



SUZUKI X7 **V** YAMAHA RD250DX CLASS OF '80

It's fair to say that Yamaha had been ruling the roost for the second half of the '70's with a certain equanimity. What other manufacturer can claim to have consistently offered such a desirable spread of machinery for the discerning youth on his 17th birthday? Having cut your teeth on for example, the legendary FS1E, you are spoilt with a choice of three machines - all with excellent hooligan potential - on which to progress and pass your test. To conclude the brand loyalty exercise, there is even a Superman sized 400cc rocket for those determined to pursue the ultimate 2-stroke journey.

Suzuki of course, has pretty much always had something to say on this particular subject matter. They have always been there or there about, and have nearly always arrived at the

battleground with a weapon to make the competition shiver - lest we forget the mighty GT750. It's just as easy to work your way through the 2-stroke Suzuki range, as they too offer a 125, 200 and 250 - it's just a shame that the range stops there. The GT250 is no exception to the norm and is here to offer customers an extremely dexterous and aggressive alternative in this particular arena.

The worry for the blue smoke aficionado is not how this battle will end, but when it will end, and indeed whether these models will be singing the swan song, if not for the 2-stroke breed, then at least the air-cooled variety. Increasingly seen as transport for Yobs by the general public and often sneered at by the 4-stroke fraternity, the future is to say the least, a little hazy for the small but thirsty sports bike. As a customer base,



CLASSIC SCRAP

It's early 1980 and the threat of the four-stroke invasion hangs heavy in the air. Yamaha and Suzuki have been slugging it out for two years in what may be the final fling for the air-cooled strokers. Words: Simon Bowen Pictures: Oli Tennent

'Yobs' is a little on the strong side and the X7 and RD250 would be more accurately categorised as 'rebels.' The thrill of their powerband is to many of us a source of great pleasure and for some, a troublesome addiction. With petrol up 25% last year to £1.25 per gallon and no doubt heading skyward this year, for those that crave this type of fix, let's hope that the beginning of this new decade doesn't signify the end of an era.

The specification sheets for both bikes make for a fairly unsurprising read. Both engines are 247cc, in-line air-cooled parallel twins with a very similar power output a shade the wrong side of 30bhp which will redline at 8,500rpm. At a standstill, admittedly at 30 paces, they do look fairly similar to each other. Naked and essentially uncluttered, both will cut a

dash in any town centre. However, take a stroll towards the two with spec sheet in hand and the landscape begins to change somewhat. Arriving at the claimed weight figures immediately paints an interesting picture, and gives a pretty accurate indication of the forthcoming riding experience.

Yes people, the revered and Race Developed (don't you know) 250 Yam is now officially a fat-arsed cow. The ace card in Suzuki's pack is plain for all to see, a dry weight figure of just 128kg - enough to impress even the fabulously undermourned Twiggy on a bad day. That's a full 20kg lighter than the RD and put into perspective, almost a fifth of its body weight. A killer blow has seemingly already been dealt but it is for now just a number, and one that may, if Suzuki has over-done the diet

element, cause a slip-up in the stability department.

At close quarters, you can easily see the physical differences between the two. The super-sleek X7 is almost a scaled-down version of a 250, a re-badged X5 but without the electric start. The biggest difference is in the width, with the Yamaha seemingly bulging at the waist in comparison. On the flip side though, the Yamaha has a superior poise and presence. From its bulk emerges an assured promise of solidity and the look and feel of a full-scale motorcycle, of a 550 and above. A man's bike, if you will.

Kick the two into life and the appropriate comparisons continue. The Yamaha has a deep and meaty resonance while the Suzuki is slightly tinny and frantic, but shows more willing as the rev counter needle spins round excitedly. The keen X7 feels much the same as it's worked through the gears. The greyhound of the pack has a sweet and crisp gearbox and accelerates from standstill with a willing spring in its step, chomping at the bit. Its lack of size and weight is so noticeable from the start that the expected lack of torque below the powerband does less to dent its progress than aboard the RD. The Yam's 'box is impressive too, though the feeling at the foot isn't quite as race-like. They are both still relatively sluggish below their sweetspots – such is the nature of the beast – but they will simultaneously surge forward at 5,500rpm with a certain sophistication, thanks to the reed-valve induction (Suzuki brag about their new dual intake system with additional piston porting here), and continue making strong power until peaking at 8,000rpm.

Predictably, the X7 feels quicker – probably because it is quicker. But there is a degree of smoke and mirrors here. The difference in straight-line acceleration isn't actually as great as it initially seems. There is an illusion caused by the lack of motorcycle sitting below you which tricks you into thinking you're travelling that much faster than you really are, which is absolutely fine by me. Keep revving past 8,000rpm and bury the needle into the red at 9,000rpm before selecting 6th gear, if you want a realistic chance of seeing 100mph on either speedo. The Suzuki is more likely to get you there on a relatively short stretch of flat highway but both will manage it on a slight downhill, or with the wind blowing in the right direction. Talking of wind, it was interesting to note that pressing the pair into a fairly strong headwind, the Suzuki understandably suffered the most. The first sign of payback perhaps?

Unashamedly marketing "The new Ton-Up Suzuki X7" to



Beware! Suzuki's mentalist X7 is the choice for the new generation of street lunatics

BEETLE MANIACS

Popular pop trio The Police went on their first world tour while the other police, known in simply in Japan as "the police," arrested and jailed Paul McCartney for possession of rock 'n' roll cigarettes. Telly was poisoned with Fame and Dallas, but the cinema was hot with Raging Bull, The Empire Strikes Back and Elephant Man. The year ended terribly with the loss of Steve McQueen, the survival of JR Ewing, and the murder of John Lennon. Topping the charts with his come-back single, and strolling home late to his New York apartment, Mark David Chapman walked up to him and shot him dead. Shortly afterwards, The Clash released London Calling – saving us all from cultural misery.



After killing John Lennon, Chapman reputedly had Cornflakes

SUZUKI GT250X7
PRICE TODAY: £899
ENGINE: AIR-COOLED
2-STROKE PARALLEL TWIN
POWER: 26.58HP @
7,500RPM
TOP SPEED: 95MPH
WEIGHT: 122KG
SEAT HEIGHT: 762MM
WEB INFO:
SUZUKI-GT.CO.UK

the biking masses, top speed is clearly of great relevance to the Hamamatsu antagonists. It's also of great interest to every 17 year-old weighing up the potential to cause chaos and inflict embarrassment on sensible old farts aboard their overweight four-strokes. The Suzuki is a weapon, and a fast one at that. But there is more to this punch up than merely screeching to the highest top speed. Whilst the Suzuki is clearly the winner in the straight-line shoot-out with its five-point mag wheels spinning in the breeze, the Yamaha is still in the running. The RD250 delivers solid performance in a controlled and stable fashion. The engine has its own character, and retains the characteristics of a larger, less stressed motor.

The way the bikes cope with the power is equally interesting. Again, the alternate power-to-weight ratios create differing handling characteristics. While sharing the same sporty riding positions, and sporting identical wheel and tyre sizes, the Yamaha is considerably more stable when the road conditions deteriorate. It's not as flickable as the X7 but can still turn in to corners with speed and accuracy, making A-road attacks as enjoyable as they are on the Suzuki. The difference comes when bumps and undulations are thrown into more demanding B-road scenarios. It's quite simple. The Yamaha is significantly more stable than the Suzuki. It is more consistent and easier to ride fast when the going gets tough. Predictability is a bonus in these situations and the Yam is not easily undone. Conversely, when faced with a section of road that offers variations in its surface or camber, the Suzuki is likely to start getting excited. Pin the throttle wide open and throw in a few turns and the X7 will soon start to shake its head and feel vulnerable. It's not unsafe but will need a safe and steady right hand to coax it swiftly through these conditions without undue drama.

KENNY ROGERS THE REST

King Kenny claimed his third 500cc crown on the trot with Prince Randy Mamola second. With Bazzar in the doldrums, the Two Cowboys were followed closely home by the Three Tenors with Marco Lucchinelli, Franco Uncini and the pre-smug Graziano Rossi close to their rears. No. 46 number two was merely one year-old at the time, and neither 46 knew that No. 2 was to be The Chosen One. Those crafty Russians hosted the much-boycotted Olympics and the grateful Brits capitalised, as Seb Coe and Steve Ovett battled each other at their respective specialist distances, to come home with one gold medal apiece.



Suzuki build quality is pretty thorough



You can tell this is a magazine photo-shoot: in real-life and on sweeping roads like this, the X7 would be miles ahead



...gorgeous, ain't she? 250 mill is almost identical to the 400



On the open road, the RD250 has a feel of real quality that the Suzuki cannot match

It's not as if you can do much to help the chassis – they are both extremely good – and neither fall particularly short in terms of suspension. It is merely a matter of adjustability. With adjustment only available on the rear end spring pre-load, the rider has to work with the bike and learn to maximise body position with throttle control. Being less frisky, the RD would need less fettling if there was the option to do so. In terms of pure sporting ability, I'd take the X7 over the DX any day – it would make short work of its opponent on any British race circuit. If stunting and high street heroics are on top of the priority list, forget the Yam. You'll destroy the clutch in pointless attempts to get the front airborne, as the Suzy flies by vertically, clicking through the cogs. I can see it now. Battalions of wannabee Storm Troopers, lined up outside the youth club on their white X7's with compulsory matching Simpson Bandit and black visor. Itching to impress the Princesses as the hairy RD mounted Wookies groan their disapproval.

Bringing matters to a halt is a part of the equation that must not be ignored. While both machines have a single piston disc at the front end, it has significantly been deemed necessary to equip the Floater with a dinky rear drum, while the Bloater has to carry a full sized disc on the back to help with the process. It does make the difference though. The Suzuki's front is a little sharper and offers slightly more feel, but with both brakes applied to the maximum, the Yamaha has enough overall power to be sufficiently effective, and will even manage to unsettle the front end as the forks show signs of twisting and flexing, given enough grip between rubber and tarmac.

So, we know that Suzuki have shown Yamaha a clean pair of heels in the sport/hooligan fixture, but hit the road for a few hours, add some less feverish riding to the mix and the tables begin to turn again. It's easy to make fun of the RD in this company, but it is still an excellent bike. In real world riding, whether flat-out or otherwise, it will in fact be almost impossible for the Suzuki to shake it off. The Yam is easier to ride fast and is more planted, requiring less physical input from the rider. It's bigger seat and general proportions make it more comfortable over a longer journey, especially for a pillion. In fact, I'd go as far as to say that you could, if you were that way inclined, fit some luggage to it and experience some sport-touring. At prolonged higher speeds, the engine vibration that is almost completely absent from the bigger-brother RD400 may become tiresome on the 250, but not enough to ruin the experience. Being identical to the untrained eye, it's inevitable that there will be a few 250's running around with 400 motors in years to come. Not that we would want to be seen encouraging learners to break the law, you understand.

The perception of quality has been shed on the skinny Suzuki, along with the 20-odd kilo advantage. Yes, it looks and rides like a finely honed pedigree pooch, but it doesn't feel like it will put up with as much long-term abuse as the Yamaha. Perhaps the reduced use of chromed parts adds to the budget look, but it's more of an overall sensation after spending a few hours in the saddle. It's just not as solid, end of story. The Suzuki is no more likely to be unreliable than the Yamaha, and is a colossal improvement over the GT250C it replaces. So how to declare the winner? Well, it's a good old-fashioned matter of horses for courses, assuming that you're not the size of a rugby player – in which case the X7 will disappear up your Wranglers in a flash. Suzuki have moved the game forward and engineered an extremely impressive pocket rocket that will be the natural weapon of choice for the performance-obsessed



Both bikes make their riders look huge, which is daft because Whitlam and Bowen are weasel-sized



This particular Yamaha has only done 361 miles from new!



Not much to go wrong here

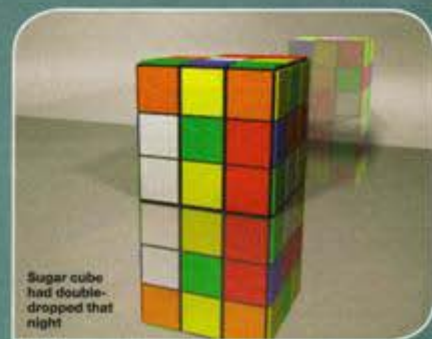
teenager. It is typical of the sort of bike that Suzuki are so keen to produce these days - fast, cheap and great fun to ride. But Yamaha has a more compliant overall package that will still run with the X7 when push comes to shove. My money would go on the all-rounder with its meatier approach and longer development run, but my hunch is that the majority of riders who buy these rampant two-strokes will be heading for the nearest Suzuki dealer.

So is this the end of the air-cooled revolution? It's looking possible. Four-strokes are getting more sophisticated every year, and with technologies like water-cooling becoming more popular the four-strokes are getting lighter and faster. As for the fours completely eliminating the twos as they gallop off into the sunset, no chance. You're more likely to see a grinning cowboy ride into the White House before that day comes. **two**

YAMAHA RD250DX
 PRICE TODAY: £2,000
 ENGINE: AIR-COOLED
 2-STROKE PARALLEL TWIN
 POWER: 27BHP @
 7,200RPM
 TOP SPEED: 90MPH
 WEIGHT: 150KG
 SEAT HEIGHT: 800MM
 WEB INFO:
 AIRCOOLED-RD.COM

RONNY RUBIK AND THE NEW ROMANTICS

Ronald Reagan was getting ready to move his old film posters into the White House, only days before he was driven stark raving mad by a multi-coloured puzzle. The Rubik's Cube became the stocking filler of the decade and hit the stores in the same year as the Post-It note. Both were adored and fingered by spotty Pac Man addicts nationwide. Women, the other stocking fillers, lost all sense of responsible couture as they and the nation lowered collective standards and proceeded to dress as Germans. Fashion crime was rife and men were equally guilty as we plunged deeper into an over-padded chasm of back combed big hair and regrettable taste.



Sugar cube had double-dropped that night