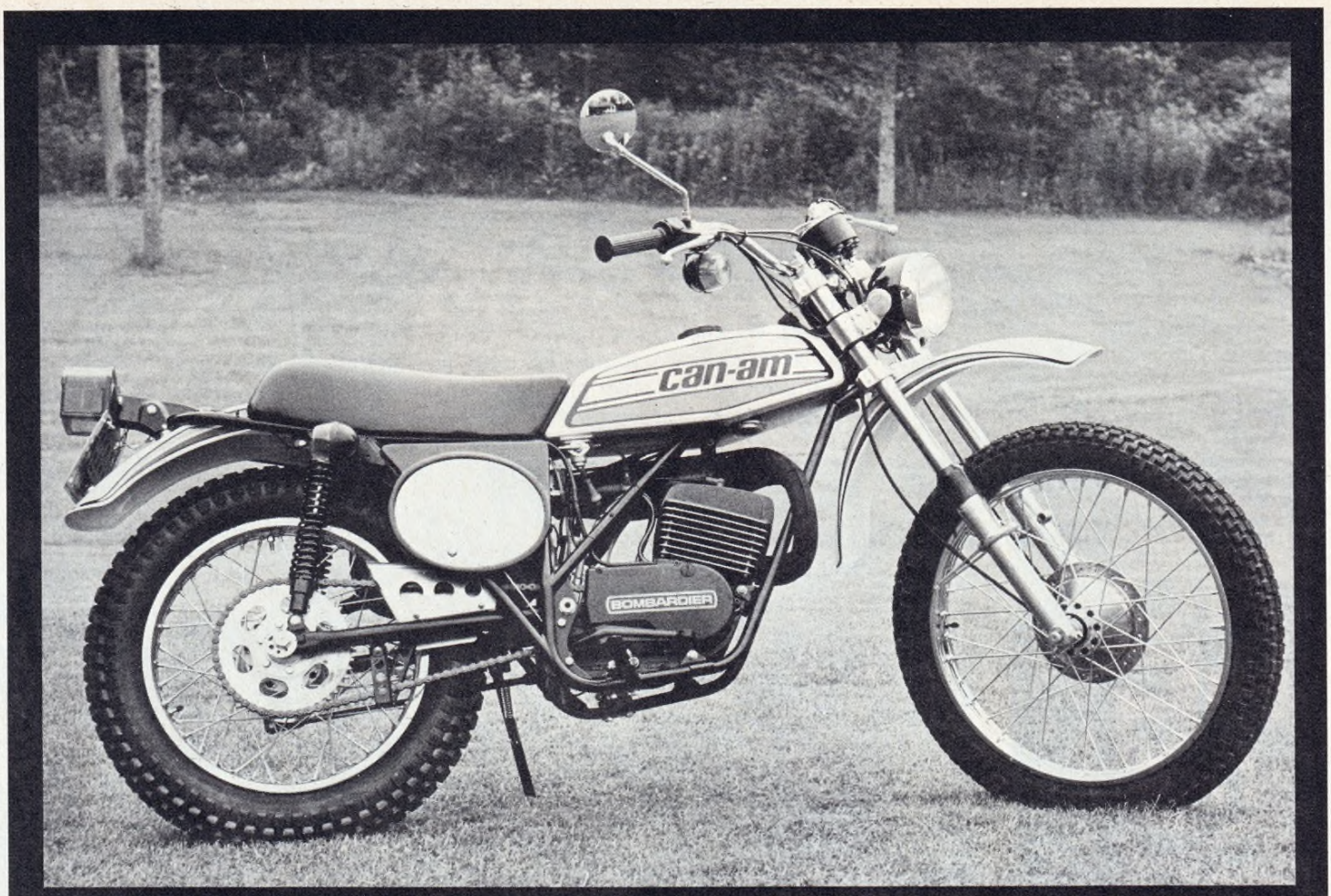
CAN-AM 175 T'NT LONG-TERM EVALUATION

Nine Months Later and Still in Love.

WE WERE PRE-ENTERED in the grueling 500-mile Greenhorn Enduro. It was only four days away when we finally got the call from DeWayne Jones that our 175 Can-Am had arrived at their shop and would be ready the following morning. We knew it would be close and we were prepared. Already sitting in various corners of the CYCLE WORLD shop were a new set of Cheng Shin tires, new grips, a Kawasaki Air Bottle/Tire Sealer, a Webco spark plug carrier, and a few extra tools. We know that this doesn't sound like a lot of changes in order to make a street/trail bike into a good enduro mount, but, actually, we had too much. We've yet to need either of the spark plugs.

There was one thing that we did need. That was a good-running motorcycle. We didn't have it. Oh, it felt fine while popping late-afternoon wheelies in the parking lot, and it never missed a beat as we ran the bike at full song up and down the local avenue, but it really wasn't right. Unfortunately, we didn't discover it until it was too late.

Greenhorn morning was hectic. Up at two a.m., drive down to the office where we all would meet, caravan until we found an all-night eatery of at least palatable quality, then drive some more, finally arriving at the start. It was six a.m. and we were scheduled to start on the 31st minute. Between the four members of TEAM CYCLE WORLD, friends who also wanted to ride the 'Horn, girlfriends and wives who tagged along, dogs, two pit trucks and the usual sign-up hassles, it was a miracle we ever got off on time, but we did. >



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First a little tour through the foothill streets of Pasadena, where we managed to get lost twice in two miles, then up into the hills. Five miles out, problems.

The Can-Am started running rich. At first it began as a slight blubbering on the top end, but very slowly, as the miles piled on, it began getting worse. Anger seems to be instinctive when something goes wrong with your bike and we were mad, but we kept trying to figure out what it was as we rode along. Maybe we overdid it when it was new and scored the piston a little. Or maybe the rings were seating in and, with blow-by diminishing, the mixture was burning richer. Whatever it was, the bike was still running, so we weren't going to screw around with it until it got really serious. Besides, it just might clear itself up.

After one gas stop, we hit the first check some 83 miles out. Perfect. We zeroed it. But the Can-Am had been getting progressively worse. We stopped to change the jetting. The Bing carburetor is pretty easy to change jets on, but you have to really be careful as you work around a hot engine. Five jetting changes later, still no improvement. We put the stock jet back in and fired up the bike. First kick, just like always, it fired. As we pulled away from that first check, the bike and rider were 57 minutes behind schedule. But the schedule was an easy one on this part of the 'Horn and the next check was more than 60 miles away.

By now, the Can-Am could only be run at one-quarter throttle. The engine would eventually get up to maximum revs in each gear, though acceleration lacked its usual briskness. Opening the throttle any more than one-quarter would start the engine blubbering. Eighty mph indicated was finally coaxed out of the 175 as it and the rider flew through a small mountain town, elevation 8000 ft. The sign said Speed Limit: 35 mph, but the local *gendarme* was not to be seen, and no one complained. Rider after rider was passed on the highway before the course markings indicated a dirt trail to be followed.

Riding the faltering bike on the trail was a chore. The concentration needed to maintain the exact throttle opening while bounding over the terrain—upshifting, downshifting, cornering and braking—was tiring. But, by the second check, 47 of those late minutes had been made up.

Later on the first day, the schedules tightened up, and the machine could no longer be coaxed into performing well. Just a little more than 210 miles from the start, way behind schedule, the rider and machine retired. There's no doubt that they could have finished the first day, but it would have been futile since they would have been eliminated for being over an hour late at the final check. Still, the engine would run.

After the 'Horn, we discovered what the problem with the engine was. One of the engine seals was defective. All day long it had been seeping transmission oil into the lower end. The incredible thing was, that the engine didn't seize or even show signs of impending seizure. It was running in the area of 9000 rpm for 10 minutes straight at times and it showed no signs of sticking. Not only would the small throttle opening cause it to run lean, but the mixing of Torco two-stroke oil

and gear lube from the transmission would certainly have caused problems. But the engine proved itself nearly bullet-proof. And it continues to prove it every time we race it.

Once the problem had been corrected (under warranty), the bike ran like a champ. The spark plug has been removed several times for cleaning, but to this day, it is still running on the same Champion N-57G that it came with.

We were warned that Can-Am shift levers break readily, so we obtained a spare and gray-taped it to the handlebars. By now, the rust has probably welded it there. The original lever is still on the Can-Am, having been bent and rebent so many times that you wonder if it isn't really made of rubber. The brake and clutch levers *do* break easily, though. Of course, each time we break one, it's our fault. They don't break if you don't fall, yet it would be nice if they had more give.

Since the initial run in the Greenhorn, the T'NT has seen action in countless enduros, several motocrosses, and even a grinding two-hour GP. TEAM CYCLE WORLD has trophied on the Can-Am in each category. And when we didn't, it was the rider's fault.

The Can-Am's reputation is built mostly on its engine. A 175cc mill that produces in excess of 22 bhp, yet retains one of the broadest powerbands around, is quite a feat. But the handling deserves some praise, as well. Considering the fact that the bike is traditionally suspended in a world of forward-mounted everything, it performed adequately when new. But it wasn't long before the S&W shocks wore out from sheer abuse and the fork springs began to collapse. We replaced the shocks with Konis. They were worse than the worn S&Ws. So we took them apart and discovered badly scored pistons in the shocks. After replacing the pistons, the dampers came up to par. You expect a lot when you buy Konis and we were disappointed in the condition of our new shocks. Once repaired, all was forgiven, as control returned to the rear of the machine.

Control returned, but the rear end is still troublesome in one respect. It lacks the travel we have become accustomed to after riding several of the long-travel '75 models. Can-Am is working on this and has supplied an improved swinging arm set-up for our evaluations. See the accompanying sidebar for details.

The forks were much more trouble. Since there were no stock springs available from any of the Can-Am dealers near us, we obtained a pair of 20-in. 20-lb. springs from Webco. They said that these springs were a perfect fit in a pair of Betor forks like the stockers on the T'NT. But they were far too stiff. We spoke with the Can-Am people and they said that the spring rate was correct, but that we should try 19-in. springs. These were much better. At least now we were back where we started. We had good fork action and control at the rear. And the engine was still churning merrily mile after mile.

We were getting ready for the Barstow-to-Vegas desert classic when, on the night before the race, we discovered that we were out of Torco oil. Since it was well past closing time at the local cycle shops, all we could do was fill up the rest of the injection tank with Klotz. Normally we wouldn't have done this, but after our experience in the Greenhorn, we knew that the engine probably wouldn't know the difference. It didn't.

Barstow-to-Vegas was the bike's only DNF. Trying to play follow-the-leader in dust as thick as soup, the Can-Am hit a rock that flattened the rear tire, not to mention the rim. But the engine continued to run.

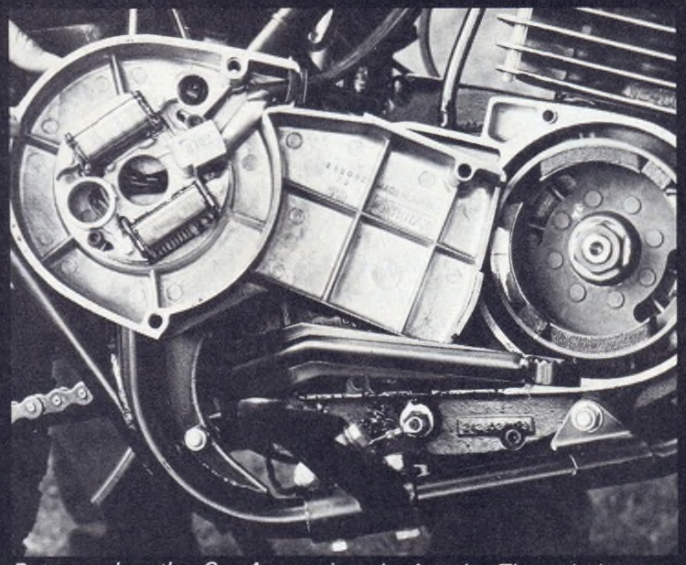
The T'NT Can-Am models come with a 2.5-gal. tank, stock. On our 175, this was good for about 70 miles of enduro riding. The least mileage we ever got was 63 miles before going on reserve. The most was 80-plus riding on the street. Considering the performance, we'd say the mileage was average. In all of the events we've ridden, we've yet to run out of gas. Even in the problem-plagued Greenhorn. And you can almost forget about the oil. The main frame backbone doubles as an oil reservoir tank for the injection system. It holds 2.3-qt. of lubricant, enough for at least three, and sometimes four, tanks of gasoline.

Another advantage of the Can-Am is its adjustable steering angle. Our bike came set at one degree from maximum rake (30 degrees) which was pretty good. The front end pushed in the corners, but the extra rake gave us the high-speed stability we need for some of those California desert enduros.

The rear brake has been excellent since the first day. The front one didn't seat in completely until after some 300 miles had been put on the bike, although it did improve steadily until that point. Now, after more than 2000 miles of competition, they are nearly worn and will soon need replacing. Darn good mileage considering the elements. And they're virtually waterproof.

The engine is the same way. No amount of moisture seems able to seep in and disturb either the carburetor or the ignition. We've never had to set the timing and yet the bike has >

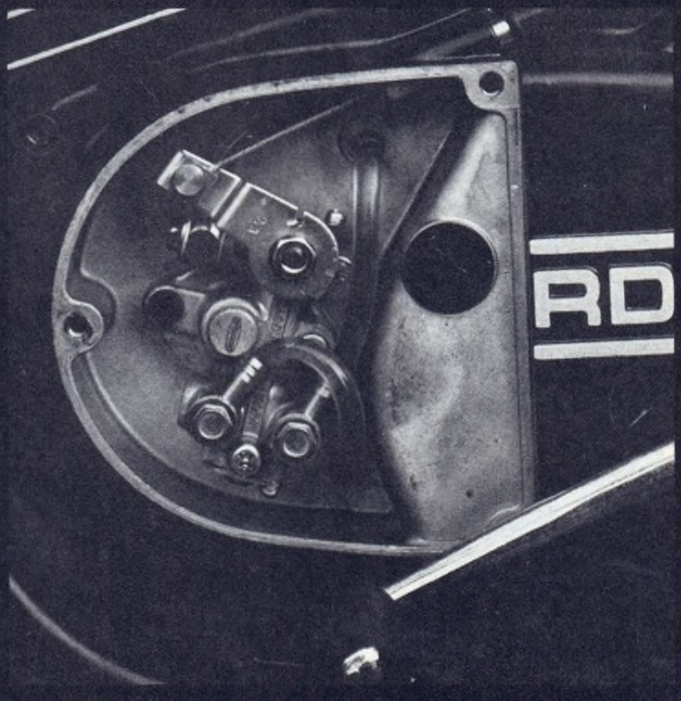
Photography: Fernando Belair, Walt Fulton



Rotax makes the Can-Am engines in Austria. The pointless ignition never let us down.

Although most of the damage has been straightened, the rock that damaged this rim was the cause of our only DNF once we got the bike running right.

The oil pump kept everything properly lubricated, even under the most trying circumstances.



The last tire on the Can-Am was a 4.10-18 Dunlop. It worked fine until it started chunking.

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never failed to start. We can't testify as to whether the kickstarter can absorb more than one tromp at a time, because we never had to give it more than that.

The present condition of our Can-Am is as follows. The rear rim still bears the scar of the encounter with the rock, although most of the damage has been hammered into submission. The neat Can-Am logo is almost gone from the tank, having been rubbed off by numerous pairs of racing leathers. The 3.50-21 Cheng Shin is still on the front wheel, although it should have been replaced a couple hundred miles ago. We've gone through four rear tires, the latest being a Dunlop 4.10-18 that has started to chunk badly. The best tire we found for the bike was a 4.25-18 Barum six-ply. It's a bit much for deep sand, but anywhere else it's perfect. We sheared one footpeg off, but a new one bolted right into place.

The ends of both levers are broken, but the levers are operable. A small leak has developed on the shift-shaft seal. A half hour and a couple of bucks should have that fixed. All three original cables—throttle, brake and clutch—are still on the bike and haven't frayed. The seat foam has lost some of its cushion, but the seat hasn't torn despite numerous get-offs.

As you can see, after our early troubles were diagnosed and remedied, our problems with the Can-Am have been few and minute. At the same time, the adventures we've had on the bike have been many, with lots more still to come. It has impressed all of us tremendously. So much, in fact, that one of our editors purchased the very same test bike. A stronger testimonial is hard to come by.

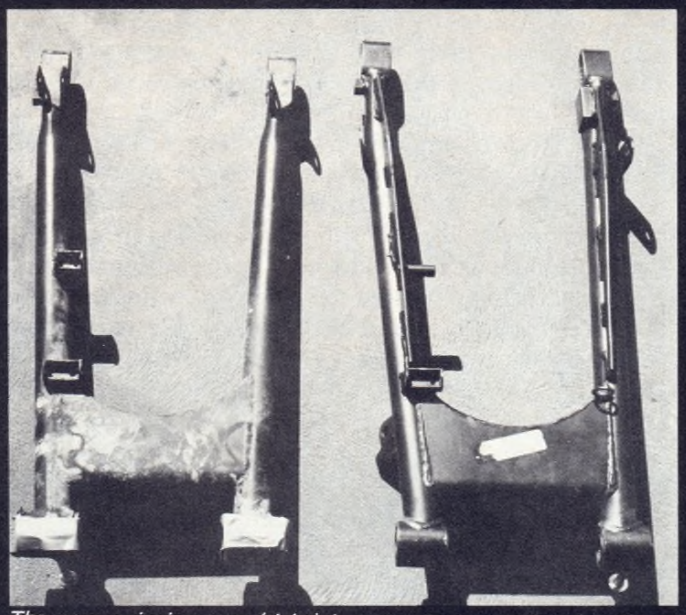
CAN-AM SIDEBAR

IF ANYTHING ON the Can-Am we tested had to be labeled sub-par, it would be the suspension. Not because it *is* sub-par as far as suspension goes, but because the other elements that make up the Can-Am motorcycle each have a certain element of superiority. The suspension is just plain normal. It allows the rider to control the motorcycle, within the limits of the travel the components provide. But you can go very fast with the powerful 175cc engine. And, in so doing, you begin to exceed the limits of the "plain" suspension. Once all of the travel is gone, any remaining unabsorbed forces are transmitted to the rider. The obvious solution would be to get more travel.

The area suffering the most from lack of sufficient travel is the rear. Our initial plans were to modify the frame and install a pair of gas/oil dampers in either a slanted or forward-mount position. But Can-Am realizes that the serious enduro rider/racer needs more travel. So, they've developed their own combination of parts that, with one simple modification (a weld), can increase rear axle travel from 3.5 in. to just over five.

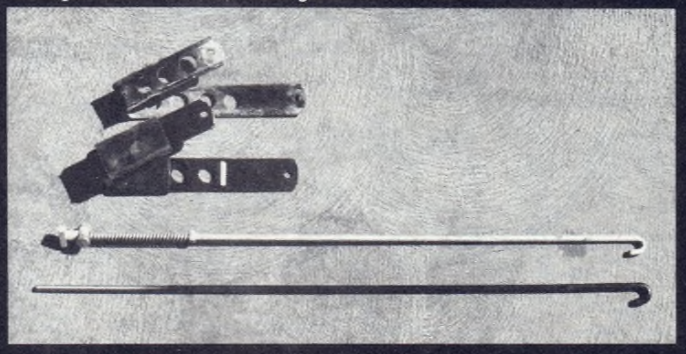
Since the original Can-Am silencer box mounts directly in front of the left rear shock, in order to move the shocks forward, you must eliminate the silencer. For this purpose, a new exhaust pipe is part of the package. The pipe looks very similar in shape to the standard one until you come to the area where the old pipe plugged into the silencer. Instead, the pipe continues rearward into a spark arrester and terminates in a fiberglass-packed silencing tip. The pipe carries heat shields to protect the rider's leg, but is well tucked in anyway.

With the new pipe comes an additional bracket that must >

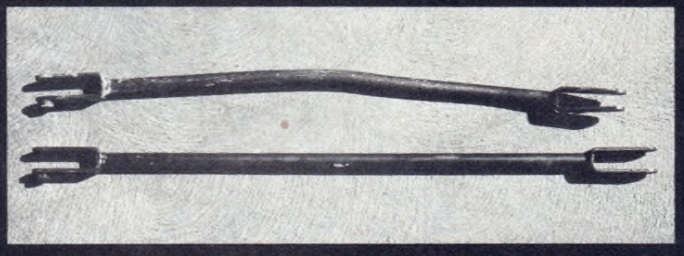


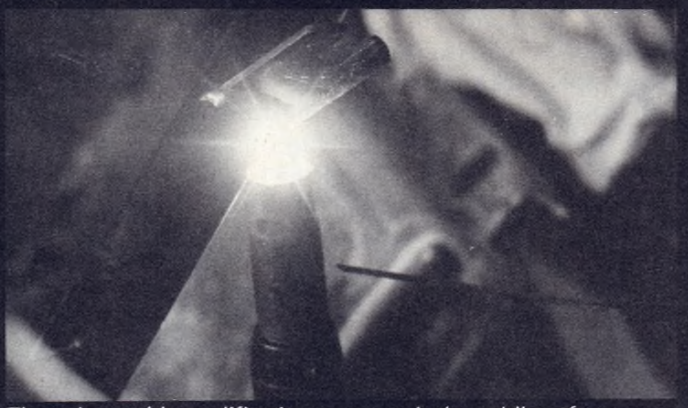
The new swinging arm (right) is not only longer, but has the lower shock mounts farther forward than the stocker.

A longer brake rod and chain guide are included.



The brake anchor arm on top displays numerous encounters with rocks and other elements. It is replaced by the longer arm below.





The only outside modification necessary is the welding of an additional exhaust pipe mount for the new up-pipe.

The completed modification looks like this. A little more than five inches of travel are available.

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be welded to the frame. Although it is about a pound lighter than the old exhaust arrangement, the new pipe still weighs nine lb. and needs the additional strength of the added bracket.

The rest of the kit consists of a new swinging arm that is slightly longer than the stocker. The shock mounts are also farther forward. A new brake anchor arm, as well as a longer brake rod and a new chain guide, is included. The kit even comes with new S&W shock absorbers. Of course, the springs are stiffer because of the increased leverage of the longer arm and new shock position.

After removing all of the hardware from the old swinging arm, install the items onto the new arm. Then remove the old swinging arm. Now it will be necessary for you to unbolt the battery/toolkit box from behind the right side panel. With this done, the airbox can be removed so that its plastic surface is not damaged during the welding of the new exhaust pipe bracket.

With the bracket in place, reinstall the airbox and the battery box. Slip on the new swinging arm, making sure that all friction surfaces are properly greased before installation. Can-Am does not specify the amount of pressure needed to properly torque the swinging arm nut, but tighten it until the arm will stay put when placed in a horizontal position. Then keep an eye on the bolt the first few times you ride.

Hooking up the shocks is a breeze; but remember to secure

them to the most forward of the two upper mounting holes. On the left side, the rear hole is the final mounting point for the pipe. Before securing the pipe into place, check to see whether it comes into contact with one of the old silencer-box mounts. It might not, but if it does, get out your hacksaw and remove the old mount. Then slide the pipe into place.

Because of the longer swinging arm, you will have to add a small piece of chain. If your chain is getting old, now would be the perfect time to replace it. When adjusting your chain, it is best to keep in mind that it should be just a little looser than normal. The rear axle is sweeping a bigger arc now, and there is more of a difference between the chain's tension at rest and at the point of greatest tautness than what you've become accustomed to.

With all of the steps completed, it's time to go for a ride.

Right away you'll notice the increased smoothness. If you've had experience with long-travel rear suspension setups, then you will be able to tell that this one falls short of true luxury; but it certainly is an improvement. Very light riders (130 pounds and under), will find the spring rate on the harsh side. Larger riders—those for whom the spring rate is better suited—will like it just the way it is.

After you stop concentrating on the pleasures of the improved suspension, other changes will catch your interest. Since the rear of the machine has been raised to provide the room needed for the increased travel, the fork rake has decreased slightly. The bike steers slightly quicker. Of course, with a Can-Am there is, because of the adjustability built into the steering head, no problem if you want to make it steer the way it did.

Another change is in high-speed stability. The wheelbase is longer and, once the rake decrease has been corrected for, that keeps the machine from veering off the line you've chosen.

We still plan to modify our Can-Am and use those gas/oil dampers. But we would have needed the new swinging arm anyway, and the cost of the shocks would be too much for most people. And then there's the expense of restructuring parts of the frame at the rear. If cost isn't a serious consideration with you, then stay tuned and we'll present our modification in a future issue. But for the competitive trail rider, or the serious enduro rider on a budget, the Can-Am kit, available through your dealer, is your ticket to ride.