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**The 550 Katana is styled for tomorrow**  
*But the mechanicals are vintage '77.*

• A first look at Suzuki's 550 Katana belies the true reason for its existence. Because as improbable as it might seem, this zoot-looking sport flashbike actually is an economy-minded model. And it was planned that way right from the start.

Suzuki's approach to the 550 sport market was quite a bit different from the competition's. Instead of trying to beat Kawasaki's GPz550 or Yamaha's 550 Seca in acceleration or top speed, Suzuki aimed for another kind of victory: to score heavily in the showroom by making the GS550M Katana the least expensive bike in its class—and do it by a wide margin.

Whenever price is the number-one priority, though, something has to give. And the 550M was no exception, so there wasn't room in its R&D budget for a lot of new—and also expensive—technology. As a result, underneath the 550M's stylish, Muth-inspired bodywork lives the same basic GS550 that's been kicking around since 1977. Only the cosmetics and a few assorted chassis pieces are new for '82.

In order to bring the new Katana in on its tight budget, absolutely nothing in the engine was changed. Right down to the constant-vacuum carbs, 8.6:1 compression ratio and transistorized ignition, it's the same powerplant used in last year's 550, and indeed, even the year before that. In fact, the last change

# Suzuki GS550M Katana

*Cannon fodder for the moto-price wars.*

to this engine was the addition of those CV carbs and the transistorized ignition in 1980; and even those modifications were implemented to please the EPA, not to increase performance. As a result, this 549cc, double-cam four, the engine that was so critically acclaimed just a few years ago, seems a little outdated.

Mostly because of its EPA-pleasing carburetion, the 550 Katana suffers from the same kinds of cold-start reluctance, long warmup requirements and mid-range surging that have typified 550 Suzukis from the beginning. But on the plus side of the performance ledger—and something that didn't require one additional red cent to accomplish—is the reliability of this engine. It's an anvil-solid, almost unbreakable piece of hardware, just as it always has been.

Still, the power that the 550M generates is

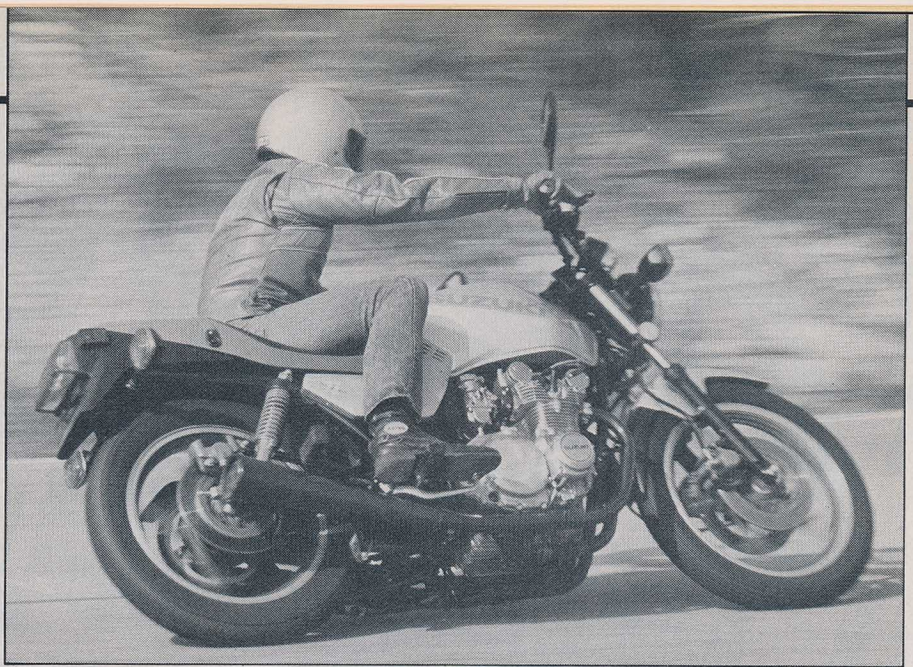
all in the upper ranges, from 7000 rpm right up to redline. What this means is that plenty of shifting is needed to keep the engine in its powerband. And while that might have been the norm for Seventies-vintage 550s, for those of today it is not. In situations where a GPz or Seca 550 might need only a twist of the throttle in top gear to accelerate briskly, this Suzuki mid-sizer will have to drop down a gear, maybe even two.

The frame for the new Katana also is no more than a basic GS550 structure, but unlike the engine, it doesn't penalize performance. The frame is rigid and free of any discernable flex; and with needle bearings at the swingarm pivot and tapered rollers at the steering head, using it as the foundation for a sportbike posed no problems at all. The only changes made to the frame were the addition of some minor brackets and mounts for the

new bodywork and reaset controls. And that didn't amount to much at all, costwise.

But while the corporate pursestrings were drawn tight on new engine and frame designs, that wasn't the case with the suspension system. Both front and rear, the 550M has all-new, totally up-to-date components. On this Katana, Suzuki has for the first time used an air-spring fork on a 550, and at the rear the 550M has four-way adjustable rebound damping. Consequently, while the 550M might lack bullet-like acceleration, its handling is right in the hunt with the latest 550 sport-riding hardware on the market.

Much of the M-model's precision in the turns stems from its spring rates, which are on the stiff side but nothing like on the flagship Katana, the 1000S. On this Katana the springing is just firm enough to inspire confidence, yet not so rock-solid that the rider's eyeballs are left jiggling in their sockets. When all the suspension settings are dialed-in to full-soft, around-town riding and freeway



**Econo-pricing and racetrack handling keep the smallest Katana on the right line**

*A Suzuki designed for the budget-minded canyon crusader.*

## SUZUKI GS550M KATANA

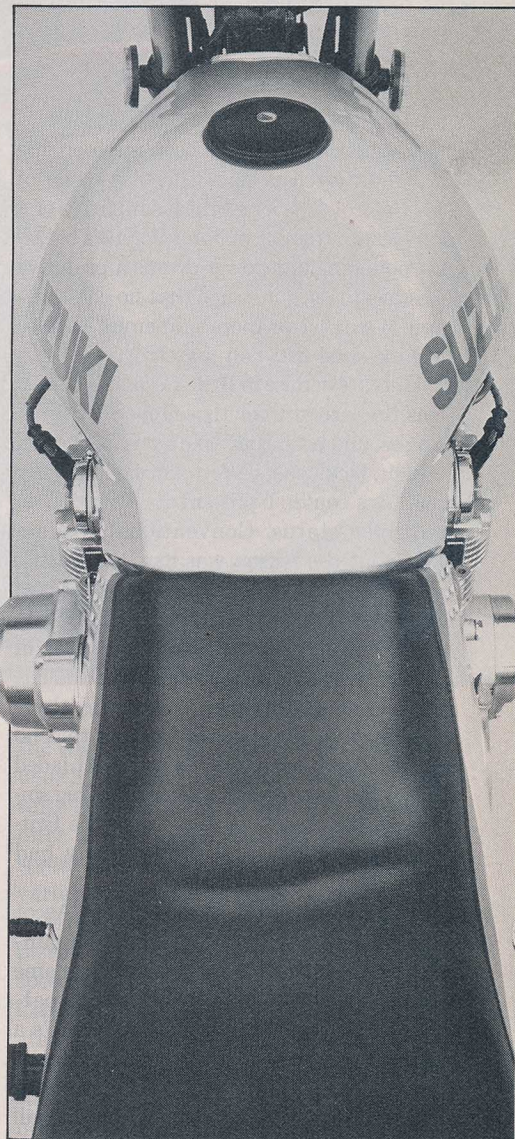
**Importer:** U.S. Suzuki Motor Corporation  
3251 East Imperial Highway  
Brea, California 92621

Category	street
Suggested retail price	\$2599
Engine type	four-stroke transverse vertical four
Valve arrangement	double overhead camshafts
Bore and stroke	56.0mm x 55.8mm
Displacement	549.7cc
Compression ratio	8.6:1
Carburetion	four 32mm Mikuni constant-vacuum
Gearbox	6-speed
Front fork/wheel travel	air-spring, 37mm stanchion tube diameter/5.1 in. (130mm)
Rear shocks/wheel travel	5-way adjustable spring preload, 4-way adjustable rebound damping/4.3 in. (110mm)
Wheelbase	57.0 to 58.3 in. (1448 to 1481mm)
Seat height	30.5 in. (775mm)
Weight	449 lbs. (204kg)
Best 1/4-mile acceleration	13.692 sec., 95.94 mph (154 kph)
Top speed (calculated)	120 mph (192 kph)
Stopping distance from 60 mph	135 ft. (41m)
Fuel consumption	39 to 53 mpg (17 to 23 km/l)
Warranty	12 months unlimited mileage
Available color	silver with red only

sportbike on the market. Granted, it's no mini-rocket, as its mid- to high-13-second, 95-mph quarter-mile times attest. But it never was intended to be anything of the sort. Price figures, not performance figures, were the objective. The 550 Katana was meant to be a competent sportbike, but at \$2599, one that would sell for \$400 to \$500 less than the competition's 550s.

And a good deal it would have been, too, except for one thing: Motorcycle sales took a dip this spring, and so to keep their warehouses from getting overstocked, both Kawasaki and Yamaha lowered the pricetags on their 550 sportbikes. So instead of undercutting the others by hundreds of dollars, the 550M is barely cheaper at all—only \$60 less than Yamaha's 550 Seca. And stacked up against Kawasaki's Little Red Ripper, priced at \$2749 this year, that Econosport Suzuki just isn't competitive.

The priceleader sportbike was a good idea on Suzuki's part. But this time, at least, it was the right idea at the wrong time.—*Joe Kress*



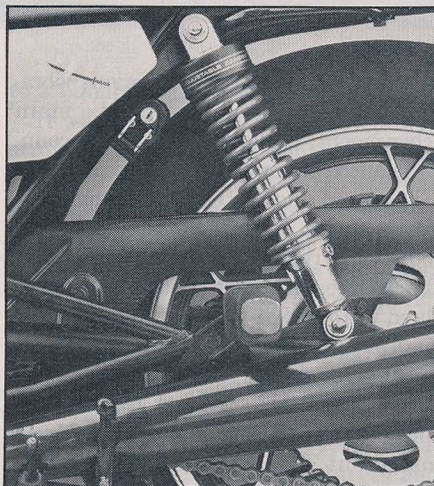
**Smooth lines flow back to rider**

*And they offer a six-gallon stay.*

cruises are smooth and jolt-free. But when the winding roads beckon, a few more pounds of air in the fork and a couple of clicks up on the preload and damping will have the 550M apexing in style. The bike might lose out on the straightaways, but you can bet it won't be lost in the corners.

Attacking those corners will be made easier by the brakes, too. As with the suspension systems, Suzuki devoted a few well-spent bucks on all-new brakes with dual discs up front and a single disc at the rear. And while the brakes are somewhat spongy-feeling at first, they never fail to pull the bike down to a quick, sure stop.

So, taken in its entirety, this new breed of sportbike—call it an Econosport—has a great deal going for it. It handles well, rides nicely, is economical to run, is extremely sporty looking and most of all, is the least-expensive 550



**Four-way adjustable GS shocks**

*Old ideas suspended by new hardware.*