

□ The yard sale: There it sat, as appropriately as a discarded Sunday edition of the *Los Angeles Times* might lie crumpled in a dumpster, awaiting a Monday morning trash pickup. Desirable when new and useful, the 1965 Yamaha Big Bear Scrambler now seemed lost in a rolling wave of litter that washed over the lawn.

The 250 Big Bear belonged to an industrious young man intent on pursuing his fortune, such as it might be found, in the operations of a Samoan fish-processing plant. Not running, lame with worn-out tires, a weak generator and a faulty crankshaft bearing, the 20-year-old Yamaha had been scored and ravaged by two decades of salty ocean air. Its Autolube oiling system, meant to civilize two-strokes of that generation, had long ago been discarded. The Big Bear was junk. It was also five dollars. Sold.

An inventory of the 60 former and present occupants of the Stein garage for senior citizens of the motor world reads, in part, something like this: Eight Ducatis, three OSSAs, an AJS twin that used *National Geographic* magazine covers as its cylinder-base gaskets, a 1958 NSU Super Max and a score of hyper-kinetic two-stroke street and off-highway Japanese bikes. The automo-

*What if this five-dollar Scrambler runs all the way to the Canadian border? Then it will be a dazzling affirmation of the beauty and value of junk.*

*By John Stein*

bile roster has included about a dozen '50s and '60s American and English convertibles, an elderly Cadillac hearse, a New York City Checker cab, a Kaiser Special and, most recently, a rumpled Lotus. Close to two-thirds of these vehicles did not run at the time of purchase, and the vast majority were more appropriate for a dismantler than for the highway.

It would be very nice, very *avant-garde*, to suggest my collection currently glistens with Porsche Carreras and newly restored Vincents, but that's not the case. For the most part I own worn-out things. Some have cultural value, yet those that do not I like just the same. To me these well-worn vehicles show more personality than shiny stuff fresh off the showroom floor, and while New Things are certain to become

worn, dirty and dented, Old Things can only improve with time and care. Well, okay, at least they can't disintegrate much more.

As you can see, the Yamaha fit perfectly into my garage. But I had grander plans for this five-dollar throwaway. What better vehicle to use to make a point about waste, about revival and utility, about attitude and travel? Why not do something outrageous with this poor, beat-up old Yamaha—get it running, load it up with a satchel of tools and clothes and take off? Why not head toward Canada and see just how far I could go on a ride that cost as much as a hamburger and fries?

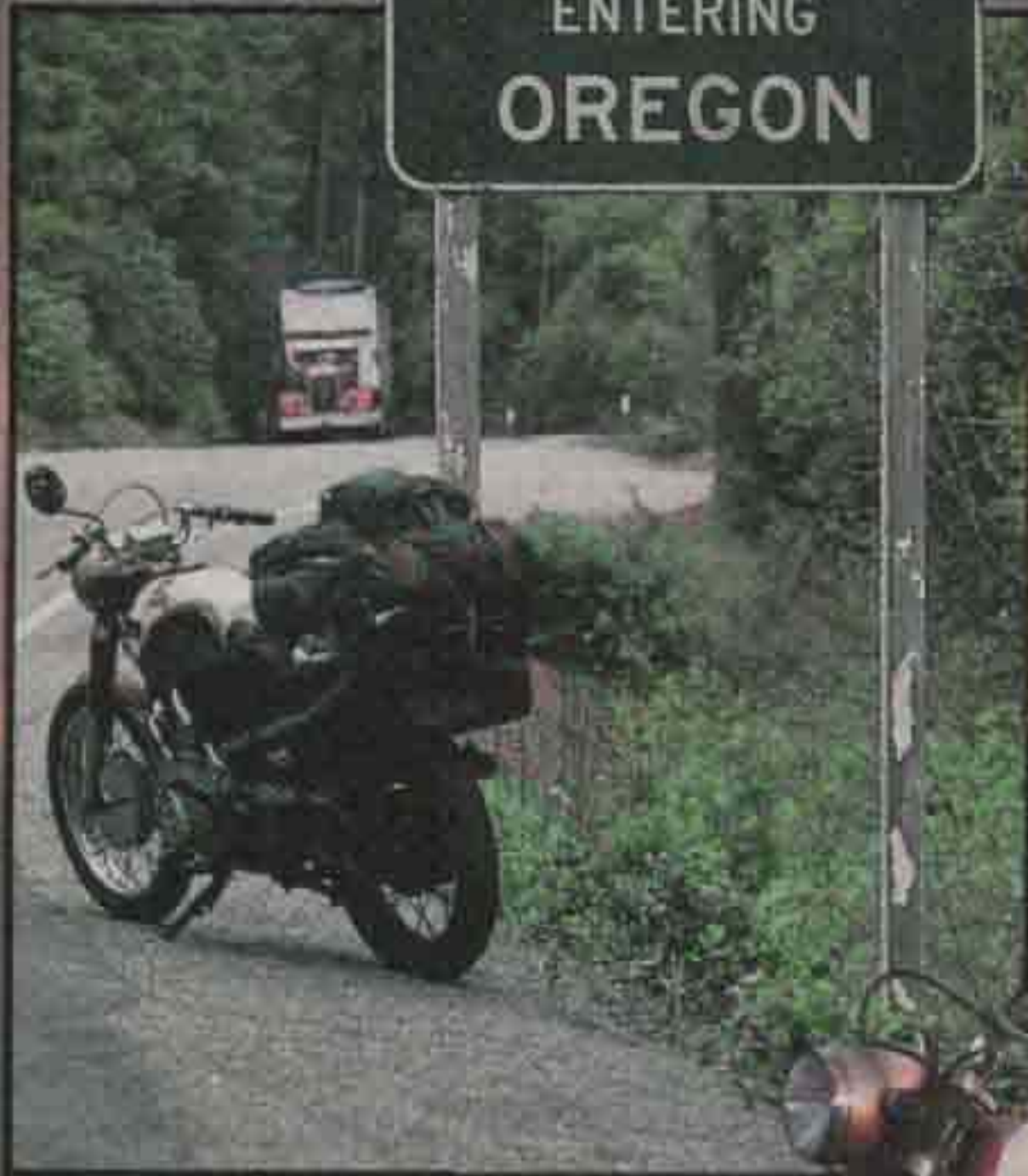
Maybe the Big Bear would keep running to the border; probably not. No matter. To prove its worth and the worth of the idea behind it, the Yamaha needed only to run a short distance. For anyone who measures his fun in accountant's terms, 100 miles would be plenty far. Five cents a mile is as good as bus fare, and the Yamaha would certainly be a better ride than a Greyhound coach. Yet, what if . . . what if the Yamaha should run all the way to the Canadian border or beyond? Then it would be a dazzling affirmation of the beauty and value of junk.

## CONFESSIONS OF A JUNKIE





STATE BOUNDARY  
ENTERING  
OREGON



PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN STEIN

But first the Yamaha would have to run.

With a bit of tinkering (a borrowed battery, beating the pistons loose with a plastic mallet) the Yamaha was resuscitated. Only one thing remained in the way: The faulty main bearing rattled so loudly I couldn't keep myself from reflexively switching off the ignition each time the engine rumbled to life. Finally, a

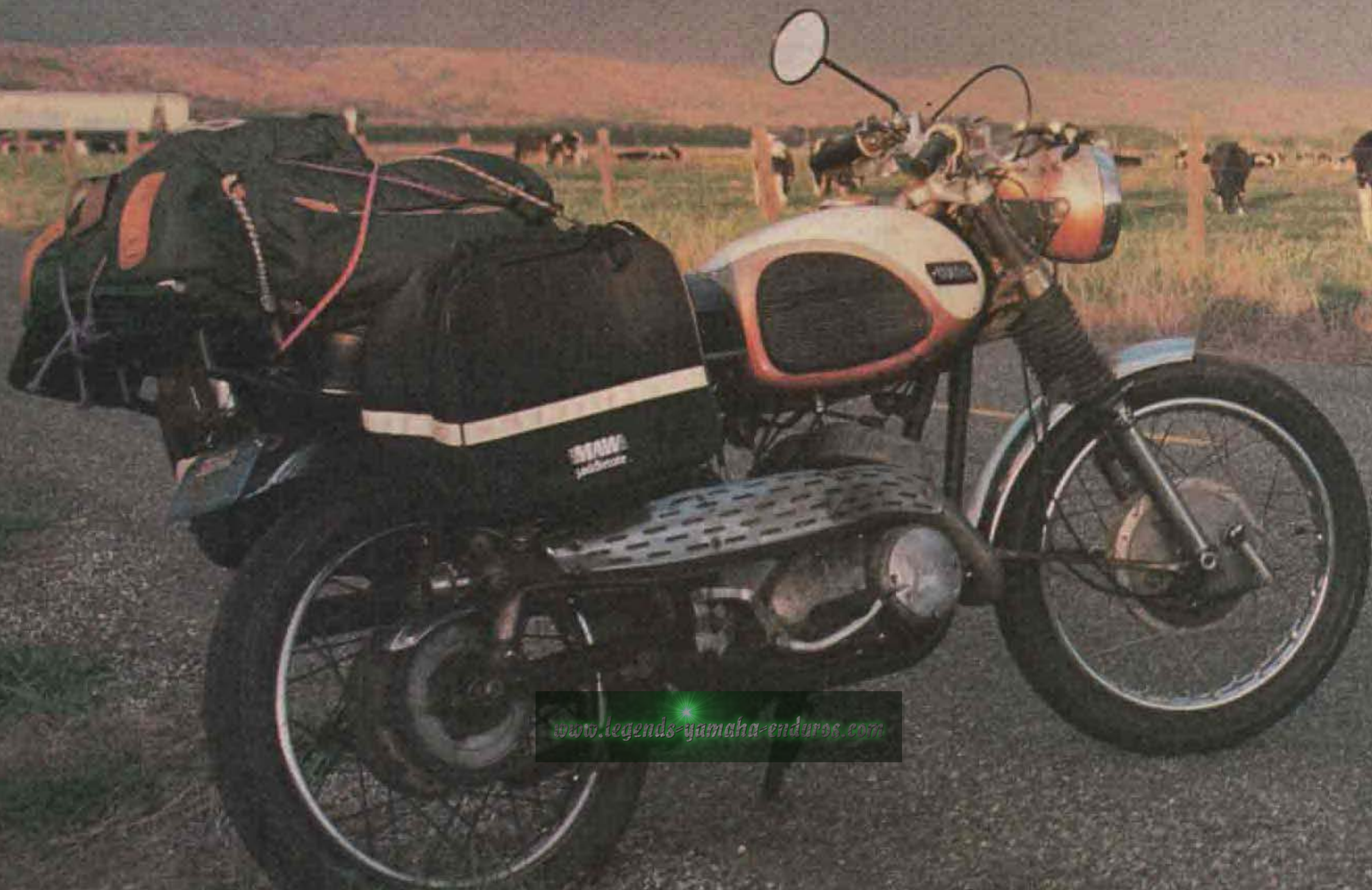
pair of ear plugs offered a cheap and painless solution.

Other details required attention, and I vowed to deal with them without spending any money. The Yamaha's throttle cable was broken, so I shortened the cable housing and resoldered the steel cable end. The kickstarter lever spun freely—but uselessly—on its once-splined shaft. Solution? Direct and strong, albeit a bit crude—I drilled the kickstarter arm and its shaft and through-bolted the two together.

For Operation Big Bear North I al-



## CONFESSIONS OF A JUNKIE



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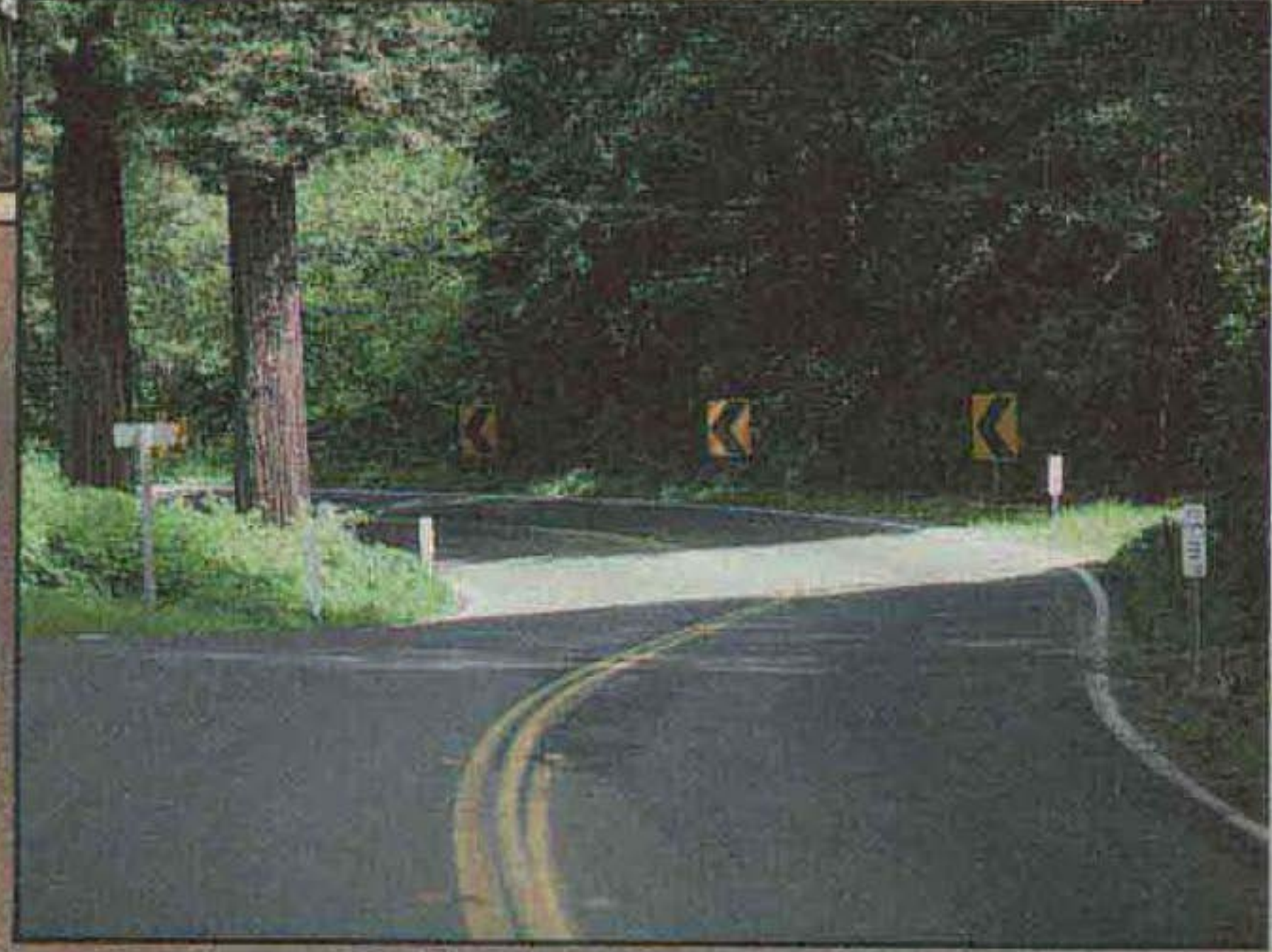
lowed one week; with delays for general slowness and breakdown, I figured an average of just over 200 miles per day. Should the YDS-3C break in a really big way, *tough*. If I couldn't repair it in a day, under the shade of a nearby tree, I would remove the pack and license plate and walk away.

As much as I've prepared for this trip, the Big Bear is still unfamiliar; in truth, I've ridden the \$5 Tourer no more than around the block since I trucked it home from the sale. Crawling tentatively



north, the Yamaha first conquers the steep hills outside of Santa Barbara. Peak engine speed is 6000 rpm at best; the aged clutch will hold no more power.

A hundred and fifty miles out, a nice little downhill presents itself. Here clutch slip is not a problem, and the Yamaha seems to run so well I loosen the reins. Its revs soon soar to 7000 rpm,



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## CONFESSIONS OF A JUNKIE



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*Once cooled, the Scrambler is ready for a new round. It starts, rattles, and runs on. Of course.*

and instantly I hear a sickening change in engine pitch that can only signal a piston seizing in its cylinder. This is it, I think—150 miles on five bucks.

Satisfied with the Big Bear's effort, I pull in the clutch, turn off the ignition and coast to a stop. After a minute I roll the bike back and forth to hear an ominous clunking. It's only slightly worse than normal, so I give the Scrambler another try. The Yamaha starts right up and runs fine.

Somewhere farther north, the Yamaha's battery goes flat. I discover that the generator's armature windings have completely disintegrated, and, desperate, I gut the wiring and run on a total-loss system. Then, at 280 miles, the whole electrical system shuts down as I roll into Fremont, California, just southeast of San Francisco. Somehow, the YDS limps to a local Yamaha dealership on one cylinder. The end is certainly near now. Yes, the generator armature is history, and the Yamaha store has no parts. No juice, no hope. But for five dollars, the Yamaha has served well. It's been interesting, and so long, Big Bear.

Not so fast.

Just as I open my mouth to ask the location of the nearest bus station, the Yamaha dealer opens his. He directs me to a motorcycle salvage shop two blocks away. It's a long shot, I know, but I halfheartedly check this place anyway. Incredibly, they have not one but *four* Yamaha YDS generator armatures (probably the only four in California). With one of these installed and a quick regulator adjustment, the Yamaha charges its battery perfectly. I find an old, used Michelin PZ2 tire and fit it to the back of the Scrambler as well. Every bit helps; the original Dunlop K70 had no pattern left whatsoever.

Nearly 400 miles out and the ride has become, well, uncomfortable—the seating accommodations stink. I now understand why Yamaha tacticians designated this thing a *Scrambler*; they

named it for what it does to your body and internal organs. To improve matters, the Scrambler could use a six-speed gearbox. It could stand to be quieter. It could vibrate less, and to this end a new crankshaft might help. Nonetheless, it refuses to quit. I envision the Scrambler as a bloody and beaten prizefighter crawling by instinct into the ring for each new round, each time to be knocked flat and then saved by the bell.

On down the road the Yamaha seizes for the second time. It's a harder seize, so sudden I don't have time to pull in the clutch lever. The back wheel skids a little on Interstate 5's cement slab. Surely, I say to myself, *this* is the end.

Or is it?

Once more I start the Big Bear, and once more it begins to move north, clattering even more alarmingly. We reach Red Bluff, California, 480 miles out, and the Cinderella Riverview Motel, sitting on the bank of the Sacramento River, offers a respite from the excruciating ride. It offers something else as well, a compelling thought: Why not retire the Scrambler now? As I look out at an eddy



swirling close to the shore I am sorely tempted to ease the Scrambler down the bank, ever so gently and inconspicuously into the cool current.

I can't do it.

A morning adjustment of the YDS-3C's ignition points and spark plug gaps improves performance a lot, but now the clutch slips terribly. I can't use the good part of the powerband starting at about 5800 rpm, the bike will definitely seize beyond 6000 rpm, and below 5000 rpm the engine bogs uselessly. That leaves a working range of about 800 rpm. With the clutch repaired I might expect 200 rpm more. I can no longer attack major hills or highways.

A full day's ride through the mountains, fighting snow flurries and nursing the smoking, glazing clutch plates, brings us to a Best Western Lodge, 650 miles out. The Yamaha continues to run. Blindly, faithfully, at five-thirty in the afternoon, I begin disassembling the Yamaha's clutch case. This clutch-repair operation will do one of two things: it will improve the clutch or totally ruin it. Either way, I win: the Big Bear will grow stronger or die on the operating table. I can pick up the pace or go home.

With a dogbone wrench and oily rag locking the clutch I use my sturdy helper, a twelve-inch Craftsman adjustable wrench, to remove the Loctite-secured clutch-hub nut. Once free to disassemble the clutch basket, I fool a fault, six-inch snap ring out of position without the help of Yamaha factory tools. The clutch plates are fried, though the springs appear to have retained their temper. With a piece of emery cloth I remove the slime and rough up the plates, then bolster the springs by adding a six-millimeter lock washer to the bottom of each spring cup.

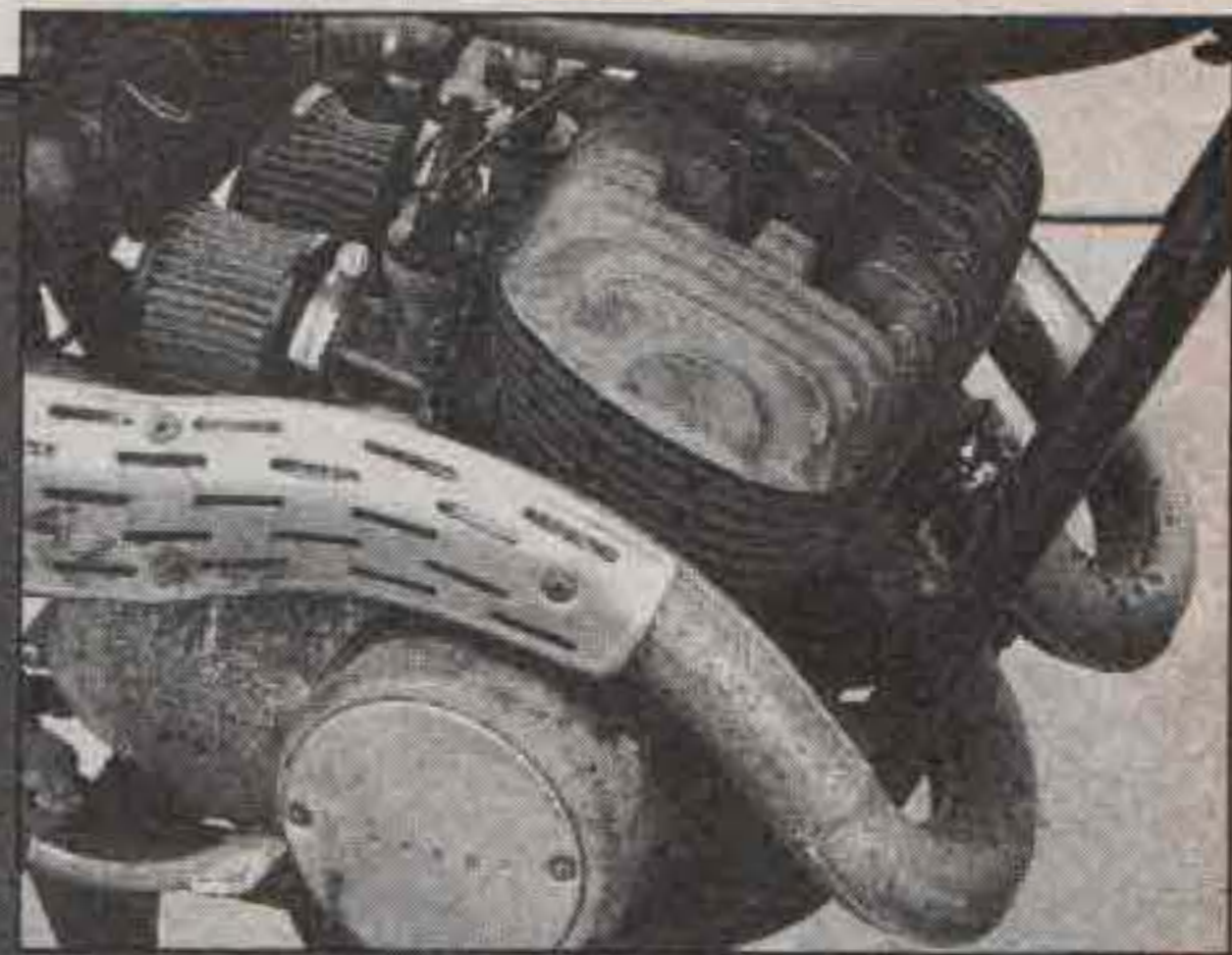
Now, in the fading light, I must reconfront the massive snap ring. With the Yamaha carcass as a weight, I leverage the clutch basket closed and replace the ring. The odds against having done this with only the tools at hand seem tremendous, but the Big Bear scores again.

In the amber glow of the motel sign I finish my task. The clutch still slips during hard acceleration, but less so. Finally, the Yamaha holds steadily at 6000 rpm, or about 60 miles per hour.

As we reach the California/Oregon border, over 750 miles out, the wretched Yamaha is still running—better than ever. The generator and regulator behave perfectly, and the Yamaha can now actually flow with the traffic. There's more. The Scrambler seems to have gained strength from my agony. For the first time in the whole trip I am able to pass cars. I do so. The Yamaha motors on. And on. I pass a thrashed Datsun B-210, a diesel Volkswagen

(Continued on page 90)

## TEST YOUR \$5 TOURING APTITUDE



□ For some people junker touring is a compelling notion. However, if you're ultra-organized, nervous, in the least bit paranoid, or if you're not particularly mechanically inclined, don't even think about undertaking such a venture. A \$5 Tourer is guaranteed—or your money back—to make you crazy.

Five-dollar touring requires that you know how to improvise. Creativity will let you see possibilities, let you get out of the certain tight spots, let you keep your \$5 Tourer rolling. The worst part of bargain-basement touring is not knowing if—or rather where—you'll break down. Remember, too, certain downside, mechanical difficulties may affect personal safety. Be prepared.

A five-, 50- or 250-dollar tourer is okay on a lark, so long as you maintain a loose schedule, so long as your friends and loved ones understand, and providing you have a bankroll big enough for some new parts, shop time and a ticket home. Suppose you're primed and ready for a junker tour, but need the bike to ride? Years of trial-and-error purchasing show the best deals arrive under three conditions: One, the motorcycle must not be in good running order; in this way the owner sees no alternative but to spend money on the bike before it can be worth market price. Two, the best deal occurs when you stumble upon a bike rather than responding to an advertisement. If an owner has taken the trouble to place a few lines in the local paper, chances are he has already figured out exactly how much it is worth. A surprise offer on a nonadvertised junker will more than likely be regarded as a godsend. Last, where possible, make your purchase from someone in a distress-sale situation. A dirty, nonrunning motorcycle sold under the black cloud of debt, divorce, childbirth or relocation will come cheap.

Here are some specific Junker Touring guidelines to help you decide if you've got the junkman's right stuff. You may pack your bags and proceed if:

You can deal with—make that *love*—spontaneity and hardship.

You are convinced that a successful and fun tour doesn't require every detail to be planned or all your equipment to be exactly prepared.

You are a master at repairing electronic, hydraulic and mechanical equipment with pliers, tape and a ball of bailing wire.

Challenge is your middle name.

You can accept losing the entire amount invested in your tourer.

You can laugh at yourself.

—John Stein





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## Confessions Continued from page 67

Rabbit and a pickup pulling a trailer.

On Oregon's Highway 199 I'm led away from the coast, northeast back to Highway 5. It's the prettiest stretch of the whole trip, and the Yamaha pulls smartly up a long series of deserted wooded canyons.

We sweat onward. And upward. There is little to report about Highway 5 through Oregon except that it's beautiful and has a lot of hills—and the Big Bear seizes twice attempting to climb one. I wonder what people must think seeing this derelict Big Bear Scrambler outfitted for touring, glossy with oil from leaking clutch-cover seals, standing, seized, by the side of a major interstate on a dark Oregon afternoon.

Once cooled, the Yamaha is ready for a new round. It starts, rattles, and runs on. Of course.

Six days, twelve-hundred miles north of Santa Barbara, the Big Bear is still running. This bike defies all fundamental rules of mechanics, pressing along the road by what appears to be sheer tenacity. I half-wish, no, I now dream the Big Bear will terrinally seize, throwing chunks of crankshaft right through the engine cases in a last heroic charge up a mountain pass. More likely, I fear, it will deliver me in its slow and painful style all the way to the Canadian border.

Olympia, Washington. They brew beer here, and I sure could use some this morning. Yet I'm hopeful. The western window of my Victorian lodging is positively filled with light-blue sky and the sounds of a half-dozen chirping birds. Today, I'm sure, will be the Yamaha's last. As I prepare to ride, dark gray clouds blow in and a sharp spring rain begins to rake the window.

The road to Port Angeles, the last stop in the United States, is a removed, two-lane affair, and the machine shuffles along it, all the way to a ferry and across the border, nearly 1400 miles from home. The Canadian border crossing offers no grand climax, and the border guard is unaffected. Just another worn-out traveler.

I admire the Big Bear's durability, but I can't stand to ride it another second. So in a wooded section of British Columbia, near the Vancouver city limits, I disconnect the Yamaha's battery and note the last spark of life arc across the ground cable. I dig a sizable trench, drop the Yamaha key into the gas tank, and roll the Big Bear down inside. I mumble as much of the Naval Officer's prayer for burial at sea as I can remember from a childhood of John Wayne matinees, cover the Big Bear with earth, stand on the shoulder of the south-bound lane and stick out my thumb, with a story to tell whoever gives me a ride home.

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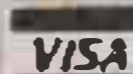
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