

# australasian **DIRT BIKE**

# R.I.P. GE **THE FINAL ADVENTURE**

**ADB'S EDITOR KILLED IN NEVADA**



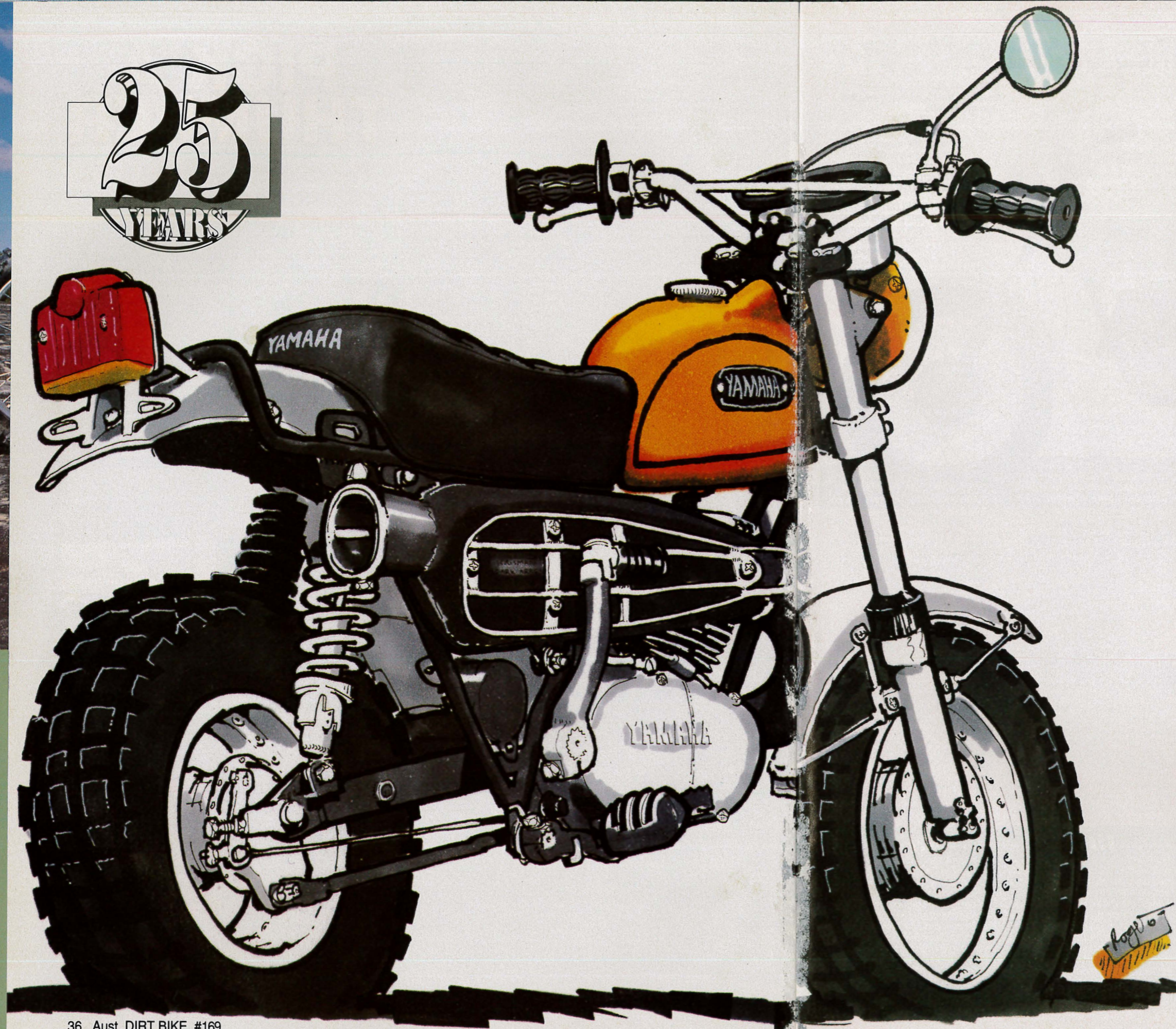
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**GIANT TRAIL TEST: KLX250 - Full test • KLX250 vs KLX250R • DR250/350 Test of time**  
**YAMAHA DT-1: Discover your roots • THE HIT MEN: Meet the fastest MXers in Oz**  
**MINIRIDER: BABY BOUNCE Tune your forks**



**25**  
YEARS



# DT-1

SPECIAL HISTORY LESSON FEATURE

The motorcycle that changed everything.

Events of historical significance are rare in dirt bikes because the history of true dirt bikes is so short. And the history of popular dirt bikes is even shorter: 25 years, in fact. It all started with the bike you see here, Yamaha's 1968 model DT-1, a 250cc two-stroke which put leisure off-road riding in reach of nearly everyone, and which started a boom that still continues today.

by the fun lovin', historically respectful staff of ADB

**W**e look at a motorcycle like the DT-1 today and it's hard not to snigger. What old fuddy duddys rode things like THAT?!?! we wonder.

Low, slow, undersuspended, heavy and evil; looked at from today's perspective the DT-1 is not good.

Neither was Henry Ford's T-Model, but it revolutionised the automobile industry because it introduced for the first time mass production courtesy of the assembly line. This in turn lowered prices, overall quality was far better than people were used to getting for the same bucks, and they were reliable.

And that, folks, is Yamaha's DT-1 and its claim to fame: it did more to popularise dirt bikes than any other single model simply because it was cheap and reliable, and it was sold in vast numbers.

Guess what? It's a quarter of a century since the first DT-1 rolled off Yamaha's line. That's a kind of significant time, a silver anniversary, a birthday.

Always ones to hoot it up on a birthday, we thought, why not honour the humble but successful DT-1? Why not indeed! Listen up, you chillun out there. This even concerns you.

#### HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

Twenty five years is forever in dirt bikes. As much as anything else, the DT-1 can be used as a reference point. It's sort of the bike

we can use to measure where the modern revolution began – you know, the long travel suspension, great power, handling, looks, reliability, all the stuff riders expect today in every dirt bike they plunk their recession dollars down on.

How so?

Because finally riders could get a bike that looked the part – it had an up pipe, a small neat fuel tank, and trials universal tyres, after all – for a lot less than what the Europeans were asking. Into the bargain the Yamaha was like a rock: stone reliable. Never mind that it handled about as good as a rock; any Bultaco, Ossa or Hodaka left it for dead, handling wise. But the DT-1 started first kick, had electrics that managed to keep the lights working even if you did go trailriding, the fork seals never leaked, the engine didn't leave a pool of oil in your garage and spares prices were quite reasonable. As well, there were Yamaha shops springing up all over, unlike shops which sold Spanish or other exotic bikes and which were found maybe once a state if you were lucky.

So the DT-1 had all the right ingredients to ignite the revolution that was just about to happen.

**STILL FUNNY LOOKING AFTER ALL THESE YEARS:** Short, stubby little thing that it was, Yamaha's original white-tank DT-1 was never pretty, but in a funny sort of way it had a lot of style.



Illustration by Roger Harvey.



# DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF THE FIRST DT-1

**EYES PORT:** The first three models had the viewing window in the left side two-stroke oil reservoir at the back.

**INDECISION:** The first model (and 2nd and 3rd) had the gearshaft protruding out of the engine on both sides. Left side shifting was just starting at this time, remember, so Yamaha was playing it safe.

**GREAT WHITE WHALE:** The easy telltale sign of the first model was the white tank with the black pinstripe. Oops, ours is an older model's. It remains one of the best designed tanks of all time.

**TWINS:** An obvious tell-tale feature is the tachometer that's smaller than the speedometer.

**COLOUR CODED:** The headlight supports were painted silver like the guards, and had no reflectors, on the first model DT-1.

**SHIELDED LIFE:** The heat shields differed from model to model for Lord knows what reason. This is the shape of the first.



**ABOVE MR. GUMBY:** Magazine test photos of the day still showed riders dressed in jeans and army boots. It was into this happy-go-lucky, naive world that the DT-1 came and made such a splash.



**ABOVE STRONG CHARACTER:** The DT-1's strong engine was the real secret to its runaway success. Lots of grunt, easy starting, and bullet-proof reliability. It was a winner.

full model years, and even then in year four of its life most of the changes were only cosmetic.

## HOW COULD IT BE SO SUCCESSFUL?

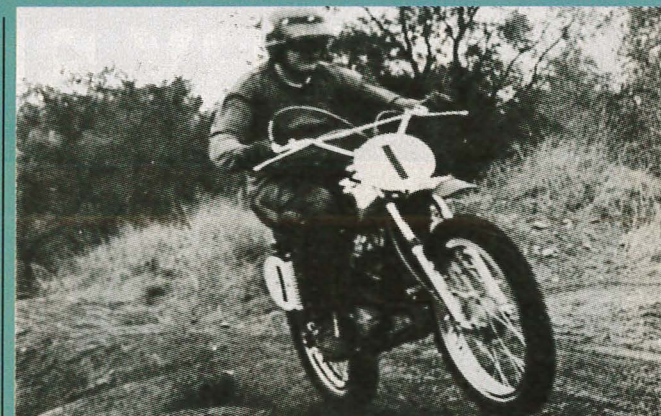
You've got us. At the time its styling was fresh and original, so that worked to an extent. The motor was way ahead of anything else being offered for road and off-road work. Its reliability and affordability was no doubt a major factor. Yamaha's concerted effort to market it worldwide would have helped too; that and the fact that Yamaha shops were springing up all over made it easier and more logical to buy a Yamaha in preference to a more expensive (but better handling)

# WHO WAS FIRST? WAS IT YAMAHA'S DT-1 LIKE THEY SAY?

**M**arketers have been known to exaggerate before the DT-1 was born and they'll no doubt continue to do so. Today that first white tank DT-1 is credited with starting the dirt bike boom of the seventies, but is it true?

Nope, it isn't. There were scores of other "trailbikes" before the DT-1.

What the DT-1 actually did was POPULARISE the sport of AFFORDABLE, RELIABLE dirt bikes. For what it's worth, here are a few of the dual-purpose bikes that went before.



## HODAKA

This small Japanese company might have had registerable dirt bikes four years before Yamaha, but they went bust in the early 70s. Pity. They were neat, if small.

## SACHS

Never big anywhere but Europe, Sachs had a couple of peaky little capacity mongrels that were as dual-purpose as the DT-1 ever was. We don't know what they were in particular, and neither do we much care.

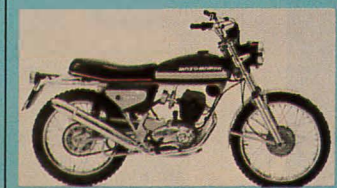
## OSSA

Another Spanish maker since gone bust, back before the DT-1 they had models like the Pioneer that were street legal (only just) and heavily biased towards dirt.



## MOTO MORINI

Who? Who cares? These guys were in there with dual-purpose bikes too in the late sixties.



## BSA

Never any good in the dirt, and four-stroke to boot, BSA nevertheless had a few big singles you could register and which were touted as dual purpose with almost as much truthfulness as the later DT Yamahas.



European bike. Everything put together added up to a successful phenomenon that somehow carved out a place for itself in the history of

dirt bikes. We doubt there will ever be another bike like the DT-1 because these days all the factories have

learned what works and what doesn't. Bikes are becoming more and more the same as one another. But the DT-1 was like nothing else.



**A REAL SQUARE:** The first three models' swingarms were square section mild steel. After that they were round section mild steel.

**NO PETAL:** The first models had no reed valve induction.

**OUT NOT IN:** The first three models had the YAMAHA logo embossed on the engine covers. Later ones were indented.

**ONLY NINETEEN:** The first few models had only 19" front wheels.

# YAMAHA DT-1

## THE PRICE IS RIGHT

In 1968 most people were working; there wasn't a recession and the average bloke who rode dirt bikes could expect to earn around \$100 a week gross. It was a time when Yamaha was selling the 1968 DT-1 for around \$580, so roughly you could say it took about two months to earn a DT-1 after paying tax. Spoilt young brats those days, eh? Today you could average it all out and come to the inescapable conclusion that it costs twice as much to buy a dirt bike like the DT-1 equivalent, the Yamaha XT250 at

\$5091; the average working bloke today is earning between \$500-\$600, so he has to work more than ten weeks (after tax) to earn his XT250. You're getting a more sophisticated bike, sure, but you're certainly paying for it in value-less Oz pesos.

However, it wasn't just the price that got DT-1 sales to move, it was a combination of different things that resulted in young males having disposable income and a burning need to spend it on something exciting. Honda had run it's "You meet the nicest people on a Honda!" campaign and put affordable motorcycles right under everyone's noses. Vietnam was winding down; man was going to the moon; technology was on the up; everyone wanted to take part in the lifestyle of the sixties. It was a happenin' time (man). Dirt bikes were on their way, and the DT-1 led the charge by a happy blend of coincidences.

## WAS THE DT-1 THE FINEST DIRT BIKE ON TWO WHEELS?

No way, Jose! It was a bit of a bush pig, really. It handled like a barge; it steered like a pregnant pig with a vertigo problem. The suspension behaved like a Vietnam chopper that had been hit by a surface-to-air missile. But what the heck; so did everything else in those days, although most riders who knew anything put their preferences with European dirt bikes for handling.

No, what the DT-1 had in spades was a brilliant motor. Not only bulletproof, it was easy to maintain, had a two-stroke oil injection system and a handy reservoir you simply topped up from time to time, and it started first kick every time. On top of that (my, my! All this and more?!!!) the DT-1 motor made lots of grunt. It pulled like the proverbial fourteen year old and beginner

riders just loved that motor. They could crawl around at learner speeds all day and it wouldn't load up or foul plugs or stall or carry on like those finicky, pernickety European bikes.

Then, when the sun sank slowly in the west, you turned back onto the tar, switched on the headlight (which would always work unless you had crashed it out), and ride back to civilisation on a bike that was just as civilised.

But as a real dirt bike they were awful. It had a 19" front wheel because no-one knew much about dirt handling needs in those days; it was all the rage, but it didn't work. The trials universal tyres were woeful. The suspension was dreadful. The weight distribution was terrible. The rubber footpegs were slippery as all getout when they got wet or muddy. The geometry was all wrong.

But it went. And went. And went. In fact, it went unchanged for three

## 1968

In an attempt to cash in on a growing phenomenon in the post-Vietnam era, the original DT-1 was released. It featured a white tank with black pinstriping, a tachometer that was smaller than the speedometer, a square steel swingarm, silver-coloured headlight brackets and a gear shaft that went right through the engine and stuck out both sides. In those days it was uncertain if shifting was to be left or right side for the future.

## 1969

Little changed for year two. It can be identified by the white tank going to burnt orange with a white pinstripe, the tachometer growing in size to equal the speedometer, and a tiny reflector on the headlight mounts. Mechanically almost identical, it still had the 19" front wheel and unpolished engine cases, and the gear shaft still stuck out on the right side as well as left. This model was designated the DT-1S.

## 1970

Outwardly, apart from the new red coloured tank, colour-matched headlight brackets and cylinder fins painted black with machined edges, the DT-1C was identical looking to the previous models, but there were changes underneath. Steering head and engine mounts were beefier, forks and shocks were improved (phew!), porting revised. Cylinder studs, clutch, crank seals, gearbox, bars, grips, brakes, all were improved.

## 1971

Yamaha was in danger of losing its momentum as they marked time. Four model years had passed since the first white DT-1 and apart from different tank colours the bike looked mostly identical. This, at a time when dirt bikes were changing overnight, was the kiss of death. Yamaha needed to do something against all the new - and often superior - models made by other makers but which were inspired by the original DT-1. What an irony!

## 1972

At last, a model change - DT-2! So what if most of it was from the new shape tank and the polished engine covers with the Yamaha logo recessed instead of embossed? Engine-wise, the big news was the new reed valve. Gone forever was the gearshaft poking out on the right side of the engine. A few other minor tweaks made it different, but not by a lot. Yamaha was in danger of losing its momentum as they marked time.

## 1973

Maybe the Yamaha gurus thought changing the model yet again (with the inevitable tank graphics update) would fool the public for another year: the '73 model, labelled the DT3, had a few minute suspension tweaks, a few engine improvements, a new taillight and precious little else. The engine was a grumpy delight, but the handling and suspension (and weight) was shameful. Still, it was reliable (and cheap).

## 1974

Whoa! Are these changes? Apart from the new name (DT250), and tank, the most obvious is the over-the-engine pipe. New indeed! Frame was actually new: the engine went lower (losing ground clearance along the way). New Thermal-Flow piggyback shocks, revamped 25mm longer forks (still awful), new bars (OK!), and an even better engine. But decent power AND decent handling in a DT? At least Yamaha was trying again.

## 1975

Lookie here! A new tank! And a new model name - DT250B. But apart from that the DT was the same old thing. It's safe to call '75 & '76 the twilight years of the bike that started it all in popular terms. There was only one model left to run, the monoshock '76 DT250C, easily the best effort ever, but still strangled by the factory designers' misinterpretation of what made a good (for the time) dual-purpose bike. There were better bikes around. Sadly.