

Heathkit of the Month:
by Bob Eckweiler, AF6C

HEATHKIT

Heathkit GT-18 and Heathkit GT-101 Trail Bikes

Introduction:

It's April again, a time when your favorite Heathkit author goes a bit crazy! In April fool's issues past, reviews included an imaginary Heathkit - the C-7 Lakoda, as well as some unusual Heathkits: the GU-1810 Gasoline Log Splitter; the F-2587 Candlestick; H\$-3860 Laptop Computer; and the GDP-5457 "Give-Away" Flashlight. This year we are going to look at two Heathkits that were produced between late 1968 and 1974 as best I can deduce. They are gasoline powered trail-bikes. So put on your leathers, gloves and a helmet where required (or smartly desired). Brush yesterday's bugs out of your teeth and get ready to enjoy the ride. These two trail-bike models were designated the GT-18 and the GT-101; they also had nicknames of the "Boonie-Bike" and the "Hilltopper" respectively.

The GT-18 Boonie-Bike:

Discover The Exciting World of the Boon-docks...With the Amazing New Heathkit "Boonie-Bike" – so reads the ad in the summer 1969 Heathkit catalog (800/93); this is the first catalog I have access to that lists the kit. It is not among the 14 new kits listed on the front page. I believe the kit came out in late 1968, after the main 1969 catalog went to press. One GT-18 trail bike is claimed to have a license tag dated 1968. The GT-18 had evidently become quite a popular kit by the summer catalog with production lagging orders as noted in a sidebar in that catalog ad (Figure 2).

The GT-18 Trail Bike came with a four-cycle Briggs & Stratton engine rated at 5 horsepower.

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Figure 1: Heathkit GT-18 "Boonie-Bike" with GTA-18-2 Horn and Light Kit

It has a two-speed chain drive transmission and an automatic centrifugal clutch. A huge 18 x 8.50 x 8" rear tire gives good traction in *mud, sand, gravel, snow, tall weeds and rough underbrush* according to the catalog ad. A twist-grip throttle on the right handle bar controls engine speed and a lever on the left handle bar operates the efficient Bendix rear brake. A spring-loaded front suspension and a large cushioned seat provides the rider with some comfort. The GT-18 weighs in, less accessories, at 116 lbs. Through its life it sold for \$199.95 plus motor freight shipping (140 lbs.). Higher prices were charged at retail Heathkit outlet stores.

**DUE TO UNPRECEDENTED DEMAND,
THE GT-18 IS ON RESERVATION
BASIS ONLY.**

To reserve your GT-18 for future delivery, use order blank (center of flyer), mark "GT-18 Reservation Only", and return to us. We will promptly acknowledge your reservation and assign a priority number. We will contact you in advance of shipping date to confirm your reservation.

Figure 2: GT-18 Notice in the Summer 1969 catalog

Accessories were available for the GT-18 “Boonie Bike” during its production. These included the GTA-18-1 Ski Accessory (Figure 3) - a front-wheel ski attachment for operating the bike in snow (\$19.95); the GTA-18-2 Horn and Lights Accessory (figure 4) - a battery operated horn, front headlamp and rear tail and brake light (\$29.95); and the GTA-18-3 Battery Charger - for charging the optional 12V, 12-AH battery required for the horn and light kit (\$6.95). The 12 volt 12-AH battery was not available from Heathkit, but was available at the time at most motorcycle shops. In 1971 Heathkit added a fourth accessory, the GTA-18-4 Spark arresting muffler that is approved by the U.S. Forest Service (\$9.95). This is required to use the bike on Federal land.

The GT-18 “Boonie Bike” was advertised to be able to be assembled in one evening. I imagine it would have been helpful to have a second person available due to the weight of the kit. (The finished bike weighs 116 lbs, less accessories and battery.) The bike came with steel fenders front and rear, and a welded tubular steel frame. Ground clearance is 6-3/4” and a welded steel skid plate protects the underside from damage going over rough terrain.

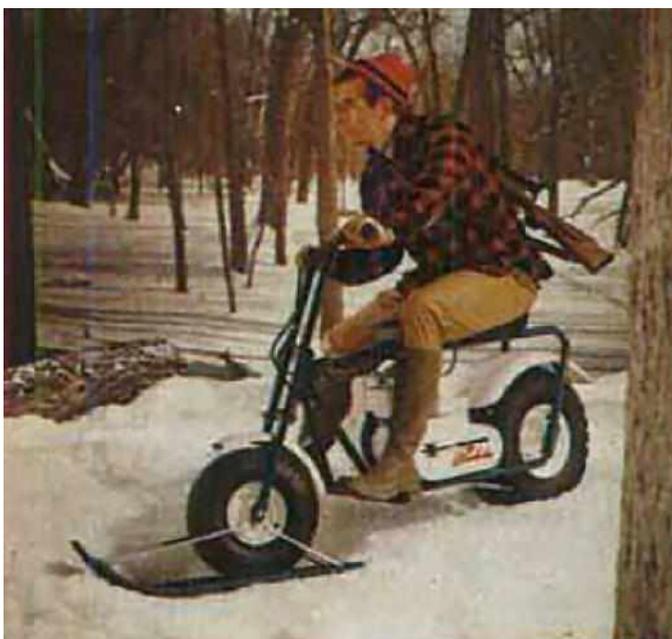


Figure 3: GTA-18-1 Front Ski Accessory - from the Summer 1969 Heathkit Catalog



Figure 4: GTA-18-2 Horn and Lights Accessory - from the Summer 1969 Heathkit Catalog

If operating at night, or “on road”, the horn and light kit is necessary. The front light is a 5-3/4” sealed dual-beam 12V headlamp and the tail/brake light is 3-3/4” dia. and uses a standard automotive 12V bulb. Power for the lamps is provided by a 12V lead-acid battery. The horn and lamp kit comes with a holder for the battery that is painted to match the bike; the battery mounts just in front of the engine on the frame.

Riding a Boonie-Bike must be a lot of fun. It’s top speed (over smooth terrain) is on the order of 30 MPH. The wide rear wheel gives it lots of traction in snow and sand. From what I can glean off the Internet, it has a harsh ride, as can be expected with no rear suspension. This is eased somewhat by the extra large cushion seat. You could get the bike in any color your heart desired as long as it was blue and white!

While looking for information on the “Boonie Bike” I came across a blogger who mentioned buying a used GT-18 with license tags. This bike is designed more for puttering around the farm or large estate, or even out in the woods, so I couldn’t see it being a street bike. Perhaps in some states, in the late sixties, you could get it licensed (though I doubt even then that it could have been licensed in California). The light and horn kit would likely be mandatory, even in the most liberal states.

The GT-101 “Hilltopper” Trail Bike:

After two years of production, a second trail bike was added to the Heathkit stable: The GT-101 “Hilltopper” (Figure 5). It probably came out in late 1970 and was heavily advertised in Popular Science, Boy’s Life and Popular Mechanics in their April 1971 editions. The GT-101 cost \$299.95 originally, though it was often advertised \$50 less, and sometimes with the front ski accessory included free. Three accessories were available for the “Hilltopper”: The GTA-101-1 front ski (\$19.95) - for use on snow; The GTA-101-2 running lights accessory (\$19.95) - for night operation; and the GT-101-3 bumper carrier (\$22.95) - that attaches to the bumper of a car or camper and carries the GT-101 “Hilltopper” or the GT-18 “Boonie Bike”.

The “Hilltopper” has many improvements over the earlier GT-18. A Tecumseh engine with a built-in alternator replaces the Briggs & Stratton engine. The alternator powers the optional running lights kit, removing the need for a heavy and messy battery. A rear suspension was added using two external springs with shock absorbers within; the front struts remain undamped springs. The “Hilltopper” braking capability was improved with both front and rear brakes independently operated by left and right grip levers on the handlebars. An ignition “kill” switch was also added. The tire sizes remain the same, but a new automatic torque converter replaces the two-speed transmission resulting in a gain in top speed to 35 MPH. Gas mileage remains pretty much the same as the horsepower remains at 5 HP, but a larger fuel tank results in an approximate 85 mile range. The engine control continues to be a cycle-type twist throttle on the right handlebar.

The “Hilltopper” remained in production into 1974 as best I can determine. It appears in the Christmas 1973 catalog selling for \$249.95 with the front ski included at no additional cost. My catalog collection is missing 1974 and 1975 so I can’t give more accurate details. The older “Boonie Bike” stopped production around mid 1972.

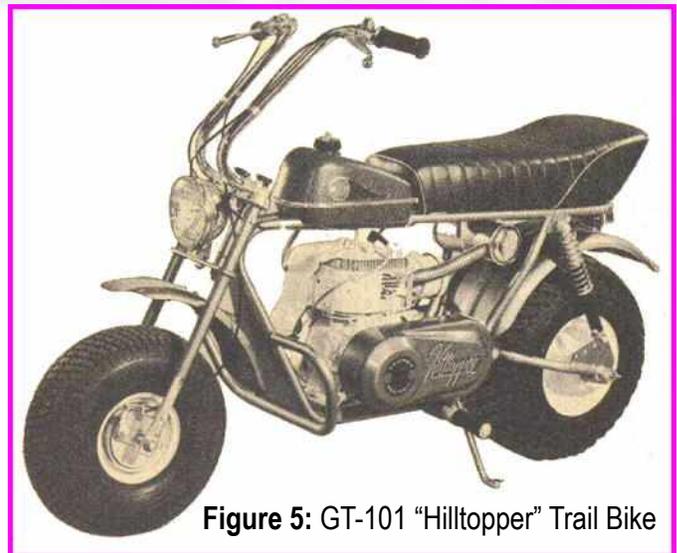


Figure 5: GT-101 “Hilltopper” Trail Bike

Summary:

Heathkit never produced another motorized bike after the “Hilltopper”, even though they sold well and are still popular today. The reason was probably the federal environmental and safety requirements that were being rolled out for the automotive industry in the mid-seventies, as well as being open for liability damages. Still this kit is a “reach” for an electronics kit manufacturer and hence is unusual enough for an April Fools article. Table I, found on the following page, gives available specifications for both bikes.

A review of the Heathkit GT-101 “Hilltopper” can be found at:

<http://users.infoconex.com/~ramrod/heathkit.htm>

A review of the Heathkit GT-18 “Boonie Bike” was printed in the April 1969 issue of Popular Science (Page 106). It is available by Googling: *Popular Science April 1969* (Google Books).

73, from AF6C



This article originally appeared in the April 2015 issue of RF, the newsletter of the Orange County Amateur Radio Club - W6ZE.

Remember, if you are getting rid of any old Heathkit Manuals or Catalogs, please pass them along to me for my research.

Thanks - AF6C

Heathkit Trail Bike Specifications:

Specification:	<u>GT-18 “Boonie Bike”</u>	<u>GT-101 “Hilltopper” Bike</u>
Engine Mfr.:	Briggs & Stratton	Tecumseh
Horsepower/Type:	5 H.P. 4-cycle	5 H.P. 4-cycle
Oil Capacity:	20 liquid ounces	(1)
Muffler:	(Spark Arresting optional)	Spark Arresting (standard)
Clutch:	Centrifugal	Centrifugal
Transmission:	2-Speed	Load sensing torque converter
Low:	15 : 1	(n/a)
High:	7.5 : 1	(n/a)
Drive:	Chain	Jackshaft & Chain
Fuel:		
Gas Tank Capacity:	3/4 U.S. Gallon	1-1/12 U.S. Gallon
MPG (Approximate):	80 MPG	80 MPG
Range (Approx.):	2 Hrs - 60 Miles	3 Hrs - 85 Miles
Suspension:		
Front:	Spring Loaded	16” telescoping front fork
Rear:	None	Shocks, adjustable
Brakes:		
Front:	None	Bendix 4-1/2” (internal expanding)
Rear:	Bendix 5” (internal expanding)	Jackshaft band type
Dimensions:		
Overall Length:	59”	(1)
With optional Ski:	70”	(1)
Width (at handlebars):	24-1/2”	24”
Height (at handlebars):	35-1/2”	39”
Height (at Seat):	25-1/2”	27-3/4”
Wheel base:	42”	44”
Ground Clearance:	6-3/4”	(1)
Load Capacity:	400 lbs.	(1)
Tire Size (Diam. x width - Rim Diam.)		
Front:	5.30 x 4.50-6 Tubeless	5.30 x 4.50-6 Tubeless
Rear:	18 x 8.50-8 Tubeless	18 x 8.50-8 Tubeless
Electrical:		
Power Source:	Optional 12V 12AH battery (Lead - Acid)	Built-in 12V Alternator
OPTIONS:		
Front Ski	GTA-18-1 \$19.95	GTA-101-1 \$19.95
Running Lights	GTA-18-2 \$29.95 (w/horn)	GTA-101-1 \$19.95 (no horn)
Battery Charger	GTA-18-3 \$6.95	(not required)
Spark Arresting Muffler	GTA-18-4 \$9.95	(standard equipment)
Car Bumper Carrier	GTA-101-3 \$22.95	GTA-101-3 \$22.95

(1) Note that I was not able to find the full specifications on the “Hilltopper” online.