

DR Test

First thing, right off the bat, let us throw you a curve. It's like we said in the OSSA MAR test last month. All things considered, a better rider, on almost any trials bike sold today, will beat a poorer rider on any other.

The demands of trials competition place more emphasis upon the rider, and less upon the motorcycle, than do those of any other motorcycle sport we can think of.

Perhaps the most glaring example of this occurred a few years ago.

"Green, green, it's green they say . . ."

KAWASAKI KT 250

A Contented Kaw?



When the TL 125 Honda was first introduced, Bob Nickelsen, then riding with the Rocky Mountain Trials Association, trounced all comers riding the pleasant, but definitely not equal to the Spanish equipment, Honda.

Later, after reworking the little four-stroke to his own tastes, which reworking included upping the engine's capacity to 163cc, Bob placed tenth overall in the nearly disasterous first American round of the World

Trials Championship.

The point is this: the little Honda was not close to being competitive, machine to machine, with the more sophisticated bikes it bested. Its abilities came from its rider. Bob was competitive.

Now, as all observed trials bikes seem to be progressing rapidly, it becomes more difficult than ever to rank them in any absolute order, one against the other.

We at **Dirt Rider**, though, have a

reputation for going out on limbs. We'll say it; the KT 250 is, in our judgment and in the opinions of our more expert test riders, the finest production trials bike yet to come from Japan.

Which is not to say that it equals OSSA, Bultaco, or Montesa. None of the production Japanese trialers do. But, mount a friend who consistently beats you at trials on a Kaw, and then mount yourself on the 350 Sherpa, which is generally considered the



world's best, and allow that friend time to accustom himself to the characteristics of the Kawasaki, and he will trounce you still. It's more rider than bike, see? Still, the KT is that close.

Our test of the Kawasaki is probably the most lengthy that we've ever conducted upon any trials bike. It encompassed innumerable trail rides, trials competition by several staffers and testers, and the riding impressions of an impressive group of Southern California expert class plonkers.

And, despite the introduction to this test, our findings were not universally positive.

We found faults, at times, where we expected none. We ended up praising many components which we were ready to ridicule. More on these later.

If the KT 250 is to be a success, at least in terms of the numbers expected by a firm the size of Kawasaki, who last year moved into second position among the Big Four, many will have to be sold that never will ride between the red and blue ribbons of an observed section.

It is as a trail bike, then, that we will first discuss the Kawasaki.

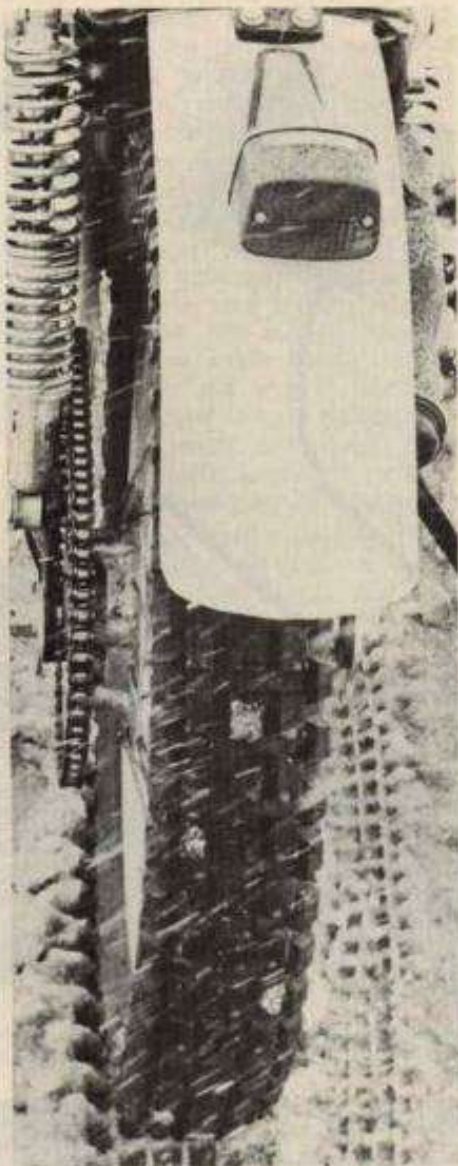
The KT's seat is firm. No doubt about it. More padding has been added over earlier models, but the bike is still not meant to cradle lazy buns for any length of time, and it will not do so without causing some discomfort.

On the positive side, however, the standing position is comfortable and natural feeling to anyone accustomed to riding on the pegs, and not too difficult, our first time trials bikers reported, to get used to for those new to such things.

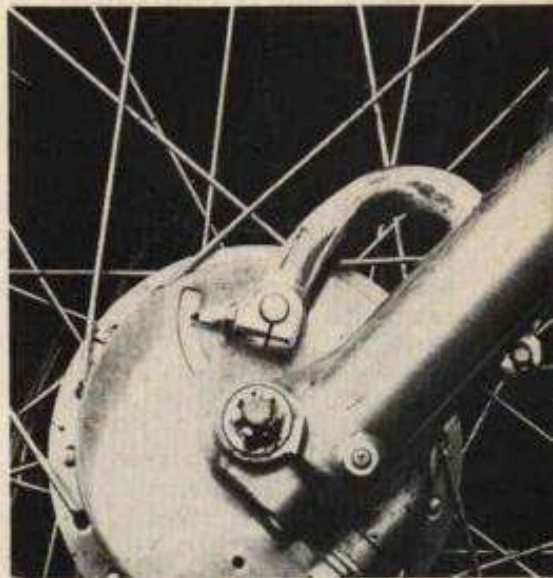
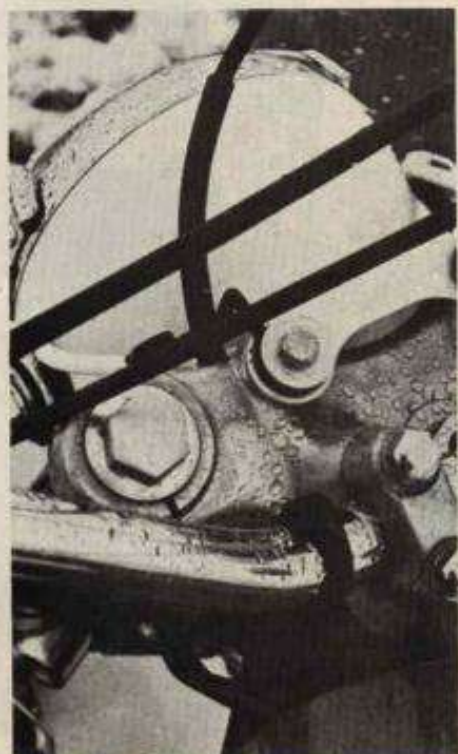
Kawasaki claims 16 horsepower from the 246cc engine. The power is smooth, the powerband relatively flat. Because of this the KT lacks the sudden surge of power associated with some strictly trail-type machinery, and will likely not accelerate with the somewhat pipier trials offerings from Yamaha and Suzuki. It can be ridden down the trail at an acceptable rate of speed, however, and allows gracious leeway for rider error in gear choice.

The gear ratios themselves work fine for trail riding, lacking those long steps sometimes associated with trials bikes. First gear has a 3.25/1 ratio, with second, third, fourth and fifth at 2.47/1, 1.83/1, 1.22/1 and 0.79/1 respectively. First gear, in fact, initially seemed more suited to trail riding than to trials competition. More on that later, too.

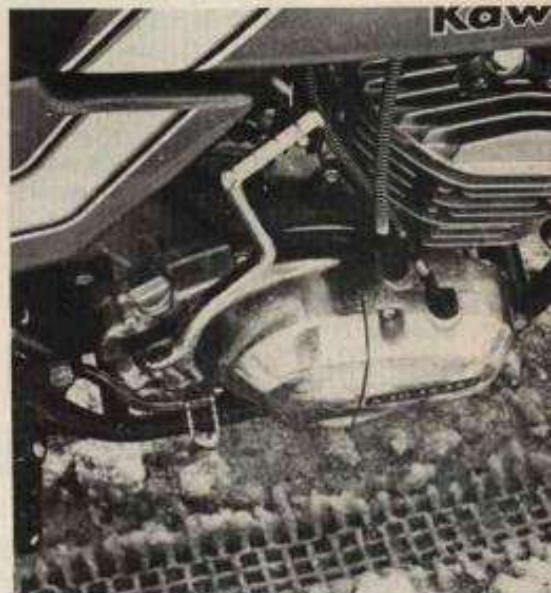
The Kawasaki's Dunlop Trials tires



Well tucked in and efficient, the head and taillights performed throughout our test.



This weird front brake actuating lever gave some trouble.



A skidplate should be attached to protect these vulnerable cases.



Ours, not protected, suffered a good bit of abuse.

worked as well as a trial pattern can be expected to in any trail application, actually performing better than some knobbies we could mention on hard surfaces.

The lights, which miraculously functioned without fault throughout our entire test, do not give the bike street legality in most states but are bright enough to pick one's way home should over exuberant riding catch him still on the trail after dark.

Lately we have given a lot of attention to exhaust noise. The KT is somewhat noisier than the most quiet trialers, which is reason enough for Kawasaki to tone down a bit. Still, it is a world quieter than most machines it will meet on any popular trail.

The bike steers, when compared to a trail or enduro bike, very quickly, and responds to small handlebar inputs and adjustments more violently than a non-trials rider may be used to. Compared to quicker turning trials machinery such as the OSSA, Yamaha, and Butaco, however, the KT feels quite stable at trail speeds.

As on any trials bike the suspension leaves much to be desired at fast trail speeds. Both ends are too soft to cope with obstacles at boogying velocities. They are, however, considerably stiffer than the no-nonsense trials suspenders found on Bultaco's Sherpa T.



A slender and attractive gas tank. Good lord, even a horn!



As a trail bike, then, the KT makes a good trials bike. That is, it has all of the faults of any trials machine when viewed as a playbike, but most of them have been toned down in Kawasaki's search for a larger audience.

When practicing upon the Kaw prior to entering it in its first trials we were frankly puzzled.

First gear seemed too high, and the engine lacking in flywheel inertia. We had come to rely on slow grunt plonking ability to allow us to idle down and change lines within a section.

After an impromptu trials school by an expert friend, however, we found we could do well on the KT by changing our styles slightly to suit the bike's abilities. A more aggressive approach to a section is required by the Kawasaki, with momentum, as opposed to pure low-end power, the key to overcoming obstacles. We were still happy, as Kaw does not at present provide alternate counter-shaft sprockets for the bike, to find than an eleven tooth from a old 125 Bul could be made to fit with minimal work. For more advanced riders it would likely not be necessary, Woods, however, found it invaluable. Anyone with the Dirty Rider's lack of ability needs all the preparation time they can find before climbing a log or a rock ledge.

Serious trials riders will likely re-

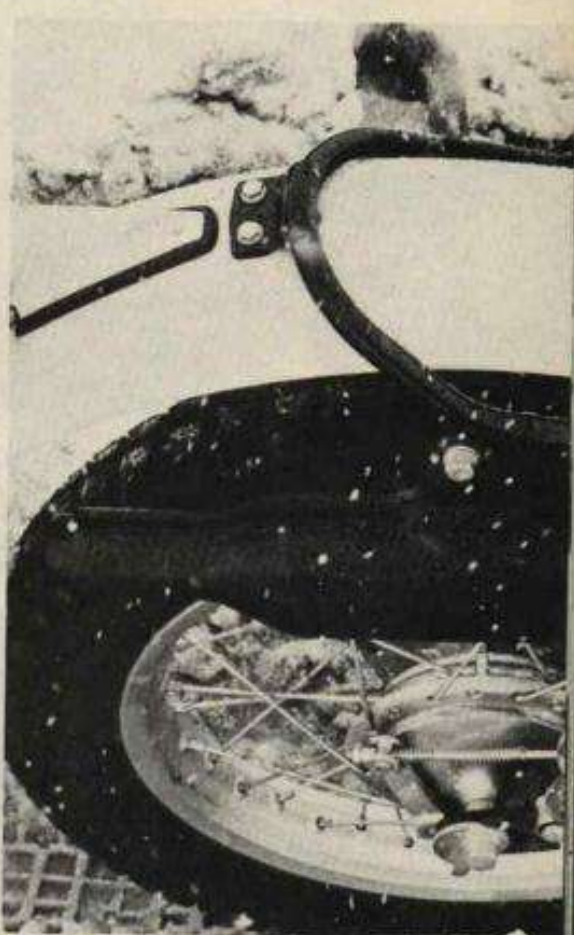
move the lighting. It is well tucked in, but contributes to the Kawasaki's ready-to-ride weight of over 220 lbs., which is well above those of even the big bore Spanish machines.

The KT's skidplate, or lack of one, is a major weakness. It provides no protection for the cases, which can be easily dinged in rock riding. The best method yet, we think, is that used by OSSA and by the factory Hondas; make the engine integral with the frame, eliminate the tubes running under the engine, and put a hefty skid plate in their place. This prevents the eventual flattening and cracking of frame tubes, and a skid plate can be replaced as needed.

Probably the major design bugaboo we encountered was the long and winding front brake actuating lever. The idea seems to be to turn everything back behind the fork tubes and out of harms way. Ours allowed the cable nipple to slip on several occasions, however, causing embarrassing unplanned front wheel lock up.

Our biggest surprise came from the tires. It has become an almost foregone conclusion that trials tires on Japanese machinery will be junk.

Not so the Kawasaki's Dunlops. In our initial test ride during a mountain snowstorm we found them to be superior to even British Dunlops in clambering over icy obstacles. They



Not the quietest trials muffler, but a step in the right direction.

Footpegs, somewhat slippery; chain tensioner, good; shocks, funny looking but functional.



Feet up, foot down, your basic broad-sliding a trials bike in the snow styles.





KAWASAKI KT 250

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|---------------------------|--|
| OVERALL LENGTH | 2,015mm (73.5 in.) |
| OVERALL WIDTH | 835mm (33.1 in.) |
| OVERALL HEIGHT | 1,155mm (44.5 in.) |
| WHEELBASE | 1,305mm (51.2 in.) |
| ROAD CLEARANCE | 310mm (12.2 in.) |
| DRY WEIGHT | 96 kg (198 lbs.) |
| FUEL TANK CAPACITY | 5.5 (1.5 U.S. gal.) |
| ENGINE | 2-stroke, single cylinder, piston valve |
| BORE AND STROKE | 69.5x64.9mm (2.74x2.56 in.) |
| DISPLACEMENT | 246cc (15.1 cu. in.) |
| COMPRESSION RATIO | 6.5:1 |
| MAX. HP | 16 bhp @ 6500 rpm |
| MAX. TORQUE | 1.9 kg-m @ 4000 rpm |
| VALVE TIMING: | |
| INLET | Open 68° BTDC; close 68° ATDC |
| SCAVENGING | Open 53° BBDC; close 53° ABDC |
| EXHAUST | Open 76° BBDC; close 76° ABDC |
| CARBURETOR | Mikuni VM26SC |
| LUBRICATION SYSTEM | Superlube (oil injection) |
| ENGINE OIL | 2-stroke oil |
| STARTING SYSTEM | Primary kick |
| IGNITION SYSTEM | Electronic CDI |
| IGNITION TIMING | 23°/4000 rpm |
| SPARK PLUG | NGK B7HS |
| TRANSMISSION | 5-speed, constant mesh, return shift |
| CLUTCH | Wet, multi-disc |
| GEAR RATIOS: | |
| 1ST | 3.25 (39/12) |
| 2ND | 2.47 (37/15) |
| 3RD | 1.83 (33/18) |
| 4TH | 1.22 (28/23) |
| 5TH | 0.79 (22/28) |
| PRIMARY REDUCTION RATIO | 3.26 (62/19) |
| FINAL REDUCTION RATIO | 3.47 (52/15) |
| OVERALL DRIVE RATIO | 8.89 (5th) |
| TRANSMISSION OIL | SAE 10w 30 or 10W 40 |
| TRANSMISSION OIL CAPACITY | 1.2/ (1.3 U.S. qt.) |
| FRAME | Tubular, double cradle |
| CASTOR | 63.5° |
| TRAIL | 79mm |
| TIRE SIZE: | |
| FRONT | 2.75-21 4PR |
| REAR | 4.00-18 4PR |
| FRONT SUSPENSION | Telescopic fork |
| REAR SUSPENSION | Swingarm |
| FRONT BRAKE | Internal expansion, leading-trailing, 120x28mm (4.72x1.10 in.) |
| REAR BRAKE | Internal expansion, leading-trailing, 130x28mm (5.12x1.10 in.) |
| ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT | |
| HEADLIGHT | 6V 35/35W |
| TAIL/BRAKE LIGHT | 6 V 5.3/17W (3/21Cp) |

seem to be second only to Pirelli's Moto Trials pattern, the new standard of the industry.

Three years ago the Kawasaki's 1976 suspension would likely have been the equal of any trials suspension available. Today it is about three years behind the best. Most of us couldn't tell the difference anyway.

Dan McEwe, the man behind Kaw-

asaki's public relations program, has come up with a novel approach to trials promotion. Rather than sponsor a national class rider, Kawasaki will attempt to send the most successful Kawasaki privateers from around the country to next year's Trial De Espana. The plan then, as we understand it, would be to send the highest placing KT rider at that trial, ex-

penses paid, to the Scottish Six Days. They might just discover a champion or two that no one else has noticed yet.

We hope it works. A variety of machinery is good for any motorsport, and the KT 250, despite its faults and learnings toward compromise, is one right pleasant motorcycle. ●

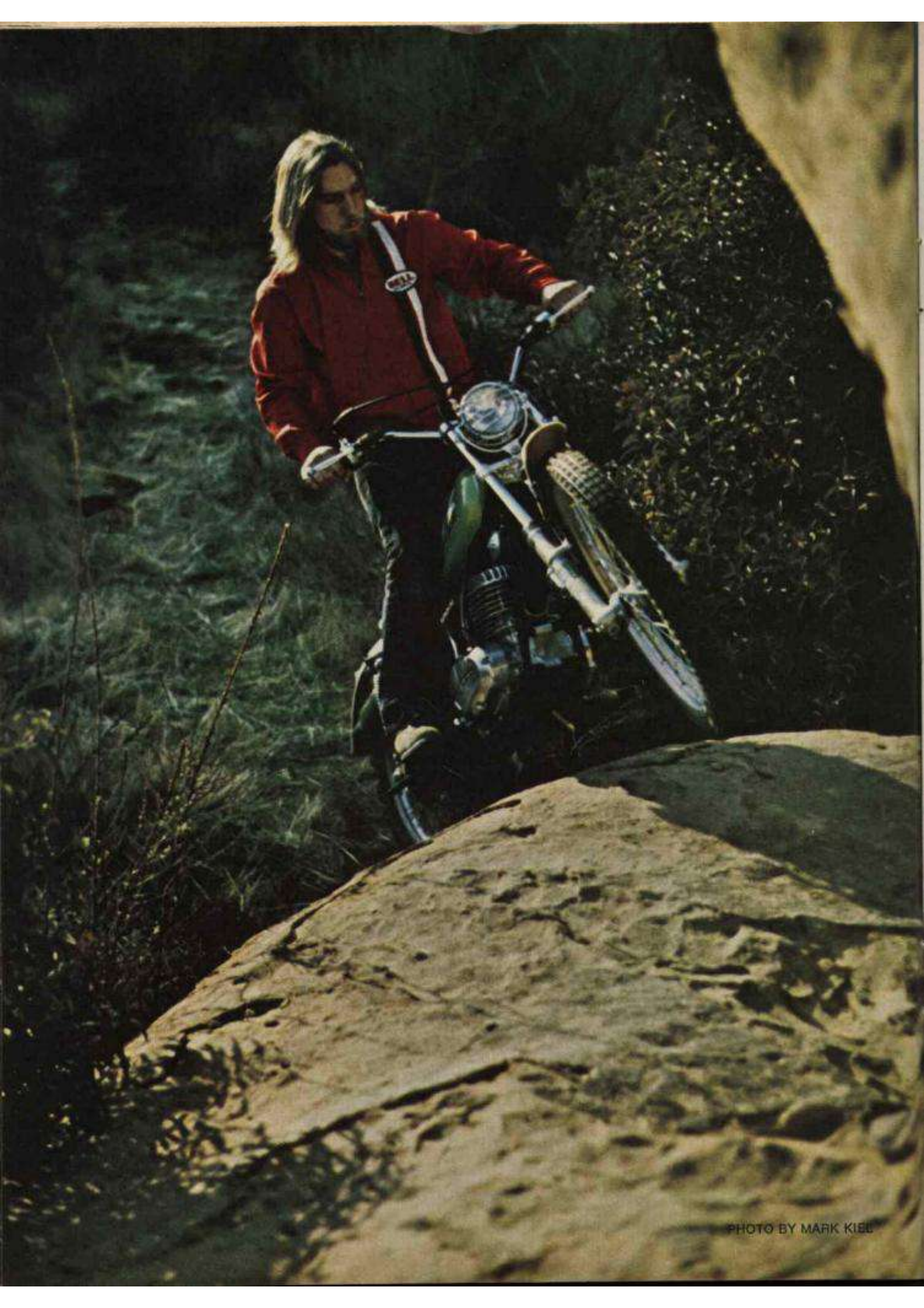


PHOTO BY MARK KIEL