

DIRT CYCLE TEST

BENELLI 175 ENDURO

THE ENDURO
NOT MEANT
FOR ENDUROS

■ If a term was ever used loosely it was when Benelli christened their 175 cc dirt machine an Enduro. We had our doubts about the title when we first laid eyes on the bike; at the conclusion of our test our doubts had proven true. This was an Enduro made for light hearted riding only.

Benelli, of course, is made in Italy, and the brand's history can be traced back into the 1920s. The company has never been known for its dirt machines; in fact exotic road racers built the company's reputation. It is well known that the factory presently is working on a V-8 racing motorcycle. We only wish that the designers would have spent more time working on the 175.

Our only experience with Benelli previous to the 175 test had been with their excellent 650 street model. The Tornado, as they call it, proved to be a pretty nice motorcycle, so we were somewhat anxious to give the 175 a try.

Like we said before, we had our doubts about the 175's potential the minute we laid eyes on it. With a short 50 inch wheelbase and a very high

center of gravity, handling looked like it would be aggravating. The bike looked as though it might self destruct in hard riding, and as it turned out, it nearly did.

The Enduro model sells for \$699, and competes directly with Suzuki's 185 Sierra, Yamaha's CT-2 175, and Kawasaki's 175 F7, just to name the more popular ones. These Japanese models all have their faults, to be sure, but all of their faults put together still wouldn't equal the Benelli Enduro's.

The frame is a double cradle design that is finished in black and is welded together very nicely. Although the tubing looks small in diameter, the main frame section should be strong and rigid due to its compactness. Very little flex should occur here.

The swinging arm though, is a different story. Under rugged conditions we don't see how it could hold up for very long, it simply is too flimsy. Of course in normal service, you shouldn't have any problems.

The same goes for the suspension. If you go easy, it's adequate. If you like to head down a trail in rapid fashion and



From Benelli's past history and success with their road racing machinery, one would expect an Enduro machine from them to be quite good and innovative. Unfortunately the opposite is true. The Benelli is a big disappointment.

make use of the engine's potential, the suspension can't cope with it. Front forks are made by Marzocchi and have approximately five inches of travel. They are on the soft side, so they bottom often. In fact, the bottom side of the front fender on our test machine was well scrubbed by the tire. We kept thinking about how it would be possible for the cleats on the tire to catch the edge of the fender and possibly fold it under and lock the wheel. It could happen. You know what that would mean—a trip over the bars.

Rear suspension is from Marzocchi also, and suffers from the same maladies as the front. The three inch travel gets used up almost immediately on bigger bumps, and the fender goes thud against the tire and your backbone compresses shortly thereafter. The seat doesn't help much

here either. Although its shaped nicely and is comfortable, the padding is too thin for the hard jolts the bike is capable of transmitting to the body.

Nineteen inch steel rims are used front and rear, and their design will prevent mud and debris from clinging to them. Both the spokes and aluminum hubs seem strong enough for their intended use, but the tire cross section size is too small. The engine could handle more tire easily.

Styling of the Enduro is anything but handsome, but nevertheless it was put together with some care and attention. Probably one of the items that gives the bike an odd appearance is the fenders. Both are chromed and have rolled edges, but they're nearly flat in shape and don't do much as far as keeping the dirt off the rider or the

machine. The rear one serves as a mount for the taillight, but the front serves no real purpose. In addition to the black frame, red paint is applied to the upper fork covers, the fuel tank, and on the side panel/number plates. It's a nice combination.

Fuel capacity is 2.5 gallons of pre-mixed gasoline and oil with the tank containing a small recess with a cover for carrying tools. Not too many items could be fit into the small space, but every little bit helps. Four loops are welded to the top of the tank to run straps through. In this manner you could carry even more tools or a wounded elk or something. The fuel petcock is hidden up under the tank in a hard to find location. Side panels on the tank are chrome, and Benelli emblems add a nice touch. Trouble is,

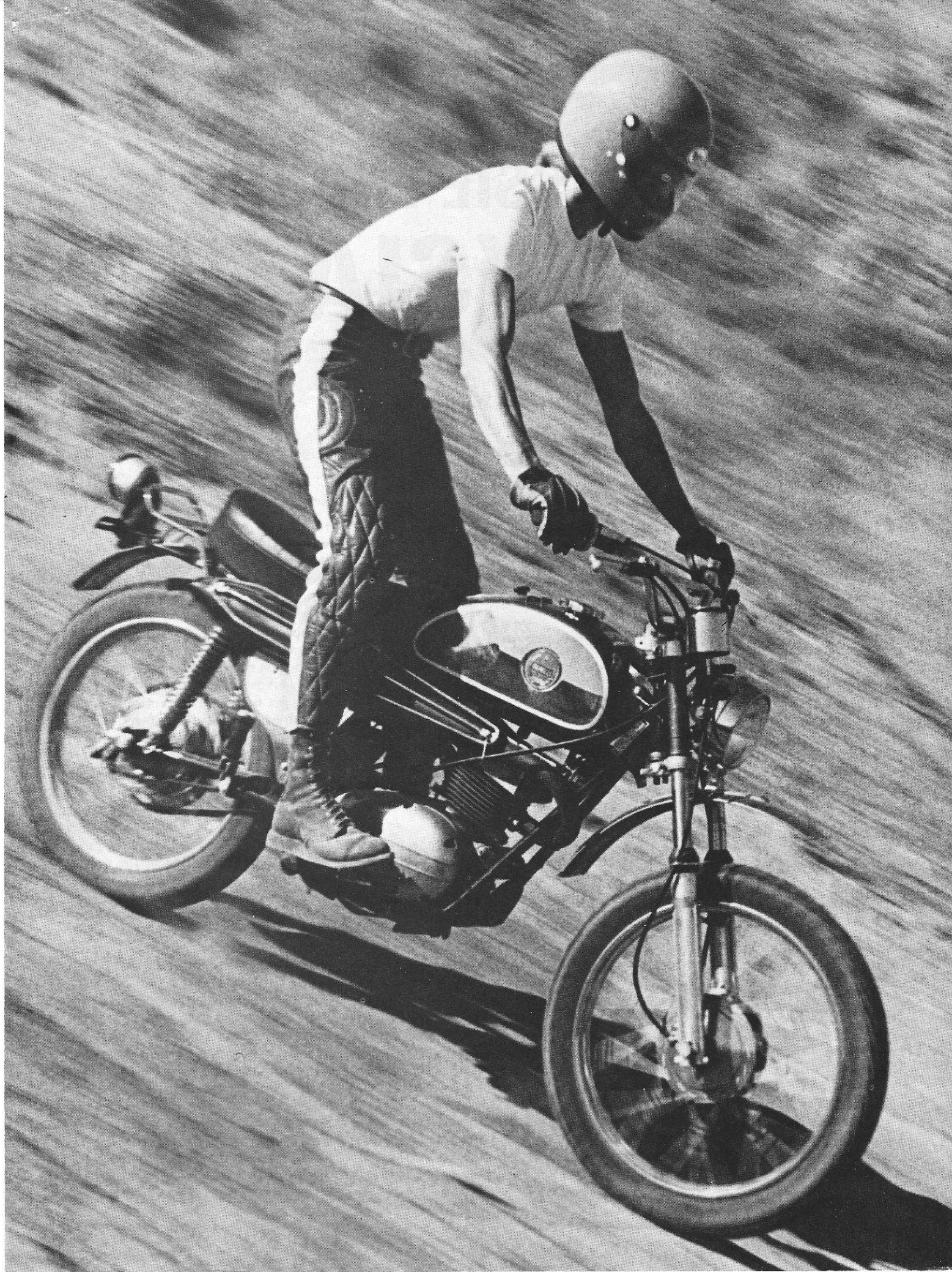


Handling qualities of the Enduro are precisely what you'd expect of a short wheelbase motorcycle.

The bike is not happy sliding or riding right at the limit.

A more relaxed pace is a better proposition with this Italian mount.





they're the stick on variety and they don't stay on too well.

The Benelli's engine is the best part of the entire machine. Rated at 16.4 hp at 6200 rpm, the 169cc powerplant has a nice power band that is easy to control in every situation. The crankshaft rides in ball bearings at each end and looks strong enough to handle the loads placed upon it. The connecting rod big end rides in roller bearings while the small end carries a simple bushing. The 60mm aluminum piston contains the usual two piston rings, and most of the other internals are pretty straight-forward. You won't find anything exotic with this Benelli.

Carburetion is provided by a 22mm Dellorto center float model that contains a square slide. This type of carb can function properly even if the motorcycle is tipped over to quite an

angle. The air filter is not the most efficient but it works okay and is very simple. The element is a wire mesh type that is kept wet (and filtering) by the carburetor's blow back of fuel. The owner who desired a better filter could fit a Filtron element with no trouble. If the machine were to be used often in very dusty conditions, this would be a wise move.

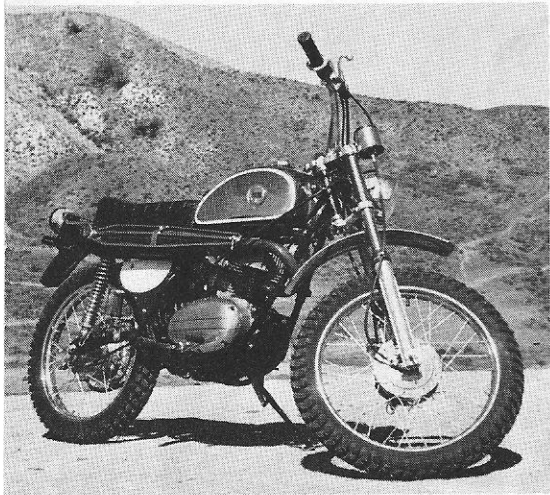
Electrics on the Enduro are good, the heart of the system being a six volt battery that locates under the seat. Attached to the engine is a flywheel magneto that feeds the secondary coil with its primary coil, and a generator keeps the battery charged. The lights really do an admirable job at night, much to our surprise.

Curling upward and to the right from the cast iron cylinder is the high mounted exhaust pipe. The unit is on

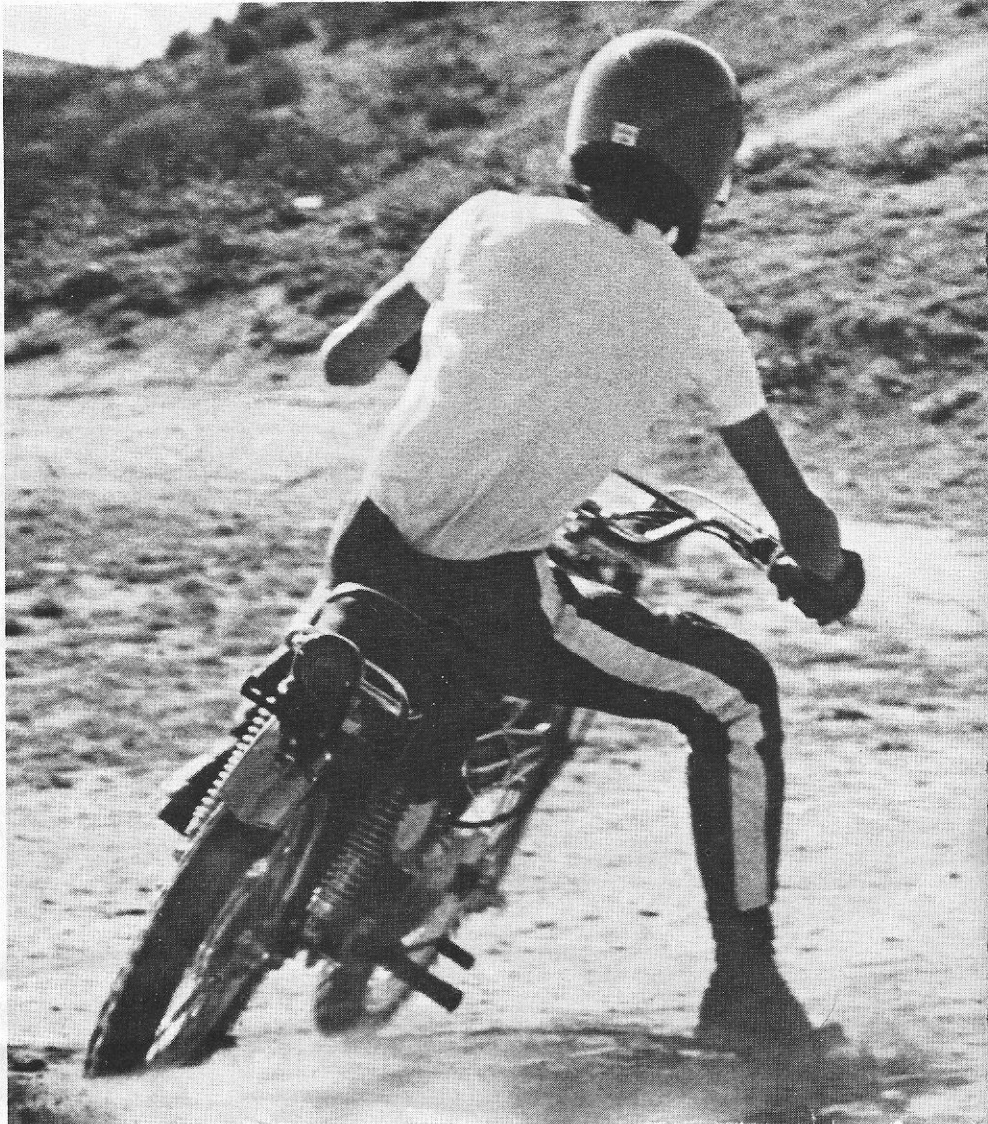
the quiet side but could use a better heat guard to protect the rider's leg from heat. Unfortunately the muffler does not contain an approved spark arrestor, so the bike will be illegal to ride in many areas as it stands.

These days we find most serious dirt machines with a five-speed gearbox. The Benelli for some reason or another offers only a four-speed, which is shifted on the right side in an up for low, down for the rest pattern. Primary drive is by gear and the wet, multi disc clutch action is smooth. The clutch cable is a crude affair with its end exposed to the elements. It wraps through a hole in the clutch arm that sticks through the left side engine case. There is too much that can go wrong with this setup; it is extremely vulnerable to damage and the screw stop is prone to slipping.





The Benelli's best feature is without a doubt its engine. The unit has an excellent power band and pulls strongly from any rpm. If the engine had somewhat better reliability and was installed in a completely new chassis, Benelli would be getting somewhere. As is, the bike would be a big disappointment for most riders, and there is little that could be done by the owner to improve the bad traits. For the same amount of money, a much better motorcycle can be purchased.



We were about ten minutes into our first test session with the Enduro when its transmission gave up the ghost. A pin had sheared inside on the shift mechanism and the machine was stuck in neutral. The Benelli people repaired the problem and returned the bike to us a short time later. This could have happened to any motorcycle but we can't help but feel that reliability wise, the Benelli Enduro is a bad bet. None of our testers would venture very far out in the boonies on one of these by themselves, so no one really had much confidence in the bike. A hard-riding owner would tear one of these to pieces in no time, take our word for it.

Riders from about 5'9" on up will probably find the Benelli's seating position a bit cramped, but as soon as you stand on the pegs the position gets much more comfortable. Positioning of the footpegs and the size and shape of the handlebars is just about perfect.

The Enduro comes standard with a speedometer that contains a resettable trip mileage indicator and a steering head lock. Handlebar grips are satis-

factory but the rubber footpeg covers are bad news in the wet. Passenger pegs are included also. Benelli fits a luggage rack but it can't really carry much in the way of gear. Actually it makes a good handle to pull the bike out of a ditch or something like that.

Starting is easy enough, although many riders find a left side kick starter awkward. Once underway at moderate speeds the machine is fun, but push it past moderation and it turns into a handful. The short wheelbase and high center of gravity make it a snap to lift the front end over obstacles. A ground clearance of some ten inches helps out there too.

Trail riding with the Benelli is the best proposition. Its ample power curve will pull it out of tight spots and since it's on the short side, a narrow, twisty path is easy.

We found that in fast cornering the front end wants to plow in a severe understeer condition. The engine has the power to hang the rear end out, but the chassis says no. The only alternative is to slow down. You might

wonder why we go out of our way to run a motorcycle as fast as it can possibly travel under a variety of conditions. You might think we're trying to make a racer out of a bike that isn't supposed to be ridden in this manner.

The fact is, that most riders, especially dirt riders, tend to run their bikes right to the limit. We do too, only to give you an idea of how capable each machine is. Our test Benelli failed miserably to perform the way an Enduro type machine is supposed to perform. It's a motorcycle that you might call good, if you didn't have anything else to compare it with. Unfortunately for Benelli, the 175cc Enduro bracket is loaded with some excellent motorcycles. When you ride them, as we have, you know what to expect and look for in that type of motorcycle.

The Benelli Enduro fell far short of the level of performance achieved by its competition. It's a motorcycle that needs a lot of work in almost every department. That's not the way a \$700 motorcycle should be, not the way at all.....

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE

Type 2-stroke piston port single
 Bore & Stroke 60mm x 60mm
 Displacement 169.5 cc
 Compression Ratio 8.1:1
 Max Horsepower 16.4 @ 6200 rpm
 Ignition flywheel magneto
 Carburetion (1) 22mm Dellorto Concentric
 Lubrication oil mist (in fuel)

DIMENSIONS

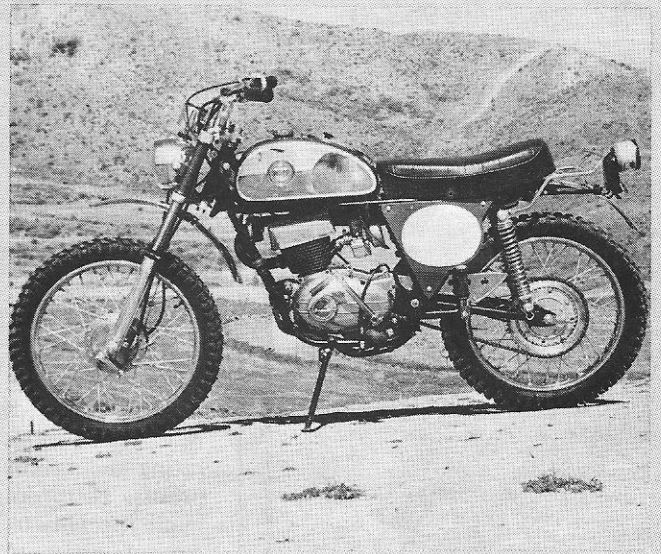
Seat Height 32.5 in.
 Wheelbase 50.0 in.
 Dry Weight 208 lbs.

WHEELS & BRAKES

Front Tire Size 2.75 x 19
 Front Brake Type drum
 Rear Tire Size 3.00 x 19
 Rear Brake Type drum

TRANSMISSION

Type four speed constant mesh
 Clutch multi disc, wet



CAPACITY

Fuel Tank 2.5 gal.

FRAME & SUSPENSION

Front Suspension Marzocchi
 Rear Suspension Marzocchi
 Frame Type double cradle

COLOR red
 Price As Tested \$699.00

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 Hatboro, Pa. 19040