



## MINITEST:

# Suzuki PE175X Enduro

*Evolution in the midst of revolution.*

• The kid on the 175 Kawasaki summed it up best: "Big deal. There ain't anything new here except the decals."

He was dead-wrong, of course, when he made that instant appraisal of Suzuki's newest 175cc enduro racer just after his KDX met our PE along the trail. The point is, though, that however erroneous his conclusion, it's easy to understand how he reached it. Because there's no denying that this year's PE175 really does look as though someone recently pasted different decals on last year's bike. But the truth is that no matter what it may look like, the new PE in fact incorporates a multitude of detail changes that render it a better motorcycle.

Considering that last year's PE wasn't exactly chopped liver, that's high marks for the

new model. Besides, if he'd been a really sharp scrutineer, Kid KDX would have spotted other evidence of brand-new on the PE. He shouldn't have overlooked, for instance, that the traditional shovel-like skidplate has been abandoned in favor of "Six-Day Bars." That's ISDT-speak for a pair of small additional frame loops, one per side, beneath the outer engine cases. Their purpose is to protect those valuable engine bits from impact damage while forestalling the accumulation of mud (sometimes as much as eight or ten pounds of it) that can build up between the skidplate and the bottom of the motor. Removal of the plate did, however, bring about the need for a tiny ramp-like "mini-skidplate" on the bottom of the frame at each junction of lower frame rail and

rear downtube. The ends of these tubes protrude down below each rail, and the ramps prevent them from getting hung up as the undercarriage is dragged across fat logs and big rocks.

There are more visible, if not trivial, differences between the old and the new PE175—including a larger tool-bag platform on the rear fender (no bag is included), a more flexible front number-plate mount and a stronger muffler-to-frame attachment system—but the truly important new stuff is where you can't see it: in the 172cc cast-rod two-stroke motor. Some riders, you see, complained last year that although the PE generally was fast enough to suit their tastes, it needed a pinch more low-end grunt and midrange response to enhance its woody flavor. So Suzuki seasoned the tuning recipe ever so slightly by lowering the exhaust port one millimeter, increasing the compression ratio from 7.6:1 to 7.9:1 and changing the size of the jet needle and pilot jet in the 34mm Mikuni carb.

Those few alterations are not as trifling as they might seem. They've allowed the new PE175 to maintain its 1990 level of peak engine performance, but the power curve now lives a bit lower in the rpm range. So even at 233 pounds dry, this 175cc enduro bike can all but run wheel-to-wheel with some full-blown 250cc motocrossers, just as it could last year. But now it also can lug up a steep hill in first gear at surprisingly low rpm, usually without the aid of any deliberate clutch slippage, and that's something it often couldn't do last year. There's still a trace of abruptness when the engine revs up into the lower limits of the powerband, especially in the first couple of gears, but that transition is noticeably smoother than on the '90 model PE175.

Compensating the engine's reflowed power delivery are a few small-but-significant refinements that should extend its longevity. For one, the reinforcing ribs on the underside of the cast-aluminum piston are bigger, which improves the piston's heat-dissipating properties and increases its strength as well. Two, both of the PE's piston rings are thicker this year (up from 2.2mm to 2.4mm) to discourage ring flutter at high rpm. That's no small deal, either, when you consider that this six-speed, competition-oriented motor probably will spend the greater part of its useful half-life hovering at or near maximum revs. And if you add to those improvements things like an upgraded ignition coil and better sound-dampening material inside the expansion chamber, you begin to understand what the kid on the Kawasaki didn't—  
that there really is a lot new about the PE175.

A few reliability-enhancing refinements even have found their way onto the PE's MX-style, RM-inspired chassis. The frame itself is largely the same as before and so is its geometry, but the steering head now is a welded-together assembly that's much stronger than the one-piece seamless head used previously. There's also a beefier fork stop, a stronger alloy material in the front wheel rim, improved spoke nipples at both wheels and a longer-lasting, non-adjustable nylon rubbing block in the caliper-type chain guide. Suzuki also borrowed a trick



Miniature skidplate ramp on bottom rails

Stopping the dreaded downtube hangup.



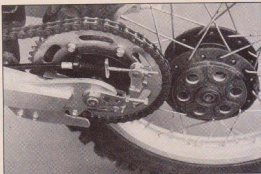
Six-Day bars instead of a skidplate

So your cases are intact on the 7th.

from the Europeans (and, in recent years, Honda) by switching to two-piece handlebar-lever brackets on the PE. The advantage is that if you fall and break a lever in an enduro (and if you're carrying a spare, of course), you lose less time by being able to remove the bracket in two pieces instead of first taking off the handgrip as you must with one-piece brackets.

In the end, though, what counts is how the chassis works, not how it's made, and Suzuki has little to worry about in that regard. The PE175 offers a wide range of handling competence that runs from the fineness of a surgeon, to a high degree of stability at sixth-gear speeds on rough trails. And the all-Kayaba suspension (air-spring front; dual unreservoired gas shocks in the rear) is just firm enough to resist excessive bottoming during spirited trail races, and yet plush enough that you won't finish a day-long ride feeling as though you just went 15 rounds with a boxing kangaroo.

Come to think of it, probably the only thing that Suzuki does have to worry about with this



PE's off-in-seconds quick-change rear wheel

High-speed tire-changing tricks brought to you directly from the ISDT team.

## SUZUKI PE175

Importer: U.S. Suzuki Motor Corp.  
13767 Fireway Drive  
Cerritos, California 90603

Category	enduro
Suggested retail price	\$1470
Engine type	two-stroke, vertical, single
Fuel arrangement	one carburetor-controlled intake, one reed valve-controlled intake, 36 main jets, one exhaust
Bore and stroke	62.0mm x 57.0mm
Displacement	175 cc
Configuration	one 34mm Mikuni slide needle
Gearbox	6-speed
Front fork/wheel travel	air-spring, 30mm stanchion fork diameter: 7.0 in. (178mm)
Rear shocks/wheel travel	3-way adjustable spring preload: 0.0 in. (217mm)
Wheelbase	66.0 to 57.0 in. (1422 to 1428mm)
Seat height	36.2 in. (919mm)
Weight	225 lbs. (101 kg)
Top speed (observed)	71 mph (114 km/h)
Warranty	none
Available colors	yellow

bike is the KDX175, the very motorcycle Kid Kawasaki was sitting atop when he passed judgement on the PE. Because in virtually every way—save for simplicity of wheel detachment, lack of rear-brake chatter and, to some small extent, the ability to slalom through the tight stuff—the KDX is marginally better. Which is not to imply that the PE is less than good or isn't worthy of consideration; to the contrary, it's an unusually fine enduro machine that, in all probability, would never make anyone regret having bought it. Unless, that is, he were one of those demanding, discriminating competition riders who always must have the very best motorcycle available at any given time.

In that case, it's a pity that the PE175 had to come along when it did, that it must occupy the same time-frame as the 175 Kawasaki. Because if there were no such thing as a KDX, the PE would be, by far, the absolute class-act in the 175cc enduro-bike category. Granted, it's not supernatural like the KDX175; it's merely great.

—Paul Dean

