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DIRT BIKE

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DECEMBER 1977

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125cc CONTROVERSY: BROC GLOVER TELLS HIS SIDE

TEST: CAN-AM 125 QUALIFIER

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MX

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• WORLD SPEEDWAY

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DIRT BIKE

DECEMBER 1977 VOLUME SEVEN NUMBER TWELVE

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Quiet, heavy and fast

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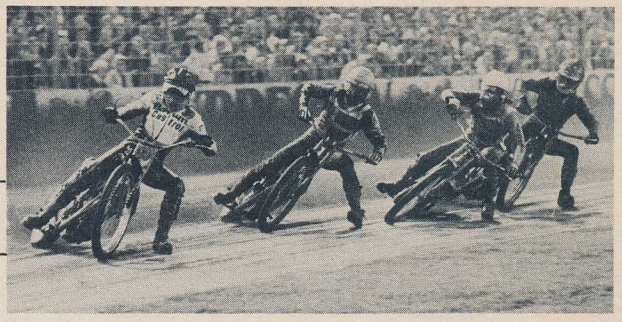

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ON THE COVER: John Therriault shot the action. Jim Gianatsis lensed the laurels; Marty Smith earned them.

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THE LITTLEST MAPLE LEAF EAGLE

CAN-AM 125 QUALIFIER

Bridging the gap between street trailer and berm buster

They say it's built to turn dirt into gold. And Can-Ams have brought home the gold during each of the past five years in ISDT competition. Still, their bikes have developed a curious reputation over the years. Gobs of radical horsepower residing in a rolling chassis that leaves some with puzzled expressions, others less baffled. After four years the Canadian house that snowmobiling built has shaped its first off-road competition bikes, based on their reliability trials and enduro efforts with modified hybrids of the existing MX and T'NT models.

A BRAND NEW BIKE —SORT OF

The Qualifier model line was added in 1977. (We tested the 175 in the July issue.) They also have a 250. The model's lineage is easily traced. Take the street-legal T'NT model engine and pop it into the MX frame.

All Can-Am models began life as 175s and then evolved up to 250s or down to 125s. Use of the T'NT street enduro engine makes for a very quiet enduro mount. The engine easily passed the stiff California noise tests, scoring in the vicinity of 83 decibels. Can-Am reps are quick to point out this acoustical plus, mentioning a competitor's enduro that requires a special kit to get down to 86 decibels — only it won't run right if the kit is added.

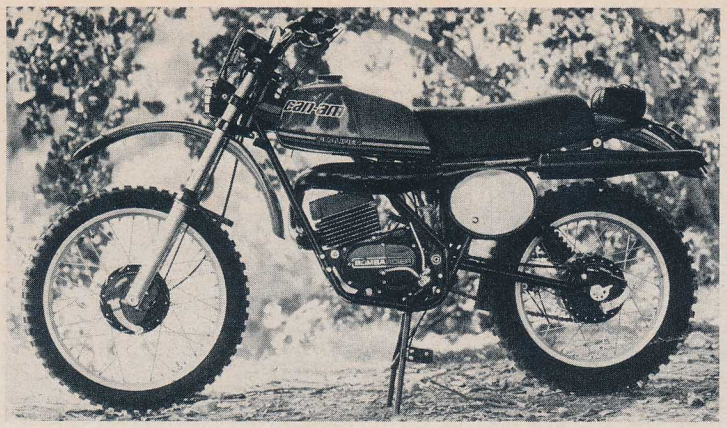
Suspension was softened for trail usage. The Betor forks offer 7.5 inches of travel, using 23-pound springs. Gas bag Gabriel shocks made in Canada are standard. Hundred-pound springs are used. Wheel travel is 6.8 inches.

The Qualifiers also picked up enduro touches like a centerstand, leather tool bag, off-road lighting and a speedometer.

QUALIFIER COMMENTS

Face it. The bike is heavy, and it would be even heavier with a mild steel frame. Instead, lighter and stronger carbon steel is used, a cost compromise between standard steel and expensive racing chrome moly. A frame built to accommodate a 175 or 250 powerplant is going to snuggle around a 125 mill like Man Mountain Dean getting friendly with Chastity Bono. But that beefy "overkill" in the frame department does mean durability and resistance to flex or crash damage.

Can-Am's involvement in ISDT Qualifiers, national enduros and the real Six Days thing reveals itself as you eyeball the machine. Quick chain adjusters, easy-off wheels, handy grab handle, maintenance centerstand, strong mounts, quietness, plenty of cable guides and



by the Staff of DIRT BIKE

brackets, quick-release spokes on the right side of both wheels for in-the-field repairs and the 25-31-degree variable head angle.

Don't let that mild-sounding engine fool you. Can-Am used their 125 powerplant to set two Bonneville speed records in 1973 that have yet to be topped. Speeds for the two classes were 128.5 and 136.5 mph. They were getting 33 horsepower out of the T'NT engine, using a close-ratio gearbox and water-jacketed cylinder.

But into each life some rain must fall. The rear brake setup is questionable. The placement of the mounting bolt in the frame makes it impossible to adjust the brake foot pedal low enough to use it without removing the foot from the peg. And the rear brake doesn't float. When the rear end starts bouncing, the brake tends to lock up the wheel.

The centerstand on our bike was missing a triangulation bracket. As a result, it was necessary to keep modifying (bending) the tab that holds it in place.

The Cheng Shin tires didn't agree with all who rode the bike on dry terrain, even though these tires are quite popular in California desert events.

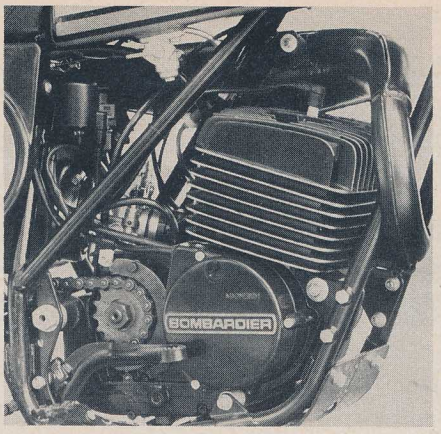
The chain guide is the only unsturdy looking piece on the bike. It didn't bend, it just looked as if a good encounter could do it in.

The breathing is a bit bewildering, with the foam filter sitting on top of the air box, but it evidently works.

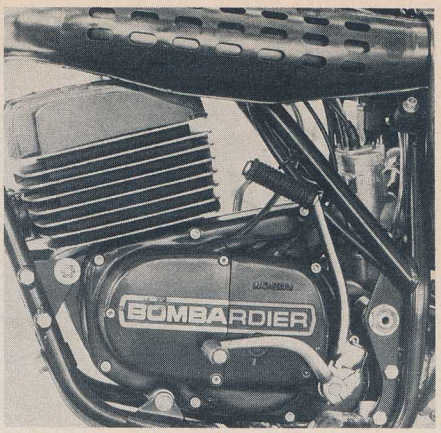
THREE FLAGS

The Baja 500 in Mexico last June prompted a Can-Am entry on a 125 Qualifier. Factory developer Jeff Smith and press rep Tony Murphy entered a near-stock bike in the south-of-the-border go-round. It was Smith's first fling at Baja. At age 43, he was one of only three North Americans to take a Gold Medal at the recent, tough ISDT in Czechoslovakia last September. He was aboard a 175 Qualifier in CZ-land. Oh yeah, he was a two-time world motocross champion too, as well as a winner of the Scottish Six Days. His racing mate, Murphy, formerly was a factory road racer for Yamaha.

Changes to the 125 for Baja were minimal. They put on some desert tires that didn't work out as well as expected. After pre-run testing they elected to go with the standard 15-tooth countershaft. They replaced the stock foam filter with what has become the standard for desert racing, the K&N pleated breather. The speedo was removed. Curnutt shocks were bolted on. The Curnutts, popular on the desert



The stator for the Bosch CDI is epoxied inside the mag case cover. The CDI unit is mounted just in from the 32mm Bing carburetor. Cylinder fins are heavily rubbered. Note the guard around the countershaft sprocket and the height of the brake pedal. Skid plate offers basic protection.



All Can-Ams except the 125 share a 57.5mm stroke. The 125 has a 54mm stroke. Plastic inserts between the main bearings and magnesium cases help compensate for temperature variations.

scene, offer additional immunity to crash damage. They also strapped on a tank tool bag and some spares.

The "graybeards" finished sixth in class and learned a lesson about pacing a long-distance Baja event. There is no pacing. They're looking to try again, without "pacing."

The 2.3-quart injection oil tank was topped before the race and did not require a refill during 400-plus miles of hard racing.

They ran regular rather than premium Mexican gas, without problems. They knew it would be OK because the factory dyno-tests the bikes using 85 octane gas, a rating lower than our gas here in the U.S.

THE WHOLE TOOTH

Our first outing found the Qualifier with the standard 15-tooth countershaft sprocket that allows the bike to top out somewhere around 80 mph. Play riding and tight trailing weren't exactly joyful experiences. Some of the gentler comments during that first outing: "It would be OK for donut runs, but you couldn't expect it to haul hamburgers." "It seems like it has some bottom end . . . but you'll soon discover that there is actually none."

So we dropped a tooth and tried again.

"It's a whole new motorcycle. It wouldn't pull third in the sand before, now it does. I was even able to shift up to fourth on some hills, but you have to keep it buzzing. It really comes on strong at high rpm, yet it runs clean enough on the bottom. Power is usable down there, even if it's not abundant. I weigh 140 and the suspension did its job. I never got into serious trouble. I suspect it would be too soft for heavier riders. The bike was comfortable for me. I didn't like the

desert tires and the lack of feel in the rear brake. The front end feels too heavy, in fact the bike feels too heavy for a 125."

"It's great if you don't have to run from the cops. I really don't know how I wound up in town, anyway. I got in a fireroad race with IT Eddie. He had an IT250, said he almost bought a Can-Am. On the fireroads it steers great with the feet up on the pegs, but it doesn't slide too well with the foot down, Class C-style. Yeah, I beat IT Eddie."

"I changed my opinion of the bike 70 percent after you regeared it. It's like it has a brand-new engine now for play riding. That engine is dynamite. Underline dynamite. I didn't think a 125, particularly one in a heavy chassis, could have that much powerband. It just keeps on revving. It steers pretty good, and it handles pretty good as long as you keep the power on, otherwise it wallows just like a

BELL
DIRT BIKE

TT500 with the power off. The bike is definitely better suited for fast, wide-open running. I'd definitely replace the shocks. It has a pretty good seat. The suspension seems to be tuned to the lighter rider, for sit-down riding rather than rough hauling. But that engine makes up for a lot of shortcomings. It's really something."

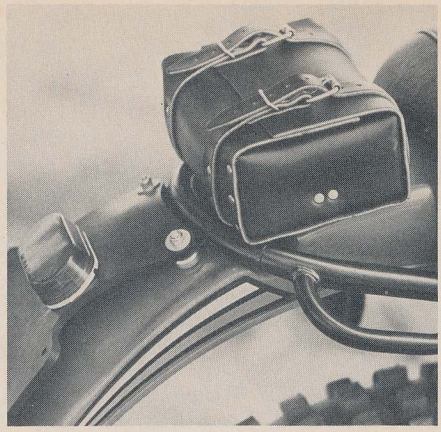
"That rear brake is not one of my favorites. It's too touchy. Totally unpleasant on downhills. It needs a floating rear brake for sure. The suspension was obviously set up for a lighter rider, so is the sitting position. It sat me too far forward. It steers pretty good. It's pipey compared to some other basic trail power-type bikes. The power was surprising on hills. It kept putting out enough power to keep breaking the rear wheel loose rather than just bogging down. It's too heavy, but it sure looks like it will hold together. Did you notice that nothing got dinged up on it?"

"It has a better powerband than most 250s. It pulls real nice, lets you keep a nice, fast trail rhythm. It seems to raise up and twitch sideways when you're going fast. It sure was hard to wheelie."

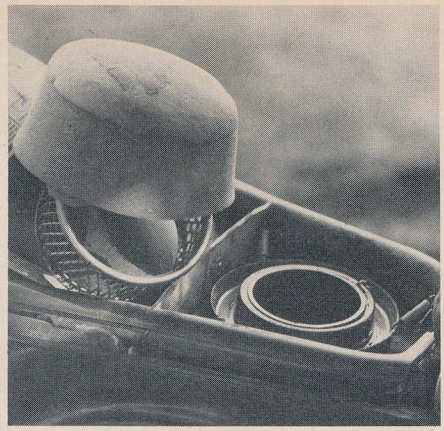
"I see this bike as being for someone who isn't looking to rip around doing wheelies for the peanut gallery. It's for the rider who finds a lot of self satisfaction in doing well on a small-displacement enduro; who really gets off on gassing his 125 by 400s on the loop. It has a bulletproof little engine."

QUALIFYING THE QUALIFIER

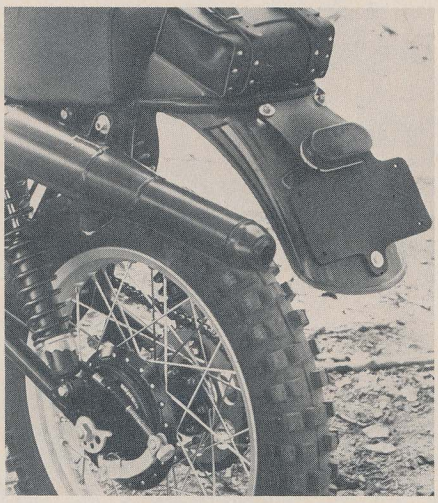
The Qualifier has been developed for serious enduro work. It is not without its limitations. It has that dynamite motor hauling a lot of chassis baggage. It's not particularly a go-slow-and-smell-the-flowers trail bike. It wants to go out and take a



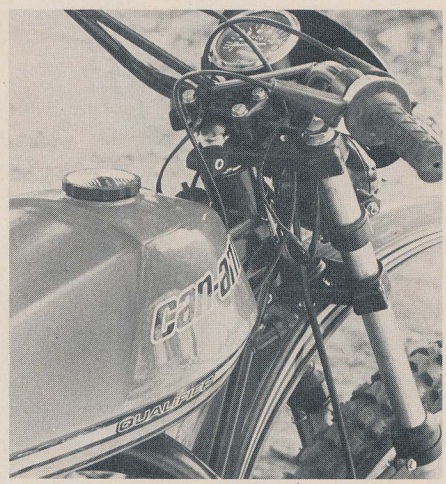
Enduro-type taillight is mounted on thick rubber license plate holder. The Qualifier is not street-legal. Grab handle comes in handy for hoisting the bike's 252 pounds (with full tank). Tool bag, which comes with the bike, is quite roomy.



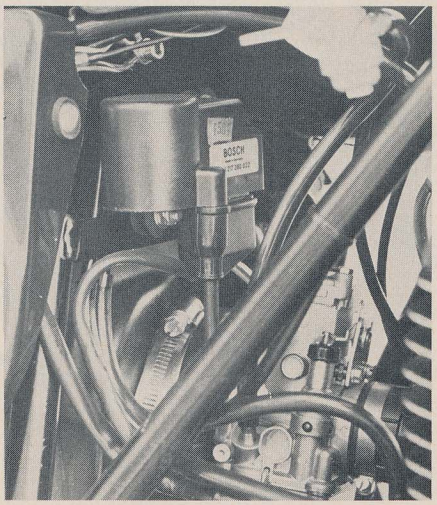
Air filter is serviced by removing two seat bolts and three spring clamps. Foam filter sits on top of the air box, which does not have an internal drain. There is an external drain hole on top for slop thrown up by rear wheel. An air intake bell leading from air box to carb is there to produce a more potent gas/air charge. Seating of the foam should be checked carefully, the fit leaves a bit to be desired.



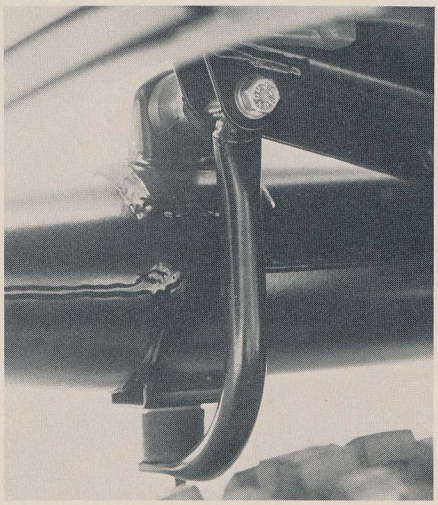
Backing plates on both hubs are magnesium. Rear wheel is set up to offer rapid chain adjustment. Beefy D.I.D spokes seated after break-in and didn't loosen. Shocks are gas bag Gabriels, made in Canada. Rear wheel travel is 6.8 inches. Heavy but highly effective silencer/spark arrestor is secured by stout double-rubber-mounted bracket.



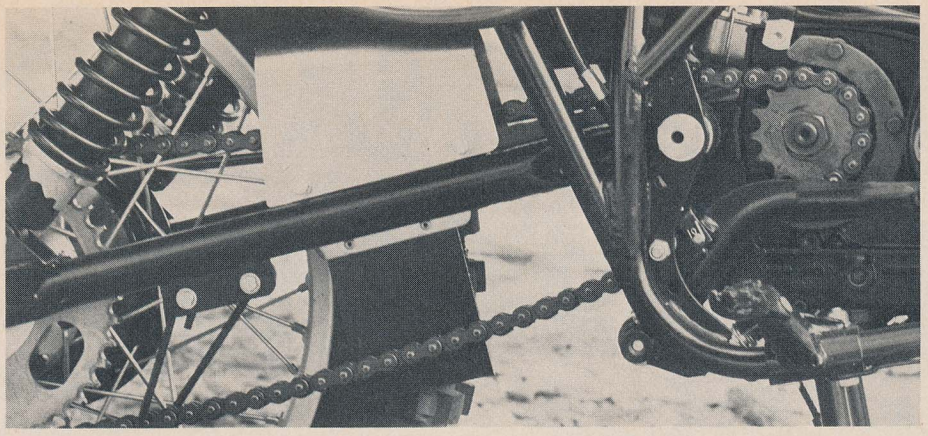
Plastic tank holds three gallons. Both plastic fenders are very sturdy. Forks can be serviced without having to move bars. Magura controls. Kill button mounted on left side. Cap for injection oil is just behind steering head.



Bosch CDI is used on all models except the 175 MX.



The pipe is heavy, so the mounting system is beefy.



Chain guide is not the beefiest. A pad on the centerstands acts as a chain tensioner of sorts. Note how close the countershaft sprocket is to the swingarm pivot. The closer the two, the less the need for a chain tensioner.

shot at passing the bigger bores, back pack and all. But don't forget to dial in the suspension first.

It has to be one of the most overengineered bikes around, with a 125 bore and stroke atop a basic 175 powerplant that holds together for the highest-horsepower 250 motocrosser in captivity. And that powerplant is bolted into a chassis designed to survive those 250 motocross wars. The chances of trash-canning a Can-Am seem highly remote. We'd give even odds in a contest between the Can-Am and a brick wall at 9000 rpm.

The bike seems to bridge the rapidly diminishing gap between fanciers of two persuasions, the East and West. It doesn't handle as well as the top European enduros, but it makes ponies. It's a sure bet for the diminutive displacement speed freaks of the unpaved universe. If you buy the 125 Qualifier, you buy bulk — that also spells rigidity and durability. You also buy power, quiet power. Not the hey-look-at-me-I'm-doing-a-wheelie type, but rather the quiet, stealthy, oh-that-was-a-250-I-just-passed kind of power. Gotcha power.

CAN-AM 125 QUALIFIER

PRICE: (approx. retail, West Coast) $1395
ENGINE: . . . . . Two-stroke, rotary valve
DISPLACEMENT: 123.7cc
BORE & STROKE 54x54mm
COMPRESSION RATIO: 13:1
CARBURETION: . . . . Bing 32mm (V-84)
PRIMARY DRIVE: Straight-cut gear, 3.29 ratio
TRANSMISSION RATIOS:
1) 3.40 (32.8 overall)
2) 2.31 (22.3)
3) 1.68 (16.2)
4) 1.31 (12.6)
5) 1.10 (10.6)
6) 0.96 (9.3)
FINAL DRIVE: . . . . . 520 chain, 2.93 ratio
15-tooth countershaft
44-tooth rear sprocket
ELECTRICS: . . . . . Bosch CDI
STARTING: . . . . . Primary kick
LUBRICATION: . . . . . Oil injection
FUEL TANK CAPACITY: 3.0 gallons (11.4 liters)
SUSPENSION:
Betor forks (7.5-inch travel)
Gabriel shocks (4.5-inch shock travel; 6.8-inch wheel travel)
TIRES: Cheng Shin 3.00x21/4.00x18 knobby
BRAKES: Drum, single shoe, 15.2cm x 2.54cm
INSTRUMENTS: Speedo, tenths-resetable odometer
LIGHTS: . . . . . Enduro
SILENCER: . . . . . Yes
SPARK ARRESTOR: . . USFS-approved
WARRANTY: . . . . . None
DIMENSIONS:
Wheelbase: . . . . . 141cm (55.5 inches)
Swingarm length: . 50.8cm (20 inches)
Ground clearance: . . . . . 26.7cm (10.5 inches
Bars, width: . . . . . 83.8cm (33 inches)
height: . . . 112.3cm (44.2 inches)
Pegs, height: . . . 33.5cm (13.2 inches)
Fork angle: 30 degrees standard, adjustable 25 to 31 degrees
Weight: 103 kg (227 pounds) claimed dry; 104.8 kg (231 pounds) ready for gas