

FIRST OF ALL, bear in mind we are just as confused about YZ/MX as you. We can understand the YZ250 as a completely different motorcycle than the MX250, which in part explains why the YZ250 costs \$600 more than the MX.

Why, then, did Yamaha chose to market two (count 'em!) 125 motocrossers that are curiously similar, especially in price? Reasonable explanation: The

TEST: YAMAHA YZ125

**"YZ" SHOULD
MEAN A WORKS
REPLICA RACER.
NOT SO, BUT IT
STILL WORKS.**

MX125 is actually a respectable racer that can be used as a versatile play-bike—cowtrailing, cross-country, and so on. The YZ is a full-blown no-compromise motocross racer, and isn't much fun for anything else.

Drawback to the explanation: the YZ125 is also a bike you can play around on. As for motocross, it's (sigh) "respectable."

The YZ costs about \$120 more than the MX, and here's where that money goes:

- a Hitachi CDI ignition that lets the YZ rev like a Cox .049;
- light, Akrontesque Takasago alloy rims;
- a 28mm Mikuni instead of a 26;
- magnesium backing plates front and rear;
- very close-ratio gearing;
- no Autolube (hoo-hah!);
- a chrome-bore cylinder with hungrier ports;
- decent handlebars;
- and last (but certainly most significant from a commercial standpoint) that titillating YZ aluminum gasoline tank complete with pukka-looking nylon straps, chrome rings and Velcro fastener.

To make those changes to an MX 125 would cost many times the price dif-



ference, and lots of stuff would be left over. Seems as if the YZ would be a better bargain, especially when it comes time to resell.

Bargain or no, our test YZ125 was brand-new-stone-stock-out-of-the-crate, so we treated it as such. We topped off that crafty gas tank with Bardahl VBA 20:1 (the factory makes no official recommendation) pushed the enriching lever, and boy, did that motorcycle ever fire up. *Yelp!* Ten thousand rpm in a millisecond.

Sitting there between your legs it feels like a minibike if you are 5-9 or more. Like Suzuki, Yamaha has designed a small racer for streamlined folks. The only effort to make a light motorcycle is in the aluminum tank, magnesium hubs (which the YZ250 doesn't even have), and alloy rims. It weighs a scant 194 pounds ready to run, which makes it second only to Honda's CR125M in the petite parade.

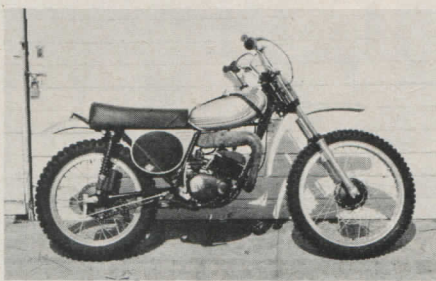
Now that the cursed ATMX is gone, we can marvel at a true mild steel motocross frame (the YZ's and MX125's are identical) replete with effective spring-loaded pegs, good rise and shape to the handlebars, thin non-fatiguing seat of hand-laid fiberglass, and overall skinniness which lets you work fast without stumbling into things.

We gingerly cruised around Indian Dune's International Course, known affectionately as The Land Of The

dr TEST

YAMAHA YZ125A

Retail price, approx: \$819
Yamaha International
660 Orangethorpe Ave.
Buena Park, Calif. 90620



SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	Two-stroke, 7-port reed valve, single
BORE/STROKE	56mm/50mm
COMPRESSION RATIO	8.0:1
CLAIMED HORSEPOWER	23 @ 10,000 RPM
CLAIMED TORQUE	11.9 ft./lb. @ 9500 RPM
CARBURETION	28mm Mikuni
PRIMARY DRIVE RATIO	3.90:1
GEAR RATIOS	2.83/2.07/1.61/1.32/1.14:1
FINAL DRIVE RATIO	12/48 (4.000:1)
LUBRICATION	Premix
FUEL	No recommendation
OIL	No recommendation

COMPONENTS

FORKS	Yamaha, 6 inches travel
SHOCKS	Yamaha Thermal-Flow, 3.5 inches travel
FRAME	Mild steel, double down tube, full cradle
PEGS	Serrated, folding, self-cleaning
HUBS	Full width, magnesium backing plates
BRAKES	Single leading shoe
RIMS	Takasago alloy
TIRES	2.75 x 21 and 3.50 x 18 Yokohama knobby
CHAIN	DID #428
IGNITION	Hitachi CDI, internal rotor
TOOLS	Pouch
AIR FILTER	Fuzzy foam in fiberglass box
SPARKING PLUG	NGK B8ES
RIM LOCKS	Two each wheel
FENDERS	2, plastic
NUMBER PLATES	3, plastic
KILL SWITCH	Button

DIMENSIONS

WHEELBASE	53 inches
GROUND CLEARANCE	10.5 inches
PEG HEIGHT	12.7 inches
SEAT HEIGHT	32.5 inches
RUNNING WEIGHT	194 pounds
WEIGHT BIAS	43.8%/56.2%
HANDLEBARS	34 inches
THROTTLE TURN	90 degrees
GAS TANK CAPACITY	1.45 gallons



Reoccurring Photograph.

As the gas and Bardahl was consumed, we could feel the bike limber up. The motor loosened and would wind higher and happier. The forks loosened and went from too stiff to extreme bottoming and topping. The rear Thermal-Flow (or is it Thermal-Phase?) shocks didn't loosen, but harshly bounced around aimlessly.

Back in the pits, we checked the plug and found jetting perfect throughout the range. That was the last time we worried about the motor for the entire test.

A pool of oil was swirling around the inside of the front rim, indicating something was amiss. An oil leak! Judging from the way the forks behaved, a quick conference determined oil was leaking from the left slider. Removing the axle, the Allen bolt that holds the damper assembly fell out, all righty. Someone at the factory forgot to torque the thing down; several YZ owners have reported similar problems.

Unfortunately, our problem was one better. The hole was stripped, which meant we could ride the thing for two, maybe three hours before it worked loose and emptied its contents. It was a hassle, but we were able to complete the test, although we consumed plenty of fork oil in the process.

On any new bike, changing the fork

oil is a must after the first session of riding. As parts bed in, small metal flakes circulate in the oil, clogging damper holes and grinding satin finishes. We replaced whatever potion Yamaha put in there with HRL Light.

We expected an improvement in the forks' performance, but nothing like what happened. Where the forks were brutal before, they now became smooth and positive, taking the bite out of stutterbumps and hard landings.

Before, the YZ was miserable in corners, but now the front end stuck quite well, so long as we parked our cheeks on the gas tank. We dropped the fork clamps about $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch down the tubes and that eliminated almost all tendency for the front end to skate. We blame the rest on those decidedly inferior Yokohama knobbies. Yuk.

Now that the front was working the rear also became better. Instead of horrible, it was now merely terrible. Yamaha seems to have two different shock/spring combinations: Thermal-Flows with stiff progressive springs and Thermal-Flows with stiff straightwounds. The combination found on our YZ125 was the same we found on last month's DT360 Enduro. We rate the spring at about 233½ pounds, so it was replaced with Gary Hymes' 75-pounders. Once again, the improvement was astonishing and now we could reel the Yammie around the course with

Godspeed without having the thing beat us to a pulp.

Plug: The springs we put on were from Gary's shop, Horizons Unlimited. They buy wire and roll their own and you can buy them for \$5 the pair. Lighter riders should look into 68-pound springs, though, and Gary doesn't make them.

The YZ can be pool-balled around corners. Like the 250, it only wants the gas on, on, on. It is a pretty good slider, but the best way to get around is to throw the bike down, take a giant step in the direction you want to go, and grab the handful. It takes a lot of practice to get the timing just right, and some may never have the reflexes needed, but you can get through tight corners awfully fast that way.

High-speed riding also takes a bit of getting used to. The YZ simply wants to move around, partly because it's very light, partly because the Thermal-Flows performed inconsistently. Compression damping was good most of the time but that last bit of travel came too quickly. We're still working on it.

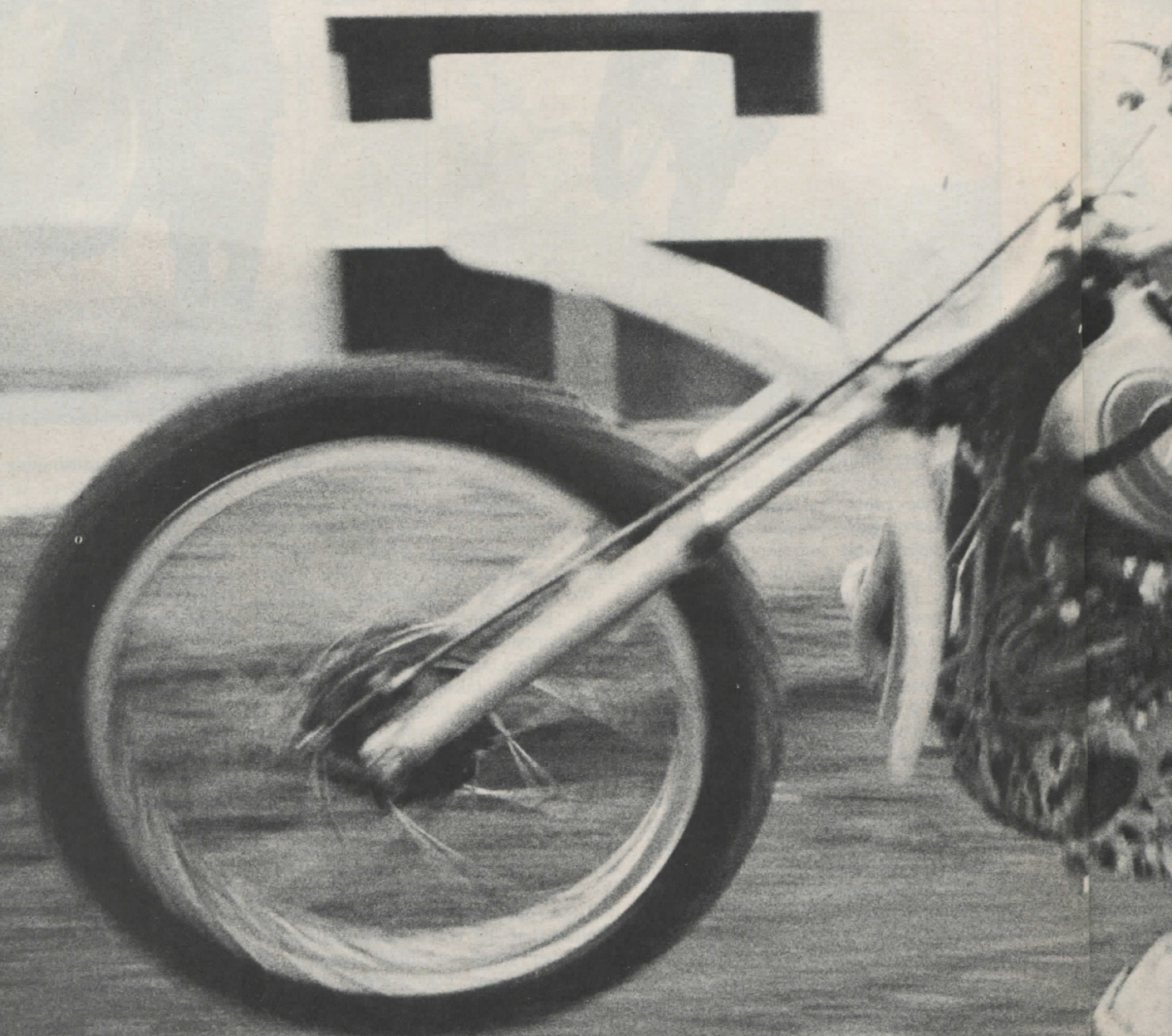
Anyway, high speed sweepers could be plenty exciting, since the rear was more ill-behaved than the front. There is one section at the Dunes you accelerate through while going a bit sideways over undulations. We could hit this section flat out on the likes of a

Maico or Honda Elsinore; the rear would bozo as it skidded across the undulations, but power got to the ground with a minimum of worry. The YZ125 would go through this section wildly swapping ends, which called for us to square the corner beforehand and hit the rough at a less radical angle.

We took the YZ out for several sessions, not to mention a desert cow-trail, and finally a real live motocross. Each time we became more familiar with it, naturally, and learned you have

to have some sort of blind trust in the handling. Try this: tell a friend to close his eyes and fall backwards, keeping his body rigid. Tell him you will catch him before he hits the ground. How your friend reacts to the situation can tell you how much he trusts you. (And whether or not you catch him also says something about your relationship.)

In other words, the Yamaha might move around a lot and do some spooky things, but during the entire test it never crashed us hard, and we gave it plenty of opportunities.



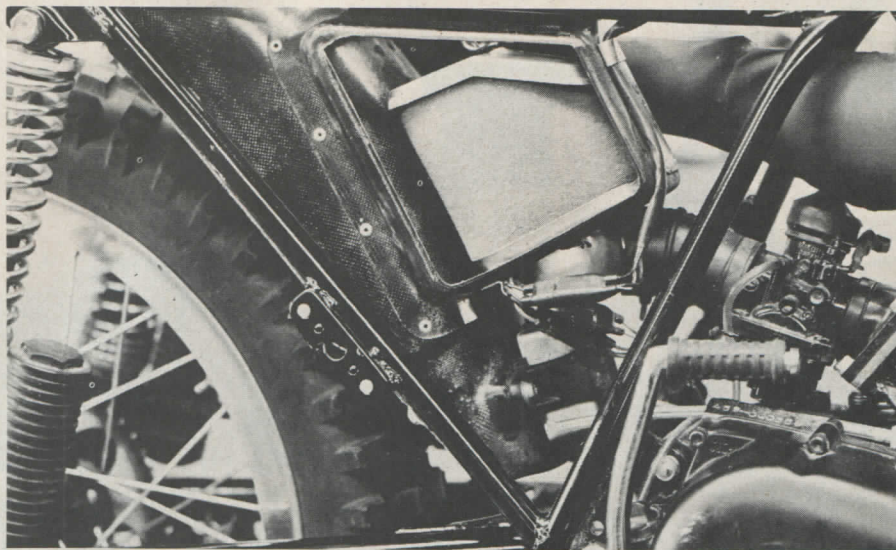


One thing the Yamaha won't stand for is too much throttle before it's straight. We must've low-sided the thing a dozen times. Tires, probably.

Yamaha has long taken pride in their "YZ" tag, conjuring up images of blood-boiling works-type racers. The YZ250 has outstanding power. Beats us why the YZ 125 is only middle-of-the-road fast. When we raced it, the YZ felt and looked a lot faster than it went, because of the way the rear moved around, and the way you could spurt out of corners. But it was only

Entire YZ package weighs a scant 194 pounds with gas; it is more suited for smaller riders.

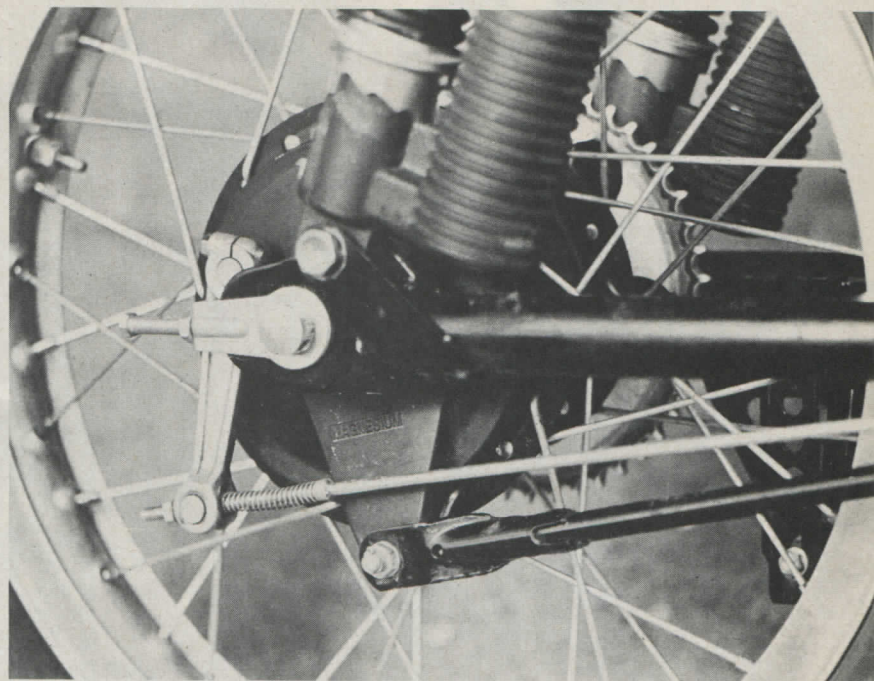
This is where the YZ 125 tries to breathe. No dice. Snap connectors can't be trusted to stay together on their own accord.



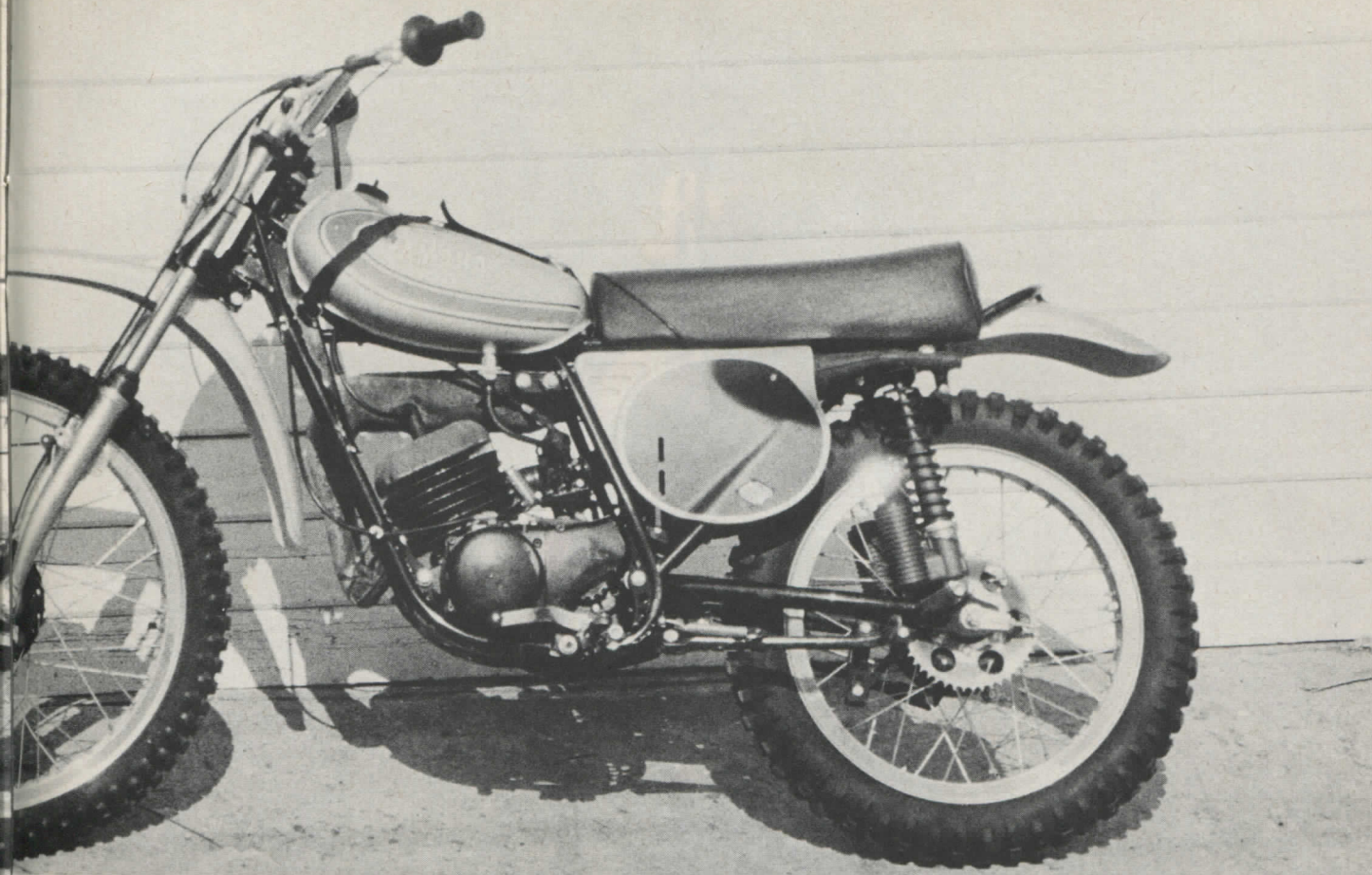
"respectable" on the straights, which is a cop-out phrase meaning it got beat. Suzukis seem to be a tad quicker, and of course Pentons and Hondas do it in but good. Four reasons why the Yamaha isn't fast enough: 1) The air filter is a hopeless design, choking off power at high revs. 2) That silencer in the pipe has to be gotten rid of, since it is a screen which accumulates carbon and unburned oil, so power slowly ebbs away unnoticeably while you ride. 3) It's undergeared. Stock, the tightest turns call for no less than third gear, and you can start in second—therefore you have about 3½ useful gears. A competitive 125 needs all the gears it can get.

And 4) It wasn't designed to be fast enough, probably. One of the pleasant things about the YZ's powerband is the very strong bottom power. Like we said, it is a very good cowtrailer. But for motocross, this is only a convenience to save you from down-shifting. Strong bottom-end pull is useful when slithering around a muddy track, but the trade-off is for less peak power. The YZ will have to have a more radical powerband to win. But if you like to race for fun, leave the power alone (after taking care of 1, 2, and 3) because it's neat. It pulls well from idle all the way until about 7000. Here, it gives you the blast you expect, and the close

(Text continued on page 72)



See? There. What better proof do you need: this is a trick hub. Rear brake suffers from Premature Lockies.



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YAMAHA yz 125a

(Text continued from page 56)

ratio gears go by snick-snick-snick with the slightest movement from your foot.

In some cases it might be a good idea to shift soon after it comes on the pipe. But if you let the motor wail away to 10,000, you can feel it get its second wind and pull some more. Amazing motor. But the factory didn't do enough race-tuning for you.

With the flywheel weighing about the same as Gilera's American racing program, the crank revs and unrevs like a yo-yo. This is good for racing

but makes brake design much more problematical; every Yamaha motocrosser we've known with a CDI ignition suffers from the Premature Lockies. Cures for this disenchanting habit range from filing away some brake lining to cutting the hub lever to unceremoniously stomping the brake rod to make it spring.

As it were, we thought the YZ125 should have perhaps the ultimate in 125 braking, what with mag backing plates and the Yamaha reputation for stoppers. We found the front to be superb in every way until Schoonmaker raced it. He discovered mud would pack the front hub, preventing the lever from moving. No front brake and a schizophrenic rear gave Dave a very good lap time and he looks quite distinguished with gray hair.

Mud gives the YZ other headaches. Unless you judiciously install duct tape

or Jones Wheel Foam in the rims, your 194-pound YZ will become a 209-pound YZ with all 15 extra pounds on the wheels where they hurt the most.

Waterproofing was non-existent. Not only does the air box restrict breathing, but it conversely lets in the moisture. Once the YZ was ridden through a teensy puddle no one would care about normally. The rear wheel sent a carefully-aimed shot into the air cleaner and stopped that bike dead.

Servicing the element is maddening. You need three hands no bigger than a wall plug and with any kind of luck only one will get lacerated. The entire arrangement is hopeless.

Once past the air cleaner, servicing the rest of the bike is a cinch. With a bit of practice you can remove that tank in a jiffy without removing anything else. It takes longer to remove the gas cap than the whole tank in fact; maybe this is the answer to faster pit stops. Allen screws hold the cases and side covers together. We bought a 6mm hex T-handle from a Penton shop and a 22mm socket to hasten our constant tinkering and peeking on both test YZs. The hex wrench considerably speeded up handling the Allens; the socket let us uncap the forks without butchering the soft metal, and came in handy for the many chain-adjusting sessions. The 125's chain stretched and stretched and long should have broken, but ran on regardless.

We learned the hard way about some things you have to watch. Snap connectors of a new design are used on the electrics, and they will unsnap under vibration.

Plastic fenders are very good; they have a memory although do suffer from a bit of amnesia. We left the bike leaning against the garage wall and it took a day for the fender to uncurl itself.

The budget-minded rider will want to replace the wretched grips immediately. We opted for some classy Oury yellow rubber numbers after the stock grips destroyed a pair of \$12 gloves and we can't convert the pain of several large blisters into dollars. (We saw a picture of Hakan Andersson's works bike and his grips look the same as stock Yammie grips. Hakan must be a masochist.)

If we were disappointed in the YZ-125, it was because we expected a bike the likes of a CR125M. Instead, we have a better MX 125. If you get the works-bike concept out of your head, straighten out the suspension and some other design flaws, you have a bike that will sling you blurrily around corners and, at worst, give everyone a run on the straights. For \$819, it is the third cheapest way to win in the 125 class. ●



Works gas tank works and looks he-man; removal is a matter of seconds. Fine Yamaha petcocks pass gas rapidly.

Mild steel frame is very rigid yet light; cases are from the bulletproof 125 we've seen for years.

