



YAMAHA YZ250F RACE TEST

LOOKING OUT FOR NUMBER

ONE

Big changes for '79

By The Staff of Dirt Bike

□ Yamaha waded through 1978 like John Wayne went through barroom doors. They won everything but the Kentucky Derby, and probably would have won that, too, but the officials wouldn't let them enter the "odd-shaped" black and yellow horse.

Let's see, here. World 500 MX title. National 125, 250 and 500 Championships. World road racing title. Gad! The list boggles the old mind. More. Supercross. Etc., etc., ad nauseum for the other factory teams.

Of course, a lot of the credit must go to a certain Mr. Hannah, who earned the reputation of being a one-man wrecking crew. His riding style, somewhat reminiscent of a crazed water buffalo in heat, nonetheless proved overpowering.

Most factories only have wet dreams about attaining the results of 1978. Yamaha actually went out and

accomplished all of the above... and more.

Quite naturally, we expected them to sit back on their haunches for the year of 1979, and offer the public the hardware of the year before at tomorrow's prices. It's only right. After all, the conquering army gets to rape all of the maidens, and takes the loot from the museums.

At the Yamaha new model show, we looked at the lineup of bikes for '79, and didn't see all that much in the way of changes. Oh sure, they had some slight changes, but the dirt bikes appeared to be pretty much last year's iron with cosmetics moved around. We weren't even in too big a hurry to get our hands on the YZs. YZs are hot

news, but well... we tested the '78s not too long ago and... koff, koff... maybe a bit later in the year, eh?

At this point, we must confess to having placed our head well up into a deep, dark, unspoken part of the body. Jeez! We coulda gotten one of these things early and scooped the world, but no. We sat on our hands and blew it.

With the history, confessions and breast-beating out of the way, let's get to the all-new 1979 Yamaha YZ250F and you'll see what the teeth-gnashing was all about.

First off, it *is* a new bike. Not a rehash. We can leap right out and make the statement that this Yamaha turns. It turns like no other Yamaha we've ever ridden.

Last year, *Motocross Action* was the only magazine with enough integrity to tell you that the YZs didn't steer. They said that the front end pushed and plowed in flat corners. You had to hit a berm to change direction. Everybody else conveniently ignored the fact, pursed up their lips and proceeded to gum the exhaust pipe of the bikes to a near death of hyper-oral adulation.

This year, the YZ deserves the rave reviews it got last year. Strange how things work, ain't it?

The big changes, right up front, are:
* The swingarm pivot point and the countershaft sprocket center have been moved closer together. This should eliminate most of the tossed chain problems that haunted Yamaha riders in the year past. Even the chain tensioner has been removed from the bike. It's just not needed now.

* More travel. While still not in the Elsinore, foot-long league, the new 250F sports 270mm front and rear. This translates out to... lemme see, carry the six... right around 10 3/4 inches. Enough.

* Shifting. The gearbox works appreciably better than those in the past. While it's still not "Maico-loose," the rider doesn't have to pay any particular attention to what he's doing with his left foot. Just stomp up or down, with or without the



Peering under the rear fender, one can see aluminum fins on the rear of the monoshock unit.

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Former trouble spot on the pipe belly has been beefed up to prevent cracking.



New FIM-style number plates are tucked in close to saddle. Side panels smack of Darth Vader school of design.



Engine characteristics have been dramatically changed for '79. Now the YZ250 is a torquer, rather than an rpm'er.

clutch, and the desired gear can be engaged. The only thing keeping this new box from perfection is the need to momentarily back off the throttle when shifting under full power.

* The steering head has been pulled back 1 1/2 degrees, making the YZ250F a turning fool. We were able to find bite on the front end just about anywhere. No longer must the YZ be considered a berm-hunter.

* Different and improved power curve. You'll find more snap right off the bottom of the rpm range. Older YZs had good mid-range and revved out nicely, but the rider really had to keep the engine buzzing to get the job done.

* Big change in the monoshock itself. If you get down on your hands and knees and peck in at the back side of the mono, you'll get a glimpse of some aluminum finning. Take off the entire shock and you'll see that the body, too, is aluminum now. This translates into a decent weight savings, all of it up high.

* Lighter weight, overall. By eliminating things like tensioners and rethinking a number of other items, pounds have been trimmed off here and there, but still add up to an appreciable weight savings overall.

JUMPIN' JACK FLASH

If you have a very strong right leg, you should be able to fire the YZ F-model up in two or three kicks. If you're like most riders, chances are it'll take you anywhere from seven to ten kicks to get the motor lit off. Don't ask us why. It's not particularly hard to spin the engine over, but fire seems to come only when it wants to. This holds true hot or cold. Every once in a while, the YZ250 would fire up on the first or second kick and scare the hell out of us. While the F-model comes with primary kickstarting capabilities, we found the bike much more willing to start in neutral. The extra drag of the clutch plates just made kicking more difficult.

When the engine does snort to life, revs build quickly in a zingy, nervous fashion. One gets the impression that power delivery will be twitchy and hard to control.

Fortunately, when the bike is rolling, this is not the case. We found the 1979 powerband flexible and easy to ride with. While the actual spread of power is short compared to most other 250s, the YZ comes on earlier and harder right off the working part of the band. There's a strong pull down low, following by a big mid-range rush, then a short, late surge. Near the top, the power flattens out, and nothing will be

YAMAHA YZ250F

ENGINE TYPE	Piston-port, two-strokes, reed valve
BORE AND STROKE	70mm x 64mm
DISPLACEMENT	246cc
HORSEPOWER (CLAIMED BY FACTORY)	37 at 7500
CARBURETION	Mikuni VM38SS
FACTORY RECOMMENDED JETTING:	
Main jet	#400
Needle jet	00
Jet needle	6F16
Pilot jet	50
Slide number	30
RECOMMENDED GASOLINE	Premium
RECOMMENDED OIL (MFR.): Yamalube R	
FUEL TANK CAPACITY	7.5 liters
FUEL TANK MATERIAL	Plastic
GAS/OIL RATIO	32:1
LUBRICATION	Pre-mix
OIL CAPACITY	N/A
AIR FILTRATION	Oiled foam
CLUTCH TYPE	Wet, multi-plate
GEARBOX RATIOS	
1	2.142
2	1.812
3	1.464
4	1.200
5	1.0
6	0.876
GEARING, FRONT/REAR	13/50
IGNITION	CDI
PRIMARY KICK SYSTEM?	Yes
RECOMMENDED SPARK PLUG	N26
SILENCER/SPARK ARRESTOR/QUALITY:	
	Silencer, average noise
EXHAUST SYSTEM	High-pipe, left side, through frame
FRAME, TYPE	Double-downtube,

	full cradle, chrome moly
WHEELBASE	1450mm
GROUND CLEARANCE	320mm
SEAT HEIGHT AT TANK	930mm
STEERING HEAD ANGLE	29.5 degrees
TRAIL	128mm
WEIGHT WITH ONE GALLON GAS:	105 kg.
RIM MATERIAL	Aluminum
TIRE SIZES	
Front	3.00x21
Rear	4.50x18
SUSPENSION	
Front, type and travel	Kayaba air/spring
Rear, type and travel	Monoshock
INTENDED USE, MFR	Motocross
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	Japan
PRICE, APPROX	N/A
PARTS PRICES, HIGH-WEAR ITEMS	
Piston assembly, complete	\$30.18
Rings only	\$9.90
Cylinder	\$115.09
Shift lever	\$5.90
Brake pedal	\$15.44
Front sprocket	\$7.20
DISTRIBUTOR:	
	Yamaha International
	5600 Orangethorpe
	Buena Park, California 90621

OVERALL RATING, FROM 0 TO 100.	
VARIOUS CATEGORIES, KEEPING	
INTENDED USE OF MACHINE IN MIND:	
Handling	94
Suspension	92
Power	88
Cost	90
Attention to detail	97
Effectiveness, stone stock	95

gained by trying to overrev the bike.

At first, we tried to ride the YZ250 like most other 250s; that is, we tried to keep it singing. Quickly, we found out that it was much better to short-shift the YZ much like an open class bike.

When you short-shift a 250 (even a torquey one), you often find the bike in a situation where the chosen gear is a bit too tall for the job to be done, but the next lowest gear will merely overrev the engine. When this happens on the Yamaha, all that's needed is a very quick fan on the clutch, and all of a sudden, the engine picks up some rpm and starts to pull like a madman.

Strangely, this is the way Bobby Hannah rides. We wonder if the Yamaha is this way because of Hannah's influence, or Hannah rides that way because the power of the Yamaha is such. And why *did* that chicken come before the egg, or was it six of one and half a dozen of the other? Who cares and so what?

Once we got used to riding in the Hannah fashion, we started to get really hot in the corners. It seems that the YZ responds best to attacking the corner, nailing the throttle in too high a gear, flipping the clutch lever once and bolting out of the turn.

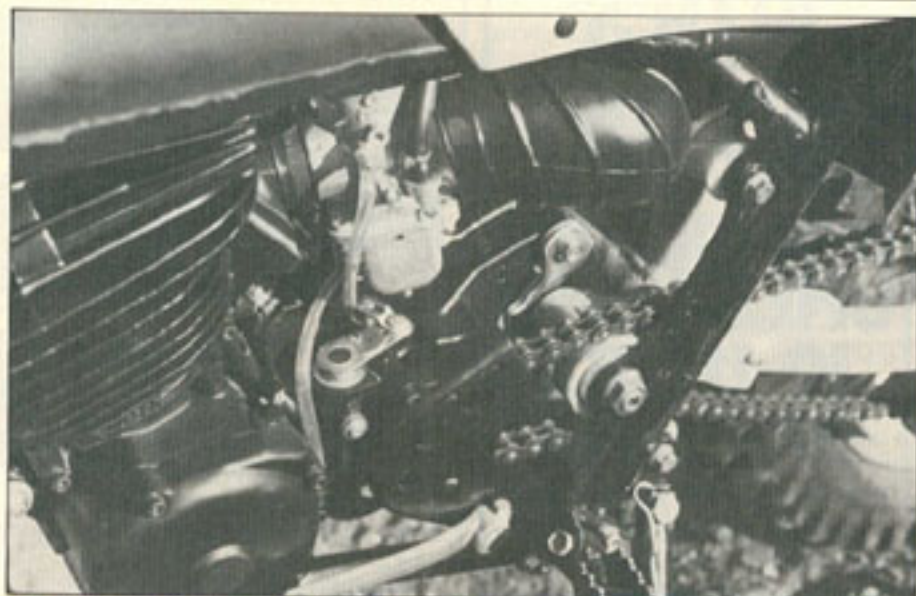
When punching the throttle in this fashion, one tends to expect the rear end of the bike to swing wildly out if the body weight and traction aren't just perfect. Not so, the rear end of the Yamaha felt very, very stable under this condition.

We told you earlier that the front end of the bike no longer pushes or plows in flat corners. Combining this with the new, stable feel of the rear end makes the YZ very pleasant in the corners. There was no need to climb up on the gas cap to make the front end bite.

One of our test sessions was at Saddleback Park on a normal Saturday race day. Here, we had three riders who owned older YZs ride the bike, and we got their impressions. Across the board, they all raved about the way the bike steered.

Another thing we picked from those same riders was that they had all experienced gearbox trouble on the '78 bikes. One 250 Expert class rider had been inside his gearbox exactly 14 times, but had experienced no other engine trouble. We checked around with a few shops and pumped them for information about the gearbox hassles. Apparently, '78 was indeed a year for shifting blues on the YZs, across the board.

More poking, prowling and prodding got us a possible answer. It seems that



Protective chain rollers abound. Bits of plastic and nylon nudge and guide the chain from end to end.

the tolerances on the '78 boxes were very close and most riders used a normal [heavy] gearbox oil. This made for sluggish shifting (increased drag) and a lot of neutrals. Shoemaker's Cycle Service (who fields a team of YZ riders) used a very light MTF fluid all year and reported no gearbox problems on the 250s and 400s, and *easier shifting*. He said that those riders using the heavier oil and missing gears were probably breaking the gears by jamming a screaming engine from a false neutral into a gear. No gearbox can take that kind of a load for very long.

The gearbox on the '79 Fs has been changed, but it still might not hurt for riders to investigate the use of lighter viscosity gearbox oils, just to be on the safe side. For what it's worth, we raced the YZ in two 40-minute motos and never missed one shift.

BUMPS AND GRINDS

Suspension travel has been increased to almost 11 inches front and rear. We had nothing but good words for the forks. In fact, they performed so well that we never even checked the pressures or played switchy-swappy with the oil. The bike was raced as delivered.

We were also pleased with the action of the mono rear for the first half of a 40-minute moto. Then, some fade was experienced and the rear end started lifting too much over rolling jumps. We experienced a few unwanted front end landings.

The fade never got to the point where we lost control of the rear end, but there was enough reduction in rebound

damping to make us modify the way we approached and left several jumps on the track. We suspect that faster riders will fade the stock mono unit before the 45-minute mark is reached. We also suspect that the great majority of riders in the Beginner, Novice and Intermediate classes and Middle of the Pack Sportsman Experts will not fade the mono unit to the point of requiring a reservoir, or modification.

In addition to race testing the YZ, we also rode the bike around just for fun, and even put in a full day of messing around in the desert. While the YZ worked the whoops well at high speeds, the riding position for sustained fast desert running is all wrong. For motocross, OK. For off-road, bar and peg position would have to be altered before the average rider would be comfortable. By average rider, we of course mean around 5'8" and 220 pounds.

BITS AND PIECES

Well, it appears that Yamaha has succumbed to the old floating rear brake myth and gone that route. Quite frankly, we found no difference between the braking action of last year's non-floating setup and this year's floating setup. We think that whoever sold the manufacturers this bill of goods has a full-floating brain. After having ridden countless bikes with "full-floating brakes" that chattered like drunken chimps, we feel the concept is overblown and next to worthless. A properly set up standard rear works at least as well and weighs less. Enough on that.

Saddle height is low, compared to

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YAMAHA YZ250F



most of the other 250s on the market. Pegs are also a bit on the low side, demanding that the rider not dangle his boots downward when riding through deep ruts. We have noticed that most pro Yamaha riders ride with the balls of their feet perched on the pegs of YZs, rather than tucking the heel/instep area over the pegs.

Grips, bars and controls were all well-liked by the various testers. Even though the grips are small, they still have a tacky, soft feel to them.

Some improvements have been made to the air box. It is still not a model of simplicity, and maintenance rates about five on a scale of ten. Water can (and will) enter the box unless taping precautions are taken. You GP riders take note.

Brakes proved to be what you might expect from Yamaha: excellent at both ends, with the front stopper being especially delightful to use.

Good plastic abounds, but the front fender appears unchanged from the '78 unit. It'll start to sag after a while in the narrow section forward of the forks.

Our decals are still on the tank after a full month of riding. But then, we haven't been as sloppy as usual when filling the tank, so who knows? Last year, the decals fell off almost instantly.

There appears to be some reinforcement around the front pipe mounting area. This was a breaking

spot last year. We found the muffler to be relatively quiet for a racer. Not as silent as a Can-Am, but decent.

The saddle was plush in the center and forward sections, and firm in the rear. Of course, when you're perched over the rear, much of your weight is on the feet, so this works out fine.

Our bike came equipped with I.R.C. knobbies, and these worked quite well as long as we had a decent track. However, when the track dried out and turned into dusty, packed adobe, we yearned for the safety and security of Metzlers, front and rear.

Spokes came loose on the YZ with regularity for the first four to six hours of riding, then settled in and required no further attention.

No nuts or bolts came loose on our bike, testifying to a decent preparation job. Chain stretch was minimal.

TAKING A SQUINTY-EYED LOOK AT THE BIG PICTURE

Summing up the new YZ250F is easy. It's an excellent motocrosser with minimal changes needed. The working pro will want more travel. Everyone else will do well to leave the travel as is.

At last report, the asking price for a '79 YZ was around the \$1800-plus mark. That's a lot of money, but at least the buyer can rest in the satisfaction that the F-model is a totally new bike, not a rehashed '78 package.

The spread of power is much more sensible and usable than on last year's bike. Other 250s will beat the Yamaha to the first turn because they simply put out more total horsepower, but the Yamaha should beat them from corner to corner, if ridden in the proper manner.

When all is said and done, though, one solid fact remains: This is the best-turning Yamaha ever built. The inside line awaits. ■

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