

LIFTOUT POSTER INSIDE!

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australasian **DIRT BIKE**

**BIG BORE
IT243!
CRAIG SMITH
JUMPS
FOR JOY!**



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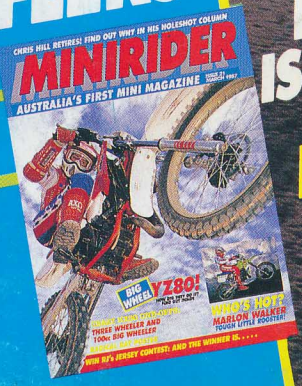
**WHO'S RIDING WHAT IN '87
KTM350 ENDURO
RACE-BRED,
USER FRIENDLY**



**SHOOTOUT!
DAKAR vs
KLR650
BURKE AND WILLS DREAM MACHINES**

**ALSO INSIDE!
Interview:
RICHARD NIELSEN**

**ADB's experts:
GALL
LOVETT
HEFFERNAN**



**YAMAHA
YZ125T
IS WHITER, RIGHTER?**

**HONDA'S
XL250RH
STOPPED IN TIME**



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MARCH, 1987
ISSUE 91
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Australasian
DIRT BIKE

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COVER

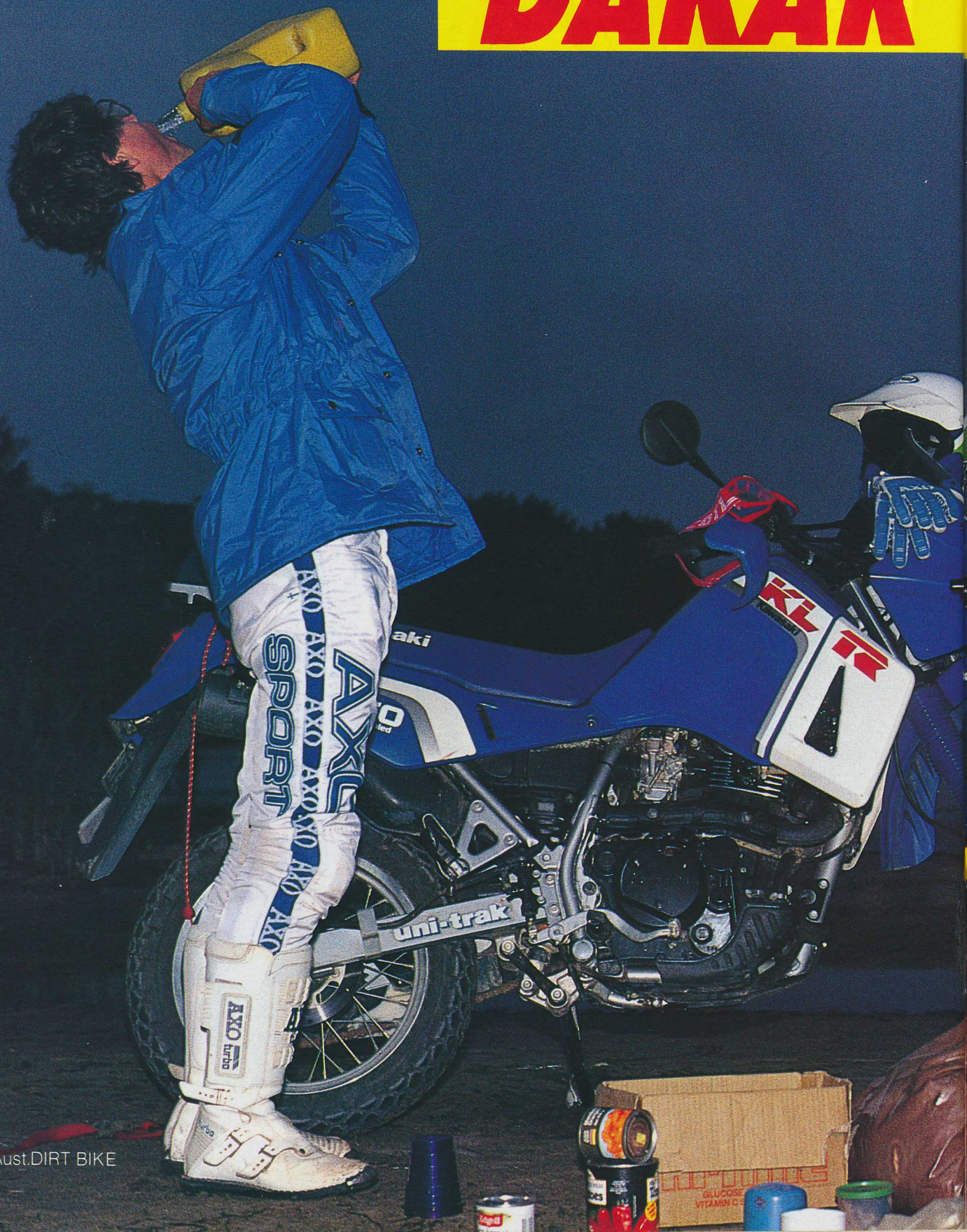
When it's late at night the day before deadline, what do you do for a cover? Go overboard, that's what. What a smorgasbord of delights! Here we have the Big Bore IT200 with Craig Smith (nearest camera) and brother Brett figuring out if it works (photo: Geoff Eldridge). We also have Pelle Granquist blitzing the ADB photo set on his KTM350 (photo: Andrew Clubb). Finally, Mark Pace trying to work out if the YZ125T has any top-end or not (photo: Clubby).

* Recommended and maximum retail price only. You guys ought to be amazed at this che-e-e-p price. After all, it's printed in Australia now, and everyone knows Aussies are a bunch of overpaid, underworked non-productive bludgers who can't make anything for a decent price even if their lives depend on it.

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SHOOTOUT!

DAKAR



Cubic fuel tanks rule, OK!

VS

KLR650

One is a big-tank trailbike, the other a balls-out adventure into the Paris-Dakar phenomenon. But when the chips are down, they're both good. It just depends what you want to do.

We've pitted these two Dakar replicas together because they're the best of the breed.

They both handle better than any of the other Dakar replicas, and neither design allows the huge fuel tank to dominate the feeling of the

bike as completely as it does with the others.

What we wanted to see was, which is better at what, between

these two champions.

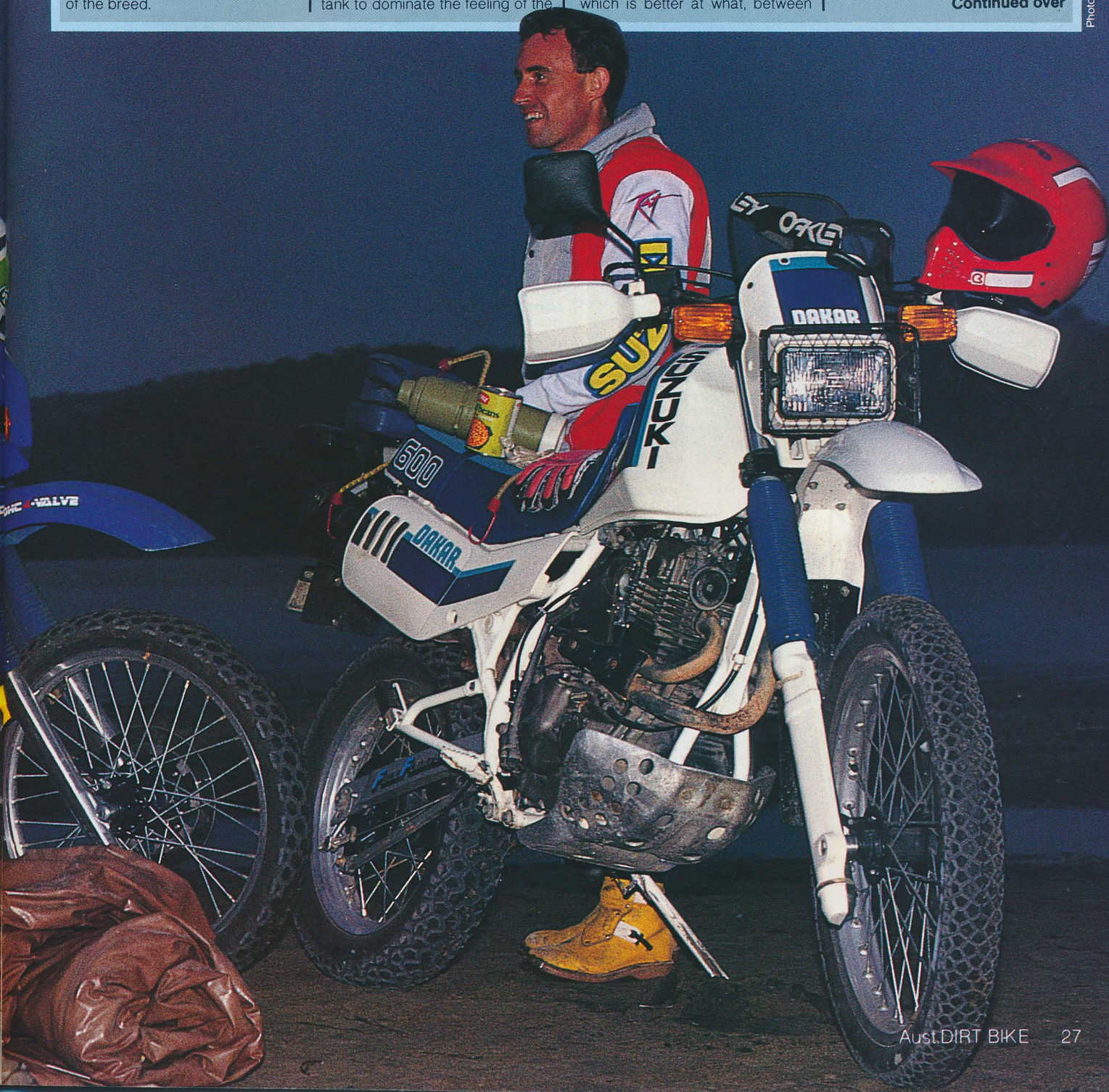
FUEL TANKS

The Suzuki's tank holds a stunning 21 litres. Stunning not because it's the most, but because it's the best shaped tank in the field of big tanks. Unless you come from a 125cc motocrosser, it's hard to believe they've stashed 21 litres in that clean shaped Dakar tank.

On the other hand, the Kawasaki gives you 23 litres, which allows approximately forty five kilometres of extra range. However, the liquid-cooling of the KLR means there are radiators and water reservoirs to contend with, and these eat into the room otherwise used to store fuel. In turn, this means the KLR tank is wider and deeper than the Dakar's.

All the same, the KLR tank is

Continued over



Photography by Andrew Clubb



Photography by Andrew Clubb

SHOOTOUT! DAKAR vs KLR650

ingenious, because after an initial settling in period by the rider, it's hardly noticeable.

Swapping from one bike to the other makes it noticeable, though, and if it comes to druthers with tank preference, we'd druther the Dakar. If it comes to liquid-cooled versus aircooled engines, we'd druther the liquid-cooling, which means we'd druther the KLR. Figure that out.

Both tanks are steel, which we like, but the KLR has a good lockable fuel cap which makes city life a lot easier.

As for positioning of the two tanks on their respective frames, the Kawasaki's is actually lower, which gives it a lower centre of gravity, which in turn makes the bike turn better and handle better in the dirt.

STARTING

How can you beat the Kawasaki's electric starting? It's hard, especially with a handlebar-mounted choke lever (which we busted off with a stray knee in a moment of off-road panic) and an engine that simply bursts into life at the press of a button.

The Dakar on the other hand, has manual kickstarting, which is a real bitch in the dirt, since the bottom-end power delivery of the Dakar has more snatchiness and a stronger tendency to stall than the Kawasaki. Moreover, the Dakar requires that you learn the technique of starting by listening for remote valve-lifter clicks and subtle turning over of the engine till it's just past TDC.

That's OK on the road where you start the bike once and it keeps running till you turn it off at your destination, in the dirt, when the motor has become hotter than hell, it's a bitch.

Kawasaki's engineers are so

confident of their electrical system that there is no kickstart lever at all, although the cases are from the first model manual-start KLR600 and there's still a kickstart lever hole right there.

So, we definitely prefer the Kawasaki for starting, by about a million to one.

There are a couple of glitches in the scenario, though. The sidestand has that infamous Kawasaki switch that stalls the engine once it's put into gear if the stand is still down. It's cable operated and once the cable gets sticky you keep having the engine cut out on you. We tossed the switch cover so we could pull the cable up by hand. The other thing we'd like to see changed is the other killswitch that operates off the clutch lever - if you've got the clutch lever pulled in, you can't use the electric start. The bike must be in neutral.

It's a pain in the dirt, but at least it's easy to fix.

POWER

A solid win to the KLR here. After all, how can you beat extra cubes?

Extra smoothness, that's one way to beat extra cubes, but sadly for Suzuki, the Kawasaki has that as well - the KLR is very smooth running by comparison to the high frequency vibrations of the Dakar that send both your bum and your legs to sleep during extended cruising.

As well, the low rpm power delivery of the KLR is amazingly smooth too - there's none of that awkward snatching and lurching of a big-bore four-stroke single on its firing strokes, which you know is a warning that you're about to stall in a big way. Smooth power delivery makes climbing bad hills a pleasure.

The Dakar, while smoother than some other big-bores we could name, still has a tendency to stall without notice.

Then you gotta start it again.

GEARING

Both bikes, with stock sprockets, will cruise on 140-150km/hr all day. Both will easily get over 160km/hr.

But the Dakar is way too tall geared in 1st, making life a hassle in the dirt if the going gets tough.

The KLR's five speeds are well matched (they're both five speeders) and there are no awkward gaps between cogs. If you do tight bush riding, you need to go down a tooth on the countershaft sprocket of the Dakar, which knocks a few healthy clicks off top gear cruising.

LIQUID OR AIR-COOLED?

There are both pros and cons for both bikes here.

The Kawasaki has liquid-cooling, while the Dakar is air-cooled.

As we all know, big-bore single cylinder four-strokes suffer from heat problems. The harder they're run, the hotter they get, the more hassles they give. A simple enough equation to understand.

Kawasaki solves the problem effectively by liquid-cooling. Suzuki tries to do the same thing with a smallish oil cooler slung out on the left side below the tank. It's not as effective as the liquid-cooling, because hard riding sees the Suzuki get real hot, after which it gets hard to start and becomes temperamental at low rpm.

However, to be fair, the system chosen by Suzuki is simpler, lighter and cheaper to produce than that of the KLR. Only one oil cooling radiator to worry about, versus the added complexity of radiator, water reservoir, water pump, hoses and whatnot.

Bottom line? These bikes won't be used in tough rocky terrain so the chances of damaging a radiator or oil cooler are very slim, so ADB goes for liquid-cooling as the most effective system of keeping the engine alive.

Try it in the heat of the outback and you'll appreciate what we're talking about.

RIDER COMFORT

The Kawasaki is a bigger bike to sit on, thanks to the lower placed engine, which locates the footpegs a good distance from the seat.

The Dakar, with higher ground clearance, feels more cramped by comparison, but it's only by comparison. We feel the KLR is one of the best bikes ever if you're a tall sun-bronzed Aussie like the staff of Ay-Dee-Bee.

Both seats are good the way they go up on the tanks, but the Dakar's seat has only one spot for you to sit in, thanks to the pronounced U-shape it has. By contrast, the KLR seat is much flatter and offers more seating choice, which is good when you're doing 1,000 kms in a day.

We think that funny grippy material the Dakar seat is covered with is a bit of a wank, although it looks trick.

Both bikes have rubber covered footpegs, indicating their intended use. The Dakar also has rubber-mounted bars.

Both bikes have frame mounted pillion pegs which we like, although the Dakar has one of those useless straps across the seat which we don't like.

GROUND CLEARANCE

We would never normally even mention this, except it's a major factor with the KLR. In order to lower the centre of gravity as far as possible for better handling and a lighter feeling bike despite the huge fuel capacity, Kawasaki lowered the engine in the frame, then lowered the tank as well.

Ground clearance goes out the window - the 650 has a meagre 240mm of it, compared to 300mm for the old KLR600 and 275mm for the Dakar.

As we've said, a lower frame makes the KLR a more spacious bike, but it also means that rocks and logs become a problem, especially since the bashplate on our test KLR was only fibreglass and soon had cracks and dents and pieces missing all over it, with a severe rock-induced oil weep from the left side.

All the same, the Dakar only scores an extra 35mm clearance. At least it's got a strong alloy bashplate that's quite extensive in its protection.

SUSPENSION

Ten points to Kawasaki, two points to Suzuki.

We didn't like either end of the Dakar's suspension.

Up front, the forks lacked rebound control and produced severe bounce back in your face, accompanied by a definite lack of steering precision.

At the rear, the Dakar's shock was marginal at anything other than keeping the rear guard off the tyre.

By comparison, the KLR actually had the basics of both compression and rebound damping half sorted out, at both ends. We won't say they were perfect, but they were pretty good for a 650cc trailbike Dakar replica. The forks are better

Continued over

SHOOTOUT! DAKAR vs KLR650

than the shock, which has no damping adjustment at all (same as the Suzuki). Corrugated dirt roads are a nightmare on the Suzuki because the back end wanders like a married man with seven-year-itch. They're also a bit scary on the KLR once the back end gives up the ghost and starts to wander all over the outback like aborigines during a dry spell.

IN THE DIRT

There's a bit of a conflict here, because they're both good in the dirt (within reason) for different reasons, and they're both bad in the dirt for different reasons.

The Dakar feels distinctly lighter and less like a porker, although by comparison to even a 600cc trail-bike it feels like a porker. The front end is far lighter than the KLR's, making it easier to lift over logs and rocks and other trailside obstacles.

The tank is not as fat as the KLR's either, making the bike feel smaller and easier to manoeuvre. Slightly higher ground clearance is an advantage.

And finally, like all Suzukis there's a certain amount of Suzuki magic about the Dakar as it goes about its business in the dirt.

But the KLR suspension eats that of the Dakar, front and rear.

This makes the KLR more fun to ride because you know what's going to happen. Neither end is unmanageable, which is more than we can say about the Dakar.

As well, the KLR has a distinctly lower centre of gravity, which gives it a decided handling edge on fast sweepers and assorted trail trickery.

There's no getting away from the fact that the KLR feels like a bigger bike, though, and several of our test riders commented on this aspect.

On the other side of the coin, these bikes work in the dirt only by a matter of degree. They're better than roadbikes, and they're better than a lot of big bore trailbikes and other things like the Tenere and BMW.

That doesn't mean they're perfect though, and it takes only a modest trail to show these bikes for the marginally suspended fatsos they really are.

All the same, we've mellowed a lot since we ran our shootout of 600cc trailbikes in March, 1985, and slugged the lot. These two bikes are really pretty good when you consider what they're faced with.

ON THE ROAD

Being honest-to-goodness dirt bike freaks, we reckon a good trail-bike is a far better roadbike than a roadbike.

Around town, they're lighter, more manoeuvrable, better in traffic and easier to park. They'll also drag anything off at the lights - up to about 80 kms/hr.

On a long road ride, they're far more comfortable, even if they don't



FRONT END

A win to Kawasaki, thanks to far better damping control. The Dakar's forks bounce back in your face too fast, upsetting steering precision. The Dunlop K750 KLR tyre is superior to the

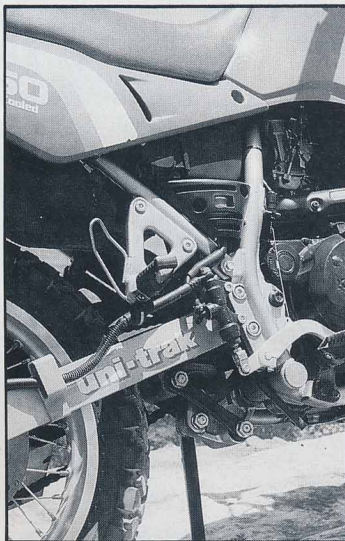


IRC GP6 tyre of the Dakar, on or off road. We like the mesh headlight rock guard of the Dakar, the fairing of the KLR and the convex mirrors our test KLR had. The KLR also had a tachometer and a heat gauge.

REAR END

Kawasaki comes up trumps again, with a reasonably well damped rear shock. The Suzuki shock spring was too soft and the damping was poor. Muffling

was excellent for both bikes. We liked the Dakar's expanding tool pouch, as well as the KLR's sturdy alloy carry rack. The KLR seat is excellent, the Dakar's too one-positional.



make as much power. They have better torque, which makes up for it.

In this role, either the Dakar or the KLR is excellent, but for overall finesse, the nod goes to the KLR.

Electric start counts for a lot. So does the better seating position, the less cramped footpeg position, the big frame-mounted fairing and the low centre of gravity. The KLR's Dunlop K750 tyres are also superior on tar to the IRC GP6 fitted standard to the Dakar (they're superior in the dirt, as well), giving amazing traction and predictability.

The suspension of both bikes sorts out road rides competently, although the KLR's suspension seems to have the edge in plushness. With less high speed vibration



to tickle your fancy, the Kawasaki scores solidly again.

But none of this should come as a surprise.

We said, after all, that the Dakar is simply a big tank trailbike, while the KLR makes a far more serious effort to be a touring bike as well. In fact, that's how Kawasaki presents it - as a tri-purpose bike, designed to be competent at street/trail/touring.

Both have 12 volt lighting systems which cast a good beam onto the road ahead. Both have a full complement of road-going lighting like blinkers, speedo lights, horns, taillights, brake lights and park lights. And both have full Aussie Compliance Plate approval, making them a breeze for street rego.

As for the fairings, we find them

both a bit of an affectation, since you need to crouch into a foetus position to get any respite from the slipstream, and on long hauls to Ayers Rock this riding position is a pain in the arse, not to mention the neck, the shoulders, the knees and the arms.

BITS AND PIECES

We like the Dakar's extendable tool pouch at the rear of the seat. It unzips and expands to hold plenty of gear without needing ocky straps. If you wanted, you could remove this tool pouch and discover a small carry rack underneath, which could be added to.

Kawasaki opts for a sturdy large-sized carry rack with an inbuilt top-mounted plastic toolkit holder. We liked the carry rack OK, but laughed at this toolkit holder till we had to use the pliers every time when wanting to start the engine from cold (smashed off the choke lever, remember), finding it to be very accessible. Suzuki has one of those small cannisters hidden behind a sidecover (couldn't ever get the tools back into it, unlike the KLR's cannister, which was plenty big enough).

Our KLR came with convex mirrors which are not allowed in Australia. They proved to us once again how much safer convex mirrors are than flat ones, although the idiots at the DMT don't agree. Let 'em ride a bike for a while, we say.

The rear disc brake of our KLR suffered from serious fade when used hard on long downhills in the dirt. Otherwise, it was good. The Suzuki brakes are fuss-free reliable units (drum rear), and both front disc brakes are about on a par.

We repeatedly bent the ultra soft footpeg mounts of the KLR. They're like butter. Weld something to them.

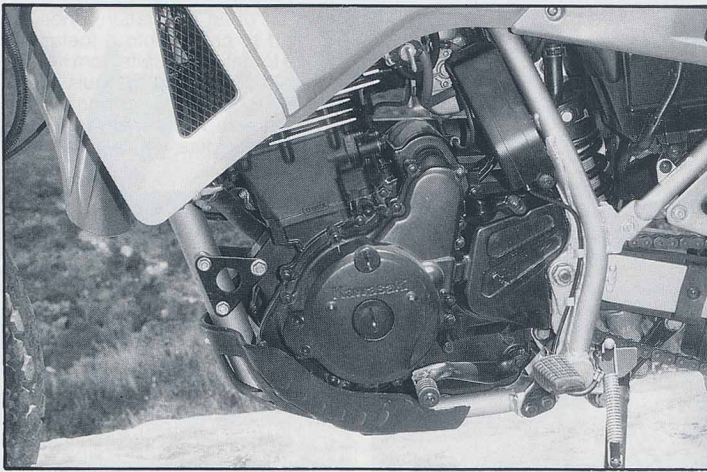
The Suzuki is, overall, a simpler bike. We felt, after a while of living with the KLR, that there were a few too many glitzy things on it. The sidestand and clutch lever kill-switches, for example - who needs 'em? A fibreglass bashplate with such meagre ground clearance - how strange. Suss mounting of the rear disc brake hose - along the side of the swingarm, for Pete's sake. Even KTM does it better.

Even though you pay a high price for it (the Dakar is, or was, about \$700 more than its plain Jane sister, the DR600), we nevertheless liked the Dakar's plastic fork protectors, mesh screen headlight guard and mini fairing.

We also liked the superb refinement of the KLR. Electric start, liquid-cooling, double disc brakes, huge sturdy alloy carry rack, frame-mounted fairing, extra fuel capacity. Great stuff.

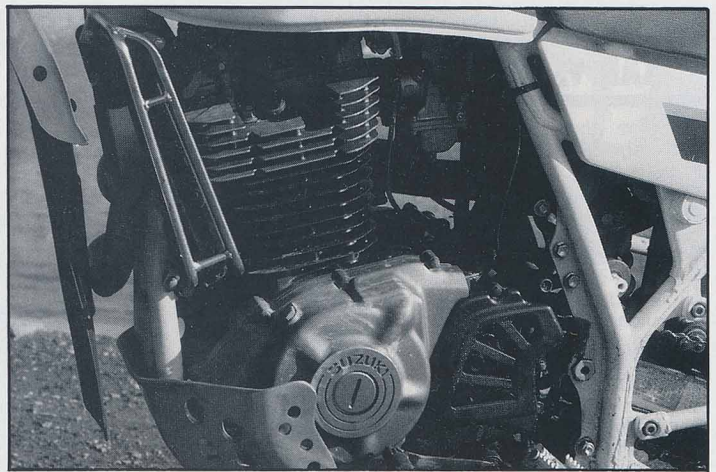
Don't like the 17 inch rear wheels. Do like the beautiful power spreads you get from both engines - wide as the Nullabor, and about as flat. Don't like the Dakar's too-tall 1st gear. Do like the Dakar's light front end. Do like the O-ring chains on both bikes. Do like the way the KLR's spokes never loosened from brand new.

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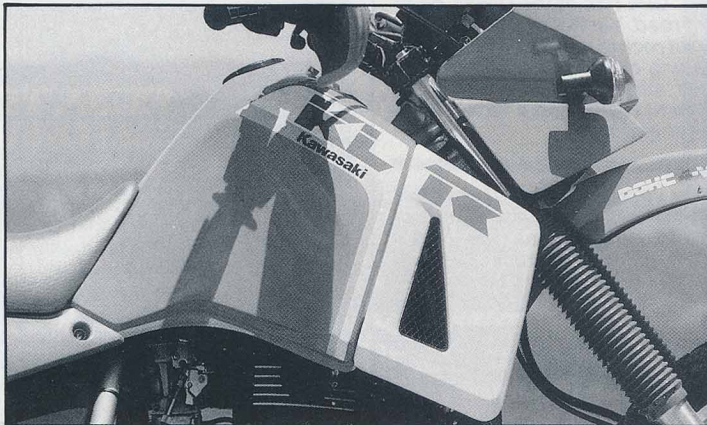
ENGINES
Kawasaki's electric start won us over, while liquid-cooling sealed

the victory. Better gearing only added to the KLR's edge over the Dakar, and smoother power



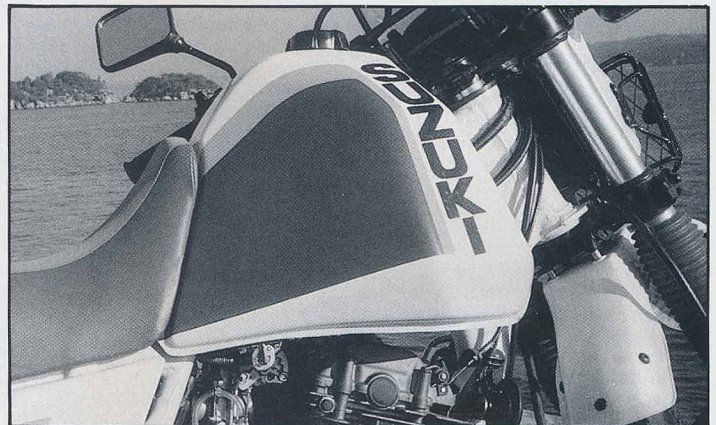
delivery sealed its fate. Yessir, the 650 is the way to go. However, it's mounted lower in the

frame and there's only a poxy fibreglass bashplate for protection. It doesn't protect much.



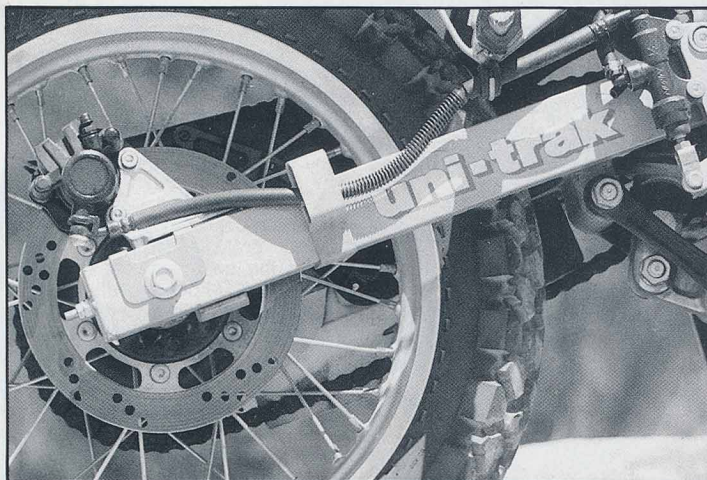
FUEL TANKS
With 23 litres, the KLR has 2

more litres than the Suzuki, but it is wider and bulkier because of



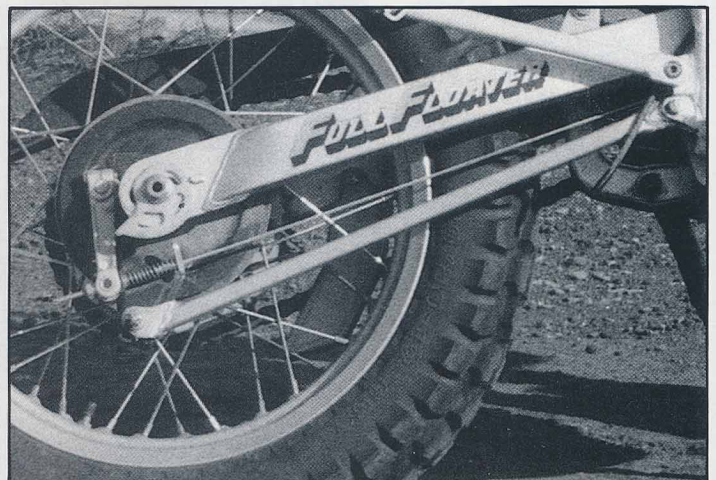
the need to mount a radiator and water reservoir up front. The

KLR had a locking fuel cap, the Dakar didn't.



BRAKES
Both front brakes were good,

predictable stoppers in the dirt, although a tad weak on tar. The



KLR rear disc is a good idea, but ours twice suffered from heat

fade and disappeared completely (in the dirt).

SHOOTOUT! DAKAR vs KLR650

Don't like having to give them back.

CONCLUSION

We'll take the Kawasaki, for sure. Overall, it's a far nicer bike to ride.

Rider comfort, smooth power delivery, extra cubes, electric start, plush suspension.

While we like the Suzuki for being the lightest of the Dakar replicas (136 kg, versus the KLR's ponderous 153kg) we figure it's simply a 600cc trailbike with a fat tank. And while we can appreciate the way they've designed the Suzuki's tank shape, the Kawasaki edges it out in overall performance and refine-

ment, particularly on the street.

Off the tar, the only two areas in which we feel the Suzuki has the edge are in front-end lightness and less overall bulkiness. It has worse suspension, less forgiving low-rpm power delivery, worse tyres and is harder to start when hot.

Nevertheless, we'd like to stress that the Dakar is miles ahead of anything else like it. We chose it for this comparison because it was the

best of the breed up till the KLR, and we still think it's very, very good.

Prices? The Kawasaki is currently going for \$4,699, while the Dakar is hovering around \$4,400. We can see enough extra value to amount to the difference.

Basically, the Kawasaki benefits from waiting to see what everyone else came up with. Once you can see the enemy, it's easy to beat him.

