

# MAGICIAN EX



Great handling at a reasonable price

□ All right, already. We admit it. We like to test expensive bikes. Our riders practically salivate when they find out that we're going to test a big-bucks machine. Lately we've been testing so many top-of-the-line bikes that we figured it was time we tested something that more of our readers could afford. After all, how many kids have Donald Trump or Lee Iacocca for a dad?

Well, fortunately for us, some companies realize that price is a big factor when it comes to most bike-buying decisions. Kuwahara came to that realization with the Magician EX, a bike they feel is the perfect freestyle bike for a beginner with a not-too-thick wallet.

At around \$210, the Magician EX is almost \$400 cheaper than the most expensive freestyle bikes on the market. Obviously, there must be some differences between this Kuwie and the super-expensive wonder scoots, but at first sight these differences weren't

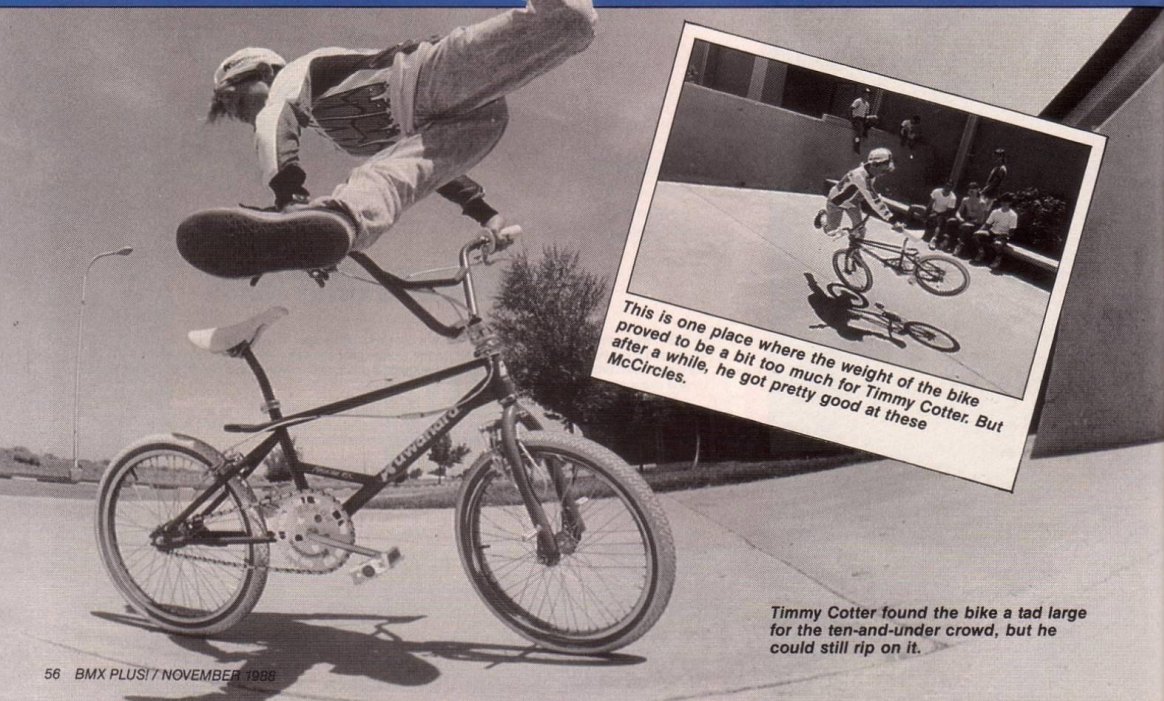
terribly obvious. The bike sports screw-in fork pegs, front and rear brakes with an Odyssey Gyro, heat-treated chromoly cranks, a cool top-tube platform, 48-spoke wheels and a trimoly frame (the top tube, down tube and seat tube are chromoly; the rest of the frame is high-tensile steel). In our book, those are pretty impressive specs for an inexpensive bike. We had to dig to find out how they could sell a bike so cheap.

We called Howie Cohen at Everything Bicycles to see what we could learn from him. Howie told us he'd be happy to send us one of the bikes for a test, but he asked us to keep in mind that the bike was designed for beginning freestylers, not pros. The 48-spoke rims are made of steel, he told us, so the bike wasn't really designed for heavy ramp use. He asked if we had to test it on a

ramp. Absolutely, we told him. Howie seemed a bit nervous at that prospect, and he asked if he could send us some mag wheels with the bike so we could put them on for the ramp session. Sure, we said. Were they an available option? Not exactly, he told us, but most bike shops would sell them to a kid as an extra if he wanted some. Howie was clearly concerned that the steel rims would bite the big one in some serious ramp riding. We told him he could send some mags along if he wanted to, and we'd use them if we needed them.

#### NEW RAMPS, NEW RIDERS

Almost every freestyle rider we knew was on tour for the summer, including nearly our entire test staff. Under the circumstances, it provided a great opportunity to try out some new test-rider talent. We called on Bobby Leftwich, a hot up-and-coming ramp rider in the SoCal area, to give us some ramp input, and his friend Kevin Martin (the inventor

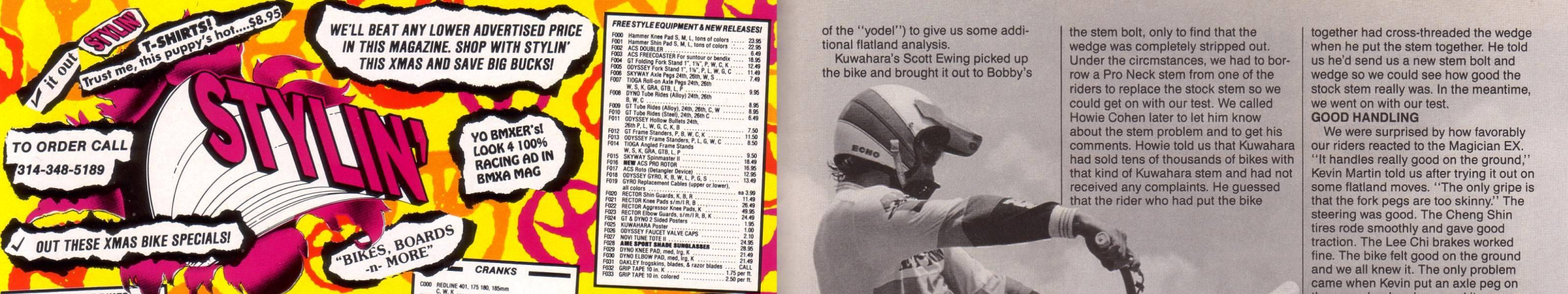


This is one place where the weight of the bike proved to be a bit too much for Timmy Cotter. But after a while, he got pretty good at these McCircles.

Timmy Cotter found the bike a tad large for the ten-and-under crowd, but he could still rip on it.







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**of the "yodel") to give us some additional flatland analysis.**

**Kuwahara's Scott Ewing picked up the bike and brought it out to Bobby's**

**the stem bolt, only to find that the wedge was completely stripped out.**

**Under the circumstances, we had to borrow a Pro Neck stem from the other riders to replace the stock stem so we could get on with our test.**

**We called Howie Cohen later to let him know about the stem problem and to get his comments.**

**Howie told us that Kuwahara had sold tens of thousands of bikes with that kind of Kuwahara stem and had not received any complaints.**

**He guessed that the rider who had put the bike**

**together had cross-threaded the wedge when he put the stem together.**

**He told us he'd send us a new stem bolt and wedge so we could see how good the stock stem really was.**

**In the meantime, we went on with our test.**

**GOOD HANDLING**

**We were surprised by how favorably our riders reacted to the Magician EX.**

**"It handles really good on the ground,"**

**Kevin Martin told us after trying it out on some flatland moves.**

**"The only gripe is that the fork pegs are too skinny."**

**The steering was good.**

**The Cheng Shin tires rode smoothly and gave good traction.**

**The Lee Chi brakes worked fine.**

**The bike felt good on the ground and we all knew it.**

**The only problem came when Kevin put an axle peg on the rear wheel and screwed it on over**

**house in Quartz Hill, California.**

**We got our riders together and headed over to the local schoolyard for our flatland session.**

**The bike looked nice.**

**The welds were decent—not inpectionable, but okay.**

**The paint job looked good, too.**

**There was one place near the bottom bracket where the paint had run a bit, but it was a minor flaw for a bike within this price category.**

**We discovered one problem right away:**

**The stem slipped in the forks, allowing the front wheel to turn.**

**We took a crescent wrench and tightened down**

**They told us to be careful with the bike on the ramps.**

**We weren't, but the bike held up anyway.**

**Guest tester Bobby Letwisch twists a gnarly look-back in the California desert.**

**MAGICIAN EX**



**One thing our guys insisted on for the ramp session was a switch from the slippery plastic pedals to some grippier metal ones.**

**Complaints about the bike were few and far between, but the skinniness of the pegs was mentioned a few times.**

**We were downright impressed with how well the Magician EX handled in flatland situations.**

**Kevin Martin demonstrates.**

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the axle nut. The peg only had about an eighth of an inch of axle holding it on, so when he jumped on it for a trick, the few engaged threads stripped out. We should probably blame that problem on ourselves for letting Kevin do what he did, but we like to let our riders take chances with our test bikes so we can find out as much as possible.

## ON TO THE RAMPS

Speaking of taking chances, we decided it was time to really take some big ones with the bike. We headed back to Bobby's house for a full-scale ramp session.

It was about 100 degrees by this time, so everybody got something to drink and then gathered around the ramp playground in the Leftwich's backyard. We were a little leery of the steel rims, but we had to find out whether or not they could take the punishment. Howie



We had some problems with the stem on our test bike, but it appeared that the problem was caused by sloppy assembly of the bike on the morning of our shoot. It seems that somebody had cross-threaded the stem wedge.

Cohen had sent a pair of Skyway's six-spoke Tuff Wheels along with the bike. If the stock rims couldn't take the ramp riding, we'd switch to the mags.

Bobby and Scott took turns on the two main quarterpipes in the yard, riding them like halfpipes. We asked them to take it easy on the bike at first so we could make sure we had some photos of it before anything went wrong. They were a little careful at first, but after a while they began to cut loose. One of the things they immediately found fault with were the stock Victor pedals. They were slippery plastic platforms that simply didn't cut it for ramp use. The guys insisted on switching to some higher-grade Victor pedals with metal cages so their feet wouldn't slip.

After that, the riding came easy. The bike handled really well in the air. "The handling is perfect for ramps," Bobby told us after trying a number of his better variations, which included his x-up one-footer, no-footed cancan, look-backs, lookdowns, and even an Indian air. "It feels like a Haro," he told us after one round of airs.

Some of the other guys at the house tried it, too, and all of them liked the handling as well. The big surprise was that the wheels and cranks took everything we put them through. Bobby landed flat-bottom a number of times and nothing failed. The rims stayed true and the Cosmo-Lite chromoly cranks hung tough, too. Bobby was absolutely amazed by how strong those cranks were.

The bike was not perfect, though. Our guys didn't really like the bars, feeling that they flexed too much. The frame flexed a bit too much, too. So, although we all liked the handling of the bike on the ramps, we wouldn't recommend it for expert-level riders who might give the bike more punishment than it can stand.

## THE FINAL ANALYSIS

All in all, we were frankly surprised by the handling impressive for an inexpensive freestyle bike. We also found few problems with the parts. Considering the overall quality of the machine, we'd recommend it highly to any freestyler who doesn't have a lot of money to spend but wants a good bike on which he can develop his talents.

By the way, we did get to retest the stem that gave us trouble due to the stripped threads on the wedge. Everything Bicycles sent us another stem wedge and bolt to replace the ones on our test bike. We installed them and they worked fine. Apparently, ours had been stripped out in the assembly process, just as Howie Cohen had surmised.

In the final analysis, we decided that the Magician EX is a remarkable buy for just over \$200. The trimly frame is good and the components are better than we'd dare to expect on a bike in this price range. You'd be hard-pressed to find a better bike for the money. □

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