



HONDA XR80, KAWASAKI KDX80, SUZUKI DS80 & YAMAHA PW80

THE SEMI-OFFICIAL TRAIL BIKE PLAY-OFFS

Do you really need a miniracer?

By the moderately concerned Staff of Dirt Bike, who are actually too big to ride these things and have to rely on input from young sprats

You might notice the absence of numberplates on most of the bikes tested here. The reason is rather simple: These are playbikes, trail bikes, if you will, and they are not meant to be raced. The reason for their existence is basic—they're meant to be thrashed within an inch of their spoke nipples in the pursuit of pure fun.

This is not a shootout, as it would be grossly unfair to match a three-speed automatic against a five-speed semi-racer. However, all of the bikes do have their strong points and will fit neatly into certain categories. Let's take it from the smallest mounts, on up.

YAMAHA PW80

The little PW80 is an ideal learner's machine. It has enough power to get the machine moving and to climb reasonable hills, as long as the size of the rider matches the squatty dimensions of the machine. Riders in the eight through 11 age group would be very much at home on this bike.

Because it's an automatic (but a three-speed one!), there's no need for the first-time rider to endure the hassle of stalling all the time and having Dad break into vile curses about the kid's hand/eye coordination. Just slip the left-side lever up for low, give the little yellow sucker some gas, and it moves off in the intended direction. Most

learning riders will find that low gear will give them all the thrills they need, and when the day comes when they discover that the PW has two more gears, a whole new world of delight and potential scraped elbows will

be theirs to explore.

If the child is small and easily intimidated, there's even a reducer that can be slipped into the exhaust, which will reduce the power output to that of a clog-



Honda XR80: the same basic small four-stroke for years.



Kawasaki KDX80: a semi-serious and very quick single-shocker.



Suzuki DS80: a peppy five-speed floater.



Yamaha PW80: a small, light three-speed automatic.



Looking very much like a full-race KX, the Kawasaki KDX80 fit the bigger riders comfortably.



The Suzuki DS80 had a surprising amount of speed. With longer travel, you could race it.



Basically unchanged since the year one, the Honda XR80 was mellow.



Joel Tokarski felt very much at home on the Yamaha PW80. Larger riders were cramped.

ged electric razor. Because the PW80 has a shaft drive, maintenance is reduced. And with that same shaft drive, it's not possible to change the gearing. As a rider gets more aggressive, he'll want more snap out of the PW, but the tall stock gearing will keep the acceleration leisurely. The PW80 has a basic oil injection unit; the rider has only to add straight gas to the tank. The suspension is straightforward and on the short side, but it is supple over small and medium bumps at trailriding speeds. There is 4.33 inches of travel in the forks and 3.8 inches can be reached out of the monoshock rear.

SUZUKI DS80

Taller than the PW80, the DS80 also has a whole bunch more power. In fact, it's worlds faster than the XR80 but is shorter and lighter. A five-speed gearbox with a regular clutch and conventional shifting pattern will let the new rider learn real dirt bike riding habits right away. The DS is almost fast enough to race as is, but the very short suspension travel would limit speeds except on the smoothest tracks.

Forks offer about five inches of travel, and the old-style dual shocks cough up a mere 4.3 inches of rear axle movement. At

129 pounds with no gas in the tank, the Suzuki is only three pounds heavier than the 126-pound PW80. Interestingly enough, the testers, all of whom race mini MX, noted that the DS was one of the best-turning bikes they'd ever ridden. More than likely, the low saddle height combined with a smoothly responsive engine gave the DS a good overall feel which lent confidence in the corners.

HONDA XR80

This same package has been around in its basic form for what seems like forever. This year, the XR finally gets forward axle forks and some plastic updating. Not much ever gets changed from year to year on the small XRs.

The engine is still a four-stroke single that runs happily on anything with an octane level higher than grapefruit juice. And, seemingly, it'll run forever.

Fork travel is still locked into the mid-'70s, with five inches available. The rear end is handled by dual shocks that reluctantly give up 4.4 inches of the harshest travel this side of a stiff-legged leap from a rooftop. All of the testers noted that the "Honda rear suspension was whipped" and made other less subtle comments.

A five-speed gearbox with a conventional shift pattern is normal on the XR. At 153 pounds with no gas in the large tank, the Honda is the heaviest of the four bikes by a sizable margin. One note about the generous 1.6-gallon tank and stingy four-stroke engine: A rider can put in a full day of serious playriding on the XR and still have fuel left over. A buck will still bring a lot of fun, if spent right.

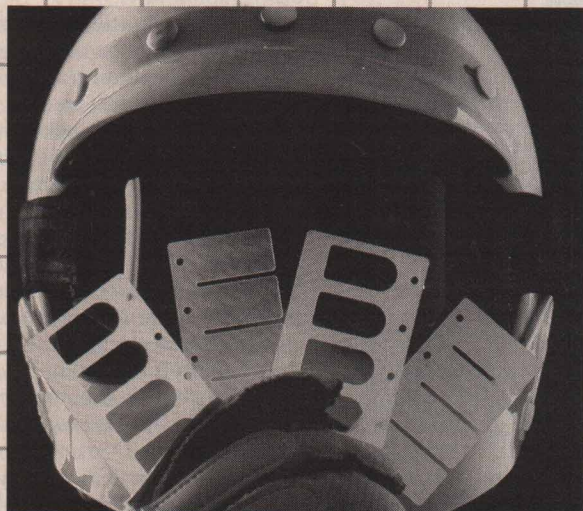
The XR is a pretty bike and detailing is excellent. It also seems to hold its value well from year to year and will accept abnor-



The **DB** mini testers, from left to right: Keith O'Neal (Honda), Joel Tokarski (Yamaha), Tod Sciacqua (Kawasaki), Ricky Sieman (Suzuki).

	HONDA XR80	KAWASAKI KDX80	SUZUKI DS80	YAMAHA PW80
Engine type	4-stroke, single, air-cooled	2-stroke, single, air-cooled, reed valve	2-stroke, single power reed	2-stroke, air-cooled, single
Bore and stroke	47.5mm x 45.0mm	48.0mm x 45.8mm	49.0mm x 42.0mm	47.0mm x 45.6mm
Displacement	79.7cc	82cc	79cc	79cc
Carburetion	20mm Keihin	26mm Mikuni	20mm Mikuni	15mm Mikuni
Gas/oil ratio	Straight gas	20:1	Oil injection, automatic	Oil injection, automatic
Fuel tank capacity	6 L (1.6 gals.)	4.6 L (1.2 gals.)	5.0 L (1.3 gals.)	4.9 L (1.3 gals.)
Transmission	5-speed	5-speed	5-speed	3-speed, automatic
Gearing, front/rear	14/46	14/50	12/34	Drive shaft
Ignition	Flywheel magneto	CDI	PEI	CDI magneto
Suspension:				
Front	Telescopic, 5.0 in.	Telescopic, 6.7 in.	Telescopic, 5.0 in.	Telescopic, 4.4 in.
Rear	Dual shock, swingarm, 4.4 in.	Uni-Trak, 6.7 in.	Dual shocks, 4.3 in.	Monocross, 3.8 in.
Wheelbase	1140mm (44.9 in.)	1220mm (48.0 in.)	1070mm (42.1 in.)	1055mm (41.5 in.)
Ground clearance	195mm (7.7 in.)	240mm (9.45 in.)	192mm (7.6 in.)	185mm (7.3 in.)
Weight, dry, no gas	153 lbs.	146.75 lbs.	129 lbs.	126 lbs.
Retail price	\$698	\$739	\$720	\$689
Country of origin	Japan	Japan	Japan	Japan
Distributor:	American Honda Motor Co. 100 W. Alondra Blvd. Gardena, CA 90247	Kawasaki Motor Corp. 2009 E. Edinger Ave. Santa Ana, CA 92705	U.S. Suzuki Motor Corp. 3251 E. Imperial Hwy. Brea, CA 92621	Yamaha Motor Corp. USA 6555 Katella Ave. Cypress, CA 90630

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KAWASAKI KDX80

The most serious bike of the four, the KDX80 is actually fast enough to race at mini Beginner level. The suspension is way too soft as delivered, but fork oil changes will help the front end, and optional springs will improve the Uni-Trak rear end, should the rider decide to turn racer.

Suspension travel is just a notch or two below current mini MX standards, with fork travel and rear-end travel both at 6.7 inches. For trailriding speeds, lighter riders couldn't ask for more, as medium and small bumps are almost ignored. Riders up to the age of 14 or so might be happy with the KDX for all-around use.

It has a five-speed gearbox, single-shock rear end, leading-axle forks and very MX-looking plastic all the way around. It hits the scales at 146.75 pounds with no gas in the 1.2-gallon tank. Oddly, the owner's manual claims 148 pounds dry weight. The KDX is the only bike of the four to run pre-mix.

WHY NOT A YZ OR A KX?

Good question. If you're into mini-racing—and by this we mean racing week in and week out on a regular basis—then you need a pure MXer. However, if you spend the majority of your time fun riding with your friends in the hills, you should really consider one of these bikes.

Face it. An MX bike is high strung, temperamental and wears out quickly because it produces so much horsepower at such high rpm. These mellower bikes have less internal stress and can be abused and neglected to the point of lunacy yet will still fire up and give an afternoon's worth of fun riding without so much as cleaning the dirty filter.

Also, each and every one of these bikes is equipped with a quiet silencer and a spark arrester. This means that no one will know you're out in the hills, violating nature, instead of doing your homework.

These aren't perfect bikes. The Honda shifts in a notchy fashion and has a rear brake that knows only on and off. The KDX is much too fast for its pillowlike suspenders and will get the rider in over his head before the bottoming-out sound reaches his helmeted ears. The PW is geared too tall and has no travel to speak of, and the DS80 has a nifty motor in a compromise suspension package.

Still, all things considered, our testers popped more wheelies, spun more doughnuts and did more bunny hops on these four bikes than any four kids had a right to.

They rode and rode and rode, crashed, picked 'em up and rode some more. And when they went home at the end of a long afternoon, all of the bikes still had plenty of gas left in the tanks. You *can't* have more fun for less money than that! □

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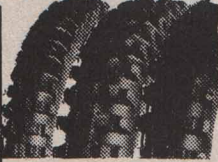
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