

# FROM SWAMP TO SHINING SEA

Different strokes for different coasts

By The Dirt Bike Staff



This may well be one of the most objective motorcycle tests written in a long time. For once, rather than use our powers of speculation and vague remembrances to relate a bike to the rest of the country (that's everywhere east of the California border), we decided to take the Can-Am to the East Coast for a little enduro riding. The story behind that abortive attempt at fame and fortune appeared last month, as the Sandy Lane story, and we couldn't have asked for a better testing ground: rain, mud, traction and tight woods, four things we don't often see together out thisaway.

Then, we'd bring the bike back, and run it over our usual testing grounds—stone stock, mind you—shoot the usual photos, and then sit back and compare notes. The result of all this flying back and forth, pain and pleasure, is now rapidly unfolding in front of you; and yes, we did learn quite a lot from the experience. Surprisingly, there isn't a whole lot we'd change, from one coast to the other, but we did uncover a problem or two, and one glaring fault...

## Mechanicals

First off, we'd like to mention that, in case you haven't been keeping up with your dealer, the Can-Am 350 is a brand-new bike in a fine old line.

Resting in a chassis which is basically the same as last year's Qualifier, is the 350's 280cc powerplant. It looks identical to the 250, but don't be fooled. The 280 has an increased bore *and* stroke, and the transmission, a five-speed, is unique to the new displacement. In other words, this particular transmission was designed for the bike—it's not from the 370 or 250.

Using the stock gearing, the 350 will pull hard from a crawling speed in second gear—good enduro gearing—but fifth cog tops out right between 65 and 70 mph, which is fine if you don't spend too much time running late. We, however, found ourselves running in the upper 50s on the New Jersey fire-roads, pawing for a non-existent sixth gear. The only alternative to this predicament is to drop a few teeth from the rear sprocket and do without the luxury of avoiding first gear. A six-speed would be nice, but forget it; the

250 box won't handle the 280's torque.

The power delivery is another matter. It's not what you'd expect from a mere 30cc increase over the 250. Our test bike would snap out of a turn like a motocrosser, and wheelie off in any gear but fifth. On first impression, the bike feels like a 250 Qualifier with a very light flywheel, but after a few hill-climbs and a tight trail or two, one realizes that there is far too much torque for a 250 anything, and we had a few of our testers taking a second look to make sure they weren't on a 370. Truly an impressive motor.

Without exception, everyone who rode the bike came back with the same question on their lips: "This is only a 280?" That, dear friends, is the beauty of the beast. The 350 Q has the least amount of displacement to get the job done in the open class—without the arm-killing power and weight of a full-blown 400 something-or-other. We feel that this motor will surprise a good number of big-bore devotees, and tickle most 250 riders pink.

## Suspension

The 350's chassis is almost identical to last year's Qualifiers, with the exception of the air-assisted forks. This is accomplished in the leading axle Marzocchis by the addition of a Schraeder valve and cross-over tube, which is going to be a sore spot with some riders, because of the age-old belief that a cross-over tube allows oil to transfer from one fork leg to the other, thereby causing an imbalance. Rather than get mixed up in the debate, we'll just tell you that we had no problem with the forks on our bike, and normal maintenance should keep any problems from occurring.

The spiffy orange fork boots (*everything* is orange) do an excellent job of keeping crud away from the seals, and we had no trouble with leakage throughout the test. One slight problem if you're using the optional speedometer: The Schraeder valve on

the left fork cap will interfere with the reset knob. Either move the valve to the other side, or extend the knob with a piece of fuel line.

Holding up the rear are Girling gas shocks, delivering a little better than 9½ inches of travel. One of the first people to see the new bike commented, "Yeah, they still got those lousy Girling shocks, gonna have to replace them . . .," which is actually a bunch of crap, to use the vernacular of the gutter. The shocks work fine for enduro riding; we only experienced fade after very long stretches of rough ground, and even then the change in damping was mild. After the first season they *will* be pretty much thrashed, and it would be a good idea to replace them with some stronger units, but it isn't difficult to live with them when they're fresh, contrary to popular belief. They are also one of the least expensive replacement shocks on the market, by the way.

#### Details

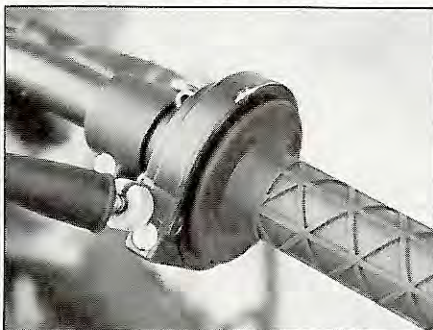
The 350 has a new rear wheel with a conical hub, with the brake and drive both happening on the right side, doing away with the brake linkage crossover of years past. The brake is now a cable-operated full-floating unit, that does an excellent job of helping to haul the bike down to a stop without any hopping or clattering. When subjected to mud and water, both brakes will fade miserably, but dragging them for a mile or so will dry them right out. After a few such treatments, we wound up having to advance the rear brake lever a notch to gain more adjustment—still with plenty of meat on the lining.

The stock tires are Dunlops, and sometimes they work, sometimes they don't. In the wet sand/ultimate traction of the East Coast they worked

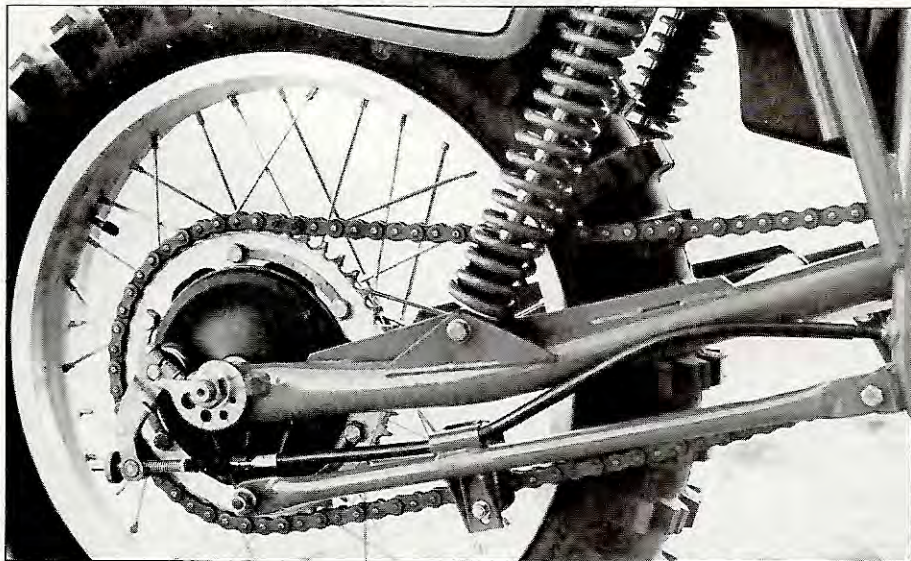
fine, and we were just as happy with them at Texas Canyon after a day-long rain. However, we found ourselves wishing for Metzeler's on a bone-dry ride in the high mountains, but this is nothing unusual. After riding in California for a while, you start wishing every bike came stock with Metzeler's.

Now comes a nasty part we have to deal with, and, in our opinion, a very serious fault. In our first full ride on the East Coast, we were surprised to only get 40 miles out of a full tank of gas. The jetting was perfect, nothing was leaking, the riding was moderately aggressive. We had the same luck on the West Coast—40 miles to a tank. That isn't nearly enough, no matter how you cut it.

We had the same problem with the 370 we tested last year—the gas tank is too small. It holds a little more than 2½ gallons, and it should have at least a 3½-gallon capacity. It's no fun running out of gas in an enduro, nor is it fun planning your trail riding around the odometer reading—"I can only go 20 miles out, and then I better turn around and hightail it back." One of the dealers we talked to on the East Coast said that many times this one



**New-design throttle features 1/4- or 1/8-turn operation, easy to change using only a screwdriver.**



**The brake hub is on the same side as the drive this year, allowing the use of a cable and simplifying the rear end.**

problem alone has helped customers of his decide on a different bike. Who wants to shell out a couple of thousand bucks for a bike and then have to buy a bigger gas tank? A sad fate for such a fine bike.

#### Riding Impression

As we said earlier, our experiences in the eastern half of the country were limited to two days in New Jersey, during an almost steady rain. In the loamy hardwood forests of the central part of the state, the traction was perfect when there wasn't a knee-deep mudhole under the wheels, and the 350 was in its glory. Every puddle was an easy prey for the Can-Am's rear wheel, as wheelies were as simple as just turning up the throttle. As could be expected, it was nearly impossible to get the front end to wash out, unless you happened to be aquaplaning at the time.

Since the highest hill in the southern half of the state tops out at a lofty 200 feet above sea level, there's nothing to lose horsepower in—save the endless white sand of the pines—and the 350 never strained a bit. All in all, New Jersey is an excellent place to ride, but there's nothing there to really test a bike on—no hills, rocks, or tractionless wasteland.

Pack it up and head west, because there's no rottener terrain on the face of the earth, and rotten riding conditions are what's going to tell just what a bike will or won't do!

Back home, we enjoyed one more day of traction, after a surprise rainstorm, and found out that the 350 is a hillclimbing fool. We had the pleasure of snorting the Can-Am up a few truly fearsome hills, and actually had to sit on the gas cap to attempt to keep the front wheel on the ground, while the bike grunted right along in first. If the



**Forks are the 9½-inch Marzocchis, and are air adjustable. A cross-over tube keeps the pressure balanced.**

traction was there, we wouldn't be surprised if this bike would climb right up the side of a building.

Things soon returned to normal, and we were back in the clutches of our usual hot, dusty, rocky, rotten riding conditions, and then the Can-Am turned into a different bike. Strike that last statement, it's not altogether true. Actually, the cause of all our problems can be directly traced to the tires—not to say that they're bad, as we previously pointed out, merely that they don't work well under tractionless conditions. In the dry stuff, they tend to cause a bit of front-end washout, and they aren't the best traction-grabbers going up a hill.

#### Bits and pieces

The 350 Q comes stock with beautiful FIM-style side panel/number plates. May we make a suggestion? Before you even ride the bike, take them

The throttle is a new design from Bombardier, and it can be adjusted for approximately 1/8- or 1/4-turn. Nice unit.

Because the front brake is on the right side of the wheel—the same side as the handlebar lever—the cable has to take a pretty severe bend at the top of the bars. Best to reroute the cable as smoothly as possible so it doesn't "belly out" the side of the bike and possibly catch a branch, rock or something. The factory really should swap the brake over to the other side.

There is actually, finally, a sidestand on the Can-Am! Although they don't come with a centerstand anymore, the stand from last year's Qualifier will bolt right on.

We never had a problem starting the 350; as a matter of fact, it started so easily that we never really needed to give it more than a half-hearted kick.



*Once the forks loosened up, we used four to six pounds of pressure in the front end. The valve should be moved to the other side if the optional speedo is used—it interferes with the reset knob.*

off and put them neatly away until you sell the bike. They serve no useful purpose aside from good styling, and it's a heck of a lot easier to get at the seat bolts, top shock mounts and electrics if you don't have to remove them first.

We took the rear brake cable out of its top guide on the swingarm and opted to tie-wrap it instead. The top guide seems a little too tight, and we were afraid the cable might bind.

The air filter is a K&N with a foam sock, and it screws right on the top of the air box. We ran through oceans of water in NJ and never sucked a drop. Excellent waterproofing.

We cut the handlebars down to 29 inches, and while a number of our testers were shocked at the narrow bars, the bend seemed to agree with everyone. Magura Powerlevers handled the controls in their usual strong-as-iron fashion.

Hard to tell when it's running, too. The 350 is just as quiet as the rest of the Qualifier line.

And before you write in and ask, we'll tell you. Don Vesco makes a 3½- and a four-gallon tank for the Can-Am, and you can find out more by writing: Don Vesco Products, 7565 North Ave., Lemon Grove, California 92077. We've just installed a 3½-gallon Vesco Fat/Skinny tank on our test bike, and we'll let you know how it works in a later issue.

#### In summation

What's the verdict? That's easy, we loved the bike. It seems to do everything well, with the exception of the two problems we had. One was the tires, but as we said, that all depends on personal preferences and where you live. The gas tank problem is inexcusable, and you either have to replace it, or put up with shorter trail rides,

and more pit stops in an enduro or cross-country race.

But, we've spent a lot of time riding the bike, and the choice, for us, would be easy. Buy the bike, and grit your teeth while you shell out the bucks for a bigger tank. Who knows, maybe when Can-Am comes out with a Qualifier with a 3½-gallon tank, they might just be selling the best enduro bike on the market. □

### CAN-AM 350 QUALIFIER Specifications

NAME AND MODEL	Can-Am 350 Qualifier
ENGINE TYPE	Rotary valve, two-stroke single
BORE AND STROKE	76mm x 61mm
DISPLACEMENT	276.7cc
HORSEPOWER (CLAIMED BY FACTORY)	35 bhp at 7750 rpm
CARBURETION	N/A
FACTORY RECOMMENDED JETTING:	
MAIN JET	155
NEEDLE JET	2.76
JET NEEDLE	4
PILOT JET	40
SLIDE NUMBER	1
RECOMMENDED GASOLINE	Premium
RECOMMENDED OIL (MFR.)	Can-Am
FUEL TANK CAPACITY	10 liters (2.64 gallons)
FUEL TANK MATERIAL	Plastic
GAS/OIL RATIO	32:1
LUBRICATION	Pre-mix
AIR FILTRATION	K&N w/foam sock
CLUTCH TYPE	Wet, multi-disc
TRANSMISSION	Five-speed, constant mesh
GEARBOX RATIOS:	
1	2.91
2	1.86
3	1.4
4	1.11
5	.913
GEARING, FRONT/REAR	15/46
IGNITION	Bosch CDI
PRIMARY KICK SYSTEM?	Yes
RECOMMENDED SPARK PLUG	Bosch W3C
SILENCER/SPARK ARRESTOR/ QUALITY	Yes/yes/very quiet
EXHAUST SYSTEM	High-pipe, left side
FRAME, TYPE	Double-downtube, chrome moly
WHEELBASE	1451mm (57.13 inches)
GROUND CLEARANCE	286mm (11.25 inches)
SEAT HEIGHT AT TANK	952mm (37.5 inches)
STEERING HEAD ANGLE	30 degrees
WEIGHT WITH ONE GALLON GAS	238 pounds (228 dry)
RIM MATERIAL	Sun alloy
TIRE SIZES:	
FRONT	3.00x21 Dunlop
REAR	5.00x18 Dunlop
SUSPENSION:	
FRONT, TYPE AND TRAVEL	Marzocchi leading axle, 250mm (9.8 inches)
REAR, TYPE AND TRAVEL	Girling gas, 244mm (9.6 inches)
INTENDED USE, MFR.	Enduro, qualifiers
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	Canada
PRICE, APPROX.	\$2099
PARTS PRICES, HIGH-WEAR ITEMS:	
PISTON ASSEMBLY, COMPLETE	\$49.50
RINGS ONLY	\$15.28
CYLINDER	\$268.00
SHIFT LEVER	\$14.10
BRAKE PEDAL	\$7.71
FRONT SPROCKET	\$15.33
DISTRIBUTOR:	
Bombardier Corp.	
4505 W. Superior St.	
Duluth, Minnesota 55806	
OVERALL RATING, FROM 0 TO 100, VARIOUS CATEGORIES, KEEPING IN TENDEd USE OF MACHINE IN MIND:	
HANDLING	95
SUSPENSION	91.5
POWER	98
COST	90
ATTENTION TO DETAIL	88
EFFECTIVENESS, STONE STOCK	95



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