

# YAMAHA MINI ENDURO

YAMAHA'S 1971 JT-1 MINI ENDURO HELPED MAKE THE JUMP  
FROM MINIBIKE TO MINICYCLE

BY MITCH BOEHM  
PHOTOS BY KEVIN WING

**1** 1971 was a doozy on the entertainment and historical fronts. *All in the Family* debuted on CBS. Led Zeppelin played *Stairway to Heaven* for the first time to a live audience. George Harrison released *My Sweet Lord*. And Apollo 14 got back on the moon after Apollo 13's near-debacle.

Motorcyclists had plenty to be excited about in '71, as well. Bruce Brown's moto documentary *On Any Sunday* — starring several AMA Motorcycle Hall of Famers, including actor and racer Steve McQueen, dirt tracker Mert Lawwill, and SoCal shop-owner and racer Malcolm Smith — opened to rave reviews nationally, garnered an Oscar nomination, and set the stage for the most explosive motorcycling decade ever seen in the world.

But it was motorcycling's kids who let out the biggest whoops of joy that year, because in '71 no fewer than four amazing new minicycles were introduced: Honda's SL70 Motosport, Rupp's Black Widow, Suzuki's MT50 Trailhopper, and Yamaha's JT-1, also known as the Mini Enduro.

The term *minicycle* raises few eyebrows today, but in '71 it was a fresh idea. The vast majority of minis prior

to that point, aside from some funky Benellis and the ubiquitous Honda Z50 of '68, were exactly what most baby boomers conjure when they hear the word minibike: a tube- and rigid-framed two-wheeler with small, squared-off tires, a tire-friction rear brake, truly evil handling, and motive power by either Briggs & Stratton or Tecumseh. No one complained much about these things at the time, but no one knew any better, either.

Those four new minis were different, especially the SL70 and Mini Enduro, which were three-fifths-scale versions of the SL175 and the now-legendary 250cc DT-1 of '68. These were real motorcycles, shrunk in size for smaller folks, that fired the imaginations of millions of boomer-aged kids like nothing else. A red SL70 was this author's very first motorcycle, and it led directly to a lifetime of two-wheeled fun and employment. Sales of these minis skyrocketed overnight, and sucked millions of kids into motorcycling's maw

along the way.

Launched at the 1970 Yamaha dealer meeting, the Mini Enduro was an instant sensation. "I introduced the thing to dealers by carrying it out onto the stage," remembered



AMA Motorcycle Hall of Fame inductee and longtime Yamaha product-planning guru Ed Burke when I spoke to him a decade ago. "Dealers knew instantly what it was all about, just by seeing it. I have to say, it was probably the easiest development project I was ever involved in. The engineers in Japan seemed to know exactly what we were going to ask for in those days, and they seemed to have that little thing ready to go right when we asked for a miniature version!

"There was no mystery to what it needed to be," Burke added. "A small DT-1, really, it having become the dual-purpose machine by that point. We just kept building them smaller and smaller, and when we finally got to the minibike, everyone knew it would be a huge hit. And, boy, was it ever!"

Even today in the face of advanced, ultra-modern minibikes, the JT-1 looks near-perfect — handsome, athletic, purposeful, well proportioned — and was stunningly transformative for baby boomers, which is why they're restored, collected, ridden, and displayed in garages and living rooms by aging baby-boomers everywhere.

"While vacationing in Northern California years ago," remembered longtime moto-industry photographer Kevin Wing, "I found a restored JT-1 — my first real motorcycle — on eBay. It was not cheap, but it was perfect and local, too, and within a few minutes I'd bought it. I couldn't help myself. I had to have it!"

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YAMAHA PRODUCT-PLANNING GURU ED BURKE



The Mini Enduro was not a technical tour de force. Its 58cc rotary-valve two-stroke single, fed by a tiny, 16mm Mikuni and lubricated by a no-fuss Autolube system, made very little power. But it was durable and reliable, and even after a long winter's nap in the Midwest or northern tier of the country, they'd fire right up come springtime — with a little help from leaded, non-ethanol fuel, of course.

The suspension was a bit flaccid for larger kids thanks to el-cheapo shocks and a fork assembly with just one spring in one fork leg. But a young, 60-pound Jeff Ward, who *Cycle* magazine had evaluate the JT-1 for its October 1970 road test, seemed



happy with the suspension. "He liked the way the bike absorbed the jolts before they could get to his backside," *Cycle* wrote.

Overall, the JT-1 was balanced and handled quite well, and kids didn't really care much about ride quality anyway; all they knew was that the thing was more fun and freedom-generating than anything else in their lives. And at less than \$300, the JT-1 was affordable,



The JT-1's 58cc rotary-valve two-stroke only made about four ponies, less than some tube-frame minis. But the bike was durable and fun, and at around \$300, was a great bargain.



with parents — many of them DT-1 owners — buying them by the truckload.

"It was just a crazy time," Burke remembered. "JT-1s would come three to a crate, and dealers would buy 60 at a time. They'd tell us, 'We can't assemble 'em fast enough to keep 'em on the floor!' Back then, there were so many places to ride, and the trail and riding-area closings hadn't begun yet. Motorcycles were everywhere, and everyone seemed to be riding.



"One dealer in a little town called Sissonville, W.V., sold some 3,000 dual-sport Yamahas for us one year — DT-1s, AT-1s, and, of course, Mini Enduros. Amazing! It was a great time to be involved, and it highlighted how big motorcycling was in the early 1970s."

Ward rode and raced a Mini Enduro for a while, as did AMA National and Supercross Champion David Bailey. "The Mini Enduro was the first bike I ever rode," Bailey remembered. "It was my stepdad Gary's pitbike, and I just got attached to the thing. When I started racing it, Gary painted it to look like a Pursang, as he was racing Bultacos at the time; we called our JT-1 the YamaTaco!"

A lot of Mini Enduros were ridden into the ground in stock condition over the years, but many were also modified, most of those for racing. Larger carburetors, high-compression heads, special exhaust pipes, big-bore kits, and modified rotary valves gave them considerably more power. They were pretty competitive for a couple of years with the heavier SL70 four-strokes, though all that ended once the

XR75 and YZ80 appeared in '73 and '74, respectively. "We helped ourselves a little by supporting a lot of minibike racing at the time," Burke remembered. "We supported events at Indian Dunes and Escape Country."

Cycle's October 1970 test summarized the Mini Enduro pretty well: "Yamaha hit the nail on the head with the new baby Enduro. It's better than a bicycle because you don't have to pedal it; it's better than most minibikes because it has real suspension units and a real transmission and the stability which comes from almost-full-sized wheels and tires; and it's different from almost all minibikes in that it looks like a real motorcycle. The Mini is

scheduled for release in October, just two months this side of Christmas. Yamaha even has the timing down cold."

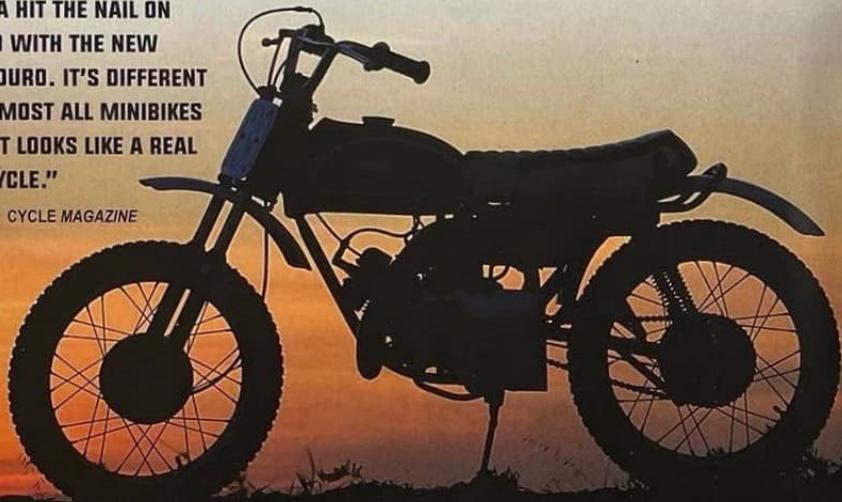
"I'd grown up on my brother's hand-me-down JT-1," remembered Wing, who still owns the bike photographed for this story, "and it's amazing to have one just like it in the garage, especially with my old Indian Dunes number on the number plates. Every time I walk by it I'm only two kicks away from hearing that memorable sound, seeing the white puff of smoke, and smelling that burned two-stroke oil. When I do that, I'm instantly 8 years old again."

And that's a wonderful thing to behold. **AMA**



**"YAMAHA HIT THE NAIL ON THE HEAD WITH THE NEW BABY ENDURO. IT'S DIFFERENT FROM ALMOST ALL MINIBIKES IN THAT IT LOOKS LIKE A REAL MOTORCYCLE."**

CYCLE MAGAZINE



## LITTLE BIG BIKES

Minicycle mania in the form of Honda's SL70, Suzuki's Trailhopper and Rupp's Black Widow

**I**t all happened pretty quickly in the early 1970s, the Japanese manufacturers and Mansfield, Ohio's Rupp Industries unleashing a range of mini motorcycles for 1971 that were unlike anything else: Three-fifths-scale motorcycles that looked, acted and were outfitted like bigger bikes, but sized for kids...or fun-seeking adults.

Alongside Yamaha's Mini Enduro came Honda's legendary SL70 Motosport, perhaps the best-known and -loved of this foursome. Handsome, quiet, refined and utterly reliable, the littlest SL came in blue, yellow and red that first year and was the perfect step-up for kids who'd cut their teeth on Honda's Z50 Mini Trail... or any of the mower-engined minis. Honda built and sold a bazillion of 'em.

Two-stroke expert Suzuki came to the party with its MT50 Trailhopper, a futuristic little thing that didn't last long

in the market — just four years — but has remained a powerful force in older enthusiasts' minds ever since.

And then there was Mickey Rupp's namesake firm out of Mansfield, Ohio, which built all sorts of wheeled

conveyances, but which is remembered primarily for its Tecumseh-engined minis such as the Roadster, Enduro, Hustler and higher-performance Black Widow.

It all makes you wanna go back in time, eh? — *Mitch Boehm*

**Dear Dad: This is why I want a Suzuki mini-bike.**

**Suzuki Trailhopper**— built to take on the outdoors!

Suzuki Trailhopper— built to take on the outdoors!

**The New Motosport 70.**

**Honda**— the quality of a winner!

**Honda SL70 Motosport**— built to take on the outdoors!

**From Mighty to Mini, Honda has it all.**



**Rupp's Super Boomer**  
Ready for racing? Then the Black Widow is the Rupp for you. It's an entirely new line in Compact Cycles—a production-model machine, superior for racing!

The Black Widow is a real competition bike, with no pretension in any other direction. Its 4-horse engine is fed by a special high-performance carburetor, and its straight-pipe exhaust system is made to minimize backpressure, optimize performance.

It comes in black and it goes as good as it looks. The 12" spaced wheels are fixed to Rupp's telescopic forks, and the Rupp TCM Torque Converter gives plenty of power to the rear. Raised front fork and slider-type suspension soak up shocks and keep the wheels on the trail. It's really a slick bike that acts like something more—a lot more.

Whatever way you get your racing kicks—competition, endurance, cross-country, hillclimb—the Rupp Black Widow will keep you competitive. The need is all to you!

\*This competition model is not covered under warranty by the engine manufacturer or Rupp Industries, Inc.

**Fun machines for fun people**