

# STROKIN' AROUND ON THE...



## YAMAHA XT250

*At Home on the Range*

**The Staff of Dirt Bike**

We've always kind of fancied four-strokes here at Dirt Bike, but when it came to the dual-purpose lines, we were left a bit cold. Honda seemed to be the only ones interested in producing a decent street/trail thumper for a while, but in recent years both Yamaha and Suzuki have been glancing over at the market and coming out with four-bangers of their own. Yamaha brought in their XT500, and Suzuki introduced their SP model. Still, Honda had the only complete line, ranging from a little XL80 up to the 500.

This year, Yamaha not only introduced their new XT250 four-stroke street/trail dualer, which expanded their line of thumpers, but they also showed us the looks of things to come in the whole four-stroke street legal market. The XT is designed to be a

dirt bike, first and foremost, with light weight and maneuverability that is surprising for a first-time effort, especially on a four-stroke.

Some of the things that prove the XT is built to go in the roughest of nature are the frame, suspension, and little detail attention. When you look at the frame, it doesn't appear to be "bulky", or over-tubed like its bigger XT brother. Instead, it's thin and light, and resembles the DT two-stroke dual-purpose line. And the suspension is a combination of leading axle front forks with a monoshock rear end, a feature that the big XT and TTs lack as well.

As for the "little details" that add up to so much; a finned front plastic fender was mounted for better engine cooling and to save weight, blinkers are rubber-mounted, and even the

rear fender is plastic, which is a rarity on street legal bikes. Some other goodies include a skid plate, a plastic chain guard, and urethane block chain tensioner, plastic side panels and air box, dog-leg levers, and a headlight with built-in speedometer, signal/neutral/highbeam light indicators, and large-numbered odometer. And none of it hidden by the bars.

### **Out on the Trail**

Don't be afraid to take the XT250 off of the pavement. It can handle it. We thrashed our tester around every pary of Indian Dunes, then tortured it at Texas Canyon. The only major problem we ran into were the claw-action tires. They wouldn't grip anything when it came time to seek traction. In the sand, the tires spun around a while, somewhat hooked,



we think, then wallowed around a bit before spinning out to the sides. On a loamy motocross track, with a berm, they still refused to stick. And on a silty uphill . . . argh! Forget it. Nope. They flat refused to cooperate.

The forks and shock, in stock form, weren't bad, considering that this is a dual-purpose bike. Usually we can take the forks and ram the tubes through the bottom of the legs, yet in some medium-sized stutter bumps, we only bottomed them three times in seven passes. They didn't jolt arms and shoulders, as you would expect, and had damping that worked well overall. The mono hopped around more, however, but it was still not nearly as bad as the dualer monos in the past. Yamaha really put together a good combination of forks and shock on the XT250, and we rate it as one of the finest dual-purpose bike suspensions.

The motor is another fine piece of equipment. It might seem hard to believe, but the XT's motor was actually faster and stronger than the pure dirt TT250. It had a better midrange and top end, with an equal bottom pull. Our only complaint was the gearing selected for the TX. As a dual-purpose bike, it should be geared a little higher for street use. The XT was way too low. Pulling a few more teeth on the countershaft sprocket should solve the matter quite effectively. Power is delivered smoothly and easily on the XT, and once it gets built up, it feels strong. But it does take some time for it to build.

The kickstarter is a nice, long arm that allows easy booting, and tucks away right over the pipe and back towards the carburetor. An automatic compression release is also featured on the XT, but we had problems with ours. The cable arm stuck on the release at the top of the motor, and had to be pried back with the help of a screwdriver. Without pulling it back, the bike would not start, or even remotely belch a puff of smoke. Keep the area well lubed to try and avoid this problem, and carry around your screwdriver at all times.

Little things that aid the XT off-road are clawed footpegs, the skid plate and dog-legged levers, and a condensed headlight/speedo unit. With those and other extras, the XT was very maneuverable, versatile, and



easy to ride. It didn't fight to turn, and the suspension made the rough sections easier to live with. It was a bike at home in the dirt.

#### **Pavement Pounding**

Although we spent the majority of our time on the XT riding it to and from the testing areas we thrashed it in, we still felt it was a better off-road machine than a street one. On the streets around town the low gearing was acceptable, but the minute you

hit the freeways you knew that it was not the hot setup for the XT. The motor screamed, yes, even though it is a four-stroke, it still screamed, at 55 miles an hour. All of that still left the gasoline mileage at around 80 miles per gallon, but put some heavy wear and tear on the powerplant.

The tires found the pavement more to their liking, but they failed to give our testers enough confidence to try

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# YAMAHA XT250

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knee-scraping through a turn. The rain grooves didn't throw the XT from side to side in the lanes, but when you hit an uprise of blacktop or a pot hole, you'll know it.

## Details

All of the controls are right where they should be to make a ride comfortable, and the handlebars are smallish, but in a good way. Their chrome plating is a pain in the eyes when the sunlight bounces off and into your sightseers, and the use of some flat-black spray paint is definitely in order.

## Wrap-Up

Yamaha's XT250 dual-purpose four-stroke motorcycle is a forerunner to what's in store for us in the near future. It's going to bring about a whole new wave of street/trail thumpers that are lighter and easier to handle, bikes that are built with off-roading in mind first.

It is a bike that you can confidently take out on a weekend trail ride, and not come back banged up more than the bike you rode in on. It has suspension that's excellent in the dual-purpose class, yet it can still be improved upon.

The bottom line on the XT is this: It's right, for now. The other manufacturers are going to have to shoot at the XT as a bettering point for their existing dual-purpose lines, or get into the four-strokes as heavily as Yamaha did and do a good job the first time out. This motorcycle is comfortable in both types of terrain, and can work well in either. But we liked it most of all because its one of the elite few that works better in the dirt than it does on the pavement. And that's a thump in the right direction. □

## YAMAHA XT250G Specifications

NAME AND MODEL	Yamaha XT250G
ENGINE TYPE	Single-cylinder, air-cooled, four-stroke, 50HC
BORE AND STROKE	75mm x 56.5mm
DISPLACEMENT	249cc
HORSEPOWER (CLAIMED)	N/A
CARBURETION	28mm Mikuni
FUEL TANK CAPACITY	2.1 gallons (8 liters)
LUBRICATION	Wet sump
TRANSMISSION	Five-speed, constant mesh
GEARING, FRONT/REAR	15/47
IGNITION	CDI
WHEELBASE	55.1 inches (1400mm)
GROUND CLEARANCE	9.8 inches (250mm)
STEERING HEAD ANGLE	29 degrees
WEIGHT (CLAIMED)	249 pounds (113 kg)
INTENDED USE, MFR.	Street/trail
PRICE, APPROX.	\$1479
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	Japan
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Yamaha Motor Corp. USA	
6555 Katella Ave.	
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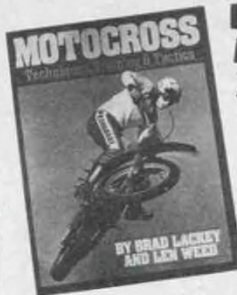
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