

trail & track

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EUROPEAN PREVIEW

We take a sneak look at the works motocrossers for '76

TRAIL THUMPER

Yamaha's TT500c converted for enduro!





Thumpin' Enduro

Amazing, too much, unbelievable, unnecessary, wild, were some of the words used by testers during our test on an enduro-ised Yamaha TT500C.

It has to be a converted motocrosser because Yamaha has yet to bring out the trail bike version, and anyway Eltham Dirt Cycles love playing around with special enduro bikes. And this weapon is certainly a very special kind of bike.

We'd, of course, ridden the TT500C before; as the production motocrosser. It struck us as having good handling, being a bit heavy, but above all having an incredible motor that pulled like nothing else conceivable. The trail version was eagerly awaited indeed.

Then we got a phone call from Ian Geer at E.D.C. He explained how he'd converted a motocrosser and registered it for his own use, we remembered having a ball on his enduro-ised cantilever last year so within a few days were thumping around the local hills on a street legal TT500C.

The main thing we expected of such a package was perfection to the lovers of the XL250-XL350 syndrome (and we've got our share of those on our staff — Ed). Our ride on the motocrosser told us in no unsure way that it was more of a fun bike than a winning racer so a few mods would have to see a mind blowing trail machine.

The modifications, as carried out by E.D.C., are very few to keep both the price and weight as low as possible.

First up is the alteration of the existing coils to operate basic lights (E.D.C. have their own process on this which they wouldn't divulge to us). TY lights and a left-hand control are then wired in place.

To keep the noise down and look after public relations an E.D.C. end muffler is fitted.

Tyres are a personal thing, but our test bike did have a 350 x 21 6 ply Bridgestone on the front.

And for that lot the going price is \$1366.

On test we had quite a shock. This came about for two reasons. One, because the motocrosser was ridden on mainly fast motocross terrain and hardly ever slow; and two, the first trail test day took place in wooded, wet and slippery tight going that was totally different. This revealed a lot more of the bike's character unknown on the motocross side.

Before we rode the unique Jawa 402 one of the most flexible motors we had ridden was a properly rigged up XL350 (forget the wild Yankee 500, that thing was verging on the ridiculous to be included in this discussion on practical machines). In comparison, the big TT makes those look like an SL100 when talking low down plonk. Would you believe it can have the clutch flicked out at tickover in third and the engine still pull away under hard load?! But that is only while playing boy rider; you know, tootling around the trailer after arriving at a base while the other bikes are unloaded and you fool around on things yelling out "hey fellas, look at this". All very stupid really, but understandably human.

Under suitable conditions that kind of low down torque is great, namely dry and hard. But, as we were very soon to find out, too much torque can be as awkward as too little (sort of on the Yankee theme).

Leaving the base the TT rider was having great fun spinning the back wheel in all gears at any low speed (so flexible is the engine power). Down the straights he sprinted away from the other trail bikes using only a whiff of throttle and just changing to a higher gear. Cracking open the throttle would then, even in top, see instant engine response with either wheelspin or grip. If it was the latter then the big four stroke was nearly as fast as a fully worked cantilever 400 . . . no mean achievement! (The bikes on that ride were the TT500C, a cantilever 400, an Ossa 250, Yamaha RT2 and the Suzuki 400 '76 model.)

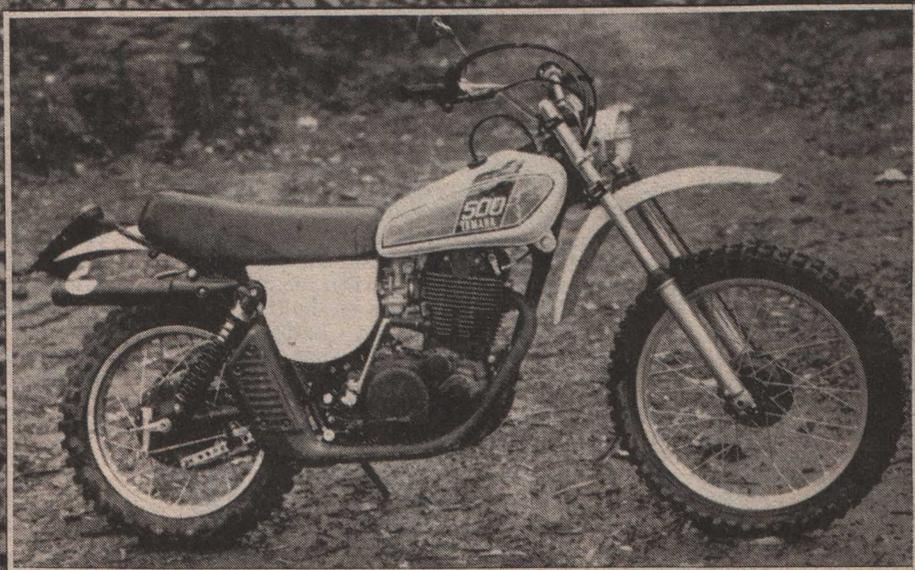
Then came the first real hill; steep and long, rocks and mud, a good test. The canty was in the lead at this stage and its experienced owner who'd ridden it for the past 6 months went up reasonably well, skilfully keeping the engine in the powerband in a low gear.

The TT rider did much the same thing at the bottom; down a couple of cogs, up with the revs and . . . charge! Thirty yards later wheel slip began, then spin, then hopeless spin and instantly the bike dropped off the slope of that slippery section. Disaster all happened with a few yards in a matter of a second.

"Hello, hello," said the rider. "Bloody strange, it didn't respond to the usual remedy for that kind of behaviour. Must have been me or the greedy bit, I'll try again."







trail & track—

Come rocks, mud or grease, the TT man was in trouble. Spin, spin, spin.

Meanwhile the Ossa sailed up, the RT2 and Suzuki just managed it and together they looked down on the poor fellow in trouble.

Gradually and painfully the cure became all too clear. The TT500C has more low down torque than anything else let loose in the hills. A low gear and an open throttle means too much power to the rear wheel for anything but perfect conditions to grip. The ONLY way this thing can be ridden on anything long, steep and slippery is low revs and a high gear! At near tickover this thing has the plonk to climb a mountain as sheer as you like, the only major problem is actually believing it and trusting the engine to do just that.

Another reason for the spin is the back tyre. The Japanese Dunlop can at best be described as a PLASTIC

soar. They don't scream out in the same way as a peaky two stroke such as a Suzy RM370, but the immediacy of the pick-up is certainly quick and bloody fast considering the low end power.

Taken overall, the gearing is high. That's no fault as the engine easily pulls it and if necessary could cope with a taller overall ratio. (Do remember we're talking about a bike that weighs around 280 odd pounds, which makes the whole thing more incredible.)

Of the overall set-up; the front brake works well and the forks are very good. The rear brake is lethal if used under bad conditions, but it is unnecessary due to the usable natural engine braking of the four stroke motor.

In true motocross style the front end is light to steer and react. For a lot of

starting this big 500 is dead easy.

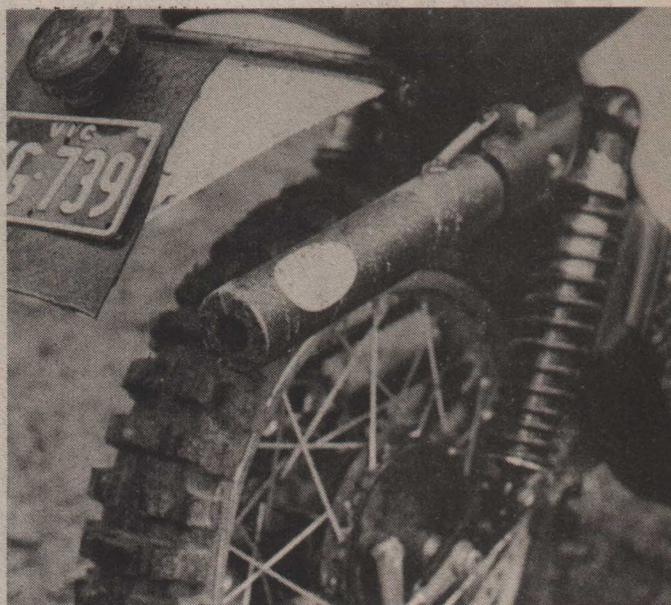
You should be predicting by now that we're going to say this thing is economical. It is, amazingly so. A week later we went on a long fast flat out ride with a 360 RT2 (suitably modded, of course). The TT roared way out in front of the two stroke for nearly 100 miles before drying up; at that stage the RT2 had already used an extra gallon. Dee dum, dee dum, dee dum.

Before closing we must make a few points quite clear.

1) the engine is no more complex to work on than an SL100 Honda.

2) Yamaha did not fit a cantilever system because of the extreme engine height (no room), increasing top end and overall weight, and the cost.

3) Being of motocross construction, this bike is certainly very fragile. Come off this baby at speed letting it



IMITATION RIM PROTECTOR!!! A good 4.25 x 18 6 ply Bridgestone enduro tyre would naturally make a lot of difference but the problem would still be there as a basic characteristic of the machine demanding it to be ridden accordingly. It's just that there is so much raw torque available every little bit helps.

(An interesting side note is that this behaviour trait makes the TT into a back tyre eater. Several people we know who have changed to more favourable rubber report the bike as burning more tyre than petrol if gunned hard. Expensive.)

This new Yamaha takes a lot of getting used to even when a rider has forgotten all his two stroke techniques. In many ways this is due to the superb achievement where the oriental engineers seem to have developed the motor for the best of both worlds: it not only thumps at tickover indicating a ton (definitely not tonne) of flywheel mass but also instantly picks up in throttle response as the revs begin to

trail applications it is too twitchy. We hope the production trail version has suitably altered front end geometry.

The long motocross seat is just great. Especially as this is a sit down and ride enduro-ised motocrosser, not a stand on the pegs semi-racer like the cantilever 400 two stroke.

Although the large exhaust system is efficient at its job and out of the way on the race track, when footing in awkward conditions on the trail the big muffler can burn . . . badly.

Despite the bulk of what, let's face it, is only a lit up motocrosser, it handles very well (the forward leant Kayabas do a great job) and when riding is deceptively fast. The latter is due to the quiet exhaust and the high gearing.

Fun drag starts and slides are the forte of the Sunday morning TT500C play rider. At them, it's the greatest.

Starting will be criticised by those who haven't learnt the drill. The valve lifter must be used to gain maximum flywheel momentum and the throttle must be left shut. Once mastered,

go into the trees, and what would be a bent handlebar, pegs and twisted forks on a DT360 trailster could all too easily be a badly bent fork, twisted frame and ruined running gear. Like the enduro-ised cantilever it's built to be as light as possible; a racer, you see.

Anyway, thanks go to E.D.C. for a ride of their street legal big thumper. We naturally look forward to the production XT500 when it gets here as the factory has informed us it will be different to the mock-up prototype that came to Australia late last year for the Motorcycle Show.