LAVERDA JOTA 1200 AMERICA

Backing Off the Boy-Racer Valve Hasn't Tamed the Big Triple

■ Circumstances alter impressions. After perhaps ten minutes and two miles aboard Laverda's Jota 1200 America, even a rider predisposed toward Italian Stallions will be ready for a choice of two actions: 1) Trade the Jota for four 400cc Twins, even up, or 2) Park the beast on its treacherous sidestand and walk away without listening for the crash as the monster topples over, which it surely will.

CYCLE WORLD TEST

Press beyond this initial barrier, though, and things change. As the road opens up and traffic falls away the Jota comes into its own, a roadster for the long, hard haul and never mind life in the city.

The Jota America is different, not only from the flock of multi-cylinder Superbikes currently on the market but from its own immediate predecessors.

When last seen on these pages the Jota was a racing machine, a 1000cc Triple lacking only number plates to be ready for the Bol d'Or and in fact in the U.S. on loan only as the various little bits and pieces, i.e. shift lever location and exhaust system, didn't meet U.S. rules. Further, the Jota was equipped strictly for hardcore sport and was a click or two beyond what even the most keen of sports riders would tolerate.

Laverda values the U.S. market. To keep our buyers happy, Laverda has modified the Jota; backed the race-ready rocket off by two clicks all the way 'round.

The major changes are internal. Bore is increased by 5mm and displacement is up to 1115cc (the 1200 tag being a rounding off on the high side, like an honorary military title). Compression has been reduced from 10:1 to 8:1, carbs are still 32mm Dellorto pumpers and the camshafts are (according to the specs) unchanged.

This is not your normal way to get more beans. Lowering the c.r. reduces power and torque all through the rpm range, and using the same carbs and cams on larger cylinders brings peak torque and power at lower revs. What you get is a bigger, softer motor. Laverda doesn't list a power rating for the 1200, but because quarter mile elapsed time is better and gearing is up and the 1200 weighs close to the same as the 1000, we'd say the 1200 does have more bhp than did the smaller engine. Miles per gallon is off a bit, 37.4 mpg for the 1200 and 38.9 for the 1000, which also makes sense. The 1200 is stronger and less efficient and quieter and there's less of a surge as the engine comes into its optimum rev band, although because there is so much power from either version of the thing that it's not something one notices.

This is a different engine. Laverda produced the Triple out of the 750 Twin, which, like most Twins from Europe, put both pistons in the same plane, with firing sequences 360 degrees apart. Japanese Twins usually use 180 deg. cranks, one slug up, one down. It makes sense, then, that when Laverda built a Triple, the Triple came with a 180 deg. crank in the European tradition, one up and two down, just like the Triumph Triple. Japanese Triples have 120 deg. cranks.

The 1200's up-and-down motion is not hard to notice. From idle to 3000 rpm, it feels as if one cylinder has gone home for the day. From 3000 to 5000, the impression is of a Twin-and-one-half. Over 5 thou, the collection of pistons becomes an engine, complete with strong-but-legal exhaust and the song of the carbs gulping air. Bravo, as we say for Italian Grand Opera.

Suspension is also softened but still strong. Forks have less compression damping and more rebound, with the same springs as fitted to the 1000. There's still more stiction than we'd like and the forks do not move as quickly as they are jarred by small bumps, but overall the 1200 is smoother. The rear shocks have been tipped forward, which has the effect of softer springs, and the former 100 lb./in. springs are now dual rate, 79/100 lb./in. Compression and rebound are both increased on the shock dyno but because of the leverage change, the overall effect is a gain in both comfort and control.

Steering rake has been increased, from 26.5 deg. to 28, and the usual gain in trail from this has been largely balanced by moving the stanchion tubes closer to the steering head. Laverda engineers said during the rework that they hoped to ensure control on the straight (the angle increase) while reducing steering effort at low speed (a function of trail).

For the rest, the adjustable and always low bars are higher and permanently shaped, the fuel tank is marginally larger and the chain is a #630, about the size you'd pick for towing aircraft carriers out of the harbor.

The Jota 1200 is what we've come to expect from Laverda: Besides being different, it's substantial, conveying a massive feeling that belies its relatively light weight. The double downtube frame is as flex-free in this edition as it has been in previous ones, upholding the Jota's reputation as a good friend to mountain riders. The good-looking cast alloy wheels, produced at home by Laverda, augment the bike's solid, predictable handling. First-rate Bosch CDI electrics light the Triple's fire. Japanese instruments furnish accurate reports of rpm, mph, etc. Dunlop K81 tires provide better-than-average stick. A Bosch H4 quartz-halogen headlamp generates about twice the lumins of an ordinary sealed beam headlamp. And the Brembo triple discs ensure right-now stops.

These are all quality licks, but at first it's hard to appreciate them. Hard is a word that comes readily to mind in thinking about the saddle. Narrow is another. Ill-considered (in reference to the two-plane seat) is still another. Although this seat's

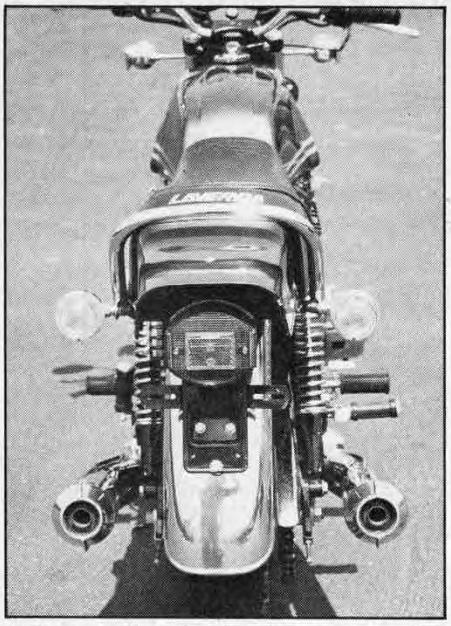
width is well calculated to hanging off the bike and is also nicely hinged for underseat access, there isn't anything else to say on its behalf. It begins to make inroads on the rider's consciousness about 25 miles along and absolutely refuses to be ignored after, say, 100 miles. We hate to even contemplate the idea of any grand touring on this thinly disguised sawhorse, even though the engine invites such endeavors.

If there's anything on the bike that'll keep the rider from thinking about his hindquarters, it's the clutch, which has the fiercest pull we've encountered in some time. Griewe summed it up best when he said it "feels like it's anchored to the frame."

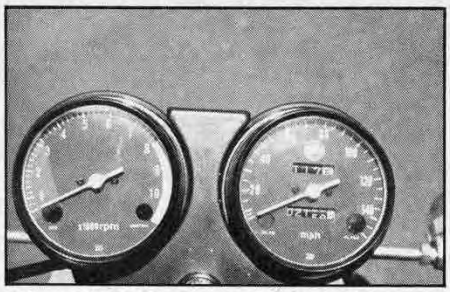
Although they don't cause actual physical discomfort, a couple other shortcomings diminish this sturdy machine. Foremost on this list is the sidestand, one of those spring-loaded self-return numbers common on European bikes. Besides limiting left side cornering clearance, this one is the most treacherous we've encountered in a long time, just waiting for an opportunity to send the bike crashing to the ground, which invariably results in one or more of the turn signals achieving aftermath status. The latter are as fragile as most of their kind, and would be considerably improved with rubber grommeting at the mounting points. The transmission is solid goods, as noted earlier, but the throws are rather long. And the location of the oil filler neck is cunningly calculated to ensure some spillage during toppings-up, even if you've got a hand like some hotshot surgeon from M*A*S*H. The mirror is hardly even worth talking about, let alone relying upon for rearward vision.

So much for the complaints. Taken singly, they aren't particularly forbidding. But the list has something else in common: the drawbacks are things one notices only>

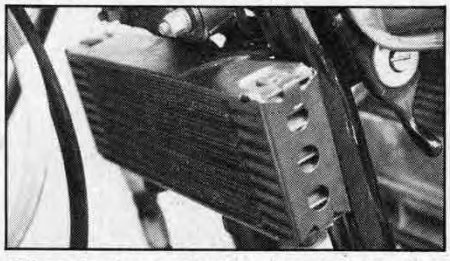
Action photos by Kirk Willis



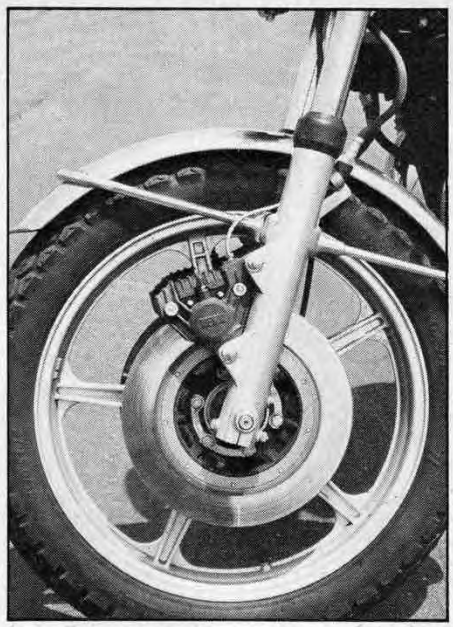
Balanced exhaust system is wasteful, as the dual mufflers exit one collector chamber.



Nippondenso instruments may take away from the handcrafted European image, but they do work.



Oil cooler is standard, a sign that the Jota was designed for hard running.



Forks are stiff but the double Brembo disc brakes are superb.

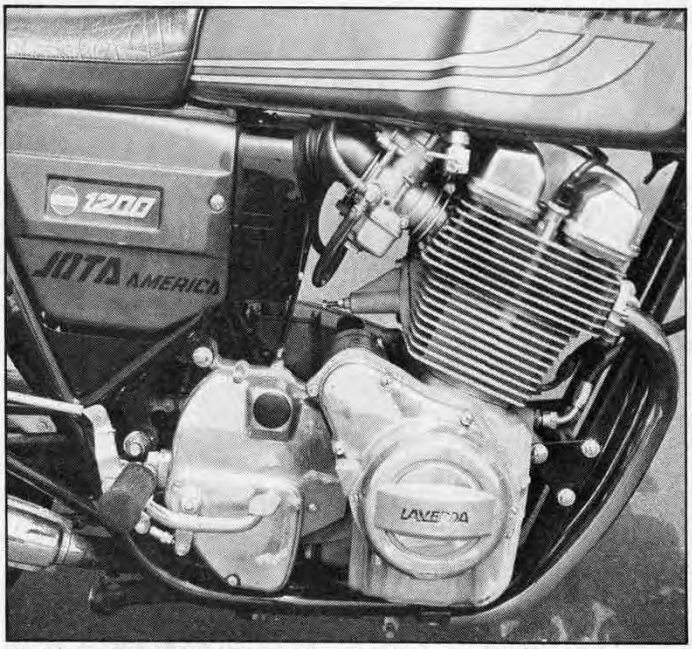
when there's nothing else to do, as in when the Jota is ridden in town or on the Interstate. If a buyer was so foolish as to mention clutch pull and heaviness around town, the Laverda designers probably would take the bike back; anybody who'd worry about stoplights and parking lots doesn't deserve a Jota.

Laverdas are road machines. At a sporting pace the handling is solid and predictable. The suspension that felt stiff for ordinary use is well suited to back-road bravery. Light taps on the rear brake produce nothing, as if the leverage wasn't enough. And it isn't, not with the suspension unloaded. The leverage and ratios of pedal to master cylinder and master to brake cylinder are picked so a firm foot works just right when the front brakes are full on and the rear wheel is unweighted, which is just when you want control.

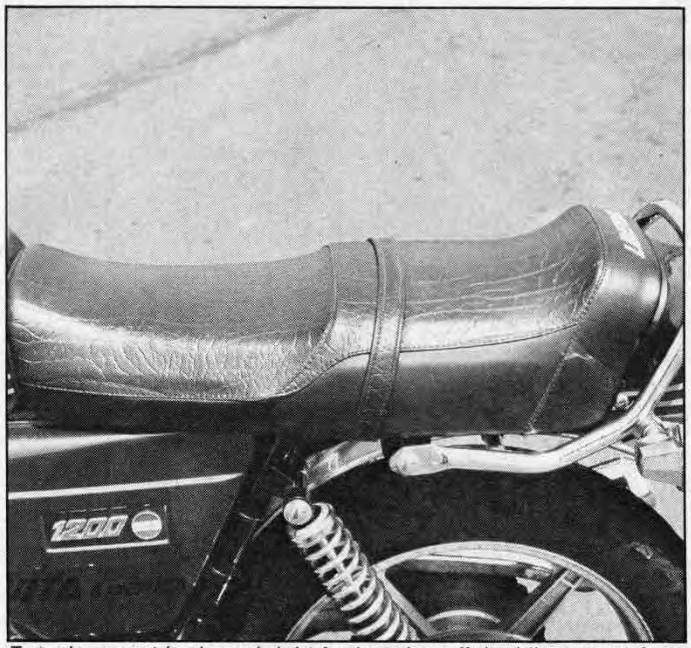
Although the slightly staggered footpegs seem to be mounted a trifle high on this rather tall motorcycle, they're set back far enough to make for a good sports riding position. The handlebars don't really seem to aid this, although they didn't draw any particular criticism from the test staff. They make the bike more manageable around town than clip-ons, and they're much better suited to touring; but we liked the universally adjustable low bars that distinguished our last Jota.

Cosmetically, the new Jota is intended to be distinctive, and no one could mistake it for anything else. It shares the lean, purposeful look of the Laverda big bike family and then some. The metallic maroon finish with burnt orange flashes isn't going to be everybody's cup of tea, but it's definitely got pizzazz. The brightwork is stainless steel, which cuts a bit off the bright in favor of longevity. We wish the front fenders of these big honkers would start looking a little less agricultural, but there's no denying they're built to last.

This goes for the whole bike. In the main, it's a solidly executed, very expensive piece for the rider who wants something that's distinctively different without having to give up too much performance to the rockets of the Big Four. The engine is one that can inspire the same kind of love men develop for Ducatis and BMWs, and in this update it's stronger than ever. The bike suffers in some of its minor details, but is obviously fastened together with quality as a primary objective. The overall package continues to be a highly desirable one.



Triple is named 1200, but displaces a bit more than 1100cc.



Two-plane seat is shaped right for hanging off the bike, wrong for just sitting there.

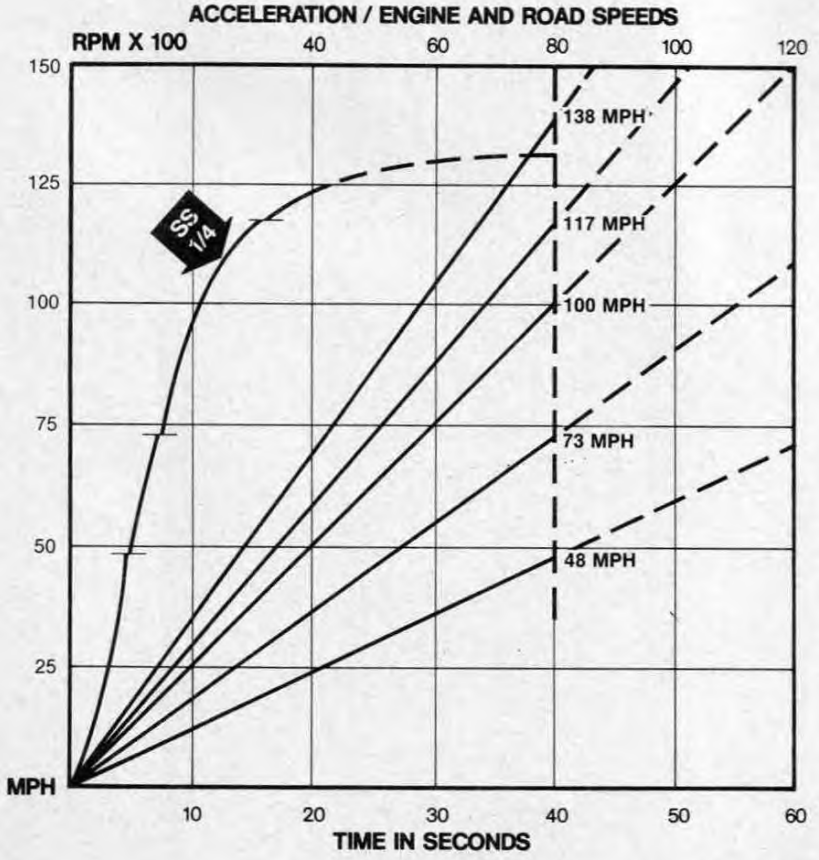
LAVERDA JOTA 1200 AMERICA

SPECIFICATIONS

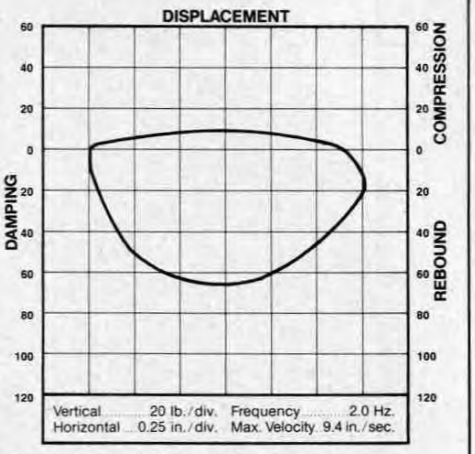
List price	$4250
Engine	dohc Triple
Bore x stroke	80 x 74mm
Piston displacement	1115cc
Compression ratio	8.0:1
Carburetion	(3) 32mm Dellorto
Air filtration	treated paper
Ignition	Bosch CDI
Claimed power	na
Claimed torque	na
Lubrication system	wet sump
Oil capacity	6.3 pt.
Fuel capacity	5.1 gal.
Recommended fuel	premium
Starting system	electric
Electrical system	12v 140w alternator
Clutch	multi-disc, wet
Primary drive	triplex chain
Final drive	#630 chain
Gear Ratios, overall:1	
5th	4.29
4th	5.04
3rd	5.90
2nd	8.09
1st	12.27
Suspension, front	telescopic fork
Suspension, rear	swing arm
Tire, front	4.10-18
Tire, rear	4.25-18
Brake, front	dual 10.8-in. disc
Brake, rear	10.9-in. disc
Total brake swept area	264 sq. in.
Brake loading (160-lb rider)	2.6 lb./sq. in
Wheelbase	57.3 in.
Fork rake angle	28 deg.
Trail	4.4 in.
Handlebar width	30.5 in.
Seat height	32.2 in.
Seat width	10.5 in.
Footpeg height	13.6 in.
Ground clearance	5.1 in.
Curb weight (w/half-tank fuel)	527 lb.
Weight bias, front/rear, percent	47.5/52.5

PERFORMANCE

Engine speed @ 60 mph	3485 rpm
Power/weight ratio, (160-lb. rider)	na
Fuel consumption	37.4 mpg
Speedometer error:	
30 mph indicated, actually	29.1
40 mph indicated, actually	38.5
50 mph indicated, actually	48.5
60 mph indicated, actually	58.5
Braking distance	
from 30 mph	31 ft.
from 60 mph	132 ft.
Standing start ¼-mile @ 108.82 mph	12.14 sec.
Speed after ½ mile	124 mph



FRONT FORKS

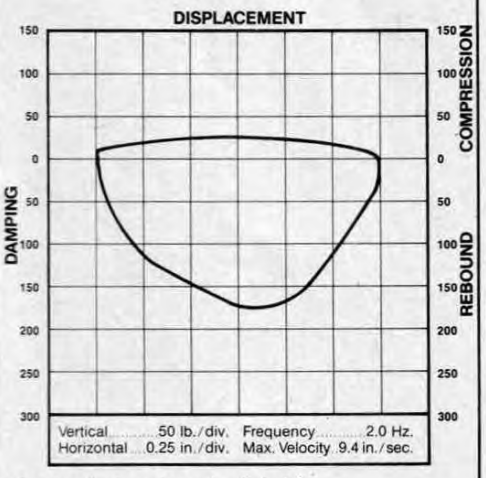


Ceriani straight-leg fork

Fork travel	5.9 in.
Engagement	6.2 in.
Spring rate	46 lb./in.
Compression damping force	9 lb.
Rebound damping force	65 lb.
Static seal friction	19 lb.
Stanchion tube diameter	38 mm

Forks on the Jota America are essentially the same as the units on the 1000 we tested in November, 1977. Compression damping has been reduced slightly, while rebound damping is increased. Comfort and control are improved, but seal friction is still too high. Gut the top seal in each leg for an increase in compliance.

REAR SHOCKS



Ceriani shock, rebuildable

Shock travel	3.9 in.
Wheel travel	4.8 in.
Spring rate	79/100 lb./in.
Compression damping force	25 lb.
Rebound damping force	170 lb.

A new mount locates the shock's upper end farther forward in a semi-cantilever position. Shock travel has been reduced, but wheel travel is ½ in. more. The original spring rate has been retained, but the damping has been increased substantially. The end product is an increase in both comfort and control, and an improvement in the bike's overall handling.

Tests performed at Number 1 Products