

A KX125 Kawasaki just picked from the vine.

At last! Competition for the Elsinore.

KAWASAKI KX 125

RACE TEST



Kawasaki PR rep Dan McCue enjoys his final moment of dryness. Dan drowned but the KX didn't.



The rotary valve engine is tough to beat in a dead pull.

There are about a thousand KX125s in the United States as you read this, and the number will be growing very soon. The short supply of the little green streaker is not because of a lack of popularity. When it first hit the market it caused a lot of commotion and was rumored a possible threat to the domination of the 125 class by the Honda Elsinore.

Various reasons have been thrown out by the factory as to why they are in such short supply — production schedules, materials, energy crisis, etc. — but we have also found out there were some teething problems, and we think this is one of the primary reasons for that short supply.

It took us quite a while to get our hot little hands on the KX125, but when we did we were treated in style. Not only one showed up, but three of them came, complete with an entourage from the distributor to see how we test bikes. The first day of testing, Randy Milligan and Dan McCue, who have the responsibilities of handling test bikes and public relations for Kawasaki, joined us. We were glad they were there. They had fun and went home as tired and muddy as we were. We were used to it, but we couldn't resist giving Dan an "interesting" day. Randy is another story. He is classed as an expert racer and can take care of himself. When they left we got to keep one of the KXs for as long as we felt it would take us to come up with a fair evaluation of the bike. We liked that and we abused the little booger. We ran the bike



Gassing it over rough sections would lock up the forks.

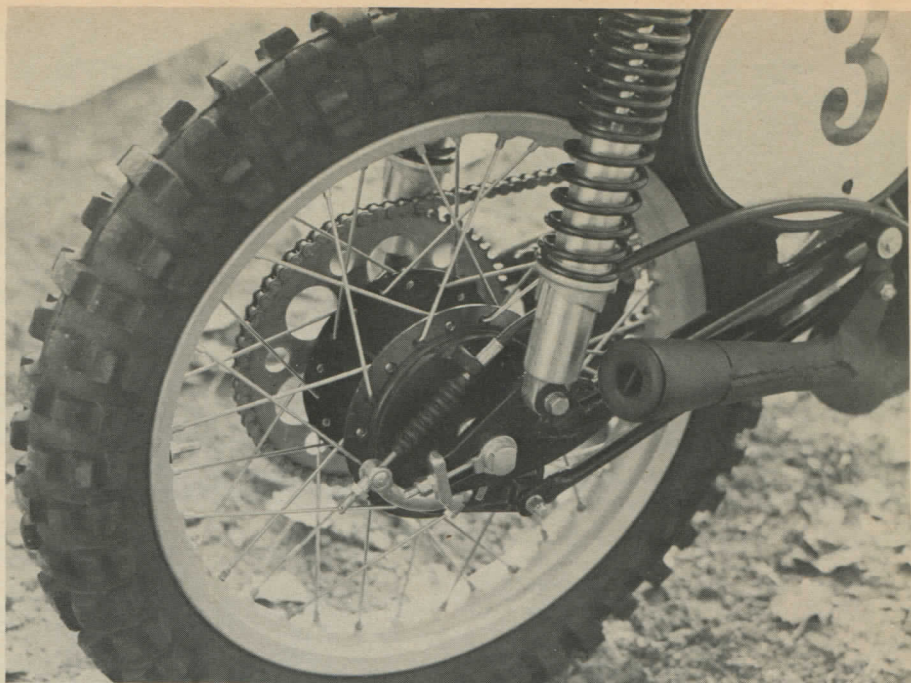


on five different racetracks in the So. Cal. area. On different occasions it rained, it was hot, it was cold. You name it. The bike was thoroughly thrashed during the weeks that we had it.

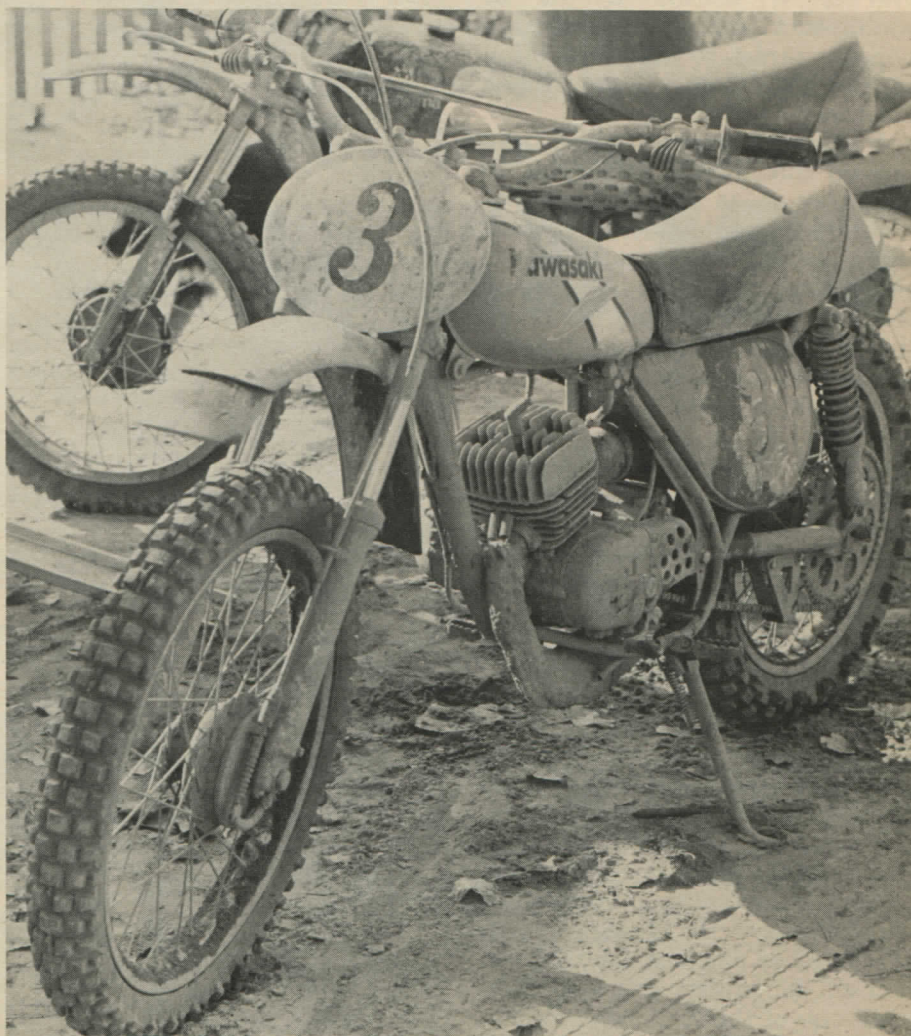
How did we like it? Was it as good as everybody was saying? You bet. We liked it a lot, and in fact feel that it has the best powerband and usable horsepower of any 125 on the market. The six-speed rotary valve powerplant puts gobs of power down low and then runs it through an rpm range that's as wide as Muhammad Ali's mouth. We had the opportunity to run it head-to-head against the '74 and '75 Elsinores. It didn't get beat. We even ran it against a tricked-out Elsie and they were dead even in a drag race. The owner of the Elsie didn't believe it was stock, so we got another KX125 that had just been assembled out of the crate and that *we* knew ourselves hadn't been tampered with. The new KX turned out to be a tad faster than the bike that we had.

Speed isn't everything. During our first introduction to the mean greenie it handled pretty good, but not real good. We blew the shocks out within a couple of hours. The Kawasaki people were there when we did it, which made it nice for us, not nice for them. They knew their shocks weren't that good anyway, but they also knew they had a pretty good bike in spite of some of the problems.

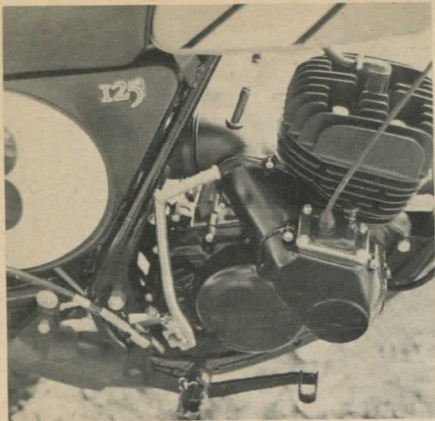
What are some of the problems that have been keeping the KX125 out of production? One major problem, we found out, has been the close spacing of the crank wheels, restricting lubrication to the rod, allowing for big end seizures. Another problem has been the wristpin bearing at the piston. The cage has been breaking up, causing a major headache for the R&D department. The only cure they had until new improved caged bearings were available was to install needles without the cage and then use a washer on each side of the rod to keep them in. The bike we tested was the *new* KX125 with incorporated changes to correct these weaknesses. We had *no* bearing problems and had occasion to check out the rod assembly from time to time, because we wore out two sets of



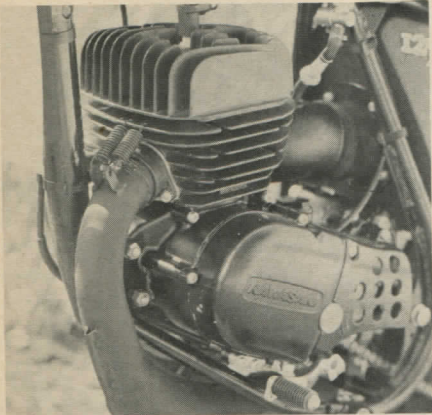
Tires, spokes, rims, hubs, brakes are excellent. Swingarm flexes. Shocks are burnt.



The Kowalski looks better dirty than most bikes do clean.



The well-endowed right side never bothered anybody.



Best stock 125 powerplant we've tested. Three big transfers deliver the torque and an excellent pipe adds the power. You pipe freaks will please note the tapered header and staged defuser.



A broad powerband makes the Kaw react like a 250 in the turns.

rings in the bike before we were done with it. We inspected the cage for the needle bearing each time and found no cracks. The big end bearing was obviously OK, because if it hadn't been it wouldn't have lasted the length of our test. The relocation of the crank wheels and the slotting of the rod at the lower end seem to

have cured any problem the KX125 had.

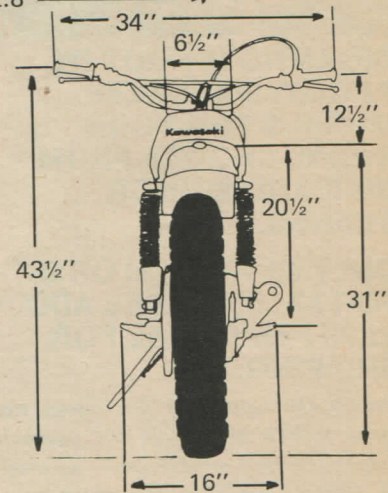
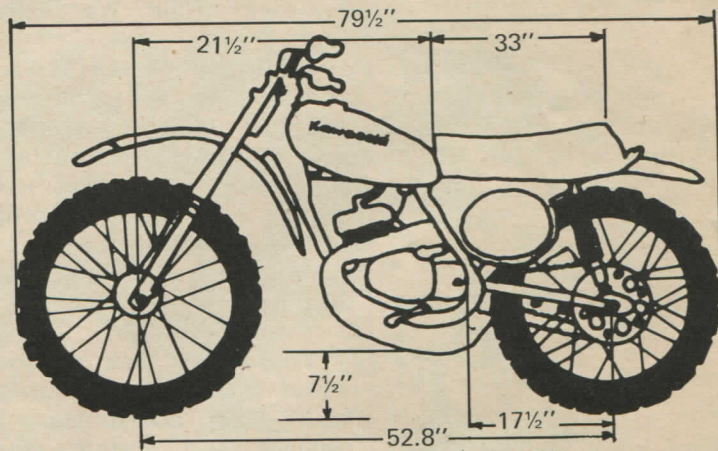
The components that make up Kawasaki's little racer are excellent. Small strong hubs, excellent brakes, shoulderless alloy rims, bendable alloy control levers, spring loaded grippy pegs, cushy seat, small steel tank, light, sturdy air box and on and on. A

lot of thought was put into the bike to make it race-ready. There is even an inline fuel filter. The plastic number plate and side panels are light and easily removable. The throttle assembly is also a light plastic. We broke it. It's made with a flange on the end of it which the special grip tucks over. The plastic used for the

SPECIFICATIONS

MAKE OF BIKE: KAWASAKI

Model & Year	1975 KX 125	Sprockets	13/60
Engine Type	Two-stroke	Ratio	4.61
.....	rotary valve single	Color	Green
Displacement	124.8cc	Frame.....	Single downtube,
Bore & Stroke	56 x 50.6mm	mild steel
Compression Ratio	8.0:1	Forks	5½ inches
Carburetion	26mm Mikuni	Rear Suspension	3½ inches
Ignition	CDI	Front Tire	3.00x21
Lubrication Method	Pre-mix	Rear Tire	4.10x18
Starting System	Primary kick	Curb Weight	192 pounds
Air Filter	foam	Weight Bias	44% - 56%
Recommended Fuel ..	Premium 20:1	Steering Head Angle	31 degrees
Clutch	Wet, multi-disc	Fork Trail	5.09 inches
Primary/Ratio	3.14:1	Fuel	1.7 gallons
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throttle is brittle and thin and if you fall you'd likely break it. We broke it without falling, if you were wondering.

Starting the bike was never a problem under any conditions. You could leave the gas on or off, it didn't matter. First-kick starts were the norm. On some very cold mornings we used the choke button on the front of the carb, but it was a convenience more than a necessity. On one occasion we were running the bike full tilt through troughs of water on the Indian Dunes course. The engine never sputtered. Almost every other bike on the course that day encountered carb and throttle problems. We didn't. Even after directing the spray of the 25-cent car wash on the engine and carb area after a day of testing it was a one-kick affair. We really liked that.

Riding position was comfortable for everyone who rode it. It was easy to move around on the seat and the narrow gas tank gave the necessary clearance for legs. The protruding carb assembly on the right side of the engine was never any problem and the brake arm was easily accessible.

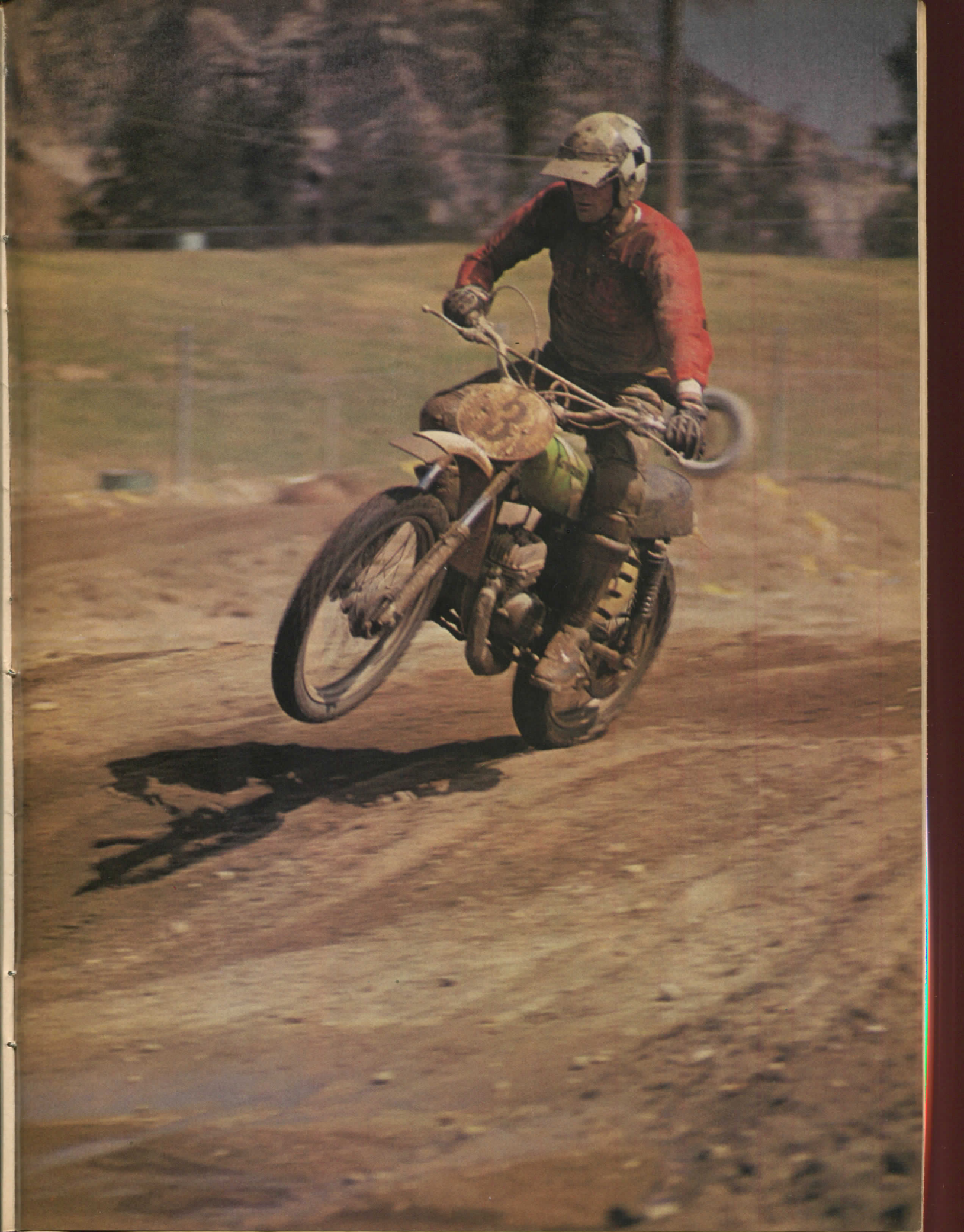
You could lock up the front wheel with extra pressure on the brake lever, but it was a gradual process and didn't give you trouble when braking hard. The rear brake worked equally well and the cable actuated unit gave a more sensitive feel than the rod type, especially since the backing plate is not full-floating. You'll have to learn to use some discretion when braking hard when first riding the bike, especially on hard-packed, slidy surfaces. The tires have a lot to do with this also. They worked perfectly on the loamy, sandy-type courses, but weren't any comparison to what a Metzeler could do on the slidy hard stuff. The low-profile, wraparound Dunlops that come on the bike stock will meet most of your requirements, and then, when they are worn out — which won't take long — you can put on a set of rubber to suit your particular need.

Getting off the start line with the KX125 is probably easier than with most other bikes in its class.

Depending on the course and starting conditions you can dial your power to order because of the wide powerband. When we were drag racing the Kaw against anything and everything we could get to go against it, we found that it got off the line well no matter who was riding it. A lot of different riders got to try it, because we would always switch riders when running up against another bike, to make it fair. The Honda, on the other hand, was a little more difficult, making it easier to blow a start because of the narrower powerband. To an expert it wouldn't make any difference, but to a novice it'll mean a bunch. The same thing can be said for the times when the rider is diving into a hard corner. The wider powerband lets you accelerate out much easier and with less downshifting. This all adds up to fewer rider mistakes because of the engine's power delivery. Again, this isn't that big a thing with the expert, but for everyone else it means more time to concentrate on something else. Like winning.

As we mentioned earlier, the Kaw 125 doesn't handle that good. When we blew out the rear shocks we replaced them with a set of Konis and ran them soft with a 75-pound spring. It was a tremendous improvement, but didn't solve all the bike's problems in the handling department. The forks were really screwed and needed something drastic. We couldn't find anyone advertising a kit, or anyone with the cure, until later on in our testing. As it turned out, a kit by Proven Performance Products developed during our test is going to be available by the time you read this, and it really shaped the handling. Prior to this change, the forks would hydraulically lock when gassing it down a bumpy hill or pounding through a rough section. We bottomed the forks out continuously, and found in a comparison with the Honda forks that it had almost an inch less travel. Another thing which made the whole handling package a problem was the flexiness of the frame components. Landing hard off a tall jump would wobble the KX three or four times before it

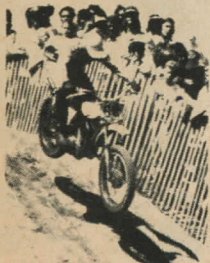
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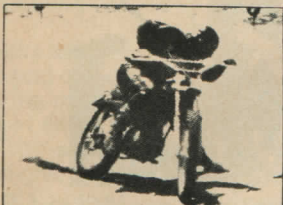
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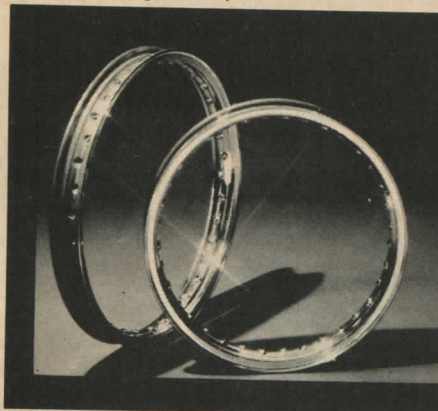
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KAW TEST

Continued from page 50

would settle down. The swingarm is a major source of the problem, and it's easy to detect by pulling on the top of the wheel while the bike is stationary and then checking the movement in the arms. We never had the chance to sort it out, but we're sure that there will be a kit or replacement arms on the market as soon as more KX125s become available.

Once we got the suspension shaped, the bike was a blast to ride. You could lay it over in the turns with the handlebars dragging the ground and lift the front wheel while accelerating out of the corner. Backing it into the long sweepers it was easy to hang it out all the way around, never getting out of shape. You'd giggle to yourself, it'd be so much fun. It handled the turns like a 250 in comparison to the regular 125. The power was strong and controlled and it let you set up drifts without the fear of losing it. On a pipey or narrower powerband engine you've really got to keep it humming to do this and not get spit off. The KX125 made it easy and fun. It also makes you look good to the fence racers.

The gearing of the bike seems to be applicable to any track, and this is probably a result of that wide powerband. We left it stock during our testing and almost decided to change it to race it in the Hopetown GP. We didn't, and it wouldn't have mattered anyway, because that's when the throttle broke two-thirds of a lap into the race with Preston Petty at the controls. He was muttering something about his Hex grips being too tough for Kawasaki's throttle. We think he's right.

Carburetion during our testing was spot-on, and when it was checked with the specs we found it to be stock. We got good color readings from the plug and never had to change it. In fact, we never experienced any engine problems, be it transmission, ignition or anything.

One item we did break, besides the throttle, was the rear fender. Vibration cracked it at the rear mount, and finally it got so bad that it was trashed for a Petty Mudder. The front fender is still

intact. Although we never lost them, the side covers/combination number plates are held loosely by a rubber band that hooks to the frame. There is a gap at the front of these panels that should be duct taped for heavy wet conditions. Another good idea is to seal the fuel line with Silicone Seal or Silastic where it enters the air chamber to the carb. After some wet running we checked the carb for water and found none, but there was evidence of some entering around the fuel line and the gasket area of the throttle cable into the air chamber.

Maintenance on the little Kaw is made easy. They even have a provision for checking the fork oil level, using a dipstick through a bolt hole in the fork stanchion cap nuts. There is access to the idle adjustment of the carb by unsnapping a plug in front of the side case. The brakes have wear indicators. Oil level is checked by dipstick, etc. They have thought of everything as far as maintenance goes, and the owner/shop manual is excellent. Kawasaki has one of the best, if not the best, manuals on the market, no matter which of their models you buy. You can do a complete teardown on the engine with it, including setting all tolerances. It's really boss, and with it comes a whole bag of cheap tools and a spare plug. One thing they should give you is a bunch of springs for the expansion chamber. They fall off faster than you can replace them. The pipe is pretty loose even with the springs. Without them it's ridiculous. We never lost all the springs or the pipe, but we got a lot of blow-by

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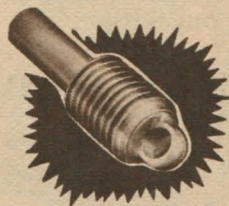


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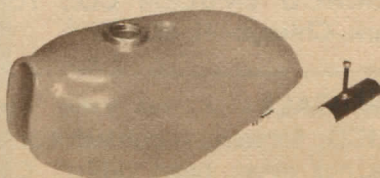
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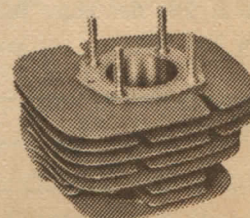


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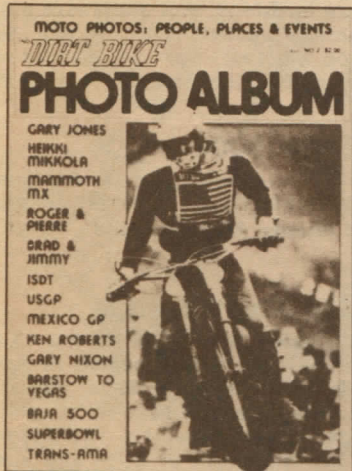
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onto the front fender when it loosened up.

The new little racer from Kawasaki is a winner. When you get the handling shaped on yours, it'll have it all. If more power is needed for your applications, it comes easy with a little knowledgeable porting. The absence of an intake port in the rotary timed system makes for unlimited possibilities in setting up transfer and boost port combinations. And with more holes showing up in the cylinder, just think of the bitchin' pipes you can build. Kawasaki got it together when they made the KX125s, but it would've been boss if they had put it *all* together and finished the package with handling to match the power. As it stands it's still an impressive little screamer, and worth every hard-earned, painfully-saved dollar you shuck out for it. *

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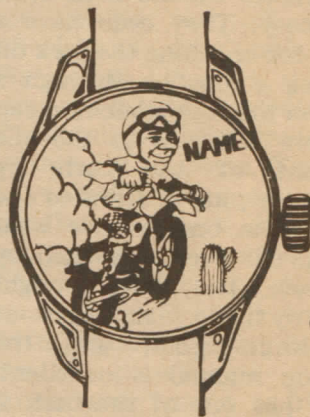
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