

Yamaha's newest 400cc dirty streeter

By Dave Ekins ■ Over here in the world of motorcycles we do things differently. Car guys voice a lot of concern about body roll when pointing a four-wheeler in another direction; we just lean our two-wheelers. Wind noise working around window edges and doorjambs, interfering with FM and twin speakers, can be irritating to someone sealed up in his coupe. Exposure to the wind and smells, and unrestricted vision are all part of the motorbiker's paradise.

We can get down a dirt road, cross a shallow stream, ride up a trail, and even ride over a mountain without worry of getting stuck (just lift the darn thing out), or the road being washed out.

All this is freedom of motorcycling. What it's about and why we do it. When a company like Yamaha comes up with a new motorcycle, ninety percent of the time it's a better piece of equipment. Yamaha, to the current bikers, are the guys who came forth with "enduro" bikes. These are the ones that take us nearly everywhere and mostly where no one else goes.

Up until now, their top-of-the-line off-roader had been a 21½-cubic-inch machine called "DT360." Although with each succeeding year small improvements have made it a better bike, they were still a bit disappointing on power, and a little heavy.

That's been fixed now, the new DT400 doesn't lack a bit for power, it handles, and is 13 pounds less than the 360. A very lightweight, conical-shaped, aluminum front hub similar to their MX model has helped some in this cause, plus giving the added benefit of less unsprung weight for a better ride. Top-heaviness, felt to be excessive on the 360, is all but gone with this 400. The fuel tank, although not sacrificing a bit of its 2.4-gallon capacity, looks smaller and sets lower on the frame. Further savings have been found elsewhere, but most noticeable are the magnesium outer engine cases.

Still retaining reed valve induction, the 400 has had 1/8-inch added to the bore and 3/16-inch more stroke to get the extra 2.8 inches. Power delivery is immediate off idle with the engine eagerly spinning into its 7000-9000-rpm red-line limit. Although at 7000 the surge begins falling off.

It has what we call a wide-ratio five-speed gearbox. A low-low for stump pulling and a high-high so the thing is barely turning over at 55 mph. Unlike many current street bikes with electric starters, you've got to kick this one. But you don't

Big-inch single is a cross between tourer and racer



need to be in neutral and there's a built-in compression release — activated by the start lever — that eliminates most of the work. It starts easily, runs smoothly and has very little engine noise. What comes out the muffler could be considered noisy by car standards, but is well within two-wheeler limits.

Rubber-covered footrests have been discarded for steel cleats so your feet stay on even when they're wet, and it has a locking gas cap. Highway-legal turning indicators are a part of the package, along with a battery and small tool kit. Matched speedometer and tachometer are also included, but we died-in-the-wool bikers

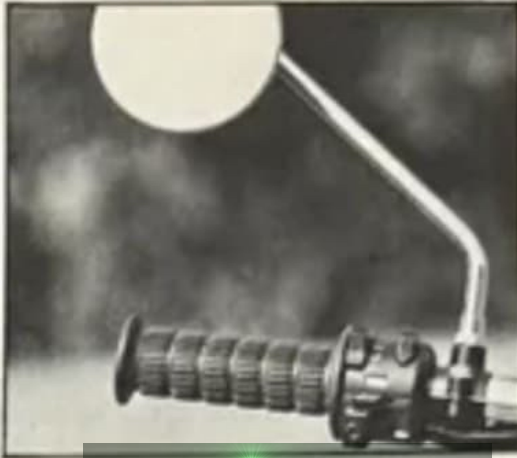


don't spend much time lookin' at 'em. There's too many other things to see when you're up in the mountains or deep in the woods.

The 400 is comfortable, has proper geometry, suspension, and is fun to ride. It's the healthiest 400 street single we've ridden in a long time. You could take a passenger, just bolt on the rear footrests.

The block-pattern tires that come on the Yammie are good for both street and dirt, but not the best for either. Dropping tire pressures to under 10 psi from the recommended 15-17 does allow some extra off-road traction. But when you get this serious it's time for the old knobbies.

As delivered, the DT400 is Yamaha's best effort so far. ■ ■



ABOVE LEFT — DT400B looks good from www.legends-yamaha-enduros.com on handlebars, horn and matching tach 'n speedo. ABOVE RIGHT — Switch control center is all operated with rider's left thumb. Bike fits matching rear-view mirrors.



ABOVE LEFT — Over-the-top exhaust system is tucked inside frame. Engine features auto-mix lubrication and reed valve ports. ABOVE RIGHT — Battery, tool kit and engine oil tank (not visible) are accessible simply by lifting seat. TOP RIGHT — Telescoping front fork has internal springs, two-way hydraulic damping and over six inches of travel. RIGHT — Rear brake shoes float unaffected by action of swing arm; note flared reservoir on shock body.

PHOTOGRAPHY: DAVE EXINS & LYNN LOVETT