

BIKES OF THE STARS

What's new besides HRP workstands

By Rondo Talbot

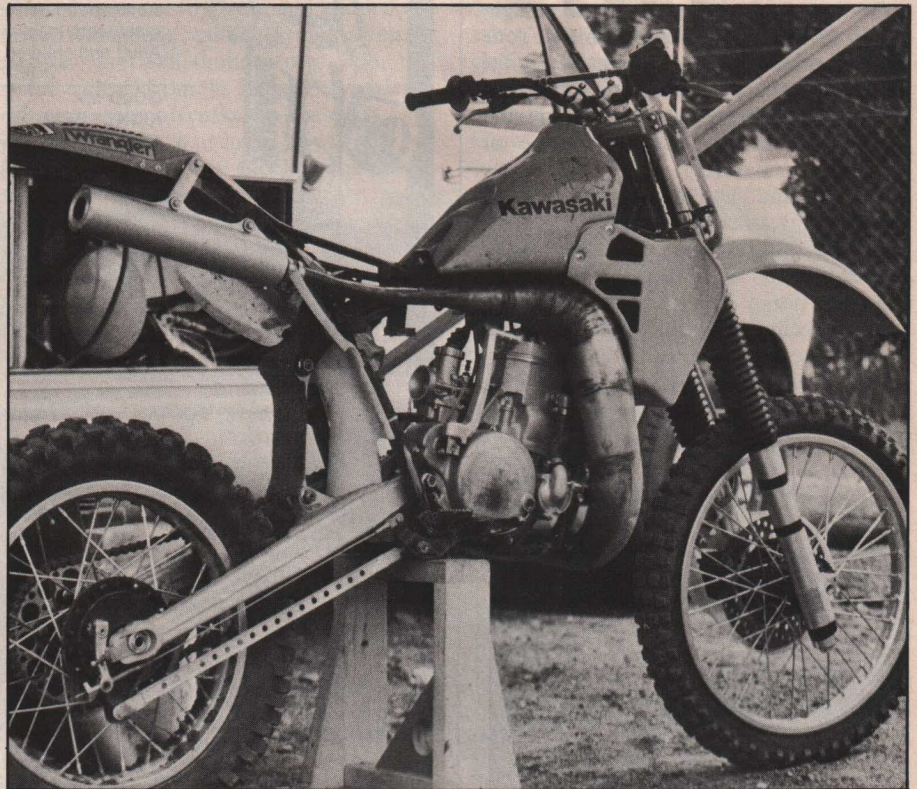
Want to find out what all the new factory bikes are running this year? Easy. Just have arms like Conan, a pit pass from the AMA, a white shirt with "official" on the front, and a disposition like a hungry guard dog. Or, failing that, you can spend a lot of time studying the photos supplied here, in these very pages.

We, the staff of *Dirt Bike*, have done all the dirty work for you. Endless hours of hanging around the pits can make a journalist tired, but, most assuredly, not bored.

One trend is clearly obvious this year: Everyone is trying to get the weight of the bikes centered as low as possible in the frame. Factories have learned that two bikes of identical weight will perform totally differently if one bike's mass is centered a mere 20mm lower to the ground than the other.

You'll also see some of the bikes running disc brakes, front and rear. There are two schools of thought on this subject, but one thing remains clear: It's still not possible to make a disc brake setup lighter than a conventional drum/shoe assembly.

Other notes: All of the big bikes are just that—big! You won't find any 450s, as in years past. The usual trickery of works bikes is present: thin-wall frame tubing, aluminum and titanium alloys in certain areas and the increased use of composite materials in areas you can't see. □

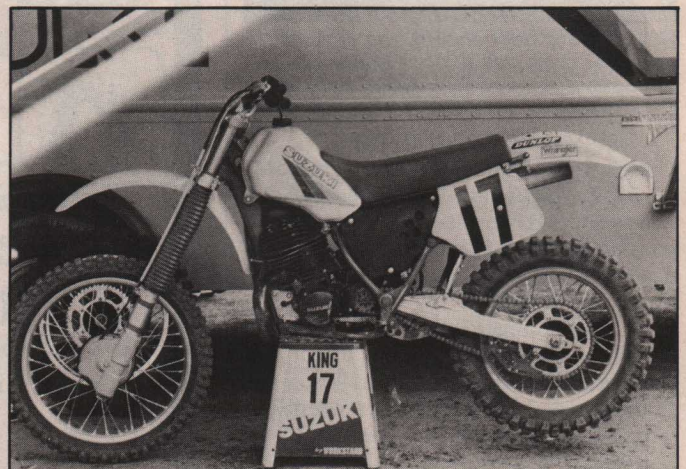


Howerton's water-cooled 500 is a monster. A 38 Mikuni and a torque pipe keep things semi-normal on the bruiser. They're just getting the handling sorted out and the weight is right at the limit. Swingarm is a very long tapered unit.

Photos by Dennis West



All of the works Yamahas are fitted with a new linkage that resembles something in between the Honda and the KTM. Ohlins handles the rear damping chores and the 500 is Power Valved.



Alan King's 500 Suzuki is a side breather and a four-speeder. It's fast, but down on power compared with the Hondas. Some 500s are running Boyesen "Wings" inside the reed cage. Lots of aluminum is used and the bike is light. The tank is shaped very much like the production Honda 480s.



Magoo's Open Honda is fitted with the same cases that the European water-cooled versions have, only it's still air-cooled. The clutch is hydraulic rather than cable operated, and the pull is easier than on the 125s.



Chuck Sun's Maico is a one-off model, built just before the start of the season. Notice the lowered aluminum gas tank, Kawa front wheel and aluminum airbox. The entire chassis is lower and slimmer and the pipe goes up the left side instead of the right, like the stockers.



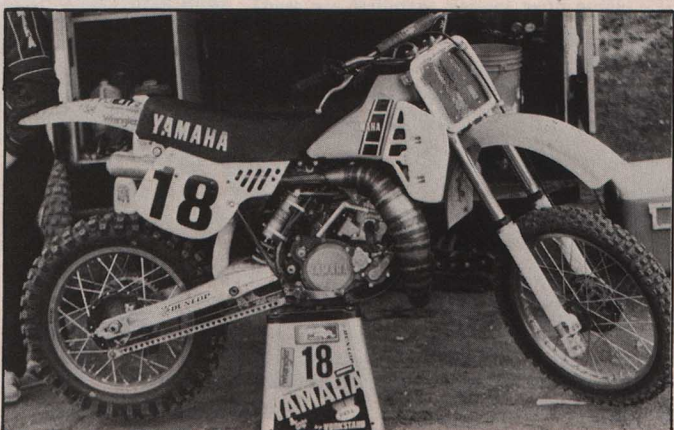
Husky's MX effort is a limited one. Here, Andy Stacy glares at the cameras while holding down his painfully stock CR500 Hooska. Besides a works cylinder and some refined suspension, the bike is a showroom stocker.



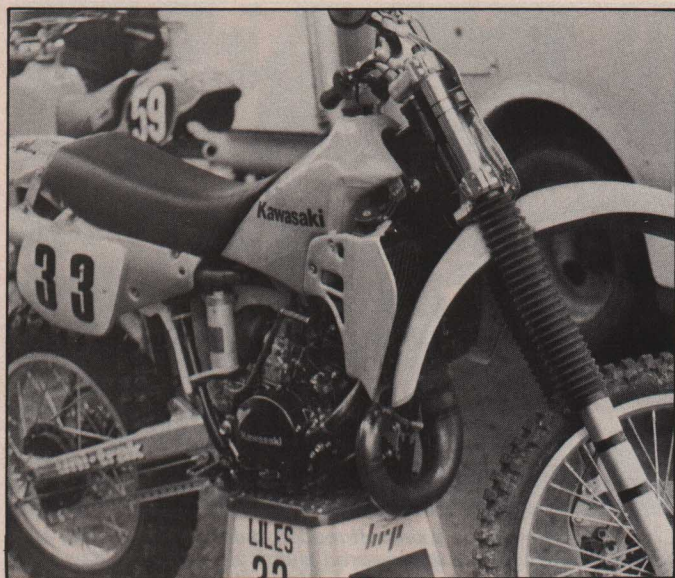
John Finkeldey's 495 KTM has had very little done to it as far as the motor goes. The entire front end is off of a 250 water-cooler, as is the front wheel. This alone saves about seven pounds.



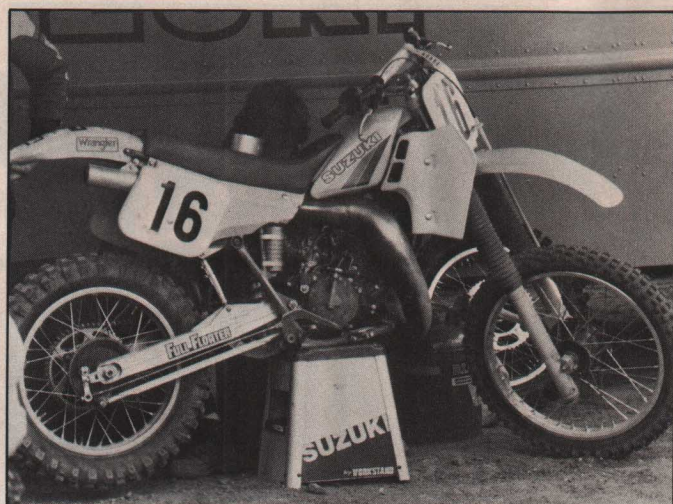
Hannah's Honda is the only red machine not fitted with a disc brake somewhere. The shock is a piggyback Showa that has adjustable compression and rebound damping. Seventy percent of the bike's fuel is carried in the lower portion of the oddly shaped tank.



Bell's 250, besides having the new linkage, features a tapered swingarm, a one-off coral pipe and a powerband that is super strong right off the bottom into the mid-range.



The Kawasaki 250 looks very stock—it is not. Gull-shaped triple clamps, aluminum tank, handmade forks and a KYB shock are all stock works items. The swingarm is a handmade tapered unit that is super light, yet very strong. It is fast.



Burnworth's Suzuki features a normal gas tank/airbox arrangement. The seat is cut down and has a safety tongue on it. A small gas tank holds just enough fuel for a 35-minute moto. The brake pedal is black painted aluminum and the kickstarter is super small and tucked in tight.



Yamaha has seen fit to focus a major amount of attention on its 125. Lechien's bike has a rotary-valve-type engine. The valve is driven off the crankshaft up to a normally placed carb. His bike is very, very fast.



Suzuki's 125 effort is suffering from a dog motor that makes Barnett work far too hard for National points. In fact, it's taking three mechanics to shape the bike in between motos. The bike carries the fuel low and handles fine, but lacks punch.



Honda's 125 runs disc brakes both front and rear. The tank is similar to the 250's design and the power is down compared with the Kawa's 125. That little bottle up by the shock reservoir is the master cylinder for the rear brake.



Ward's Kawa 125 is the fastest in the class. The bike sits right on the weight limit, and has the motor of death. Muffler is stock; both the swingarm and the linkage are hand-machined trick-o's. □