THE TEN BEST BUYS IN MOTORCYCLING

● Too often in this world we don't get what we pay for. Some of the time we do, but this is to be expected—value equal to price. On rare occasions a product is worth more than its cost. It may not be cheap, but for what it is, the price is a bargain. We are getting more than our money's worth. The ten motorcycles chosen herein are in this latter category. Each one delivers an entirely serviceable, and sometimes outstanding, product at a price which cannot be met by other bikes in its class.

Since price is the major factor in choosing a bike as one of the top ten buys, and price fluctuates all over the place, you must analyze our selections based on the prices supplied to us by the distributors. All are 1974 Suggested Retail Prices as quoted late in 1973. Realize that by the time this appears some country or another may have revalued or devalued its currency, lifted or raised tariffs, arbitrarily raised or lowered prices, or altered shipments so the natural law of supply and demand reshapes the prices printed here. Then, of course, some of the top ten selections would have to be reconsidered.

Also realize that many bikes not included in the top ten would be if the prices that can be negotiated in some areas reflected a national situation. For instance Suggested Retail on a '74 Honda 750 Four is $1822, but Honda dealers advertising in the *Los Angeles Times* will sell one for $1479, most certainly a bargain. In an area where dealers or supplies are scarce, however, a fellow will have to pay full list, which is what the bike is worth, no more.

You may notice that some of the new prices seem high. You're right. The overindulgences of world economics have unburdened themselves on the consumer's wallet. Motorcycles with no changes for 1974 other than a new paint job cost a lot more compared to last year. A 1973 850 Norton sold for $1795. Virtually the same bike costs $2055 with 1974 in front of its name. That's a $260 increase without any major technical improvements in the machine.

Norton isn't alone in adjusting prices strictly out of economic necessity. Suzuki's GT-185K street twin went up an even hundred bucks, from $695 to $795. The Montesa Cota 125 trials bike at $950 costs $130 more than in 1973. So don't hark back to some of last year's prices and wonder why your favorite bikes aren't on the list. They might have been priced right out of contention.

No bike was chosen for the top ten unless the *Cycle* staff felt it was satisfactory or superior by these criteria: performance, parts availability, serviceability, reliability and resale. There are cheaper bikes available in some of the same classes represented in the ten best buys, but they are lacking enough by one or more of these criteria to be eliminated.

A top ten best of anything without an overall winner is a cop-out. *Cycle* has picked the Suzuki T-500K Titan as the best buy in motorcycling. It wasn't a hard choice. The Titan has been a bargain for five years. For the first time its price has sneaked past the $1000 level even though it's basically the same bike as before. Suggested Retail for 1974 is $1045, but since the Titan is a steady (not runaway) seller, its cost can usually be negotiated.

Justifying the Suzuki's selection is simple: 75-mph cruising, decent handling, adequate braking and a fairly smooth and quiet ride give the Suzuki strong credentials. Its performance was a threat to the early Superbikes, but while its powerplant remained unchanged, the others became bigger, more exotic and therefore faster. But the Titan will still handle two-up touring with saddlebags and a windshield. Top speed is an honest 100 mph. Gas mileage averages 36 mpg.

Parts and service are available at any of 900 Suzuki dealers. Since the bike has existed almost without change for so long, dealers are totally familiar with its parts and service needs. No waiting, and no mysteries.

Dependability and reliability are the Suzuki's hallmarks. It survives neglect, abuse and age much like a good car. You can climb on a Suzuki and brashly head for the tip of Baja without any tools. A Suzuki dealer near the *Cycle* shop showed us a set of Titan cylinders after 47,000 miles with no maintenance. The owner had brought them in for a bore job "just because I assumed they needed it by now." They didn't.

Think about what you're getting for $1045: 100 mph, 36 mpg, enough power to go anywhere at any speed, reliability, durability and pleasant styling. None of the other bikes in its class come close to meeting its price, and some don't even match its features. Its competition is: the $1489 Yamaha TX 500 twin, too new to have proven its reliability yet; the Triumph Daytona at $1475; Suzuki's 550 at $1445; Honda's 450 twin ($1325) and 550 Four ($1600); and Kawasaki's 500 triple, which not only costs $1349, but also wobbles and gets poor gas mileage. The Titan is in a class by itself—the best of the ten best.

Following a complete road test on the winning Suzuki T-500K are profiles of the nine runners-up.

SUZUKI T500K

PHOTOGRAPHY: DAVE HOLEMAN

THE BEST BUY

● Along with certain of the livelier profanities, "cheap" is a word traditionally avoided by the motorcycle press in its product reports—probably because to many people the word suggests shoddiness as well as a low price. But in Mr. Webster's dictionary this adjective's first definition is given as, "purchaseable below the going price or real value" and that description fits Suzuki's familiar 500cc Titan roadster like a well-tailored Hart, Schaffner and Marx Suit.

Make that a denim suit, for the twin-cylinder Suzuki has denim's no-nonsense durability, and it's the only thousand-dollar 500cc road bike to be found. The Titan offers no frilly extras and little in the way of performance. It's as basic as a basic motorcycle should be, with no pretensions toward being a superbike, giant-killer or masculinity improver. Flogged hard and expertly, the Titan thuds through the standing-start quarter-mile with times well into the 14-second bracket, strains to touch an honest 100 mph, and has all the sex appeal of a 1959 Chrysler Imperial.

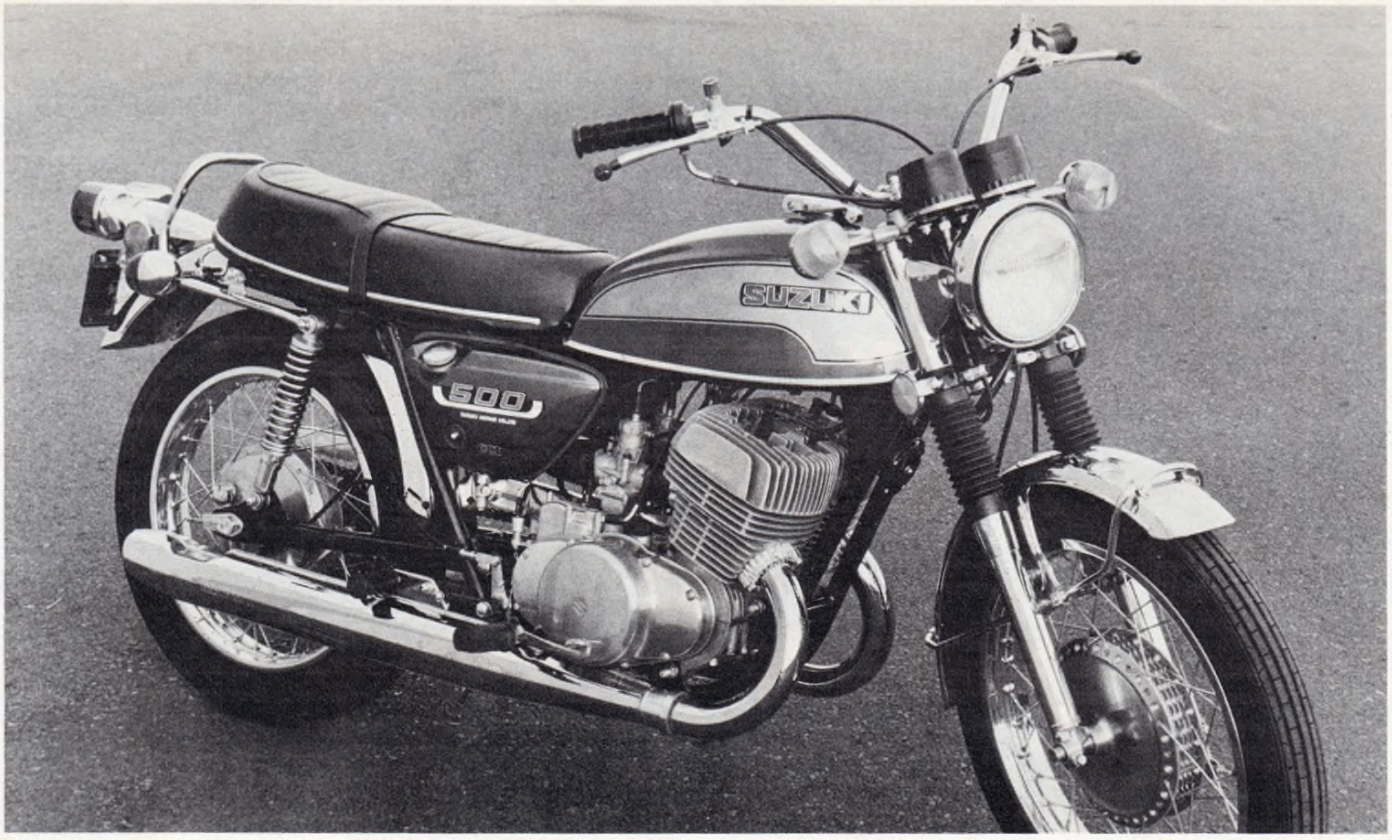
With all that, we still think the Titan has a lot to offer. It's the rock-steady representation of Suzuki's conservative engineering and sales philosophy—a philosophy from which they occasionally depart but never entirely abandon. Suzuki never

Cycle Test

intended that the Titan should set the world on fire; only that it should create a warm spot in its owner's heart, a respect for its basic virtues. The bike still does those things today, more than five years after its debut.

The Titan was the first big-bore roadster from Japan and as such generated a lot of cautious curiosity within the industry when introduced in June, 1968. The astonishingly fast Suzuki X-6 Hustler was fresh in everyone's mind and many assumed that the Titan, sharing the same bloodline, was intended to outclass the world's 500s in the same way an X-6 would dust off all the 250s. But everyone's assumptions proved to be wrong: whatever else it was, the Titan was not a hot performance bike, and almost certainly never was meant to be. Suzuki left that slice of the American market to Kawasaki's 500cc triple, which was under development at the same time, and was introduced here only months later. It ran circles around the Titan then and remains capable of doing so to this day.

Sheer speed isn't the Titan's forte. It's not a sprinter but instead is the typical long-distance runner: not much for muscle but plenty of heart and stamina, with an almost supernatural willingness to keep going without a wheeze or stagger no matter how hard it's pushed. We did



Touring comfort is reasonable for short trips, but gas mileage and vibration inhibit long rides. Oil consumption is less than many four-strokes.

all the right things to break the Titan and never did find its limit—if it has one. Three riders took the Titan 1800 miles into dusty, desolate Baja California for a wear-out contest, and the final score was Titan-3, riders-0. None of the riders involved were enthusiastic about the big, pipe rack-plain Suzuki when the trip was started; all learned to respect its stubborn willingness to keep going.

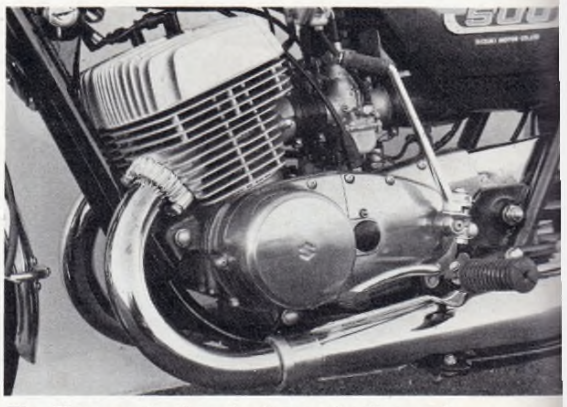
Consistent with its general absence of frills, the Titan's engine has to be kick started. The only button you push is the one that sounds the horn. With the conservative 6.6:1 compression and an inordinately long kick-start lever, little effort is needed to crank the engine, and you don't have to do much cranking. There's never any kick-back or spitting; the engine starts every time on the first or second kick.

You won't have to wonder if the Titan has started: engine noise is tolerable but conspicuous, even at idle. There's not much piston clatter, especially for an engine having 70mm bores, but there's plenty of whine from the helical primary gears and more of the same from all the big, spur gears freewheeling when the transmission is in neutral. You probably would hear the gear howl if Suzuki hadn't done such a good job of silencing exhaust and intake noise—which holds the overall noise level down to a modest, respectable 81 dB(A).

No doubt some of the quiet has been obtained just because the Titan's engine is in such a mild state of tune, making just under 33 bhp on Webco's dynamometer. Actually that output is pretty good when you consider that the engine's port timings are conservatively arranged and the compression ratio is so low that its cranking pressure is under 130 psi (145 psi is more nearly the norm). And no big-bore two-stroke engine running with NGK B77E spark plugs—which are very warm—may be said to be overworked. These hot plugs may be taken as absolute proof that the Titan's engine isn't under any great strain even when running at maximum revs and at wide open throttle.

There's nothing trick about the Titan's engine except for the size and strength of the pieces inside. Intake and exhaust functions are handled by the traditional three-port system: the intake port is piston-controlled, like the exhaust port, and each cylinder has only two transfer ports. Early Titans had 34mm Mikuni carburetors; throat sizes on the latest version are 32mm. Exhaust gases are filtered out through a pair of huge mufflers, which reduce the two-stroke bark to a mumble. Oddly enough, these mufflers incorporate Forestry Service-approved spark arresters and that means you can even use your Suzuki Titan as a trail bike without drawing heat from Smokey the Bear.

The Titan's chassis is tall, heavy and stretched-out. It has a 59-inch wheelbase, and steering with 29 degrees of rake and a mighty 5.2 inches of trail. From those specifications you'd expect the bike's handling to be slow, and it is. But you'd miss, on the high side, if you tried to guess the Titan's weight: the bike weighs 410 pounds, so it is about 30 to 50 pounds



The Titan engine has the heart of a lion and will give its owner incredibly long and inexpensive service without mechanical problems.

under others in the same displacement group, but that's still fairly heavy and the wheelbase/steering layout make the Titan feel heavier. Of course, the heaviness exists only for the rider; not the engine—which is not being asked to move such extraneous hardware as electric starters and oversize batteries.

There are a number of features built into and bolted on the Titan that keep it from handling as well as one might wish. One of these is the handlebar mounting, which is rubber-bushed to stop engine vibrations before they can get to your hands. The bars are wide, backswept and quite comfortable in most respects but the rubber mountings make the steering seem excessively wobbly and imprecise when you're working your way down a twisting mountain road. Adding to this

feeling of vagueness is the utter lack of triangulated bracing in the frame, and a swing arm made of tubing a little too small for the 21-inch reach between the pivot and the rear wheel. So the bike is structurally soggy, the handlebars are only indirectly attached to the forks, and everything tends to flex when you hurry the Titan through corners.

Suzuki hasn't helped the Titan's handling with the choice of tires. The rib-style tire up front seems to be a mismatch with the near-flat profile, block pattern skin on the rear wheel. These tires are matched only to the extent that neither will get a secure grip on anything but clean, coarse asphalt. That probably is just as well, because while the cornering clearance on the Titan's right side is adequate, the side and center stands ground solidly at small lean angles.

The bike's suspension units are passable, if barely. The front forks are simple, single-damping units with external springs covered by pleated rubber sleeves and they give a soft ride without much rebound control. We have reason to believe that the springs need to be up-graded because by the time we had 2200 miles showing on the Titan's odometer its springs had sagged so badly that the forks were halfway up to their bounce stops as soon as one sat on the bike—leaving very little travel to take care of bumps. The rear suspension wasn't much better: no settling of the springs was observed, and the ride was soft enough, but the shocks themselves did virtually nothing beyond holding the springs in place.

Suzuki's engineers got the Titan's handlebars in the right place; they missed badly with the bike's footpegs, which are too far forward. You feel more like you're sitting in a barber's chair than on a motorcycle when riding the Titan, and it all seems very unbalanced when you try to make it go around corners. If anything, straight-line cruising is even worse, and we found ourselves using the passenger pegs to get our legs comfortably situated.

In evaluating the Titan it is important to remember that it's six years old, and something of an institution for Suzuki. Six years ago it was a great, even revolutionary motorcycle, and it quickly demonstrated that it wasn't going to be troublesome for either Suzuki or its owners. As a result, the Titan remains very nearly the same motorcycle today as when it was introduced. There have been some styling updates, so we have seen different tanks, seats and side panels in the long line of bikes from the original T500 to the present T500k. And the bike has been modified slightly to meet noise-limit requirements. But the Titan has had fewer changes in its long life span, clings closer to its original form, than any other motorcycle being sold today. We might wish for a few changes; Suzuki has reason to be satisfied with the bike just as it is: they've sold 25,000 Titans since 1970, long after the bike was new and perhaps fashionable, and sales continue at the level of 500 to 700 units per month.

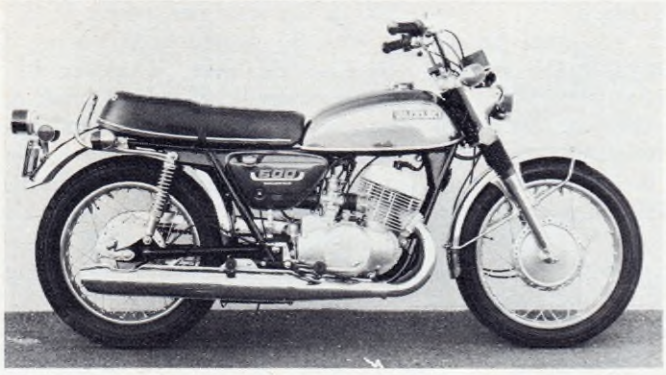
Why do people keep buying Titans? Because the bike, whatever its detail faults, really is cheap and good. A lot of motorcycle for the money, and as impervious to abuse as anything being made today. Powerful it isn't, but that big twin-cylinder engine gives you the feeling it's never going to quit, coming across more like a truck diesel than something for a motorcycle. It has huge flywheels, which insure that everything the engine does will be done deliberately. It revs slowly, and loses revs the same way when the throttles are closed. The power band is wonderfully wide, running from 2000 rpm all the way up to 8000 rpm. You might be able to shorten its life by running it up to 8000 rpm in the gears all the time, but there's enough vibration above 6000 rpm to discourage that habit.

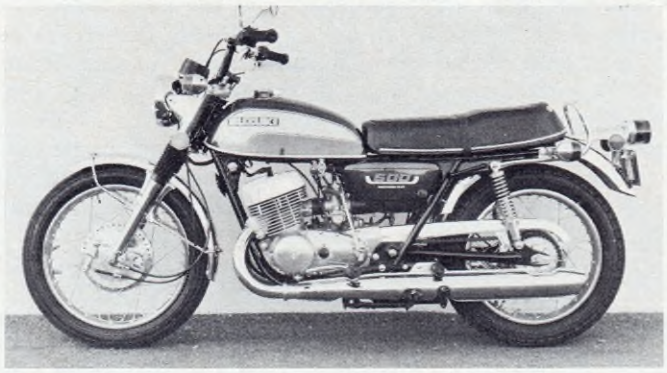
The transmission ratios are not evenly arranged: there's a largish gap between first and second gears, and between second and third. But then the staging changes and you get a close-ratio third, fourth and fifth. With the engine having so much flywheel effect you get a big lurch from 1st-2nd, 2nd-3rd shifts unless the clutch is held disengaged long enough for engine speed and road speed to come into agreement. The shifting action is clean, however, and you can make no-lurch shifts if you can remember which ratio differences are large, which are small, and do all the business with clutch and throttle accordingly. We needed about 500 miles of experience with the bike before we began to get smooth upshifts and downshifts regularly.

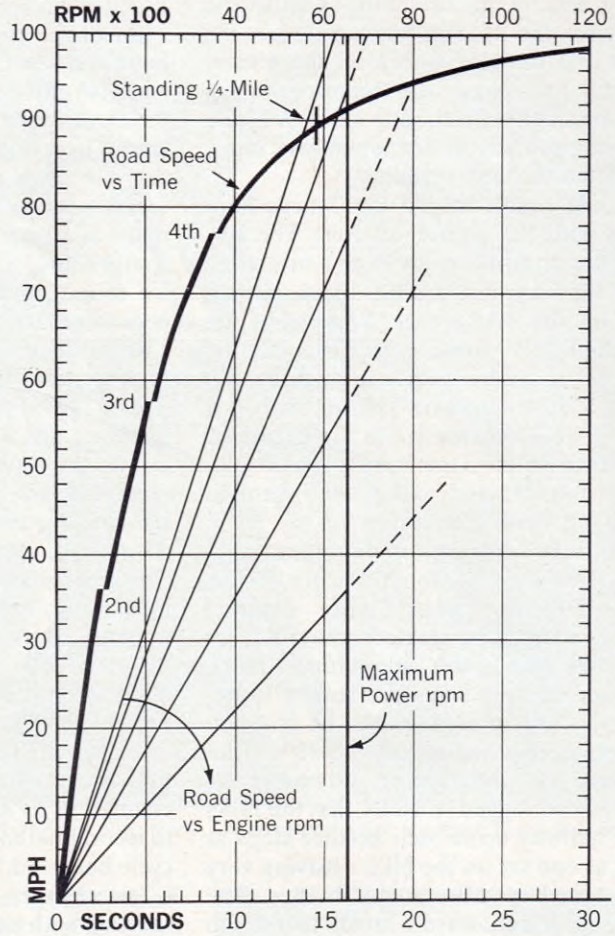
One of the several features that make it obvious Suzuki had reliability in mind with the Titan is the bike's overall gear ratio, which is 4.79:1 in fifth. With that drive ratio the engine is turning only 4150 rpm at 65 mph, and that virtually guarantees longevity. How much damage can an engine suffer when it's running 3850 rpm below its redline? Unfortunately, when the Titan's engine is rumbling along at 4150 rpm it also is 2350 rpm and 13 bhp under its power peak, giving it only 20 bhp to deal with grades and headwinds. With this gearing the bike would do 127 mph at 8000 rpm, and if it would pull anything near those revs it would be a rocket. In fact it has to strain to hit the century mark; the engine is strong, but not strong enough to pull the gearing.

On the open road the 500 Suzuki twin will cruise very comfortably at 65–70 mph (actual, corrected speed). But as soon as the Titan feels a headwind or upgrade you'll have to shift back into fourth—and if you're carrying a friend third-gear will be needed to hold the bike at its cruising speed. Switching from the standard 15-tooth countershaft sprocket to one with 14 teeth would bring the Titan's engine speed up to 4400 rpm and give it 23 bhp

Suzuki's 500cc two-stroke twin will ingest stale low lead gas without missing or pinging.

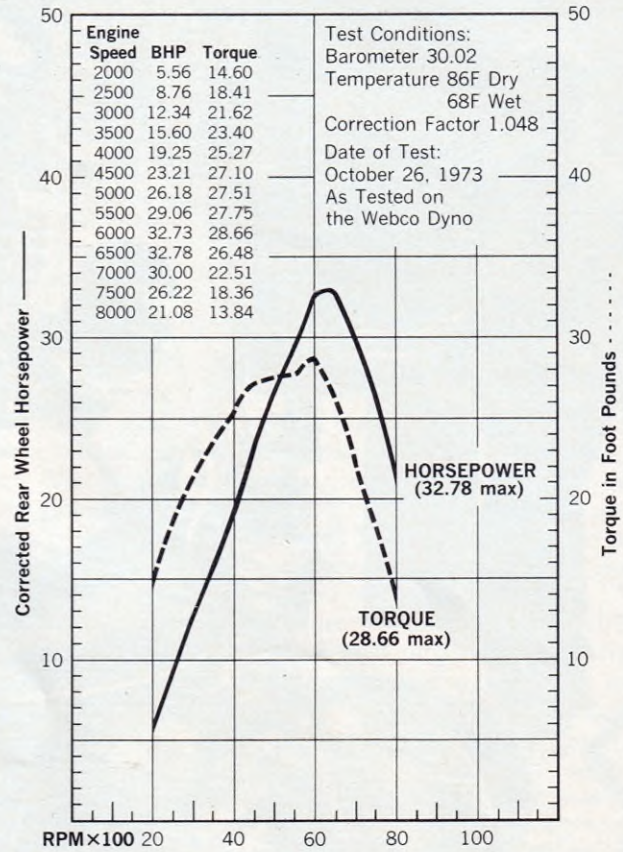






SUZUKI T-500 TITAN

Price, suggested retail	West Coast, POE $1045
Tire, front	3.25 in. × 19 in. Inoue rib
rear	4.00 in. × 18 in. Inoue Universal
Brake, front	8 in. × 1½ in.
rear	7⅛ in. × 1 1/16 in.
Brake swept area	61.5 sq. in.
Specific brake loading	6.6 lb/sq. in.
Engine type	Two-stroke twin, piston port
Bore and stroke	2.75 in × 2.52 in., 70mm × 64mm
Piston displacement	30.01 cu. in., 492cc
Compression ratio	6.6:1
Carburetion	2; 32 mm; Mikuni
Air filtration	Washable foam
Ignition	Battery and coil
Mph/1000rpm, top gear	16
Fuel capacity	3.7 gal.
Oil capacity	1.9 qts.
Lighting	12v, 130 watts
Battery	12 v, 7 ah
Gear ratios, overall	(1) 13.75 (2) 8.58 (3) 6.38 (4) 5.23 (5) 4.79
Wheelbase	59 in.
Seat height	30 in., with rider
Ground clearance	5.25 in., with rider
Curb weight	410 lbs., with full tank of gas
Test weight	610 lbs., with rider
Instruments	Speedometer, tachometer
Sound level, Calif. Std	81d B(A)
Standing start ¼ mile	14.72 seconds 89.28 mph
Top speed	108 mph (indicated)
Braking force in Gs	.835



at 65 mph, which should make it cope more easily with grades, winds and loads. This change in gearing also would improve its acceleration.

On the other hand, there might also be a dramatic increase in vibration. Those big slugs whacking up and down in the Titan's cylinders do raise a commotion and this intensifies sharply with increases in engine speed. At highway speeds the rubber-mounted handlebars tingle your hands, which is not too bad, but you do have a real problem with the footpegs—as these buzz with considerable vigor. You have to keep pulling your feet in to prevent them from jiggling right off the pegs' ends. After a time this becomes a matter of habit, but it never stops being an irritation on long rides.

Because the engine does run relatively slowly, and at low levels of stress, a longer break-in period is needed than is typical for other two-strokes. When the Titan was new it felt tight and unhappy; with 1600 miles on the engine it was beginning to loosen and there was a noticeable improvement in performance. This difference had become so marked at the 2200-mile point that we returned to the drag strip for a second try and got a run at 14.27 seconds and 90.18 mph—which was a half-second and one mile per hour better than its performance 1800 miles earlier. The improvement didn't surprise us, because with the accumulation of miles the Titan just felt stronger, with better acceleration and noticeably less throttle needed to hold cruising speeds. Just as important, the vibration was much reduced in pitch, so long trips began to feel a little less long.

Taking the Titan deep into the Baja peninsula, following the new paved road leading down to La Paz, should have been an epic adventure. Both gasoline and towns in that part of the world are rare and sub-standard in quality (though the people are first-rate). A breakdown can mean hours hunkered down in the wilderness waiting to hitch a ride. And for that kind of trip a superbike is one that will get you there without serious incident. In that sense the Titan proved to be a super bike. We had some trouble with the front tire packing with mud and had to remove the front fender, and the headlight refused to stay aimed despite repeated efforts at adjustment and tightening. Other than that the trip was uneventful. We oiled the chain at 150- to 200-mile intervals and adjusted it twice. That was the extent of the service required. We did find that the seat padding is a little thin after a couple of hours in the saddle, and that the instrument lights and high-beam indicator are too bright. Those things, and the other deficiencies already noted, paled to insignificance compared with what the Titan did for us in those long, hard miles.

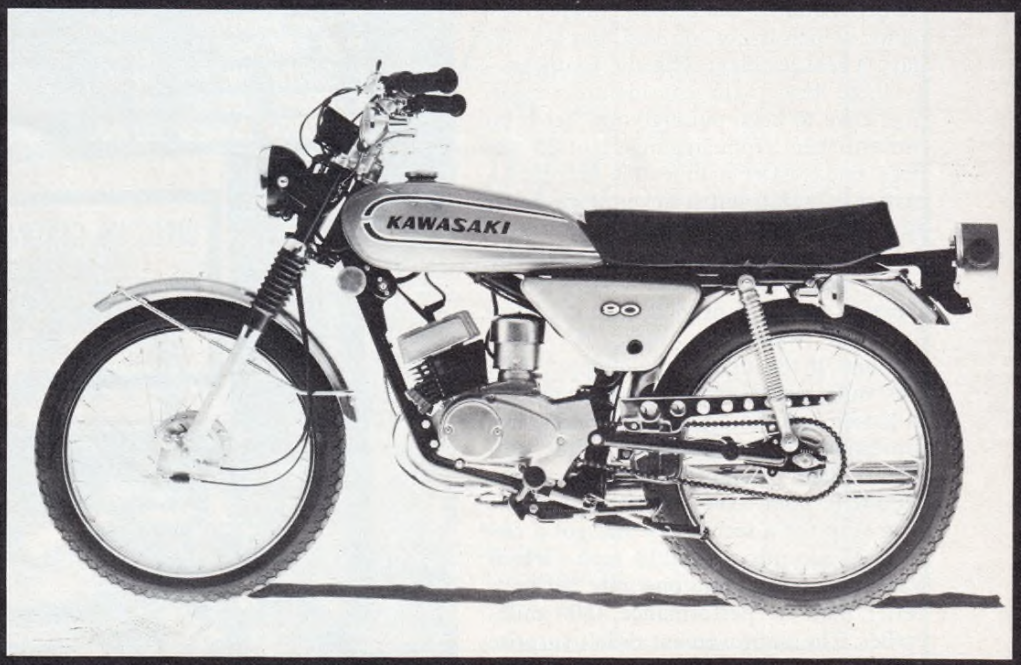
We pushed the Titan in a way that would have broken most bikes, running it wide-open from Tijuana to Ensenada, right through El Rosario, Rancho Santa Ynez and all the other fabled Baja waystations right to Mulege (pronounced, "Moolahay") on the Sea of Cortez. The trip down was hard; the trip back was worse, with headwinds of 30 to 50 mph, blowing sand and a solid 400 miles of two-up, full throttle running using 5th, 4th and 3rd gears on gasoline that is notoriously detonation-prone. It is unlikely that any other two-stroke engined motorcycle would have made it at all, but the Titan went 1700 miles before developing its first and only problem: a bridged spark plug gap. Two other motorcycles making the same trip were stopped dead in their tracks by the noxious Baja gasoline; the Suzuki ran like a champ on the stuff and averaged between 26 and 34 mpg. We got up to 40 mpg while riding less briskly, and oil consumption averaged 375 miles per quart—which is less than you'd use with many four-strokes, taking periodic oil changes into account.

After we came to know, understand and like the T500K Titan, its economical ways with oil seemed no more than consistent with the rest of its character. Beyond its one-flash-too-many surface the big Suzuki is honest, honest, honest. Motorcycles with hearts of fire too often have souls filled with treachery; the Titan has neither of those things. It's slow, for a modern 500, but it will by God get you where you're going, it doesn't demand a lot of attention, dealers have parts for it, it doesn't cost an arm and a leg to buy or operate, it starts easily and stops passably, it affords a comfortable-enough ride, is careful with gas and oil, and can—if you desire—be turned into a real tiger. At a time when most everything costs far more than it's worth the Suzuki T500K (assuming you know exactly what you're buying and why) stands as the best buy in motorcycling—and that sometimes means more than 12-second quarter-mile ETs, or rumbling exhaust notes, or handfuls of cylinders. The Titan is a blue-denim motorcycle: cheap and good. ◉

THE TEN BEST BUYS

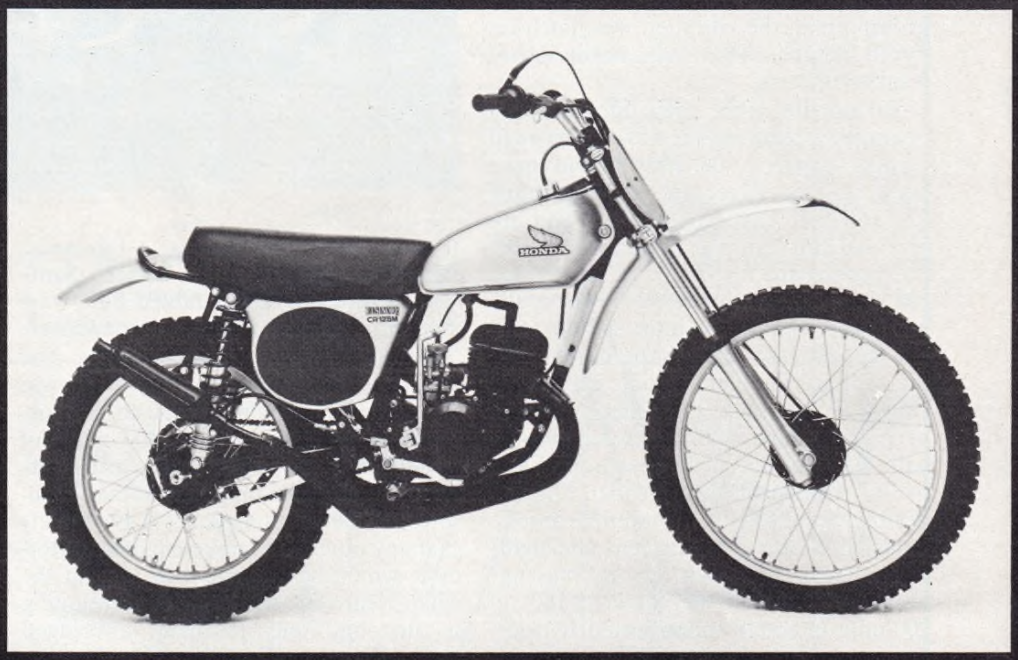
Kawasaki G-3 90 $375 2

This little street bike will carry any commuter who uses surface streets with the flow of traffic for less than a penny a mile. It's mileage is the kind that would have averted the gasoline shortage. Yet its tiny 89cc rotary-valve, autolubed, two-stroke engine will still zip 70 mph on a flat road. A high school student would love the G-3. For '74 there is a new frame, new rod and piston, new seat and a redesigned oil tank. Its main competition is the Yamaha RD 60, a smaller, slower motorcycle which costs $422. Honda's CL-70 sells for less than the Kawasaki, but doesn't come close to matching its performance. The Kawasaki weighs just under 200 pounds with its 2.1-gallon tank full of regular. A standard magneto ignition and Mikuni carburetor help keep tuning simple. Kawasaki says the five-speed G-3 is street legal in all states.



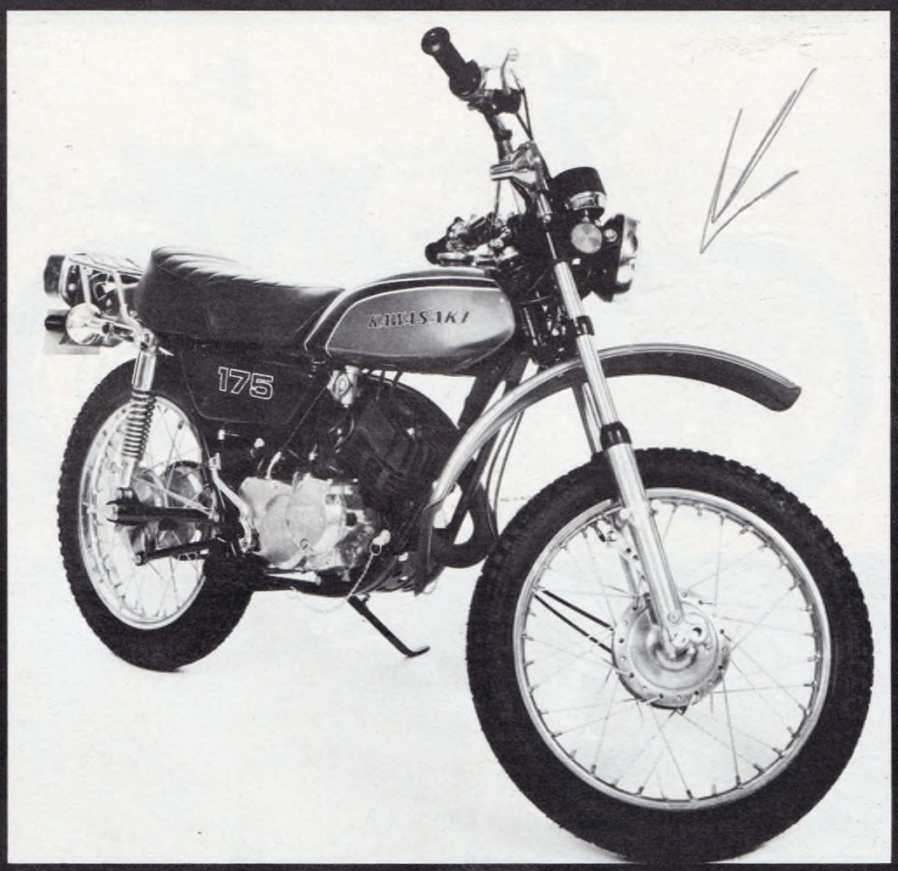
Honda CR-125M Motocross $730 3

If you go racing you want to win, or at least know your machine has the capability of winning. Almost without exception in years past such machines were expensive European imports. But now a good rider on a Honda 125 Elsinore can win against a whole field of $1100 Huskies, $1035 Pentons, $1000 Bultacos, $1025 CZs and even the $1365 Monark. Some people even say the Honda is the best 125 motocrosser available. Certainly it's one of the top three. At 190 pounds wet and with 16.93 dyno-tested horsepower, the CR-125's power-to-weight ratio is superb. So is handling—good enough in fact to swallow many 250s simply because its rider can go into a turn deeper and get on the gas sooner coming out. Super peaky power is perhaps the bike's only drawback, since a stronger low end would make it easier to ride. Premix fuel passes through a standard piston-port two-stroke engine with six-speeds, CD ignition and muffled expansion chamber.



4 Suzuki TM-125K Challenger $720

Everything said about the Honda Elsinore also applies to Suzuki's 125 motocrosser, and since their prices are so close, both must be included in the ten best buys. The Suzuki's minute horsepower advantage (17.41) and slightly wider powerband more than offset its 9-pound weight penalty (199 pounds). Many riders prefer the Suzuki after riding both. It was a brand new machine in 1973, inheriting nothing from the 125 Enduro but the basic crankcase halves. Suzuki's experience gained in winning the 250 World Motocross Championship four times and the 500 title three times has surfaced in the little 125. Forks have the same design as bigger Suzuki racers (Ceriani type) while shocks are dual-spring units with five preload settings. The engine is a 56 x 50mm, four-port, autolubed, two-stroke single with CD ignition and five speeds in the gearbox. For $1000 a young racer can have the bike, a helmet, leathers, boots, a spot on the starting line, and a solid chance to win.



5 Kawasaki F-7 175 Enduro $699

Some of the other Japanese 175 Enduros are close in price, but none have the power to insult 250s the way the Kawasaki does. Its dyno-tested 15.11 hp will pull the bike up nearly any hill and give an honest 75 mph on top end. In fact Kawasaki has certified the F-7 for freeway usage this year. Other changes for '74 include a new piston, connecting rod and carburetor plus quieter gears and a redesigned automatic oiling system for less smoking. Infinitely adjustable Hatta forks support a 19-inch front wheel with a steel rim and trials universal tire. Few bikes have as many features, from a helmet holder to one-key locking system. Weight is hefty at about 260 pounds with the 2.5-gallon tank brimming. Power comes from a rotary-valve, two-stroke single with CD ignition, oil injection and five gearbox speeds. Its competition includes the Penton at $1175, the Ossa SDR at $1025, the Suzuki 185 at $795 and the Yamaha 175 at $735.

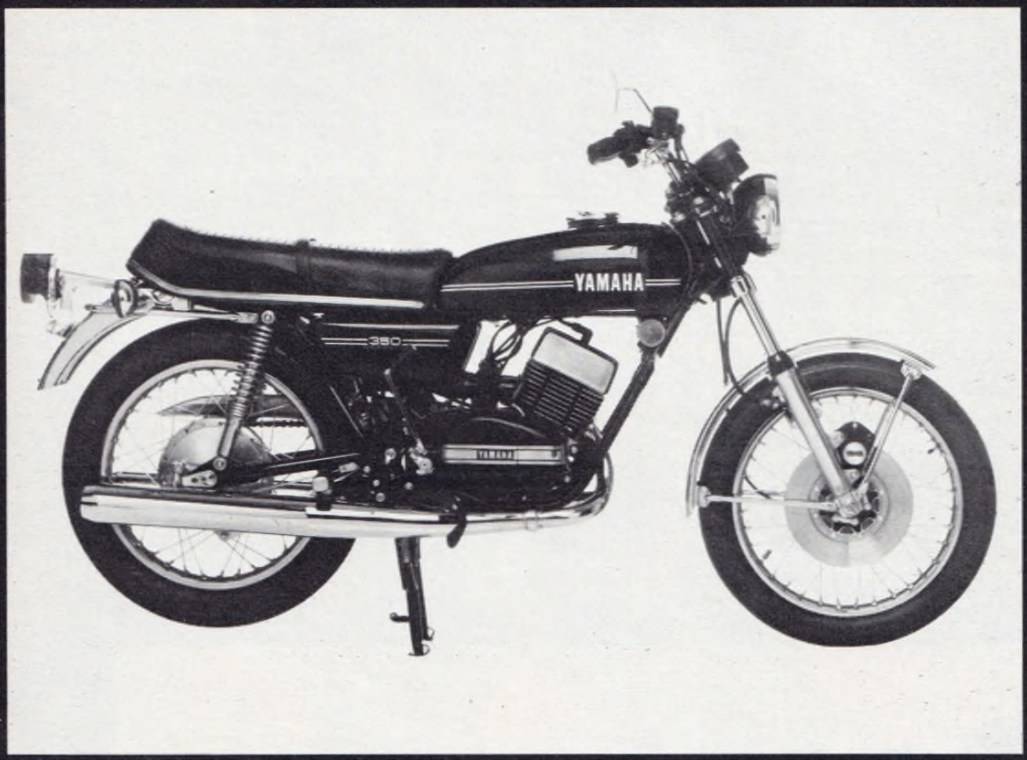
THE TEN BEST BUYS

Can-Am 175 Enduro $945 6

If the Kawasaki 175 insults 250s, the Can-Am digs a trench, shoves them into it and buries them. A Can-Am dyno curve superimposed on an average 250 curve looks like the Himalayas sitting on a sand dune. The 175 class has two divisions; the Japanese side with all the features and the cushy ride, and the performance side dominated by Penton, Puch, Bultaco and Ossa—each of which nudges the $1100 bracket. The Can-Am matches or exceeds the performance of these for at least $100 less. Bombardier of Canada (Ski-Doo snowmobiles) builds this good-handling, lightweight, rotary-valve, two-stroke single which produced an actual 22.4 hp on the Webco dyno and turned a 16.2-second, 77.25-mph quarter mile. Any maker would proudly advertise these figures for a 360. The Can-Am rotary-valve design features a long inlet tract which enables the carburetor to mount in back of the cylinder so narrow engine width may be maintained.

Honda XL-250 $875 7

This bike is a double alternative to the 12 other 250 enduros available—first because it is the only four-stroke, and second because it is the only one priced under $900 (except for Honda's MT-250 at $870). Its four-valve, overhead cam motor has the reliability of a diesel and pulls lower down on the rev range than any of the two-strokes. It also smokes less, is quieter and gets better mileage (39 mpg) than any of them. It will cruise along at 60 mph on pavement unhampered by pinging, surging, or the threat of imminent seizure. Street suitability is clearly superior to the two-strokes. In the dirt the XL is hampered only by a 299-pound wet weight, but not enough to discourage four out of the top ten enduro riders in Southern California from competing on it. Its price shines in comparison with the $962 Yamaha, $995 Suzuki, $939 Kawasaki, $1238 Montesa and $1300 Husky. Only the Honda MT-250 two-stroke threatens it. And if there was an 11th best buy, the MT would be it.



8 Yamaha RD 350 $908

With alternatives being the more expensive Suzuki GT-380 at $1165, the Honda CB-360G at an even $1000 and the slow and shakey Harley SS-350 for about the same price, the RD 350 is in a class by itself. It will comfortably wax all bikes with equal displacement and will out-brake any machine in motorcycling. Keep the six-speed box in harmony with the power band and the Yamaha will climb mountains as fast as you can ride, or it will quietly tour across a continent. Reed valves, seven ports, dual carbs and a battery/coil ignition are the backbone of this 350cc two-stroke twin with Autolube. Plenty of ground clearance, good suspension and a sensational disc brake aid fine handling. Fuel consumption of about 35 mpg gives a cruising range of just over 100 miles with the 3.2-gallon tank. A water-cooled racing version incorporating many of the RD's parts handily zapped 750 triples several times last year in AMA National road racing. These racers were reliable—just like the RD.

9 Kawasaki 400 S-3 $935

Here is another case where just a few dollars separate two excellent bikes in the same displacement class, so both are included in the top ten. Naturally the 400 is slightly quicker and faster than the smaller Yamaha, and naturally it weighs slightly more—370 pounds to the Yamaha's 351 pounds. Mileage is a lot less, about 24 mpg, so cruising range is only 88 miles from the 3.7-gallon tank. Few bikes match the smoothness of the Kawasaki up to 70 mph; beyond that it gets the buzzies. Lithe handling unhampered by lack of power, dragging centerstands or bad tires makes the S-3 fun to ride fast on twisty roads. A disc up front delivers superbike braking. The engine squeezes out over 30 hp and 100 mph from three cylinders, 400ccs, three carburetors, battery/coil ignition, five gears and automatic oil injection. One-kick starting is the rule. Under $1000 *out the door* will buy a reliable bike easily capable of commuting in the fast freeway lane, yet still not reluctant to poke around in town.

THE TEN BEST BUYS

10 Kawasaki 903 Z-1 $1995

Nineteen-ninety-five is a pile of dough, but it buys a superbike, a super-tourer, a mountain racer and a boulevard bullet. Versatility is why the Z-1 is a bargain—it will match or exceed any number of specialty bikes at their own specialty. Take speed: it's the fastest there is at 130 mph and second only to its H-2 cousin in acceleration. As a tourer it's smooth, quiet, durable and thrifty—42 mpg on regular. Other bikes capable of similar versatility (but always on a less scorching scale) are the Triumph Trident, $2140, the Norton 850, $2055, the electric starting Sportster, $2495, and BMW's new 900S Sport at an astounding $3400. The 903's closest threat comes from the near-perfect Honda 750 Four which undersells it at $1822. The Honda would be perfect if it had the 903's power, but it doesn't even come close. Kawasaki employs technical exotica to achieve its prowess: four cylinders, double overhead cams, gear-drive primary, four Mikuni carburetors, electric starting, pressure fed chain luber and a disc brake. Be thankful you're a motorcyclist. You can have a 903—just about the best bike there is—for less money than the cheapest (and tiniest and most gutless and least fun) car. ◉