

TEAR ALONG DOTTED LINE

We Did It On A Tour From The West Coast
To Minnesota And Canada
And You Can Do It With A Coupon That
May Net You A Tour-Ready XS Eleven

By Paul Wilcox

It was a hot and hazy spring afternoon when the van from Yamaha Motor Corporation rolled-up to our Hollywood, California offices carrying its precious cargo—a new '79 XS Eleven. It was an impressive sight to savor, shimmering in a suit of deep Indigo Blue Metalflake with matching fairing and bags. Even as I helped ease the massive XS down the narrow loading ramp, I marveled that *Motorcyclist* would soon be giving away an identical machine—worth a cool \$4800. It was no mystery why the magazine had picked this captivating model as a prize. The story of how we rode an XS Eleven across America non-stop in 59 hours had drawn more reader interest than any other feature to appear in our pages.

To generate exposure for our giveaway, and to get impressions of the Yamaha touring accessories, I was to pilot the Eleven to the first National Motorcycle Rally and Road Tour in St. Paul, Minnesota. Once at the Minnesota State Fairgrounds rally sight, I would meet with a local Yamaha dealer and set-up a display booth with the bike as the center of attraction. There, some 15-25,000 rally-goers would have a chance to drool over the machine and sign-up to win one. (Your own personal contest entry form can be found elsewhere in this issue).

Once inside the *Motorcyclist* shop, I examined the bike that would be propelling me halfway cross-country to St. Paul. The only updates on the '79 version were a quartz-halogen headlamp and the near-black Indigo paint. The touring package installed by Yamaha the day before was very complete and pleasing. Not only did

it include a stylish frame-mount fairing and panniers, but also lower leg shields, chrome case guards, a luggage rack and heavy-duty suspension front and rear. All the touring goodies are official Yamaha parts designed for the Eleven alone—not for “most large touring bikes.”

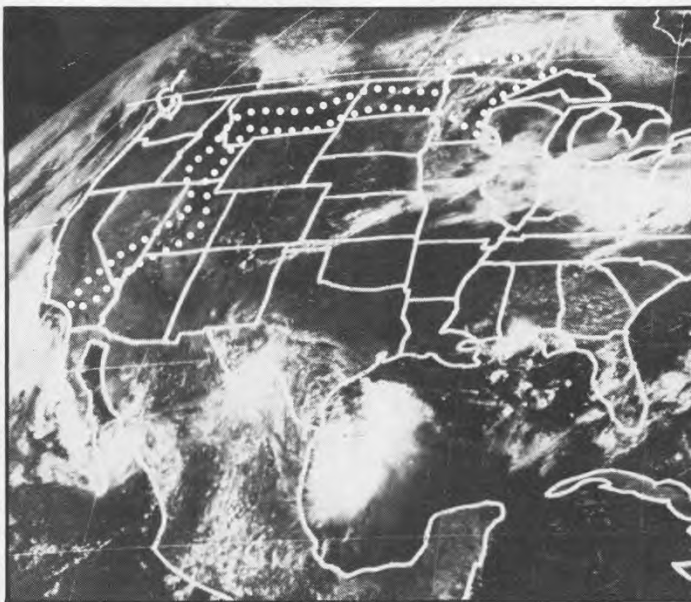
As it stood, I had only one day to get myself and the bike ready for the 2600-mile trek to the Twin Cities. The clock showed only 150 break-in miles, and since it wouldn't see the inside of a shop for at least 6000 miles, I took a few precautions. To help avoid flats I pumped liberal amounts of ACP tire sealer and balancer into both tubes. To free myself from the drudgery of frequent oil changes, I filled the cases with Mobil One synthetic lubricant, the stuff that's supposed to be good for 25,000 miles between changes. Since the Eleven is blessed with both transistorized electronic ignition and sealed shaft drive, there was little else to do. One last-minute job was the installation of an Autotronics

long-range X- and K-band radar detector—a most needed device when there's 96 hungry horses on tap.

While packing I was happy to find enough room in the fairing and bags for all my cold weather gear and spare street clothes. I didn't know whether the panniers would be waterproof, so all my clothing went into plastic bags first. Various-colored trash bags gave me a handy color-coding system—brown for pants, white for shirts, yellow for shorts and black for soiled items. By ten that evening the packing was complete and before bed I settled down to read the last few chapters of Gene Mason's informative book about police and traffic tickets entitled *Save Your License!*

Morning came at 2:30 a.m. when a shrieking alarm jolted me into semi-consciousness. Why this inhuman hour? As any Southern California resident will tell you, Los Angeles is very trying to escape from. To get out one must traverse the greyest, most congested series of freeways known to the civilized world. By leaving before daybreak, I could not only avoid 2 million commuters, but also the sight of the bleak urban communities from which they spew. After a leisurely meal and a last-minute pre-flight check, I was headed away from cubicles and regimen to panoramas and adventure. My phone number would be unlisted for nine days.

Riding the massive Eleven with a full touring load for the first time brought several revelations. For one, the bike seemed ignorant of its 1000-pound fully gassed, fully loaded weight. Hauling away from a dead stop still produced pound-



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ing veins, wide eyes and stretched forearms. In fact, even with a large percentage of my worldly possessions aboard, the front wheel could be lifted 3 feet off the pavement—a trick to make Gold Wing owners break down and weep.

In the tighter turns on the way to the Interstate, I found that the beefed-up suspension did a respectable job of handling the added weight. Although the bike would oversteer in the slow turns, it was fairly stable and predictable at moderate clips.

Settling down to a close-to-lawful speed during the long journey out of town, I had the road to myself. At first, the seating position on the big Yamaha seemed ideal for long hours in the saddle. Much later that day I

concluded that the bars were placed too far forward for my relatively short arms. Nevertheless the atmosphere behind the large fairing was serene. The wide windscreen blocked-out most of the wind's buffeting and the lowers reflected more than enough engine heat to keep my legs toasty as I cut through the morning chill.

By sunrise the California desert was flashing past—I was somewhere near Barstow, a parasite on the road to Las Vegas. Still the highway was deserted and the going was easy. One of the first vehicles I encountered was another bike headed eastward. As I gained on him and eventually passed, I saw that he was a fellow XS Eleven pilot. His was a '78 model without the tour pack. Quickly he passed me back. I responded with

more gas, and before long our Elevens were exceeding the Magic Ton. As we edged toward 110 mph, then 115 (just cruisin' as far as the bikes were concerned) the Interstate began to gently curve. As the turn became tighter, he carved through solid as Gibraltar and my machine—heavy-duty suspension and all—began twitching. The wobble got worse and I had visions of an uncontrollable tank-slapper, but the Yamaha regained its cool after some feathering of the rear disc. I knew right then the bike did have its limits . . . limits I would discover again.

Still there was no resisting the bike's awesome power. What impressed me the most while playing with the throttle was that the bike still had passing power to spare even

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with so much added weight. From 55 mph, a few seconds of open throttle would shoot the speedo past the three-digit mark. Also impressive was the disc-brake trio, which would bring the bike back to legal speeds in a flash. With an indicated top speed of 125 mph (yes, fully laden) it was reassuring to have sturdy brakes.

Quite quickly the theme of the trip became clear; it was a game of Cat and Mouse... Me against The Man. And really, how else could it have been? I was on a bike pumping-out

close to 100 horsepower, I had just finished reading *Save Your License!*, a radar detector sat on the dash and I *had* to be in St. Paul on time. It all added-up to lots of high speeds and a sharp eye peeled for lurking gendarmes. In all, I must say that being a faster rider was making me a safer rider. At higher speeds, not only was I having more fun (one of those unavoidable side effects), but also I found that my attention was heightened considerably. There would be no day-dreaming or sightseeing this time around.

Through a dry, lifeless Nevada I gained experience in the fine art of radar detection. The Autotronics unit

functioned flawlessly (as it did throughout the trip) and gave me ample warning that Smokey was nearby. Most of the radar I detected came from patrol cruisers passing in the opposite direction. First the detector's yellow "caution" light would begin flashing and as the source drew closer it would blink faster letting me know just how far away the radar was. In time, I learned just how much brake was required to get my speed down before being clocked.

My first full day of getting used to



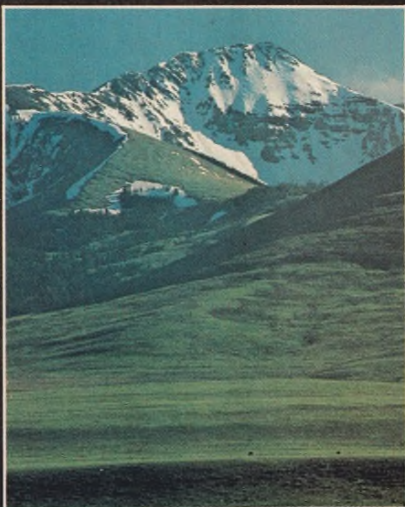
the Yamaha resulted in some pretty high average speeds, which got me further along than I had originally planned. By evening I was in Salt Lake City, miles from home, and rather than push further I made that town my home for the night. As the bike sat outside of my budget motel room, a steady flow of onlookers admired it and grinned a lot. In fact, it almost always drew crowds. Decidedly not a machine for riders who prefer a low profile.

Salt Lake to Butte, Montana was scarcely memorable. The following day in Montana was much more intriguing due to an abundance of

greenery and rolling hills. Nevertheless fatigue set-in near Glendive, Montana so I started looking for an overnight lodging.

It must have been a popular time of year to visit Glendive, for every motel I tried was booked for the night. As I hopped from one "No Vacancy" sign to another in the evening chill I noticed that a carload of midwesterners was going through the same routine. With only three motels

left, I was getting desperate. Somehow, while I was checking the situation at another spot, the wagon full of tourists managed to get ahead of me, vying for the same room as I was. As they approached the next-to-the-last place in town, I weighed the alternatives—gas it up and beat them to the registration desk, or sleep on the ground. The Yamaha passed the station wagon much like a karate chop—clean and quick—and it only took $\frac{1}{4}$ throttle. Suddenly however, there was a dazzling display of rotating blue lights behind me, accompanied by the wail of a siren. As I pulled over, I was a little baffled. Was this local constable actually getting upset about a 30-



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mph pass in a 25-mph zone? What cop would bother with such a chick-enfeed violation? Nobody. Except for one particular deputy sheriff and he most certainly was upset. Seems they don't take a-liken' to folks that push the limit, even the slightest bit.

While the midwesterners were herding their kids into *my* motel room, I sat with the deputy in the patrol car, cramming my foot deep into my mouth. I was in such fear of endangering my license that I launched into a five-minute dissertation on how it was impossible for the officer to have clocked me. Oh, I convinced him alright—he was sold

on not writing me for doing 30 in a 25. So he came up with another charge, "failure to drive in a careful and prudent manner." I should have copped to the 30-mph charge, since the other carried a \$50 fine payable in cash right there in the car. Outraged, I told him that it's unheard of for an officer to demand cash out there in the field. It certainly didn't seem on the up-and-up. To this he simply responded "it's just two blocks to the county jail. I'd be more than happy to drop you off . . ." Never has currency flown from wallet to open hand faster. Roadside justice may not seem legitimate, but boy, is it *speedy*.

I got a motel room after all—next door to 17 noisy kids and a whining dog. Morning saw me exit Glendive quickly. I didn't bother to "Take One" as it said on the box of picture postcards in the motel lobby. I wanted to forget Glendive.

The last few miles out of Montana went quickly, as did the lush scenery.

After being in North Dakota for only a short time, the surroundings went from green to brown, hilly to flat-lands, and the road switched from curvy to straight-arrow. In the National Boredom Standings, central North Dakota rates a strong second, just behind Kansas, the only state whose greatest natural resource is dust.

Thankfully I slipped into Minnesota toward the end of the day. Like Montana, Minnesota boasts a variety of scenery that rivals any riding area in the country—which is one reason why the promoters of the National Motorcycle Rally held their event in St. Paul. Rain keeps the Minnesota countryside green and thriving, and that day it kept me "green and thriving" as well. Fortunately, the outside



temperature was high, so the wetness didn't seem so unbearable. I found that the Yamaha's fairing was not of much use in the wet. Like most other fairings, the windscreen became obscured with droplets on each side and was so tall that I had a hard time seeing over the top. I also discovered that the legshields didn't keep my legs dry. A steady stream of water from the front wheel slipped past the fender and came up between the tank and the fairing, so I was actually getting wetter than if I had no fairing whatsoever. What really bothered me, though, was that the bike was getting covered with the kind of filmy road-goo that takes hours to clean off. I had managed to keep it looking presentable up to that point, but now I faced endless detailing before the XS would be ready for display.

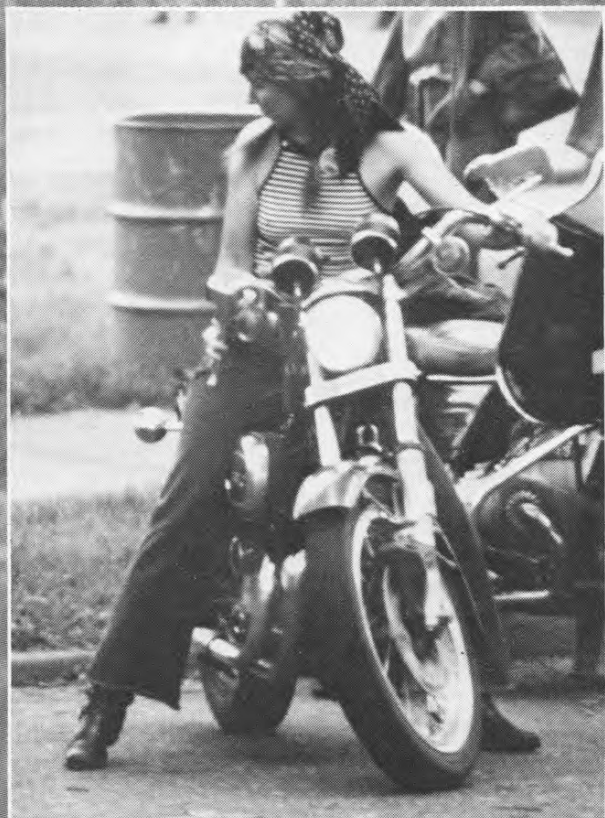
By nightfall the rain had let up, but I was still soaked and getting colder by the moment as the temperature dropped. I was having problems seeing the narrow two-lane highway through the windscreen since the reflections of the instruments were bright enough to be distracting. As it turns out, Yamaha will be putting out a louvered plastic cover that allows the rider to see the instruments but prevents them from reflecting on the shiny plastic screen. But I didn't have

one and since I was also tired of craning my neck to peer over the windscreen, I ducked into a roadside town for the night.

With sunlight on my side the next day, it took only a couple of hours to get into the Twin Cities area and the state fairgrounds. It was the day before the rally's official opening date, so the grounds were almost deserted save for a few groups setting up displays. The Minnesota State Fairgrounds resemble a small town, complete with a network of narrow streets. It's the largest 10-day fair in the country, but during most of the remaining 355 days it's used for such events as the rally. The *Motorcyclist* display area was indeed there and waiting, along with all the materials

that were sent ahead of me from California. Kenny's Yamaha Shop, a local dealer, would provide all the Yamaha accessories that were also to be displayed. My contact from Kenny's was Ken himself, who brought a display pedestal for the Eleven and helped set-up the booth. When only halfway through hanging the banners, crowds began closing-in on the bike asking questions and trying to jump the gun on getting their contest entries in. One oversight was that there was no loading ramp to get the bike onto its carpeted pedestal. Im-

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provising, we used a folding table as a ramp. Shaky but effective.

Once the bike was up in plain view, its reception was far beyond our expectations. All through the rally weekend there was a flock around the bike and the entry table. One die-hard Harley rider who wore a T-shirt that said "You ain't sh-t if you don't ride a Harley," signed up six times to win the Yamaha. For three days we talked with people who stopped to view the beast. For three days we answered an endless stream of questions. "Yes, it's a '79;" "Yes, it was ridden from the coast;" "No, it's not black, it's Blue;" "Yes, it's still fast." Some thought the Eleven was a non-functional machine that had never seen the open road. Such thoughts were quickly banished when they found that I was commuting on it during my stay in St. Paul. At the end of each day, we would simply recruit a few bystanders and heft the monster off its display stand. Then I simply rode it through the wet streets to my hotel.

Despite the damp climate, the rally went on strong all three days. At one end of the fairgrounds, field-meet skill contests were being staged. In another area, organized "run-what-ya-brung" drag races continued endlessly. Each hour on the hour road tours departed to wander through the lush surrounding back country. Every evening rock bands blared steadily, setting a lively pace for the residents of "Tent City." A healthy number of antique rigs showed up for scrutinous judging in special vintage competition.

All present were happy to be right where they were, and it showed. Spirits were high and the whole event went off peacefully with only a couple of isolated exceptions. For a first-time effort, nobody could have asked for a more successful gathering. By Sunday noon, though, it was all over. The Tent City vanished as quickly as it had appeared, and thousands of riders headed home.

My plans were to head due north into Canada, then wander westward to the Pacific Coast in British Columbia. From there I could take the long route down the coast to Los Angeles. With seven days to get back, there would be little time to waste. I had run into Roy Mattson of Accessory Research Engineering the day before, and he offered to set me up with a custom touring saddle and a pair of their bar-backs. I agreed because the '79 seat had proven to be much less comforting than the '78

pad, and the bars were too far forward for me. All the parts went on late that evening and once again the bike was ready to roll, except my concern over the incredible rate at which the rear tire was wearing. With only 3000 miles on the clock more than half of the center tread had been consumed. I chose to continue on anyway, thinking that I could replace it further down the road—and maybe even get all the way back to California.

The sky was stormy and foreboding as I ran along the rocky shoreline of Lake Superior, headed for the Canadian border. Forests lined the twisty roads along the lake and the air was refreshing to breathe. I was anxious to get into Canada—to ride on foreign soil. At the Canadian customs inspection station, my excitement was even higher. All went smoothly until the inspector started looking through my camera case. He seemed convinced that I was part of an international dope-smuggling ring and there must have been oodles of contraband stashed in my telephoto lens. He even wanted to detain me while they had the lens disassembled, but I somehow convinced them that I was, indeed, an upstanding citizen and they allowed me to pass.

There were two signs just inside the country that surprised me. One said that seat belts were mandatory for motorists in Canada (something the Americans have fought off for years) and another proclaimed that the use of radar warning devices was illegal in Ontario. I decided to leave my Autotronics Snooper in place, figuring that I could merely hang my helmet over it if I got pulled over.

Entering the town of Thunder Bay, I was a bit disappointed. I expected everything in Canada to be alien to my American eye. So what did I see? McDonalds' golden arches. Safeway supermarkets. Chevron stations.

Dwindling funds forced a change



in my route and I would have to drop back into the U.S. somewhere around Winnipeg, after a shortened stay in Canada.

Slipping through a series of back highways, I passed through a rain-forest flatland dotted with small lakes and streams. The rain finally caught up with me and after an hour of getting drenched in "liquid sunshine," I holed-up for the night in Ignace, a micro-sized town off of Ontario's Highway Eleven (how appropos). By the middle of the next day I was clearing customs at the U.S. border at International Falls. The shortest route home was through North Dakota along the bleak and narrow Highway 2 which aims through flat farmlands. Hours later I had slipped into Montana, but not without concern. The rear skin on the Yamaha was so worn that I couldn't get much further without a new one. Although I was pushing my luck, I chose to shoot for Billings and have it replaced the next morning.

The stretch to Billings generated a strange series of malfunctions that almost resulted in my untimely demise. Early in the day, the electronic tach stopped working, followed shortly by the radar detector going berserk and blinking its warning constantly. Soon the starter motor slowed and got more and more sluggish with each use. By sunset it refused to turn at all, and I was forced to break-out the emergency kick starter. As darkness closed, the headlight and instrument lights were also losing steam. Quickly they were nothing but glowing embers that did nothing to light the way. Under a moonless sky I crept along the side of the black road at about 15 mph, peering down at the white stripe, struggling toward the next town. I would have recruited a car or truck as a guiding beacon, but alas, the road was void of life. After what seemed an eternity, the engine quit suddenly—as though an unseen hand had flipped the kill switch.

I was about 30 miles short of Billings and ready to try anything. Thinking there might be a service station over the next hill, I tried pushing. While straining uphill I mentally tallied the weight of the bike. The rough figure was 850 pounds. Perhaps that's why I nearly dropped from exhaustion after pushing only a quarter-mile. Something was obviously very wrong with the electrical system. As a last ditch effort I tried disconnecting the fairing harness to possibly free enough juice to fire the engine. A few stabs at the emergency kick starter and it came back to life and ran fine. Of course, I had no

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lighting whatsoever. And each time I stepped on the rear brake, the engine would die. But I was able to move, and it sure beat pushing. Eventually, a car came along and I used its headlights to guide me into Billings. Once in the city we both had a shock coming to us. He was surprised to find that an unlighted motorcycle had been following him and I was surprised to see that his car was a Highway Patrol Cruiser.

Needless to say, we had a little roadside chat. I was astonished that instead of giving me a hard time this patrolman was actually helpful. Not only did he escort me the rest of the way into town, but he also called ahead on the radio to arrange accommodations so I wouldn't have to follow him all through the town looking for a motel.

One of the larger Yamaha dealerships in the area, Billings Cycle Center, came to the rescue the following morning. The Eleven was hefted into a truck and taken to their service department where General Manager Bill Rodier went over the entire electrical system. In short order Bill traced the problem to a defective voltage regu-

lator which had set off a chain reaction that drained the battery and affected the tach, radar detector and lighting system. The problem had come-up on other XSs that Billings Cycle had worked on, and as a result, the regulator I needed was out of stock. To get me back on the road, Rodier generously swapped the regulator and battery from my bike with those off a display bike on the showroom floor. A new rear tire was also installed and once again, the bike was road-worthy.

Getting back to California on time was going to be quite a feat: With only 48 hours left, and I knew I'd be going through a lot of desolate country, and the heat was going to be hitting record highs. Amazingly I made it from Billings to Salt Lake City in one fell swoop, despite the fact that much of my riding was on narrow two-lane roads amid 50-mph wind gusts. Salt Lake to Los Angeles was even worse, simply because the heat seemed more intense. The Nevada desert boasted 105 degrees in the shade that day and behind-the-fairing temperatures could have put a microwave oven to shame. Stopping for liquid refreshments every 50 miles I managed to fight-off the effects of dehydration and throat seizure to haul myself back to the city that I

had left nine riding days and 6000 miles ago.

Collapsing quietly on my front steps, I looked back. There were a few things that I had learned during my two weeks on the road. For one, I found that even though the XS Eleven has been rolling around America's highways for close to a year now, peoples' enthusiasm over it hasn't quelled in the least. The crowds at the National Rally proved that, as did the many admirers the bike attracted on the road—and the roadside on-lookers weren't on the verge of winning one, so their praise was that much more sincere. The Yamaha accessories that went through hell and high water proved to be among the better components on the market. True, the fairing leaked rain and retained heat, but the package represents the most complete offering from any of the Big Four manufacturers. With the exception of the defunct voltage regulator, the bike itself performed flawlessly throughout the trip. All it required in the way of maintenance was adding 3 quarts of oil in 6150 miles. Offering brute power, posh ride and acceptable handling, the fully-tourized XS Eleven well deserves its title of King of the Interstate. And Minnesota. And Glendive, Montana. **M**

FOR ATHLETE'S FOOT
KILLS ATHLETE'S FOOT FUNGUS.

FOR JOCK ITCH
KILLS JOCK ITCH FUNGUS.

KILLS FUNGUS ON CONTACT

Aftate FOR Athlete's Foot

Aftate FOR Jock Itch

Aftate For Jock Itch