



CAN-AM'S TRIPLE THREAT

T'NT, Qualifier and MX-3 175s: Three specialized machines built from a common parts bin

■ Fact and Folklore:

Ever since motorcycles became specialized, for as long as there have been fun bikes, racing bikes, off-road bikes and dual-purpose bikes, we've all agreed that a machine built for one purpose isn't good at anything else. We know this to be true and for as long as it's been true, bikers have been working around or accepting the limits of specialized motorcycles.

What we haven't been doing is taking a serious look at why this is true, or at how valid these limits are.

Thanks to Can-Am, we can take that serious look in the persons of the dual purpose T'NT, the hardcore enduro Qualifier and the purely racing MX-3, all with 175-cc engines, indeed, virtually the same engine in different forms.

Can-Am is the perfect company for this semi-comparison test. Can-Am's history has some odd parallels with Honda, in that



Photos by Dave Gooley



both firms were founded by powerful and intelligent individuals, self-taught inventors with canny foresight and business skills. In Can-Am's case, Joseph Armand Bombardier invented the rubber-cushioned drive wheel and track which resulted in the modern snowmobile. Bombardier created sport and business snow vehicles, which led to a controlling interest in Rotax, makers of two-stroke engines, which in time led to Can-Am motorcycles.

Can-Am's owners are farsighted and enterprising men and Can-Am motorcycles have an excellent reputation as competition and sport motorcycles. Even so, Can-Am is not a large motorcycle company. Where the Big Four can produce a separate engine, frame, suspension and so forth for each of its various fields, Can-Am must get maximum use from each component.

In the present case, they have taken one basic engine and two basic frames and used them to make three different models, each aimed at its own segment of motorcycling and each (as we'll see) excellent in its own way.

Beginning with the mild end of the range, the T'NT is the street/dirt model, as well as the basic Can-Am of the past few years. Naturally the T'NT is legal for road >

use in all 50 states and Canada and comes with full lights, signals, muffler, mirrors and minor bits like key and kill switch.

The T'NT frame is conventional and designed for conventional shocks in a nearly upright position. The shocks for 1977 are long-travel S&Ws so the T'NT has respectable amount of travel. Front forks are Betor, again conventional in that they have a centered axle, and again modern because the travel is longer than you'd expect to find with a dual-purpose bike.

A truly uncommon feature is the adjustable steering rake found on all Can-Am

models. Rake controls steering quickness and straight-line stability and any setting will be a compromise between the two. Other makers choose their compromise on the drawing board and set the degree of rake permanently. Can-Am has a standard setting of 30 deg. but the parts catalog contains an assortment of offset cones for the steering head. Juggling cones allows the rider/owner to vary the rake from 25 deg. (quick) to 31 deg. (stable).

What sets Can-Am apart, though, is the engine and the engine's rotary valve. The Rotax engine pre-dates the Can-Am

motorcycle, although both Bombardier and the Rotax division have developed and improved the engine every chance they've had. The result is more power than anything in the class and sometimes above.

The rotary valve is only part of the secret. The method is well known. A rotary valve is simply a way to synchronize the delivery of fuel with piston position but independent of it, that is, the opening comes around and the charge goes in without being controlled by the position of piston and ports. Several of the big manufacturers have experimented with rotary

Photo by Mike Brown





valves and found they work, albeit at a price paid in complexity and bulk. Racing two-strokes with rotary valves have come and gone.

The Rotax remains. Because intake timing can be controlled by the valve, Can-Am is not restricted by carburetor size and piston ports. As a result, Can-Am engines have more power than their rivals while also being less peaky. Further, the 175-cc engine is a smaller-bore version of the Can-Am 250, which comes with generous fins, bearing area, stout crankshaft, etc. Can-Am and Rotax are not bound by tradition and the lefthand kick lever works in any gear, unlike the systems from Bultaco, Husqvarna et al.

Tuned for the TNT and the street, the 175 engine gets to use a high compression ratio and large carb, a 32-mm Bing with choke lever. The exhaust system is tucked away as well as legal and the rubber silencers are fitted to the top of the fins. Handy to have your own rubber division, as obviously the sound deadeners have been made for this application and this engine.

Oil is via pump, from a separate tank in the frame top tube, with a metering device keyed to the carburetor. The wider the throttle opening, the more oil.



The TNT's street functions have been deftly handled. Front turn signals mount below the bars just inside the grips and the rear signals are on rubber stalks. Grips are surgical rubber. Fenders and tank are light, crash-resistant plastic.

Next in order of ferocity comes the Qualifier 175. This is the newest Can-Am model and is, in effect, the TNT engine fitted to the MX frame.

There's more to it than that of course. The move from street manners to semi-competition allows an increase in noise and temperament, that is, more power.

Uncorrected compression ratio goes up two points, 15:1 from 13:1. Claimed power stays the same, 24 bhp, while the peak speed for the Qualifier engine is 9000 rpm, 500 higher than peak for the TNT.

What they've done is not worry about peak power. The torque curve has been fattened then tailored so the off-road engine is stronger at all times; power where you need it.

The six-speed transmissions in the Qualifier and TNT are the same, right down to the internal ratios. Because the lighter, more powerful off-road bike will pull taller gears, the Qualifier has them.

The major difference is the frame and suspension. The Qualifier has a completely different frame, designed for competition, that is, extra ground clearance and rear tubes swept up sharply aft of the swing arm pivot so they'll take forward-mount and lay-down shocks. The shocks are long Canadian Gabriels, valved and >

calibrated just for this bike. (One benefit from working in a country with stiff tariff laws and made-here quotas is that the companies within that country find it easy and useful to work together.)

Front forks are Betors, with more travel, stiffer springs, etc., than provided by the similar units on the TNT. Brakes on all three models are 6-in. drum, with magnesium backing plates which interchange among the models and between front and back. No harm in sharing parts wherever they'll fit.

Specialized equipment for the Qualifier begins with the small and permanently-lit headlight and enduro-style taillight on a flexible rubber pad.

There's a proper leather tool bag, an airbox with high intake for water crossings and the right side of the rear frame hoop has a useful handle, the better to haul the bike onto its center stand.

Ah, the center stand. Much better off road than a side stand and in the Qualifier's case, the right leg also contains a chain snubber. The stand is held up by a foolproof pressure latch and held at the correct down position with an adjustable cable. Worked right every time.

As fits an enduro machine, the Qualifier



basic unit, this time tuned to full power. Again this seems to be a matter of packing power into the middle of the curve, as the MX-3 engine also has the 32-mm Bing carb used on the milder powerplants and the MX-3 175 engine is rated at 30 bhp at 8700 rpm, max power midway between the peaks of the other engines. Compression

The MX-3 is also complete. Thanks to Jimmy Ellis and the Superbowl, most everybody knows by now that the Can-Am is a competitive motocross racer, especially on courses where power is the controlling factor.

The MX-3 frame is the Qualifier frame minus everything that can be removed, as in brackets, stand, rear grip and the like. The fuel tank is a tiny 1.9 gal.; enough for one moto and a cool-off lap.

The MX-3 has its own set of Canadian Gabriels, longer ones mounted further forward for still more wheel travel than on the Qualifier. The MX-3 175 has Betor forks, the same model used on the Qualifier. (The 250-cc MX-3 uses Marzocchi forks, we assume because the top-power racer justifies the extra money.)

The jump from Qualifier to MX-3 chiefly involves the engine. Still the same



comes with a hefty 3-gal. gas tank, Magura levers and throttle, resettable odometer (shared with the TNT) and Can-Am's own soft rubber grips. The axles have permanent helper bars for quick tire repairs and changes. The Qualifier engine also comes with oil injection and metering controlled by the throttle opening. The Qualifier comes complete, in short.



T'NT

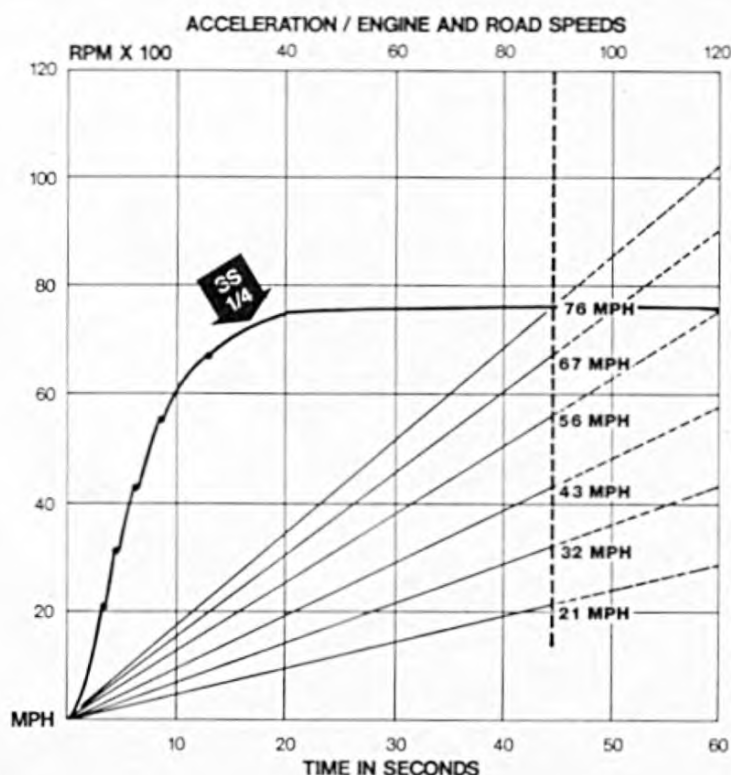
SPECIFICATIONS

| | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| List price..... | \$1495 |
| Suspension, front..... | telescopic fork |
| Suspension, rear..... | swing arm |
| Tire, front..... | 3.00-21 |
| Tire, rear..... | 4.00-18 |
| Brake, front..... | 6-inch drum |
| Brake, rear..... | 6-inch drum |
| Total brake swept area, sq. in..... | 37.7 |
| Brake loading, lb./sq. in. (160-lb. rider)..... | 11.0 |
| Engine, type..... | rotary valve, two-stroke Single |
| Bore x stroke, in., mm..... | 2.44 x 2.26; 62 x 57.5 |
| Piston displacement, cu. in., cc..... | 10.60; 173.6 |
| Compression ratio..... | 13:1 |
| Claimed bhp @ rpm..... | 24 @ 8500 |
| Claimed torque @ rpm, lb./ft..... | na |
| Carburetion..... | 32-mm Bing |
| Ignition..... | CDI |
| Oil system..... | automatic injection |
| Oil capacity, pt..... | 4.6 |
| Fuel capacity, U.S. gal..... | 2.5 |
| Recommended fuel..... | premium |
| Starting system..... | primary kick |
| Lighting system..... | 12V alternator |
| Air filtration..... | oil-wetted foam |
| Clutch..... | wet, multi-disc |
| Wheelbase, in..... | 55.0 |
| Seat height, in..... | 33.0 |
| Seat width, in..... | 7.5 |
| Handlebar width, in..... | 33.75 |
| Footpeg height, in..... | 11.7 |
| Ground clearance, in..... | 9.0 |

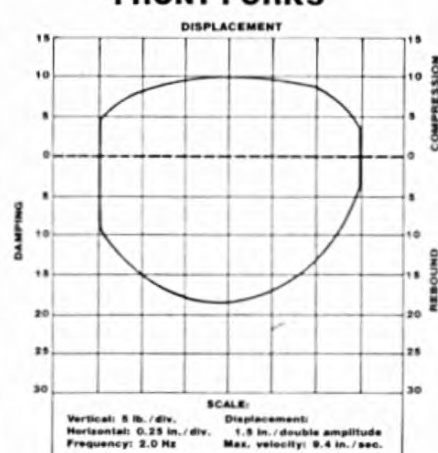
| | |
|--|-------------------|
| Primary drive..... | straight cut gear |
| Final drive..... | # 520 chain |
| Gear ratios, overall:1 | |
| 6th..... | 9.01 |
| 5th..... | 10.28 |
| 4th..... | 12.30 |
| 3rd..... | 15.77 |
| 2nd..... | 21.69 |
| 1st..... | 31.92 |
| Front fork rake angle, degrees..... | 25-31, adjustable |
| Trail, in..... | na |
| Curb weight (w/half-tank fuel), lb..... | 254 |
| Weight bias, front/rear, percent..... | 44.5/55.5 |
| Test weight (fuel and rider), lb..... | 414 |

PERFORMANCE

| | |
|--|-------------------|
| Engine rpm @ 60 mph..... | 7100 |
| Piston speed (@ 9000 rpm), ft./min..... | 3396 |
| Lb./hp (160-lb. rider)..... | 17.25 |
| Fuel consumption, mph..... | 65.3 |
| Speedometer error: | |
| 40 mph indicated, actually..... | 35.0 |
| 50 mph indicated, actually..... | 47.2 |
| 60 mph indicated, actually..... | 59.5 |
| Braking distance: | |
| from 30 mph, ft..... | 38 |
| from 60 mph, ft..... | 148 |
| Standing one-quarter mile, sec..... | 17.00 |
| terminal speed, mph..... | 72.87 |
| Top speed (actual @ 9000 rpm) mph..... | 76 after 1/2 mile |



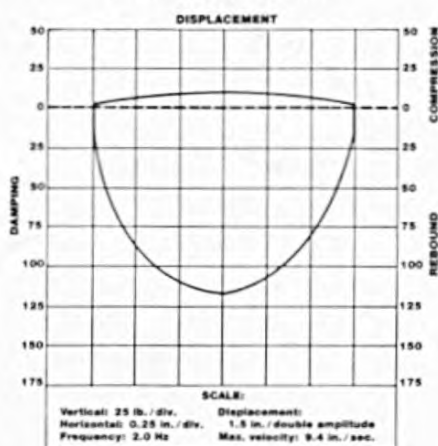
FRONT FORKS



Description: Betor telescopic fork, HD-315 oil
Fork travel, in.: 6.8
Engagement, in.: 4.8
Spring rate, lb./in.: 20
Compression damping force, lb.: 10
Rebound damping force, lb.: 18
Static seal friction, lb.: 19

Remarks: Forks on the T'NT, as on the MX-3 and Qualifier, can be improved by gutting the upper seals in each of the stanchion tubes. This reduces seal friction substantially, increasing suspension compliance. No other modifications should be necessary.

REAR SHOCKS



Description: S&W (Mexico) shock, gas/oil, non-rebuildable
Shock travel, in.: 3.7
Wheel travel, in.: 6.3
Spring rate, lb./in.: 90
Compression damping force, lb.: 10
Rebound damping force, lb.: 116

Remarks: The T'NT's hind end works quite well as is, although the rear springs are slightly stiff. When replacement time arrives, another set of S&Ws, or other quality shock, should be installed with the original springs, or a set of 80 pounders.

Tests performed at Number One Products

ratio is 15:1, just like the Qualifier, but valve timing is moved about to increase output in the top half.

The exhaust system plays a major part. The MX-3 pipe is a true snake system: out of the port into an expansion chamber which turns down, then up and across the head diagonally, into a stubby exit just behind the seat.

This borders on the clumsy, so much so that riders who slide onto the tank for turns will find themselves resting their right knee on a hot expansion chamber.

Also the MX-3 is noisy. In stock form it's banned from public land in California. Can-Am appreciates the market for desert racing so the west coast reps have just finished having an add-on silencer cer-

tified for California. If you live in that state and plan to ride an MX-3 in the desert, get the silencer with the bike or you won't be allowed to buy an off-road sticker.

Enough technical discussion. A quick check of the specifications and measurements shows that if the same maker uses the same engine and other components to make three models for three markets, the result will be:

| | Dual purpose | Enduro | Motocross |
|-------------------|--------------|----------|-----------|
| Weight | 254 lb. | 241 lb. | 217 lb. |
| Horsepower | 24 | 24 | 30 |
| Ground Clearance | 9 in. | 10 in. | 10.5 in. |
| Seat Height | 33 in. | 34.8 in. | 35 in. |
| Wheel travel, f/r | 6.8/6.3 | 7.5/6.8 | 7.5/7.0 |

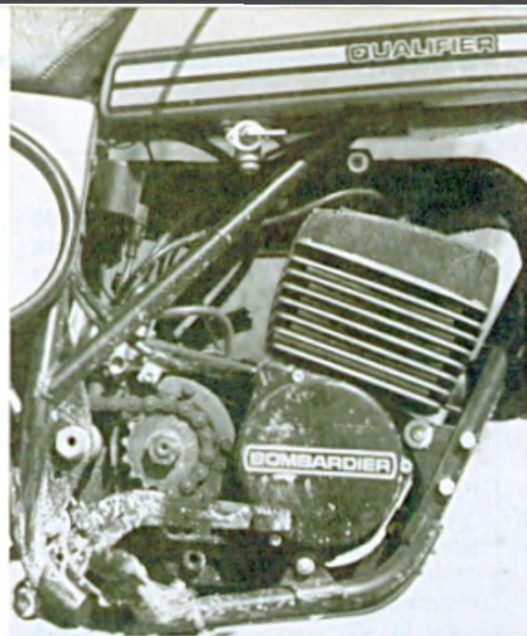


Photo by Roger Morrison



QUALIFIER

Not many surprises here. Allowing for Can-Am's particular tuning methods and for the large Qualifier tank making that model appear heavier than it would otherwise, we see a logical progression. As the motorcycle changes from errand-runner to front-runner, it becomes more powerful, lighter and taller, all in a series of what look like small steps.

In use, the TNT may begin with something of an advantage. Because this model began as a motocross/dirt bike with street equipment added, it's safe to say the TNT is a dirt bike converted for street use. The mass-market entries are the opposite, that is, their normal dual-purpose bikes began as road-going Singles fitted with high front muffler and trials tires.



SPECIFICATIONS

| | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| List price..... | \$1595 |
| Suspension, front..... | telescopic fork |
| Suspension, rear..... | swing arm |
| Tire, front..... | 3.00-21 |
| Tire, rear..... | 4.00-18 |
| Engine, type..... | rotary valve, two-stroke |
| | Single |
| Bore x stroke, in.; | |
| mm..... | 2.44 x 2.26; 62 x 57.5 |
| Piston displacement, | |
| cu. in.; cc..... | 10.6; 173.6 |
| Compression ratio..... | 15:1 |
| Claimed bhp @ rpm..... | 24 @ 9000 |
| Claimed torque | |
| @ rpm lb./ft..... | na |
| Piston speed | |
| @ rpm ft./min..... | 3396 @ 9000 |
| Carburetion..... | 32-mm Bing |
| Ignition..... | CDI |
| Oil system..... | automatic injection |
| Oil capacity, pt..... | 4.6 |
| Fuel capacity, U.S. gal..... | 3.0 |
| Recommended fuel..... | premium |
| Starting system..... | primary kick |
| Air filtration..... | oil-wetted foam |

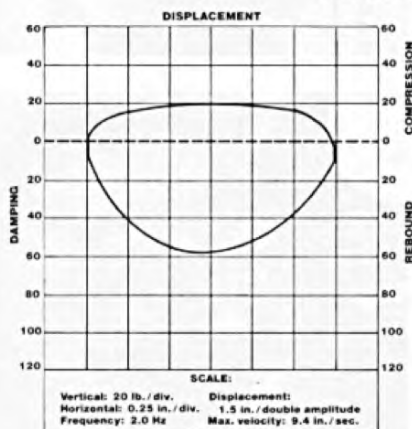
POWER TRANSMISSION

| | |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| Clutch..... | wet, multi-disc |
| Primary drive..... | straight-cut gear |
| Final drive..... | # 520 chain |
| Gear ratios, overall:1 | |
| 6th..... | 8.83 |
| 5th..... | 10.07 |
| 4th..... | 12.05 |
| 3rd..... | 15.46 |
| 2nd..... | 21.25 |
| 1st..... | 31.28 |

DIMENSIONS

| | |
|---------------------------------|------------------|
| Wheelbase, in..... | 55.5 |
| Seat height, in..... | 34.75 |
| Seat width, in..... | 7.5 |
| Handlebar height, in..... | 34.0 |
| Footpeg height, in..... | 12.75 |
| Ground clearance, in..... | 10.0 |
| Front fork rake angle, | |
| degrees..... | 25-31 adjustable |
| Trail, in..... | na |
| Curb weight (w/half-tank fuel), | |
| lb..... | 241 |
| Weight bias, front/rear, | |
| percent..... | 43/57 |

REAR SHOCKS



Description: Gabriel (Canada) shock, freon bag, non-rebuildable
Shock travel, in.: 4.5
Wheel travel, in.: 6.8
Spring rate, lb./in.: 100
Compression damping force, lb.: 20
Rebound damping force, lb.: 58

Remarks: The Qualifier differs in rear suspension from most in that relatively low damping rates are combined with stiff springs. This combination does work, but less aggressive riders might enjoy the bike more if 10-20 lb. lighter springs were installed. When the stock shocks expire, follow the same replacement guidelines as for the MX-3.

Tests performed at Number One Products

The nice part about that is that the TNT is a good road bike. As the figures show, the Can-Am 175 will do the standing quarter in a time good enough to bring credit to a 250, and the 75 mph top speed means easy cruising at 55. In traffic, peppy isn't half strong enough. Surely this is the only production 175 which calls for restraint. If you roll the throttle open, next you'll be using the brakes. They also work adequately, so it's more a mental than an actual problem.

A road rider popped onto a TNT for the first time probably would feel a bit odd, as for a street machine it is high and light and the steering is quick, calling for some attention at highway speeds. The quickness also brings accuracy and in the right hands, the TNT has been the terror of production road-racing in class ever since it appeared. Lots of fun, in other words. There is vibration, fuzzy mirrors, small

pegs and such, just as there always are in this market. Only truly unusual bits here are the foot brake lever, which for woods use has been tucked close to the engine case, and which the road rider tends to miss on the first try.

Also disconcerting is the tendency of the trials tires, Cheng Shins on our test bike, to become excited over those damned rain grooves. As always, nothing actually happens, but the bike does dart and hunt and twitch.

The TNT is at its best as a fool-around bike. Ride to the end of the pavement and begin to explore. Steering is good and because the center of gravity is low, the TNT will turn willingly. Again, the engine is so strong and the curve so flat that the rider can slog through here, pick his way through there and squirt up any hill that appears. The tires may be a benefit in the

rough, as it's easy to spin the rear wheel in mud or sand that could bog the engine if the tire had more traction.

Forks are fine. The rear shocks have been valved to work fairly well on road and off. They do the first better than the second. A good bump will bottom the shocks and over stutter grooves the rear wheel tends to lose track of the ground. Understandable in light of the maker's intent, and also, seeing that there is not much wheel travel when compared to a newer chassis, a comment on how much dirt bikes have improved in the recent past.

The motocross spirit still lives. This is a joint test, after all, and the TNT did some time on the motocross track with the Qualifier and the MX-3. No contest with them, as you'd guess.

But the TNT did feel at home and it did whip some minis and another street-legal >

machine, with a larger engine, that ventured out on the track at the same time. We wouldn't race a TNT. Neither would we apologize for it.

Two flaws, both of which were shared by the other models we tested.

One, the Can-Am gearbox seems to have a neutral between every speed. If you don't shift up and down with firmness, you may find yourself revving a disengaged engine and falling onto the tank. We found a neutral between 2 and 3, 3 and 4, 4 and 5, and 5 and 6.

Second and less important, the convenient oil tank has an equally convenient cap/dip stick. On the stick is a cork gasket which on all three bikes flattened and then split. We'd replace it with a rubber ring of some sort, pronto.

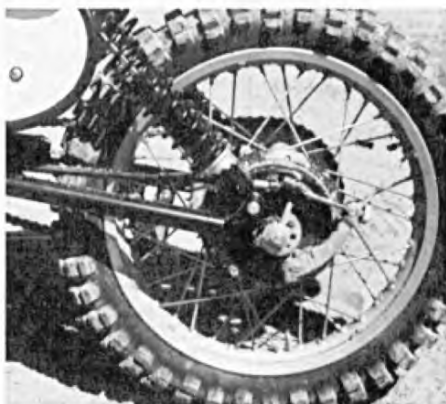
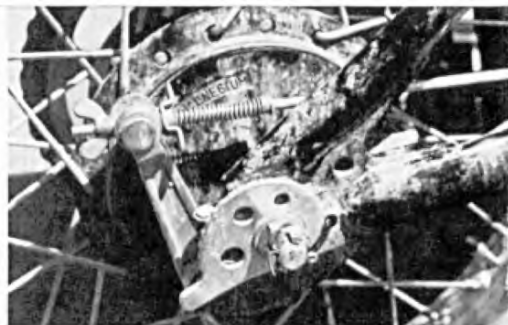
The step to the Qualifier is a high one, literally. A big jump up and the immediate impression of a modern off-road motorcycle.

Most of the impression follows this line. If the Qualifier 175 is a powerful motor for its class, so is it a large and relatively heavy and high one. Next, as usually happens with motorcycles designed by people who know firsthand what riding and racing are about, the customer gets a machine that does what the designer wants it to do, as opposed to what the rider may want.

there. With balance and lean and positive lock applied before the actual line, you'll do fine.

Right, this is a trail or enduro bike, so getting around the corner is more important than keeping the right line or blocking some other rider. Fair enough.

Sound thinkers, the Can-Am people. The brakes which worked so well on the TNT are on the Qualifier and MX-3 as well and they are beyond reproach. All the braking you can use on any surface, with control and never a trace of hop, chatter or locking. Super.



Like what? Like not turning as sharply or with as much control as, oh, the Yamaha IT175 comes to mind. It may be the centerline forks on the Qualifier, it may be the height. The Qualifier handles very well, once the rider learns that either you stuff it into the berm, lean hard and gas it (see any race picture of Jimmy Ellis for details) or you begin to plan the turn before you get

MX-3

SPECIFICATIONS

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| List price | \$1695 |
| Suspension, front | telescopic fork |
| Suspension, rear | swing arm |
| Tire, front | 3.00-21 |
| Tire, rear | 4.10-18 |
| Engine, type | rotary valve, two-stroke |
| Bore x stroke, in.; | mm |
| Piston displacement, | cu. in.; cc |
| Compression ratio | 15:1 |
| Claimed bhp @ rpm | 30 @ 8700 |
| Claimed torque @ rpm | lb./ft. na |
| Piston speed @ rpm | ft./min. 3283 @ 8700 |
| Carburetion | 32-mm Bing |
| Ignition | CDI |
| Oil system | automatic injection |
| Oil capacity, pt. | 4.6 |
| Fuel capacity, U.S. gal. | 1.9 |
| Recommended fuel | premium |
| Starting system | primary kick |
| Air filtration | oil wetted foam |

POWER TRANSMISSION

| | |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| Clutch | wet, multi-disc |
| Primary drive | straight-cut gear |
| Final drive | # 520 chain |
| Gear ratios, overall:1 | |
| 6th | 11.40 |
| 5th | 13.01 |
| 4th | 15.56 |
| 3rd | 18.77 |
| 2nd | 24.59 |
| 1st | 31.60 |

DIMENSIONS

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Wheelbase, in. | 55.5 |
| Seat height, in. | 35.0 |
| Seat width, in. | 7.5 |
| Handlebar width, in. | 33.75 |
| Footpeg height, in. | 13.25 |
| Ground clearance, in. | 10.5 |
| Front fork rake angle, | degrees 25-31, adjustable |
| Trail, in. | na |
| Curb weight (w/half-tank fuel), lb. | 217 |
| Weight bias, front/rear, | percent 46/54 |

Strange finding for this model is that when the suspension parts were tested in the lab, the front forks were identical, the rear shocks nearly so and the rear springs seemed to have been reversed. The motocross model had springs rated at 70 lb./in. and the enduro machine had 100-lb. springs. The factory rep said that was right and anyway, he added, anybody who buys one of either bike will be a serious rider and will swap springs to suit himself so why worry about what comes from the factory?

Could be. Still, in our capacity of testers of production bikes, we'll note that the Qualifier did feel a bit stiff in back—this before we had the lab results—and the MX-3 bottomed off the high jumps. If we were consultants, we'd swap springs and try again.

In a sense, it's not quite fair to rate the Qualifier and the TNT together. They are two different bikes which share an engine and brakes, both top quality. In feel, though, they are very different and in the wild country the Qualifier simply flies away from the TNT (or from Brand Y, too.) Surprising that the IT, presumably made for the entire continental U.S. and Europe, is more tidy in the woods than the Quebec-bred Qualifier, and that the Qualifier is better in the wide open spaces,



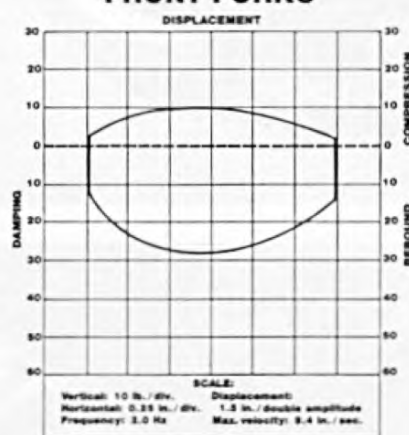
charging past its rivals across the whoop-dees and cross-grain as if they weren't there, but that's how it works out.

An in-general note: It has been our habit to refer to enduro-legal headlights as things which will serve to get you home if you get caught in the outback when the sun goes down. Optimistic. Happened during this test the Qualifier and IT were caught out after dark. Enduro-style headlights are good for maybe 5 mph when you don't know where you're going.

Moving to the MX-3 is another step up, another boost in power and a narrowing of direction.

The MX-3 is a racing motorcycle and nothing else. It's also a victim of circumstances. Can-Am began with a strong 175-

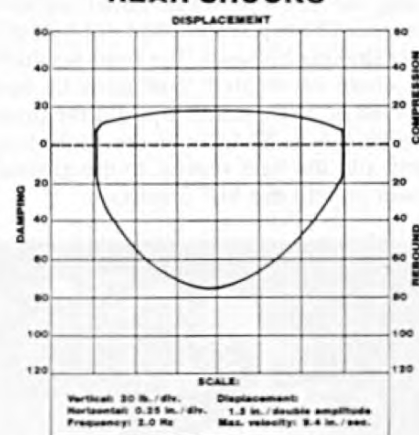
FRONT FORKS



Description: Betor fork, HD 315 oil
Fork travel, in.: 7.5
Engagement, in.: 3.8
Spring rate, lb./in.: 23
Compression damping force, lb.: 9
Rebound damping force, lb.: 29
Static seal friction, lb.: 25

Remarks: Forks on the MX-3 and Qualifier are identical except for color (MX-3 forks are black, the Qual's are natural). Travel, at 7.5 inches, is adequate for most situations, as are damping rates. We occasionally bottomed the forks, but switching to heavier fork oil would cure this. Two seals are used for oil retention, making the forks less compliant than they could be. The top seal should be gutted and used as a spacer, reducing seal friction by half.

REAR SHOCKS



Description: Gabriel (Canada) shock, freon bag, non-rebuildable
Shock travel, in.: 4.5
Wheel travel, in.: 7.0
Spring rate, lb./in.: 70
Compression damping force, lb.: 16
Rebound damping force, lb.: 76

Remarks: The MX-3 rear suspension works well as is, but is marginally light in both damping and spring rates. When these non-rebuildable shocks need replacement, a suitable aftermarket pair should improve handling. Straight-wound springs with an 80-lb. rate or some dual-rates (about 70/120) would be a good match for the bike.

Tests performed at Number One Products

cc engine and did well in the 175 class as well as in the 250 class, just because Can-Am had more power than anybody else. Rival 250s are now stronger than the Can-

Am 175, so Can-Am offers (and wins with) its own 250.

Meanwhile, though, there are classes for 175-cc enduros. When you don't build vast >

numbers of motorcycles, and you can make a model with only a few parts changes, a small but steady market is worth the effort. Therefore, Can-Am has the MX-3 175. The displacement size for this joint test was our choice, so we could compare model with model. Unless you live in an area with 175-cc motocross racing, neither we nor Can-Am recommend you buy this bike.

Power from displacement is no problem at all. The MX-3 is a rocket. To get all the performance possible, Can-Am has dropped the final drive gearing and tuned the engine so it works best within a narrower range. Add that to the gearing and you have a machine that's fast and quick within the range of speeds normally possible on a normal motocross track. Top speed is less than with the Qualifier and plunking through the rocks at a crawl is a lot of work.

While the adjustable steering head allows individual settings, Can-Am has its own preference. The TNT and Qualifier were delivered with 30 deg. rake, and the MX-3 had 29 deg., for quicker turning.

Even more than for the enduro version, riding the MX-3 to full potential required practice. The first session had our best test rider shaking his head. The front wouldn't go where he wanted. Not until he had experimented for many laps did the times tumble down: Slide onto the tank, turn early, put the bars vertical to the ground, power on and the MX-3 works.



Budgets must play a part here. The Gabriel shocks seemed to do their job well, allowing for an inch or so less travel than the racers from other factories have this year. Spring rates have been mentioned. The forks weren't exactly a disappointment. More like a shortcoming. The time






of the leading axle fork has arrived. They work better than centerline forks. The MX-3 250 has leading axle Marzocchis. Can-Am is working on leading axle forks for the other models; probably they'll appear when the factory can afford the risk and investment.

In the hands of an experienced and adaptable rider, an MX-3 can win its class, provided there's a 175-cc class or the competition isn't as good as the Can-Am owner is.

As a play bike, the MX-3 is not the answer. Too much work at the slow end, too many revs at the top end. For desert racing, sure. Kick the front end out two degrees, fit the optional silencer and stiffer springs and go for it. Should be just the ticket for a budget racer who can't afford to build a mass-produced stocker as stock as the factory teams use.


Other companies have fobbed off road bikes as dual-purpose bikes. The purists have said you can't have a good time unless you're on a full built competition bike.

An enthusiast willing to accept some limitations, like a few pounds here and a few horses there, will find that the other companies were clumsy and the purists were wrong.

Comparison Test? Sure. Score it Can-Am 3, Folklore 0. 

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