

**S**o far this year we've tested three 125cc moto-cross machines, and if you've been paying attention you'll have noticed we felt as though we were testing ourselves into a corner, so similar were the Rickman, the Bultaco and the Montesa. It was hard to pick one over the other since they all got the job done well and they all shared common specifications.

Not the DKW. It differs in many technical respects from all other moto-cross machines; shorter wheelbase, leading link front fork and the appearance more of an enduro machine than an all-out racer. We were sure that it would also differ in performance because of these facts and we were not disappointed. It's different, but delightfully so.

Although the name DKW is an old one, dating back before WW 2, the machine that it now adorns was once a Sachs. As a Sachs it had a fantastic reputation for ride and handling and more than a few times surprised competition riders on much larger machines. Most credit for the superior ride must go to the leading link front suspension

MOTORCYCLIST TEST:

# DKW 125 MX

DECEPTIVE POWER AND  
FANTASTIC FRONT SUSPENSION  
MAKE A COMPATIBLE PACKAGE.

BY TONY MURPHY



now rarely seen on off-road machinery. Greeves, for one, built a reputation with such a system and then abandoned it in favor of conventional telescopic forks. Even DKW has a new moto-cross version waiting in the wings with Spanish Betor telescopic forks. After again sampling the leading link setup we wonder why everybody isn't using it. It's plush.

All the "Deek's" unique features are confined to the chassis. The engine is the old reliable Sachs unit that is now used for a variety of other machines as well as the DKW. In this instance, the DKW name is cast in the side covers, but the engine unit is obviously a Sachs. There's none better for performance and reliability.

With 54mm bore and a 54mm stroke the exact displacement is 123cc. Sporting a 27mm Bing center-float carburetor and a compression ratio of 12:1, horsepower is up over last year. The model tested develops 22, while the yet-to-come version with telescopic forks pumps out 24. That's right in there with the rest of the 125's, and close to many 250's.

The engine unit has had some updating over the last year or two and now incorporates a massive square-finned cylinder and sunburst cylinder head. A forged piston with Dykes-type compression ring delivers the power to the needle bearing big end, supported by full circle flywheels. The right end of the crankshaft drives a Bosch magneto while the left side provides the drive to a constant-mesh six-speed transmission. With the increasing popularity of the 125cc class, the six-speed transmission is in itself a feature. When the chips are down that extra gear can really make the difference, particularly with a smaller engine. Throughout the test, all gear changes were smooth and effortless with or without the clutch. When the clutch was used, its action was easy and could be pulled with two fingers.

Scrutiny of the chassis reveals several clever departures from the norm that typify the Teutonic approach to motorcycle design. There's an extra piece of tubing welded to the frame just in front of the crankcases to protect this vital area from any damage. The front and

rear brake hubs are identical, being interchangeable. That's a little thing but helps keep down the price of the machine and makes it easier on the dealers when they stock essential parts for their customers.

The frame itself is massive-looking but through the use of thinwall tubing the weight is comparable to other 125's, weighing in at 217 pounds. A large-diameter backbone runs down beneath the 2.5-gallon fuel tank and terminates just below the swinging arm pivot point. There it is joined by two smaller diameter tubes that come down from the steering head and under the engine, providing a mount for a skid plate. The swing arm is also robust-looking but again is lightweight. It is equipped with both a chain guide and chain guard.

Compared to other 125 moto-crossers, the seating position seems higher and a little cramped. The handlebars are narrower than most but as we soon found, they offer excellent control. The upswept exhaust system is tucked in away from the rider's leg and incorporates an additional muffler on the end



• Though it may not have the stark look of today's batch of moto-cross bikes, it sure has the performance.



PHOTOGRAPHY: ERIC RICKMAN

of the expansion chamber stinger. Noise level is quite low. Although the foot controls are easy to find they are also well tucked in out of the way of bushes and other hazards likely to snag them. The shift and kickstarter lever are mounted on a common shaft and the shift pattern is the familiar down-for-low. Throughout the test the engine would start with one kick. Hot or cold, just one kick.

By the time we got around to riding the machine, we had some preconceived ideas. In all honesty we didn't expect it to be competitive. Such evaluations are easy to make and we well know that we've been mistaken before. For whatever reason, the DKW just didn't seem to be the ultimate concept of a small moto-crosser, and we were prepared for good rather than great performance. We were wrong, although it took us some time to realize just how

well it did run. All by itself it's deceiving. It just doesn't seem as though it's going fast. It wasn't until we started doing some side-by-side comparisons with other machines that we came to realize that the performance is there. It just does things so easily it's deceiving.

The front end is the most confidence-inspiring we've ever experienced. It doesn't matter what you hit or how hard you hit it. The leading link suspension absorbs it all and you stay under control when you'd be looking for a place to land with most other machines. Unfortunately, the rear suspension is not on par with the front. Even on the hard setting the rear units bottomed on numerous occasions but did offer good control on other than the worst bumps. We tried to avoid jumping through the air since even the well padded seat could not overcome the jarring landings when the suspension bottomed.

## DKW 125 MX

**Model** • Moto-Cross  
**Price** • \$829  
**Displacement** • 123cc  
**Engine type** • 2/S Single  
**Bore & Stroke** • 54 x 54mm  
**HP @ RPM** • 22 @ 7000  
**Compression** • 12:1  
**Carburetion** • 27mm Bing  
**Ignition** • Bosch magneto  
**Gears** • Six  
**Shift pattern** • Left, down-for-low  
**Brakes** • Full width hubs  
**Tire sizes** • F, 3.00x21  
                   R, 3.50x18  
**Oil system** • Pre-mix  
**Clutch** • Multi-plate  
**Primary drive** • Gear  
**Fuel capacity** • 2.6 gallons  
**Weight** • 217 pounds  
**Steering damper** • Yes  
**Folding pegs** • Yes  
**Kill button** • Yes  
**Adjustable shocks** • Yes  
**Tire security bolts** • Yes  
**Wheelbase** • 51 inches  
**Ground clearance** • 10 inches  
**Seat height** • 32 inches



• Compact engine unit pumps out honest 22 hp, drives through six-speed transmission. The chassis is robust but weight is kept way down by eliminating all the non-essentials.

• DKW should call the 125 the "easy rider." The engine never seems to be working and the chassis makes the roughest terrain feel like a paved road.



From corner to corner the engine delivers good power but not the vicious variety. The smooth power, combined with the chassis, puts all the power on the ground. Even in soft dirt there is minimum wheelspin from the 350x18 rear Metzeler. While others might be spinning their wheels trying to get a bite, the DKW will be going straight and true. It's an uncanny feeling and no doubt was responsible for the unfavorable first impressions. Once the side-by-side comparisons sink in, one begins to realize that you don't have to feel like you're going fast to be going fast. The sensation has to be experienced to be believed.

We rode and rode around our favorite moto-cross course and with each successive lap discovered the "Deek" more to our liking. The front end at first seemed a little heavy off of jumps but we soon realized that a squirt of power and a little tug on the bars would get the rear wheel to come down first. Even if the front end did make contact before the rear, the suspension handled it. As our fondness for the machine increased, the rear suspension remained the only sore point. Literally, the only sore point. Taken as it comes, the DKW is competitive on virtually any type of moto-cross course and the only change necessary to make it an all-around winner would be a better set of rear shock units. With that done, we'd have to agree with the DKW advertisement that claims it's "the little bike that wins the big races!" ●