

Taco 100

"... a tough, well built little devil that will handle just about any terrain. . ."

When we received the Taco 100 we soon had the engine nicely warmed up. You know how it is - the day is long, and just before the sun goes down you need a little relaxation. In our new offices we are lucky - there are still some open areas around - so from time-to-time, we'll haul out a few machines and everybody in the office goes for a spin. There's nothing like it for blowing away the cobwebs. It's not really testing - it's just having fun.

Well, the day the Taco arrived, after the phone had stopped ringing, we decided to take a ride. Naturally, we took along the new test machine for first impressions. We wheeled the machines across the street to a little trail alongside a lettuce field - fired them up, and took off.

Our art director weighs in at 225 pounds and the editor of our sister publication, Modern Karting, weighs 250 pounds, so, naturally, its the bigger machines that they usually drag out. The Taco 100 looked kind of insignificant alongside their machines but once it was warmed up - look out! They were eating the test machine's dust for most of the two hours we were exploring.

Of course, we chose the pathways that were not too tough and there is not much in the way of hills around the office. A nearby railroad (we've never seen a train on it) provides a means of getting from one open area to another and others must have had the same idea because there are two well-worn tracks, on both sides of the rails.

We even found some paved road, blocked off for construction, that enabled us to really wind the machines up. Under these conditions, the Taco 100 still held its own against the other machines that were equipped with geared transmissions.

Lynn Wineland, Steen's director of marketing, may be a little upset when he gets our test Taco 100 back. He may have to put a new set of those grabbin' 14-inch diameter tires (that must cost a small fortune) on the machine before anybody else can use it. It's not that we're down to the casing, yet, we've even got a little tread left. Which is kinda strange, considering all the miles we've put on the test machine since we've had it in our possession.

Still, maybe Lynn won't get too mad. After all, if we rode it that much we must have liked it. And that's a fact. We did like it - all of us around the MBG office.

It's hard to say, exactly, why we liked it. There is nothing really extraspecial about the Taco 100 - except, maybe for the big, fat, tires. It has the straight-forward, traditional, type double loop frame, with a relatively low seat height (25-inches), and telescoping front forks and swinging arm rear suspension. The front forks come straight up to form the handlebars and the seat is set in between the upper loop frame. There is a jackshaft hooked up to - now it starts to get interesting - a five horse Briggs and Stratton. Now you look at the tires, as we said, 14-inches in diameter with 4-inch treads in front and 4½-inch in back - and you start to see something developing.

And "something" is what happens once the engine is nicely warmed up.

However, this speedy performance revealed an aspect of the Taco 100 that a trail rider may find bothersome.

The Taco 100 is geared on the high side, in our opinion, for a machine basically intended for trail use. The final drive ratio to the rear sprocket is a little under 5½ to 1 (compared to a pretty standard 6 to 1) and then you have to take into consideration the larger-than-usual diameter of the rear tire. This is great for trails that are pretty smooth and without long sharp grades - however, when you get stuck in the rough stuff...

The proof, as they say, is in the pudding (although why it's in that gooey mess, we don't know) so we reserved our judgement about the gear ratios until we were at our test site, Saddleback Park, not far from the new MBG office. The trails around there are designed for dirt motor cycles so they give mini-bikes a more than thorough work-out. On the trails the Taco 100 was perfectly at home. The powerful engine kept the machine moving fast enough on all but the straight-up-and-down hills, so that the clutch stayed fully engaged at all times. So far, the gear ratio was fine except that there was a tendency

towards too much speed on the more rugged sections.

However, when we ventured off the trail, making our own across some rocky patches, we had to take it fairly easy - and it is then that the Taco 100 started to bog down. Not "bog down" in the motor-cyclist's sense, when the engine starts to lug, but in the mini-biker's sense, when the centrifugal clutch starts to slip. As the speed starts to drop, the springs on the clutch shoes start to get close to disengagement speed. With large tires, the revolutions are lower for any given speed and so the clutch gets closer to slipping. And that's what happened on our trail-blazing trip.

Of course, gear ratios present a quick-sand of alternatives and it's up to the user to decide which is best for his particular needs and applications. With the Taco 100's jackshaft, a gear ratio change is a simple and inexpensive thing. We recommend changing the 14-tooth sprocket on the left side of the jackshaft for a 10-tooth unit. This would give a final sprocket ratio of 7.6 to 1.

Gear ratios aside, the Taco 100 proved itself as a tough, well-built, little devil that will handle just about any terrain



is simple (the frame is essentially the same as the Taco 99) it has, at the same time, been well-proven. The front forks telescope into a larger lower section with the chromed springs stopped below the lower steering crown plate. The axle-bearing lower section of the forks are prevented from parting company with the upper section by a short piece of the spring material welded to the two sections and threaded into the spring itself. At the rear there is a sturdy-looking swinging arm pivoted behind the jackshaft (the anchor bar seems a little too close to the tire for comfort). A good set of Italian shock absorbers run from a bracket welded to the top of the swinging arm, just above the rear axle, to another bracket welded to the underside of the upper frame loop, towards the rear of the seat. The total suspension package seems to be tuned just about right for trail riding, not too soft, not too stiff.

Two tiny footpegs are welded (and fixed, more's the pity) to the frame, a little aft of the engine. They are small because, that way, they won't cause trouble by digging into obstructions on the trail - a better idea would be to have folding footpegs. As you know, we have a thing about fixed footpegs and the average rider may not be so sensitive.

The deep foam rubber and naugahyde seat is interesting - its set in between the upper frame loop which helps to protect it from tearing. The controls are positive (although we would like to see a bigger brake lever) and the plastic throttle is



one of the few that we have tested that seems to have an immediate, "dead-man", return action. The brake itself is an excellent, 4½-inch, internal expansion unit that never failed us during our long, down-hill, drags at Saddleback Park.

As we said at the beginning of this article, it is difficult to say why the Taco 100 is such a fun machine. However, it is, truly, and the amount of use it has had during its stay at MBG is some indication of this. When we sort out which machines we are going to use on our little unwind, fun, trips - the Taco is invariably one of the group - and the guy that's riding it is bound to come back with a big grin on his face. What better recommendation can you ask?

SPECIFICATIONS



Manufacturer: Steens, Inc., 1635 West Valley Blvd., Alhambra, Calif. 91803

Model: Taco 100

Price: \$219.50

Engine: Five hp Briggs and Stratton, four-cycle

Transmission: Jackshaft, 5/8"

Drive Ratio: 5½ to 1

Clutch: Mercury Centrifugal

Tires: 14-inch diameter, knobbies; 4-inch tread, front; 4½-inch tread, rear

Suspension: Front, telescoping forks; Rear, swinging arm, shock absorber dampened

Brake: Hand-operated, internal expansion, 4½-inch drum diameter

Accelerator: Twist-grip, motor cycle type, plastic mount

Weight: 93 pounds

Length: 53-inches

Wheelbase: 39-inches

Height: Seat, 25-inches; handlebars, 31-inches

Ground Clearance: 6-inches

Wheels: 6-inch split rim aluminum, sealed ball bearings

Seat: 15-inch foam rubber and naugahyde, kick-up rear

Cost/Efficiency

Index: Eight (on a scale of ten, a subjective evaluation based on cost of test machine and performance within design parameters)