



**Well, do choppers commute?
They sure do . . .**

Many people's lives revolve around earning a crust. That means they have to get to their place of work. To do this as cheaply and quickly as possible, the motorcycle shines. To-day more than ever, with crowded roads and escalating fuel prices, bikes make sense as pure transport.

Among the current crop of commuter bikes are three sweet little 250s, thinly disguised as mini-Harleys. Kawasaki has the Z250G single, the smallest bike in the LTD "chopper" range. The others are from Yamaha, the XS250SH twin and SR250H single.

These 250 Custom bikes make a marvellous starting point to motorcycling. In fact, even if you generally detest choppers, there are still valid reasons for buying one. Anyone suffering Duck's Disease (whose bum is too close to the ground) is a candidate, as are those who require a bike that is simple and cheap to operate.

Many bikes, even 250s, are unnecessarily tall. Not so with these three. Low seats are a key design feature. The XS just manages a seat height of 750mm, the two singles are even lower at 720mm. You don't appreciate the virtues of a low seat enough until you're tried one.

Reaching the ground comfortably is both a safety and convenience bonus. You're not likely to be caught with your legs dangling at the end of the driveway or on uneven terrain for one thing. Ease of manoeuvring and parking is worth a lot, too.

One point I particularly appreciated was the way I was able to recover easily from dicey situations.

I ran into one of those wet tram tracks snaking its way through Melbourne, and recovered easily by putting my feet down motocross style.

Economy is the other strong point of these bikes. Not just the miserly use of our precious fossil fuels, but also the low cost of service and maintenance.

The Engines

The SR powerplant is borrowed from the popular XT250 trail bike,

Our thanks to Tiziana Savaris, Debbie Wise and Lyn Walton for riding the bikes for photography — and posing with them.

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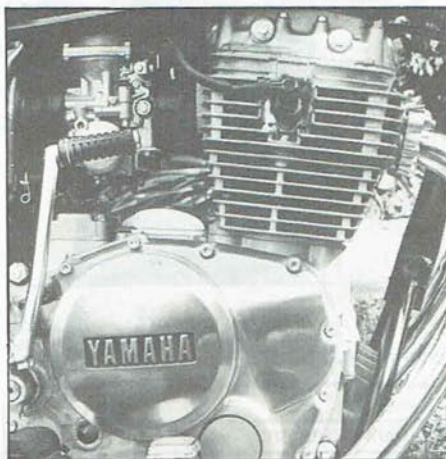
Yamaha SR250

Kawasaki Z250G

Yamaha XS Special

sporting an electric start rather than kick to avoid scaring off beginners. Capacity of 239cm³ is obtained from a very over-square motor with a bore of 73.5mm and stroke of 56.5mm.

Also relying solely on electric start, the longer stroke motor of the LTD at 70 × 64mm produces very good mid-range torque.



The XS powerplant might be overweight and underpowered, but it was the only one of the three that features a kickstart.



The LTD motor produced more midrange torque than either of the others. It was the most reliable starter, too.

Both the singles have similar motor characteristics, producing usable power from low revs and flattening out in the higher rev range. The LTD has a slight throttle lag at low revs, whereas the SR comes on tap whenever required. Once in motion, however, the LTD produces the best torque and hill climbing ability, particularly in the commonly used mid-range.

Single overhead cams, driven by chains, operate just two valves on each of the singles. Power is then transmitted through gear primary drives, through a wet multi-plate clutch and out to the chain driven rear wheel via a five speed gearbox in both cases.

Occasional false neutrals marred the LTD gearbox while the SR's box is smooth and quite faultless in operation.

Wooden spooner in the engine is definitely the XS twin. It lacks power and response in almost any gear, making it necessary to keep the engine buzzing away madly most of the time.

The XS motor is a fairly heavy 250 twin, once again running a single chain driven overhead cam. Because this motor lacks the torque of a single it is fitted with a six-speed gearbox with closer ratios. When working in hilly country or trying to keep up in heavy traffic, you find yourself playing "God Save the Queen" with the gear lever.

One saving grace is the retention of the kickstart (non-existent on the other two) in addition to the electric start.

Unlike the singles, which start hot or cold (choke when necessary) at the first stab of the magic button — the XS is reluctant to fire up. Particularly when cold — thank God for the kickstart.

One other unfortunate feature of the twin is the vibration. The single cylinder engines were putting out enough vibes to make you aware of what the engine was doing, but they never felt as if they were overworked and underpaid. They even felt comfortable at times. The twin, however, was unpleasant, constantly buzzing through even the rubber mounted bars and footpegs and making the mirrors almost useless.

Handling and Suspension.

An area in which the XS shone was the ride. Because of its extra weight and upright riding position on a firm seat, it makes the rider feel

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secure. It isn't as quick in handling or steering as either of the singles, but is more stable and predictable. It helps that the suspension hasn't suffered in the name of economics as badly as on the singles. It copes very well solo, but is still only just satisfactory two up. The bike tends to wallow.

Yamaha SR250

Specifications

Make:.....Yamaha
Model:.....SR 250 H
Price (plus on-road charges):.....\$1463.95

Engine

Bore × stroke:.....73.5 × 56.5mm
Displacement:.....239 cm³
Compression ratio:.....8.9:1
Carburetion:.....VS 34 Mikuni
Ignition:.....Transistorized Ignition
Redline:.....No Tachometer
Starting:.....Electric

Transmission

Number of gears:.....5
Clutch:.....Wet Multi-plate
Primary drive:.....Gear
Final drive:.....Chain

Suspension

Front:.....Telescopic fork-oil damped
Travel:.....140mm
Rear:.....Twin shocks, 5 way adjustable
Travel:.....85mm

Brakes

Front:.....Single Leading Shoe Drum
Rear:.....Single Leading Shoe Drum

General

Electrical output:.....112 watt
Headlight:.....40/50 watt
Air filter:.....Oiled foam rubber
Lubrication:.....Wet sump

Dimensions

Weight (full tank):.....129 kg
Wheelbase:.....1335mm
Ground clearance:.....145mm
Seat height:.....720mm
Fuel capacity (inc. reserve):.....10.7 litres
Oil capacity:.....1.6 litres
Rake/trail:.....29 degrees 45'/121mm

Performance

Braking distance: 60 km/h to zero:.....13.9 m
Fuel consumption:.....29.5 km/lit 3.35 lit/100 km
Range per tank:.....320 km

Sample spares cost*:.....\$111.14
Sample crash cost**:.....\$314.88

Test bike supplied by:.....Milledge, Mulgrave

*** See page 70.

Plus:.....Fuel economy, low seat, low weight. Good upright seating position. Snail-cam chain adjusters. Dog-leg clutch and brake levers. Flexible indicator stalks.
Minus:.....No trip meter or tachometer. Bad pillion seating. Poor horn. Soft forks.

Both front and rear shocks on the LTD are a trifle soft, and not satisfactory on anything less than good bitumen roads.

You'd almost swear that you can hear the fish swimming in the front forks of Yamaha's SR, the oil is so thin. The rear shocks aren't much firmer, making the bike almost dangerous for any serious pillion



Summing up

	Terrible	Poor	Average	Good	Brilliant
Cornering					
Cornering clearance					
Steering					
High speed stability					
Front forks					
Rear shocks					
Engine responsiveness					
Smoothness					
Bottom end power					
Medium range power					
Top end power					
Fuel economy					
Clutch operation					
Gearbox operation					
Brake effectiveness					
Fade resistance					
Quality of finish					
Riding position					
Seat comfort					
Pillion comfort					
Touring range					
Headlight					
Value for money					

work. Despite this, one up the SR still gives the most confidence and control over rough roads.

Pull back bars and seating position tend to make the bikes a bit vague at the front-end. Sitting upright, rather than over the handlebars as on many bikes, does give a very good command of the situation in traffic.

The riding position makes relaxed putting along the road a real buzz.

Kawasaki Z250G

Specifications

Make:.....Kawasaki
Model:.....Z 250 G (LTD)
Price (plus on-road charges):.....\$1484.95

Engine

Bore × stroke:.....70 × 64mm
Displacement:.....246 cm³
Compression ratio:.....8.9:1
Carburetion:.....32mm C.V. Keihin
Ignition:.....Transistorized Ignition
Redline:.....9,000 rpm
Starting:.....Electric

Transmission

Number of gears:.....5
Clutch:.....Wet Multi-plate
Primary drive:.....Gear
Final drive:.....Chain

Suspension

Front:.....Telescopic forks-oil damped
Travel:.....150mm
Rear:.....Twin shocks, 5 way adjustable springs-oil damped
Travel:.....92mm

Brakes

Front:.....Twin Leading Shoe Drum
Rear:.....Single Leading Shoe Drum

General

Electrical output:.....140 watt
Headlight:.....25/35 watt
Air filter:.....Paper
Lubrication:.....Wet sump

Dimensions

Weight (full tank):.....137 kg
Wheelbase:.....1335mm
Ground clearance:.....145mm
Seat height:.....720mm
Fuel capacity (inc. reserve):.....8 litres
Oil capacity:.....1.4 litres
Rake/trail:.....29 degrees/106mm

Performance

Braking distance: 60 km/h to zero:.....13.7mm
Fuel consumption:.....29 km/lit 3.45 lit/100 km
Range per tank:.....230 km

Sample spares cost*:.....\$84.51
Sample crash cost**:.....333.25

Test bike supplied by:.....Kawasaki Australia

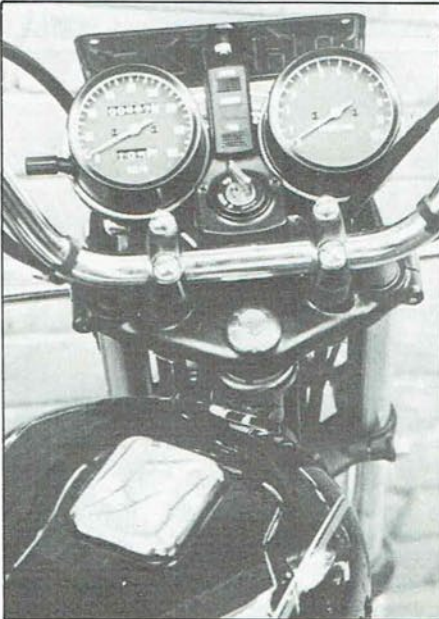
*** See page 70.

Plus:.....Fuel economy, low seat, low weight. Good looks and exhaust note. Very reliable starter. Quiet, torquey motor.
Minus:.....No starter lock as on larger Kawasaki models. Poor headlight.

The vagueness (particularly obvious on the LTD) probably wouldn't be noticeable unless you have been brought up on more conventional bikes.

The SR offers the best compromise with high, wide bars that don't form a sharp angle with your wrists. They are also slightly further forward, shifting the weight forward and giving better control.

Kawasaki has gone just a little too



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Riding position					
Seat comfort					
Pillion comfort					
Touring range					
Headlight					
Value for money					

far with its bars and you tend to slouch into the seat to avoid being poked in the ribs by their ends while turning.

Yamaha's SR feels more like a pushbike than a small motorbike with its narrow frame and crankcase. This gives excellent ground clearance and makes the bike a breeze to toss from side to side, or even to change line midway through a corner. The even narrower LTD comes close in this respect as

Yamaha XS Special

Specifications
Make:.....Yamaha
Model:.....XS 250 SH (Special)
Price (plus on-road charges):.....\$2028.95

Engine
Bore x stroke:.....55 x 52.4mm
Displacement:.....248 cm³
Compression ratio:.....9.6:1
Carburetion:.....2 x BS 32 (s.u. type)
Ignition:.....Points
Redline:.....9,000 r.p.m.
Starting:.....Electric and kick

Transmission
Number of gears:.....6
Clutch:.....Wet Multi-plate
Primary drive:.....Gear
Final drive:.....Chain

Suspension
Front:.....Telescopic Forks-oil damped
Travel:.....140mm
Rear:.....Twin shocks, 5 way adjustable springs-oil damped
Travel:.....80mm

Brakes
Front:.....Single piston disc
Rear:.....Single leading shoe drum

General
Electrical output:.....188 watt
Headlight:.....45/45 watt
Air filter:.....Dry foam rubber
Lubrication:.....Wet sump

Dimensions
Weight (full tank):.....176 kg
Wheelbase:.....1375mm
Ground clearance:.....140mm
Seat height:.....750mm
Fuel capacity (inc. reserve):.....14 litres
Oil capacity:.....2.3 litres
Rake/trail:.....27 degrees 30'/87mm

Performance
Braking distance: 60 km/h to zero:.....15 m
Fuel consumption:.....22.2 km/lit 4.6 lit/100 km
Range per tank:.....310 km
Sample spares cost*:.....\$178.08
Sample crash cost**:.....\$428.92

Test bike supplied by:.....Milledge, Mulgrave

*** See page 70.

Plus:Accurate, easy to read instruments, night or day. Dog-leg clutch and brake levers. Well positioned switches.
Minus:Mirrors useless above 4,000 rpm. Lacking of power and torque. Difficult starting. hot or cold. High weight.

well. The only thing that will throw these bikes is a large dip or bump mid-way through a quick corner, when the instability is annoying without being dangerous.

Wheels and Brakes

All the bikes run 18" tyres on the front and 16" on the rear, following the chopper tradition.

They were all fitted with the sort of tyres that we'd thought had disappeared years ago.

Yamaha runs cast aluminium "mags" on the XS, utilising a no-fade single disc and a single leading shoe drum brake at the rear.

Kawasaki also fit mags to the sweet little LTD, with a drum rear brake and a twin leading shoe drum brake at the front. These show little fade even with constant use.

One hassle was the rain running down the fork tubes and into the front brake, making it quite useless. Talking to other owners (and Kawasaki) suggested that our bike was unique in this respect.

The SR is one of a minority of road bikes still using wire wheels, which helps with the overall feeling of lightness of the bike.

I must admit to being surprised at its braking ability. The single leading shoe brakes are small diameter and only half width, like those on trail bikes, but don't be deceived by appearances. Both brakes had

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Riding position					
Seat comfort					
Pillion comfort					
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Headlight					
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Kawasaki's little beauty. It drew puzzled and even half-way approving looks from a couple of Harley riders — admittedly, with a lady on board.

reasonable feel and enough power to make the wheels chatter or lock under extra hard braking.

The brakes on this bike gave the most stability and control under all circumstances. In straight line braking they didn't quite match the LTD, and they were the only brakes to fade after constant use.

Maintenance

As these bikes are aimed partly at the economy market, home maintenance is an important consideration. All the handbooks are well laid-out, clearly explaining necessary tasks.

Cost cutting hasn't gone as far as leaving centrestands off any of the bikes. All the stands are very conveniently positioned and easy to use, as are the side stands.

Too heavy and too complicated, the XS still impressed in a number of ways. It was also the only one of the bikes that one of our lady riders wanted to buy!

The SR single leads in ease of maintenance. The bike is fitted with snail-cam chain adjusters which are extremely easy to use, with clearly marked indexes to keep the wheels aligned. There are also marks on the back of the exhaust baffle-box to indicate the optimum chain freeplay.

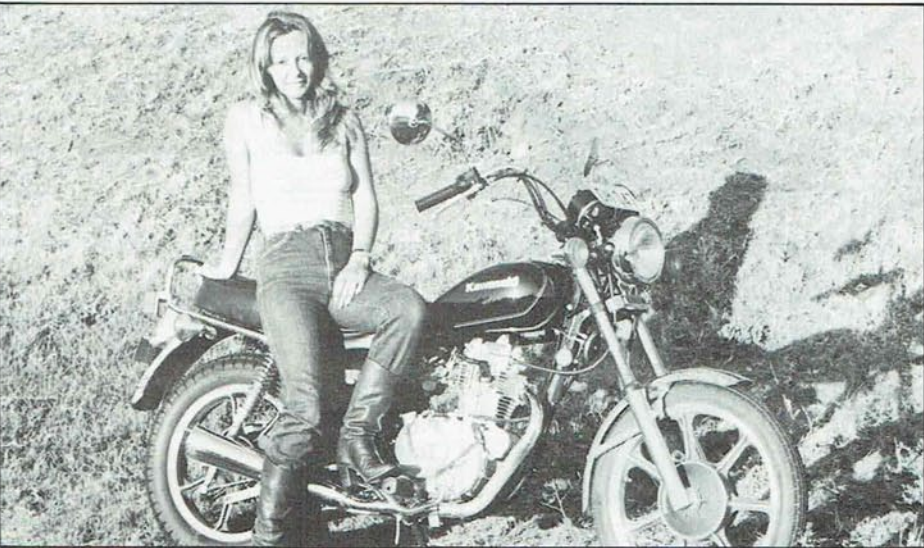
Both the SR and the LTD offer simple design with everything easily accessible.

The twin is more crowded, making access difficult. Many parts come in pairs too, of course. Another black mark is that this bike continues to run points ignition rather than no-fuss transistorised ignition as on the others.

Yamaha's little econobike. If there's a winner in this comparo, the SR is it.

THERE'S MORE to the cost of running a bike than just the purchase price. To help you get some idea of how much it will cost to keep a particular bike on the road, we have made up two theoretical "baskets" of spares - one including a general selection of spares, the other simulating a moderately serious crash repair.

*This price includes an oil filter, an air filter, a full set of brake pads/linings, a full set of globes, (except instrument lights), a



blinker lens and a chain (if applicable).

**This is how much the spares would cost if you were repairing the bike after a 60 km/h crash, with the bike falling on its right-hand side. Obviously, the actual parts to be replaced will vary.

All prices are recommended retail at time of test. What you actually get charged is up to the dealer, so do the usual thing - shop around!

General

When parked with other bikes, the singles looked like toys. People of slight build or stature would make a bee-line for them and marvel at the low seats. Some were cheeky enough to straddle them! They would nod in appreciation when they could reach the ground with flat feet and bent knees. The gods of motor-cycling hadn't forgotten them after all!

All controls are easy to reach and use and the dog-leg control levers fitted to the Yamahas are a dream people with small hands. The XS is the only one of the three fitted with self-cancelling blinkers, giving the novice one less thing to worry about.

Despite the out and out spartan approach of the SR, which doesn't even get a tachometer or trip meter, I found it my first choice out of the little choppers. The absolute ease of operation allows more time to enjoy and survive on the road.

Another factor was the optimum seating/handlebar relationship, giving a comfortable upright position in traffic. Add to this the servicing ease and you have the ultimate economy commuter.

The LTD has the appealing looks and drew more attention than the SR, which is just a bit too bland to cause even a ripple. The LTD has a beautiful tank (which will eventually find its way onto other, larger choppers), is very narrow and manoeuvrable and is just as economical on fuel as the SR. The exhaust note is more pleasing and this, combined with the stylish appearance, made it feel like "a bike" rather than just a commuting machine.

For those who like a bike that looks and feels more like a big bike, but is still closer to terra-firma than most, the XS twin is just the ticket. Despite other virtues, the engine let it down.

In conclusion.

The XS seems to suffer an identity crisis. It does appeal to some people, but is neither a "real" chopper nor a convenient commuter.

If you want a bike for completely utilitarian reasons; if you're subsidised by the Department of Social Security; or if you're after a bike that spells utter simplicity — than get the Yamaha SR 250. If you want something more stylish, look at the Kawasaki. And if you must have a kick starter — there's always the XS.

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Touring Story Competition

Win a Nolan helmet
and a set
of leathers!

BIKE is looking for the best touring stories around! Every month, we'll choose one story to publish in the magazine — and the lucky author will not only get paid for it, but will also win a Nolan helmet! The best story of the year will be picked in December, and will win a full set of superb leathers as well!

Just send us the story of your trip (preferably typed) and colour slides, black & white prints or drawings to illustrate it (no colour prints, please) and you're in the running for the helmet and the leathers. It doesn't matter where you went — to South America, to the Centre or just into the bush for the long weekend. If the story's good enough, we'll print it!

