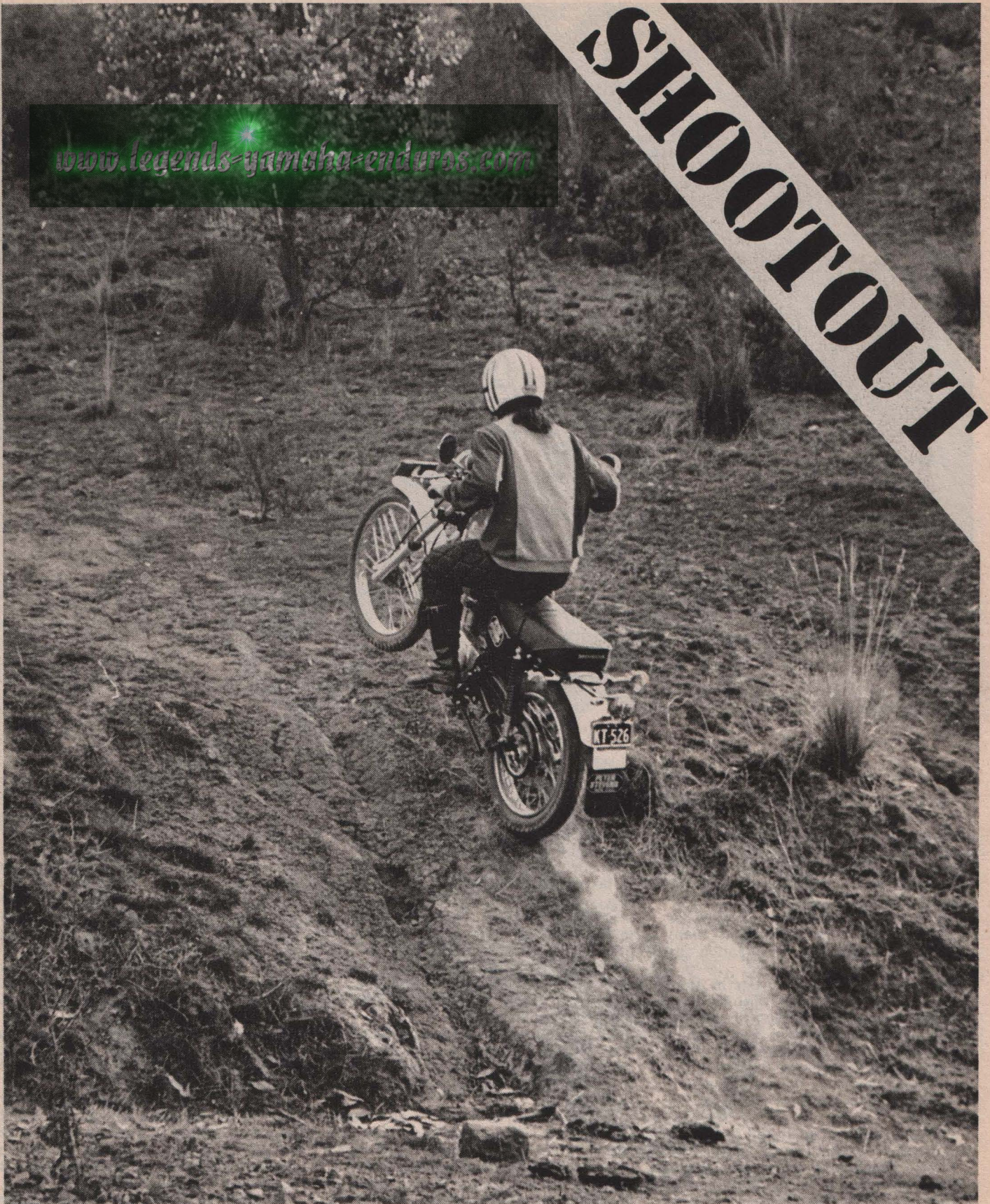
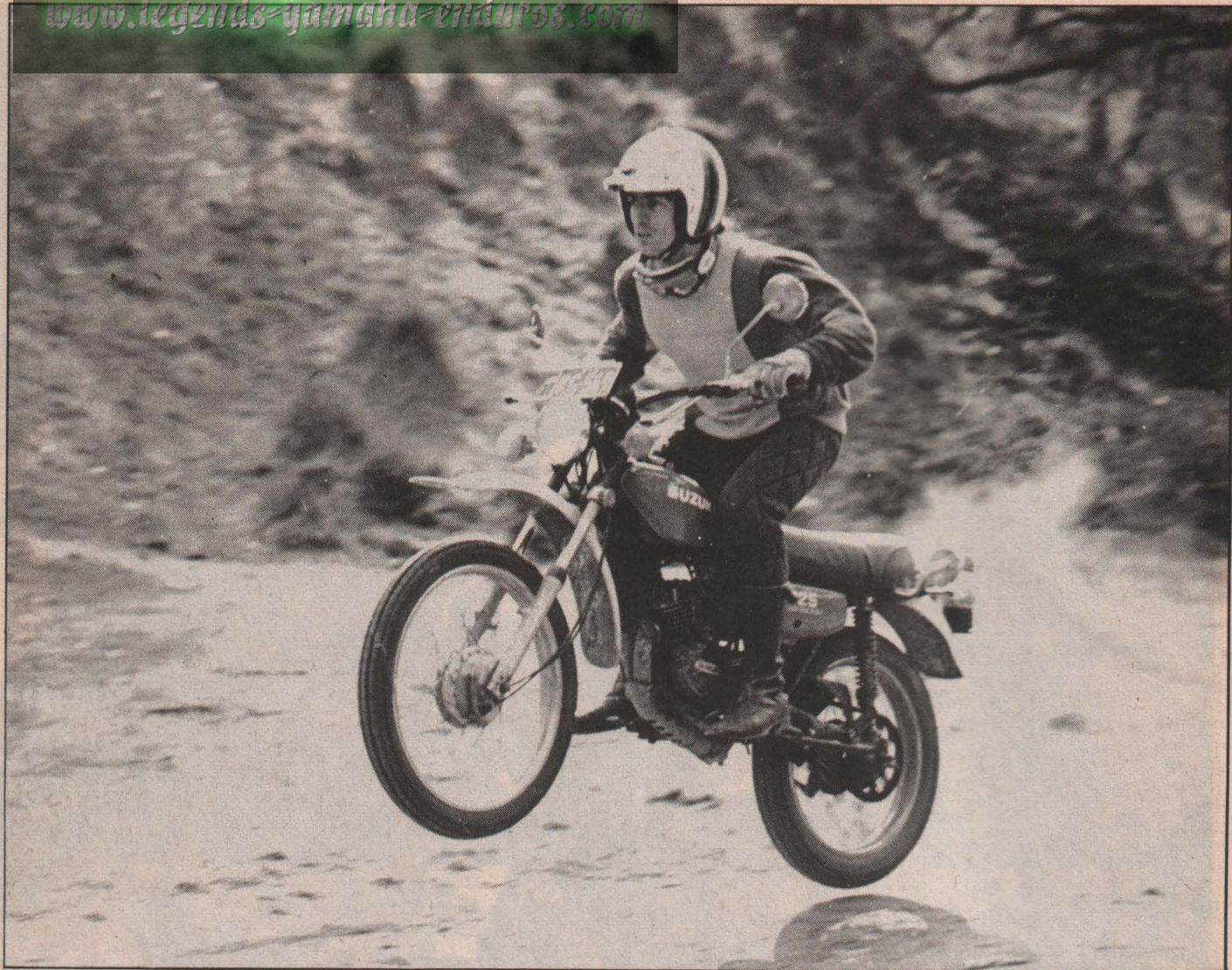


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SHOOTOUT



THE 125 TRAILS



The trouble with doing a 125 trail bike comparo is deciding what things should be judged, and how they should be judged. It's no good lining the bikes up and doing quarter mile drag tests. It's irrelevant to what the owner of a 125 would be using his bike for.

We decided to make our comparo as wide as possible to take in as many aspects of 125 trail application as possible.

We considered the bikes from the point of view of the owner who'll use his bike mostly for commuting. We also thought of the serious enduro rider who wants a 125 class Japanese enduro bike. And somewhere in between we thought of the guy who's going to do a mixture of weekend trail riding and riding to the milk bar.

The bikes we lined up are all Japanese, and are the four that hog the market.

Firstly Honda's ever popular XL125. Plenty of people ride one of the XL range, simply because they're four strokes. That's OK. For our part we made no allowances for it, and simply lined it up with the rest to be judged on its performance.

Second (alphabetically) comes the Kawasaki KE125. Kawasaki have never had big selling trail bikes. Neither have

their motocrossers set the tracks on fire. We don't know why. They out sell Yamaha in the U.S. In our 125 shootout the KE certainly provided a surprise.

Suzuki's TS125. The cheapest. And with something of a reputation for being more of a commuter. We tested one on its own less than a year ago but dragged it back out again to put it up against the rest.

Finally Yamaha's ever popular DT125. What can we say about DT's that hasn't already been said.

No MT125 was included. They're no longer a current model.

All the motors are different. Obviously the Honda is four stroke. Its gear ratios are well matched and what we found best about the Honda was the power spread of the little 125.

The Kawasaki is a rotary disc valve six speeder. The extra gear over the others gives it a definite advantage. Along with its stronger pulling motor it can run up to an easy 90 kph cruising speed with no effort, and zings around the trail like a real little enduro. Except for the fact that the disc valve is on the other side, you could say it has a lot in common with the 125 Can-Am. The same zippy top end, along with surprising torque down low.

The Yamaha engine has that famous

Yamaha reed valve. This no doubt accounts for the extra low end grunt, and robs it of a bit up top. Like the Suzuki we think it could use an extra gear. Not to give it any more top end, but to bring the other gears closer together. Accelerating the Yamaha up a long uphill road we found too big a gap between second and third. The revs dropped right down out of the power band.

The Suzuki is a straight piston port engine. It always started easily, but needed to be kept revving. We also found it needed a lower first gear.\$

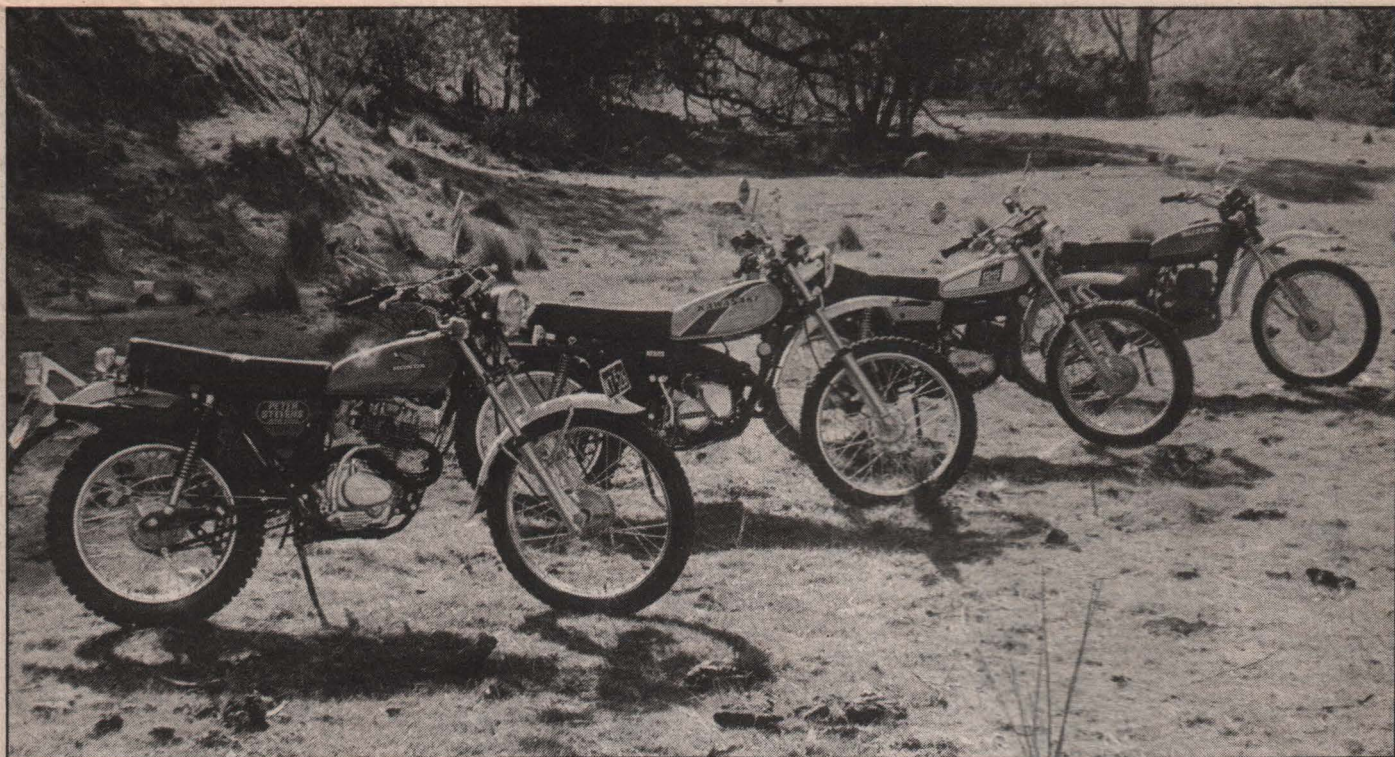
The Honda, of course, is the only four stroke among the lot. It has the most tractable power, and the gear ratios were perfectly suited.

Both the Honda and the Kawasaki were the worst starters. Often the Honda would have to be kicked five or six times to get it to fire. Also its kickstarter couldn't go through a full swing because it clashed with the footpeg.

The Kawasaki fouled a couple of times. Maybe we got it too juiced, but whatever the reason we didn't have the same problems with the Yamaha or Suzuki. Being only a 125cc there was no real problem starting the Kawasaki. Just put it in third gear and walk along beside it with the clutch out.

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We did two acceleration tests which we consider relevant. Both of them were up hill.

The first was a straight up hill run. The track was dry, offered good traction and was bumpy. In this test the bikes were given a run up and timed from a point at the base of the climb to a point about two thirds the way up.

All the bikes were on full song in first gear as they went past the first timing point. About one third the way up the revs began to drop as the gradient increased slightly.

In this test the Kawasaki came out quickest with an elapsed time of 7.8 seconds. The Honda was second with 7.9 while the best runs of both the Yamaha and Suzuki were 8.1 seconds.

We expected the Kawasaki to be quickest. While its on song the Suzuki is an equal flyer, but as soon as the revs drop a little, it dies. The Honda was second quickest up the hill, not because its so quick flat out, but because where the gradient steepened, it kept on pulling strongly.

The second of the acceleration tests demonstrates this even more. In this run we had the bikes start from a standstill, crest a steep rise, then continue up a gradient similar to the first.

And it took effort to get over the first rise. This was where the tractable power of the Honda and the Yamaha really showed up. Over the first rise on the Suzuki the rider had to really blast it, which meant cresting with the wheel way up in the air, and consequently letting the revs die to regain control, or simply stalling part way up. For this reason the best time we could get on the Suzuki was around a full second slower than the others.

The low pulling power of the Honda gave it the best time of 7.1. The Yamaha was next with 7.2, then the Kawasaki 7.4 and Suzuki 8.3.





Best under brakes. Suzuki's TS125. Note the rear wheel in the air.

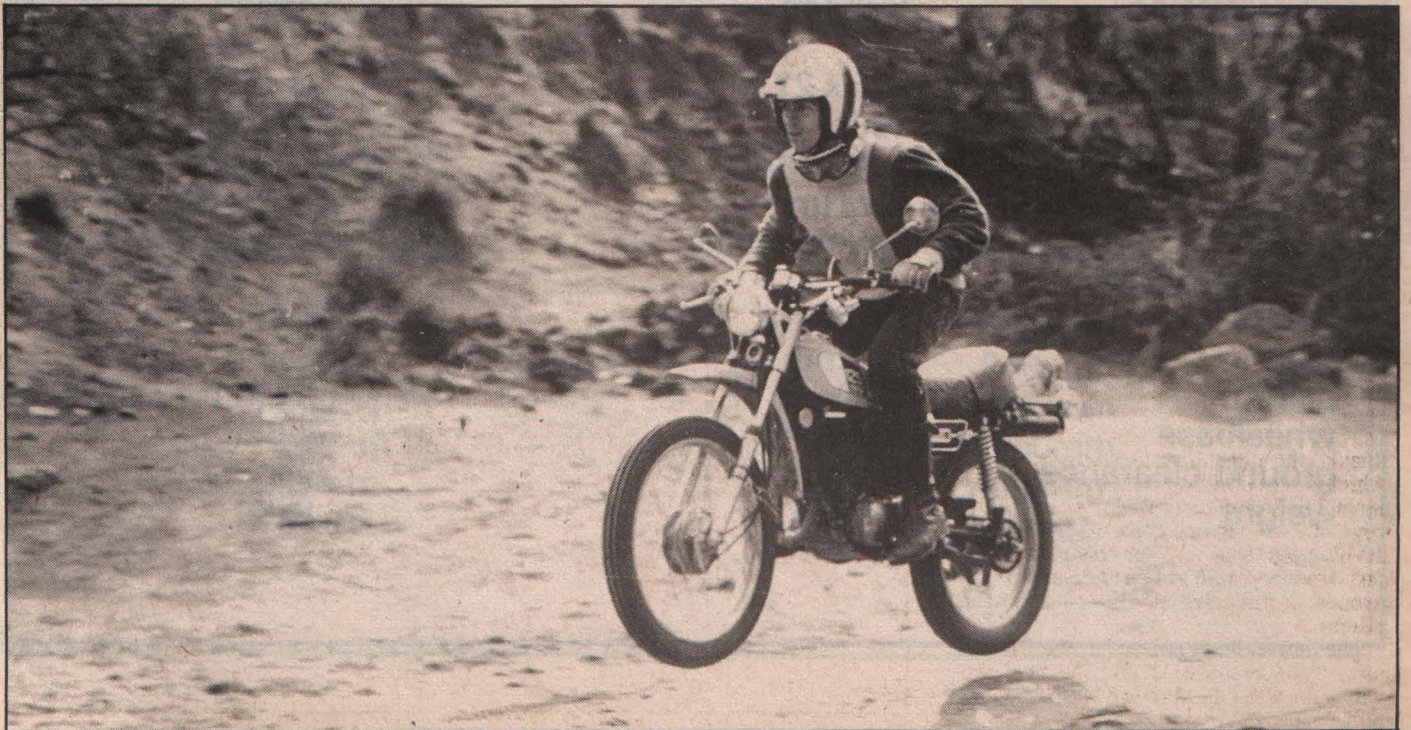
Brakes on trail bikes which are really 50-50 road-trail, have to be a compromise between feel and power. When deciding on a braking test we ruled out a bitumen surface test because the most powerful brakes are not necessarily the best. Actually we ran a bitumen surface braking test from 60kph just to satisfy our curiosity, and found that the four machines were so close as to be no real difference between them.

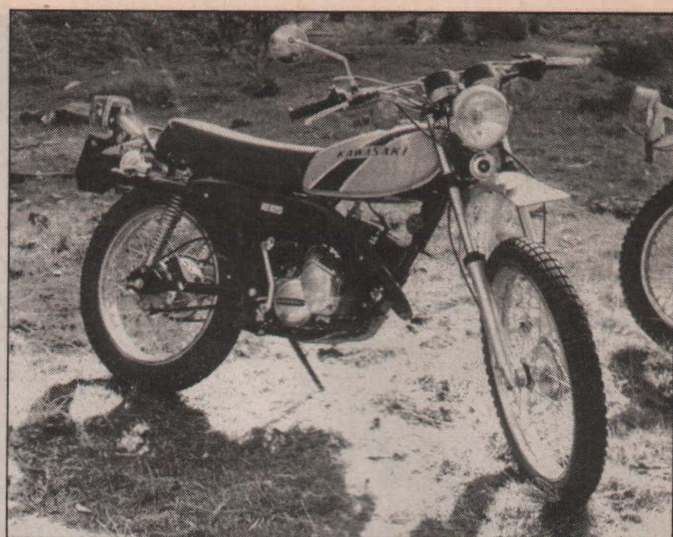
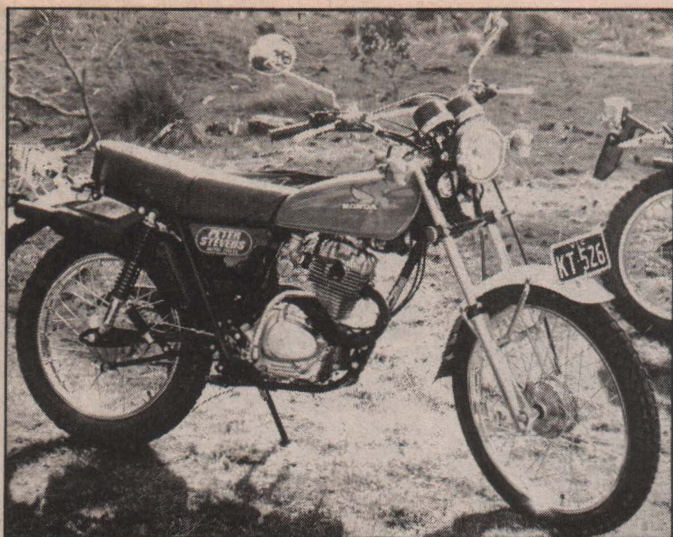
In the dirt its a different story and we needed a test from which we could draw direct comparisons. On a loose surface all brakes were capable of locking up their respective wheel, either front or back, if they were clamped on hard enough. So power was more than adequate.

What we wanted to test was sensitivity. Another factor becomes automatically involved, and this is suspension. Especially with the rear brake. The better the suspension the more the rear wheel will stay on the ground, instead of hopping over bumps. For this reason we did two braking tests from which we decided to publish the results, and its the results of the two tests we publish that we consider most important. Both were carried out on a straight piece of unmade road that was (a) gravelly, and (b) corrugated. The road was set in the hills, and the corrugations were caused by running water.

The first test was a rear brake only test and the bikes were braked from 40 km. As the rear brakes locked up very easily, some trial runs were attempted until we were confident we were stopping in the shortest possible distance.

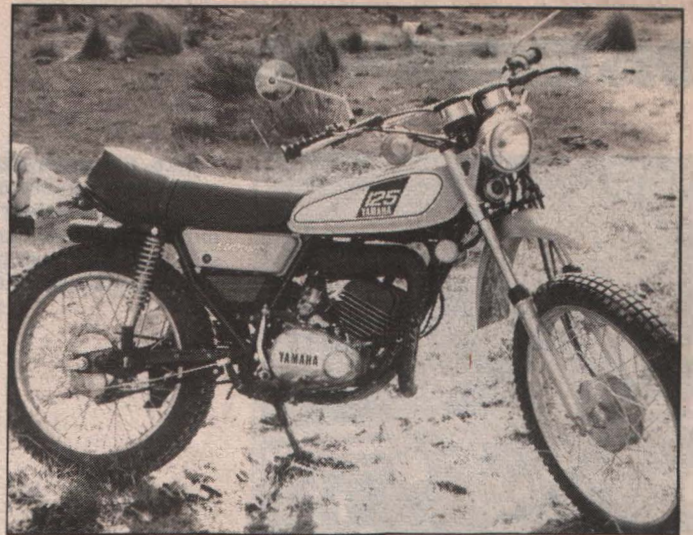
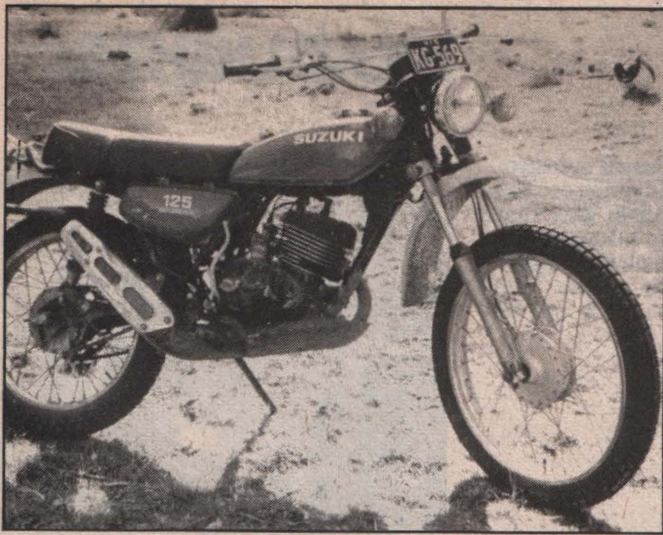
One very funny or very serious incident happened (depending how you look at it) while we were doing the rear braking tests. Whether it was a subconscious motivation to be unbiased or not we don't know, but we tried the bikes in alphabetical order. Which meant the





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MAKE	HONDA	KAWASAKI
MODEL	XL125	KE125
PRICE	\$699	\$695
engine	four stroke	two stroke
capacity	124cc	124cc
bore x stroke	56.5 x 49.5mm	56 x 50.6mm
compression ratio	9.0:1	7.0:1
horsepower	12ps at 9,000	13 at 6,500
torque	N.A.	1.48 kg-m at 6,000
induction	head valve	rotary disc valve
starting	primary kick	primary kick
transmission	5 speed	6 speed
CYCLE PARTS		
tyres front	275 x 21	275 x 21
rear	350 x 18	350 x 18
suspension front	telescopic fork	telescopic fork
rear	5 way units	5 way units
frame	semi double cradle	single downtube
DIMENSIONS		
length	2075mm	2075mm
width	885mm	885mm
height	1100mm	1075mm
wheelbase	1315mm	1350mm
ground clearance	190mm	245mm
weight	104kg	97kg



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**SUZUKI
TS125
\$689**

two stroke
123cc
56 x 50mm
6.8:1
12.7 at 7,000
1.33 kg-m at 6,500
piston port
primary kick
5 speed

275 x 21
325 x 18
telescopic fork
5 way units
single downtube

2050mm
770mm
1155mm
1350mm
235mm
96kg

**YAMAHA
DT125c
\$720**

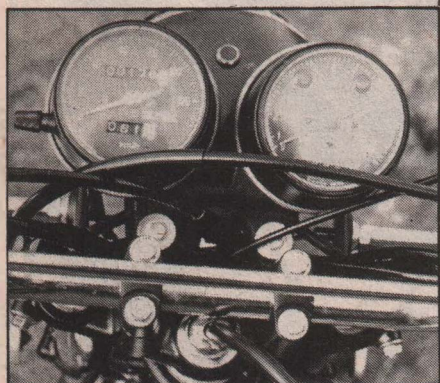
two stroke
123cc
56 x 50mm
7.1:1
N.A.
1.38 kgm at 6,000
piston part reed valve
primary kick
5 speed

275 x 21
325 x 18
telescopic fork
5 way units
double cradle

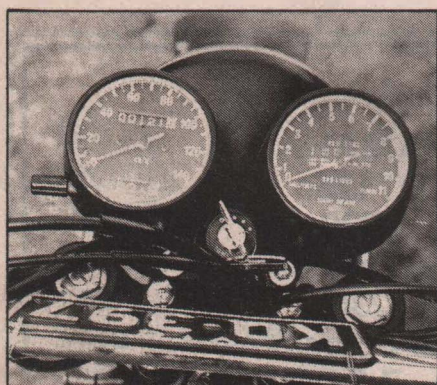
2050mm
860mm
1090mm
1350mm
250mm
97 kg

INSTRUMENTS

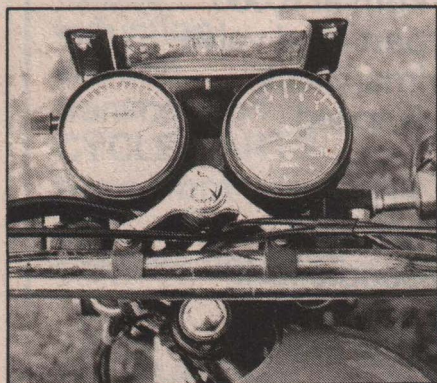
HEADLIGHTS



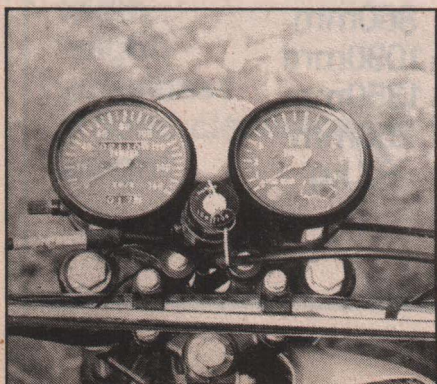
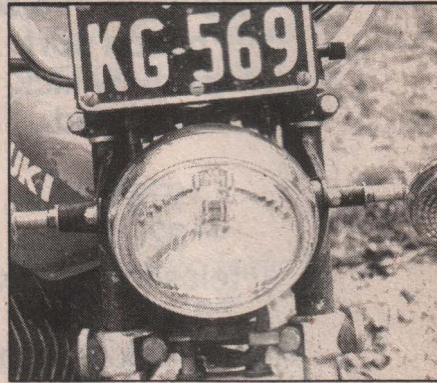
Like the others the Honda's instruments were calibrated in kilometres. The ignition key is under the tank. The front blinkers are not seen here because they stick out of the picture, which means they are obviously too wide.



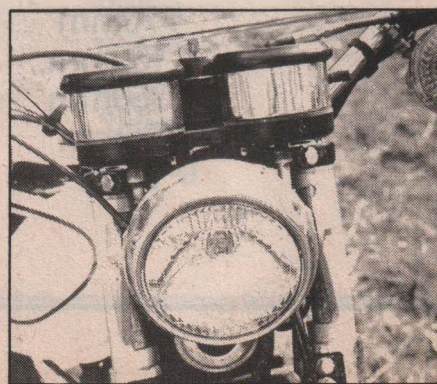
The Kawasaki had a good instrument layout. Cleverly the blinders are mounted on the handlebars. We took the front number plate of the handlebars because it rattled too much.



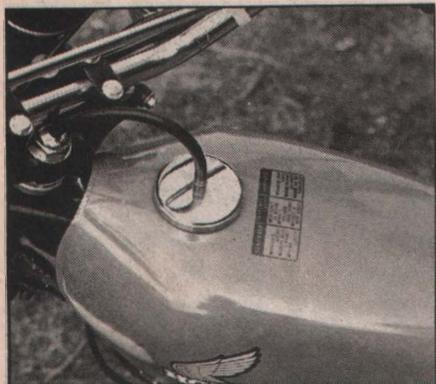
The Suzuki lacked a kill switch and all round its instruments were a bit dated. The blinker arms were stronger and shorter than the Hondas. Like all the others it had trip meter.



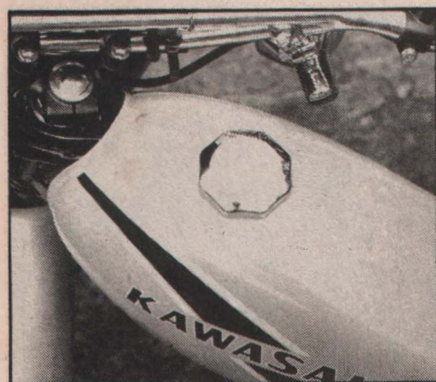
All round the Yamaha came out equal first with the Kawasaki in the department. It too had its indicators mounted on the handlebars, and all the switches were simple and functional.



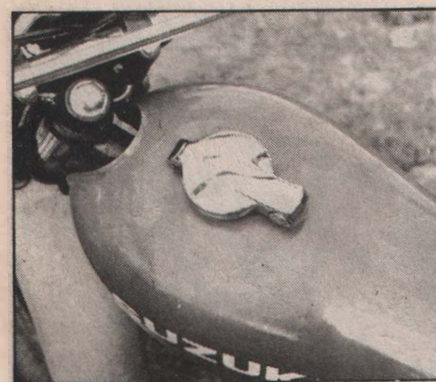
TANKS



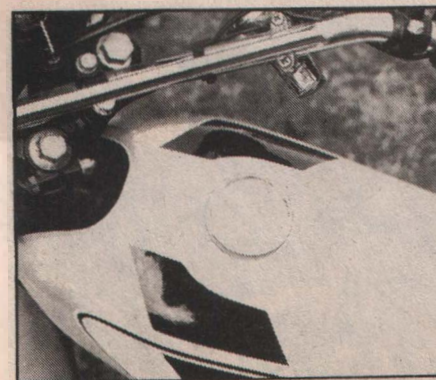
Only one with a breather pipe out of the tank cap was the Honda. The tank cap didn't leak either. All bikes except the Yamaha had a variation on the Doherty twist grip. Even though the throttle looks pretty trick it has no quicker an action than any of the others.



The Kawasaki's cap didn't leak either, and the twist grip was spiffy, needing only a quarter of a turn.

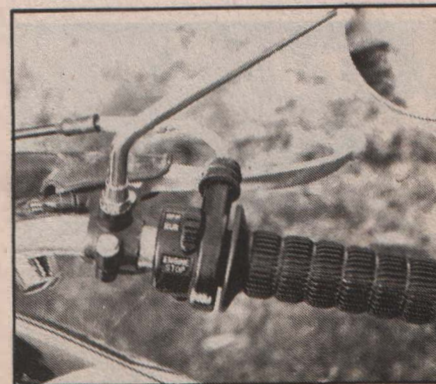
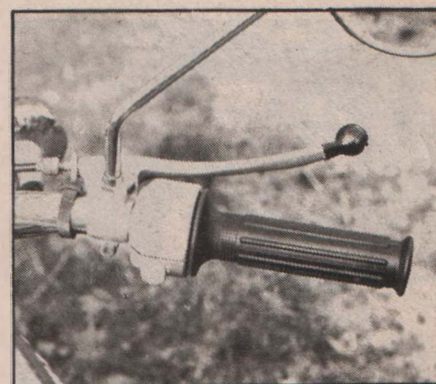
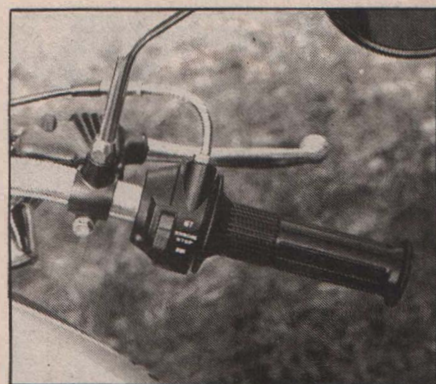
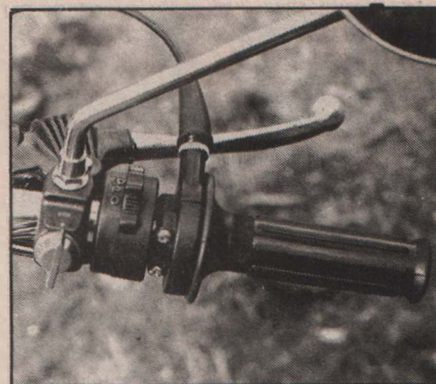


The Suzuki cap leaked. It was lockable and was too high. The twist grip had the throttle cable coming out the bottom.



The Yamaha's cap leaked a little and the grip was very hard and uncomfortable.

CONTROLS

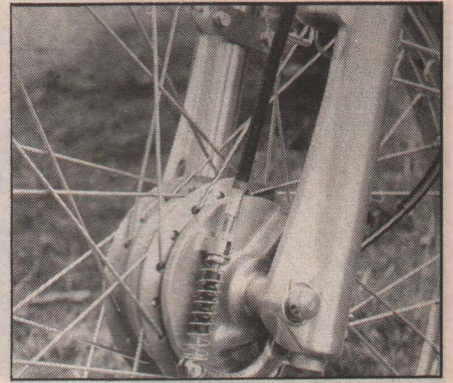


TAIL LIGHTS

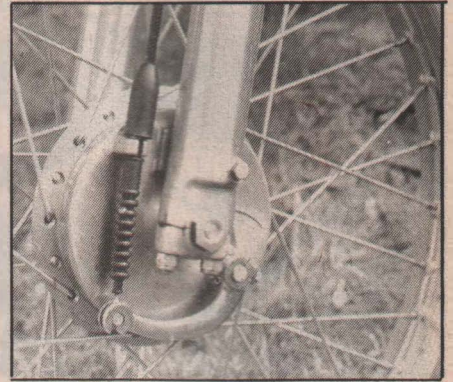
BRAKES



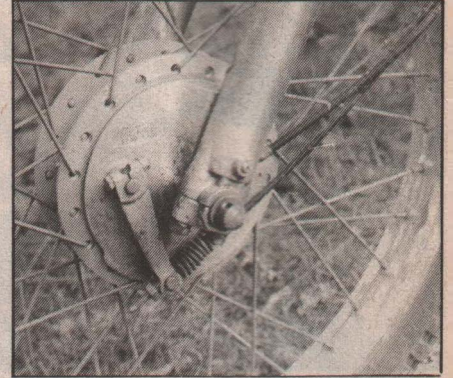
The Honda's taillight was the smallest, but like all the others stuck out too far. Check out the Maico type forks.



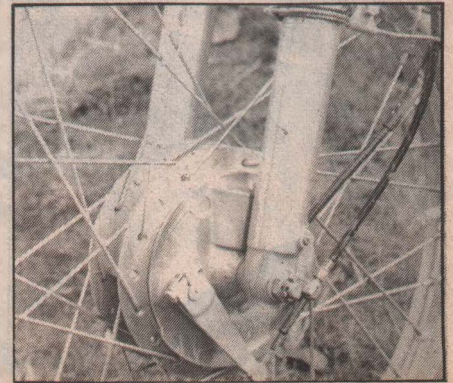
The Kawasaki had a huge tail light and a good idea for mounting the number plate. The brake arm was reversed to point forward. Like all the others it had a rear indicator for the pads.



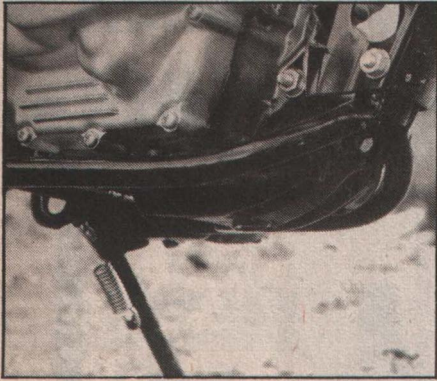
Tail lights on the Yamaha and Suzuki were very similar. The brake set up was also similar. On the Suzuki it worked better though.



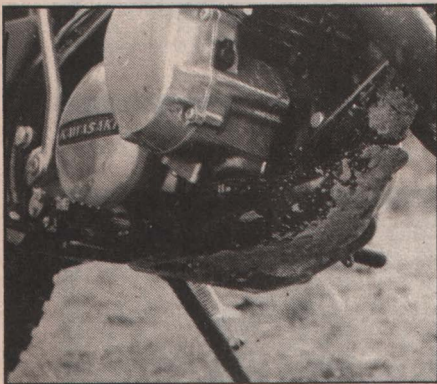
Just love those Yammy reflectors.



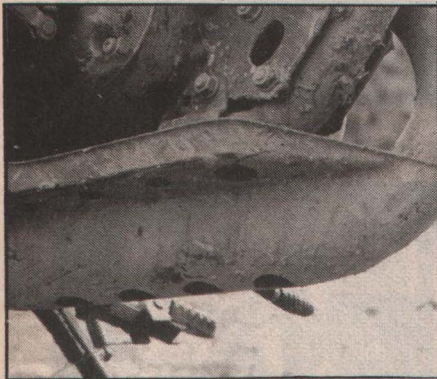
SUMP GUARDS



The Honda had less ground clearance than the rest and only a tiny sump guard. The exhaust was very quiet.



The Kawasaki's weak spot. It needs more protection to the carby inside the right hand engine case. The exhaust didn't get in the way.

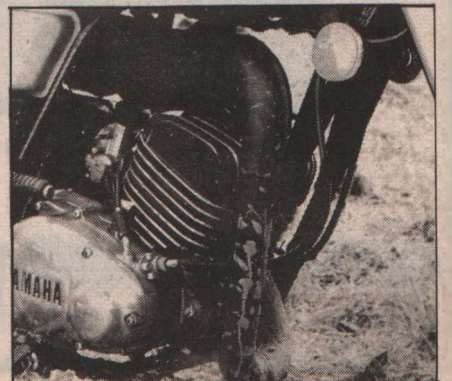
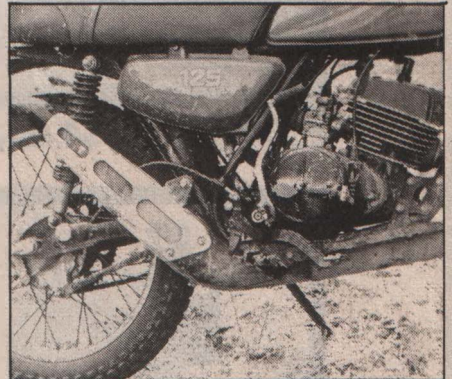
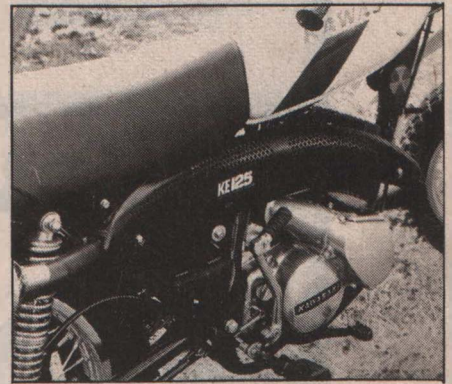
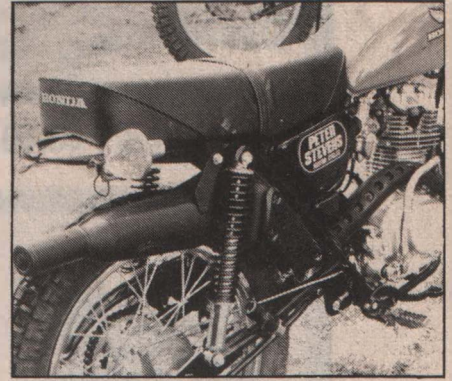


The Suzuki had to have a good sump guard because it had to protect the exhaust as well. Its pipe was functional but a bit noisier than the rest.

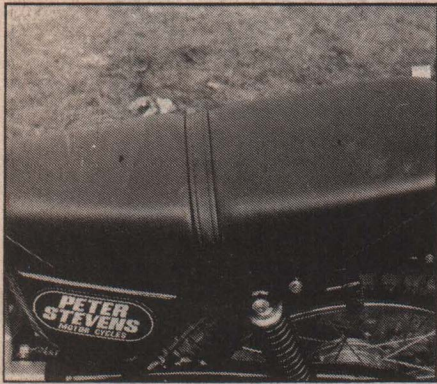


The Yamaha pipe is a bit vulnerable. Otherwise it had about the same sump protection as the rest. The pipe was through the frame.

EXHAUSTS



SEATS



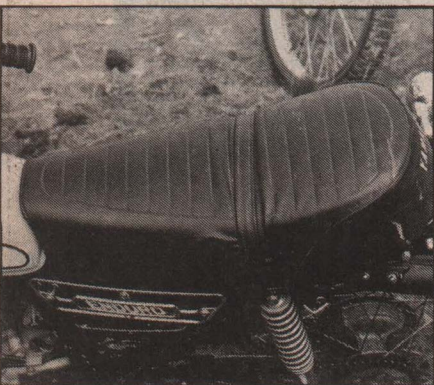
The Hondas seat was the only one which didn't flip up. It was bolted down, but still had a lockable helmet holder. Definately the Honda had the best chain guard. It gave plenty of protection against oil flying off.



The Kawasaki had a trick seat which lifted off quickly. It was the most comfortable as well. It was also the only bike with anything like a grab rail over the rear mudguard. The chainguard was virtually useless.

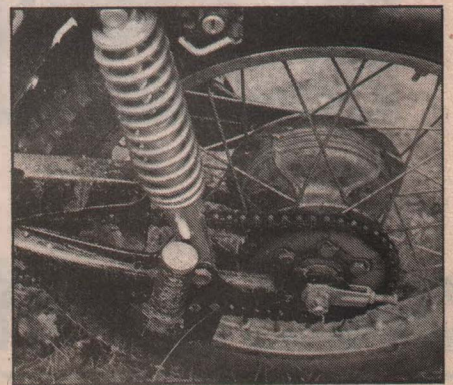
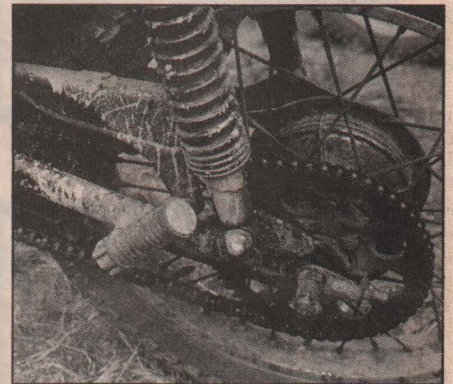
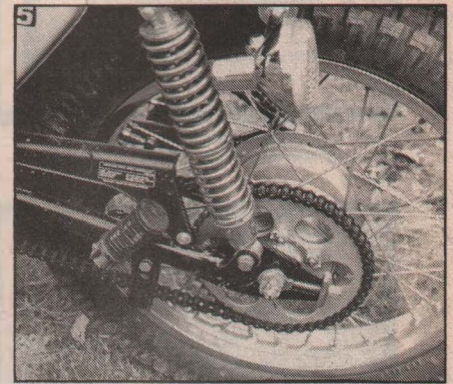
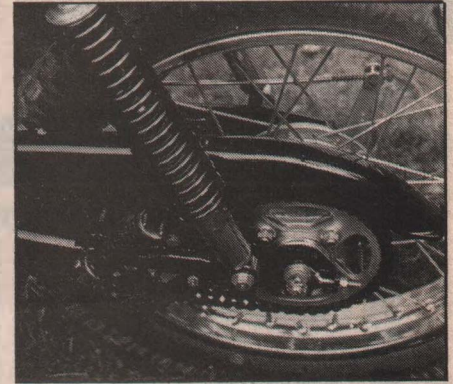


The Suzukis seat was the widest. It had enough room for a skinny pillion and was lockable. Like the Kawasaki and the Yamaha it's chain guard offered very little protection.



The Yamaha had a good seat and a lousy chainguard. The straps across the Yamaha, Suzuki and Honda seats are a waste of time.

CHAINGUARDS



Yamaha was last. Anyway we had our stretch of road, and the run up road, and with the other three bikes had already set up markers for where they stopped. Just passed there we had all our gear, camera equipment etc, piled on the ground, and just passed that the road curved off to the right.

Riding the Yamaha intrepid Assistant Editor Hanlon came hurtling up the run up road and braked on the prearranged line. The Yamaha continued past the markers, past all the gear, and stopped front wheel in a ditch where the road curved to the right. Something was wrong we figured, and so we tried again. And again. And each time the same thing happened. We swapped riders. We swapped rear unit preload settings, and each time it was the same. In the rear brake tests we just couldn't get the Yamaha to stop. It wasn't the suspensions fault, because we tried a few other tests on the Yamaha, and on any loose surface the rear brake was so insensitive that it either wasn't operating, or was locked up.

Off the other machines the Suzuki's rear brake was the best, followed by the Kawasaki and then the Honda.

When using both brakes the Yamaha came within competitive distance of the others, but was still the poorest performer.

All machines had suspension that was passable. The bike with the best set up was the Kawasaki. It had two separate springs on each rear unit for twin rate springing. Up front the forks were about right for the rider around 11 stone, and with 20 weight oil the damping was very good. Like all the other machines it had five preload settings on the rear.

Next to the Kawasaki we liked the Suzuki's rear end best. Both the Honda and the Yamaha didn't seem to have enough damping. This only really worried us over the fast bumpy stuff.

Good as it was at the rear, the Suzuki lacked damping up front. Heavier oils aren't the only answer either. The Suzuki forks need to be worked on. We found the front end of the Suzuki "wandery". We'd be on a dirt road, going around at say, 50 kph, and the front end felt very unsure, like it wanted to wash out all the time. It's not a nice feeling, especially when you're trying to keep up with the other bikes.

The Yamahas front end felt too soft, in springing and damping. In really slow trail work it was useful, but it needed to be stiffened up a little for good all round application. Again, oil isn't the only answer.

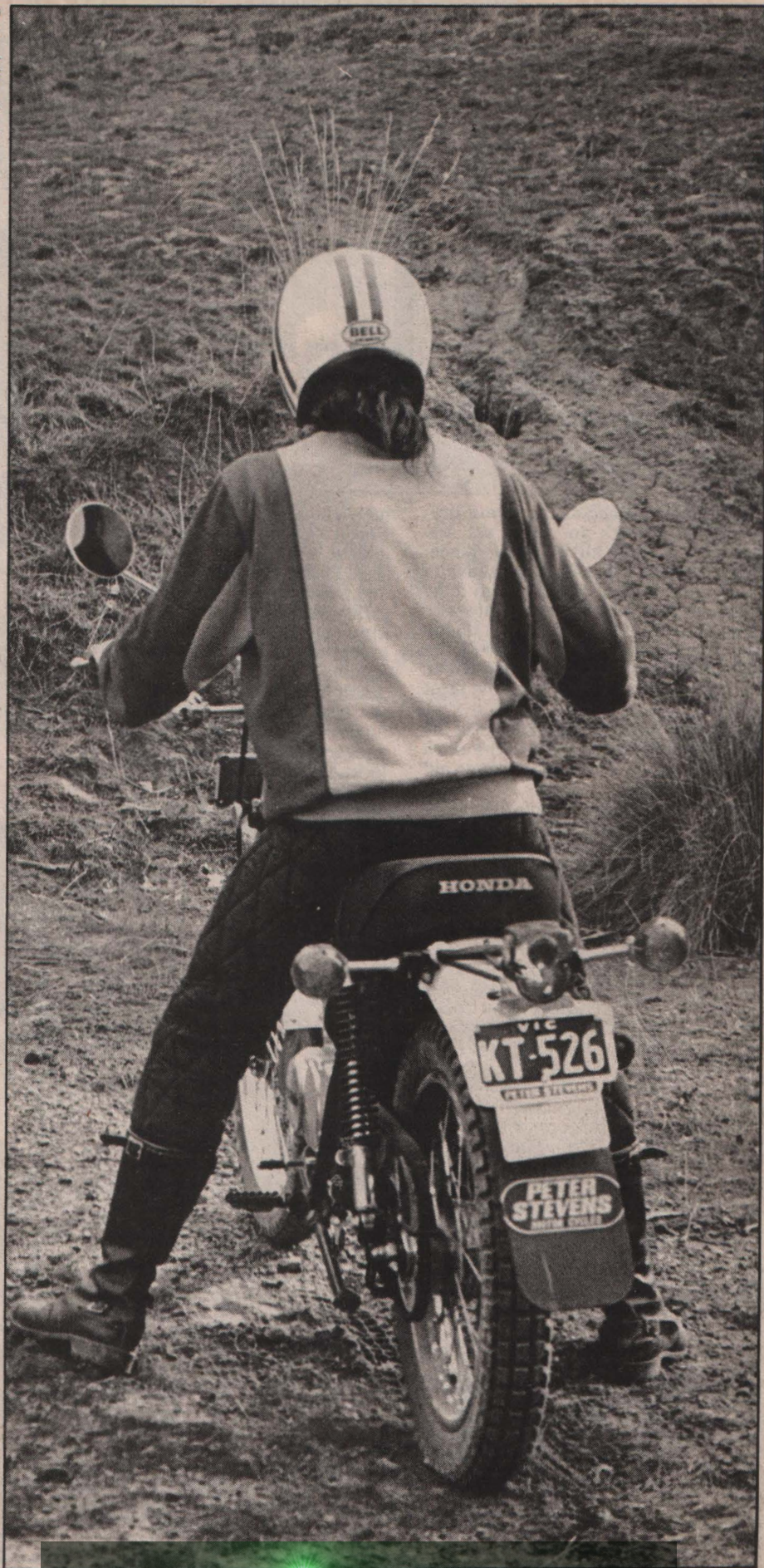
Next to the Kawasaki the Honda had the best front end.

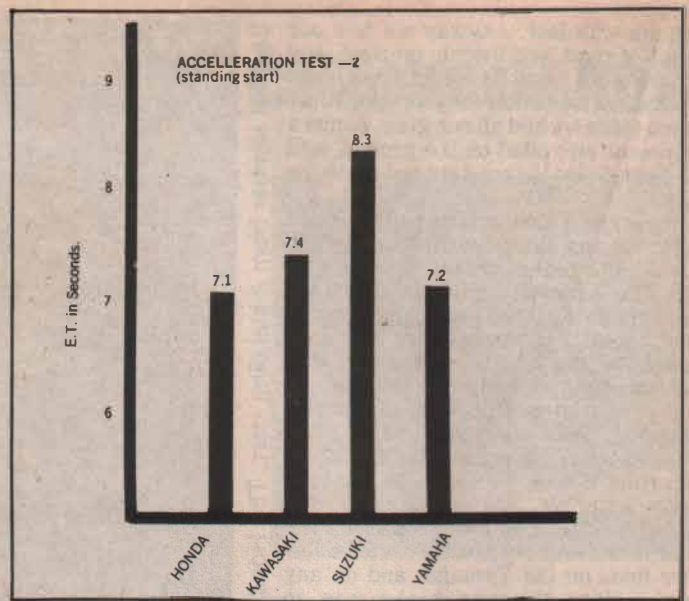
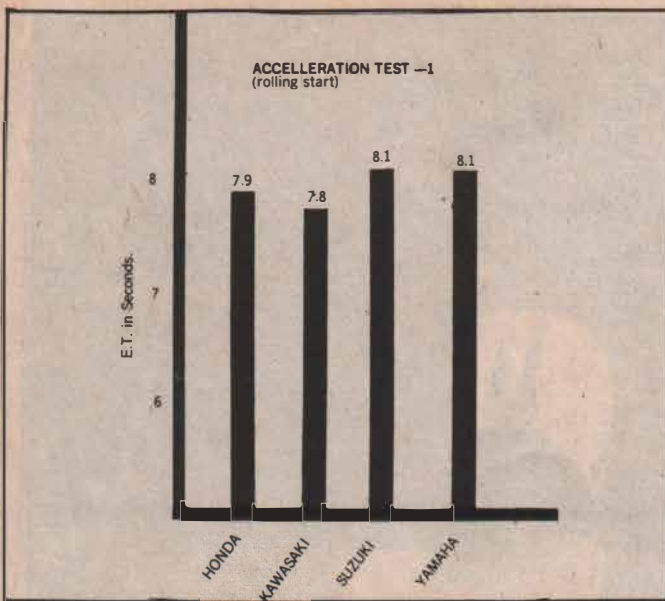
In the "extras" department all the bikes are remarkably similar. All have steel rims. All have 275 x 21 front tyres. The Honda and the Kawasaki have 350 x 18 rears, while the Yamaha and Suzuki have 325 x 18 rear rubbers.

All were fitted with similar patterned trial universal tyres. We'd advise anyone to hurry up and make up their mind as to what kind of riding they're doing, and either fit road tyres or knobbies.

The trials universals were OK for commuting on dry roads, and taking on

Best hill climber from a standing start. The Honda.





the easy trails as long as they were dry. Once the trail work got a bit wet, the bikes were sliding all over the place. Because they're only 125cc, they have to be screamed a bit to get them up hills. With these tyres the back wheel naturally just spun. Best performer was the Honda as the rider could tackle the hill with the least revs because of the engine's power spread, and consequently, keep the most traction.

Of the four machines the Suzuki is the cheapest, and it lacked some of the extra little trick bits the others had. Like no kill switch for example.

Otherwise the instrument, headlight set ups were very uniform. The Kawasaki and the Yamaha both had their front indicators hung from the

handlebars, which was a good place. The Honda's front blinkers stuck out too far, and we were lucky not to break them.

All the rear indicators were vulnerable, and we took them off before we started.

Headlights and switch set ups were almost identical. The only major exception was the Honda. It had its ignition key under the tank, which we didn't like.

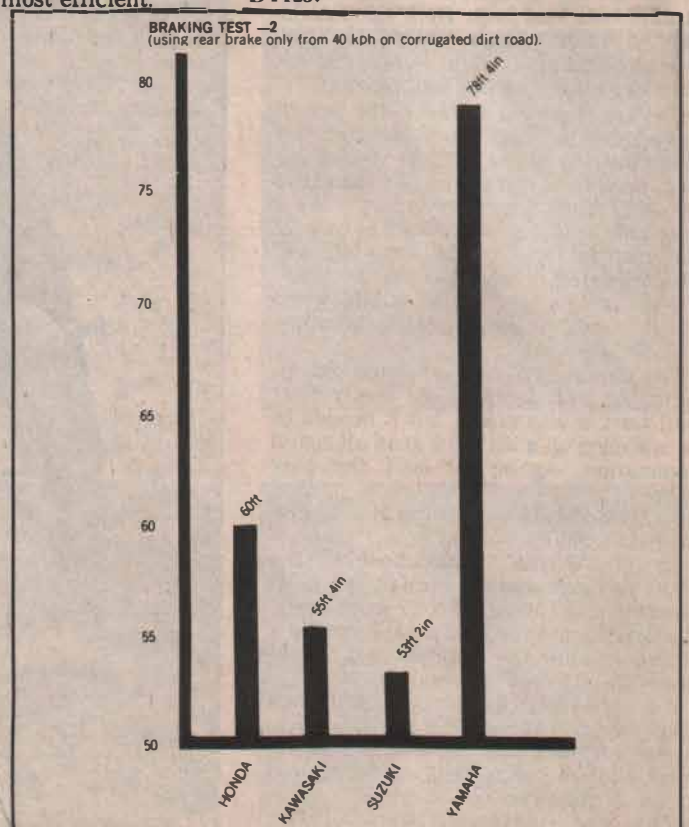
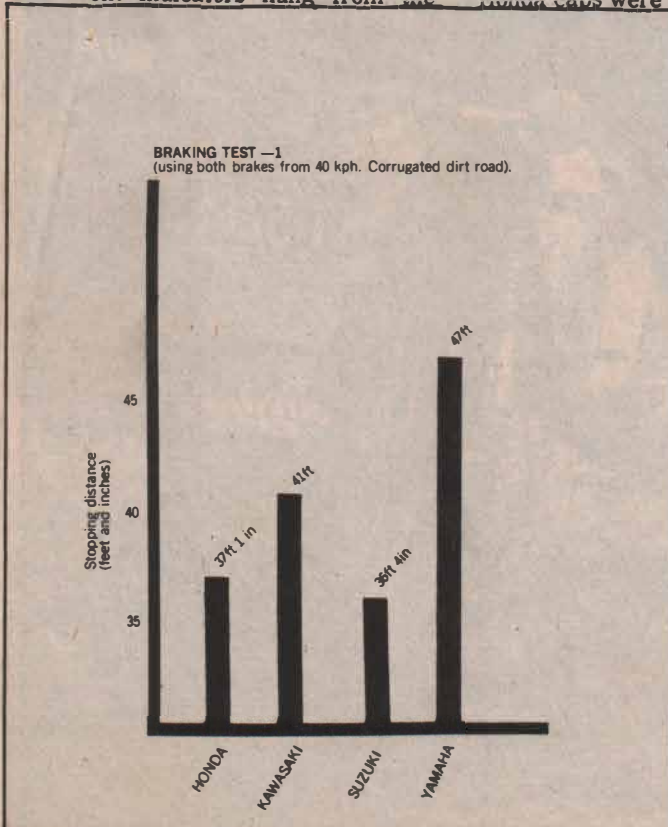
We also didn't like the tank cap on the Suzuki it was too high, and too dangerous. Admittedly it was the only lockable one, but then anyone wanting to steal fuel would only have to pull the petrol line off. Also the Suzuki's petrol cap leaked when the bike was on its side. As did the Yamaha. The Kawasaki and Honda caps were the most efficient.

For our money it's a toss up between the Kawasaki or the Honda. The Kawasaki is quick and trick. It's the one you need if you want Japanese and are going to try enduros. Also it's a little flyer around the streets.

The Honda is more fun for simple trail riding because the four stroke motor is easiest to control.

Our thanks to:

- .. The Peter Stevens organisation for the Honda XL125.
- .. Kawasaki Motors Pty. Ltd. for the KE125, and to Dennis Brown Motorcycles, Frankston for preparing and servicing the machine.
- .. Melbourne Motorcycles for the TS125.
- .. Milledge — Sport and Road for the DT125.



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