



CENTAUR ROAD TESTS THE

YAMAHA an over-40 m.p.h. '50' from Japan

ONCE upon a time it seemed fashionable to smile at the products of Japan, for their exports were associated by many with low-priced imitative work. Nowadays the boot is on the other foot. A few weeks ago we road tested our first Japanese moped and apart from the many obvious desirable features, mention was made of the very high standard of workmanship. Now, following the spectacular feats of the Yamaha 250 cc. racers in the Isle of Man T.T. this year, comes this company's counterpart, which is equally praiseworthy.

In the period we had for testing the Yamaha (provided for test by Comerfords Ltd., Portsmouth Road, Thames Ditton, Surrey) it became quite clear that it had a character all its own. The deeply finned cylinder head proclaims that it is a two-stroke and the wailing crescendo from the exhaust when the machine is accelerated hard, amplifies this fact.

Like the Honda, the Yamaha 50 is packed full of good things and it is difficult to know where to begin. Acceleration is perhaps the most startling and I recall the first evening I rode it. The rider of a large capacity combination, having considered the Yamaha as underpowered in his own mind, attempted to overtake me. However, half a second previously I had begun to open up. For a couple of seconds we remained almost level then the Yamaha really got its head down and we swished away leaving only the memory of that haunting exhaust note behind.

Top speed was in fact 42 m.p.h., but it was the rapidity with which 30 m.p.h. could be achieved that was more significant. Another likeable trait was the excellent tractability of the engine. Although the gearbox was there to be used it was possible to come down to 17 m.p.h. in top gear and then breeze away. Second gear was the giant-killer in the box and could be held until almost 30 m.p.h. This factor was of immense importance when riding through heavy traffic and making use of narrow openings. Fuel consumption was about 145 m.p.g.

The clutch is automatic and the gears are selected by rocked pedal. Engagement of first from neutral was smooth and, provided the revolutions were kept down, there was no tendency to "creep." It paid to be rather brutal about the upward changes and engage them as quickly as possible. Changing down proved to be quite simple once I had temporarily rid myself of the habit of a lifetime—blipping the throttle before dropping the cog.

Quick Starting

The Yamaha is equipped with a kickstarter and I used it once—to check whether it would in fact start the engine. Obviously, it did. Otherwise it was merely a question of switching on the ignition, turning on the fuel by means of a large tap handle with clearly marked instructions, closing the strangler lever about a third of its total travel, and then pressing a small button located on the throttle twist-grip housing. For two or three seconds the electric starter, powered by an admirably large accumulator, would whirl and then the engine would chuckle into life. The strangler was opened after about 15 yards of running and the machine was by this time perfectly warmed up.

Suspension was rather soft and more suited to someone weighing a good deal less than me (I'm 220lb.) and the dual seat was not quite firm enough either. Neither of these factors interfered with the handling of the Yamaha which could be flicked easily and swiftly through tight corners. Smallish wheels (2.25 by 16in.) seem to contribute well to the machine's apparently inherent stability.

The whole of the Japanese craftsmanlike attitude was evidenced in the front brake lever. Made in alloy it fitted together neatly and unobtrusively, the flare angle was just right and there was a small knob at the tip of the lever to prevent the hand from slipping off. The front brake was an excellent stopper and I used it almost exclusively. The foot operated rear brake was almost in the same class but not quite so progressive in its action. From 20 m.p.h. (a direct reading from the accurate and easy-to-read speedometer) the stopping distance with both brakes applied was 10ft.

I often reserve comments on lighting for the final paragraph because there is often little complimentary to say. The Yamaha, however, had a magnificent headlamp which threw a helpful pattern of light. Dipping really meant something and the dipswitch, which is incorporated into the housing of the dummy twistgrip on the nearside end of the handlebars, was neat and easy to operate.

A counterpart to the dipswitch at the other end of the handlebars works the winking indicators. The action is positive, as it needs to be, and the lights are clearly visible to traffic at the rear and at the front, as well as to the rider himself. The horn gives an imperious and penetrating note.

Compartments on either side of the machine have plastics covers and contain, on the off-side, the accumulator, and on the nearside, a small tray for tools above a variety of electrical equipment including the voltage regulator and the ignition switch. Amateur mechanics will be glad to note the extensive use of snap connectors making the removal and/or replacement of the electrical components an easy matter.

The legshields, which are in one piece together with the upper section of the engine fairing, are completely efficient and made of a plastics material. The front mudguard is similarly fabricated. A strengthening bracket forms a loop round the back of the front wheel joining the ends of the forks.

The fuel tank cap is located under the hinged saddle and is less likely to allow the entry of dirt because of this. The steering head can be locked. A number of small spares are provided such as washers. Surprisingly enough there is no pump.

The Yamaha is an exciting machine and I predict that it will be bought by those prepared to pay out just that little extra for a host of excellent features plus the undefinable quality which it possesses.

SPECIFICATION

Engine: Single-cylinder two-stroke. Bore 40mm, Stroke 40mm, 50c.c. Compression ratio 7.4:1. Maximum output 4.5 b.h.p. at 7,000 r.p.m.

Transmission: Automatic centrifugal clutch with three-speed, foot change gearbox.

Frame: Pressed steel, with leading link-front suspension and swinging-arm rear suspension.

Wheels and Brakes: 2.25in. x 16in. interchangeable wheels. Front brake operated by hand and rear brake by foot pedal.

Lights and Ignition: Battery operated starting and lighting as well as flywheel magneto ignition and lighting.

Equipment: Centre stand, tool kit, dual seat, horn, dipswitch, spare fuses.

Tank Capacity: 1.5 gallons with reserve.

Concessionaires and Agents: Mitsui and Co. Ltd., Bucklersbury House, 83 Cannon Street, London, E.C.4.

Price: £118.

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