

# THE THUMPETTES

## *Suzuki DR350 vs. Husky 350WXR*

By the staff of DIRT BIKE

**R**arely do we go through such extreme phases in a test. The Suzuki and the Husky 350 thumpers did it to us, though. They made us moody.

Before we swung a leg over the first bike, we thought we knew the outcome of the test. The Husky would win, and that was that. Our only job would be to determine whether or not the Husky was worth \$1000 more than the Suzuki.

That was Phase #1. Phase #2 came when we took the bikes on a casual play ride. All of a sudden the outcome didn't seem so clear; it became a toe-to-toe battle to see which bike would win, regardless of price. The Suzuki really surprised us.

Then came Phase #3. That was when we took the bikes out and rode them for all they were worth. We raced them, thrashed them and whipped them. Another mood change resulted. Actually, we reverted to mood number one—but we were a little less certain.

### EVOLUTION & LACK THEREOF

Back in '89, Suzuki reinvented the middleweight thumper class. The DR350 came out, Suzuki sold a jillion of them, then proceeded to enjoy success and do nothing for three years. Now the Suzuki is back for a fourth year and is completely and totally unchanged. Aside from graphics, the '93 DR is identical to the '89 DR.

**When it comes to racing, the Husky is lighter, faster and more stable than the DR. It's a matter of knowing what you want to use the bike for.**

In the meantime, Husqvarna saw Suzuki's success and came out with its own 350. That first Husky 350 was a little crude but, unlike Suzuki, Husqvarna has changed the bike every year, making it a little better all the time.

Husqvarna has the advantage of having more money to work with. Virtually all of the parts that go into making the Husky are of higher quality (more expensive) than those of the Suzuki. It has a Showa



cartridge upside-down fork, while the Suzuki has an old-fashioned, non-cartridge, conventional fork. The Husky has a first-rate, fully adjustable Showa shock; the Suzuki has a cheaply made Kayaba. The Husky is liquid-cooled and has a barrage of expensive things like aluminum handlebars, twin aluminum mufflers, Metzeler tires and even thick inner tubes. The Suzuki isn't and doesn't.

So imagine our surprise when we first rode the two bikes and realized that we liked the Suzuki better.

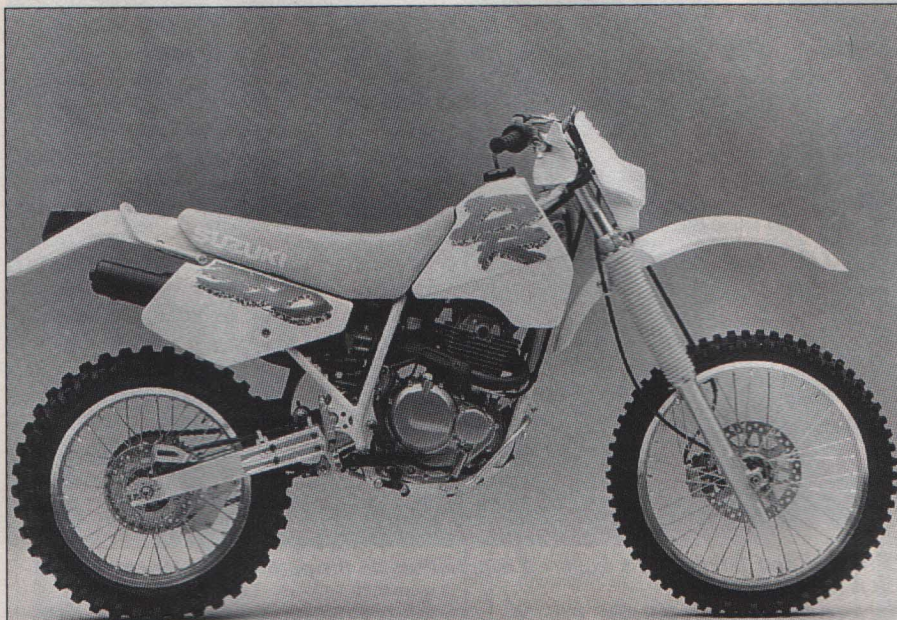
The Suzuki is four pounds heavier than the Husky, but feels 50 pounds lighter at first. It's a much smaller bike and has faster steering, plus the engine is super-torquey and quick-revving. In contrast, the Husky is slow-revving, slow-steering and very large in physical size. When you get off the Suzuki and get on the Husky, it feels like you are suddenly encased in molasses. Everything happens slower. The motor tediously gains revs, but has no hit or burst of power anywhere along the way. The handling is anything but twitchy. Even the suspension felt no better on the Husky, because the fork was set up surprisingly soft.

On the first ride, the Suzuki was more fun. With its better throttle response and more agile handling, it produced a smile on every face; the Husky, on the other hand, was the disappointing victim of overly high expectations.

## DOWN TO BUSINESS

Okay, the break-in ride was over. When it was time to do the real testing, we made some quick discoveries. First, the Husky is, indeed, more powerful than the Suzuki. It doesn't *feel* more powerful, but it is. The Suzuki has a strong initial snap of power that makes it easy to lift the front wheel at any given time. The Husky doesn't make any power at low rpm, but revs much higher than the Suzuki. Ask any drag racer or engine builder: Higher revs mean more horsepower and quicker acceleration. The Suzuki's torque might be better right off the bat, but it signs off while the Husky wheels away.

Discovery #2 was that the Husky's fork was easily made better. We went from the stock seven clicks out on the compression damping to four clicks out and the fork was transformed from a bottoming, wallowing mushpot to a good-working suspension unit. Those clicks do something — what a concept. Unfortunately, the Suzuki was as good as it was going to get, which wasn't very. It was soft, springy and inconsistent. Both forks have a very unusual feature: adjustable preload. We have absolutely no doubt that pretty soon all bikes will have this type of setup, but it wasn't very useful in either case here. We set them both at maximum preload and forgot about them.



	SUZUKI DR350	HUSQVARNA 350 WXE
Engine type	Four-valve, air-cooled four-stroke	Four-valve, liquid-cooled four-stroke
Displacement	349cc	349cc
Bore and stroke	79.0mm x 71.2mm	84.0mmx64.0mm
Carburetion	33mm Mikuni	34mm Dellorto
Fuel tank capacity	2.5 gal. (9.2 L)	2.4 gal. (9.0L)
Gearing	14/47	13/50
Lighting coil	Yes	Yes
EPA-legal	Yes	Yes
Spark arrester	Yes	Yes
Running weight w/no fuel	264 lb.	259 lb.
Wheelbase	56.5" (1435mm)	59.0" (1499mm)
Rake/trail	N/A	N/A
Ground clearance	12.0" (762mm)	13.5" (343mm)
Seat height	36.2" (305mm)	36.8" (935mm)
Tire size and type:		
Front	80/100-21 Bridgestone ED1	300-21 Metzeler MXR1
Rear	110/90-18 Bridgestone ED12	450-18 Metzeler Multicross
Suspension:		
Front	Kayaba, adj. preload, compression damping, 11.0" (279mm) travel	Showa inverted, adj. preload/comp./reb., 12.0" (305mm) travel
Rear	Kayaba piggyback, adj. preload/comp./reb. damping, 11.0" (279mm) travel	Showa alum. piggyback, adj. preload/ reb./comp., 12.5" (317mm) travel
Country of origin	Japan	Italy
Suggested retail price	\$4099	\$5050
Distributor/manufacturer		
	American Suzuki P.O. Box 1100 Brea, CA 92621; (714) 996-7040	Cagiva North America 5 Washington Ave. Fairfield, NJ 07004; (201) 883-9141





Cliff Cook and Jimmy Lewis explore a river bottom. In the putt-and-explore mode, the DR is hard to beat.

In the rear end, the Husky is better than the Suzuki, but we kind of expected that all along. The Suzuki certainly isn't bad, but feels too short and will start hopping from side to side in a long series of whoops. The Husky will do this too, but with more warning and not as severely.

It wasn't until we started going really fast, pushing the bikes and our own capabilities to the limits, that we began to ap-

preciate the Husky's handling traits. In a rocky sand wash, the Suzuki deflected easily while the Husky stayed on course. On tight, narrow trails, it was more of a toss-up. The Husky's slow handling just took a little more getting used to. You would have to set up for turns a little earlier and get on the gas sooner. The Suzuki required virtually no acclimation. Everyone felt comfortable right off the

bat, even if they had been riding the Husky all day.

#### ABOUT THE LITTLE STUFF

The Husky does have a lot of nice little features, but it has just as many weird quirks. The kickstarter has a great automatic decompression device that means you don't have to get the bike at top dead center or anything like that before you kick; you just kick. The problem is that the lever is mounted way too high for anyone with short legs to even have a chance of reaching it. Then the kickstart lever doesn't always return; sometimes it just stays down. Husky dealer George Erl tells us that this will go away once the bike is ridden for a few months. The Suzuki requires a long, drawn-out starting procedure, and then might not start anyway.

The brakes on both bikes are pretty good. Surprisingly, the Suzuki's might be a little better. The Suzuki's big steel muffler looks really ugly, but experimentation has proven to us that it's well designed. We have tried a lot of pipes that are louder and make less power. The Husky's twin-pipe system is pretty, but heavy. If you put on an aftermarket pipe like the one from Up-Tite ([714] 540-2920), you can save about eight pounds. Of course, the bike gets louder, too.

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When it comes to modifying these two bikes, we have learned two very different lessons. In the Suzuki's case, don't do it. Every time we ride a DR that makes a lot of power, it blows up a week later. With a little jetting, and maybe some holes in the airbox, you can get some more power, but don't go beyond that. Cycle Gear ([415] 236-7384) can give you some good advice. In the Husky's case, the bike can be made to work much better. The suspension can be made to work very well with a little bit of valving and the engine was originally designed to handle 610cc of power, so you know it can be pumped up.

If it sounds like neither of these bikes is perfect, then you are getting the right picture. The Suzuki is excellent as a play bike, which is all it was designed to be in the first place. Never mind that Suzuki has hired riders to race the machine; even those guys will admit to the machine's shortcomings. It's not a race bike, but it is a lot of fun.

The Husky, on the other hand, isn't much fun, but it is effective, and with a little attention it can win anything from a National enduro to a—dare we say it?—motocross, at least at the Novice/Intermediate level. If you are a racer, the Husky is worth the extra money.

If you are not, it's not. □

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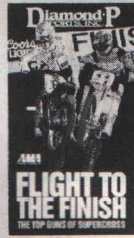
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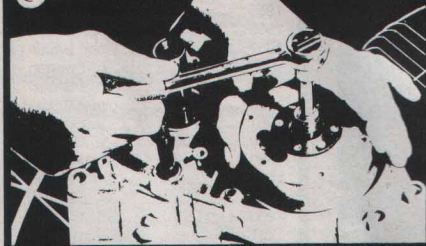
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