

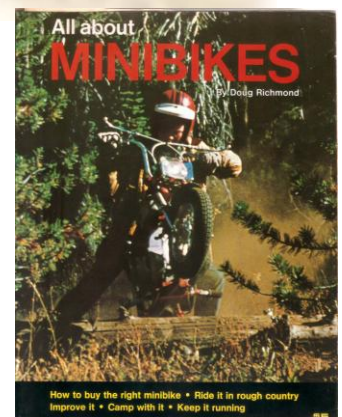
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The first book I ever read on mini bikes back in 1973. I got it at the Library. I bought the kids a mini bike for Christmas several years ago, [Sarah loved riding](#) and I got back into mini bikes. Hence, the name of our FaceBook page and Website... "All About Mini Bikes" thought you might get the connection. Thanks for your patronage in our hobby and feel free to write us anytime at Przyojski@Yahoo.Com

Your Mini Bike Friends, Dan & Sarah

AllAboutMiniBikes.Com



ITALJET MK.1

A neat mini-bike has something to talk about



With a few notable exceptions, mini-bikes costing less than \$200 tend to be look-alikes or stripped down utility machines. Which may explain why there haven't been too many recent test reports on such machines. But the Italjet Mark I from Speed Center USA proves that it "ain't necessarily so."

True, this machine costs a few bucks more than \$200. Around \$235, to be more exact. But a large chunk of this cost is created by President Nixon's 10 per cent import surcharge. It was Speed Center's original intention to bring the Italjet Mark I in from Italy at a figure as close to \$200 as possible but international politics got in the way, somewhat. This is only the first such increase in price we have come across—others will undoubtedly follow when the dust settles.

Still, even at \$235 our test machine is interesting. It incorporates a number of innovative design features, offers a four-horse engine, features front and rear brakes, and provides full suspension.



And it's all put together in an attractive, Italian-styled, package.

The frame is the single backbone, double engine cradle, type. The backbone member, in this case, is an enormous 3¼-inch diameter tube. Obviously, there is no need to have such a big member for strength considerations alone (it's nice to have, of course, but well-over-engineered). It has to serve another purpose, as well, and that is as a gas tank.

We have come across gas tanks that are an integral part of the frame before. We have always liked the idea, for several reasons, since we first saw it back in 1965. For one thing, the tank is usually infinitely stronger than any other type of tank and this is an important safety consideration when the vehicle gets thrown around like most mini-bikes. For another, it seems logical to use the space inside the frame tubes, even if it means over-sizing the tubes as in the case of the Italjet, to carry fuel. This is true because of the usual lack of fuel capacity on a mini-bike.

The Italjet Mark I is not, as it happens, over-loaded with fuel. The tank holds about three quarts but, had the stock engine-mounted tank been left in place, it would have had a respectable five quarts. As it is, don't go making starry-eyed plans about travelling over hill and dale without looking to the fuel capacity problem.

Domestic manufacturers are going to groan again about our favorable reaction to this type of gas tank. It takes skill and time to make this type of tank attractive and leak-proof. It would, undoubtedly, cost a fortune in U.S. dollars to get a finish such as the Italjet's tank. It really is a remarkable thing. The tank isn't simply cut off and ends welded in. The ends gradually and smoothly come down to a cone shape with no evidence of a weld or join. Incidentally, the welding job on this machine is absolutely

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fantastic. The only way the welds could be any smoother or complete would be to fill the whole join up and then to grind each one down. Maybe that's what they did.

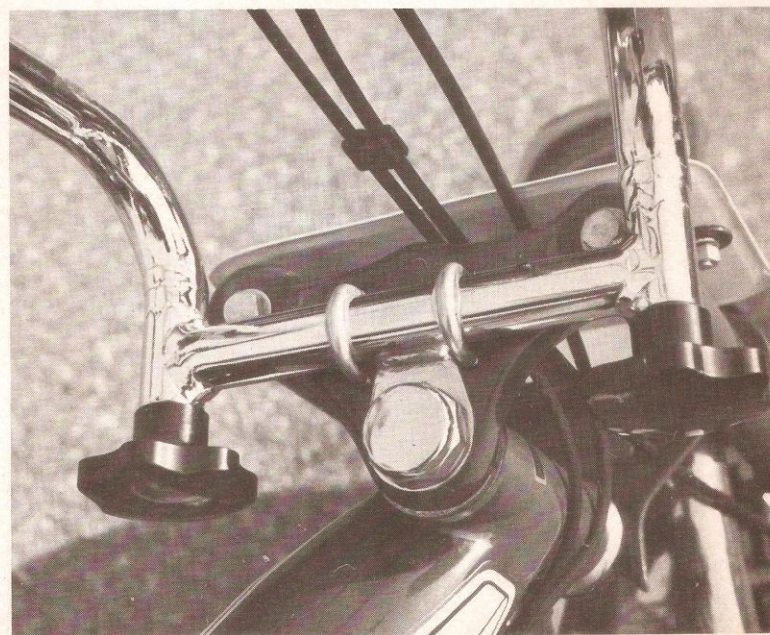
The engine loop cradle is not welded to the rest of the frame. At the steering head it is bolted to a gusset that triangulates the tank/main frame backbone. It then bends around the engine and is attached to the upper shock mount bolts at the rear. The loops are pinched down at this point to make flat sections and this looks like a likely place for metal fatigue to set in. We would feel happier if this section was gusseted. At the bolt hole the loops bend horizontally, as though to make a lifting handle at the back. Instead, the loops are cut off, swaged out to form a flat face, and the rear of the fender is bolted to the face with a rubber shock mounting for the fender.

Rear suspension is the swinging arm type with cushioning provided by two Sebac shocks. The upper mounting is via a bolt that runs through a transverse tube welded to the back of the backbone/gas tank. The spring rate on the shocks is too stiff and the swinging arms are too short. Both factors leading to a rather unforgiving rear end, at least, for the lighter rider.

The front suspension is nothing to get excited about, either. It is the typical telescopic fork arrangement with the cushioning provided mechanically by internal springs, with no hydraulic dampening. Although the suspension on the Italjet is less than perfect, it should be remembered that most machines in this price range have even more rudimentary suspension, if any. It is, at least, a heck of a lot better than some we have seen.

Rake on the front end is about 28 to 29 degrees, angled out enough to give about 2½-inches of trail and very stable steering characteristics. Part of the reason that the Italjet does so well in this department is the 10-inch wire spoke wheels and the 16½-inch outside tire diameter. This diameter gives a much better ride than the smaller diameter tires usually found on the less expensive machines.

Yet, even with the bigger wheels and tires, the seat height is low enough (25-inches) for the beginning and intermediate rider, the type of people who will be buying the Italjet Mark I. However, this low seat was bought at the expense of ground clearance which was reduced to 5½-inches by moving the swinging arm pivot point up the back of the engine cradle loop. You can't get it all ways. The mounting tab for the swinging arm,



incidentally, is very stout and does not look as though it will easily get an egg-shaped hole in it as some of these things do.

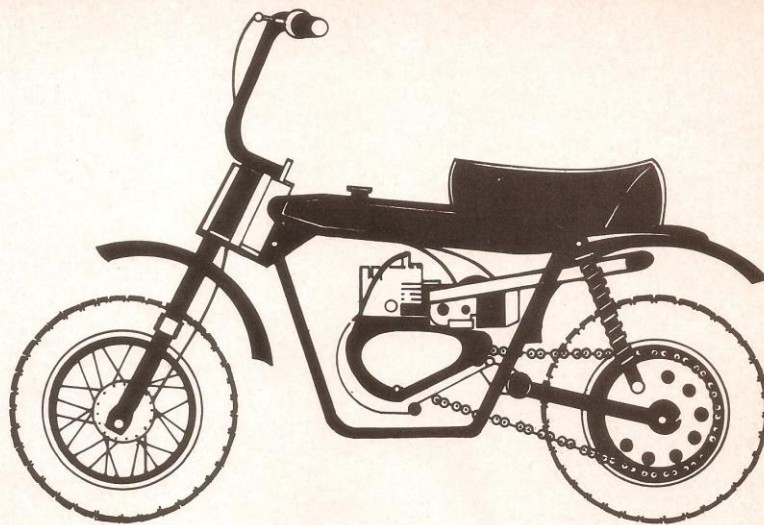
The tires have cobby knobs that are lovely for loose surfaces but that do not get much bite on tracks or other reasonably hard surfaces. The wheels have steel spokes and solid rims which means that the owner better have a couple of tire irons handy.

In the center of the wheels there are full width hubs that carry the brakes. Both front and rear brakes are operated by hand levers on the handlebars. Having two anchors is considered a luxury among mini-bikers and, for most practical purposes, one is enough except for the faster machines. However, it is impossible to have too much braking ability and two brakes give added security if one should let go.

It is especially nice to have two brakes if they are both excellent units, like the Italjet's. And it is doubly especially nice to have two brakes, both of which work well, if they do not push the price of the machine through the ceiling.

We mentioned the handlebars, briefly, before. They are the type that fold independently of each other and, therefore, there is no bracing between them. This type of bar is inherently weak for serious boonie-bashing but the bars on the Italjet are the best we have seen of this type. They are not mounted in cast aluminum crown plates (the cast crown plates on the early mini-cycles were far too thin). The crown plate on the Italjet is stamped steel and there are familiar U-bolts holding a tube clamped across the crown plate. Instead of bending upwards to form the handlebars, the tube is cut off a little wider than the crown plate and short serrated tubes are welded, T-fashion, across the ends.

The two sides of the handlebars then follow the usual "fold-down" style. The matching serrations are clamped into the fixed part of the set-up by a large knurled plastic knob. This arrangement is stronger than others of the type because it has been more carefully thought out and executed. The serrations lock more positively than the "ears" we sometimes see, simply because there is a much larger bearing surface. There is no danger of the crown plate cracking because steel is not as brittle as aluminum. And the bars are probably stronger because they have fewer bends, no holes drilled in them and, possibly, because a stronger tubing is used. Of course, it is more expensive to do it the Italjet way but we haven't noticed that this has priced the machine off the market.



ITALJET MK. I

Importer: Speed Center USA, 825 Victory Blvd., Burbank, CA 91502

ENGINE

Engine type	Single, four-stroke	Carb	Float bowl
Bore	2 1/2"	Ignition	Flywheel magneto
Stroke	1-27/32"	Lubrication	Splash
Displacement	9.06 cu. ins.	Fuel capacity	2 quarts
Horsepower @ rpm	3 1/2 @ 3,600	Fuel requirement	Regular
Compression ratio	N/A		

TRANSMISSION

Transmission type	Direct	Final drive	No. 35 roller chain
Clutch type	Centrifugal	Gear ratios	4.5:1

CHASSIS

Frame type	Single backbone, double loop engine cradle	Tires,	
Wheelbase	48 1/2 inches	Front	300 x 10 x 1 1/2" dia.
Overall length	58 inches	Rear	300 x 10 x 1 1/2" dia.
Suspension,		Brake(s)	Hum-mntd. int. exp., frnt & rear
Front	Telescopic, mech.	Ground clearance	6 inches
Rear	Swinging arm, shock absbrs	Seat height	25 inches
Wheels	10-inch wire spoked	Handlebar height	36 inches
		Dry weight	90 lbs (approx.)

PRICE AS TESTED \$235.00



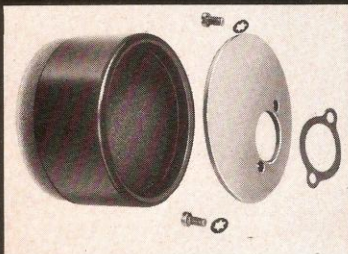
In front of the handlebars is a competition number plate. Now, will you guys quit giggling.

Power for our test machine comes from an Aspera four-stroke 3 1/2 horse engine. The shape and style of the head fins may have you fooled for a time but you'll soon recognize the rest as belonging to the Tecumseh design. This engine is made in Italy under a license from Tecumseh but does not come under Tecumseh's service policy. Nevertheless, just about anybody with Teke experience will be able to give the engine all the attention it needs.

The major difference between an Aspera Engine and a Teke, apart from the head fin configuration, is that the Italian job uses, naturally, a Dell Orto carburetor. Don't get all excited, now, because this carb is indistinguishable,

Continued on page 64

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ITALJET

Continued from page 31

outwardly at least, from the Teke float bowl carb. Our test machine was equipped with a long chromed, exhaust that exits under the seat—right under the seat. It needs to be extended by about four or five inches to avoid the possibility of "hot pants".

Transmission is direct. That is to say, there is a centrifugal clutch on the PTO and there is a final drive chain that runs back to a rear sprocket on the same side. The clutch is of a make we have never seen before, probably Italian. The friction material in the clutch is one piece, instead of the usual three piece shoes most domestic clutches use. We don't know if the clutch was ever properly attached to the power-take-off shaft but, when prying around, we found it wasn't for our testing. It appears that the bolt holding the clutch in the tapped end of the shaft had come adrift. Only about half the width of the shoe was in contact with the drum.

Considering this condition, the clutch worked reasonably well. However, it had an almost impossible task to perform. The gear ratio was so high, around 4:1, that it was a wonder the machine moved at all, even if the clutch had been attached properly. To make this machine a viable proposition the gear ratio should have been no taller than 7:1. This, we are sure will be changed in production models since it is merely a matter of rearranging the number of sprocket teeth.

The chain, too, was unusual. Normally we are not in favor of No. 35 chain for mini-bikes but the chain on the Italjet had the saving grace that it had roller bearings. The No. 35 chain that you still find, sometimes, in mini-bikes is usually without rollers and this means rapid wearing. The chain may be able to handle the modest power of our test machine but we wish it had been a little heavier.

One of the nice things about the Italjet Mark I is its light weight. When we were unloading it, ready for the test, one of our young riders braced himself for the load he had come to expect from our test machines. He was surprised to find that he could heft it around with no trouble.

The same thing applied on the trail. The light weight, combined with the larger diameter tires and good front-end trail, produced a feeling that the machine could do almost anything. Unfortunately, the engine didn't feel the same way. Of course, that badly installed

clutch might have had something to do with it but the basic cause, we felt, was the under-powering of the machine.

On talking this over with the Speed Center people we were told that the four horse engine would be standard and that a three horse engine would be offered as an option. As a bonus we were told that the price for the four horse engine machine would remain the same and the cost of the three horse jobbie would be slightly less. Nice guys!

Since we feel that the four horse Tecumseh/Aspera engine is in a different league from the 3 1/2 hp engine, the difference in performance will probably be noticeable. And with the smaller engine, the Italjet will be everything a lower-priced machine should be, not too spirited but with excellent handling characteristics.

Although domestic manufacturers will wince at the thought of another competitor from overseas, they are receiving some incentives to do as well from the 10 per cent surcharge on imports. If the Italjet Mark I makes it on the market place, it will be in spite of this extra charge and that must mean something. What it probably means is that this machine is most of the things that a middle-priced mini-bike should be. □

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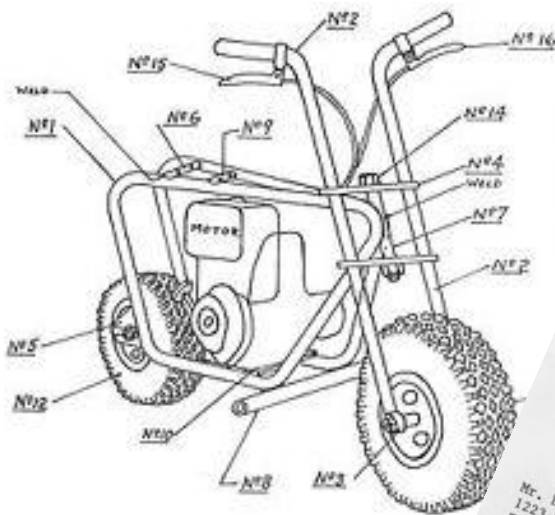
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