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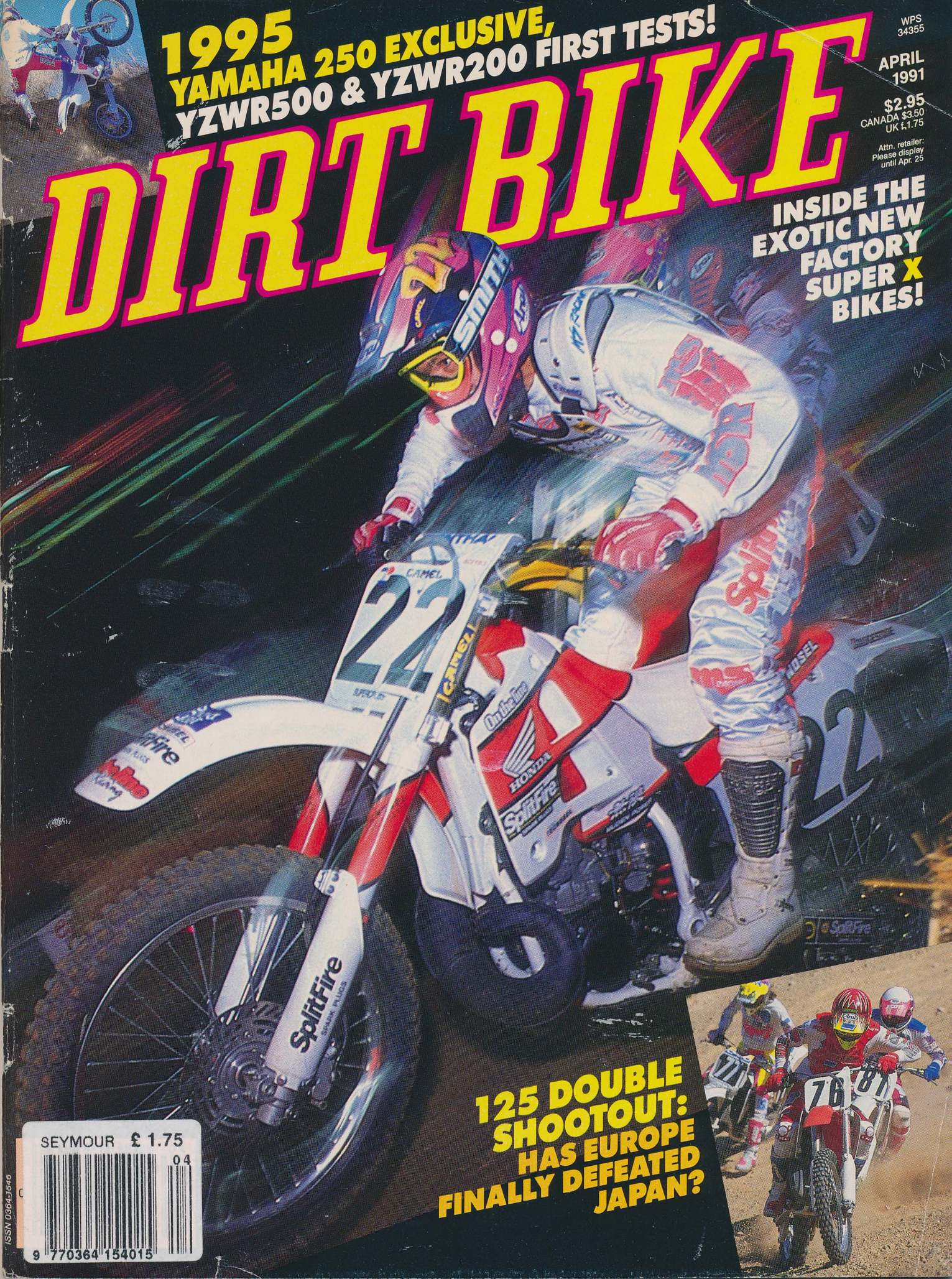
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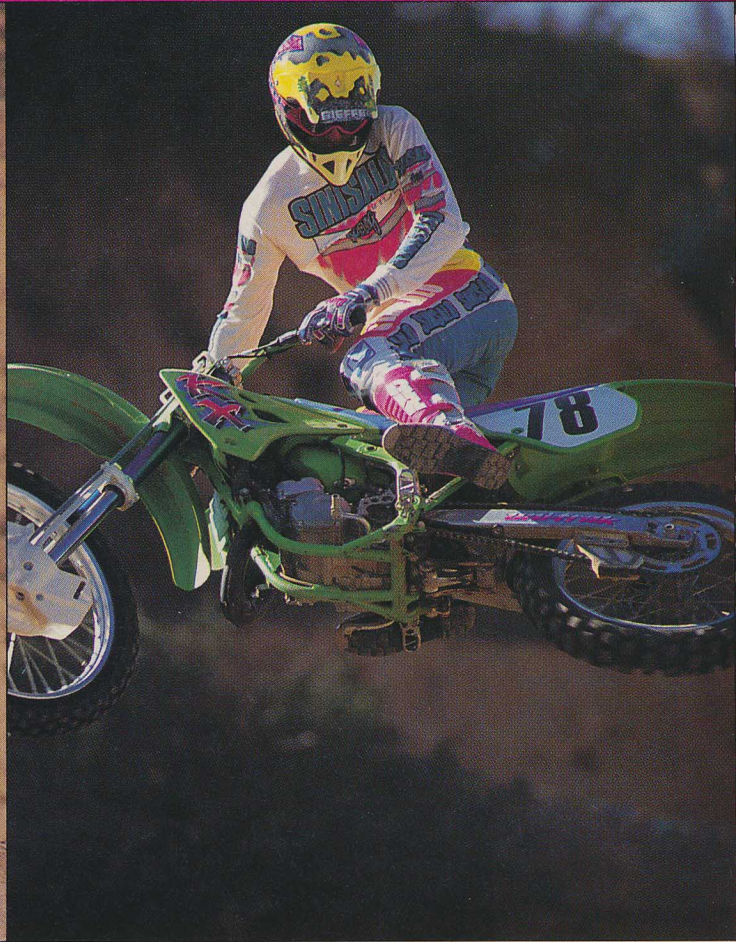
APRIL 1991
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ON THE COVER: "Zip" Ty Davis streaks on an On The Line CR while Jim Holley free-falls on a WR200. In the meantime, the 125 MXers line up to be fed to the *Dirt Bike* crusher. Photos, cover design and color separations were tag-teamed by Chris Hultner, Ron Lawson, Tim Tolleson, DeWest and Valley Film.

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Last year Yamaha built an expert-only screamer. This year the YZ's power is moved downward in the rev range, and the suspension lets it hook up and haul out of corners, once you massage the reeds.

After the hair-pulling experience of the the 1991 250 shootout, we were not at all looking forward to the 125 shootout. The 250s were sooo close, we figured the 125s would be nearly indistinguishable too, and picking a winner would be harder than defusing a grenade while wearing oven mitts. Last year's 125 shootout was tough to call because all the offerings were flawed in some way, and it was a nightmare deciding which flaw was least severe.

Every manufacturer made revisions to the '90 designs for '91 in an attempt to correct the flaws of the previous year and create a winner for the new season. As we rode each Japanese 125 it did seem better than the old effort, but the difference was far from earth-shattering. Clearly, the 125s were not as improved for the new year as the awesome

250s. Had someone really done his homework right, we'd have a clear winner, but it was not to be.

GOALS FOR '91

Everybody complained about the '90 CR125R suspension, and a few owners sneveled about high-rpm popping, but most agreed the CR motor was the best in the business. Honda addressed those two problems for '91, completely revising the Showa fork and bolting on a Kayaba shock, along with slight motor mods to cure popping. The 45mm fork was reconfigured to reduce oil contamination, got a stiffer spring rate, a larger-capacity cartridge and new valving. The shock also was revalved, and the 125 got '90 CR250R-style Heim joints and linkage bearings. Head mods, more ignition advance above 11,000 rpm, slight carb changes and a 250-style airbox and filter were the only motor news.

Honda blew it. The fork is a little better, but the shock is still far from perfect. Also, the new motor pops, where our old bike never did! Why spend \$3498 on a '91 when

Read the test and you might think the KX125 is a loser. Not so. The Kawasaki is a hard-hitting, berm-blasting package with excellent suspension, but even our experts think the KX is a handful.

you can spend \$300 revalving your '90 and end up with a better, faster bike?

Kawasaki, which won only one 125 outdoor National moto in '90, worked on getting more peak power and a wider powerband out of the same basic motor, plus increased flywheel effect and motor reliability. The suspension was also upgraded, with a new 43mm Kayaba fork, more progressive Uni-Trak leverage ratio and more linear shock valving. The KX125 was the porker of the '90 model year, so Kawasaki shaved a few pounds here and there.

Kawasaki blew it. The killer midrange hit that the '90 motor had is tamed, but the new bike isn't really any faster, just easier to ride. The suspension is better but far from perfect, and the KX125 is still the heaviest Japanese 125 on the track.

FOR BETTER OR WORSE? *Hang on to your old 125!*
By the DIRT BIKE Staff



The CR has the best motor and the most improved suspension of the Japanese 125s. Action is immensely better at both ends. Unfortunately, it still has the worst suspension of the lot.

Suzuki won the suspension category hands down in '90 but, for some strange reason, decided to throw away the Kayaba components in favor of Showa units for '91. The motor received a lot of minor mods to boost efficiency (power) and reliability, things like moving the power valves for a better seal, making the piston more slippery and changing the silencer for more flow. Third through sixth gears were strengthened, as was the shifter assembly. Suzuki also made a bunch of little changes to the chassis to make the new RM125 handle better and be easier to maintain.

Suzuki blew it. The new Suzuki is different but not necessarily any better. It makes more low-end power and is a little less slow on top. The fork is better than last year's, but the shock is not.

Yamaha put the most effort into its 125 B-1. New shifting, major porting changes, a new head and piston, increased clutch size and new plates were pumped into the motor. A new airbox, seat base, pipe and silencer also were intended to get more flow and power. A new frame, swingarm, 43mm Kayaba fork and different shock valving and

brakes were aimed at improving terrain control and handling.

Yamaha blew it. Instead of the B-1 Bomber, we got the B-1 Bummer. The '91 YZ125 is slow. It has much better shifting, clutch feel, brakes, suspension and handling, but it will barely get out of its own way, stock. Such is life in 1991.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT—CHEAPLY

Honda's jetting is too lean on the bottom and too rich on top. We went from the stock 172 main to a 168, switched the 1469 needle for a slightly richer 1468 and left the pilot stock (#58). This cut down the popping on top and fattened the low-end a bit, but the '91's low-end isn't as strong as the '90's. We installed an Answer Roost Boost (\$59.95) and got a vaguely noticeable increase in power at lower revs, although some of our faster riders liked the power just fine without the Roost Boost. These experts can do without low-end and prefer the smoother power delivery of the non-Boosted motor. The sad part is that, with or without the Roost Boost, a stock '90 CR125R will smoke the '91. For a 155-pound fast rider, we set the fork at seven clicks out and the shock at nine compression and nine rebound with 100mm of sag.

Like the CR, our KX came too rich on top. Our KX125 test unit wasn't as fast as other '91 KXs, so we installed a Swaser

The Suzuki rates high in every category except power. It has good low-end and midrange power, making it a great novice bike, and it has handling that pros will love once they pump up the engine.

spark plug capacitor (see "Ten Rides After" in this issue). The hotter spark burned the too-rich top-end mixture more efficiently, eliminating the bog we experienced when wicking the throttle, but this is a Band-Aid fix. We removed the Swaser unit and went to a 157 main and slightly leaner NOEK needle (clip in the second position). Through the grapevine, we hear that no two 125 Kaws run alike this year. In fact, ours was a little slower than another that just happened to be handy during a test session. If you still experience bogging, go up one or two teeth on the rear sprocket. For a 155-pound rider, we set the suspension at 9/9 (comp./reb.) front and 13/6 rear with 97mm sag.

We removed the airbox mud cover and put the needle clip in the middle position on our RM125. To take advantage of the better low-end power, we raised the gearing slightly with a two-tooth-smaller rear sprocket. We set the fork at 9/4 and shock at 24/3 for a 155-pound rider, with sag set at 100mm. A 36mm Keihin will make this bike absolutely rip and get better gas mileage, but we left the bike stock for this comparison.

Yamaha technicians modified the reed as-



125 SHOOTOUT

sembly on our YZ125. They cut the fingers off the metal reed stops so they had two metal strips with screw holes in them. They also chamfered the leading edge so it wouldn't cut the reed. Then they cut the old reeds down to one inch in length and put new reeds under the old ones. Of course, you can buy Boyesen reeds for \$29.95, but stock reeds cost \$14.80. This cheap fix makes the YZ much more responsive and competitive. Yamaha also has a Wrench Report on modifying the stock pipe. Yamaha says to add 5mm to the midsection, at the first seam after the headpipe, and the bike will pull even harder throughout the range, but it still flattens out on top. If you ride on tight and sandy or loamy tracks and experience bogging between gears, go to a one-tooth-larger (52) rear sprocket. Our reed-modified YZ didn't bog (we left the pipe stock for this comparison), so we left gearing stock. Set the fork at 12/17 out and shock at 12/9 out with 97mm sag for a 155-pound rider.

Now that the bikes are as good as they're going to get, short of getting out a fat wallet, porting grinder and valving shims, let's start the shootout! Heads-up testing consisted of sessions from L.A. County Raceway's stadium-style sand track to DeAnza's hardpack, choppy, high-speed outdoor track.

POWER PICKS

Despite a tendency to break up (pop) at high rpm over bumps, the CR125R would walk away from the other 125s on top-end, regardless of track type or condition. The RM125 flattened out a bit sooner than the CR but refused to pop, and the KX125 would barely pull the YZ125 on hardpack. In deep sand, the YZ had the edge slightly over the KX. Honda clearly wins here, but second through fourth is very close. Peak power ratings are CR, RM, KX and YZ, but the sad part is that a stock '90 CR will beat all of the '91s on top.

MOTOR MANNERS

Pros might only be interested in peak power, but how a motor reaches those peak revs is more important to most riders. If a bike has the powerband of a Tomahawk missile, it'll be unridable to all but motocross' elite pilots. Honda has the widest spread of usable power, but the YZ125 wins this category with a snappy, easy-to-ride power spread. It is the easiest 125 to keep on the pipe and has the best acceleration out of corners. Yamaha got rid of the raspy delivery of old and smoothed the midrange to help it hook up better on slick surfaces.

Second goes to the Suzuki, which has a bit less flywheel than the YZ, making it a bit more skittish on slick hardpack. It also has a bit better low-end than the CR125, which takes third. The Honda has a slight-

◀ **If there are just '91 125s on your local starting line, the CR125 will reach the first turn first. The trouble is that there will be several '90s at most races, so the '91s will get smoked.**



Still not perfect: Despite huge improvements in suspension action, the CR125R is still a handful on stutter bumps. The Honda's wheels don't follow small irregularities in terrain as well as the other machines' wheels do.



Whip it good: The Kawasaki 125 is the largest and heaviest machine of the bunch. It doesn't refuse to respond to the rider's wishes; it just takes more muscle to whip the KX over jumps.



Slim sailplane: The RM125 is the style king over jumps. It's light, slim and ergonomically perfect. Suzuki has the best suspension and chassis, but the motor is still missing in action.



Launch mode: Our reed-modified YZ125 is the fastest machine out of corners. The Yamaha revs quickly but controllably and has excellent clutch and shifting. If it just had a little more on top . . .

ly wider powerband, but it happens higher in the rev range, and the CR is harder to keep on the pipe than the RM. The CR's extra flywheel makes it very controllable on hardpack and mud. Fourth goes to the KX125, which is much more controllable than last year but still the hardest 125 to ride, motor-wise. It has little in the basement, then hits more abruptly than any other 125. As a result, the KX pilot will have to abuse the clutch more than any other 125 rider.

FORK FACTS

Our 125 pilots range from 135 to 180 pounds in weight, and most had trouble deciding whether they like the KX or RM fork better. Both offer a good compromise between suppleness on small bumps and bottoming resistance on big hits, and both have a wide range of adjustability to accommodate different rider skill levels and sizes.

The KX has a stiffer spring and is aimed at larger, more aggressive riders, though. Lighter pilots have to back way off the compression adjuster to get the front to settle into corners. Still, more riders gave the nod to the KX fork over the RM.

Yamaha takes third. The 43mm Kayaba fork has a wide range of adjustments to suit a great variety of riders, but it's valved more towards plushness for less aggressive riders. The YZ draws rave reviews on whooped-out sand tracks but doesn't handle choppy hardpack as well as the KX KYB or RM Showa units. Fourth goes to the Honda, which is much improved since last year, but the new Showa fork doesn't follow small bumps in and out of corners as well as the other '91s. It skips and hops, forcing the CR rider to pay closer attention to line selection and braking.



	HONDA CR125RM	KAWASAKI KX125-H2	SUZUKI RM125M	YAMAHA YZ125-B1
Engine type	Liquid-cooled, case-reed, power-valved 2-stroke	Liquid-cooled, case-reed, power-valved 2-stroke	Liquid-cooled, case-reed, power-valved 2-stroke	Liquid-cooled, case-reed, power-valved 2-stroke
Displacement	124.8cc	124cc	124.8cc	124cc
Bore and stroke	54mmx54.5mm	56mmx50.6mm	54mmx54.5mm	56mmx50.7mm
Carburetion	36mm PJ Keihin	35mm PWK Keihin	35mm NTM Mikuni	35mm TM Mikuni
Fuel tank capacity	2.0 gal. (7.5L)	2.2 gal. (8.5L)	2.1 gal. (8.0L)	2.1 gal. (8.0L)
Gearing	13/51	12/48	13/51	13/51
Running weight w/no fuel	205 lb.	208 lb.	202.5 lb.	199.5 lb.
Wheelbase	56.9 in. (1445mm)	57.1 in. (1450mm)	56.8 in. (1445mm)	57.9 in. (1470mm)
Rake/trail	25.8°/4.33 in.	25.5°/4.3 in.	27.3°/4.37 in.	27°/4.72 in.
Ground clearance	14.2 in. (360mm)	15.6 in. (395mm)	14.2 in. (360mm)	14 in. (355mm)
Seat height	38.4 in. (973mm)	37.4 in. (950mm)	37.8 in. (960mm)	37.2 in. (945mm)
Tire size and type:				
Front	80/100-21 Dunlop K490	80/100-21 Dunlop K490	80/100-21 Dunlop K490	80/100-21 Dunlop K490
Rear	110/100-18 Dunlop K695	100/90-19 Dunlop K695	110/90-19 Dunlop K695	100/90-19 Dunlop K695
Suspension:				
Front	Showa cartridge inverted 45mm fork, adj. comp., 12.0 in. (305mm) travel	Kayaba cartridge inverted 43mm fork, adj. comp./reb., 12.2 in. (310mm) travel	Showa cartridge inverted 45mm fork, adj. comp./reb., 12.2 in. (310mm) travel	KYB cartridge inverted 43mm fork, adj. comp./reb./prel., 11.8 in. (300mm) travel
Rear	Pro-Link, KYB piggyback res., adj. comp./reb./prel., 12.2 in. (310mm) travel	Uni-Trak, KYB piggyback res., adj. comp./reb./prel., 13.0 in. (330mm) travel	Full Floater, Showa piggyback res., adj. comp./reb./prel., 12.8 in. (324mm) travel	Monocross, KYB piggyback res., adj. comp./reb./prel., 12.4 in. (315mm) travel
Country of origin	Japan	Japan	Japan	Japan
Suggested retail price	\$3498	\$3349	\$3399	\$3499
Distributor/manufacturer	American Honda Motor Corp. 1919 Torrance Blvd. Torrance, CA 90501-2746 (213) 783-2000	Kawasaki Motor Corp. 9950 Jeronimo Rd. Irvine, CA 92718 (714) 770-0400	American Suzuki P.O. Box 1100 Brea, CA 92621 (714) 996-7040	Yamaha Motor Corp. 6555 Katella Ave. Cypress, CA 90630 (714) 761-7300
REPLACEMENT PARTS COSTS				
Piston	\$46.48	\$44.20	\$26.92	\$27.30
Ring	10.04	7.36	10.61	6.00
Clutch plate (drive)	4.82 (7)	7.22 (8)	4.79 (8)	6.30 (7)
Clutch plate (driven)	5.82 (6)	5.34 (7)	2.81 (7)	4.30 (6)
Front sprocket	10.15	13.88	8.57	13.20
Rear sprocket	47.97	60.30	61.76	47.90
Front brake pads	21.85	32.00	32.99	28.10
Rear brake pads	21.85	32.00	25.53	25.70

125 SHOOTOUT

SHOCK WAVES

This is where things get really weird. Suzuki got the nod for having the best shock last year, but it wasn't perfect. The Kayaba shock was replaced with a Showa, which isn't as good as the unit it replaces but is still good enough to beat the other bikes' shocks. Lighter riders complain of harshness, but the RM follows the bumps better than any other Japanese 125. A close second goes to the KX125, which is also set up on the stiff side for lighter pilots. It delivers a slightly harsher ride than the Suzuki Full-Floater rear end. On chop, the YZ and CR rear ends are more busy than the RM and KX, but the YZ does a better job of following stutty bumps than the busy CR. None show any blatant midstroke harshness or tendency to kick, swap or bottom too severely.

In review, we have:

Fork: KX, RM, YZ, CR.

Shock: RM, KX, YZ, CR.

Overall suspension: RM, KX, YZ, CR.

HANDLING REVIEWS

Put together 100 riders and you'll get 100 different riding styles. There are at least 100 variables that determine how a machine handles berms, off-camber turns, whoops, rough sweepers, jumps, etc. No machine can

be the perfect bike in each situation for all 100 riders, but some machines come closer than others. Here are our evaluations, so you can look at your needs and style, then see which bike best fits them.

Suzuki's RM125 is the best all-around handler. It carves corners like a laser scalpel, slides predictably when you want it to, follows ruts with minimal input, tracks straight in whoops, ricochets off berms with abandon, feels nimble in the air and doesn't do anything scary on rough sweepers. If it has a handling quirk it's that the front end is a little too quick. Suzuki changed the steering head bearings this year to allow you to tighten the headset more predictably so you can slow steering and eliminate the slight headshake.

Honda rates a close second overall. The CR125 turns almost as quickly as the RM but is a bit more busy in throttle-off situations. Suspension has a lot to do with overall stability, so the CR requires more concentration in stutty bumps and choppy sweepers. It shakes its head slightly but dives into ruts without a fight. The CR refuses to push or wash out on off-cambers and smooth, slick corners, but some of our experts noticed the lack of a 19-inch wheel in the back. On hardpack, the 18-inch simply didn't hook up as well as the competi-

tion. Jumps are a gas on the CR, as it will ignore lips on take-off and do anything you want in the air. Its handling flaws are related more to suspension than any glitch in geometry, and the CR pilot is the last to get arm pump on rough, technical tracks.

Yamahas have long been known for neutral handling, and the YZ125-B1 is no exception. It won't slice the inside line quite as easily as the RM and CR, but a rider can make it hold a tight line. It will square, brakeslide, rail or slam berms, and power-slide predictably, and it's magic on off-cambers. Following ruts isn't a problem, but the lowness of the YZ will have it snagging first in deep ruts. The YZ is the most stable 125 in whoops and sweepers and feels almost as light as the RM in the air. In other words, it doesn't really do anything exceptionally well except inspire confidence in the rider.

Larger riders really like the KX125's handling, while smaller ones have trouble coming to grips with the green machine. This is a big bike with a very heavy-feeling front end. It's a supercross bike that is more at home bouncing off berms than carving the inside line unless you have the strength to force it to hold the tight line. Raising the forks 5mm in the clamps helps turning, but it will still lose the front end on flat or off-camber corners. Rutted corners also require



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concentration and strength, as the KX doesn't want to settle in and follow the groove. It's much more stable in whoops and in chopped-out sweepers this year, due mostly to the improved suspension, and it's almost as stable as the Yamaha. The KX isn't as nimble as the others in the air because of its weight and size, but it doesn't exhibit any bad manners, either.

FINDING THE FIT

Which bike will fit you best?

All testers really like the slim, agile-feeling RM125, although riders taller than 5'10" would like to have a slightly taller seat. Nobody complained about the handlebars, and the controls are the new industry-standard. Both the throttle and clutch pull are extremely light, and shifting feel is almost insanely light. Suzuki has clearly stolen Honda's reputation of having the easiest shifting. Brakes at both ends are strong, with a light feel at the levers, and nobody complained of a too long or short shifter or brake pedal.

Some of our taller riders said they felt cramped on the CR125 at first, but once they turned a few laps felt right at home on the Honda. It has a slim midsection, excellent handlebars and nicely shaped seat, so smaller riders won't feel intimidated by the bike's size (it has the tallest seat height). Tall riders can trade out for a 250 seat, which is a tad taller. The footpegs, levers, shifter and brake are first-rate, though the clutch

and shifter require more pressure than the RM. Both brakes are the best of the class. Overall, the CR fit the widest variety of riders but couldn't match the RM for ease of control manipulation.

The YZ125 feels really low, and its seat height is more than an inch lower than the CR. Also, its plush suspension lets it settle into turns, making the YZ a great choice for shorter riders. Taller riders felt cramped until one of the testers wiped out the stock bars (which nobody liked) and we went to taller Bradshaw-bend Renthal bars. Shifting and braking are on a par with the CR, finally. Seat shape and firmness are excellent, and the handles in the side panels are very handy. However, some riders complained about the bulging right side panel.

No doubt about it, the Kawasaki is a big motorcycle. It has the second-tallest seat height but is wide in the midsection, giving it the tallest overall feel. The seat is also very square. When you get way up on the tank for corners, the radiators bow your legs outward like an overstuffed taco. Many mentioned that the front of the bike feels very heavy. Leapers really like the wide footpegs, but some riders said they are too wide—almost like Harley running boards. Nobody complained about the clutch, shifting or brakes, but they didn't rave either.

AND THE WINNER IS . . .

Despite having the least plush suspension and a motor that's inexplicably slower than last year's, the Honda CR is the fastest 125 of the year. It handles well, has the best

Each and every 125 has improved suspension for 1991, so monster leaps are a lot more fun. None of the bikes do anything ugly on take-off or landing, but some fly better than others.

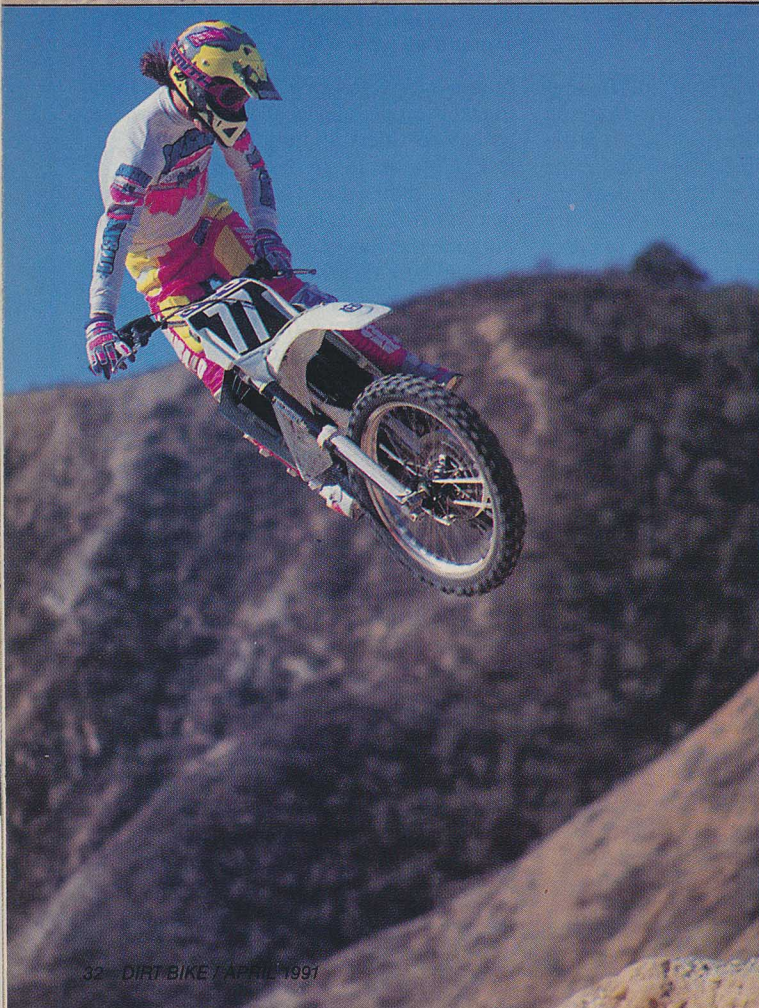
brakes and widest powerband, is the most tractable on slick surfaces and fits the widest variety of riders and talents. Most of our test pilots could go faster longer on the CR125R than on any other bike. The suspension is flawed, but the overall package outguns the flawed competition.

From here things get complicated. On a tight, supercross-style sand track, most of our test riders prefer the do-it-all, easy-to-ride YZ125 over the nimble, midrange-intensive RM125. If the track is more hard-packed and wide-open, the RM would edge out the YZ, due mostly to its better suspension and top-end pull. A more experienced rider can go faster on a stock RM than a reed-modified YZ, but a less intense rider will go faster and progress quicker on the YZ. A larger rider or one who races supercross-style track exclusively will do well on the KX125, but ones who are smaller or ride mostly outdoor tracks will be better off on any of the other Japanese 125s.

There you have it. Just like last year, all of the Japanese 125s are as flawed as a mustache on the Mona Lisa. Honda actually succeeded in making its 125 slower for '91, but the suspension is improved enough to move it into first place—barely. The rest are a little faster this year but, compared to the CR, are all second-class citizens. □



▲ *Horsepower was and still is the KTM's strong point. Bobby Moore demonstrates.*



◀ *Is it a Cagiva or a Husqvarna? It doesn't really matter—the WMX still is very European in feel and handling. Mike Young demonstrates.*

Want to really shake up the rest of the 125 class? It's easy. First practice up on your European accent. Which European accent, you ask? It doesn't matter—just emphasize all the wrong syllables and leave out a lot of prepositions. Then walk up to the guy who's been winning your race every week. "You ride Zuzoooki, yah? Have very few back in home—Joost powder puff class." Then shake your head as if to say "Well, I hope you do well anyway."

The final straw will be when you show up on the line on a KTM 125MX or a Husqvarna 125WMX. Everyone in the race will be so busy staring at you that they might not notice the gate drop. You just don't see that many European motocrossers anymore—especially not in the 125 class. Fifteen years ago there were Can-Ams, Bultacos, Maicos and about a billion Sachs-engined 125s to choose from if you wanted a Euro alternative. Now just these two are left. There are a number of small cottage manufacturers building other 125s in Europe (most in Italy) like TM, Kramer-Italy and so on, but most of those are companies so small they struggle to just stay in business—the bikes are somewhat primitive and they aren't imported into the U.S.

What happened? The Japanese bikes were better than the Can-Ams, Bultacos and Sachs. Are they still better? We'll see.

THE SWEDISH/ITALIAN CONNECTION

The 1991 Husqvarna is 100 percent Italian. Not one part was made or even designed



in the old Husqvarna plant in Sweden. Despite carrying the Swedish name, the 125 WMX actually is the direct descendent of the Cagiva 125. That's a good thing. The old Husky 125 motor was horribly dated, even ten years ago. Husqvarna would grind the ports a little differently every year, trying to coax a little more power from the old powerplant. The company wasn't very successful. The engine was like a good baseball player who wouldn't retire, destroying the memories of great moments with fading performances.

The Cagiva/Husky motor, on the other hand, should be quite the screamer, if its specs are any indication. It has a very short stroke and a large bore (56mm x 50.6mm). That generally means the bike is designed to rev quick and hit hard. Oddly enough, those are the exact same measurements as a Kawasaki KX125. Also, the carburetor is a 37mm Dellorto—that's monstrous for a 125. Most of the Japanese bikes come with 35mm carbs. Again, it seems like Husqvarna is aiming to make its bike a high-rpm screamer.

Cagiva calls its power valve system the Husqvarna Torque System (HTS), but in principle it bears absolutely no difference

from the guillotine devices found in most bikes today. Back when Cagiva purchased Husqvarna from the Swedes, the Italian engineers had to decide whether or not to continue development on the design that the Swedish engineers were working on—a power valve that was operated electronically, rather than centrifugally. The engineers decided to take the safe route and use a centrifugal mechanism, even though they saw no real problems with the Husky design. It was expedient to go with the proven system.

In the chassis, too, the Husky really isn't that different from a mainstream motocrosser. It has White Power suspension at both ends—both with valving that is set up to Husqvarna specifications. The Takasago Excel rims that the bike comes with are generally acknowledged as the best in the business. The Brembo brakes, standard on the Husky, are generally acknowledged as mediocre. The bike also comes with disc guards, pipe guards, caliper guards, etc. The Italians didn't cut corners with the Husky—it is an expensive bike to build.

KROENING TRUNKENPOLTZ MATTIGHOFEN

KTM is doing better in this country than it ever has in the past. The company is im-

When the KTM and the Husky meet, it's a classic case of horsepower vs. handling.

porting more bikes than ever and, with rare exception, selling out. With the success, KTM has been able to redesign its 250 and 300 to make them more competitive than ever. The 125, however, hasn't received as much attention. It is very close to the same bike that KTM had last year. Why? Because KTM figured the 125 was the most competitive bike in the lineup. After all, a works version did take the 125 world championship in '89 and the production bike was considered to be one of the fastest bikes in the class.

Time is catching up with the KTM powerplant, though. It still is a "backwards" engine—that is, it has the clutch on the left and the chain on the right. For that matter, so does the Husqvarna, but it at least has the kickstarter on the right—KTM's is on the left. Are there any disadvantages? We can't think of any legitimate ones, but since KTM has already converted to left-side drives on the 250 and the 300, we would guess that the next time the 125 gets a major revamp, it will be converted as well.

Like the Husky engine, the KTM uses a guillotine power valve that is operated off

*Husqvarna
125 WMX vs.
KTM 125 MX*

By The DIRT BIKE Staff

THE WESTERN FRONT



Surprisingly good suspension and so-so power combine to make the Husqvarna what it is: a mediocre bike that has the potential to be a good one.

a ball-ramp centrifugal mechanism and, like the Husky, the KTM uses a 37mm Dellorto carburetor, White Power suspension (but with KTM valving), Excel rims and Brembo brakes. On paper, at least, the KTM and the Husky are very similar bikes. On the track, however, they have as much in common as guppies and piranhas.

EURO POWER

There's no use in contesting it—the KTM is a very fast 125. For years speed was the easiest way to tell the difference between a European 125 and a Japanese 125: the European bike was the one that ran like it was towing a Winnebago uphill. KTM has made that a thing of the past. It doesn't have very much bottom-end power, but it builds to a great top-end rush.

On the other hand, the Husky motor isn't anything to get real excited about. No, it doesn't act like it's hauling a trailer of bowling balls, but it simply doesn't have any strong points. It has less power than the KTM, yet it's more pipey. In a drag race between the two bikes, the KTM jumps out to a big initial lead. Even when the WMX gets on the powerband, the gap between the two bikes continues to grow, but not as rapidly.

That means that you have to be fairly quick to fan the Husky's clutch. A good rider can hold the throttle wide open, clutch the bike through the gears at high rpm and never really notice that the bike has a narrow powerband. Not all riders are that talented, though. If you don't use the clutch just right the Husky bogs down.

Actually, if you just hold the throttle open at really low rpm, the WMX acts like you

125 SHOOTOUT

hit the kill button. It bogs down and won't come to life again until you shut the throttle a little. It feels like a case of over-carburetion. We would like to try a smaller carb on the Husky—it would probably liven up the entire powerband.

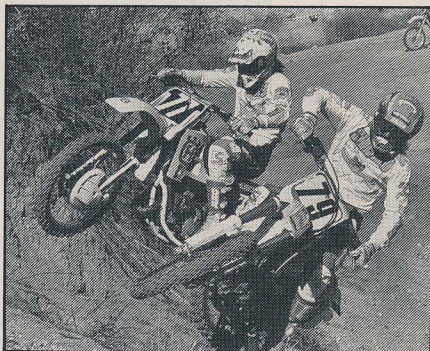
Interestingly enough, the KTM has the same exact carburetor but seems able to use it. No, the KTM isn't exactly a marvel of low-end power either, but it does make enough top-end that we can forgive it. Like the Husky, you have to spend some time clutching the KTM to really make it sing. Unlike the Husky, the KTM has a very hard clutch pull. That's made worse because the lever has a long throw (you have to pull a stiff lever a long way to make anything happen). If you do that for more than three laps in a row, your left arm will be bigger around than Hulk Hogan's left leg.

Neither bike shifts in a big hurry. That really hurts acceleration. When you have to roll off the throttle completely between every gear to ensure a good shift, it can slow down your entire race. The two bikes actually have two quite different shifting problems. To shift the KTM, you have to yank on the shifter like you're pulling your foot out of a Georgia mud hole. With the Husky, you have to be delicate. If you brush the shifter in a section of whoops, you might well knock it into neutral. Once the Husky goes out of gear, you have to let the motor rev down before you can get back underway.

SHOCK TREATMENT

Hold on; before you cross the WMX off your wish list, there's something you should know. It has pretty darn good rear suspension. That's not pretty darn good for a Husky, or pretty darn good for a Euro bike, but pretty darn good by any standards. It's soft and cushy through most of the stroke but never does anything nasty that might even be interpreted as bottoming. For light riders the rear end probably is ideal, but heavier riders (160 and over) will run out of travel.

Up front, the Husky still scores well, but the White Power fork might be a bit *too* soft and cushy. On downhill sections when the



Why be normal? The KTM and the Husky are sure to get you noticed on the track. Of course, you could always wear a giant sloth costume.



Is it the fastest production 125 in the world? The KTM 125 motor makes a convincing argument.

rider is using a lot of front brake, most of the suspension travel is used up and so impacts are transferred more directly to the rider's hands. Overall, though, we would still rate the WMX as the best-suspended motocross bike Europe has produced to date.

That, of course, includes the KTM 125. If you've read much about the 250, 300 and 500 KTMs tested in recent *Dirt Bike* shoot-outs, you shouldn't be too surprised to learn that KTM missed the mark this year with its suspension. The 125 is no different. Both ends are harsh and seem to make little bumps into big ones. One Pro-level tester (whose initials are Mike Young) said that the KTM feels almost like a good stadium bike, with high-compression damping that allows it to skip over the tops of whoops. Unfortunately, we didn't have a stadium handy to test his theory. On the conventional holes and bumps that live on most regular MX tracks, the KTM delivers a very harsh ride, even with the compression damping on its lowest settings at both ends.

INSIDE OR OUTSIDE

For two machines that were manufactured only about 300 miles apart, it's amazing how different they handle on the track. The KTM wants to bounce off something like a nice berm or a wall, while the Husky would just as soon take the inside line, maybe even drop into that rough groove. The Husky's steering is hard to fault—it goes where it's pointed without fuss. The KTM requires a little more finesse, and you have to be careful or the front wheel might wash right over the berm. We can blame some of this on the Metzeler All-Cross tire that comes up front

125 SHOOTOUT

(it looks like a hard-terrain tire but works so-so everywhere).

Both bikes are fairly stable in the straights, though the Husky feels more substantial. It should—it weighs more than any of the 125s tested in this issue. On the official, frighteningly accurate *Dirt Bike* scale, the Husky is 218 pounds. That's 12 pounds over the KTM's weight (in case you left your calculator at the rocket lab, that means the KTM weighs 206), and you can feel it. The Husky is a big bike and when you try to slow down in a hurry, it really wants to keep right on going in the direction it was heading.

That is exaggerated by mushy-feeling brakes. Even though both bikes have Brembo brakes, the KTM's feel stronger at both

ends. Now here's the strange part: The only difference between the two systems is that the Husky has a twin-piston caliper in front, while the KTM's is a single-piston unit. The Husky's should be better! We bled the system like a bunch of thirsty vampires but never noticed any change.

THE GOOD & BAD

The Husky is an extremely well laid-out, comfortable bike. The seat, unlike those on Cagiva's we've encountered in the past, is well rounded, reasonably soft and quite easy to move around on. On the flip side, the Husky vibrates badly, especially at high rpm.

Vibration is minimal on the KTM, but it still doesn't rate as well in the fit and feel department as the Husqvarna. The bike is too cramped, especially for tall riders. The

footpegs are much farther forward (in relationship to the handlebar) than the Husky's and the seat isn't as plush. KTM does offer a taller seat, which provides more cushion as well as a more spread-out riding position. Both of these bikes provide the owners with options. The Husky even comes with an assortment of extra parts, including alternate gearing.

As far as reliability is concerned, neither bike had a perfect record. The most dramatic failure was the Husky's clutch, which was toasted under severe rider abuse. Of course, the KTM clutch was being just as badly abused on the same uphill section and it didn't let go—the Husky wouldn't even attain forward motion after it went away. The KTM did have an astounding number of nuts and bolts come loose repeatedly. The most interesting was the rear brake height adjuster, which caused the rear brake to lock up.

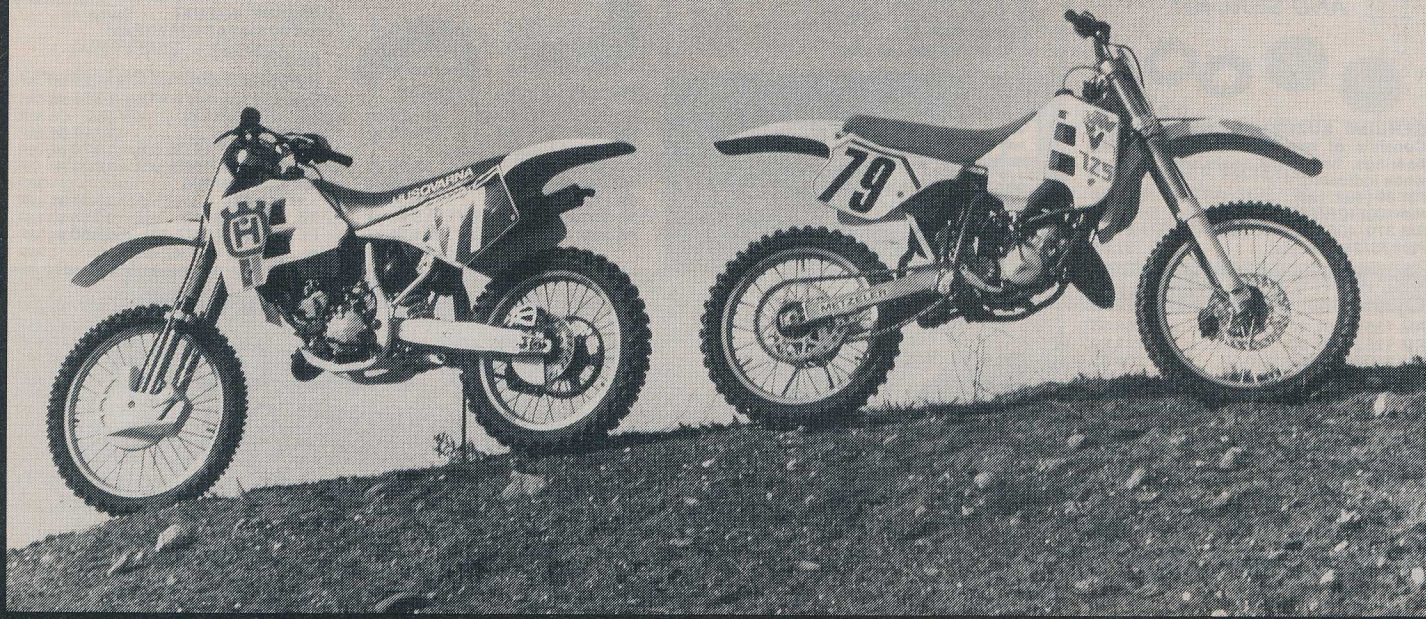
WOULD WE RIDE ONE?

Sure. Both bikes are far from being perfect, but tracking down the imperfections and correcting them is a fun process. What's that? You say you don't have time to finish the factory's work? Then you have assigned yourself to be one of the masses, indistinguishable from the rest of the Kawayamahondazuki riders. The Euro bikes will set you apart from the pack, and a smart rider can afford to be set apart without paying much of a price in performance.

Which one would we ride? Right now, with both bikes in stock and admittedly imperfect form, the KTM can turn faster lap times, primarily due to its great top-end power. That could be turned around easily, though. If a good tuner could get KTM-level power out of the Hoosk, then it would win in nearly every category.

For now, though, with both bikes in stock form, we'll take the KTM. What you take is up to you. □

	HUSQVARNA 125 WMX	KTM 125 MX
Engine type	Reed valve, liquid-cooled 2-stroke	Case-reed, liquid-cooled 2-stroke
Displacement	124.6cc	124.8cc
Bore and stroke	56mm x 50.6mm	67.5mm x 69.5mm
Carburetion	37mm Dellorto	37mm Dellorto
Fuel tank capacity	2.4 gal.	2.4 gal.
Gearing	13/51	13/52
Lighting coil	No	No
Running weight w/no fuel	218 lb.	206 lb.
Wheelbase	58.5 in. (1486mm)	56.3 in. (1430mm)
Rake/trail	NA/NA	27.5°/NA
Ground clearance	13.4 in. (340mm)	14.5 in. (365mm)
Seat height	36.0 in. (914mm)	37.8 in. (960mm)
Tire size and type:		
Front	90/90-21 Pirelli SandCross	90/90-21 Metzeler All-Cross
Rear	120/90-21 Pirelli SandCross	100/90-19 Metzeler MXR199
Suspension:		
Front	White Power inverted cartridge, adj. reb./comp., 11.3 in. travel	White Power inverted cartridge, adj. reb./comp., 11.8 in. travel
Rear	White Power aluminum piggyback, adj. reb./comp., 12.5 in. travel	White Power aluminum piggyback, adj. reb./comp., 13.2 in. travel
Country of origin	Italy	Austria
Suggested retail price	\$3475	\$3329
Distributor	Cagiva North America 5 Washington Ave. Fairfield, NJ 07004 (201) 882-9141	KTM America, Inc. 1906 Broadway Lorain, OH 44052 (216) 244-2726
PARTS REPLACEMENT COST		
Piston Set	\$128.70	\$98.48
Rings	16.53	23.82
Clutch plate (drive)	11.76	12.95
Clutch plate (driven)	2.62	5.29
Front sprocket	15.96	21.64
Rear sprocket	42.50	57.75
Front brake pads	28.75	22.95
Rear brake pads	34.95	22.95





THE BEST VS. THE BEST

We're not going to keep you in suspense. Japan's 125 motocross bikes have been better than Europe's since 1973, when the Honda CR125 Elsinore blew off the Penton 125. Back then, the Penton might have been a much better-handling motorcycle, but the Honda won on the basis of sheer horsepower.

Today, Japan's best (the Honda CR125, descendent of the Elsinore) still is a better bike overall than Europe's best (the KTM 125 MX, descendent of the Penton). If that's all you want to know, then quietly line up at your Honda dealership with the rest of your class. If you think you know *why* the Honda is better than the KTM, though, then you better keep on reading. You might be surprised.

◀ *When worlds collide: The KTM and the Honda have everything in common but are nothing alike.*



Japan's top 125 takes on the Euro champ

By The DIRT BIKE Staff

Let's say the Honda and the KTM line up side by side on the start line. Both riders get equal jumps and blaze through the gears. Which one will get to the first turn first? We don't know. We drag-raced the two bikes until we were ready to join the NHRA, and neither bike showed a discernible advantage over the other in sheer acceleration. In terms of top-end horsepower, we can honestly call it a draw. Surprised? We were.

Peak horsepower isn't all there is to an engine, though. The Honda's powerband is a little wider than the KTM's and is a little easier to keep revving between gears. The KTM has wider gear ratios, with a very low first gear. On one hand, that means you have to scream it before each shift to keep your momentum, but on the other, it means that the bike is more versatile. If not all of your riding is done on a track, the KTM might well be the better choice simply because it will go slower in its low gears and faster in its tall gears.

Both bikes have disappointing suspension. The Honda's simply is less disappointing, that's all. The CR's fork is harsh, but the KTM's is harsher. The CR's rear end is merely okay. The KTM's isn't. We cringe when we call the Honda a winner in the suspension category because we wouldn't ride with it in stock form. Both bikes need a trip to a suspension revalver to be race-ready, so we'll say that both bikes lose in the suspension contest.

The only place the Honda has a hands-down advantage is in handling. The CR

◀ *With enough horsepower to stay alongside the Honda, the KTM only lacks in the handling and suspension categories. Times have changed.*

Japan's finest isn't all that great this year. The gap is narrowing. ▶

probably is the best-turning bike on the market—in any class. We would challenge a good 80 rider to slice a turn inside the CR125. The KTM, on the other hand, really needs a berm or something solid to bounce off of. The KTM is a very light bike, but it is a little clumsy and hard to throw around compared to the Honda. Part of that might be because the KTM is wider—after all, it has enough fuel capacity that you only have to fill the tank once a month. As far as odds and ends are concerned, the Honda just seems more sorted out. It has better tires, it's more comfortable and absolutely nothing broke during testing.

It's easy to figure out which bike is the better overall package. The Honda is an easier bike to win with, right out of the box. That much hasn't changed since the old days. Only now, the Honda is better because of handling, not horsepower.

That much *has* changed. □

