

A new tool bag, rear fender, air forks and chain guard are obvious at a glance. KDX is still comfortable and good handling.

FIRST IMPRESSION

1981 KAWAS

The best gets better

In order to become the Bike of the Year for 1980, our KDX175 had to prove itself over months of punishment. We rode it in four separate District 37 enduros, a number of informal motocross sessions, and many long hours of trail riding. We never went easy on it, and aside from a few minor problems in the beginning, we never had to do more than change the oil, grease the suspension components, and fill the tank with pre-mix. Reliability was one of the main strong points, and the stock suspension and handling characteristics were so good,

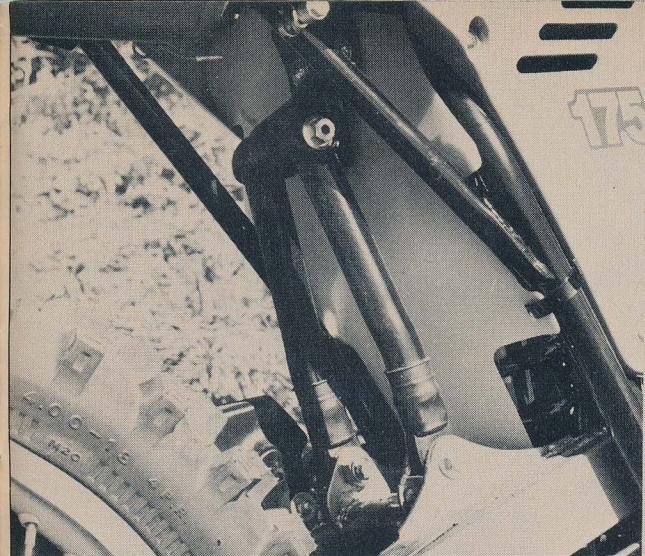
we can't recall ever taking a bad crash on the bike.

With this in mind, the big question was: what could Kawasaki do to make it better? And would they even try to make any improvements? Even though the KDX was a superb first year effort, it would be understandable if Big Greed decided to leave it alone for one more year, and concentrate on the rest of their line. Even if they did no more than change the tank stickers around, we'd ride it and like it, although there'd be nothing new to report.

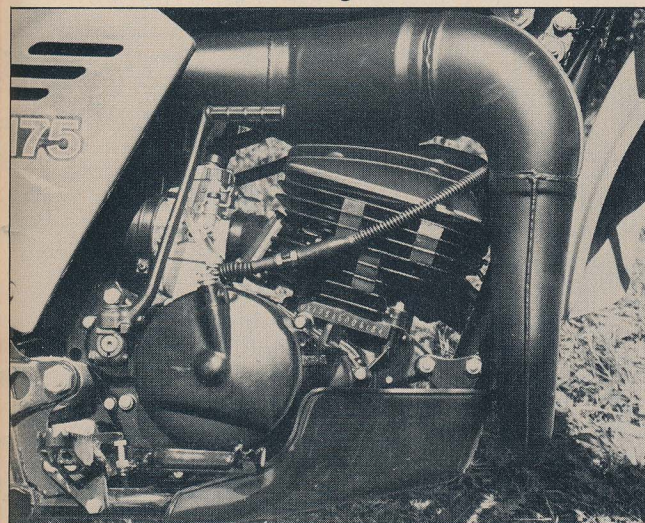
As it turns out, before we even had a chance to guess at what would be the major changes in '81, we were offered a ride on the new model at Jackpine enduro last August. We are happy to

report that Kawasaki didn't sit on their hands this year, and the KDX is a much improved machine for 1981.

The first detail improvement we noticed was a new rear fender. Not living in the mud belt, we don't know too much about this, but we are told that the old fender was too short to do the job in really sloppy runs. The new fender should take care of this, as it's quite a bit wider and longer than last year's model. Perched on the top of said fender is a vinyl tool bag. The method of attachment is a little curious, and the bag is rather funky looking, but at least it's a tool bag. The taillamp is molded into the fender for '81, and should prove to be a little more durable and better protected in a



Rear Trak arms are a new cylindrical shape, should be much stronger.



Larger diameter pipe midsection and suspected porting changes make for a much more powerful KDX.



SAKI KDX175

crash.

Out front, the forks have gotten the air treatment for '81, and it feels like air pressures between 6 and 12 pounds will be normal. We're told nothing internally has been changed, except the spring rate, and damping feels the same as the '80 bike. The front fender and headlight remain the same.

We had no specs on the rear suspension, but suspect that the shock hasn't been changed on the new bike. The Trak arms have been redesigned for all the KX and KDX models and should prove to be much stronger at the rear pivot. Overall, the KDX's suspension felt as good as the '80 bike and now offers the option of dialing in more fork stiffness with a few pounds of air.

The big news is the engine. Last year's KDX was one of the fastest 175s on the market, but this year's bike will blow its doors off. We won't have any details until we get out test bike, but it's obvious that the '81 KDX uses a different pipe, and possibly different cylinder porting. The power gain is mostly in the low and mid-range, and along with making the KDX much quicker out of the hole, the abundance of power makes the second/third gear gap much less bothersome.

It's too early to tell for sure, but it seems like the KDX is going to be the most ferocious 175 in the class again this year. The bike constantly amazed us. On a rough sand fireroad it would pull up alongside of anything other

than an open bike, and with a little more prodding, start to pull away. This is one unbelievable motor.

Along with its new shape, the pipe has received a new O-ring groove where the header meets the cylinder, and we're told that this will cure the exhaust leak problem of the past. In true Dirt Bike tradition, we didn't believe a word of it, and will be checking out this sore spot much closer when we get our test bike. Also we'll be looking at the vibration/motor mount problem of the past, and whether or not anything has been done in this direction. Either way, after one too-short day's ride, it's obvious that Kawasaki has one more winner on their hands. □