

# BIG WHEEL YZ80

## YAMAHA YZ80 - Big Wheel Hey Little Big Wheels!

By Andrew Clubb

Steve Ashkenazi is one of the most respected names in the motorcycle tuning game and his expertise in the off road arena is matched by very few others.

Steve's been around for ages, working on many and various machines over the years, though perhaps his greatest claim to notoriety is helping four times Mr Motocross champ, Stephen Gall, to many of his wins in the days of the Toshiba Yamaha Dealer Team.

Nowadays Steve works from his home just south of Sydney, where he has established his own motorcycle tuning and preparation business. Home to Steve is a 50 acre spread of land surrounding an old sand quarry, which just happens to make an ideal testing ground for the many motocross and enduro machines he works on.

It was Steve's reputation that led Frank White and his son Paul, who's a member of the Lake Macquarie Minicycle Club, to Steve's door with the thought of converting an '86 Yamaha YZ80S into a Big Wheel machine.

As you can see from the accompanying photographs, Paul is a fairly long and lean young fella, who was starting to get pretty cramped on his 80, yet wasn't really ready yet for the big step up to a full-size 125 machine.

Steve and the Whites threw the idea of a Big Wheel conversion around, and Steve came up with the machines you see featured here, one belonging to Paul, and the other to Steve's son Kim.

### LET'S GET CONVERTED!

Discussing the job of converting a 80 into a Big Wheel with Steve detailed the work involved in replacing the YZ80's standard 17 and 14 inch front and rear wheels with full-size 21 and 17 inch wheels, and then mating these larger wheels with the YZ's minicycle sized chassis.

Beginning with the wheels, Steve decided that retaining the standard front and rear YZ80 hubs would save the hassles of trying to fit non-standard hub's to the YZ's front and rear suspension components.

Noted wheel builder and repairer, Mike Warner, made up some spokes that let the YZ80 hubs be laced to the larger 21 and 17 inch rims. In one easy move, the wheel sizes were increased, with the standard hubs, brakes and axles all retained. This way the wheels could be bolted straight back onto the standard mounts.

### RIGHT

**Stainless steel extenders are machined up that screw into the top of the YZ80's fork tubes, allowing the forks to be lowered in the triple clamps, giving extra clearance for the larger 21 inch front wheel. A YZ125 front guard is fitted.**

Looking for a machine to bridge the gap between 80cc and 125cc class racing?

Perhaps a neat conversion like this of a current model 80cc mini-motocrosser into a Big Wheel version is just the machine you are looking for?



The larger wheels obviously brought about changes to suspension performance and some tyre clearance problems, so both the front and rear suspensions were modified.

At the front end, Steve machined up stainless steel extenders that screw into the top of each of the standard YZ80 fork tubes, allowing the forks to be positioned lower in the triple clamps to give the necessary wheel clearance under full suspension travel.

The rear suspension is also modified, to let the rear wheel and tyre

clear the swingarm. 70mm extensions are welded to the rear of each side of the swingarm, shifting the rear wheel backward and giving the necessary clearance.

### BELOW

**The swingarm is extended by 70mm to allow extra clearance for the 17 inch rear wheel. Because of the extra leverage of the longer swingarm, heavier riders will need a stiffer spring than comes standard on the YZ's shock. Mike Warner laced the larger rims to the standard YZ80 hubs.**



### LEFT

**Noted race mechanic and tuner, Steve Ashkenazi, can turn any of the current mini-motocrossers into Big Wheel 80s. Wheel, fork, swingarm, shock and detail modifications are all it takes to make the conversion.**

The longer swingarm increases the leverage ratio of the Monocross rear suspension, and while lighter riders, such as Kim, can get away with the standard shock and spring, taller and heavier riders, like Paul, will need a stiffer accessory spring.

### OTHER LITTLE DETAILS

With the larger wheels laced up and the front and rear suspensions modified modified to fit them, there isn't much more to the Big Wheel conversion other than taking care of some fine details.

The larger 17 inch rear wheel radically alters the bike's gearing, and to compensate the standard 14-46 YZ80 gearing is replaced by 13-60 sprockets. A longer chain has to be fitted, obviously, and the rear brake rod has to be lengthened as well.

A YZ125 guard is fitted to the front end, while the stock YZ80 rear guard is used at the rear, though repositioned slightly to give extra clearance from bottoming when the rear suspension is fully compressed.

With that work completed, Steve's Big Wheel YZ80s were ready to roll, looking all the world like they could have come straight from Yamaha's Japanese production lines.

Both Paul and Kim are rapt in their new bikes, and revel in all the attention they get whenever they race at a new track where the locals haven't seen the bikes before. They reckon they have a very difficult time convincing people that the Big Wheels aren't new '87 model YZs, the conversion work is that neat.

The bikes are more than a match for anything else around in the Big Wheel 80 class, plus they're also eligible for the 100cc class, giving the riders twice as many races on the day as with a standard sized 80cc machine.

As well as the Big Wheel conversion, Steve also handles hot-up work of YZ (and other brand) engines, and he can put together a porting, pipe and muffler combination that can turn the Big Wheel YZ80 into a real giant-killer!

For further information contact; Steve Ashkenazi, PO Box 155, HELENSBURGH. NSW. 2508. Ph: (042) 94-2700 (BH). (Steve can Big Wheel all the brands, not just Yamahas)

Thanks to Paul White and Kim Ashkenazi for their help with this story.

Photography by Andrew Clubb



