

dard 350 Sherpa. But it's no use the inexperienced rider thinking he's going to win purely because he's got a better bike than the next man.

That's not to say you should avoid the Bultaco at all costs — if you've set your heart on one as your first bike, fair enough. You'll at least be able to appreciate the look and feel of high class machinery, but really it's best to wait until you've got the experience that can make full use of the big motor's extra torque and the steering's hair-line precision.

As your average wet-behind-the-ears beginner, getting astride the Bultaco made me feel a little like a road racing school pupil sent out on his first lesson aboard a TZ 750 Yamaha.

What a terrible waste this all is, I thought, as the bike, beginning to look slightly secondhand by now, crashed to the ground for about the tenth time. The Sherpa I was testing was, in fact, the private property of John Lee, several times South Midlands centre champ and proprietor of a motorcycle shop at Higham Ferrers, in Northamptonshire. Now John's a helluva nice bloke, but I decided his good nature might be stretched to the limit if I took his bike back in a heap of bits, so I stopped riding before it reached that stage.

I did have time to discover though, that its handling was definitely superior to either Jap bike, and the motor was docile and tractable in comparison to the Kawasaki, although a clumsy handful of throttle instantly produced far more power than I could cope with on the rough.

Gearchange was awkward, the pedal being on the opposite side to the Japanese bikes, and the shift being heavier and noisier. It needed a positive prod to swap the cogs, at one stage it slipped out of gear on a steep climb, bringing my groin into painful contact with the petrol tank as the bike came to a dead halt. When my voice resumed its normal pitch I tried to restart the bike and discovered that the motor could not be turned over in gear with the clutch pulled in, as with the other two bikes. Finding neutral could be difficult too.

Casting an eye over the machine better revealed its superiority over the oriental contenders to me, however. The frame is beautifully constructed from chrome molybdenum tube, the hubs are pared down to minimal size and weight, and the alloy buffed to a mirror finish. The engine casings are kept amazingly narrow and the slim alloy tank, seat and side panels give the bike a wasp-waisted look. Not a superfluous bit anywhere, the Sherpa looks really sanitary and weighs no more than the Honda or Kawasaki, despite its bigger motor. The whole impression is of a bike with years of trials experience behind it, a bike that is hand built rather than churned out.

Of course you pay extra for that class. And if you want to look like a pro in the paddock, even if you don't while riding, by all means shell out your loot on a Bultaco.

*Bill Haylock*

## Kawasaki KT250

AT A TIME when even the *DailyExcess* can't fabricate good news for you and Britain, I find wintry comfort in the fact that there's hardly a trials machine around that wasn't designed or developed by a Brit. Sammy Miller worked the magic for Bultaco and Honda, Gordon Farley for Suzuki, and when Kawasaki wanted an iron of their own they called up three-times European champ Don Smith.

And these guys aren't just kept smashed in a penthouse suite waiting to have their pix taken alongside some bike they've never seen before. After they've developed the thing they gotta go out and actually *win* on it, because that's how trials bikes are sold to the punters.

You don't have to know anything about a trialer to appreciate that the KT250 is well equipped, or that the whole deal is nicely hung together for a mass production item. It's got surprisingly bright lights, separate oil injection, twin-plug head, capacitive discharge electronic ignition, a massive toolkit, practical chain oiler and a comprehensive workshop manual as well as all the usual goodies. And it still only tips the scales at 216 lb.

The most impressive thing about this rock hopper is its mechanical reliability. It always started first or second prod — in or out of gear — and didn't gas up like the Bultaco. The 246 cc motor naturally lacks the Sherpa's tremendous flywheel effect, and on the same going I had to either select a lower cog and sacrifice grip, or snap the throttle open more frequently to keep it tick-tocking along.

This slightly uneven power delivery made it tricky to handle at first, especially when I'd just climbed off *onda's* sewing machine. The front end is surprisingly heavy, or as Don Smith would have it, "positive". All part of a design philosophy which requires the bike to be an expert rather than the rider.

Look at it this way. You want to blast up a steep bank without looping the loop, and if you're a novice the heavier the front end the better 'cos it won't disappear over your head so easily when you turn the power on hard. As you improve you'll just dial the weight into your riding style.

At around 600 notes the KT has got to score on versatility to make it really worthwhile, even though most 250s are in the same price range. A KT team stole the manufacturer's award at this year's Welsh Two Days, so it has obvious potential in enduro events. The lights mean that you can ride it to and from trials, work or whatever, but after 70 miles — on one gallon of fuel — up the A1 at a buzzy 45 mph my haemorrhoids nearly burst a blood vessel.

Serious trials riders usually opt for petrol lubrication and throw the oil tank and

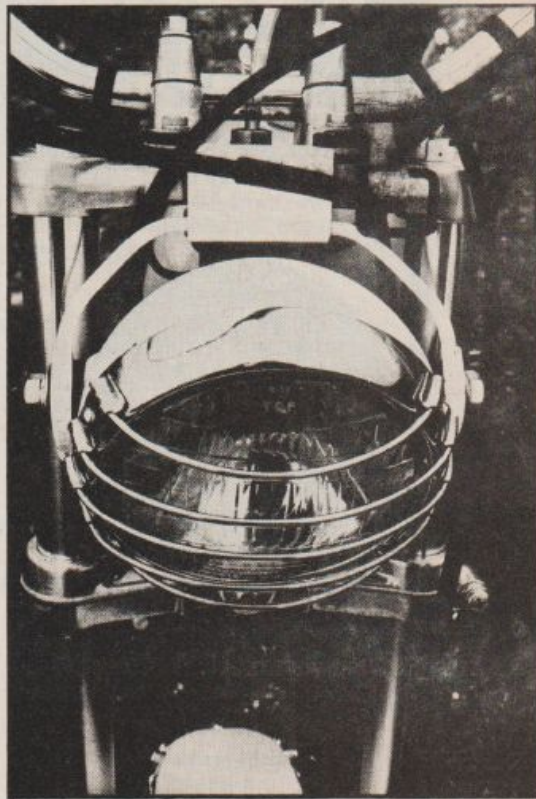
pump cable away — it's just an extra complication. Our professional aides used this as one argument to prove that the KT isn't really a genuine trials machine, but an enduro/trials compromise. I'm not so sure that's true, or that any moderately serious rider would use it anywhere else than in competition.

Gearing is a useful mix of three rather low — almost subterranean — ratios fol-



*The Kawasaki is a tidy, functional machine. Oil for chain lubrication is contained in the swing arm tube and a tensioner helps keep the chain on the sprockets. Ignition switch and oil tank are things you'll not usually find on a trials bike.*

*Trials bikes don't have lights, do they now? Well in the States they have to by law — that's why the Kawasaki comes with illumination.*



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# Giant Test

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that the Guzzi was not one of those coronary - on - every - wet - corner frighteners. A combination of soft four-stroke power, fine handling from a strong frame and supple suspension, brakes with a high degree of feel, and that most crucial biker's item, good tyres, had the Guzzi gliding swiftly yet without drama along miles of wet and twisty Midland by-roads. The S3's reassuring rubber, incidentally, comes in the form of Michelin's S41 covers.

In the dry, as you might expect, riding the S3 is a rather fine experience. The motor has an odd wheezing sound that somehow fits the bike's loping style. Laying over the big tank, you aim the Guzzi into turns and it feels very predictable, very reassuring. As on all the best motorcycle gearboxes, you can sense the cogs moving out of and into mesh as you make the changes. It's a two part operation on the S3, with an almost imperceptible pause needed between the movements, yet it's still a smoother and much quieter business than on the BMW. If you're into the blurred scenery style of biking, you can't help but like the S3, and it's at such times that the £1,750 price ticket seems justified.

However, the Guzzi isn't the day-long full tilt land cruiser that we'd hoped for. The riding position, not the machine itself, makes that impossible. A medium height rider finds it quite a stretch over the tank, and despite the low seating position, the clip-on bars induce wrist and shoulder ache so that two hours is about as much riding as you want before you need to break. The seat is also too narrow for true long distance touring, and it's short enough to make two-up trips a distinctly intimate affair.

The equipment and fittings largely match the Guzzi's price. The refinement of shaft drive means running maintenance is little more than an oil check every 1,800 miles, and an oil change every 6,000, as opposed to desperate applications of aerosol lubricants to keep musclebike chains in order. The major change from the S3 featured in these pages earlier in the year is the coupled hydraulic braking system. The foot pedal operates the rear disc and one of the twin

front discs, a compensator ensuring that 75 per cent of the pressure is applied to the front stopper. The result is highly predictable braking on even the greasiest surface, with the handlebar lever acting as reserve to bring in the other front disc for emergency stops. It's intelligent sophistication, unlike some of the suspect gimmickry being pressed upon motorcyclists largely by the Japanese makers.

Other useful safety features on the Guzzi are an electric starter that cannot be operated until the clutch lever is pulled in (to stop you from lurching forward if you forget you're in gear, dummies) and a catch button that prevents you from accidentally switching all the lights out. The switchgear itself is among the best to be found on Italian bikes, practical and easy to locate. A tool kit, excellent in both quantity and quality, is stored in a container below the seat, but really needs more room, and the centre stand is impossible for one person to operate in confidence. Well it was for the emaciated *Bike* staff, anyway.

Ah yes, nearly forgot that old fable about the dire effects of in-line crankshafts and shaft drives on motorcycles. It's almost entirely an illusion. If you rev the motor with the bike stationary, you can indeed feel it rocking slightly from side to side. But you don't notice it once you're moving. Failure to match revs to road speed when changing down can lock the rear wheel, possibly causing you to crash on wet roads or in a bend. But then the same sort of clumsy riding will send you down on any two-wheeler. Take it from us, the Guzzi is among the safest and most stable bikes you can buy.

Put through the speed trap with 1,500 miles on the clock, the S3 registered 123.45 mph. The importers say that Guzzi V motors are not fully run in until up to 4,000 miles have been covered, so maybe a little more speed was lurking inside the test bike. Personally, I doubt it, and in fact I feel obliged to shoot down some of the more fatuous performance claims that the S3 seems to inspire above all other motorcycles. Not only do we have the aforementioned 140 mph fantasy, but a recent road test on the machine claims that at 120 mph the engine is spinning at only 6,300 rpm, "well within its limits" and able to hold that speed "indefinitely". Maybe somebody hadn't been checking the Guzzi's erratic speedometer, because at 6,000 rpm in top it

was actually running at 94.93 mph, according to our electronic timing gear. Flat out on the 123 mph run it was revving at just on seven grand.

In terms of general road use, however, even this information is slightly academic in that the S3's easy-rolling style is deceptively fast over most roads. Limitations in rider comfort prevented it from being the all-day mileage machine we were originally looking for in this test, but it's still one of the most appealing motorcycles in a very competitive section of the market.

Mike Nicks

## Summary

WE WERE looking for ultimates, and our choice of machinery proved a good one. But although both bikes fulfilled nearly all the exacting requirements to qualify as the ideal long distance high speed cruisers, they reflect two quite different approaches to building bikes.

Both companies use very similar engine/transmission layouts. The transverse engines and shaft drive, providing tireless, robust power at sustained high speed with a minimum of maintenance, are ideally suited to the demands of the hard use these bikes are intended for.

But the way the design concept has been arrived at is very different. The German factory combines traditional high quality workmanship with typically painstaking thoroughness in applying logical thought to the machine. The Italians use not so much logic, as intuitive flair for motorcycle design, with an equally high engineering skill.

The thorough German approach results in a machine which is almost faultless and entirely functional. Meanwhile, the intuitive Italian approach produces a bike of highly individual character, with a few flaws. The Guzzi does not match the BMW on quality of detail or finish, and at £250 cheaper it's not fair to expect it to. Neither does it offer the same comfort as the R90S. But it makes up for it with beautiful styling and that indefinable quality character.

Which bike you choose in the end depends on what sort of person you are.

## ALL OUR TRIALS

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lowed by a couple of taller cogs for 'tween sections and the road. The shift is nice and positive, but the footrests just feature pubescent pimples on a flat plate instead of the Bultaco's steel shark's teeth, and I was slipping and sliding off everywhere.

With so many neat design points — oil reservoir for the chain oiler in the swing

arm, tucked-up front brake arm, rubber-mounted headlamp — I was pretty stunned to have to unbolt the seat to top up the oil injection tank. This obviously helps maintain a slim profile, but a hinged seat would be better, along with somewhere to stow the tools. I never did fancy falling off and collecting a bag full of spanners in my guts.

Sheer drops are no sweat for the KT, with acres of ground clearance and sizeable brakes. Suspension is really first rate, with dual rate rear springing provided by twin chromed coils on each side separated by a

nylon bush.

For '76 Kawasaki's KT mods are strictly cosmetic. The long suffering plastic guards will come in black instead of white, and the tank will sport a metallic green with black stripe. This year's sales should top out at around the 200 mark, which is pretty gratifying for a newcomer in such a tough sector of the market. Its success will be assured once enough clubmen get to grips with a machine which, above all, just keeps on coming.

Peter Watson

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