

TRAVERSING - Large rear tire on Slingshot digs in pretty well on railroad embankment.

change, but an important handling factor nevertheless, is the new 14-inch diameter tire on the rear. Last year the tire diameter was 13-inches on the 300X. The Slingshot's rear tire is a heavy knobby (inviting trail usage) but has no brand name (unless you count an ambiguous "Made in U.S.A."). The front tire is a smaller (12-inch diameter) tire and this high-at-the-back appearance emphasizes the machine's rakish appearance.

Somewhere between a style and an engineering change is the inclusion of a kill switch mounted on a consol located on the upper frame member in front of



SLINGSHOT *colorful missile*

the seat. Nothing to do with HPE, although the Slingshot is the first machine we have seen with this feature, is the new location for the choke lever on the Tecumseh engine. Instead of the dog-legged lever that goes over the top of the air-cleaner, the lever on the engine in the Slingshot comes out to the right on a level with the top of the carb. We figure this must be a Tecumseh safety feature designed to prevent mini-bikers from trying to operate the choke lever from the left hand side - where that hot little muffler is situated.

One other design feature is the accelerator twist grip which is injected molded by HPE themselves (along with many other parts for their pool equipment line). This accelerator has a nipple on the collar that tightens down on the handlebars that matches an indentation in the metal. The idea is to prevent the collar from twisting on the smooth metal of the handlebars when it is cranked on hard (a constant problem with some twist grips). The Slingshot's hand grips, incidentally, are made from soft, high ribbed, plastic that are designed to give a good grip for sweaty hands and, in fact, to provide plenty of ventilation to prevent perspiration from building up.

These are the basic engineering improvements on this year's middle-of-the-range model but it is in the styling that the major changes were made. First of all, the Slingshot comes with a really great paint job - some kind of metallic candy apple green that is the most attractive paint job we have seen on a relatively inexpensive (dare we say





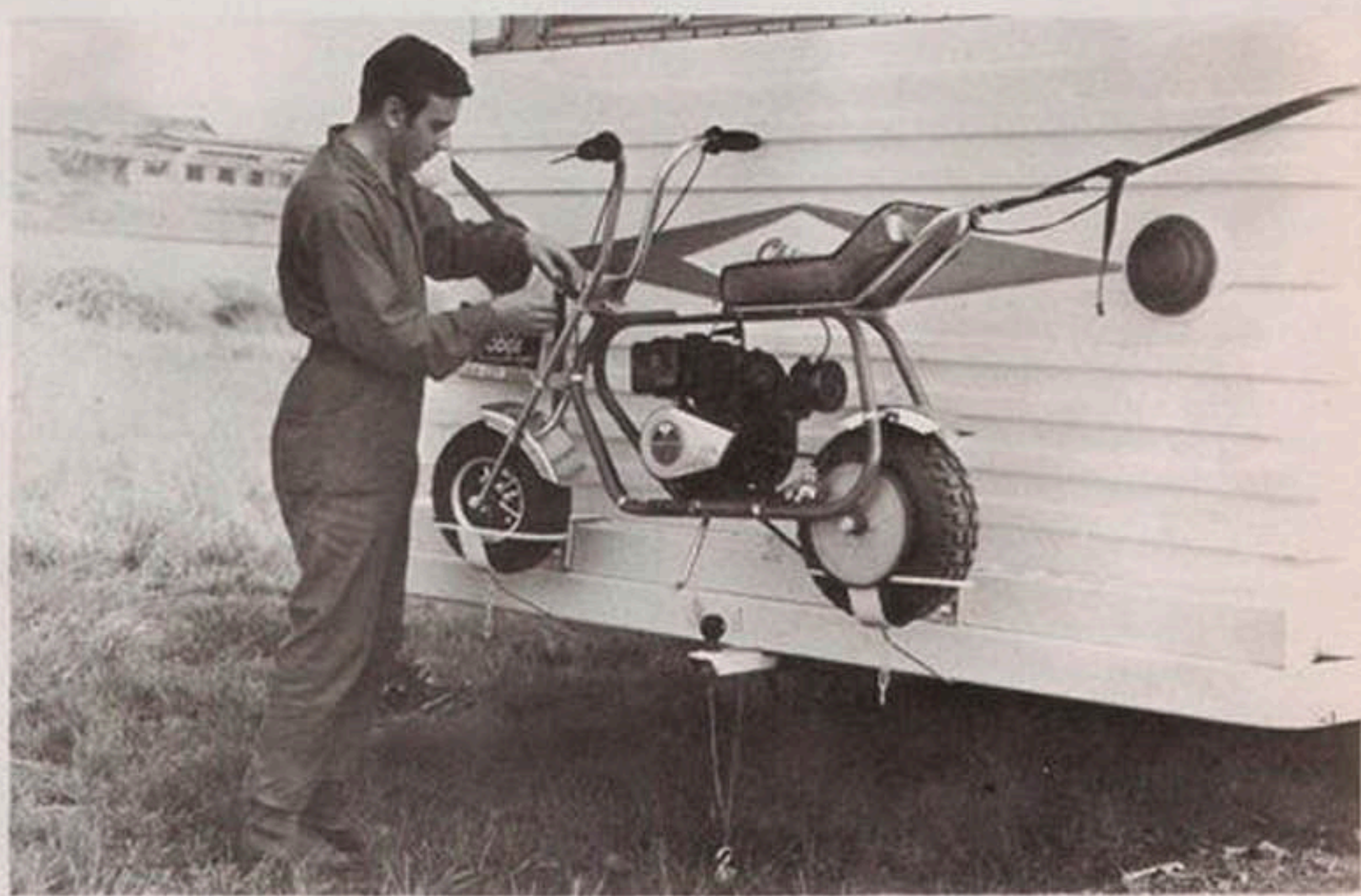
"cheap") model. A two-tone (black with metal-flaked gold/black) seat has a high kick-up at the rear supported by a moderate sissy bar (which, incidentally, provides a very handy lifting bar without being so high as to become a safety hazard). This chromed sissy bar is bolted to the underside of the seat but might have had more practical strengthening abilities if it had been bolted to the frame.

The whole front end is chromed, from the axle-bearing holes to the hand grips. Mounted over the wheels are attractive, though somewhat impractical, chromed pressed steel fenders and other chrome accents include the chain/clutch guard and ignition kill switch consol.

Mechanical carry-overs from '69 include the mechanical spot disc brake which operates on the leading edge of the rear wheel sprocket and the direct drive transmission. There has, however, been a change in gear ratios. Last year's machines had rear sprockets that came awful close to the ground and sometimes, on a more radical turn, touched it. The new models have smaller rear sprockets giving a slightly higher gear ratio - 6 to 1.

Introduced last year, late last year, were the folding footpegs (thank God) and these have been continued on the new machines. Like last year's models, the Slingshot has a rigid rear and a single spring, steering column-mounted, front suspension.

In running the Slingshot, the front suspension came in for some harsh words from the test rider. What they amounted to were "why bother?". There was some cushioning over the



worst bumps (you could tell by the noise the upper crown plate made as it clunked back into position) but a suspension, by definition, should work without having to be dropped off a cliff. Of course, this type of suspension (we have come across it before with the same results) is better than nothing but hardly worthy of the amount of thought that has gone into the rest of the Slingshot.

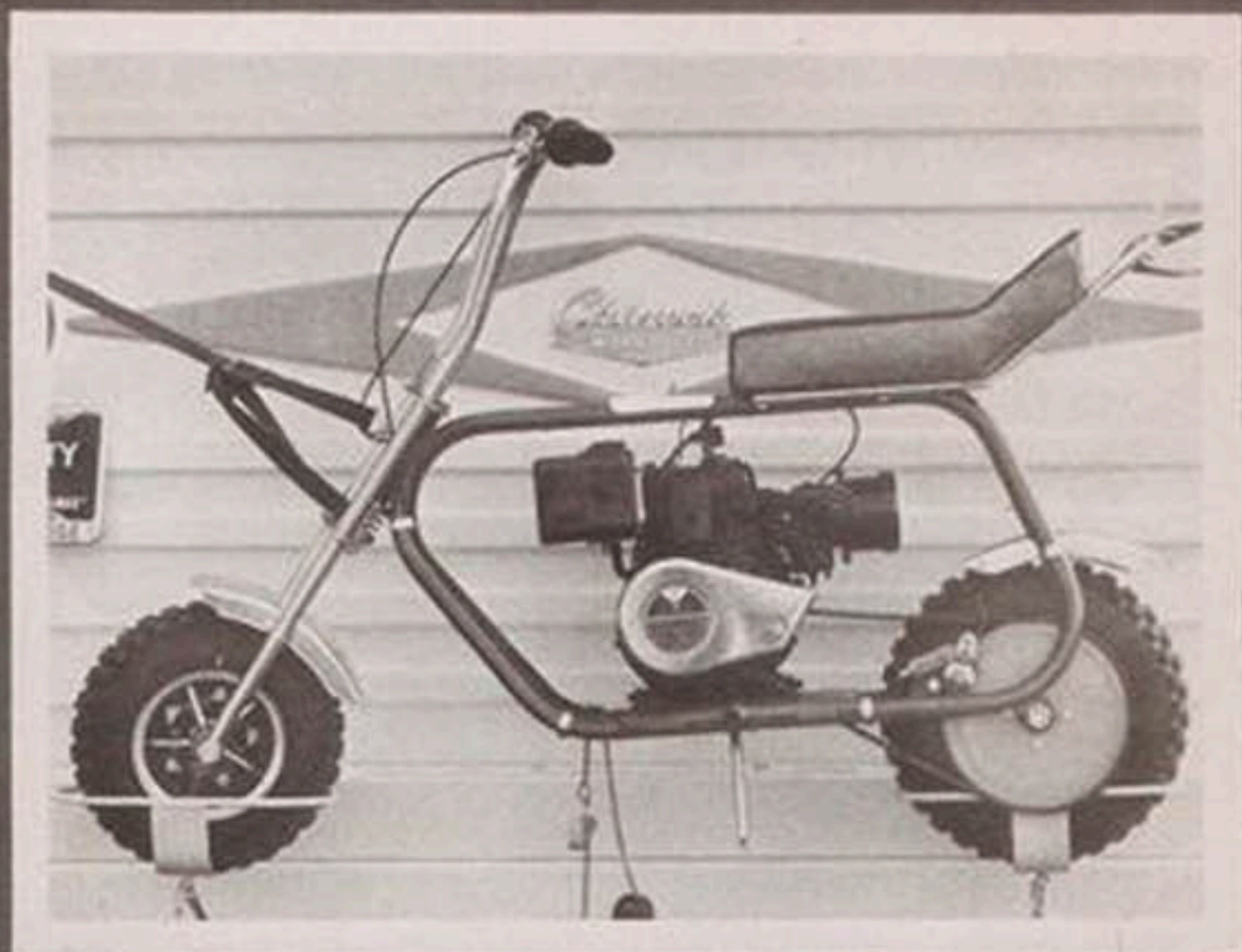
On the trails the steering worked just fine, but the front suspension acted as a friction plate and although this is considered a good feature by some riders, we prefer not to have to fight for the right to steer. Off trail, where quick steering becomes more critical, the friction plate effect of the front suspension was a sheer nuisance - and its cushioning effect not much better. Okay, guys, we're through bitching - the rest is all downhill.

Although the Slingshot is not, basically, a serious trail machine, it does a pretty fair job in those conditions. As long as the rider sticks to the trail, practically anything can be tackled and ridden with this machine. However, at least with a 160 pound rider (which might be a little unfair considering the modest power package), the rough stuff causes some bogging down. On the other hand, the Slingshot tracks better than most machines (we were even tempted to some hands-off riding) and some traversing of pebbly railroad embankments proved that the big rear tire will dig in just fine and prevent any downhill sliding of the rear end.

With our relatively heavy test rider aboard, the Slingshot was plenty fast enough for trail conditions and the riding position is good, if not perfect. We would have preferred to have the handlebars with a little more forward cant for a really comfortable seat/handlebar relationship but standing on the strong footpegs for the rough sections proved remarkably stable. And we must remember Gil Losi's marketing philosophy - he is not building the Slingshot for full-grown test riders but for "his" people - the younger mini-bike set.

And his people are just going to love the Slingshot. It is, as we said at the beginning of this test, the most stylish \$150 mini-bike we have had the pleasure of testing (that's an average price gathered by shopping at various stores). It incorporates all the lessons of the past year regarding strength and quality of workmanship - plus a move to a more classy-looking machine. It's simplicity, besides contributing to the low price, makes it possible for the owner to find his way around with ease. Anybody shopping around in this price range, with a not too-heavy or too-large rider in mind, would do well to consider the Slingshot - it's one of the best values we have come across.

SPECIFICATIONS



Manufacturer:	HPE Inc., 225 Acacia Street, Colton, Calif. 92324
Model:	Slingshot
Price:	\$150 (approx.)
Engine:	3½ hp Tecumseh four-stroke
Transmission:	Direct drive
Gear Ratio:	6 to 1
Clutch:	Horstman steel shoe (12-tooth)
Tires:	Front, 12½-inch diameter; rear, 14-inch diameter - knobbies
Suspension:	Front, single spring steering head mounted; rear, rigid
Brake:	Mechanical spot disc, rear sprocket leading edge mounted
Accelerator:	Quarter-turn twist grip, soft plastic, positive locking
Weight:	81 lbs.
Length:	51½-inches
Wheelbase:	38-inches
Heights:	Seat, 29-inches; handlebars, 33½-inches
Ground Clearance:	6¼-inches
Wheels:	6-inch pressed steel, split rims, sealed bearings
Seat:	17-inches long, exaggerated rear kick-up, two-tone nauga-hyde
Miscellaneous:	Ignition kill switch, upper frame mounted; front and rear fenders; chromed chain/clutch guard; folding footpegs; chromed sissy bar
Cost/Efficiency Ratio:	Nine (on a scale of ten, a subjective analysis)