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**FASTEST 125 WE'VE EVER TESTED:  
KTM's AWESOME MXer TAKES OVER THE LEAD!**

**DIRT  
BIKE**

# DIRT BIKE

NOVEMBER 1983

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KAWASAKI 'CROSSERS:  
EVEN MORE FOR '84**

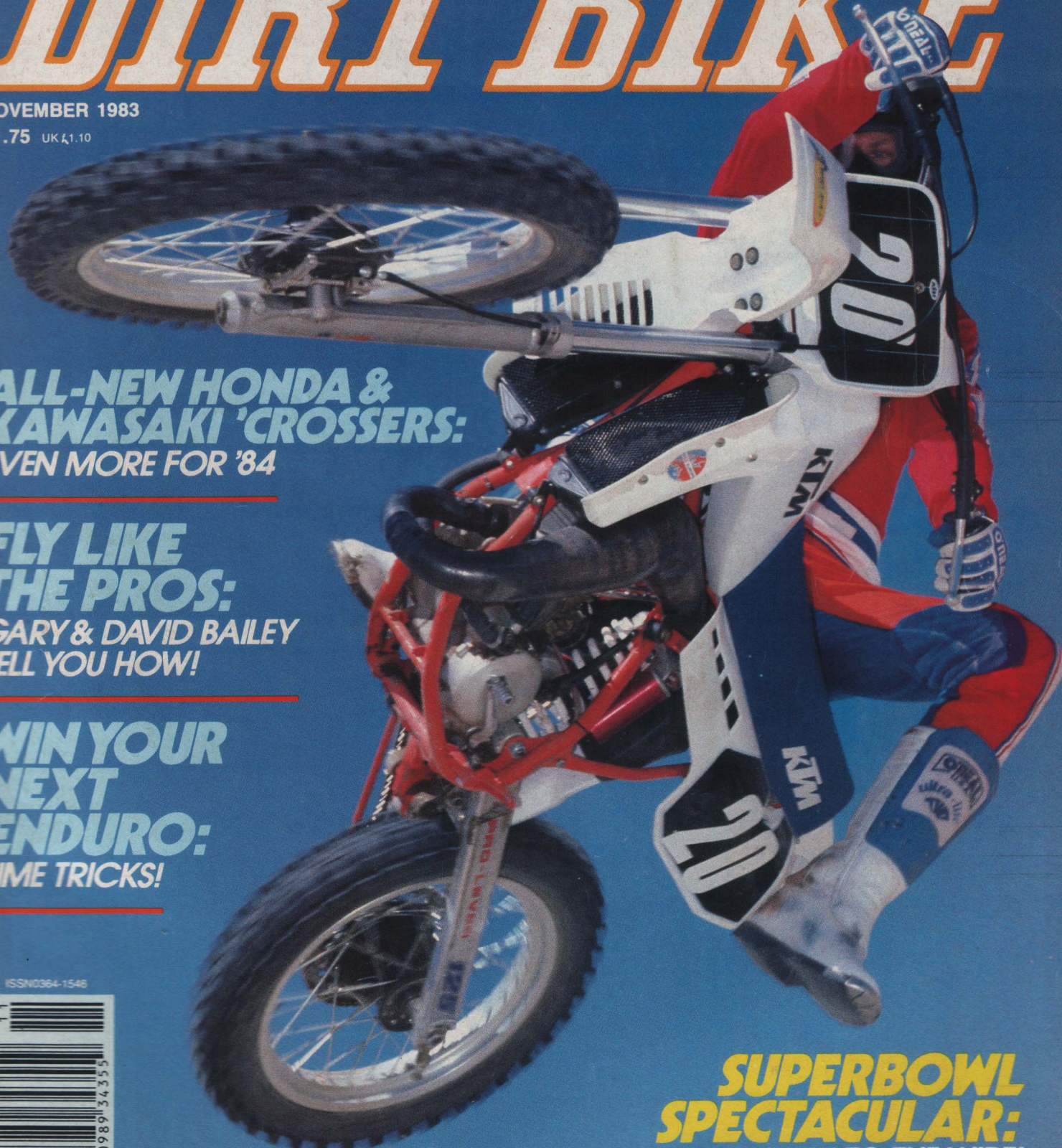
**FLY LIKE  
THE PROS:  
GARY & DAVID BAILEY  
TELL YOU HOW!**

**WIN YOUR  
NEXT  
ENDURO:  
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**SUPERBOWL  
SPECTACULAR:  
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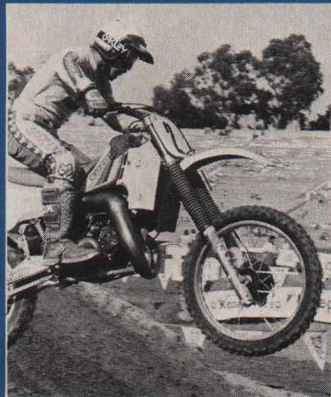
# DIRT BIKE

NOVEMBER 1983

VOLUME 13, NO. 11



SUPERBOWL



JUMP LIKE A PRO



SUZUKI SP250



SUZUKI SP500



SPRING TUNING



TRI-ZINGER



KTM 125MX

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**ON THE COVER:**—Larry Baker hangs buns on the near-supersonic KTM 125. After a couple of jumps like this one, we wound up stapling his gloves to the grips just to keep him on the bike. Ultra-radical photo by Tom Webb; stylish separation by Valley Film.

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**EXCLUSIVE: FIRST TEST!**

# 1984 KTM 125

Stand back, Honda, Kawasaki, Suzuki & Yamaha.  
Get ready for the new challenger

By the Staff of *Dirt Bike*

**M**ake no mistake about it, 1983 was a great year for 125 motocrossers. The Big Four came out swinging, with fast, light racers bristling with trickery. This made it difficult for a 125 European bike that was merely "good" to cause much of a fuss or make a dent in the MX marketplace. Thus, the KTM 125 was relegated to the small but faithful band of hard-core enthusiasts who appreciated the good mid-range power and ultra-reliability of their white bikes.

One other point—and a less-than-minor one. You had to be a real gonzo KTM freak to own the 125. It retailed for over \$2400, while the Japanese counterparts sold for the mid-1700s. That's a big enough spread to discourage a full-on charge with money in fist to KTM dealers, beating on the counter and demanding a Katoom.

It sort of makes you wonder why anyone would pay an extra 700 bucks just to have something different. Well, after talking to

many KTM 125 owners (and KTM dealers), they said that the white wonders were incredibly reliable and actually cost *less* to race and maintain over a full year than a Big Four 125.

In this respect, we must somewhat agree. Nothing is more clapped out and tired than a Big Four 125 MXer that's been raced or ridden hard for five or six months. By that time, the frames are sagging, the cases are a mass of air leaks, and the dogs on the gears are barking loudly.

Things like forged pistons *do* make a difference. That's why they cost more in the first place. We know of riders who have raced for a full year with the same piston on a KTM 125, 1983 flavor. When you become aware that *no* Japanese motocrosser comes with forged pistons (they're all cast!), the price differential seems almost worth it.

Almost.

You see, there was still one last fly in the

KTM's appeal to the mass market: It wasn't as fast as all of the other 125 racers out there. Sure, it could turn good lap times in the hands of a skilled rider, but it was most assuredly not going to be right up there in the first turn dicing with the quick Kawasakis and the Power-Valved Yamahas. It also weighed a good ten pounds more than the competition. Eastern riders accepted the slight weight penalty and learned to love the sensible power of the KTM for hare scrambles and muddy tracks. All few hundred of them.

**STOP THE PRESSES!  
HOLD THE MAYO!**

What we have here is just about all of the barriers removed with the emergence of a new—no, make that *all-new* KTM 125. The biggest news is that it's a rocket! Probably more important is the fact that it'll be priced right smack against the Big Four. No more \$700 spread just to ride white.

In 1983, the retail prices of the other 125s

# 1984 KTM 125

were as follows: Honda, \$1738; Kawasaki, \$1739; Suzuki, \$1739; and Yamaha, \$1769. For 1984, plan on at least a \$100 price increase across the board, possibly more.

The 1984 KTM will sell for right around \$1970.

If the 100-buck differential scares you, consider the fact that the KTM comes with the very latest Metzeler tires, while the Big Four are equipped with throwaway O.E.M. rubber. Priced a set of Metzels lately?

## GOODIES AND OTHER ENTICEMENTS

In order to bring the KTM 125 in at a more attractive price, the factory will have to make more of them. And they surely don't want them sitting on the dock while riders choose between their favorite shade of red, green or yellow.

So, a White Power Super Adjuster shock comes stock on the Katoom. This is the same quality unit that riders are paying over \$400 for. A magnesium Dell'orto carb is stock, and the usual gaggle of aluminum shifters, mufflers and brake pedals is there to tempt.

Double-leading shoe brakes are front and rear, and both stoppers are adjustable. With a wrench and an owner's manual in front of you, you can dial them in anywhere from a tire squealer to a gradual speed reducer. Regina Extra Gold chain is stock—one of the finest chains available at any price. Nordisk rims, Magura controls and new-styled plastic top off the package. Also, the forks are the same 40mm units found on the 250 water-cooler—plenty big for a 125.

## LESS IS MORE

KTM realized that the weight of its 1984 offering would have to be reduced, so they went the entire enchilada with exotic materials and weight-saving techniques. Hollow axles and swingarm pivots greet the eyes. The engine weighs an incredibly light 36½ pounds, with the carb! Magnesium cases and side covers help get the weight down.

That Regina chain is a slightly smaller—but plenty strong—428 size. This also allows the sprockets to be thinner and lighter. Hubs and wheels are the same as those on the 250, which are among the lightest around. A new trimmer aluminum swingarm saves a few ounces. The Nippondenso radiators are also fabricated of aluminum, rather than the previous brass and copper efforts.

Engine mount bolts are tiny 6mm items, and sculpted aluminum plates act as motor mounts. Everywhere you look, there are 10mm heads on fasteners, much like the Suzuki attention to reduced nut/bolt/washer size. Savings here? Surely not more than a few pounds, but it all adds up. Hold the titanium axle nut in your palm and it feels as if a good breeze would lift it away.

The result of all this attention to detail is a pre-production bike that hit the undeniably accurate *Dirt Bike* scales at 193.75



The 40mm forks (Marzocchi) are the same as those found on the 250 bikes.

pounds, with no gas in the tank, but all the vital oils and cooling fluids nestling happily in their respective pockets.

When you consider that our bike *was* a pre-production machine and sported things like fiberglass radiator shrouds, a sand-cast shock body and a solid 495 front axle, you can see that another pound or two less will be expected on the production unit. How does this stack up against the 1983 offerings of the competition?

Well, the numbers read like this: Honda, 192.5 pounds; Kawasaki, 195.1 pounds; Suzuki, 191 pounds; and the Yamaha, 193 pounds. We already know that the Honda will be at least a pound heavier in 1984 and we might see weight gains on some other bikes. All things considered, the KTM is now *right in* the ballpark, weightwise.

## RIDING THE WHITE KNIGHT

After firing up and thoroughly warming the engine of the first complete 1984 KTM 125, we ran it through the gears to get an overall feel. The thing was a missile! It pulled murderously hard through the mid-range and revved out plenty strong. Like any other racing 125, there's not a lot of low-end power available and you have to make the engine sing to move forward quickly.

The rpm buildup was *not* mellow; the thing exploded and revved quickly. It hits with a bang and the rush is frantically continued as each higher gear is engaged. There are no gaps in the gearbox and all the rider has to do is stir the stick and leave the Magura Duo throttle pinned.

We had a fresh YZ125 with us for comparison, and the Katoom was impressively faster, perhaps as much as three good lengths ahead through the gears. The most impressive part of the powerband is in the mid-range. Here, it pulls almost like a 250, with more power than seems possible out of the tiny 125 engine.

A few things were immediately noted by



Now the Katoom is competitively light and can be tossed around like the other 125s.

our testers. The bike feels ultra-light and is very slim at the seat/tank juncture. This makes for easy front-to-rear moves. The layout is a pure racing stance, with the rider situated very close to the bars; the tank is short and the saddle extends forward more than past KTM layouts. The saddle is not a safety type, which, quite frankly, was not missed by any of the riders.

## SUSPENSION

Our bike came equipped with a too stiff spring, even for 190-pound riders. Even after backing off the preload to the top of the adjusting rings, it was too firm, causing a slight chattering when accelerating over the small bumps. On the crushers the White Power shock was excellent, taking any hit without protest or bottoming out. The KTM reps took notes to notify the factory, saying that because of our comments, the production bikes would come with a softer spring, with the heavier one as an option.

The White Power is a high-quality, widely adjustable unit with a new aggressive distributorship for parts and service by the White Brothers, of four-stroke fame.

Up front, we were a bit less happy with the 40mm Marzocchi forks. At best, we'd rate them "above average"—no more. Admittedly, we did not have the pre-production bike for our normal lengthy testing period and did not have time to play with fork oils or springs. However, they are the same basic units found on the 250LC, and we've never found those to be exceptional. Also, a certain amount of flex was detected in deep sand. There doesn't seem to be quite enough surface on the triple clamps to give sufficient grab.

## HANDLING

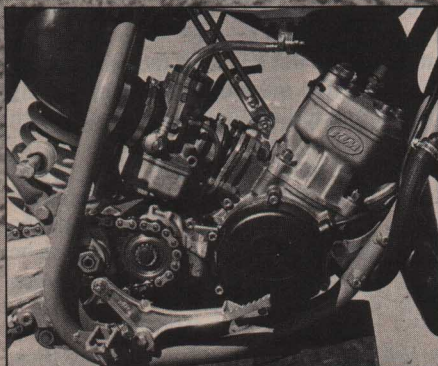
With the forks up in the clamps to their maximum height, the KTM was a turning fool, able to carve inside the turns with a nod of the head and a slight body shift. Steering was superb!

# 1984 KTM 125

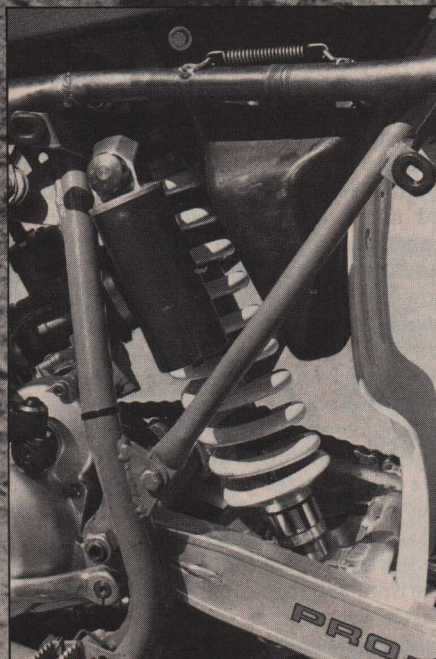
Deep sand didn't bother the 125. Just blip the clutch and the revs hit immediately.



DB staff rider Larry Baker liked the excellent mid-range punch of the Katoom.



Right-side view of the all-new engine shows a very compact design. Surprisingly, the tidy engine weighs in at 36½ pounds, with the carb.



The White Power shock now has the reservoir mounted directly to the shock body, eliminating the long hose. It's adjustable on both compression and rebound damping.



New slim aluminum swingarm cradles a double-leading shoe rear brake setup taken directly from the 1983 250LC.

Over bumpy whoops the bike tracked straight and true as long as the power was on hard. With the throttle trailing there was some headshake, but nothing to bring big eyes to the rider. A softer spring in the rear will no doubt cure this and allow the rider to dial in the right amount of preload to retain the steering qualities.

With the light weight and great power, the riders were able to lift the front end while turning without even thinking about it, even on fast sweepers. Flicking the bike through S-turns showed that it liked directional changes. Berm shots had the front end diving a bit too much for our tastes, but the rear end was ultra-stable and exiting the turns under power was predictable.

#### BITS AND PIECES

Shifting was better on this KTM than any other Katoom we've ever ridden. None of the notchiness we've experienced on the water-cooled 250 was noted. Dare we say it? The 125 KTM shifts like a Japanese bike, but even better, because you can up-shift under full power without blipping the throttle or using the clutch.

Some of the testers thought the aluminum shift lever was a bit too short, but others liked it just fine.

The brake pedal was way too high as delivered, and even with the adjusting bolt all the way out, it demanded that the rider lift his foot from the peg to get braking action. We cured this by removing the stock bolt and putting in one about a half inch longer. This allowed us to lower the brake pedal, and braking improved dramatically.

You won't find any hose leading to a reservoir on the White Power shock. It's the new piggyback style with the reservoir cast into the body. Compression adjusting is accomplished by reaching under the left-side panel, and the rebound knob is at the bottom of the shock in the usual location. Like many White Power shocks, the rebound adjusting knob is on the stiff side and may require pliers to turn it. Still, it's a simple operation.

The airbox is roomy and resides under the saddle. Oh yes, the saddle. Unlike previous KTMs, on which the saddle seems to be made of mahogany, the seat on the 125 is slightly softer, more like plywood. We're told it will break in with time.

A very short kickstarter is on the left side, and the bike proved to be a one-kick starter just about all of the time.

Jetting on the machine was slightly rich, but after an hour or so of riding, we leaned out the needle position on the magnesium Dell'orto carb and performance improved notably.

The gas tank is huge for a 125, holding about 2.4 gallons of pre-mix. This should be enough for more than one hour at MX racing speeds and an easy 50-plus miles in hare scrambles. As usual, the Acerbis gas cap's little rubber seal fell on the ground about ten times when checking the gas. Isn't it about time this irritating glitch is cured?

There's no conventional liner in the KTM. Instead, there's a new coating

(possibly a nickel alloy?) which has been thoroughly tested on the KTM works bikes and is said to be nearly indestructible. They have even deliberately run dirt through an engine and have ruined pistons and rings without hurting the coating.

Travel at the front is about 300mm, a hair less than 12 inches, while there is 320mm or 12.6 inches of stroke at the rear.

Saddle height is 37½ inches, but feels taller because of the firm seat. The foam looks to be quite thick, and shorter riders will no doubt trim more off to suit themselves.

You can find needle bearings on the shock linkage, which is great. However, there are no zerks fittings. There should be.

Other nifty details include a Heim joint on the rear brake arm and Timken tapered bearings on the steering head.

Oh yes, a word about the lightest clutch pull we've ever experienced on a full-sized bike. Its one-finger action encourages use.

The clutch itself is an all-metal unit with sintered plates. It should prove to be long lasting.

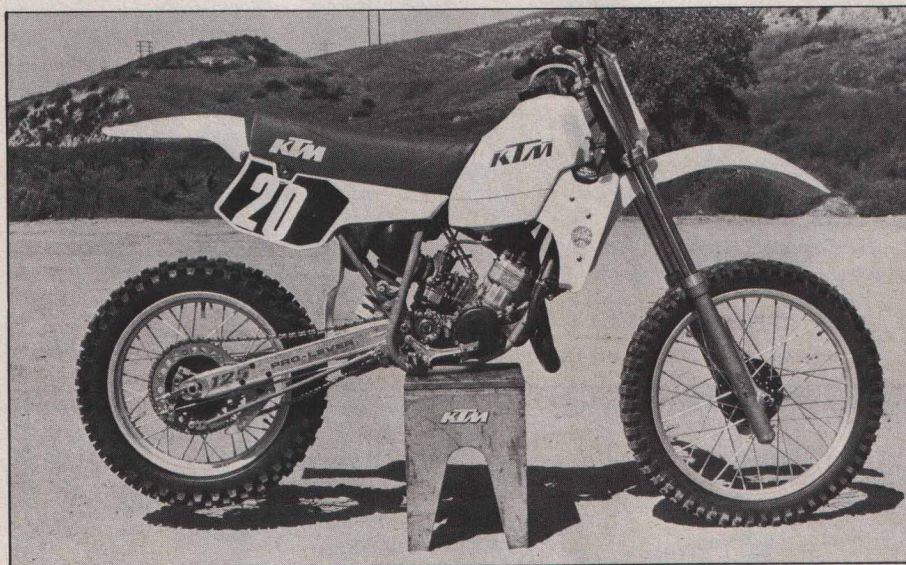
Grips were Magura and hurt the palms after extended riding. Save them for mud runs and put on something more comfortable for general racing use.

The trim plastic side panels are quickly disconnected and require no tools to remove or replace. A good idea.

#### THE INEVITABLE COMPARISON

Clearly, the 1984 KTM 125 is a marvelous machine with only a few niggling flaws. It is definitely faster than any other 125 we tested in 1983. And now the weight and the price are right on target.

It would have won the 1983 125 shootout by a landslide if it had been in existence six months earlier. The only question that remains: What will the competition have to bring up against the KTM 125? If it isn't extremely impressive, we already have the winner of the 1984 125 shootout. □



### 1984 KTM 125MX

Engine type	Water-cooled, 2-stroke, single	Wheelbase	1460mm (57.5 in.)
Bore and stroke	54mm x 54mm	Ground clearance	375mm (13.75 in.)
Displacement	123cc	Seat height	948mm (37.75 in.)
Carburetion	36mm Magnesium Dell'orto	Trail	N/A
Factory recommended jetting:		Wet weight, no fuel	193.75 lbs.
Main jet	210	Rim material	Nordisk aluminum alloy
Needle jet	CF-272	Tire size and type:	
Jet needle	U-3	Front	3.00 x 21 Metzeler 3E
Pilot jet	70	Rear	4.60 x 18 Metzeler Perfectcross
Slide number	40	Suspension, type and travel:	
Recommended gasoline	Premium, 92+ octane	Front	40mm Marzocchi telescopic, 300mm (11.8 in.) travel
Fuel tank capacity	9.08 L (2.4 gals.)	Rear	Single White Power shock, Pro-Lever, adj. comp./reb. damping, 320mm (12.6 in.) travel
Fuel tank material	Plastic	Intended use	Motocross
Lubrication	Oil in gas, pre-mix	Country of origin	Austria
Recommended oil	Kal-Gard	Retail price, approx.	\$1970
Oil capacity, gearbox	500cc	Distributor:	
Air filtration	Oiled foam in still airbox	KTM America	
Clutch type	Wet, metal, multi-plate	1905 Broadway	
Transmission	6-speed	Lorain, OH 44052	
Gearbox ratios:		Parts prices, high-wear items	N/A
1	12:33	Overall rating of bike, keeping intended use of machine in mind:	
2	15:31	Handling	Excellent
3	17:28	Front suspension	Good
4	19:26	Rear suspension	Very good
5	21:25	Power	Excellent
6	20:21	Cost	Good
Ignition, front/rear	16/60	Attention to detail	Very good
Ignition	Motoplat external rotor	Effectiveness, stone stock	Excellent
Primary kick system?	Yes		
Recommended spark plug	Bosch 340S2S		
Silencer/spark arrester	Silencer only, aluminum, rebuildable		
Exhaust system	High-pipe, left side		
Frame, type	Chromoly, single downtube, split cradle		