

Kawasaki KL250 A-2

THE THUMPER SYNDROME

Cow-trailing the 7-11 Special
By the Staff of Dirt Bike

The KL250 enjoyed a variety of uses during its stay in the DB fold. We rode it to and from work, around high mountains, in muddy streams — one staffer even used it to pass a driving test for a bike license. It huffed and puffed around all over the place, and probably picked up more miles than the average DB test bike. And we came up with a number of conclusions. The main one? It worked a lot better on the street.

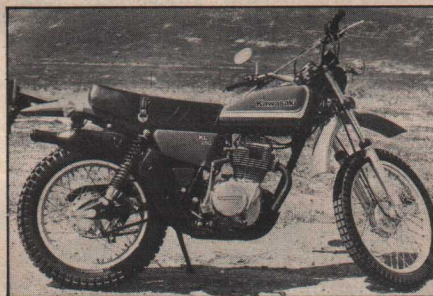
The KL seems to be about five years behind the times. Short suspension travel and a low ground clearance, on a full-sized bike, make it suitable for putting around on back roads and little else, and the stock jetting on our bike was so far off that it felt like a weak 175. And it was heavy.

But we rode it. And it didn't do too badly, just as long as we thought *slow*. As long as the bike was ridden within the limits imposed by its design, we could learn to live with it. But like it? Not in a day of long-travel suspension, powerful, light motors, good available tires and suspension components, and forgiving handling. Maybe a few years ago, but not now.

Let's look at this thing a little closer.

Mechanicals

The motor is a rather straight-forward, overhead cam four-stroke, with nothing unusual about its design, save the fact that it resembles a Jawa speedway motor. Only in looks, not in performance. Early in the game, we decided that the KL was running too rich, but not having a set of Keihin carb jets stopped us from doing the major tinker. Halfway through the test, at an altitude of 6000 feet, the jetting



became unbearable. The motor was literally eight-stroking. We used a makeshift cure.

The air box is a side-access affair, the cover of the box sealing the top of the filter, and the whole mess is held on with a wingnut. We removed the cover, cut out a piece of plastic number plate to conform to the shape of the filter, and tightened it up in place of the cover. The difference was astounding. The pulling power of the KL was doubled, and it would now rev out to redline with no trouble. If waterproofing isn't important to the owner, we would suggest cutting a few one-inch holes in the top of the air box cover, and then a thorough rejetting session. The power is there, but you have to go in looking for it.

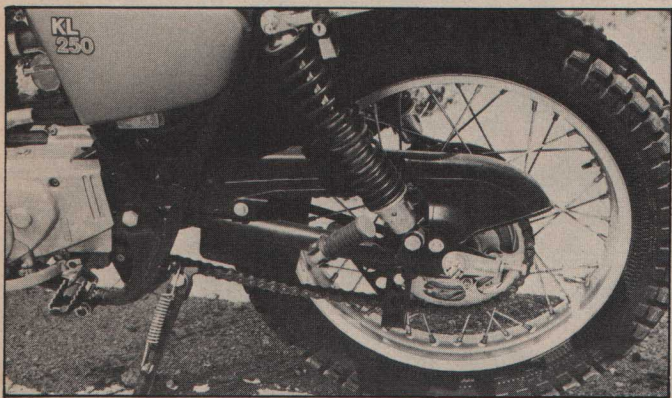
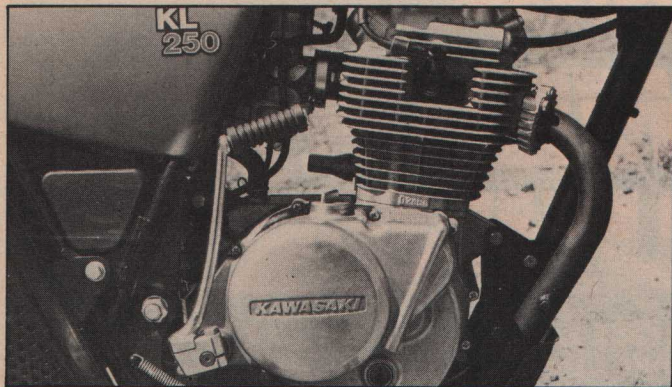
Turning to the suspension, we notice

that the front forks are reputed to have 7.28 inches of travel. Not too shabby. We felt they were kind of harsh, but a fork kit would probably mellow them right out, at about eight inches, plenty for trail riding. But what about those chrome shocks? A quick look at the spec sheet says that they are capable of 4.3 inches of travel. This must be wrong, it felt like at least five inches. Even with a good pair of shocks, you would be hard-pressed to achieve more than a total of six inches of travel. And a different pair of shocks is a must for the dirt.

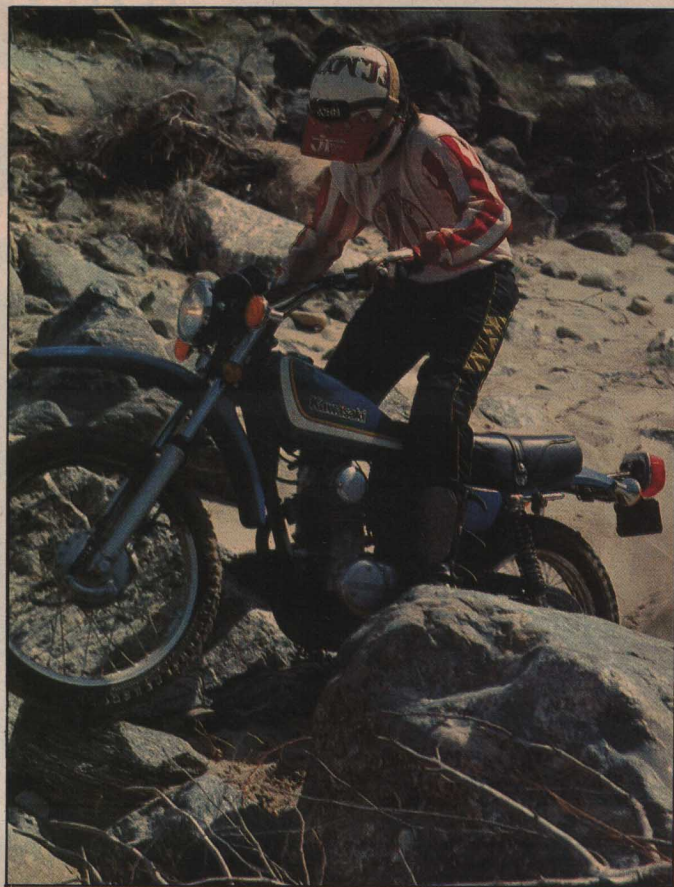
Another problem we noticed was ground clearance — not enough of it. Every time we bottomed out cresting a rise or a small bump, our feet were neatly cleaned off the pegs. A low clearance like this leaves you with very little confidence in a rock field. As a matter of fact, we managed to bend both the shift and brake pedal, supporting that theory.

The KL has a battery electrical system, that gave us no problems throughout the test. Thankfully, the battery isn't needed to start the bike, only to make the lights — none of which burnt out during the test — street-legal. The ignition kept firing the plug throughout the richest jetting conditions imaginable, and it fired on the first couple of kicks every time.

And it certainly was quiet. One of our testers complained that he couldn't hear what the motor was doing in critical sections. If only we had problems like this with every bike. Once we modified the air box cover, the noise was doubled (all induction noise), but it still wasn't offensive. It's a shame that the muffler system



(TOP) The KL's motor had plenty of power — after we jetted the carb. (BOTTOM) The chain is covered with a plastic chain guard, running its entire length. Trials tires offered little traction on the hills.



(LEFT) Rear shocks are straight from the stone age. Muffler is quiet, but quite heavy. (RIGHT) The front forks boast of over seven inches of travel. Brakes, front and rear, were surprisingly good.

apparently weighs about 20 pounds, and will soon be replaced by anyone concerned with performance in the dirt.

Tires are Bridgestone trials-type, and work as you would expect them to in most dirt conditions — wheelspin by the cartload, unless the ground is moist, flat and smooth. Although, compared to knobbies, they're not half bad on the street. . .

In conclusion. . .

What can we say about the KL250? All the parts are there — good alloy

rims, much can be done to save weight, there's power in the mill — at the expense of a little tuning. And it's not all that uncomfortable to ride at slow to moderate speeds in the rough stuff, once the shocks are taken care of. It's a nice, mellow sort of street bike, with good, clean, quiet four-stroke manners. Things just start getting grim once you leave the asphalt.

But, perhaps that's where the KL belongs? A form of transportation, with just enough ability to take you for short jaunts in the outback, and get you back out again. If pure dirt is what you're

Kawasaki KL250 A-2

PRICE, APPROX \$1449
 ENGINE TYPE OHC four-stroke single
 BORE AND STROKE 70 x 64mm
 DISPLACEMENT 246cc
 HORSEPOWER (CLAIMED BY FACTORY):
 21 at 8000 rpm
 CARBURETION Keihin PW28
 FUEL TANK CAPACITY 8.8 liters (2.3 gallons)
 LUBRICATION Wet sump
 TRANSMISSION : Five speed, constant mesh
 GEARING, FRONT/REAR 14/40
 IGNITION Magneto
 WHEELBASE 1400mm (55.1 inches)
 GROUND CLEARANCE: 205mm (8.07 inches)
 STEERING HEAD ANGLE 29 degrees
 WEIGHT (CLAIMED) 125 kg (275.5 pounds)
 INTENDED USE, MFR Street/trail
 COUNTRY OF ORIGIN Japan
 DISTRIBUTOR:
 Kawasaki Motors Corp., U.S.A.
 2009 E. Edinger Avenue
 Santa Ana, California 92705

interested in, you will obviously have better choices. Kawasaki themselves are coming out with the KLX — a hybrid created from a KX chassis and a KL250-based motor — that promises to be an excellent dirt bike, following along in the TT/DR/XR crowd of thumpers.

So, in the meantime, what do we do with the KL? Well, it's a lot more fun to fire one up for a trip down the street, rather than climbing into that multi-cylinder monster in the driveway. Who knows, maybe we'll all get to like it? ☐