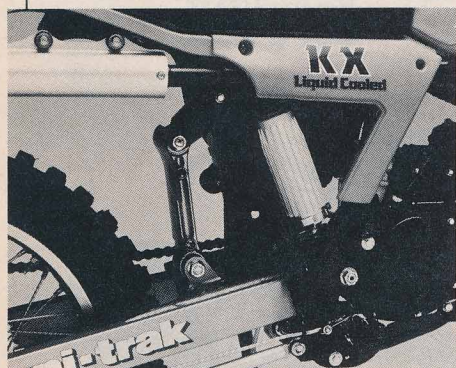


KAWASAKI KX125

Kawasaki's new front and rear suspension designs keep the 1983 KX in the forefront of the ultra-competitive 125cc class.



□ Last year, Kawasaki's sweeping changes to the KX125 pushed it right to the front of the competitive 125 motocross class. When the competition's hot, though, a bike can't coast on last year's momentum, so the factory wisely took an aggressive course once again with the KX, substantially improving it for '83.

This year, Kawasaki concentrated on the KX's running gear, redesigning both the front and rear suspension. Replacing last year's 41mm fork is a 43mm setup—not only larger than the

fork on any other 125, but the same as on Kawasaki's 250 and open class bikes. The Kayaba-built unit offers an adjustable relief-valve system that affects high-speed compression damping. At lower fork speeds two non-adjustable primary orifices take care of the compression damping. When the fork compresses rapidly, the adjuster opens two secondary damping orifices. Screw-type adjusters at the bottom of each fork leg effect a four-percent change in damping for every turn. From the heaviest-damping, fully seated position, each adjuster screws out eight turns. Like last year's 125, the 1983 KX features air caps, though Kawasaki recommends zero psi in the fork.

The 125 shares its single-shock Uni-Trak rear suspension with Kawasaki's two larger motocrossers. This Uni-Trak differs completely from last year's; a single aluminum strut replaces 1982's twin steel arm pieces, a new steel rocker arm improves the rising-rate relationship, and the gas-charged remote-reservoir shock has been revamped. To cut weight, Kawasaki reduced the size of the shock piston and rod diameter, as well as the shock spring. Even though the shock stroke is 20mm longer than last year's 100mm, the new Uni-Trak linkage keeps rear-wheel travel at 11.8 inches. As with last year's 125, threaded collars set spring preload, and rebound damping adjusts four ways, each step increasing damping force 10 percent.

Kawasaki retained the unusual but effective front disc brake, increasing the diameter of the caliper piston from 30 to 34mm to improve stopping action. Conversely, Kawasaki decreased the inner diameter of the rear

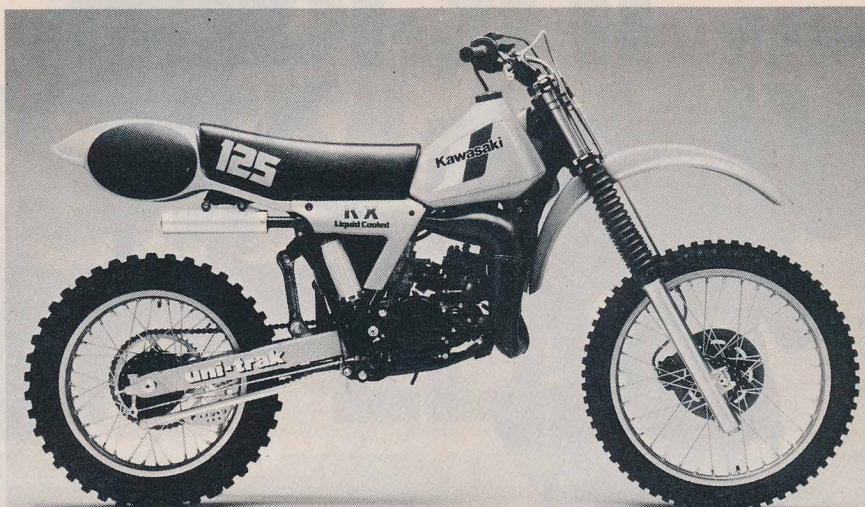
(Continued on page 83)



KAWASAKI KX125

drum brake from 130mm to 110mm to cut weight; this and other changes slimmed the KX down to a svelte 205 pounds with one gallon of gas in the plastic 2.0-gallon fuel tank. Even so, it weighs 7.5 pounds more than the new featherweight Honda CR125R.

New engine porting toughens what was already one of the hardest-charging 125s available. Last year Kawasaki gave the KX an impressive top-end charge that came at the cost of low-end and mid-range flexibility. Though last year's 125 is still a top-end wonder, engine refinements have bolstered the rest of the powerband.



To guarantee the durability of this high-revving powerplant, Kawasaki strengthened the bottom end, clutch and transmission gears. A lower primary reduction ratio relieves some gearbox strain, and a 12-tooth countershaft sprocket replaces last year's 13-tooth gear to retain just about the same overall ratio. On the intake side the KX uses a new two-stage foam air filter, and a new rebuildable aluminum silencer replaces the usual throw-away steel OEM items. A revised advance curve in the pointless electronic ignition system rounds out the engine changes.

On the track the KX125's most striking attribute is an excellent top-end power surge. The battle for horsepower supremacy is still a major issue in the 125 class wars; you simply cannot spot the competition a couple of ponies. With the '83 KX you don't—the power is there; it's up to you to use it. No excuses.

The KX adheres to the primary rule of 125 racing: Don't Shut Off. Top-

flight riders who can keep the throttle pinned constantly will love the KX's brawny high-rpm muscle. Less expert riders may not fully tap the Kawasaki's potential; though less peaky than last year's powerband, this year's is neither as broad nor as forgiving as the Honda CR125R's. Should you let the Kawasaki fall off the pipe, however, a slap or two at the clutch lever brings the 125 right back up to the fat portion of the powerband; the gear ratios suit the engine well, and the newly strengthened clutch can survive a thrashing.

The updated front disc brake is so effective it may take you a while to adjust to the 125's remarkable stopping power. The disc provides good feel, progressive action and virtually fade-proof braking even in the wet. The effective full-floating rear drum brake further enhances the KX's stopping abilities.

Kawasaki's excellent new rear suspension eliminates the bugs that plagued last year's Uni-Trak system. The rear end is now a smoothly progressive rising-rate system; gone is the heavy bottoming and harsh mid-stroke action that handicapped the '82 KX. Over small stutter bumps the rear end yields a compliant, well-controlled ride, and it sucks up even large bumps and drop-offs easily. We liked the shock action with the damper set on the number two position, and the fork with no air and the compression damping set out five to six turns from fully seated. The Kawasaki's fork is good, though less responsive than the Honda CR125's front end. And while the KX offers neutral and precise steering, its front end does not stick quite as well as the Honda's. In slick, off-camber corners where KX riders head for the berm, CR pilots will

hold the edge in handling as they pivot the more agile Honda through on the inside line.

Although we've so far tested only two new 125 MX bikes—the Honda CR and the Kawasaki KX—prospective buyers will find choosing between them a pleasant dilemma. Like two good bantamweight boxers, these bikes can battle head-to-head, neither giving up an inch. Each holds slight advantages over the other, so consider your riding style and skill level before making your selection. The Honda is as suitable for novices as it is for experts; the KX is cut out mainly for the best riders. Either bike can be a winner; if you're mounted on the Kawasaki or Honda 125 and you don't take the checkers first, you've no one to blame but yourself. ■

Vital Statistics

Make & model Kawasaki KX125-B2
Price \$1739

Engine

Type Two-stroke, reed-valve-inducted
single; liquid-cooled
Bore & stroke 56.0 x 50.6mm (2.20 x 1.99 in.)
Displacement 124cc (7.6 cu. in.)
Transmission Six-speed, constant-mesh,
wet-clutch

Chassis

Type Single-downtube, full-cradle frame;
box-section aluminum swing arm
Suspension, front ... Leading-axle, air-adjustable fork
with 43mm tubes, adjustable
compression damping, and 11.8 in.
(300mm) of travel
rear. . . (1) gas-charged, remote-reservoir
shock absorber, adjustable for spring
preload and rebound damping,
producing 11.8 in. (300mm) of
rear-wheel travel
Brake, front Hydraulic, single-disc
with single-piston caliper
rear Rod-actuated,
single-leading-shoe drum
Tire, front 3.00 x 21 Dunlop Sports K490
rear 4.00 x 18 Dunlop Sports K490
Fuel capacity 2.0 gal. (7.6 l)
Weight (w/one gal. gas) 205.0 lbs. (93.0 kg)