

Yamaha RD 200B

A low budget racer

By John Ulrich

Just because it's small does not mean the Yamaha RD 200B is a beginner's motorcycle. It demands too high a level of skill from the

rider to be a good machine to learn the functions of motorcycling aboard, but delivers a high level of performance to match.

This motorcycle starts, stops, and changes direction with impressive rapidity, bearing in mind the limitations of 11.89 cubic inches engine displacement (195 cubic centimeters). For being a 200, the RD is a positive rocket, complete with retros.

Our test bike didn't want to move until the RPM reached the halfway point between zero and the 9,000 RPM

redline. The owner's manual advocates keeping the around town revs in the 4,000 to 5,000 range, and the reed-valve twin will keep up with city traffic while making little noise in this mode. However, the bike also makes little power there, (enough to move, but not enough to move quickly), and the plugs tend to foul after prolonged low speed, low RPM maneuvers.

Around 5,500 RPM it comes alive. Above six it screams all the way to 7,500, where the power on our model dropped off. Kept between six and seven-and-a-half, the 200 will leave most

cars behind at an intersection, embarrassing all but the most determined Detroit barge pilots up to cruising speed. At 60 MPH, the tach shows 6,500 RPM, and it's happy to stay there. At this RPM it will tackle moderate headwinds and hills, and will stay at 60 MPH against anything you're likely to encounter if downshifted into fourth. In fact the RD 200B had more cruising-speed torque and ability to maintain top-gear speed against gusts and grades than the Kawasaki 250cc Triple we tested several months ago. For spirited running, spark plugs one step colder than stock work well.

Very quick handling and powerful brakes combined with the powerplant's strength to make the bike a fine mount for certain applications. Light weight, low height, and a 49 inch wheelbase put the in-traffic handling right where it should be. In and out of lanes, dodging a straying turkey, beating a freeway jam — the little Yamaha is tops. It's much less nerve wracking to thread the RD 200 through the usual rush hour constipation of Los Angeles' alimentary canals (the freeways) than to try the same trick with our regular ride, a 750 Honda.

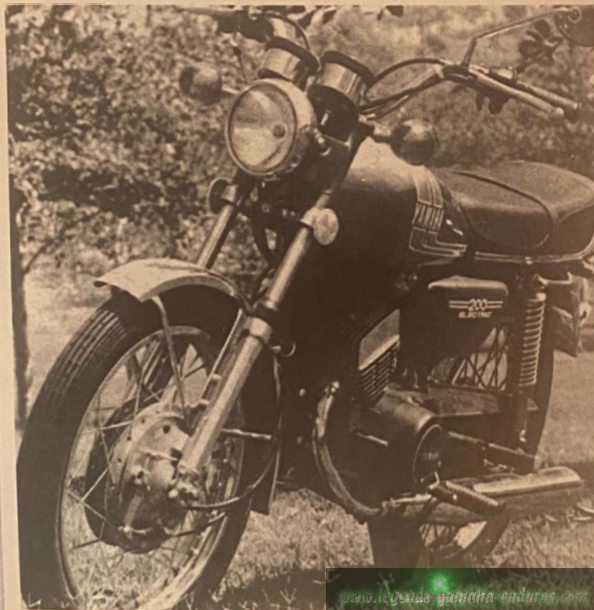
These same qualities put together into a swell traffic dicer also affect high speed handling. The startling reaction of the bike to the slightest rider input takes getting used to after stepping off a larger machine. Side winds, passing trucks, rain grooves, and even lane changing demand more attention since the little motorcycle moves around a lot more, and a lot more suddenly. Never was our test bike uncontrollable or dangerous with an experienced rider at the bars.

That's with an experienced rider. Would we let a newly enthused friend loose on this machine? Nope. With a novice on the seat, starting to move, accelerating, and stopping are all added to the list of reactions qualifying as "startling."

Taking off from a stop requires clutch slipping. A beginner usually has problems with this simple-to-a-veteran operation, and can be expected to blow it. What's the next step for our beginner? Grab a handful and dump the clutch. The bike immediately assumes a vertical posture, all set to come tumbling down.

Even when rolling, the wheelie demon may strike. Hitting a depression in the road surface under hard second gear gassing-it-up would easily loft the front end six inches. A handful in first would do it every time around six grand. Even hooking a tight second gear corner and grabbing a handful can have you charging out, half cranked over, nose high, and crossed up to correct. You'll either have fun with it or die.

The RD 200B isn't a bad looking scooter. Metallic blue paint with gold trim is semi-flashy, yet hides dust well.



www.legendaryamotorcycles.com



Gasging it out of a corner was the way it liked best.

The brakes react to pressure faster than the engine reacts to throttle. If you wish to stop very quickly, know what happens and what to do when a wheel stops moving before the vehicle it is attached to does, they're excellent. With a bit of screech and howl a good rider can haul down the RD in an incredibly short distance relative to many street bikes. But, since they are loaded with power yet lack progressiveness, the available "instant lock" carries the potential of putting many a novice on his head at inopportune moments. This is especially true since over-sprung

Locking gas cap is an old concept in a new shape for Yamaha. Last year's cap would have been better if reversed, at least from the viewpoint of potential injuries in a slide up on the tank.



shocks with a tendency to wear out quickly and soft forks exaggerate weight transfer under braking.

It's not a beginner's bike. It's not really an "economy" bike in the sense left in the back of the mind by the gasoline shortages, either. While it is miserly with injection oil (300 miles to a quart), the 200 demands fill-ups every 80 miles like clockwork by going on reserve. That's 30 miles-per-gallon with the engine kept on the power.

The seating position and the seat itself are not very good for extended journeys, and the footpegs feel weird. They're bolted to a rubber-mounted bar fastened under the engine, curling up around the outside of the exhaust pipes. The rider can feel the pegs move under his feet (not good for initial confidence) but they're supposed to dampen the engine's high frequency vibration. After several hundred miles you'll still feel it, not enough to be distracting, but still

noticeable at intervals through the pegs and bars. It's most annoying at about 3,500 and just under 7,000 RPM, when everything seems to resonate.

The tires, the pegs, and the centerstand (which we removed) conspire to limit bravery in cornering. Around slow speed corners, braking entering and gassing exiting worked best, instead of coasting or cruising

The brakes are the same way — strong and quick. Locking the tire isn't something that has to be worked at, but rather consciously avoided.



around. The worst thing it ever did in a high speed turn was to wobble in a 70 MPH downhill sweeping left hander inscribed with rain grooves. The tires do not hold the pavement when hot from being pushed hard, and don't stick much at all when wet.

The break in period calls for staying under 4,000 RPM the first 100 miles, which is also under any power. We didn't pay any attention to that warning, but were very careful to vary throttle settings constantly. But by the time 300 miles had rolled around the clock a week after we got the bike, we got lazy, thinking it was broken in after lots of freeway runs, and did not vary engine speed. The engine seized one hot afternoon at a steady 45 MPH on a surface street in fourth gear, but loosened up after a 15 minute wait and never missed a beat since. The power, though, is a bit down from the way it was before. If an owner has the patience to follow the break in directions for the first 500 miles, this probably wouldn't be a problem. When you're testing bikes

for a living, 500 miles is a luxury you can't afford. Test bikes delivered with 14 miles on the odometer suffer accordingly.

On the first 20 mile ride we took on the test machine, the round threaded nuts which hold the header pipes to the mufflers both came loose and allowed the escape of noise and smoke. The liberal application of silicone seal and tightening with a shock absorber spring pre-load adjuster tool solved the problem for good. Some owners report problems with the baffles falling out of the mufflers on earlier model 200s. A little seal or safety wire should prevent that.

The toolkit is junk. However, it makes a swell toy for a precocious child. The electrics were not up to Japanese standards. In other words, they were not absolutely flawless. Oh, sure, the electric starter always started the engine, the headlight always lit, and the adequate horn always horned. But the taillight bulb developed an intermittent short, blowing a fuse before being discovered, and the left rear turn signal bulb never did light up. That's all.

No, the Yamaha RD 200B is not for Arvil Average out for his first two wheeled spin. Then who is it good for?

It's good for a graduate from the tiddler class wanting a faster, more furious mount after putting on some road miles, for the dude who wants something relatively cheap to subject to the dangers of an urban parking lot after transporting him to his workplace with enough pizzazz to get him a little excited before hitting the grind, for the low-budget rider who likes to do wheelies and chirp the front tire as he barrels down the boulevard just to see the heads snap around, for the guy who wants to get into production road racing without spending a fortune to start (A friend took an absolutely stock RD 200B and took second 200 Production in a CMC money-paying road race September 1.), for anybody who wants some cheap action and can handle it, even if it does mean a sore back if they try to go touring on it, and, it's just dandy for the fast lady with legs too short for an RD 250.

That covers a lot of people.

