



Get ready to blow your top: "\$1900."



PENTON MINT





400 ENDURO

Get ready to blow your top again: "It's a bargain and you'd better hurry."

Last month newly-crowned Dirt Rider Word Director D. Russell Schoonmaker did the only thing a man in his position could do: admitted he wasn't going to play any games with his conscience because he personally didn't care for a truly excellent motorcycle, the Ossa Desert Phantom.

If he can do it, so can I. I never much cared for motorcycles with big holes. I've been a 125 freak ever since I realized open class bikes for what they are: over-engined, under-suspended antique-framed status symbols for frustrated power junkies.

A lot of us true-blue bikies rediscovered 125s in the past couple of years when we found you could ride them wide open all the time, bouncing off big rocks and stumps, careening down narrow paths shifting your brains out, not caring what was

around the corner because good 125s were total-harmony packages that seldom did dumb things. By contrast, most 400s were 40 romping, neck-snapping horses bent on shoving an endless supply of fear pills down your throat. They use too much gas, too.

What's more, we found out bigger bikes could only beat us up hills or on fire roads. One-two-fives offer more giggles per dollar spent than anything on the market. Shoot, look at how nice the Suzuki and Yamaha 125s are. Then look at how not-very-nice Yamaha's SC 500 and Suzuki's TM 400 are.

You get my point. Our technology is somehow set up so 125s are the optimum size for absolute performance.

So it used to be. With recent suspension advancements plus a lot of revelations through successes like the

Penton 125, designers have finally figured out how to make open class 125s—bikes you can ride full bore through the woods bouncing off everything. Except they've made a bike you can—and often should—ride insanely fast.

If God wanted us to go that fast he would have given us body rockets.

—David Swift

KTM spared little expense when they made the Penton Mint 400, so you're not going to be able to, either. Suggested retail is \$1,895. If you think that's expensive now, next year you are going to say, "I could have got that thing for only two grand last year—whatever happened to good ol' 1975?" In other words, prices on everything are going up next year, and not just 10 percent. Better move now.

Is it worth the money? Of course it is, if you have a profound understanding of your dirt riding needs in the first place. The Penton 400 is a motorcycle made for going anywhere a motorcycle can possibly go, faster than anyone need go.

Unlike Hondas and Yamahas, the Penton 400 isn't designed to reach optimum handling characteristics at speeds befitting "the average American rider." Nor will it ignore or encourage bad riding habits. KTM has designed a motorcycle that reaches to the current known human limits—it's designed by The World's Best Riders to be ridden by the World's Best Riders. If you wish to expand your potential, this is one of the few bikes on which you can do so safely. Simply put, the faster you ride the Mint 400, the easier it becomes. Theoretically, the Penton has its limits, but its crash threshold is well beyond any sane man's terror threshold.

Power starts at the bottom as a big lump of torque which appears to need more flywheel at first. With revs the lump swells gradually until you almost burst from an adrenaline rush. Repeat the process through all six gears in a matter of seconds and once-intangible concepts such as "life" and "death" suddenly gain new meaning.

The last Penton 400 we tested (the MX last November) ate a \$40 Metzeler 4.50 in three hours, mostly because of wholly excessive power. The enduro version comes with a 40 percent heavier flywheel on the Motoplat ignition. It helps the traction problem some, but the best advice we can

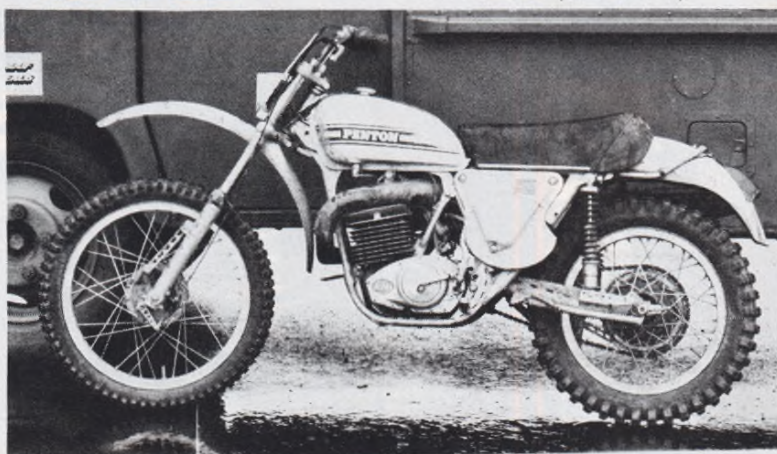
dr TEST

PENTON MINT 400 ENDURO

Penton Imports
3709 West Erie Avenue

Lorain, Ohio 44053

Price: \$1895 (\$1820 MX)



SPECIFICATIONS

Engine	Two-stroke/air cooled/maxiported/single
Bore/stroke	81mm/69mm
Displacement	355.5cc
Compression ratio	12.5:1
Claimed horsepower	42
Claimed torque	NA
Carburetion	38mm Bing
Clutch	Big wet multiplate
Gear ratios (:1)	2.20, 1.78, 1.33, 1.04, 0.88, .075
Primary drive	Spur gear, 25/69 (2.76:1)
Final drive	12/52 (4.33:1)
Lubrication	Premix
Oil recommendation	Hi-Point 32:1
Fuel recommendation	Premium
Warranty	Nossir

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase	54.5-56.5 inches
Ground clearance	10.3 inches
Peg height	12.7 inches
Seat height	32.7 inches
Running weight	245 pounds
Weight distribution	46% front/54% rear
Handlebar width	34 inches
Throttle turn	90 degrees
Fuel tank capacity	3 gallons
Transmission capacity	1.5 quarts
Rear wheel travel	4.9 to 7 inches, depending

COMPONENTS

Forks	8-inch travel Ceriani
Shocks	4-inch Ceriani gas/oil
Frame	Double downtube chrome molybdenum tubing stress relieved, grey
Pegs	Steel, folding, unloaded
Hubs	KTM magnesium, full width front, conical rear
Brakes	Single leading shoe, internally expanding
Rims	Mud-gathering Akront alloy
Rimlocks	1 front, 2 rear
Tires	Metzeler Motocross, 3.00x21, 4.50x18
Ignition	Motoplat
Lighting	ZKW: headlight, taillight, brake light
Chain	Regina Extra
Tools	Lots of good ones
Air filter	Twin Air
Spark plug	Bosch W280 MZ1
Handlebar controls	Magura levers, carb choke
Muffler	Yes, a reasonably quiet one with spark arrester
Valve stem core removers	1 front, 1 rear



A manhole for a cylinder shows a lot of port area and few spots where rings always touch walls.

give for reasonable tire wear is to learn throttle control. In fact, that's the key to riding the Penton quickly, patiently, unobtrusively through the woods: throttle control. It takes very little encouragement from the throttle to accidentally squirt dirt all over your buddies.

Further, if you learn to keep the 400 in no less than fourth gear all the time, wheel spinning will be a minor problem. Without worrying about a slithering rear end, you can give your attention to the fact you're going to hit the next check 16 minutes early and be disqualified. No matter how you approach it, it's plumb fast.

The 400 actually displaces a mere 355.5cc. During its development it was a true 400 and 380, but rumors kept floating across from Austria that KTM had to decrease displacement because it was "too powerful." Could be, could be.

Inside that hole is a series of cav-

erns including four transfers, two intakes, a sprawling V boost port, and enough exhaust port area to scavenge a fire pump. If you pull the cylinder on your Penton, be sure to check the service manual and follow directions regarding setting deck height—it doesn't need any more compression.

At least all six gears were operative—the last time we checked the motorcrossover had first gear blocked out. Gear spacing is brilliant: gears 2-5 make for a well-balanced four-speed, good for all conditions. Gears 1 and 6 become special bonus gears, for those rare tree-climbing or free-way adventures.

We set the magnesium center cases on a postage scale. They weigh 8.5 pounds, including bearings, compared to 10.5 pounds for Sachs 125 center cases.

All engine components are robust and plenty heavy. If you take pains to keep the air box sealed, the Bing properly jetted, and run good oil, it should last at least a season with only a spark plug change from time to time.

Ours wasn't jetted properly. It loaded up a bit off idle then experienced a sharp lean spot that caused some vicious rattling. We aren't sure of jetting improvements yet, but we do know you can enhance overall performance by hacking holes in the air cleaner cover. Since switching to the GP frame with six different shock positions, the air box has been a mere shadow of its former self in



Forged aluminum torque arm and brake lever are improvements over stamped steel items of yore.

terms of volume, and the high-breathing frame doesn't pass the wind quickly enough. Open class bikes have lusty appetites.

Suspension tuning is a maddening task if you haven't much in the way of experience; if you plan to go fast the Penton's suspenders become highly critical. Proper boingers determine the speed you can corner, how much the big bumps will hurt, how long your body and mind will last before sacking out, and keep that hairline dividing a crash/not crash situation a couple millimeters closer to your side.

At the bottom of each slider is





stamped "200," indicating the number of millimeters travel. Eight inches. The Penton's Cerianis need at least 500 miles break-in before they quit binding. Once those tight tolerances rub themselves out, you will not find a finer fork anywhere.

The rear may not be as much fun. Our bike came with 90-pound springs so we had to run them at a conservative vertical position. The cantilever (lay-down) position gives a Cadillac ride but you must buy 110-130 pound springs, and thus far Ceriani shocks we've known haven't shown much in the way of longevity. Penton claims that previous problems, particularly the eyes breaking from the body, have been cured.

Once the suspenders start doing their intended job, you will have a hard time not boring your friends to tears about how you can ride over railroad tracks and not feel a thing. Forget the eloquent raves: Penton's stock suspension is far superior to any others, and no current aftermarket \$300 modification is superior.

Only two motorcycles we've tested come with a worthwhile swingarm, the Penton and the YZ Monocross. The YZs is blessed with triangulated bridgework for strength, the Penton's is fairly well gusseted. Both have needle bearings at the pivot, which give the machines a startling degree of extra rigidity and response in bumps.

KTM has worked harder to achieve rigidity than anyone. The result is rigid, yes, almost a parody of rigidity. The entire chassis is chrome

Aluminum chain guide and torque arm lessen unsprung weight. Swingarm is helperstrong and pivots on needles.



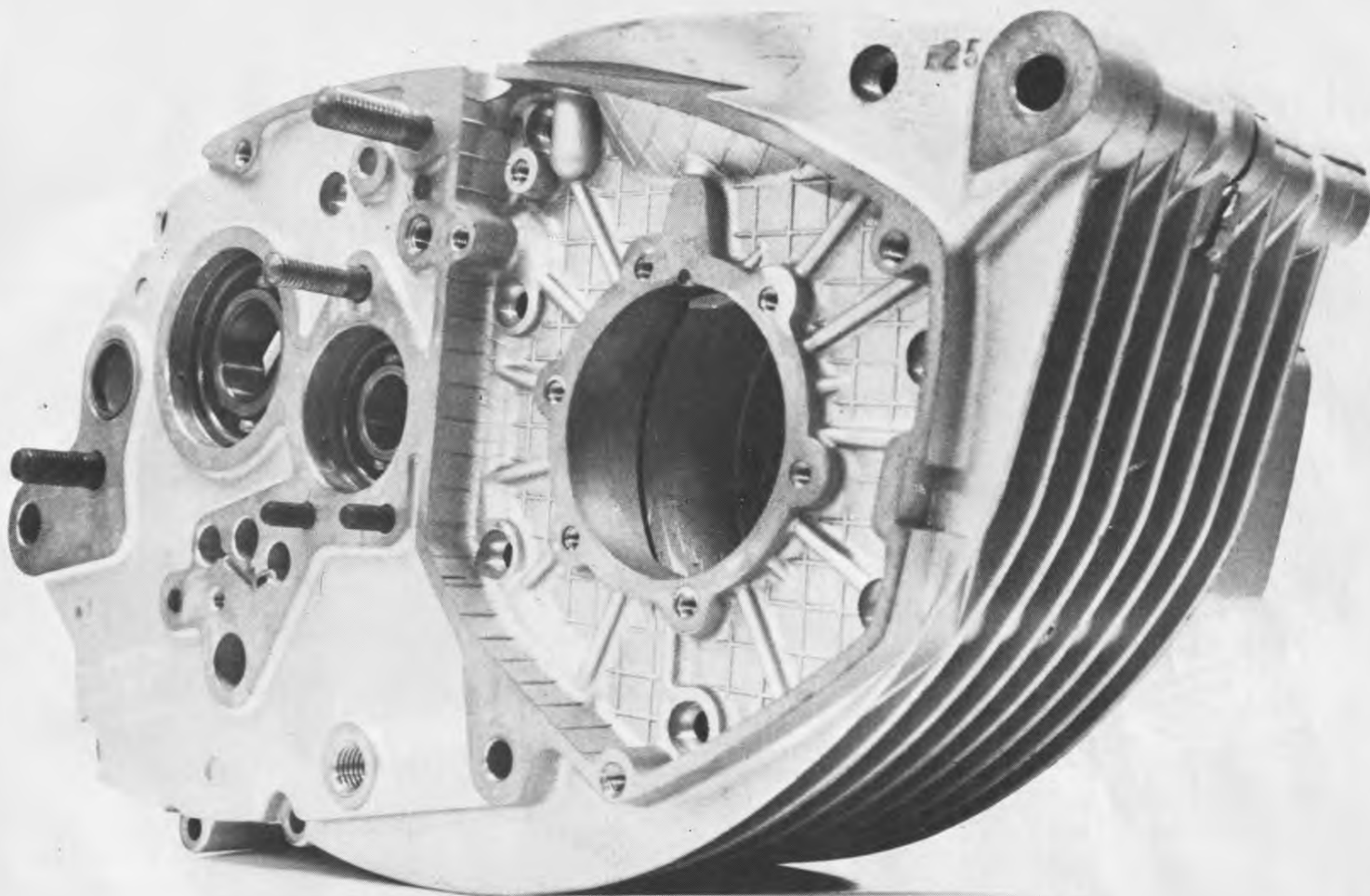
GP frame has reduced airbox capacity. Lower screw removal drains water.

molybdenum tubing. After welding, the frames are stress-relieved for more strength. The stamped backbone is aided by two other straight tubes running nearly the length of the bike. The carburetor is blocked by two struts whose sole purpose is to give the cradle some extra triangulation. They are important pieces. Early Pentons kept shedding the bolts for these struts but that has been cured with longer studs and bolts.

Meanwhile, all this framery wraps around elaborate induction and exhaust systems, not to mention the electrics and numerous other subsystems. In effect, a Penton is a three-dimensional jig-saw puzzle and an absolute bitch to work on. Long-time Penton owners pride themselves in their ability to, say, remove the exhaust pipe easily by manipulating it just-so. It can be done, but it takes lots of experience. All told, Pentons have inflamed more tempers than any other bike we've been around.

That's in the garage, we should add. On the trail, certain tasks happen with poetic ease. Loosening two



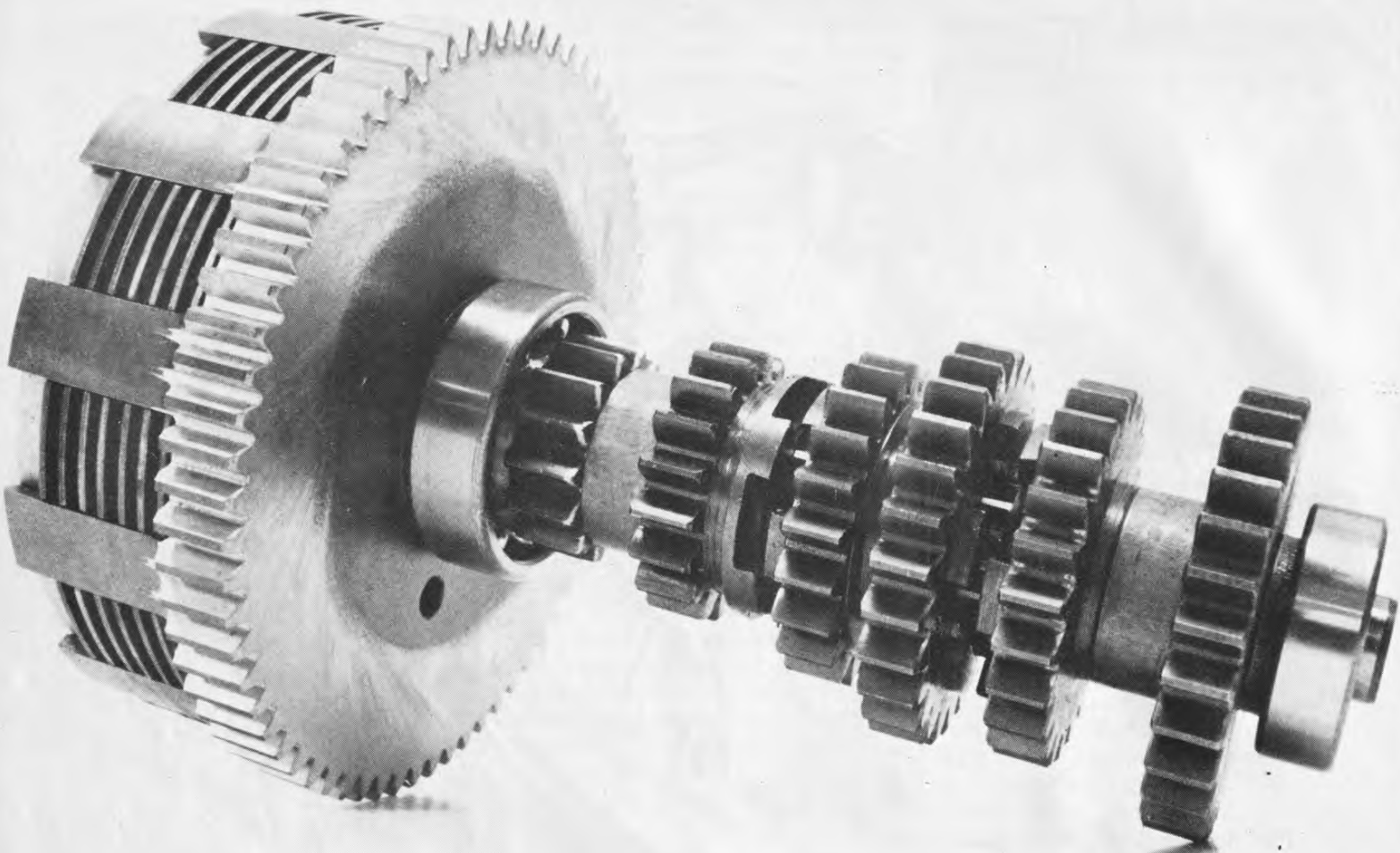


Magnesium cases weight 8.5 pounds, two pounds less than the Sachs 125's cases.

bolts pops off the seat. The latest Penton tank-mounting system is the cleverest yet devised: two spring cables come off by hand without even removing the seat. You can install the new cables to any Penton for less than \$13, retail. Three bolts uncover the air cleaner cover and the bottom one serves to drain a puddled air box. The rear wheel comes off quickly with no hangups with chains, sprockets, or superfluous hardware. The front is just as easy and can be made easier (see next story).

In case you are wondering, our test Penton is actually the bike Carl Cranke might use for the qualifiers this season. He had just pulled it out of the crate and installed his Petty goodies when we called about the test. The only non-stock things you see are the headlight/number plate, IT rear fender, and American Sport grips. Gone from the pictures are the stuff you get with your Mint 400 Enduro: VDO clock, ZKW headlight, pukka taillight on plastic rear fender, and the usual front fender.





Layshaft shows off gears befitting a semi and clutch that didn't fall off.

When you buy a Penton, especially the 400, you have some new responsibilities. First, you're going to have a hard time explaining to the little lady why any motorcycle can be

Tank removes in a jiffy. High-breather frame restricts the 356's lusty appetite.

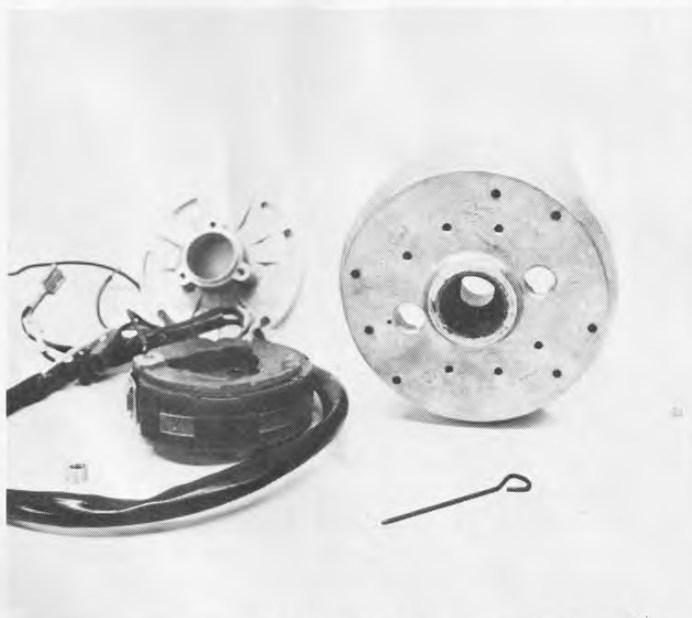
worth two grand. Second, you're going to have a hard time convincing yourself it was worth two grand if you don't roll up your sleeves and get to work on that thing before you fire it up. You won't have to shell out any extra money for good tires, shocks, air filter (it comes stock with a Twin-Air), or anything else. Except

maybe springs. But you must go over every nut and bolt you can find, make *damned* sure the airbox isn't leaking, keep after the spokes, and learn everything you can by hanging around those more knowledgeable. If you do that and fasten down everything as if you never intend to remove it, chances are you'll seldom have to remove it.

Not that the Penton 400 isn't hurting here and there. The rims, ridged Akronts, are becoming dated items. Folding brake and shift levers would be a handy stock item. The skid plate still insists on gathering sticks when it should bend around to protect the magnesium side cases. You have to kickstart the thing like you're stomping the life out of a rattlesnake—you try to make every shot count for fear of pain. Sometimes it'll click itself in gear during the kickstart, which means you adjust the clearance between the levers.

Because we place equal importance on the fun and noise factor, we have to say the Penton 400 is tied with the 250 for the most elegant dirt bike ever. Nowhere can you get such a performance and reliability package out of the box, for any price. The





Motoplat flywheel is 40 percent heavier than early MXers, but you'd never guess.

Penton's price tag is the highest, but it's also more of a bargain in the long run than anything we've yet tested.

For some of you, the fact that it's the fastest thing you can buy is all the reason you need. You're all nuts. ●

