

# australasian DIRT BIKE

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1979 \$1.65

Southerners \$1.65  
**MIKE  
LANDMAN  
MARK HILL**

The Power and the Glory

## **SUZUKI RM400N**

Cruising down  
mainstreet

## **YAMAHA XT500F**

## **Caterisms Part 2**

Shortening the odds,  
increasing the choice

## **YAMAHA IT175F SUZUKI PE175N**





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NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1979  
VOL. 4, NO. 2

australasian  
**DIRT  
BIKE**

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## PEOPLE

EDITOR: Geoff Eldridge.  
 CONTRIBUTING EDITORS: Rick Verren, Garry Treadwell, Warren Jack, John Lethlean.  
 PHOTOGRAPHY: Michael Andrews, Warren Jack, Bruce Dryburgh, Geoff Eldridge, Susan Nivison, Barry Marshall, Philip Eldridge.  
 LAYOUT AND DESIGN: Geoff Eldridge.

Managing Director: David Yaffa  
 Sales Manager: Adrian O'Mara  
 Advertising Manager: Claus Bjarnoe

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**COVER:** Some like them powerful. Some like them to handle well. Others just like to have whatever is up with the forefront of design. This machine embodies the lot in one beautiful package. The RM400N.

Photograph by Michael Andrews, after ADB's trusty Pentax gave up the ghost on a critical day of shooting. RIP.

*\*Recommended and maximum price only*







# SUZUKI RM400N



**There is a saying: you have to kiss a lot of toads before one turns into a Prince.**

**A**lthough all previous RM370/400s haven't exactly been toads — far from it, in fact, the earlier 370s were a force to be reckoned with — the most recent offering from the factory of the yellow machines (the RM400C) was not exactly up to the par of the day. It was overweight and slightly underpowered, although it still represented value-for-money for most open class riders.

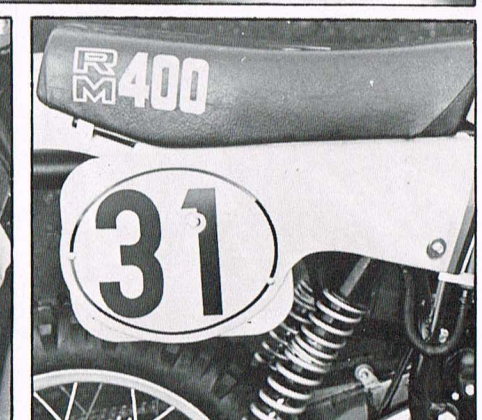
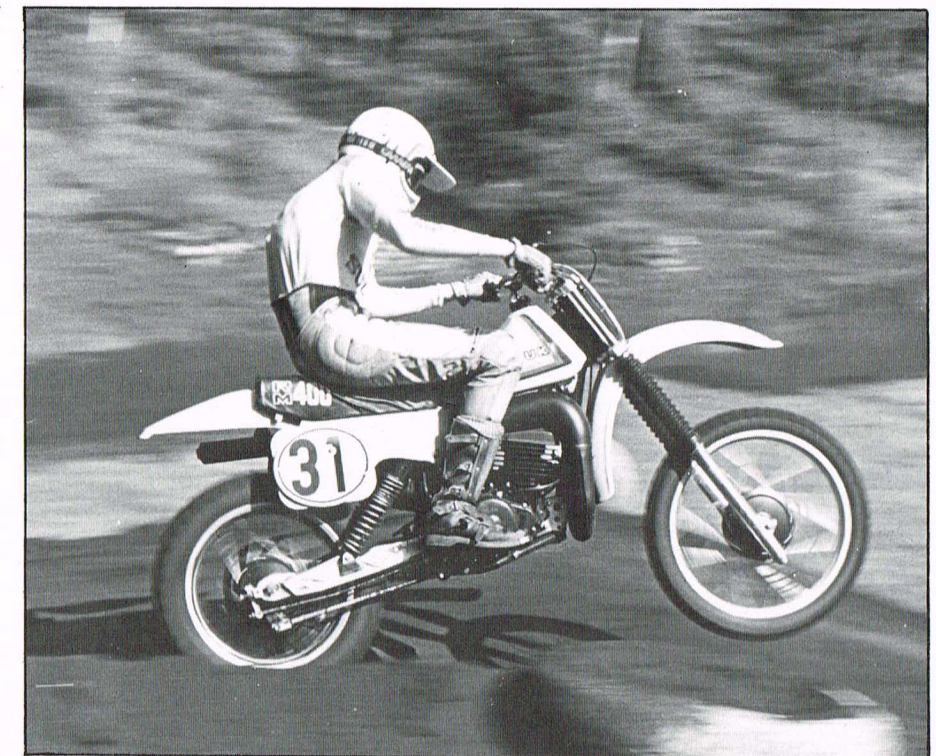
What Suzuki has done is change everything except the design of the word SUZUKI on the tank, so that the resemblance between the C and the N is about the same as that between a toad and a prince. Everything you can see has been redesigned; as well, most everything you can't see has been redesigned.

The N comes with a whole new set of plastic-ware: FIM style rearset numberplates, shorter worksy fuel tank and 21st century guards bring it right up front in the style department. Next most noticeable change is the extruded aluminium swinging arm: it is an extrusion because that's the best way to achieve rigidity (the C model had an aluminium swinging arm, but it was a welded unit made up of a number of separate pieces which had less rigidity than the arm on the N). The shocks have a chrome-coloured spring, but are still Dr DeCarbon units; the shock body is the same for the 250 and the 400, but the spring rates are different.

A longer seat is fitted to the N to allow the rider to get further forward for radical cornering. There is no problem with the shape of the fuel tank getting in the way, because the junction is perfectly smooth to allow the transition. Since the RM didn't steer as well as some bikes you can get, this point was appreciated by everyone.

Actual suspension travel is close to the 11 inch mark both ends, but don't believe it if anyone tries to tell you it is any more. Riders can fine tune their forks and shocks for their own weight, preference and track condition: the shocks allow two-position damping adjustment and three-position spring preload settings, while the forks are air/oil and can be set up however the rider likes. A 10 weight fork oil works best for damping.

As far as the power department is concerned, the N is a pleasure to use. It doesn't



The plastic fuel tank features a well-contoured shape which allows the rider to easily slide forward for better cornering. We found it was necessary to do this. Tank decals are the best yet. Pipe is out of the way. Filler hole is a little too small.

Sidecovers look fine until you put your square numberplates on. You have to remove the black oval outline, otherwise it is still considered to be an oval plate, despite being square. You get at the air-filter by undoing the seat.



come on suddenly, because Suzuki has mellowed the powerband; you can use this engine in the midrange where it is meant to be used and the power delivery is always smooth and predictable, and as strong as you'd expect in a 400 motocrosser. Always shift early and get to use the torque of the engine. With an engine which delivers a lot of power, you need a corresponding amount of braking: the N shines here, too. The fully-floating rear brake is fine, with a lot less chatter than some other units available; one rider commented that it was a far superior brake to the floating brake on his old Honda CR250R. The front brake is the same: excellent feel and the ability to stop you on demand, using only two fingers. This model has a full width hub.

With a seat height of 38 inches, the RM is one of the tallest motocrossers around. The YZ400F is much lower in the saddle height due to a lot of thought by the designers, and riders who aren't too long in the legs should consider this; check out the two and decide for yourself. Starting the bike isn't a problem, as the kick-starter ratio is very mild, but the 400 still doesn't have primary kick starting: Suzuki does this because of the design of the gearbox and power chain, and if the bike was equipped with a primary kick, as-is, the internals would self-destruct. Once you get it fired up, it has a mellow, throaty bark which is louder than the YZ.

Starts can be done in either first, second or third gear, depending on the track. The power as-delivered is sufficient to keep pace with anything else on the way to the

first corner, but we can't hang out and say that the RM is the fastest bike in its class. One of, maybe, but the fastest, no. More important is the power delivery and the way the bike gets around the track.

Suzuki scores well with their 400N in these departments. The ride is plush over most anything you can throw at it, although the forks felt initially stiff over little bumps, and a little too soft on full compression on bigger ones. The air in them can be pumped up to partially alleviate this, but this only increases their stiffness on smaller bumps. We mentioned the steering before: a tendency for the forks to plough was noticed when compared to the steering of other bikes we have ridden, but the RM certainly turned better than a YZ. We figured this was as much due to the lesser high-up frame weight rather than superior steering: if pressed, we'd have to say that the steering of the RM and YZ was pretty close. With a good tyre it is improved considerably: we tried our RM with a set of Pirelli GaraCross tyres and noticed a definite improvement, so if you can afford it, when the time comes for replacement tyres consider a better brand.

At the rear, the shocks did the job well, but most people would opt for better units when the originals gave up. Bottoming out isn't the problem: it is more a case of an incompatibility between spring rate and damping. The 400 springs are slightly too heavy for the damping, even if the shocks were set on the heavier damping position.

You notice this most of all when you brake into a corner, and the rear end is kicked about. As they are, though, you have no real need to change them unless you are in the very top echelon of motocross.

But the N is a bike which loves to be ridden hard. If you keep shifting early and keep the power in the midrange, it will power around the track with the best of them. And if you push it into corners and use berms properly, or if you fit a good front tyre, it will corner better than anything except maybe a Maico and one or two other European bikes which are never seen on our motocross circuits anyway. The suspension gives you a plush ride and you can concentrate better on your lines. The whole bike is a pleasure to ride and is relatively easy to maintain.

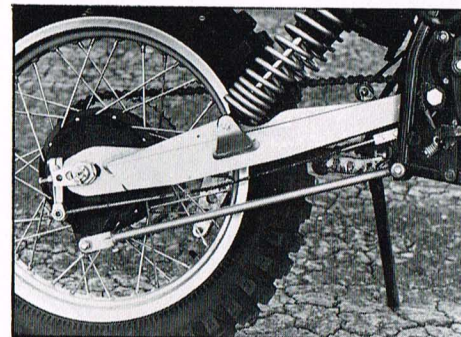
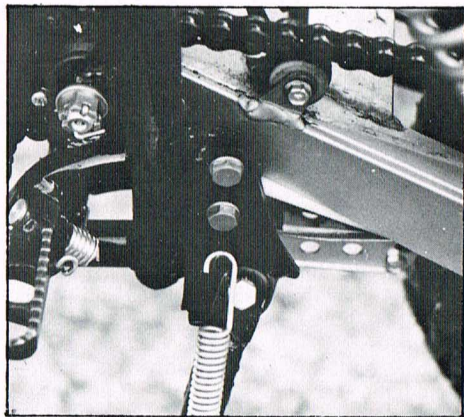
While in the US, the guys from Motocross Action magazine claimed that the chain tensioner had a habit of picking the circlip off the connecting link in the chain, causing you-know-what. We haven't heard of it happening in Australia yet, so the problem may have been cured (Jody Weisel said his method of fixing it was to bend the tensioner sides with a pair of pliers and that the factory were going to issue a bulletin to the same effect, so by now they may have completely redesigned it. Check).

One of our test RMs was run in Con-dobolin and the chain guide on top of the swingarm disappeared completely, as did the rear engine mount bolt. Nothing else went wrong. Jetting is as close as most people would ever want with a 400. The sidestand fell off, but you have to take it off anyway. Parts were available at the time of writing, but we understand there had been a bit of a shortage before that particular shipment: Suzuki isn't really too bad when it comes to parts, in our experience.

This RM is certainly a force to be reckoned with in the open class, and is available at a price which can't be argued with. Add to that the availability of a lot of extras, and the very minimal degree you need to go to to turn it into the equal of the best (tyres and shocks) and the RM400N has to be the Prince of the 400s.

Just watch out you don't burn you lips on the pipe, if you feel like kissing one.

This chain guide was smashed to pieces during the Centrepoint 200. Keep your eye on both it and the lower-run chain tensioner if you are to avoid chain hassles.

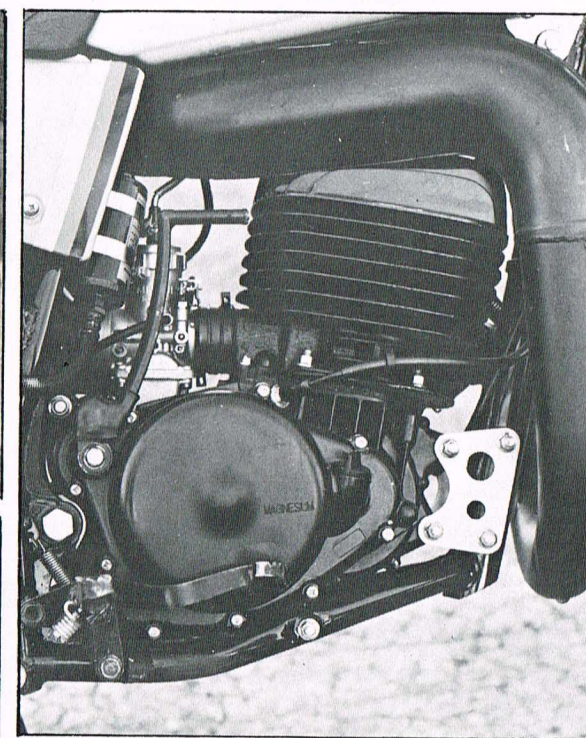


Swingarm is an extruded aluminium section which is far stronger than any other type of alloy swingarm construction. The shocks are fine for all but the best riders, but aren't rebuildable. There are two damping settings and three spring preload settings. Fully floating brake works well.



Forks were too stiff initially and too soft at full compression. Apart from that, very plush, easily the best out of Japan. Front brake is superb.

The heart of the beast is a torquey 417cc case-reed inducted powerplant which delivers a powerband designed to win. It is close in its configuration to what the works team uses. Keep your eye on the bolts, and make sure the aircleaner is meticulously maintained.



**Engine Type**  
Two-stroke, Power Reed™  
single cylinder  
**Displacement**  
417cc  
**Carburetor**  
Mikuni VM36SS  
**Compression Ratio**  
70:1  
**Bore and Stroke**  
80.0mm x 83.0mm  
**Starter System**  
Kick  
**Transmission**  
5-speed, constant mesh  
**Suspension: Front Fork**  
Air, oil-damped, leading axle,  
11.2 in. travel  
**Rear Swing Arm**  
Aluminum box type, gas-oil shocks,  
2 damping adjustments,  
3 load settings,  
11.8 in. wheel travel  
**Ground Clearance**  
350mm (13.8 in.)  
**Brakes: Front**  
Internal expanding  
**Rear**  
Internal expanding, full floating  
**Tires: Front**  
3.00-21-4PR, full knobby  
**Rear**  
4.50-18-4PR, full knobby  
**Lubrication System**  
Fuel oil mixture  
**Fuel Tank Capacity**  
8.5 lit (2.2 gal)  
**Length**  
2,145mm (84.4 in.)  
**Width**  
880mm (34.6 in.)  
**Height**  
1,235mm (48.6 in.)  
**Wheelbase**  
1,445mm (56.9 in.)  
**Dry Weight**  
101 kg (223 lbs)  
**Color**  
Yellow



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