

Pint-Size PERFORMER

1970 Suzuki AC50 Maverick

In the world of motorcycles, Suzuki's AC50 Maverick is a relative unknown. But when it comes to small displacement bikes — often referred to as “tiddlers” — these smart and sunny bikes stand proud with their pint-size stature and surprising sophistication. Don't let the scaled-down looks fool you. Yes, you can fit on it; yes, you can keep up with traffic; and yes, you'll have fun riding it.



Story and photos
by Chris Hartman

Tiddler tidbits

The term tiddler could be viewed as being derogatory, or at the very least slang. But then again, what better term to describe a class of machines that have scaled-down dimensions and near thimble-sized power units? Famous tiddlers include such noteworthy bikes as Honda's vintage Cub C110 as well as Yamaha's YJ and YG series. Combined with lesser-known examples from Kreidler, Yamaguchi, Aermacchi and DKW, to name only a few, there are hundreds of bikes that fall into the tiddler category.

The Sixties and Seventies proved to be the heyday for small bikes, as manufacturers tried to capture the blossoming youth market while also offering machines that would slot into small-displacement European tax categories, which rewarded smaller bikes. And the Suzuki AC50 Maverick — and its A50, AR50, AS50 and K50 derivatives — proved a success both in sales numbers and with customers, thanks to its standout features and surprisingly peppy performance.

Walk around

Replete with modern 1970s styling clues, the Maverick lived up to its marketing hype. Period sales literature — complete with polyester-plaid-laden pilots with hipster headwear — pitched the machine as able to “do more for your image than a new pair of suede loafers.” Like most motorcycles companies in 1970, Suzuki abandoned the typical mid- to late 1960s small bike styling cues like leading-link front suspension, integral pressed steel rear fender, and one-piece headlight/speedo housing. Instead, the Maverick treated the prospective buyer with slender telescopic front forks, brilliant chrome fenders and even a wind-cheating, teardrop-shaped fuel tank, absent both chrome

Suzuki AC50

Years Produced	1970-1974
Total Production	N/A
Claimed power	4.9hp @ 8,500rpm
Top speed	62mph
Engine type	49cc, two-stroke, rotary valve, air-cooled single
Weight (dry)	73kg (160lb)
Price Then	N/A
Price Now	\$500-\$1,000
MPG	75-100 (est.)

“ A ride on this little monster tells you instantly that you’ve got something more than the average run-of-the-mill tiddler. You’ll have trouble believing that the Maverick only has a piston the size of a pop bottle cap. ”

— *Motorcyclist Magazine*, April 1970



sides and rubber knee pads.

The brilliantly original “Pop Green” tank on our 1970 feature bike is finished off with a simple, thin, black and white stripe with “Suzuki” script running horizontally along the tank’s base. About the only leftover 1960s styling cue on the Maverick is found just a few inches north, where a very 1960s-looking Suzuki badge attaches. Even that didn’t last for more than a couple years, replaced by a longer, more rectangular tank and basic vinyl sticker on later versions.

A quick walk around the bike reveals standard tiddler gear. Rolling stock consists of narrow 17in chrome wheels with 36 thin-gauged spokes per rim, all wrapped with pencil-thin 2.25 and 2.5in tires.

Thin yet sturdy telescopic front forks feature the then-common rubber gaiters, and are tied together with a uniquely shaped headlight and housing — round at the top and sides, but squared off at the bottom edge — with mounting ears for the Maverick’s full size turn signals. This feature alone generated significant interest by magazine testers of the day, showing how far safety equipment has come over the years.

For such a compact bike, the Maverick has a certain length to its look. Perhaps it’s the nearly horizontal engine layout or the leggy rake of the front forks. Or even the thinly-proportioned chrome fenders and upswept “Scrambler-style” exhaust pipe complete with finely detailed heat shield. One thing is for sure; the Maverick lost much of the chunkiness that small Sixties bikes often suffered from.

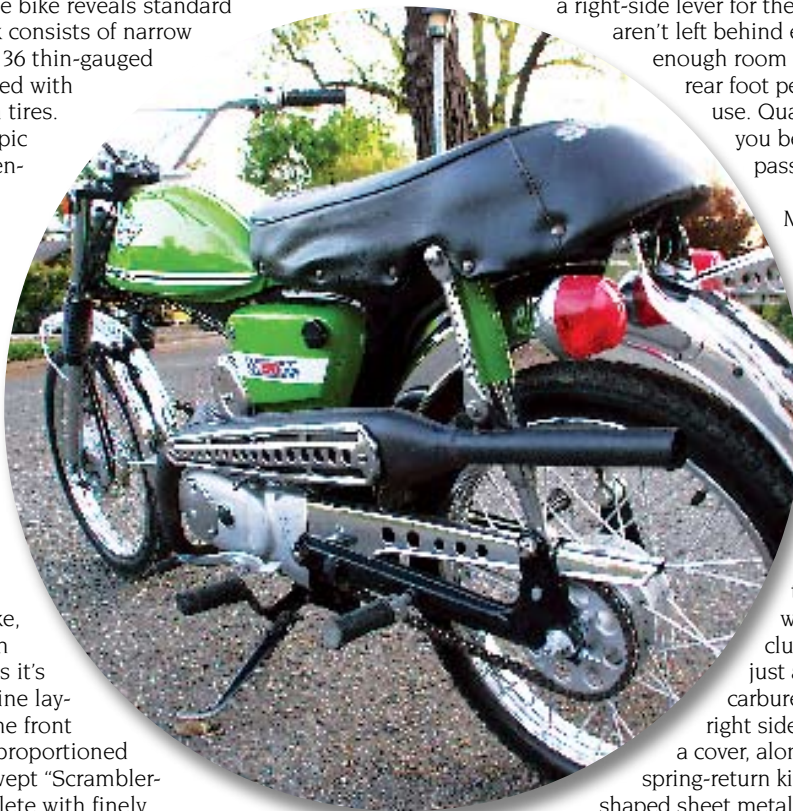
Upper controls are standard small bike fair, with a left thumb-operated choke, and delicate clutch and brake levers requiring only gentle two-finger operation. There is even a tiny pen-cap-sized horn button that operates a fairly muted electric horn. The very-Seventies black-housed speedometer winds in a clockwise fashion, with markings past 80mph. While this may seem exuberant on Suzuki’s part, remember that this model was very popular in Europe, and in fact was known to approach those kinds of elevated speeds when fitted with optional hop-up kits.

But will I fit?

The sitting position is near perfect for a small bike, even with my 6ft-1in frame. Yes my legs are a bit pinched, but the spread and pull-back on the bars give a very sporty riding position. As does the nicely padded seat, with its stitched, black vinyl cover measuring just 30in from the ground. Even height-disadvantaged riders can easily touch down one or both feet during a stoplight break. Foot-operated controls consist of a left-side gear change with both toe and heel pads, and a right-side lever for the rear brake. Passengers aren’t left behind either, as the seat has just enough room for a second bum, and the rear foot pegs easily fold down for use. Quarters are close though, so you better be friendly with your passenger.

The powerhouse of the Maverick is mounted to a sturdy, black-painted, pressed-steel frame using two solid bolts at the rear of the housing. Thanks to its minimalist overall dimensions and two-stroke, air-cooled design, this 49cc rotary-valve mill weighs just a smidge over 40lb. The flywheel magneto is mounted under a chrome cover on the left side of the unit, with the easily accessible clutch adjustment screw just aft. The diminutive 16mm carburetor is mounted on the right side of the unit, also behind a cover, along with the conventional spring-return kickstart lever. An oval-shaped sheet metal air filter housing runs horizontal across the top of the engine and is capped with a bright chrome cover on each end.

Located just underneath one’s legs on the left side of the bike is the side cover for the battery and tool kit that houses the four-position keyed ignition switch. Covers are a thin hard plastic material — painted to match the tank — and are adorned with checkered flag-themed stickers proclaiming the 50cc engine size. On the right side, the matching cover houses the oil injection tank, tagged “Posi-force” by Suzuki engineers. It holds a generous 2.5pt of oil, eliminating the need for pre-mix. The mostly hidden chrome rear fender is adorned with an equally shiny taillight housing bracket, again, complete with full-size rear turn indicators.



“ With the little twist grip pinned back, I’m still accelerating through fourth gear, trying to take advantage of the screaming 8,500rpm redline before I kick it into the fifth and final gear. ”

ESSENTIALS

1970 Suzuki AC50 Maverick

Engine	49cc, two-stroke, rotary valve, air-cooled single/4.9hp @ 8,500rpm
Bore & Stroke	41mm x 37.8mm
Compression ratio	6.7:1
Carburetion	Single 16mm Mikuni
Transmission	Five-speed
Electrics	6v, flywheel magneto ignition
Frame	Pressed steel
Front suspension	Telescopic forks
Rear suspension	Twin shock absorbers
Front brake	101.6mm (4in) single-leading-shoe drum
Rear brake	101.6mm (4in) single-leading-shoe drum
Front tire	2.25 x 17in
Rear tire	2.5 x 17in
Wheelbase	1,185mm (46.7in)
Weight (dry)	73kg (160lb)
Seat Height:	762mm (30in)
Fuel Capacity:	5.5ltr (1.5gal)



Big looks in a little package: The AC50's 17in wheels and 30in seat height mean even 6ft-1in tester Hartman can ride it comfortably.



You can spend hours admiring the numerous functional details on the Maverick, but you can't truly appreciate the complete package until you've ridden it. And I'm about to do that.

Riding the Maverick

It's a warm spring day, so not much choke is needed for starting. And thankfully, the little 50cc engine doesn't take much effort to kick over. With a quick burst of my right foot and a little fiddling with the throttle, the familiar ring-a-ding sound and light output of two-stroke smoke indicates it's time to ride. And what better way to spend a calm Saturday morning than tooling around on an exceptionally original 1970 Suzuki AC50 Maverick.

If you haven't enjoyed a well-preserved tiddler, you're in for a treat. No, you won't be throwing wheelies through the grocery store parking lot or matching engine notes with uncorked Harleys. Instead, what you'll enjoy is a light, extremely nimble machine with surprisingly good punch. It's amazing how sprightly a light, high revving two-stroke machine with a close-coupled five-speed can feel.

As with most small bikes, it only takes a little nudge with the left toe to engage first gear. A good bit of throttle is needed to keep the revs up, and the light-feeling clutch lever needs just a little release to engage the cable-operated, multi-plate clutch in a smooth fashion. An immediate burst of speed results, thanks to the low overall first gear ratio. I can't get too distracted by the light controls

though, as I have to shift to second gear almost immediately. With the revs up and the throttle cracked, I find myself quickly gaining speed and needing to brush up into third gear. Literally within 50ft of my departure, I find myself easily accelerating through third gear, right in the heart of the tiny mill's top-end-oriented power band.

And this is where this bike shines, punching along in town or on narrow residential avenues. As one would expect with a wet weight barely exceeding 170lb, and a between-the-knees width of a scant 8in, the Maverick is extremely maneuverable and quick to react. Sharp, slow-speed 90-degree corners

Resources

AC50 Owners Group
<http://autos.groups.yahoo.com/group/Suzuki50cc/>

Parts — Suzuki Simon
www.suzukisimon.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/

prove a breeze when leaned over on the skinny tires, thanks in part to the bike's ample ground clearance. While not overly harsh, there is a tight, controlled feel about the front end that allows for quick turn-in and sharp transitional maneuvers.

Braking is relatively painless, too. At first glance, those tiny finned drums — measuring barely over 4in in diameter — might alarm your typical rider. But I've ridden enough small, two-stroke machines to know that once you close the throttle at 8,000rpm, your momentum is quickly lost. As a result, applying both the front and rear brakes is almost an afterthought when approaching stop signs or gearing down for tight corners.

As I exit the confines of suburbia I can finally shake out the cobwebs and unleash all 4.9hp. Following a quick run up through third gear, a quick snick into fourth has me swiftly accelerating down an almond-tree-lined orchard road just outside of town. The exhaust note is light but crisp, emitting just a faint haze of mosquito killer behind me. I start to think about opening it up and instinctively begin to tighten down into my Moto GP-like crouch, just touching the chin of my helmet to the handlebar cross bar.

With the little twist grip pinned back, I'm still accelerating through fourth gear, trying to take advantage of the screaming 8,500rpm redline before I kick it into the fifth and final gear. The revs don't drop as much as I expected — or as much as I've experienced on other small bikes — leading me to believe Suzuki intended top gear to be useable. Gaining ground on the wind-blown blossoms covering the lane, I'm quickly past 50mph and watching the bright white speedo needle swinging ever closer to 60mph.

As I pull my wrists and hands in as far as I can take them, and clamp my knees tight against the tank, I come over a gentle rise that flattens out to smoother asphalt. I tell myself to keep it reeled out for another 10 seconds before regaining my senses. Sure enough, I swing past 60 mph, and for a brief moment touch the magic number advertised in the Suzuki literature and magazine road tests of the day.

After that excitement I regain my composure and proceed to finish up a 30-minute ride around the valley, ending up at my favorite little coffee house. With my helmet and gloves perched on the flat seat, I sit back and admire this newest addition to my ever growing list of tiddler experiences. This bike is easily the most refined of the many tiddlers I've ridden, thanks in part to the fact it's the newest of the lot. But most importantly, the little Maverick proves once again that being small isn't a disadvantage. In fact, no "normal" size bike can come close to achieving the same level of excitement for any given speed. Not to mention the attention it gains — and deserves — when parked in a crowd of motorcycle enthusiasts. **MC**

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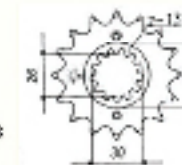
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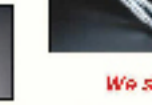
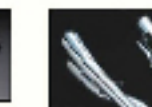
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