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■ When Yamaha's SR250 was introduced to our shop the reactions were, putting it mildly, mixed. The staff had some artistic criticisms. We showed the bike to a woman whose previous motorcycle was a Wards 125—no novice she—and she said it looks silly.

Then we had a visit from a man who works for our printer. He's just become interested in motorcycles and was asking the usual questions so we took him out to the shop, waved at the row of bikes and he took one look.

"That's it!" he said as he climbed onto the SR250. "This is the motorcycle for me."

Yamaha's marketeers won't be surprised. When they set out to learn what people want motorcycles to look like they found that there are two strong schools of opinion. Survey groups who like what the stylists call square motorcycles, for example the XS750D2, late RD400s and early XS400s, don't like round motorcycles, as illustrated by Yamaha's specials. And people who like the specials like them very much.



Further, there seems to be some sort of variable that didn't show up in the research. People with personal experience with motorcycles tend to think that bikes should look as they've always looked with perhaps a touch of road racer.

People who have always seen motorcycles from a distance, who may not have noticed anything about bikes since those posters of Peter Fonda, laid back and headin' down the road, are duck soup for specials that look right and don't look challenging.

That should be explained. First, although we object to some of the features of Yamaha's Specials, usually the handlebars and seats, we agree the style has sales appeal. But they are based on a look that began with big machines which have room to laze back in the saddle, put your feet up and your hands high. Room to stretch, which is how the highway cruiser began.

The same artists working toward the same silhouette can't make it work as well when the mechanical parts are smaller. A small single-cylinder engine and a short wheelbase don't translate. Mohammed Ali could get away with fancy dances and poetry in the ring. He could proclaim "I am the greatest" because he was. But a kid working his way into the Golden

YAMAHA EXCITER I SR250

**Under the
Harleyesque
Styling is a
Perfectly Good
Motorcycle With
Special Appeal
for Beginners.**



Photos by John Ulrich

AUGUST 1980/67

Gloves who struck such heroic postures would be hooted from the ring.

Or he would be if the fans knew something about boxing. The non-fight crowd might think *all* boxers talk like that.

This brings us to the SR250, better known in the lay press as the Exciter I.

Yamaha wants new business. They know motorcycles are becoming more popular, outwardly because of fuel prices, and Yamaha wants to get these people into their showrooms and onto their motorcycles.

Even the name is part of it. Most riders think and talk in terms of displacement, be it Harley 74, Husqvarna 390 or Honda 750. It's part of the sport and we seldom question it.

People who don't know much about engines find this confusing. Because Yamaha doesn't want to baffle potential converts, they skip the problem by leaving the displacement out of the name and off the side covers. It's the Exciter I, a written nudge in the ribs, and for the model that comes with top box instead of passenger seat, it's the Exciter II.

Mechanically the SR250—we'll use the technical title with due respect—is Yamaha's normal businesslike good engineering.

We've seen the basic engine before, in the XT250. It's a new-for-1980 engine, bore and stroke of 75 x 56.5 mm, with a single overhead camshaft and two valves. The 9.2:1 compression ratio works fine on low-lead gas and the carb is a Mikuni 34-mm CV, chosen for emissions control while the off-road TT250 gets a 28-mm

slide-throttle Mikuni and the XT250 has a slide-throttle-with-accelerator pump. It's difficult to compare capacities of different types of carburetor, but we'd guess the street-only SR loses some punch to the emissions rules and gains it back with a larger venturi. Like the other new Yamaha 250s, the SR has as its only different engine feature a counterbalancer, not as complicated as the Honda double-balancer system but nearly as effective. The SR250 is reasonably smooth for a small engine and it's restfully smooth for a Single.

The engine is a stressed portion of the frame, completing the loop from down-tube to swing axle pivot. The SR frame isn't at all like the XT and TT frame, but the stressed engine is used in both so the engine can be low, which means the frame can be designed with a fairly straight backbone and still mount the seat low. To further this, and maybe for style as well, the rear tire is a 16-inch. The SR250 is supposed not to intimidate, to feel right with the potential buyer's feet firmly and flatly on the ground, and although the bike isn't billed as such, there's the unspoken hope that women will like its looks and welcome not having to stop on tippy-toe. If there are other, larger motorcycles with even lower seats than the SR's measured 29 inches, well, never mind, most young adults can reach the ground without effort and that's what's important.

The other components are not surprising. Electric start only, on grounds that new riders don't like kick starting and may view a kick lever as a sign of potential elec-

trical problems. Drum brakes at both ends, presumably for cost reasons, five speeds and electronic ignition.

There are several useful items not always found on small road bikes. The steering lock is integral with the ignition switch, the fuel petcock is vacuum controlled, the starter won't work unless the clutch lever is pulled in. None of these is new but they are features more often found on expensive models and they appear on the SR because they make the bike easier to operate.

An odd item on the list, although useful too, are flexible turn stalks, just like those on dual-purpose bikes and don't let us catch you talking about women riders. And the SR has small stowage areas on the handlebar crown and beneath the seat, no comments please.

There are also two glaring omissions, but we'll get to that.

Evaluation of the SR250 falls readily into three general groups.

First, mechanical operation, where the SR250 does quite well. Given full choke in the morning and whenever the engine has been allowed to cool to ambient air temperature, the engine fires quickly and although it doesn't leap into action while cold, it isn't as bad as some other recent 1980 models. Lots of flywheel keeps the Exciter I from stalling with even the most ham-handed wobbler at the controls, yet performance is a match for anything in the 250 class (which isn't much, nowadays). A quarter mile time of 16.36 sec. makes the Exciter more than a match for the occasional Porsche or Camaro. The

original Japanese 250s were slower than the present Exciter I and so are Honda's XL250 and Kawasaki's KL250.

More than peak power and a willingness to keep running under the worst of conditions, the Yamaha 250 has excellent mid-range power and crisp throttle response. The balancer does its job, holding vibration down to unobtrusive levels. If it weren't for the awkward riding position the Exciter I would be a surprisingly good highway machine because of the low vibration and the feeling of relaxed power that comes from hearing one cylinder fire 3111 times a minute instead of the average big four cylinder engine firing 8000 times a minute.

On top of the good performance and smooth running, the Yamaha gives excellent gas mileage. On the mileage loop, half city and half highway, the Exciter I returned 76 mpg. Only Honda's CB125 has been more economical in the *CW* mileage test, and it only got 78 mpg. Mileage alone justifies the SR250's existence. Economy continues into maintenance on the small Yamaha. Ignition is by CDI, eliminating points. The two valves adjust with a wrench and a screwdriver.

Brakes and chassis are certainly up to the demands of the Exciter. Though only drums front and rear, the Exciter stops quickly with moderate lever pressure and good control. And having drums, the Exciter's brakes likely will work in wet weather, too.

Suspension travel is limited and the suspension feels much harsher than it is because the low seat has so little padding.

Still, the suspension isn't what you'd call punishing. Handling is a question of faith and just how much the Exciter's rider has in its tires. There's more cornering clearance than tire traction and up to the limits of the rim protectors/tires nothing wiggles or wobbles so the Exciter handles without problems. Mostly due to the seating position the bike tends to fall into corners and turn before the rider is ready, but that goes with the short wheelbase. Overall, the Exciter I performs admirably for a small street bike.

Part Two, ergonomics. Here the Exciter I, the lookit me styling, interferes with the well-designed SR250. Good taste prevents us from printing the rude remarks about the seat, which is too much bucket, and the bars, which, well, if the old style high bars were known as Sit Up and Beg, then the Exciter's bars are Perch And Read Small Print. A 52-in. wheelbase plain doesn't give enough room for the laidback bits to strut their stuff. The controls, as in clutch and brake pull, return spring, shift lever effort, are light and smooth, reaching them is not. Pegs, grips and seat are too close together for any ride longer than 20 minutes. The bike would be more easily ridden, with less effort and more comfort, if less styling had been done.

Which brings us to Part Three, the Exciter I/SR250 as a motorcycle for novices.

Here are the glaring omissions. There is no sidestand and the choke lever is awkwardly hidden beneath the tank.

Unacceptable. We're told the plan was for the sidestand to be an option, so the suggested retail price would be lower by a

dollar or so and the customer could be persuaded to spend a non-sticker couple of bucks on the second stand.

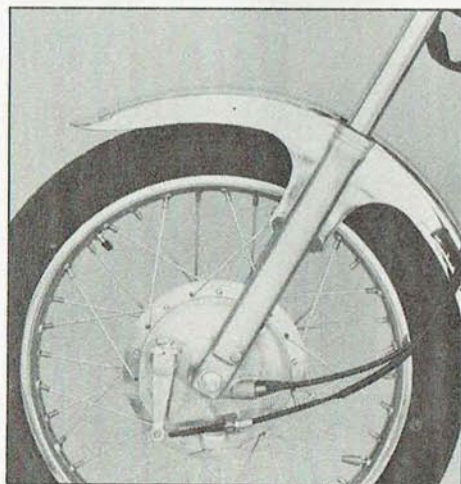
The SR250 has a low seat, with a high passenger portion and high and narrow bars. The short people who appreciate the low seat find it hard to kick their right leg over the high part while keeping the machine balanced with not much leverage. Remember, these are riders who've just learned how.

The Yamaha XJ650 has a lovely choke lever on the left grip. The rider can pull in the clutch and punch the starter button while controlling the throttle and choke with both hands on the grips, that is, in full control. The not-quite-motorcycle Yamaha-hopper has a bar-mount choke.

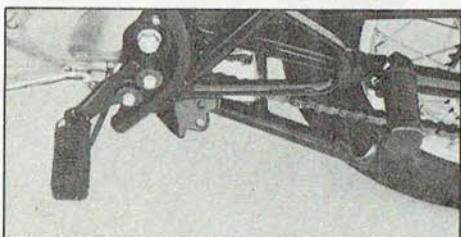
Why the devil doesn't the SR250 have one? Couldn't the SR250 and XJ650 share controls? Isn't increased production supposed to reduce unit cost?

The bottom line in our opinion, is that the SR250 was designed to appeal to people who don't know much about motorcycles. They don't know what to ask for. They'll understand Special styling, electric start and the little stowage bins and not having to shut off the fuel every time, so they get them. New riders—and we believe in encouraging them—won't know until later that you don't need to fumble with the choke or wrestle with centerstands.

The SR250 will attract showroom traffic and it's properly engineered, but for now, until it rides and operates as good as it sits on the showroom floor, we'll vote for healthy exercise and prefer the XT250. ☒



Simple single leading shoe drum brakes on both ends of the small Yamaha stop the bike in short distance with little pressure and work well in the wet.



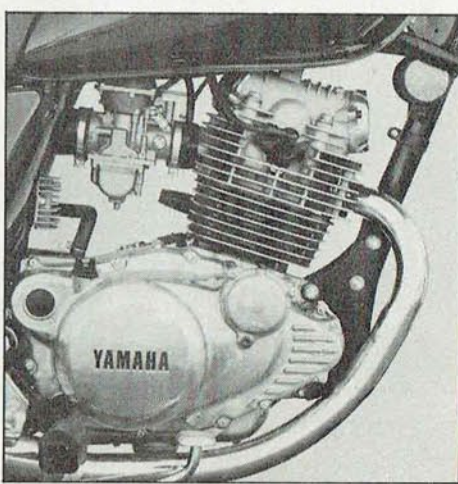
No sidestand is installed on the Exciter I, though there is a mounting tab on the frame for a stand.



Like the dual purpose XT250, the Exciter I has snail chain adjusters and a lightweight rear sprocket.



A hinged plastic compartment at the Yamaha's steering head is convenient for storing change for parking or toll roads. Instrumentation consists of a 85 mph speedometer and lights for high beam, neutral and turn signals.



In street-only trim Yamaha's small four-stroke Single has electric starting and a rubber plug where the kick starter used to be.



Not all parts of the Exciter I will appeal to beginning motorcyclists. The choke knob mounted on the carb is difficult to reach.



YAMAHA EXCITER I SR250

SPECIFICATIONS

List price	\$1279
Engine	sohc Single
Bore x stroke	75.0 x 56.5mm
Displacement	249cc
Compression ratio	9.2:1
Carburetion(1) Mikuni BS34	
Air filter	oiled foam
Ignition	transistorized electronic
Claimed power	21.0 bhp @ 8000 rpm
Claimed torque	14.8 lb.-ft. @ 6500 rpm
Lubrication	wet sump
Oil capacity	1.7 qt.
Fuel capacity	2.7 gal.
Starter	electric
Electrical power	12 v AC magneto
Battery	12 v 12 ah
Headlight	50/35 w
Primary drive	gear
Clutch	multiplate, wet
Final drive	chain
Gear ratios, overall:1	
5th	7.39
4th	8.99
3rd	11.34
2nd	15.15
1st	23.77
Suspension:	
Front	telescopic fork travel
	5.5 in.
Rear	swing arm travel
	3.3 in.

Tires:

Front.....	3.00-18 Yokohama
Rear.....	120/90-16 Yokohama

Brakes:

Front.....	6.25-in. drum
Rear.....	5.12-in. drum

Brake swept area39.7 sq. in.

Brake loading (160-lb. rider)11.25 lb./sq. in.

Wheelbase52.75 in.

Rake/Trail27.5°/4.8 in.

Handlebar width28.0 in.

Seat height29.0 in.

Seat width11.5 in.

Footpeg height11.0 in.

Ground clearance7.0 in.

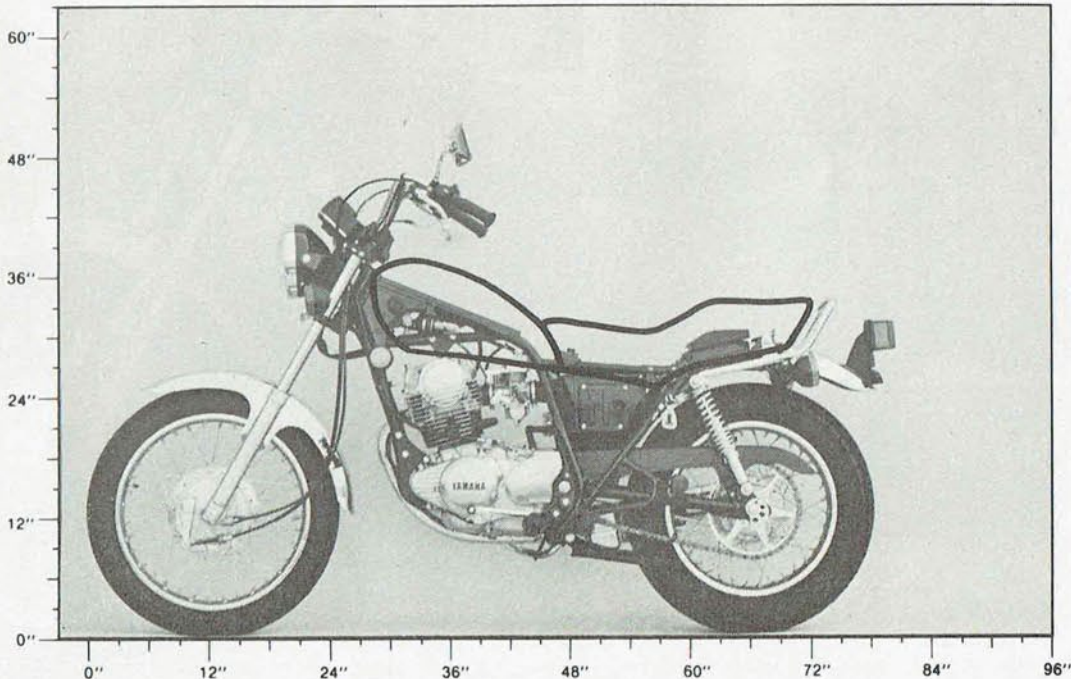
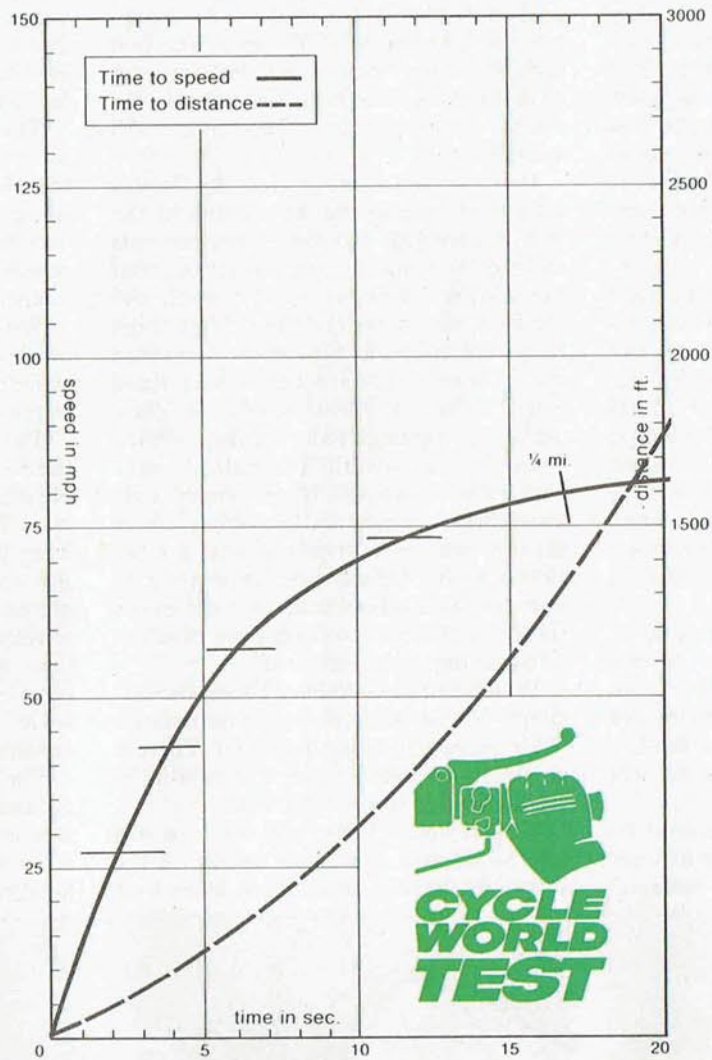
Test weight
(w/half-tank fuel)287 lb.

Weight bias, front/rear,
percent45/55

GVRW655 lb.

Load capacity368 lb.

ACCELERATION

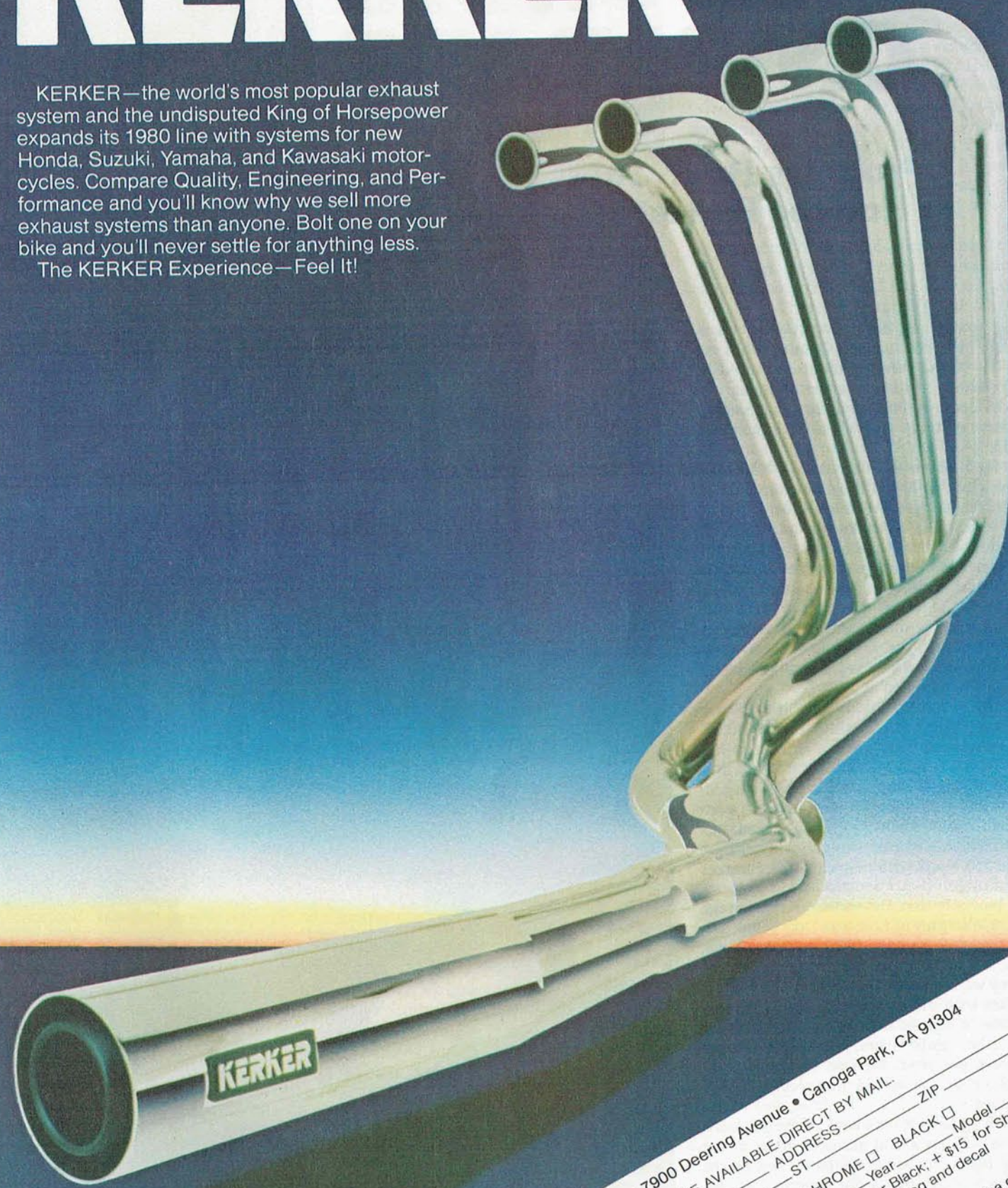


PERFORMANCE

Standing ¼-mile.....	16.36 sec.
	@ 76.66 mph
Top speed in ½-mile	80 mph
Fuel consumption	76 mpg
Range	
(to reserve tank)	167mi.
Acceleration:	
0-30 mph.....	3.3 sec.
0-40 mph.....	4.2 sec.
0-50 mph.....	6.0 sec.
0-60 mph.....	7.4 sec.
0-70 mph.....	12.8 sec.
0-80 mph.....	25.0 sec.
Top gear acceleration:	
40-60 mph.....	7.9 sec.
60-80 mph	13.6 sec.
Maximum speed in gears:	
1st.....	27.0 mph
2nd.....	42.3 mph
3rd.....	56.6 mph
4th.....	71.4 mph
5th.....	86.8 mph
Speedometer error:	
30 mph indicated..	27.3 mph
60 mph indicated ..	57.3 mph
Braking distance:	
from 30 mph.....	28 ft.
from 60 mph.....	125 ft.
Engine speed	
at 60 mph	6222 rpm

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