

Bultaco Frontera 370 MK II

FOUR DAY AFFAIR

With special thanks to Don Rhodes of Auburn Motorsports
for test bike set-up and preparation

By Paul Clipper





A lot of people have been wondering why we haven't been testing Bultacos, and a few folks are probably surprised to see this test now. It seems that the situation on the West Coast is becoming unfavorable for some distributors, and the end result in our case is a lack of test bikes. As a matter of fact, in the past year or so we've lost our KTM, Montesa, Ossa and Bultaco distributors and have to deal with the Eastern offices, which slows down the process considerably.

So when our friends in Washington offered us a new 370 Frontera to ride, we jumped at the chance to test it. The 370 we tested was basically stock. The only changes made were to drop one tooth on the countershaft to suit the mountainous terrain we'd be riding in, and we changed jetting when the need arose. The bike had a little over 100 miles of break-in time on it, which is just as well. Occasionally a brand-new, unbroken-in test bike will run so badly (before everything loosens up) that testing turns into a sit down and guess session as we try to jet it to run as we think it should. Anytime we can put a few miles on a bike before we actually test it, things go a lot smoother.

First impressions

One glance at the Frontera, and you just *feel* enduro. The bike is set up with excellent Preston Petty fenders, a headlight/number plate, centerstand and a speedo, and it looks like the kind of bike that begs to be ridden hundreds of miles. On this bike, the bars were cut down to a nice, narrow 30½ inches, just the width for serious woods riding. The levers are standard non-dogleg Bultaco numbers, grips are hard rubber items, and the speedo is calibrated up to 100 mph. You shouldn't need this feature very often.

After fiddling around with some picture-taking, dressing, and gassing up, we were ready to go. And not a moment too soon, in my opinion. People say that you can tell a lot about a bike by looking at it, but I could care less. Why stand around and gawk, when you can be riding?

My only worry was being able to start the bike without falling over. I haven't had a whole lot of experience with Bultacos, but enough to know



that no matter what it runs like, or how it handles, I will never be able to honestly say that I like the kickstarter position. Allow me to be perfectly clear on this point: I hate it.

Now that I have every Bultaco rider in the world laughing at me, I can relax. Bultaco kickstarters are about the simplest in the world, and it would take a real leadfoot to break one, I'm sure, but using one can occasionally be a real pain in the ass. First you click the pedal out, then push it back about 50 degrees until you feel it engage, and then give it a mighty boot. If it doesn't start, go through the whole ritual again, each time standing to the left side of the bike—which is leaning toward you at about 45 degrees—holding



on to the bars.

Words cannot describe accurately how awkward this position is, and on the side of a hill, it becomes a religious experience. I am told that once you get used to it, a Bul can be started while you're sitting in the saddle. But I don't believe it.

Another small gripe about the starting system, while I'm on the subject. As of 1979, the Frontera still does not have a primary kick system. If you're used to European bikes, this is hardly a problem, but after using a primary kick motorcycle for a long time, it's a bother having to find neutral every time you stall the bike out. Rumor has it that Bultaco will be using a primary system on their 1980 bikes.

The bike starts easily, at any rate. When cold, it'll be unusual for it to take more than two kicks, provided that the bike is kept in a good state of tune. Our bike started easily warm, but some owners experience a problem here. We never had a problem, hot or cold.

Once under way, things started feeling normal. The clutch on our tester had a tendency to drag when cold, but it never turned into a serious handicap. Stomping down for low revealed a nice, smooth engagement without any heavy graunching sounds. The shifter has a feel something like stepping on a beer can, almost as if the gearbox was full of tar, instead of oil. I was told this was perfectly normal. Don explained that it had something to do with the spring arrangement in the shifting mechanism. Whatever, aside from the peculiar feel, there weren't any problems, and the only time I would hit a false neutral would be during a sloppy first to second shift.

After I got used to these petty annoyances, the good points of the Frontera started showing through. First good point: torque. Lots of it. On level ground, first gear was a good get off and run alongside the bike gear, and even though this makes first useless in most situations, there are times when nothing else will do. Like having to start from a dead stop halfway up a hill, a trick I pull quite often.

Aiding and abetting the torque, is the heavy flywheel on the Frontera. There

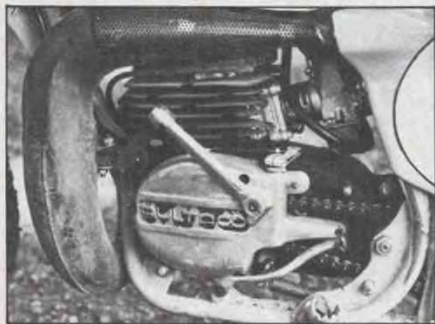
are three different flywheels available to fit, and ours had the heaviest. This made the bike very difficult to stall out, and consequently very slow revving. In tight woods, slow revving is the way to go, but if you like to lift the front wheel over obstacles you'll need a lighter one. I felt that the bike would be easier to ride quickly with one of the lighter options.

The magneto, by the way, is a Motoplat, one of the easiest units to check timing on, and there are no points to maintain. In the past, Motoplats have had a less than perfect reputation, but if you get a good one, it will never do you wrong. In a phone conversation with Bultaco they told us they had found a minor problem with a few units that made the bikes hard to start when hot. We had no problems with ours, but if you have any, give Bultaco a call and they'll be happy to help.

Soaking it up

The terrain we were riding on was a combination of loam, sand, dust, rocks, roots and water in a variety of altitudes ranging from just above sea level to almost 5000 feet. The altitude changes, in particular, made the most significant difference in the way the bike acted, and the Amal carb did its best to keep up with it. At one point, we had to change the pilot jet to improve the low-end response, and even went so far as to cut down the slide with a pen knife. I had never seen it done this way before, but Don assured me it was the hot setup. Whatever works. After two days, the Frontera lost most of its top-end power, but this was traced back to a clogged filter (we were riding in heavy dust), and a switch to a fresh filter brought the bike back to life.

The top-end power was never really what I would have expected on a 370, even though we spent most of our time riding in the lower throttle ranges. I suspect the bike was jetted really rich, and this, compounded by the problem of a new bike loosening up (which will make it run richer), may account for the loss. Amal carbs are not known to



The legendary Bultaco kickstarter. Even though the bike started without any hassle, I soon began to wish for a right leg about 14 inches shorter.



Forks have aircaps for adjusting the stiffness, can be used without air. After the first day we tried five pounds per and were quite happy.

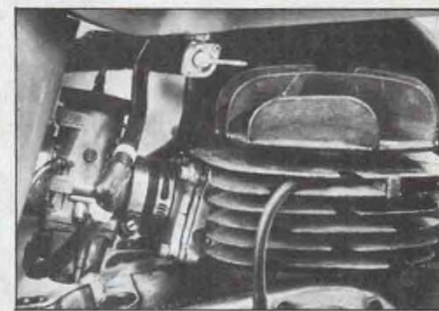
be the most efficient, though. On my first day out we rode about 60 miles, and at the 50-mile point I ran out of gas. The fuel tank holds only 2 3/4 gallons, and the bike was almost new, but I still believe that a different carb would use less gas.

Now, about those rocks and roots. Front and rear, the suspension was set up soft, by most standards, but it worked out to be just what we needed in the Washington woods. In high-speed desert-type riding, or on fast fire-roads, a stiffer suspension would be required, but on tight trails, the cushiness works to your advantage in keeping the wheels on the ground. On really nasty rough stuff I'd occasionally bottom one end or the other, but that's better than living with suspenders that're too stiff.

The forks stroke out at about 9.5 inches, and are conventional coil spring units with air caps, so you can dial them in to what's needed at the time. On our first day, I rode with no air pressure and decided afterwards that they were a little soft. We added about five pounds per leg and they were just fine. The nice thing about air forks is that by adding air, you can change the total effect of the forks without giving up a plush ride at low speeds—just as if you were changing the point at which they bottomed. The forks never started leaking—another surprise!

The shocks are S&W Freons, laid down on a well-gusseted swingarm, and they deliver 10.24 inches of travel. Rear-end action is also rather soft, and it matched the front end well. The S&Ws were preloaded to the second notch, and I occasionally had thoughts of boosting it up a little, but I guess it didn't bother me that much—I left them alone.

The tires are Pirelli Pentacross, laced to strong alloy rims. They protected the rims well in the rocks, but my hosts told me that they didn't work all that great in mud. Traction was never a problem wherever we went, except for a minor front-end washout problem that seems to be caused by the front tire. Apparently, the sidewalls are very



Amal carb is fed by two gas lines, one conventional petcock and a squeeze-the-ball Montesa type. Carb worked reasonably well, but fuel mileage was terrible.

flexible and allow the tread to squirm around a lot. The washout was never so bad that it caused me to lose it, but it certainly was the kind of thing that kept one on his toes.

Aside from the front tire problem, the handling was quick and accurate, aided by a generous amount of steering lock that made the Frontera a joy to ride in the tight stuff. It seems that the longer forks get, the more manufacturers are moving the steering stops in to limit turning radius, and it's refreshing to ride something that turns again. Even with the soft suspension, the ride was stable at higher speeds, and the quick steering was always predictable, except for the washout. After the second day, all the other guys were letting me lead through the sections (guess they got tired of me running into their backs), and the Bultaco was a genuinely nice bike to stretch out a lead on. Funny, it seemed to be most comfortable at about a 24 mph average...

Bits and pieces

The brakes worked well throughout the test. The front was strong with a minimum of effort, and the rear was just as good and showed no tendencies toward locking up. And then we went through a deep stream... no brakes at all! But, after dragging them for about a half-hour, they came back. The standard brake tricks should help here.

The speedometer never worked. Don said that some of them use a plastic drive gear in the front hub and it was most likely stripped. Bultaco makes metal replacement items.

All the lights worked, even the brake light.

Bultaco seats still slope forward, you'll be happy to know. However, the Frontera seems to scoot you into a proper riding position, at least.

We rubber-banded the centerstand up to stop the clanking; the spring holding it up seems to be a little soft. It embarrasses me to admit that I have no idea whether or not it works—I never used it.

Unless you're left-handed, the kickstand is on the wrong side.

The chain is excellent. In four days we did about 200 miles of laid-back riding and never had to adjust it.

The tank-mounted toolbox is a good idea, very convenient and easy to get to, but if you don't stuff a piece of rag in there, the jingling will drive you crazy.

After the fact

I didn't go into this test without being fueled with a lot of nasty rumors and superstitions about Bultacos, and there were times that I really wasn't all that choked up about riding one. I'm glad to find out that a lot of the things

Bultaco Frontera 370

NAME AND MODEL	Bultaco Frontera 370
ENGINE TYPE	Single-cylinder, two-stroke
BORE AND STROKE	.85 X 64mm
DISPLACEMENT	363cc
HORSEPOWER (CLAIMED BY FACTORY)	42.2 at 7500 rpm
CARBURETION	Amal 40mm
FACTORY RECOMMENDED JETTING:	
MAIN JET	.600
NEEDLE JET	.112
JET NEEDLE	2F1
PILOT JET	.30
SLIDE NUMBER	4.0
RECOMMENDED GASOLINE	Minimum 86 ron octane
FUEL TANK CAPACITY	10.5 liters (2.76 gallons)
FUEL TANK MATERIAL	Plastic
LUBRICATION	Primary: SAE 30, gearbox SAE 90
OIL CAPACITY	300cc/600cc
AIR FILTRATION	Foam filter
CLUTCH TYPE	Wet, multi-disc
TRANSMISSION	Five-speed, constant mesh
GEARBOX RATIOS:	
1	.319
2	.457
3	.621
4	.820
5	1.0
GEARING, FRONT/REAR	13/42
IGNITION	Motoplant CDI
PRIMARY KICK SYSTEM?	No
RECOMMENDED SPARK PLUG	Champion N3
SILENCER/SPARK ARRESTOR/QUALITY	Yes, reasonably quiet
EXHAUST SYSTEM	Up-pipe, left side
FRAME, TYPE	Single downtube, chrome moly
WHEELBASE	1420mm (56 inches)

GROUND CLEARANCE	345mm (13.6 inches)
SEAT HEIGHT AT TANK	940mm (37 inches)
STEERING HEAD ANGLE	N/A
TRAIL	N/A
WEIGHT WITH ONE GALLON GAS	245 pounds
RIM MATERIAL	Aluminum alloy
TIRE SIZES:	
FRONT	3.00 x 21, Pirelli Pentacross
REAR	4.50 x 18 Pirelli Pentacross
SUSPENSION:	
FRONT, TYPE AND TRAVEL	Leading axle forks/240mm (9.456 inches)
REAR, TYPE AND TRAVEL	S&W Freon shocks/260mm (10.24 inches)
INTENDED USE, MFR	Competition, off-road
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	Spain
PRICE, APPROX	\$1845
PARTS PRICES, HIGH-WEAR ITEMS:	
PISTON ASSEMBLY, COMPLETE	\$60.00
RINGS ONLY	\$7.70
CYLINDER LINER	\$60.00
SHIFT LEVER	\$18.50
BRAKE PEDAL	\$9.90
FRONT SPROCKET	\$8.00
DISTRIBUTOR:	
Bultaco International	
P.O. Box 62547	
Virginia Beach, Virginia 23462	
OVERALL RATING, FROM 0 TO 100, VARIOUS CATEGORIES, KEEPING INTENDED USE OF MACHINE IN MIND:	
HANDLING	85
SUSPENSION	90
POWER	95
COST	90
ATTENTION TO DETAIL	90
EFFECTIVENESS, STONE STOCK	94

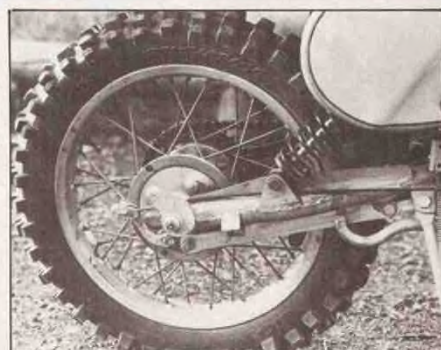


Headlight and all plastic is by Preston Petty. Gas cap never leaked, speedometer never worked.

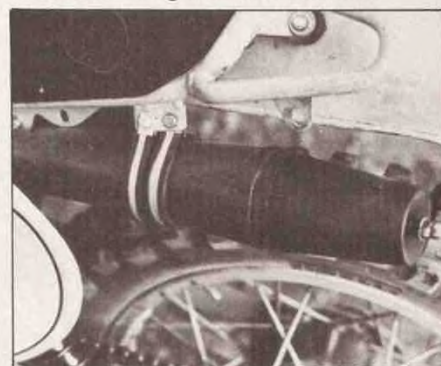


Just in case we forget how long our forks are.

I'd been told were wrong, and it was kinda fun being surprised by things I knew I wasn't going to like. After spending four days on the bike, I'd honestly have to say that this is the



Rear brake rod is well-protected, runs under shock eye. The brakes worked fine until we got them good and wet. Chain is among the best available.



Super-Trapp unit is very effective, but the discs will plug up if the bike runs too rich.

first serious enduro bike in a long time that I wouldn't mind owning, and I really didn't like leaving it behind when I left. It's that good.

But I still hate the kickstarter. □