



YAMAHA MX125C

race test

The choice in the 125 class gets one bike harder

Confidence is the key. There is no way that you can really ride a motocross quickly unless you have absolute confidence in your own abilities and those of your machine. The true worth of a motocross bike to you is measured by what kind of tune it plays in the spaces of your mind as you click it down through the gears and pitch it screaming into a rutted, loamy turn. What happens, happens. How you feel about what happens is maybe more to the point.

Up until now, the 125cc Yamaha MX series motorcycles have always played a shaky tune. Twitching back ends and bucking fronts kept rider confidence levels lower than basement plumbing, while anemic five-speed engines kept speeds low enough to make falling off safe. As a result, the MX125s were always

considered to be good trailbikes; but as racers the series just didn't make it.

This year, Yamaha has redesigned the 125 MX, making it into a full-on racing machine that still comes stock with a U.S. Forestry Service approved spark arrestor. Now, the 125 MX is not only a dynamite

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"There's something to be said for the dual-purpose concept when it's executed correctly."

trailbike, but an excellent racer to boot. There's something to be said

for the dual-purpose concept when it's executed correctly.

Replacing last year's standard-mount Thermal Flow rear shocks are new gas Kayabas with a single-rate spring, and mounted in the laydown position. It's a setup similar to that of the RM Suzukis. Yamaha insists that *their* gas Kayabas are better than *Suzuki's* gas Kayabas. Whatever. The relevant truth of the matter is that gas Kayabas, whether they're on a Suzuki or a Yamaha, wear out very quickly (like in five races if you're gassing it), so it doesn't matter much whose are better. We detected no significant differences in terms of shock function.

While the Kayabas work, they work very well — as does the entire mechanical package which comprises the MX125C. All the things which made the old MXs no more than just good trailbikes, things like oil injection, spooky suspension and a poky engine, are gone. In their place the MXC debuts a really powerful, six-speed YZ-like engine that gets you the holeshots and spits you out of turns like a watermelon seed, and a suspension that, while not perfect, can be dealt with.

But the MXC is not simply a YZ of a different color. The things that made the old MX a neat bike to own, things like dependability, durability and low maintenance costs, are still there. They've just been made better. For instance: The engine, though ported to YZ specs, still has an iron cylinder liner that can be rebored if you happen to waste a piston. The YZC's cylinder, which has a chrome bore, must be rechromed or replaced if damaged. Have you ever tried to have a cylinder rechromed? Most people end up having to buy a new one.

Then there's the suspension. It's not a perfect package, but it can be



The Yamaha MX125C: an absolutely competitive bike that is understandable.

YAMAHA MX125C

lived with, and it avoids some of the hassles of the monoshock system like set-up difficulty, weight and air box restriction. The saving grace of the MXC's rear suspension is that it is *understandable*. Motocrossers have been dealing with shock absorbers and springs for a long time. We can get into a shock absorber and get it working just right for our own

particular style. While the monoshock system is something that

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most people (and a lot of dealers) are afraid to screw with, a more conventional system like that of the

MXC can be personalized without undue trauma.

That's something the even relatively serious racer will have to do soon after buying an MXC. Suspension has never been a strong point on Yamahas, and the MXC is no exception. It starts off feeling pretty good, but soon the forks start bottoming and you begin to lose



Gas pressure Kayaba laydown shocks work well for a while. Spring rates wither with time.



Spokes, both front and rear assemblies, never came loose, a rarity among test bikes. Forks kept the wheel on the ground up to a point. Pitching it at speed over bumps would cause loss of contact and a wash.



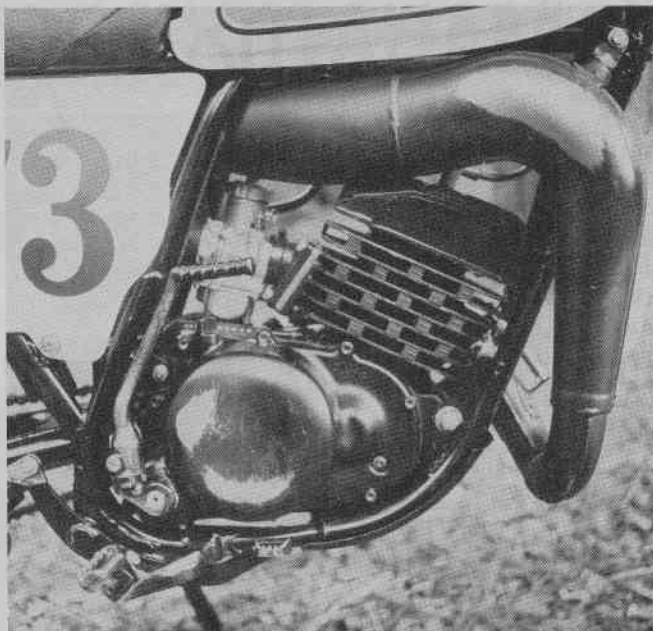
Fork position is adjustable over a two-inch span, cables are heavy-duty and smooth working. Brake cable is well guided and doesn't hang up on the fork tube.



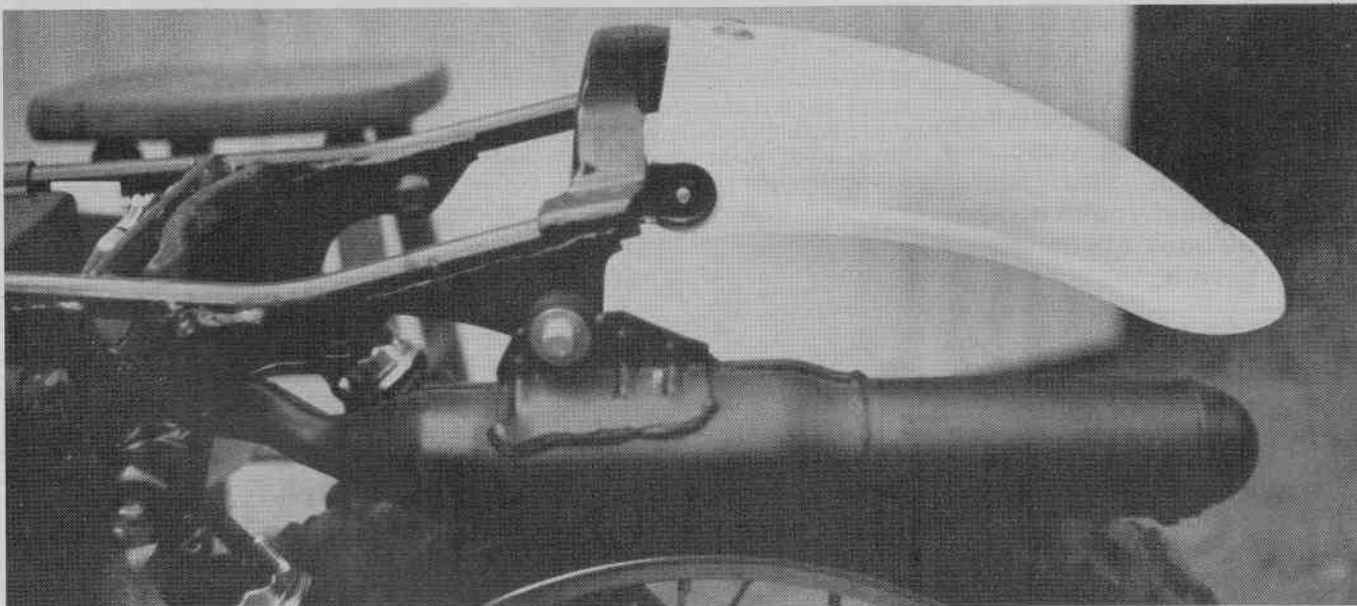
Pipe disconnects easily at this point for quick access to the cylinder. The whole bike is the most easily serviced of any we've tested.



Air cleaner design, usually the weak link on a Yamaha, is so boss on the MX125C that it is actually *trick*.



Six-speed YZ engine with an iron sleeve delivers some of the finest power we've ever experienced from a 125 stocker. Footpegs are very slippery on a wet track. Kickstarter is a little awkward and your knee will occasionally contact the pipe.



Weight saving is apparent on the MX. YZ-type bobtail frame and short fender make up for the weight of the muffler/spark arrestor. The U.S. Forestry-approved unit doesn't intimidate power output at all.

your confidence in the shocks. The substitution of 190cc of Bel-Ray 30-weight in each fork tube settles the front end down a little, and a couple of clicks on the shock spring adjusters sets the back up just right. But after a few hot practice sessions, the forks start feeling squirrely again and the shocks fade. The front wheel seems to want to dance on the bumps, giving you a dreary feeling

about what's going on below. A front end that jitterbugs through a corner doesn't do much for your

"... one of the most easily serviced bikes we've ever tested."

confidence. When the shocks fade, they begin to return a little too smartly for our tastes, but it's not too

bad. But as the springs begin to weaken — and they'll do that sooner than you expect — the ride begins to get unmanageable. Yamaha needs to get their hydraulic pressures worked out more completely, and to get turned onto some good springs. Otherwise, as in the case of the MXC, the new owner's first consideration must be to upgrade the suspension.

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YAMAHA MX125C

This is not to say that you can't wail on this bike in stock trim. While the suspension isn't quite there, the persevering rider is well-served by the excellent frame, engine and tire package. While the chassis is made from the same light-duty steel that constitutes most Yamaha frames, it is constructed in short enough sections to make the frame fairly rigid. You might say that it's a YZ frame without the monoshock. Much of the vertical stress that caused last year's MX swingarm to flex so much is relieved by the laydown shock arrangement this year, so deflection caused by side loads is much less apparent. And the added travel of the laydowns — 5.8 inches — helps to make the rear end more stable. The result is a machine which handles better than you might at first suspect.

The power produced by the YZ-ported six-speed is excellent. We always felt that the reed valve 125cc Yamaha engines lacked the top end

"The new MX125C is definitely a better machine, because after it tickles your alarm centers to see if you're awake, it gives you back the handle so you can save it."

power necessary to compete with race-tuned Hondas. The top end slump endemic to the Yamahas was, we felt, a function of the reed valve induction system. But a few rides on some factory-prepared Yamaha YZs convinced us that the power was there, it just has to be coaxed out with the proper port work and pipe tuning.

That work has been done. The MXC has all the power you'll need to be competitive against almost any 125. In stock trim, burning a hefty 20:1 pre-mix and with the spark arrestor still attached, the MX125C comes on like a KX125 Kawasaki, and keeps delivering all the way to the top. We were very impressed.

For the novice, the reed valve induction still gives the added advantage of clean running even at impossibly low crank speeds. You can pull it from anywhere in any gear and never fog the spark plug. This gives the bike a decided



Heavy hits will keep the Yamaha skittering until the suspension settles down, which makes two nasty jumps in a row something to deal with.



Good tires keep the MX sticking longer and excellent throttle response gets the Yammie away faster than most production 125s.

advantage over many highly tuned competitors, especially when the action hits sand or mud.

Staying on the powerband is no problem with the six-speed gearbox, but keeping the piston and rings is another story. Because of the high power output and the somewhat radical porting, Yamaha strongly recommends in the owner's manual that the piston and ring be replaced *after every race*. While this may seem a little excessive, considering the pipe wrench durability of past MXs, this is not an unreasonable requirement. If you're not racing,

just riding, you should still pop for a new piston assembly every few weeks. Take our word for it.

Keeping your confidence at the Marty Smith level when your suspension is doing a tap dance through the turns can be a chore if your tires aren't doing the job. This year, Yamaha has shod the MX model with a sano set of Dunlop Sports. Between the wraparound 4.10 on the back and the sticky 3.00 on the front, there's more than enough prime rubber on the ground

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White on black with red trim and a set of businessman's tires makes the MX acceptably hairy looking.

SPECIFICATIONS

Make Yamaha
Model MX125C
Country of Manufacture Japan
Retail Price \$890

ENGINE

Type:

Two-stroke, single-cylinder, reed valve

Bore & Stroke 56mm x 50mm
Displacement 123cc
Compression Ratio 7.5:1
Cylinder Five-port, iron sleeve
Carburetion: 30mm Mikuni (VM30SS)
Ignition CDI
Lubrication Pre-mix 20:1
Air Filter Fuzzed foam

TRANSMISSION

Type Six-speed, constant mesh
Ratios:

2.538, 1.933, 1.555, 1.300,
1.142, 1.045

Primary Helical gear
Ratio 3.894
Drive Chain DK428HD

SUSPENSION

Front Sprung hydraulic forks
Rear:

Pressurized hydraulic shocks
and springs, laydown position

Travel: 6.5 inches front, 5 inches rear

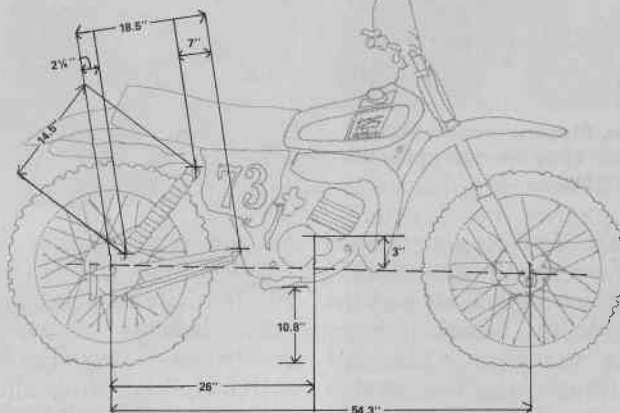
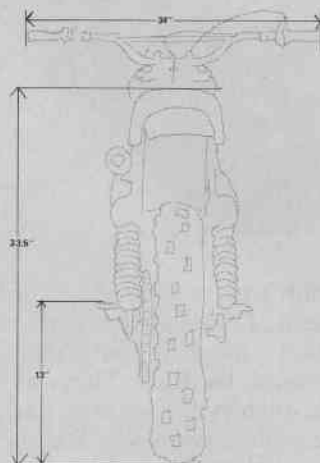
DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase 54 inches
Ground Clearance 10.8 inches
Seat Height 33.5 inches
Track Weight 189 pounds
Weight Bias:

44 percent front, 56 percent rear

CAPACITIES

Fuel 1.5 gallons
Transmission 650cc
Forks 190.5cc



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to get the job done. The MXC will skitter on a bumpy surface, especially when you're setting up for a turn, but each time the tires take a bite they deliver enough of those "good traction vibes" to calm your brain and keep you on the gas.

The skipping suspension, combined with all that deluxe power, means that this bike has a definite limit, one which any reasonably skilled rider can reach. And that means that every once in a while you'll be doing one of those radical fourth-gear rail shots along the outside of a sweeper (something that's a great deal of fun on this bike) and the front wheel will suddenly take a wash. This is when motocross gets thrilling. You're sitting on the tank, backing it in, with your right leg out as far as it will go, and your front wheel suddenly feels like it's running on linoleum. Your brain takes a 50-amp shot of pure terror. Your muscles tighten, you . . .

In the old days, this is when you would kiss your "better machine" good-bye. But the new MX125C is definitely a better machine, because after it tickles your alarm centers to see if you're awake, it gives you back the handle so you can save it. We used to call a bike like this "forgiving," but that was before we found out that a really *good* bike doesn't get you into trouble in the first place. Save the little Yamaha this way a few times, and you start to develop a technique for breaking the front wheel loose, even in the hairiest turns.

After you grow familiar with the adhesion limits of the front wheel, you begin to really jam it into the corners hard. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred you'll come out smack on your line in a sweeping cross-up, roosting all over the opposition. But every once in a while the limit shows up, and the back end comes around as though you'd just run over a frog.

Which is to say that this is the perfect bike for the beginning motocrosser. It's not so overly radical as to scare a new rider, but it's not so toady as to get boring after the novice has mastered a few tricks. It is also one of the most easily serviced bikes we've ever tested. The air box is so effective and easy to service that

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it borders on being trick. The pipe disconnects forward of the silencer/spark arrestor assembly for easy access to the cylinder. Unlike *every* other Japanese bike we've tested lately, the MXC had virtually no spoke problems. We tightened them once after break-in, and never again had to touch them. The wheels required only occasional adjustment.

The engine, too, seems dead reliable. We like Yamaha's recommendation of frequent piston replacement, because it teaches the new racer the all-important basics of good *engine maintenance on race machinery*. But just to see what would happen, we left the original piston assembly in for three test sessions and a race. Other than things sounding a little loose, there was no damage. Still, we don't recommend this procedure to the owner/racer.

As a matter of fact, during our entire test of the MXC the only problem which surfaced was a slight crack in the gas tank seam — not

unusual on any machine. Thus, the bike seems likely to maintain its reputation for durability, while building a new one for competitiveness. Can't beat that.

There are a lot of new people who are going to get interested in motocross this summer. For them, the Yamaha MX125C is the perfect choice to go racing on during their first season out. It's fast and reliable, and handles well enough to make the novice happy for a long time. And, if properly maintained, it will last a long time. Our quibbles about suspension can be easily mollified with trick shocks at the rear, and some individually satisfactory package of oil, springs or a fork kit up front. Some riders won't even feel this is necessary and will leave their MXCs stock. The stock bike will handle anything you can put it through up until the time you feel you've reached a skill level which demands a more sophisticated mount. So if you're a new racer looking to invest in a motocross bike for the summer wars, at \$890 (f.o.b. West Coast — \$897 f.o.b. East Coast), the Yamaha MX125C just could be the best deal around. 