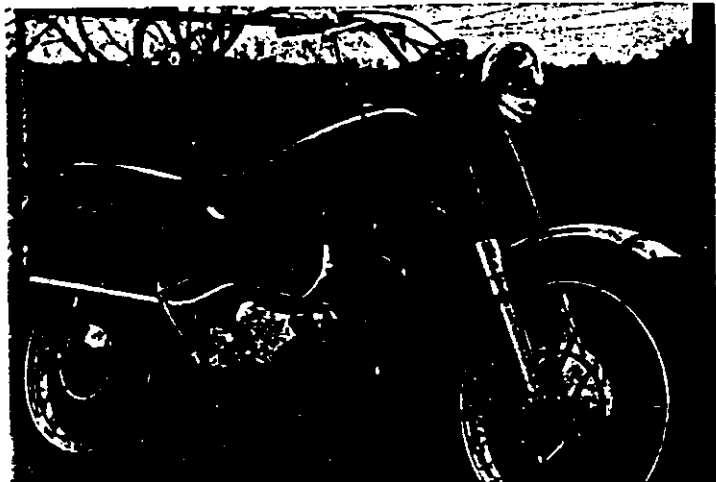


CYCLE TESTS

Norton Atlas Scrambler



The Atlas Scrambler as you get it.

We had the opportunity to make an end of the season test of the new Atlas 750cc scrambler that Norton is making for the U.S. market, when four of these arrived in New York before the November 13th Berliner Motor Corp. Service School. We drove down to the school and brought home the Atlas that had been used as a demonstrator for the dealers in attendance.

This Norton is a big bike, make no mistake about it. It is tall, and it is heavy. It is also very powerful, with a claimed 60 bhp. It certainly has the power, as we found out, and very flexible power at that, with a compression ratio of only 7.5 - 1.

As we got it, the bike was fully road equipped, except that it had upswept straight pipes. A batch will come through with low pipes also offered. It was not going to be possible to ride this bike in the final scramble of the year, at Middleboro, Mass. on November 17th, without considerable modifying.

We started by removing 35 pounds of unnecessary equipment, including all the lighting equipment, two stands, tool box, front fender, tach & speedometer setup. We cut off the long rigid footpegs and welded on some folding pegs, the ones made by Harley-Davidson as buddy rests for their big bikes. We did not have time to fit up spring returns, and were to be sorry for this.

The gearing was far too high, with 21 teeth on the engine, and we borrowed a 19 tooth sprocket from Bob Hogan, but still it was too high. With the enormous range of power the engine has, it was not difficult to ride it with this high gearing, but it was still not geared as we would have liked.

Now the bike was as near to scrambles trim as we had time to bring it, and off to Middleboro we went for a first hand try at riding the big job in actual competition.

During practice we found the large size to be no apparent handicap, and the ride was very comfortable. The power was breathtaking, the acceleration out of the final turn onto the straight, after my quite conservative cornering, was tremendous, and though I refrained from really screaming the virtually new engine down the straight, I did get over the jump at quite considerable speed, and the big Norton landed quite well in the moderate bumps beyond the jump.

In the heat, things went along OK, I still did not really turn on the big monster too hard in the turns, as I was hardly familiar with its handling, and had no wish to drop it. The speed on the straight was still quite stimulating, and for the final, we decided to give it some more go.



Ready for a first try at the scrambles, the Atlas has lost a lot of weight.

This is when something I had overlooked took affect, and gave me several anxious moments. My first couple of efforts at really giving the engine the gas coming out of the somewhat rutted turns ended in some very ungainly actions in trying to recover my balance. The back end stepped out quite as expected when all that horsepower was fed to it, but the front end did not carry on across the ruts as it should have, but rather caught up in a rut and steered along the rut. Well you can imagine the outcome of this, as the back end continued swinging out, while the front straightened up and refused to drift at all. I was fighting hard to pull the bars back from the tendency to turn under into the turn that this produced.

After a couple of frantic episodes like this, I concentrated on easier but slower cornering, and when, later on, one of my folding pegs stayed folded as I came out of the sand pit, I toured off track into the pits, unable to brace my right foot on the peg in time for the upcoming left turn. Had the peg not been folding, I'd have hung the whole works on its side at the sandpit exit. Folding pegs are to be standard on the regular shipment.

This problem with the front end I was inclined to attribute to my own faintheartedness, but upon reflection, I felt it did not handle as had certain other big bikes I had recently ridden over rough going. A closer check on the forks decided me that they were far too soft and squishy. I should have thought of this, and put in at least stiffer oil, but really, the solution is in a stiffer spring. The weight of the bike was surging up and down too much on these very soft springs, and the consequent variation in wheel grip was giving me my trouble.

The forks on the Atlas are a combination of Norton and Matchless parts, and are wedded to the Matchless G-80 scrambler frame. The result is very eyepleasing, but the forks are definitely quite long, placing the bars very far up, and also giving the heavy motor quite a lot of ground clearance, about 8 inches to be exact. It was thus a rather high rig.

I was definitely disappointed in my lack of success in coping with the Atlas scrambler, but I feel my problems are curable with some attention to the front end in the way of stiffer spring action and damping, at least for use on rougher tracks. The engine in this bike, totally stock, with only 7.5-1 compression ratio, has all kinds of ready power, and on a smoother track, or on the road, it should be some bomb. With the front end sorted out, and some more sophisticated weight savings made on the too heavy assembly, it could also be, in the hands of an experienced big bore rider, a real winner on the rough stuff. That engine is sounder stressed, it should just run and run and run, still giving you all the power you could ever use.

Reported by Bob Hicks. Hicks Photos.