

TROPHY GRABBING 250 MAG HUSKY

DIRT BIKE

34355 SEPTEMBER 1974 75¢

**KX 125:
ROTARY ROCKET**

**WHEN
YOU BREAK:
250s**

**BETTER BRAKES FOR YAMAHAS
CZ FRAME-UP**



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FALLEN TIMBERS ENDORS



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Kawasaki really blew it.
Seriously blew it.

Last year, Kawasaki was impressive. They had Brad Lackey, Jimmy Weinert, Peter Lamppu and Jim Cooke riding for them. It was all paying off. Weinert drowned the Europeans in the mud at the Houston Trans-AMA. Lamppu had third place in the National motocross open class. Wyman Priddy had tenth place. Jimmy took fourth nationally with his 250.

With a little road show and some publicity, Kawasaki could have sold eight jillion motocrossers.

Fastest unfinished package in the class

KAWASAKI KX-125 SPEED FREAK

by the Staff of DIRT BIKE



But they didn't, because they didn't have any.

And if they had brought out this bike, this little KX 125 we've been testing, back then... well, they'd be more common than crushed beer cans at the track on Sundays. Because this is a really neat little bike.

It's a six-speed, rotary valve 125 that makes funny noises as it flies down the track. That rotary disc and the fancy pipe give the exhaust a sort of a whoosh and a whine that you can get anywhere in the rev range.

And that's quite a range, too, with a maximum of 17.1 at 9500. But just that one number doesn't tell the story. Check out the dyno



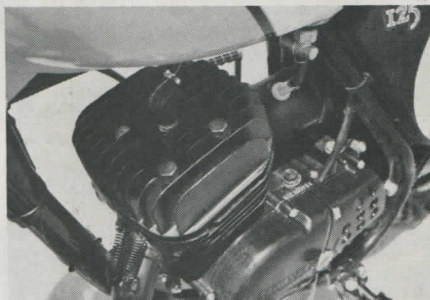
The staff really got off on the KX.

chart and you'll see that the little KX pulls evenly across a 6000-rpm range. In a case like this, it's the shape of the line on the chart that matters.

The dyno built into the seat of your pants confirms it. You come off the line and start shifting wildly. The whoosh and the whine build, and never fall. It seems like you can make shifting mistakes in either direction and never pay for them. Shift too soon and it's OK; the KX still wants to go fast. Shift too late and all you cost yourself is about eight-tenths of a horsepower. It never wants to load up — for normal riders, that is; Al Baker says it will on a long downhill on a Grand Prix course. But then, that's Al Baker.

The rest of us found the machine very competitive in the 125 class. We even managed to blow off a tricked-out Elsinore in a couple of drag races. Once again, it's the way the KX builds power, not the maximum numbers, that counted.

Kawasaki knew the bike would pull; the stock rear tire is a big 4.10 Dunlop knobby. The whole



Somehow that little motor manages to put out 17.1 at the rear wheel. Note the springs holding the exhaust pipe together; keep after them, they tend to disappear.

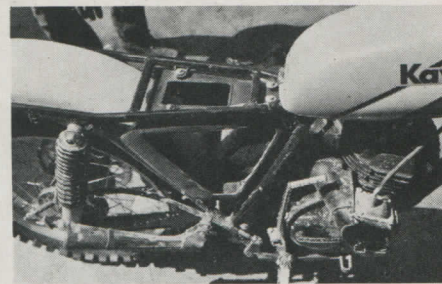


The carb sticks out the right side, like a rotary is supposed to; the button in front of the cable is the choke.

package can fool you; it's so neat to be on a 125 with guts. No waiting for the power to start as the bigger bikes go by you in practice. And you can actually relax, make a corner like you were on a 250; no 125 slithering around, afraid it'll fall off the power.

Yes, it can fool you. One of the staffers held off a 400 for a multitude of laps, then pulled off. The 400 rider stopped too and commented that the KX 250 wasn't too shabby. We didn't tell him; we just kept a knee over the 125 decal so he wouldn't give up the sport in disgust.

Good points for the KX don't stop with the power, either. The bike has excellent geometry. But to find that out, you have to be



Oiled foam filter hides behind a number of fasteners, side plates, etc.

able to separate your feelings about suspension from your analysis of the frame. The reasons for this complication are the KX's suspension components: The shocks are only adequate, and the forks aren't that good. But we'll get back to that; meanwhile, there's the handling to describe.

It's bitchen.

Because it doesn't fit into the normal 125 handling categories. Usually the little one-n-a-quarters have short wheelbases that require straight up and down cornering, or they're long, long kinds that seem to make you horse the chassis around physically — unless you slide it. Don't get us wrong, you can slide any bike; just back up into that corner. It's just that most 125s don't have the power to make that kind of cornering comfortable, even when they have the necessary length.

Now, with the KX, you can do more than slide. Coming in, you just set everything up the way you would with any good-handling 'crosser, tap your brakes, start downshifting, and throw your shoulders over: and what ho! a

genuine two-wheel drift! It skids across the corner perfectly, evenly balanced between front and rear, smacks the berm and shoots off in the new direction. Decent!

Coming out is a gas too. Because that rotary lets the rear tire grab some ground, and snap the bike upright again. You start ignoring your old lines and showing off, spreading roostertails all over the spectators. Not race-efficient; but fun.

On the sweepers, when the bike was new (and the tire was still sharp), you could actually flattrack the KX around, but the tire's knobs started ripping and rounding off in two or three rides. After that, you had to think out the sweepers and the off-camber corners. To keep the worn tire



Al Baker blew up some berms for us.

from coming all the way around, you have to find a soft spot or a little berm somewhere on the corner, then stick the back wheel in there and keep your hot line.

At least it still works.

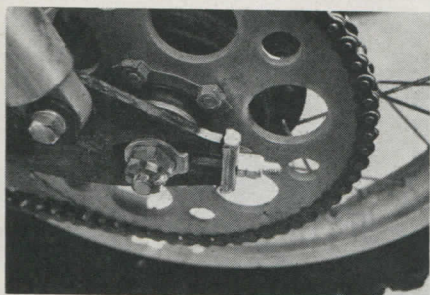
On the other end of the scale for goodies are the forks and shocks. Our very first ride on the KX revealed a rebound damping problem; off a big jump and into the air, there was a terrifying clank as the fork springs pushed the tubes out to their maximum extension. Then this problem disappeared and only returned occasionally thereafter; instead, the forks bottomed out from then on. Oh, not constantly; just

enough to keep you aware of the problem, and enough to ensure that the rider would carefully select the smoothest line through any choppy stuff.

The front end problem never became a major, mostly because the bike has motor enough to make the weight transfer to the rear possible when the rider was in doubt.

There were no accessories available for a bike as new as this one, so we never experimented with the Trickit concept, or anything like that. Sorry.

The back end of the bike didn't bother anyone as much as the forks. But a strange thing happens

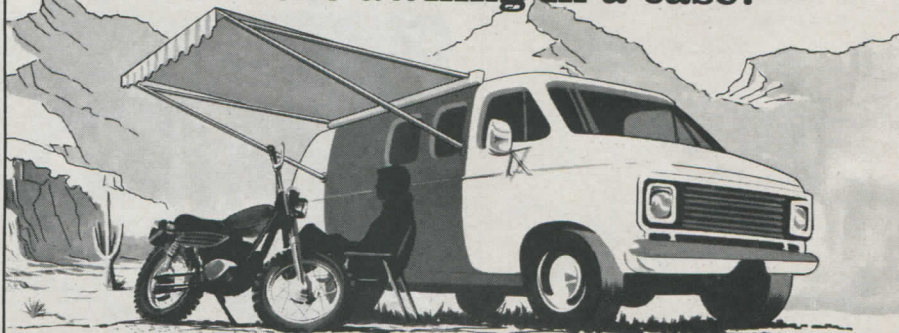


Caps on the chain adjuster keep the whole business from sliding down under the swingarm.



George slid into some corners.

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KAWASAKI 125

PRICE: retail, approx. \$840

ENGINE TYPE: Two-stroke, rotary valve

single

DISPLACEMENT: 124.8cc

BORE & STROKE: 56mm x 50.6mm

COMPRESSION RATIO: 8:1

CARBURETION: Mikuni VM26SC

HP @ RPM: (claimed) 22 @ 9750
(actual) 17.1 @ 9500

CLUTCH: Wet, multi-disc

PRIMARY DRIVE: Gear (3.14:1)

GEAR RATIOS: 1) 2.27:1

2) 1.69:1

3) 1.33:1

4) 1.14:1

5) 1.00:1

6) 0.89:1

FINAL DRIVE: 4.61:1, chain

13-tooth countershaft

60-tooth rear sprocket

AIR FILTRATION: Oiled foam

ELECTRICAL SYSTEM: CDI

magneto

LUBRICATION: 20:1 pre-mix

RECOMMENDED FUEL: Premium

RECOMMENDED OIL: Two-stroke

racing oil

FUEL CAPACITY: 1.7 gallons

FRAME: Single downtube

SUSPENSION:

(front) 6.3-inch telescopic

(rear) 3.5-inch shocks

WHEELS: Shoulderless alloy

TIRES: (front) 3.00x21 Dunlop

(rear) 4.10x18 Dunlop

DIMENSIONS:

Wheelbase: 52.8 inches

Ground Clearance: 7 inches

Seat Height: 33 inches

Handlebar width: 36 inches

Weight: (claimed) 178 pounds dry

(actual) 187 pounds

with a quart of gas

(on front wheel) 43.3%

(on rear wheel) 56.7%

BRAKES: Drum

INSTRUMENTS: None

LIGHTS: N/A

SILENCER: Yes, quiet

SPARK ARRESTOR: No

PRIMARY KICK: Yes

PARTS PRICES: (frequently replaced items):

Piston assembly: \$21.16

Rings: \$9.60

Clutch cable: \$4.80

Cylinder: \$63.30

Shift lever: \$6.70

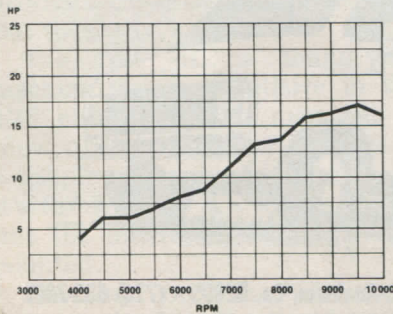
Brake pedal: \$6.00

Clutch lever: \$2.90

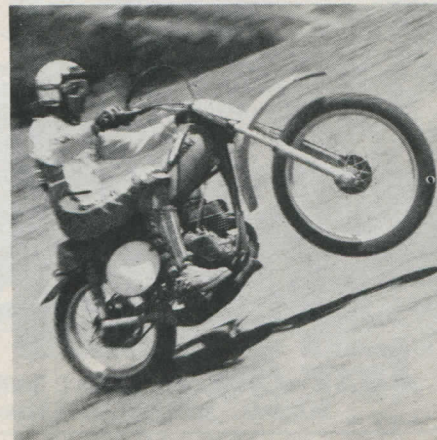
Front fender: \$13.92

Rear fender: \$24.30

Throttle cable: \$4.64



And Al jumped off some cliffs.



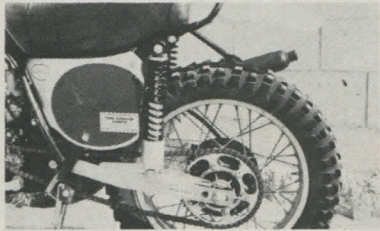
when you get the front end of a bike sorted out; the shocks are suddenly terrible. Since the KX didn't have impressive absorbers to begin with, we assume that this would have happened. Anyway, that's what *did* happen with the KX 250 we tested a while ago.

Let's get back to the good stuff; this time, the brakes. Both are super. You can adjust the front for either extreme: two-finger lock-up with next-to-no lever travel; or back off everything so that full-on occurs when the lever is against the throttle. Or just leave it somewhere in between. In any and all cases, the action is positive and controllable. And the brakes work without any twist, unlike some sloppy brakes we've used that want to torque the handlebars one way or another.

The back stopper just about



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finishes off the full-floating brake myth, too. The rear brake is a cable-operated unit with a long anchoring arm, and it works fine. Better than a lot of floating units we had the misfortune of locking up.

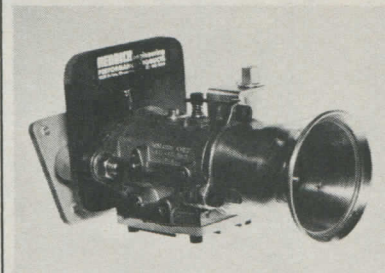
There was some amount of unnecessary activity at the back end during the usual hard-braking, nasty-terrain situations, but it's a suspension problem again.

We had gearbox troubles on our last riding day with the KX 125, right before we gave it back. Two things happened, each experienced by all the test riders. First, we had trouble downshifting out of the upper gears. The trans seemed to be hung up above third, but each time, it could be cured by using the clutch, just that once. Then things went right for a long while after.

And the other thing would only happen after a sixth gear straight; someone would be bombing along, shut everything down for the corner, and snap down three or four gears. Usually there's some amount of engine braking at this

Cont'd. on page 96

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KAWASAKI

Cont'd. from page 46

point, but the KX would feel like it was in a neutral. If you pushed down another cog, there'd definitely be a gear, but it would be the wrong one. One too low and the engine would really sing.

On the other hand, if you ignored the neutral feeling, went through your corner and got back on the gas, it would turn out to be in the right gear. Strange. Maybe the detent was sitting in the slot, but it wasn't fully engaged.

However, it happened after a solid month of riding and probably reflected some worn surfaces. But we let you down again because we didn't find out exactly what was going on, and we gave the bike back.

Enough apologizing.

BITS AND PIECES

The KX *really is* one of those bikes you read about that makes people walk up to you and tell you how good looking it is. They did it all the time. We usually sold them subscriptions to the magazine.

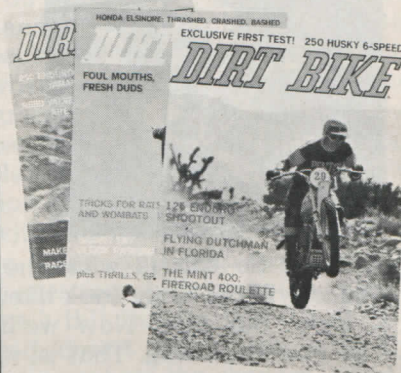
Layout was good, fitting our entire range of editors without any hassles. That's from a high of six feet to a low, low of 5' 8".

Kawasaki has pumped a lot of pleasant little details into this machine. Examples are the fuel filter already in the line (though it's one of the kinds we didn't like); the inspection hole for adjusting the carb even though it's inside the cases (rotary, remember?); the double sheaths on wear points of the cables; the cap that locks the chain adjuster onto the swingarm, preventing the all-too-common rotating adjuster problem.

Two more details deserve special mention. The first is the inspection screw in the fork caps. You just use a big screwdriver to get it out and then you can check the level of the fork fluid with a dipstick. Fabulous. Doubt is banished forevermore.

And the second is the manual. Instead of the old-style rider's handbook, Kawasaki gives you what amounts to a shop manual. The kind you used to have to pay ten bucks for. It's a genuine maintenance manual, giving you all kinds of values to measure

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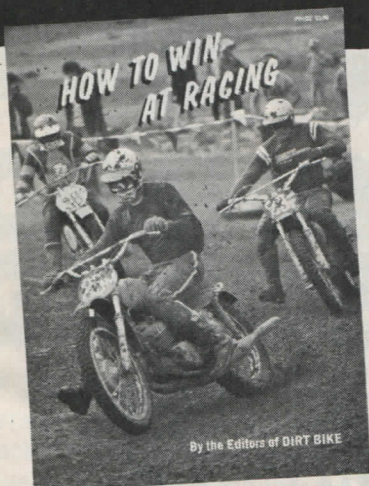
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D4-9

parts against so that you catch worn components before they result in DNF's. That even includes little things like brake return springs and all. There's even a picture showing how to use a plastic bag to lube your cables; if someone had sent that in to us as a hot setup, we would've paid them five dollars.

And we have a couple of snivels. Naturally. First one was the flat rear tire. It happened twice. Seems that one of the rimlocks just wore out the tube. Twice. Ugh. We hate changing tires.

The footpegs are held in place with a simple bolt through the mount. The constant flopping of the pegs wears out the cheap bolt fast. Replace those bolts with the best you can find, or you'll be sorry later.

White plastic fenders seem to be the style these days; admittedly, they're light and neat looking, but we found cracks in the rear one. It also got permanently deformed and discolored when George managed to get himself run over by a Maico. It looked like one of those plastic dishes that'd been left on a stove by accident.

One last snivel. The air box design is simple and the snap-on side/number plates are a good idea. But we're not convinced that the seal is adequate for a really sloppy motocross track with water crossings and such things on it. The drain for this box is a plastic thingie at the bottom that swivels; turned in the wrong direction, it could act like a scoop for water thrown off the rear tire. We'd suggest you 3M it down.

SUMMARY

Super-neat and competitive. If you go to the trouble (and you should) and sort out the suspension, then you can give the local Elsinores some real competition. Because once you get past that hassle, you'll be able to drive the KX around the track with a complete disregard for sanity. Stuff it into corners, do mighty leaps, throw rocks at the people behind you, all that neat stuff.

It's just too bad they didn't have this thing on the market last year, instead of giving away the first innings to Honda.



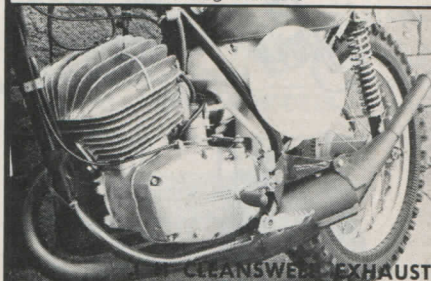
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