S trail bike which, besides having been around for years, never really had any dirt pretensions, has just been graced with a seat-and-giant-tank kit of sufficiently outrageous ugliness to define some sort of Paris-Dakar profile. In this guise, it remains the ordinarily decent road bike it always was, perhaps slightly suckered by a wimpy front fork that is not averse to wandering about under the stresses imposed by application of the single front disc brake or not-particularly strenuous cornering. The kit alters its image and, practically, gives it a gargantuan range twixt hugely expensive fuel stops but also has a couple of minor detractions.

As with all hastily-concieved bolt-on goodies, whether they originate from the OE manufacturer or some backstreet accessory supplier, these don't quite fit the bike. Sidepanels have to be left off simply because they stick out like pimples on a beauty queen's chin and the longer tank pushes the rider too far back, producing an uncomfortable crouch to get at the too distant and too low handlebar.



*At least the lovely Fatima Ali Ben Kiwi's little tootsies can reach the Beemer's distant bars (did somebody mention bars? Do you mean public bars or saloon bars or cocktail bars?)*

The price, at approximately £3600, might make anybody but a dyed-in-the-designer-sweater BeeEmm enthusiast blanche, but it's a damn sight cheaper than the rumoured six-figure costs associated with each genuine BMW Paris-Dakar desert racer, a bike that the kitted-out R80GS has almost nothing in common with except for boxer engine layout and gestural visual presence. The

works bikes, piloted with consummate lunacy by the likes of Gaston Rahier, differ in more than detail. Their motors churn out ninety free-revving ponies, thanks to lightened cranks no BMW road bike was ever graced with. Metallurgy, carburation and cylinder-head design are also unrecognisable. Frames, beyond the basic BMW double cradle, are transformed with



*Meaningful eyeballs across the Elephant. The Cagiva is all angles, most of them pose-worthy.*

the type of motocross technology that one might discover at the top of a beanstalk. Twin, laid-down rear shocks are tucked inside the main spars, Husqvarna-style, at the top, giving the maximum amount of travel possible within the constraints of the shaft transmission's universal joint. Massive motocross legs hang on the front while the wheels, brakes, instruments, lights, toilet roll holder and prayer mat are all, er, *special*. On the pro bikes, a large proportion of the vast white blob in front of the rider doesn't even contain petrol — it's an airbox with quick-release desert filter. A subsidiary tank hides under the seat aft of the motor.

Cagiva, with the unfortunately named Elefant, has at least tried a little harder to satisfy poseurs hungry for pukka dirty detail. This Pantah-engined weapon is appearing in the British economic desert in small numbers thanks to the good offices and eye to future commercial potential of Keith Davies at Three Cross Motorcycles, now firmly established as the Ducati-Cagiva importer.

The Cagivas have swiftly earned rally — and street — credibility in the hands of Hubert Auriol, who won the Paris-Dakar twice for BMW before throwing a terminal wobbler about the disproportionate size of Rahier's pay packet compared with his own, and old 'crosser hacks like Jean-Jacques Loup and Gilles Picard. Even if they haven't actually won anything, the bikes have been both fast and finishers — a rare combination as either desert contenders or Italian factory product!

Of course, the racing equipment could be said to harbour various technical aberrations besides the excusably obvious like fuel-carrying capacity, when offered up against the retail item, but the differences aren't on the Comedy Store level of BMW's easy piece. The carcass is built round a massive square-section double cradle with convincing suspension on both ends. The rear stars Cagiva's soft-rate 'Rising Damp', as we say in the trade, acting on an alloy swinger. Most of the pose-necessary and practically-unnecessary off-road cosmetics are present and styling is razor-sharp. Being privileged with access only to a dead-engined show bike for photographic purposes, we haven't got a clue what the thing feels like to ride, but unloading it from the *Bike* truck's mezzanine-level flatbed came close to causing hernias. It is a tad on the heavy side for a dirt tool, but who cares? These bikes aren't. Paying £3250 for what's supposed to be a classic Italian vee-twin lump inserted into a new disguise that's almost certainly meaty enough to behave has got to put the Elefant on the inside...

But up amongst the global big boys and back down amongst the big singles, Honda has taken the Tenere head-on with its 'XL Paris-Dakar' which arrived here in the middle of last summer. To say that the bike is a triumph of image over intention sounds insulting, but I don't really mean to be rude. Its origins clearly lie in the XL trail bike range and its extensive detailing is drawn from Honda's own Dakar tackle, which, in the hands of Cyril Neveu and in the days before BMW began to dominate with cubes and pure velocity, actually crossed the Senegal finish line in front of the others. However, it's probably happier poodling around Ongar than savaging Ougadougou with a spot of automotive neo-colonialism and that's just as well.

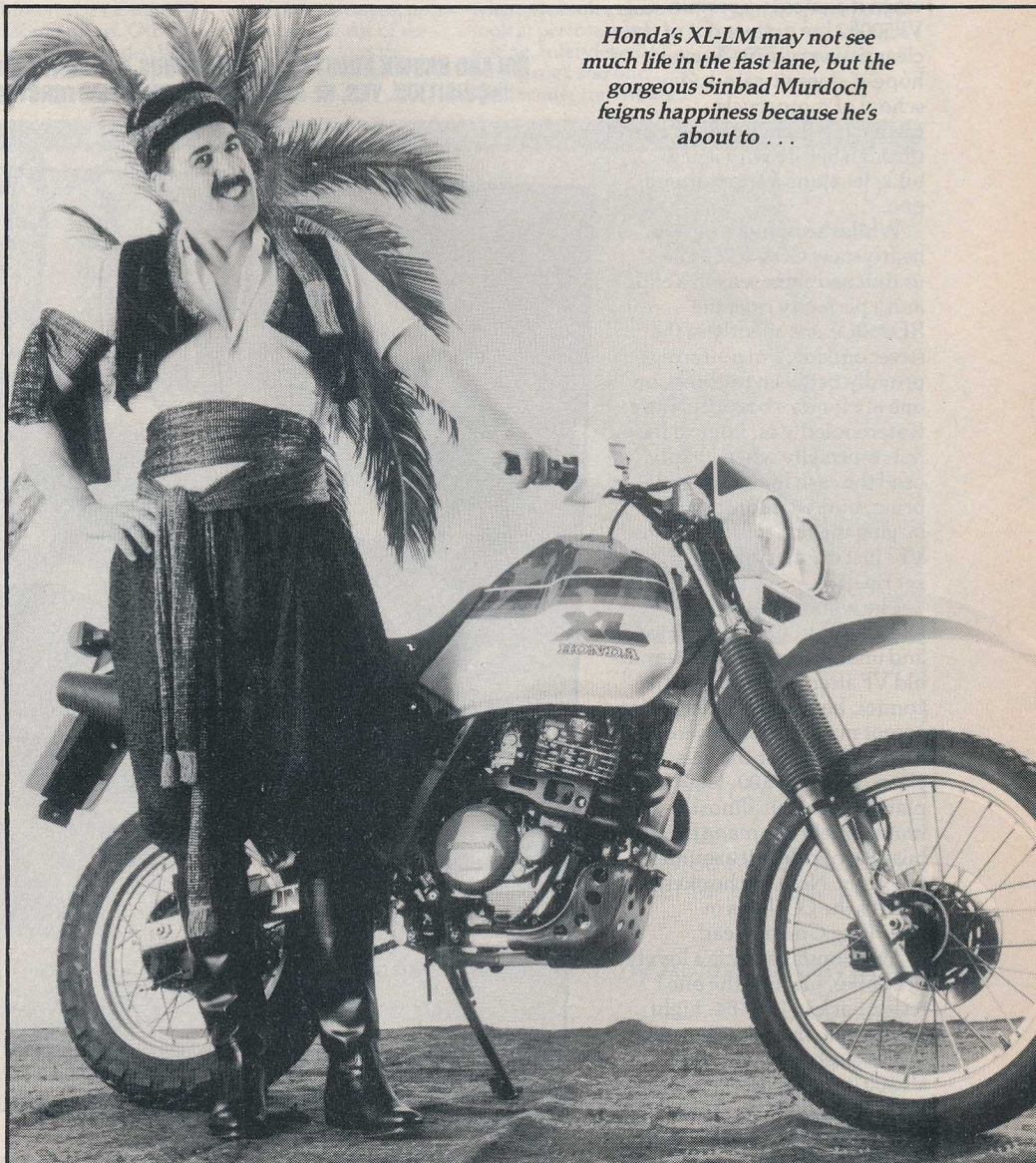
Things have moved quite a long way from the humble spec of Honda's fairly useful XL600 trail iron. The LM's frame, a fashionably square-section confection, is entirely different. The engine, whilst appearing to have gained nothing but a trendy coat of red paint, has a slightly less oversquare bore and stroke at 97mm x 80mm, resulting in a minimal two-cube capacity hike to 591cc. Radial four-valve head layout and twin carb aspiration remain much the same, though. Like next year's Yam and anything else that's going to cut the cake as a vanity case, an electric starter removes strife.

The suspension registers a fantasy off-road pedigree. At the front, softly sprung 41mm air-assisted Showa legs give an amusing 229mm of travel and a Pro-Link arse is harnessed to the now-expected alloy swingarm. Every bit of exposed alloy, save the dinky bash plate, is gloriously gold-anodised. This includes wheel rims, which apart from looking pretty, feature Honda's latest novelty of reversed, straight-pull spokes. These hang into a flange on the rim rather than going through it, allowing tubeless boots to be fitted.

Extremism of the usual dirt/desert let's-pretend variety afflicts the bodywork and plastics to a poseur-pleasing degree, with the standard baffled mega-tank (28 litres), crawl-up seat, comp plates and hand

protectors. A double headlamp unit upstages rivals, too, even if it is stylistically more reminiscent of a works BMW unit than the grilled peepers that go onto the real Honda Dakar bikes. Some details, like the magnesium engine sidecases offered in all seriousness as weight-saving miracles on a bike that's going to trip the scales at more than 400lbs fuelled-up anyway, are enough to make even a tax inspector grin, although a mere £2139 tag would wipe this smirk off.

Honestly, some work applied to this Honda, the Tenere and possibly the Cagiva, could turn them into capable, if not completely competitive, desert rally bikes. The real thing. The BMW is another story, but R80GS's with big tanks have been known to turn up in the strangest of places, too. Such a *possibility* is essential to the unrealised dreams of potential owners, even if it ain't an *actual* requirement. Any initial tendency to write the bikes off as stylistic nightmares, bad jokes built to please foreign wankers, needs resisting. How can it be any sillier to bop around in rush-hour traffic, role-playing on board a desert battleship, than it is to sit stuck behind a bus, boxed in by taxis, with grade-one arm ache thanks to the clip-ons of some repli-racer? Stand up, poseurs, and be counted, because whether or not we admit it, most of us will be in the final tally...



*Honda's XL-LM may not see much life in the fast lane, but the gorgeous Sinbad Murdoch feigns happiness because he's about to . . .*