

## Testing the 250s Part II



### Yamaha SR250

Well, they say there's one in every crowd, and our 250 comparo proved no exception; cosmetically at least Yamaha's SR250 proved the ugly duckling of the bunch, with its chopperesque styling detracting, in our view, from an otherwise sound little bike.

In some respects, the SR is something of a contradiction in its own terms. On one hand, the bike is an out and out cost cutting exercise, fitted with drum brakes, spoked wheels and a spartan instrument console lacking both tach and trip meters. But then the stylists got to work, and for some reason decided that the SR would look at its best with two-tier seat, 'teardrop' style tank, forward-mounted pegs and medium rise handlebars.

So, as it sits on the showroom floor, the SR250 appears to be a little schizoid, and until our testers threw a leg or five over it, we found ourselves in a quandary as to how to label it. On the road, however, the message comes through loud and clear: commuter!

Despite its looks and the competition lineage of its engine (TT250), the SR is unashamedly at its best through traffic, despite its shallow rake of a shade under 29.5 degrees, a full two degrees more than most.

Shallow rake normally goes hand in hand with good high speed, straight line manners at the expense of ground clearance and nimbleness; so far as the SR is concerned, the former is unnecessary, while the latter seems unaffected. These attributes necessary to commuting were found in abundance, with our testers genuinely impressed with the bike's low speed handling, ground clearance and the distribution of its modest 121 kg (267 lb) weight.

The same story failed dismally once on the open road, however. While both its thoroughly conventional suspension and tyres were deemed par for the course, the unorthodox sit-up-and-beg riding position made itself uncomfortably apparent, while the front end felt a little vague when travelling at 100 kmh or so.

Similarly, two-up riding provided its share of minor troubles, netting distinctly average marks from our intrepid pilots. Overall, it seemed felt that carrying a passenger made unreasonable demands on the bike's modest spread of power while contributing to the uncertainties of its light steering.

So much for the SR's shortcomings; taken in context, the little Yam performs admirably in most circumstances, particularly when ridden solo. For city work, all its cycle parts work in harmony, blessed, as it is, with adequate mirrors, lighting and horn. Even the rudimentary instrument console works to the rider's advantage in the cut-and-thrust of dense traffic, requiring little attention.

Bearing in mind the SR's highway deficiencies and styling type, its applications within the commuting brief are universal. Other than to those over six feet tall, it creates no distinction as to those who

*The Yamaha SR250 proved a worthy commuter despite a possible styling handicap.*

may avail themselves of its charms. While no-one actually fell in love with the thing, it was agreed that ladies, diminutive 17-year-olds and managing directors of multinational corporations might all benefit from riding an SR to the office.

The strong point of the entire package is the 239cc engine; as a four-stroke single, it's not a demanding motor on which to perform day-to-day maintenance tasks, requiring only a little time, a few additions to the tool-kit provided, and an adequate helping of gumption. Access to the battery, camchain and final drive chain all receive good marks, while several testers remarked upon the commendably simple drive chain adjustment by snail-cam adjusters. Perhaps the weakest point is the seat removal mechanism; obviously a case of form preceding function, the rigmarole involved in removing it inspired frenzied rage in our testers and much mirth among onlookers.

The origins of the generous torque available is the 239cc mill, which is quite a slogger despite oversquare cylinder dimensions of 73.5mm by 56.5mm stroke. Sparks are regulated by transistorised ignition, with the resultant charge being taken by gear primary drive to one of the five available gearbox ratios. The single carburettor employed is a 34mm Mikuni which is fed air through an oiled foam filter.

As you'd expect from such an engine low fuel consumption is its byword, and despite a sound thrashing from most, the SR returned admirable figures; ranging from 23 kpl to a fraction over 30, the SR averaged out at 25.4 kpl or 71.7 mpg. Impressive figures for predominantly city work, despite what enraged Velocette or BSA single owners might say.

So there you have it; although not at home on the open road, where most of the twins outperformed it in almost every respect, the SR will withstand any amount of rough treatment within the city limits and will run economically into the bargain; it looks are definitely something of an acquired taste, as indeed are the drum brakes and spartan instruments. Overall though, the SR was thought a most useful bike, and would have been all the more so had not the Kawasaki Z250C come along. But that, as they say, is another story.

### Kawasaki Z250 C

Some bikes in this comparo were easily labelled, and others did so many things so well that they were hard to classify. Kawasaki's Z250C falls into the former category; all who rode it circled the word "commuter".

In a way it's a shame to pigeonhole this bike so readily, because it had about it an air of unfulfilled promise. With its light weight and robust, torquey engine, it could have been one of the best of the lot.

But still, the little single proved a popular bike and during the Great Ocean Road run

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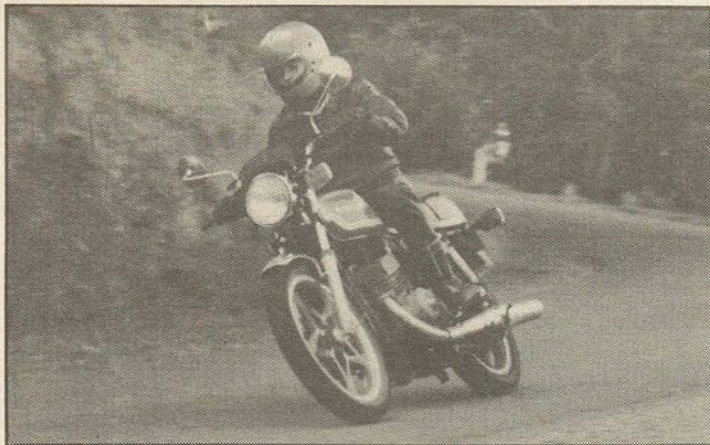
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## Testing the 250s Part II



hotshot little bike; albeit with a question mark over its brakes. Both the single front disc and rear drum are certainly efficient, and certainly up to the task of stopping its modest poundage. Sadly though, the back in particular proved a little sensitive, and prone to locking the back wheel if a prudent right foot was not used.

The X7 is also a very comfortable bike, with the bars, footrests and seating position all at the proper distances and angles. There's sufficient room to carry a pillion comfortably, though the lightness of the steering is accentuated thereby. The only control that could be faulted was the combined indicator/dipswitch, which was a nuisance to use and needs a rethink. Instrumentation is neat and simple, and the mirrors are well-located and not overly blurred by the vibrations.

Two-strokes have fallen out of favour to

*Among the better balanced bikes in the test, the Suzuki GT250X7 had less pizzazz than the RD250LC's more mid-range torque.*

some extent lately, and it's easy to see why after riding the X7 around town. The rider is followed by a plume of smoke, the engine rattles and pops, and there's a subconscious urge to pull into every petrol station one passes; on the other hand, the bike is reliable, fast, a good handler, a good stopper, and lots of fun.

As a pure sports bike the X7 is surpassed only by the RD250LC, but adapts far better to the wide range of demands placed upon it by the average motorcyclist. It might not be watercooled, and it might not have the sleek good looks of the LC; but it is well-finished, and handsome enough in its own way. And at \$1299, there are 200 good reasons why we'd rate it up with the better four-strokes.

## In Conclusion

During the last two issues of the *Horror*, you'll have read, or at least glanced over, road tests of ten two-fifty cubic centimetre capacity motorcycles; in short, almost every 250 roadster on the market.

From an idea born in the dark and alcohol-laden recesses of Nielsen's brain, the idea was germinated by the remainder of the AMCN staff until it became an all too uncomfortable reality; but as Everest had to be climbed, so the 250 test had to be completed.

It took over two months to actually get the bikes ridden and a shade over half that time again to get our vague perambulations down on paper, so that you, dear reader, have access to the accumulated wisdom of the ten lost souls whose responsibility it became to test the bikes.

That's right, ten people, ten sore bums and five times that number of differing ideas as to what a 250 should, or should not do. During the course of the test, each rider got to ride each bike over a four day period, and was then asked to give a brief assessment of that particular machine's performance.

We chose over 50 different parameters to

measure, and having measured them each rider was then asked to write a brief piece on the special merits of each of the bikes.

The net result was reams of paper containing all manner of useless information which Guntrip was asked to collate on pain of bi-weekly enemas. From there came the mini-tests for each bike and the results which you see before you.

During the period of the entire test, opinions flowed copiously concerning the merits of each bike; but when, after the test had run its course, the company were asked to pick winners, few doubts were expressed.

With such a multiplicity of bikes available, the potential 250 buyer can almost pick a bike to match the colour of his hair, eyes or any other physical characteristic; how, then does one decide on a winner?

Essentially, it was agreed a 250 would fit

### Suzuki GSX250EX

Aircooled four-stroke twin  
249cc  
10.5:1  
60.0mm x 44.2mm  
26.4 bhp @ 10,000 rpm  
2.02 kgm @ 8000 rpm  
2 x 30mm Mikuni  
Wet sump  
6 speed  
Wet multi-plate  
  
CDI  
Electric  
45/45 watt  
  
single cradle  
  
Oil-damped telescopic  
shocks, adj. preload  
Cast alloy  
3.00 x 18 front, 3.50 x 18 rear  
Hydraulic disc/SLS drum  
27.5 degrees  
100mm  
  
160 kg  
1360mm  
805mm  
14.5 lit.  
21 kpl  
\$1599 (\$1499 spoked wheel)  
12 months/20,000 km  
Suzuki Australia

### Suzuki GT250X7

Aircooled two-stroke twin  
247cc  
6.7:1 (corrected)  
54.0mm x 54.0mm  
29 bhp @ 8000 rpm  
2.6 kgm @ 7500 rpm  
2 x 26mm Mikuni  
Suzuki CCI  
6 speed  
Wet multi-plate  
  
CDI  
Kick  
35/35 watt  
  
semi-double cradle  
  
Oil-damped telescopic  
shocks, adj. preload  
Cast alloy  
3.00 x 18 front, 3.25 x rear  
Hydraulic disc/SLS drum  
27.3 degrees  
107mm  
  
128 kg  
1310mm  
795mm  
15 lit.  
16.25 kpl  
\$1299  
12 months/20,000 km  
Suzuki Australia

### Honda CB250NB

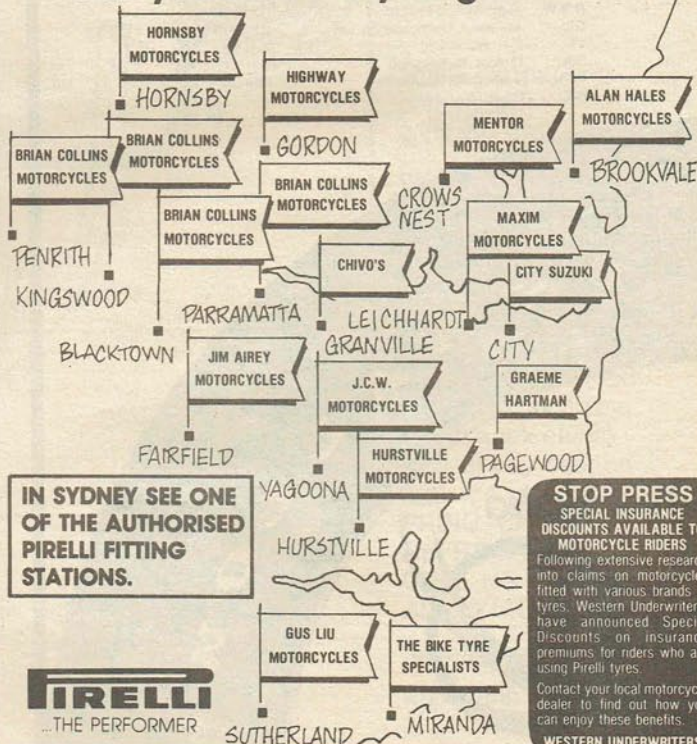
Aircooled four-stroke twin  
249cc  
9.4:1  
62mm x 41.4mm  
27 bhp @ 10,000 rpm  
2.0 kgm @ 8500 rpm  
2 x 28mm Keihin  
Wet Sump  
6 speed  
Wet multi-plate  
  
CDI  
Electric  
50/40 watt  
  
semi-cradle  
  
Oil-damped telescopic  
shocks, adj. preload  
Comstar  
3.60 x 19 front; 4.10 x 18 rear  
Hydraulic disc/SLS drum  
28 degrees  
140mm  
  
167 kg  
1395mm  
795mm  
18 lit.  
18 kpl  
\$1709  
12 months/20,000 km  
Honda Australia

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## Testing the 250s Part II

into one of three categories; commuter, sportster or all-rounder. The commuter box is perhaps most readily identifiable. Since time began, small capacity motorcycles have been plying the route from home to office, while their riders, in at least a percentage of cases, have no more interest in motorcycles than getting to work each day.

Therefore, to be a good commuter, a bike should be easy to maintain, reliable, cheap, economical, light and manoeuvrable, quick enough to keep its rider one jump ahead of the traffic flow and well mannered.

The second category, that of sportster, is also easily defined. Here the emphasis is reorientated so that speed, good handling, good brakes and well tuned suspension come to the fore. If the bike in question is also relatively light and easily maintained, then that's a bonus; and how many boy racers out there are really expecting fuel economy?

All of which brings us to the problem of defining an all-rounder. Perhaps the best shot would be to look for the bike which best emulates the qualities found in bigger displacement bikes.

Here, a bike should be reasonably fast and reasonably economical; it should be relatively easy to maintain, it should take a passenger with few complaints, should offer good handling, be adequately braked and suspended, have adequate lighting and enough comfort to take its rider on a tour of the bush; it should also be reliable and able to suffer all manner of abuse at the hands of novice riders. All of which is a tall order for any bike, let alone a 250.

Nonetheless, not only were winners found in all three categories, but they are good bikes to boot. Sure, the half-hearted compromises were there, but not at the top

As a commuter or a two-up tourer, it's a thoroughly ridiculous proposition, but as a sportster, it stands head and shoulders above everything else, even at the unfriendly price of \$1899.

And so to the best all-rounder; the bike which must by definition satisfy the most difficult criteria of the entire test to gain the prize.

Naturally, a little soul-searching was necessary before any hard and fast conclusion could be drawn, but at the end of it, the Kawasaki Z250A came out from a line ball to take the top prize.

There is little point reiterating the qualities of the A; all these can be found in the relevant test. Suffice to say the Kawasaki twin performed well in all its facets, and maintained a fulsome measure of poise while achieving same.

What separated the A from its closer competitors is a small measure of both quantity and quality. On the quantity side of things, the A was faster than both the Honda and Suzuki GSX250, while being more economical than either; on the quality angle, it offered a more secure ride and better braking than any of its peers. Only the GSX250 and the Kawasaki Z250B came close, and the GSX was deemed harder to ride due to its revvy nature, while the Kwaka B bowed out after much deliberation on the relative merits of drum brakes versus discs, and spoked wheels versus cast items. The simple fact of the matter is that while the B sells for \$1420, an extra \$79 will get you a flash paint job, a virtually maintenance free front disc brake and certainly easily maintained cast wheels.

Consequently, the Kawasaki Z250A won out by half a length from some tight competition as top all-rounder. The B model missed out by virtue of its cost-

*"During the period of the entire test options flowed copiously concerning the merits of each bike, but when, after the test had run its course, the company were asked to pick winners, few doubts were expressed."*

of the heap.

Top commuter was undoubtedly the Kawasaki Z250C; the attributes which go to make up a sound commuter point unswervingly toward a single cylinder four-stroke, and those attributes were found in generous measure on the little Kwaka.

Although not as economical as the SR250 Yamaha, the Kawasaki returned a fairly respectable 22 kpl (62 mpg), and there is no question the little C both looked and felt like a motorcycle. At 128 kg, the C is one of the lightest bikes in the class, and its quality of finish and instrumentation won a good many hearts, as a bonus. You want cheap? Then the C's for you at only \$1099 plus on road.

With the single qualm about only having five gears taken into consideration, the C was still capable of cantering along at a respectable lick, and with a single cylinder layout, it is more than capable of being maintained by the home mechanic.

Top sportster was pretty much a foregone conclusion, and with due respect to the Suzuki X7, there was no way it would have ever dislodged the Yamaha RD250LC from top spot. A bike that promises grand prix performance on the road and gets it even half way right just must be offering something very special.

Despite being almost entirely useless below 5000 rpm, the LC does indeed deliver. Its performance above 6000 rpm gained an 11 out of a possible ten marks from one tester who shall remain nameless. Davis, while other riders found its performance as impressive.

Performance is indeed the operative word for the LC, because every twitch of the right hand is matched by a rigid frame and suspension set-up. At times the front forks were too soft for some of our demon brakers, while certain of the lightweights felt the monoshock to be a little hard. Even so, frame, brakes and suspension were well matched to the bike's performance.

Other aspects of its performance were exemplary; the 60/55 watt halogen headlight, for example, was everything a headlight should be; much less borders on criminal negligence. Watercooling will add to the bike's long term stamina rather than detract from it.

All in all, the RD won high praise, despite its highly individual mannerisms.

cutting measures, while both the CB250NB and the Suzuki GSX250EX both deserve a 'mention in the despatches'; the GSX for its high level of comfort and remarkable front brake, and the Honda for its tight, racey feel that is spoiled by the engine's lack of perceptible grunt when the going gets tough.

Of the others? Everyone liked the X7, a bike which ran the LC close in several respects. Similarly, most folks found the SR250 Yamaha endearing; its single cylinder torque and simplicity went much of the way to making the SR a good little bike. Alas, in the final analysis it was let down by its poor brakes, unusual seating position and lack of top end poke.

The remaining members of the Yamaha stable were unfortunately memorable only for their mediocrity; both the XS250 variants felt sluggish, dated and heavy, while the SH suffers from a crippling \$1899 price tag. At this office, we're certainly looking forward to Yamaha's new range of 250s.

So that's it; the good, the bad and the ugly. In the two months of the test we chalked up over 25,000 kilometres, all of them trouble-free and most of them fun. Most of the people involved in the testing will not look upon 250s in quite the same light again, particularly after the run down the Great Ocean Road which concluded the test.

Credit must go to all the people who sacrificed their spare time to ensure the final run was the success it deserved to be. Among the folks involved, Mark Davis and Al Kofoed showed most of us how to do it, not to mention a few Katana riders into the bargain; Mike Lithgow, who showed great restraint on the road and took some great shots off it; Lynda Harley, who endured us all so patiently; Simon Egglestone, who showed us how to ride the Z250C; Noel McLaughlin, who stepped into the breach at the last minute; Mike Wauchope, whose youthful exuberance surprised most folks, himself included; Warren Tapner, who gave us just a hint of his old skills; Bob Guntrip, who contributed so little for so long that most of us forgot he even came, and Editor Nielsen, who exercised so much organisational flair on the day that ten madmen on as many bikes didn't put so much as a foot out of place.

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