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SUZUKI DRZ400

Way more than a bored-out DR350



◆ Honda isn't the only company that's been keeping secrets. On September 21, Suzuki unveiled three versions of a new thumper to a mob of drooling dealers. If any shop owners had been trying to make a living off Suzuki's off-road line, the shock probably killed them on the spot.

Suzuki calls its new baby the DRZ400, not to be confused with the DR350, which has now vanished. Suzuki seems reluctant to divest itself of that DR logo, which has been around since the days of the DR370. The new 400 is all-new; no parts from old DRs have been recycled. (Well, you could probably make the tires fit if you tried.)

The three versions are a kick-start dirt bike, an electric-start dirt bike and an electric-start dual-sport bike. There is *no* motocross version, and Suzuki executives cringe when you even ask that question. The YZ426F still sits alone as Japan's only four-stroke motocrosser.

In just about every other way, though, the DRZ is *very* Yamaha-like.

The engine is liquid-cooled and has double overhead cams which eliminate the need for rocker arms. The cylinder is aluminum with a Nikasil coating and the displacement is 398cc. The engine is dry-sump, meaning the oil is carried in the frame. The transmission is a five-speed and the carburetor is a 39mm Keihin FCR with a throttle-position sensor. If that doesn't sound like a YZ, then you haven't been paying attention. Suzuki uses a more conventional four-valve layout instead of Yamaha's five valves, but so does everyone else.

What about the weight? Suzuki claims the kick-start version is 250 pounds with lights and full-enduro gear. That would be the same weight as the 1998 YZ400 *without* lights. But you need to understand that manufacturers' claimed weights are not always reliable. For example, Yamaha claimed the YZ400 was 231 pounds. Maybe they weighed it on the moon.

Still, the DRZ sounds like it's worth getting excited about. It will have a conventional cartridge fork, an aluminum

Look closely at the new Suzuki DRZ400-E. Is there anything wrong with this picture? Of course; the kickstarter ain't there. For some reason, Japanese manufacturers think it's inappropriate to have both an electric starter and a kickstarter on the same bike.

SUZUKI DRZ400

It might not be a YZ426 killer, but the new Suzuki DRZ400 sure has a shot at knocking the WR400 down a notch.



subframe and a side-access air filter. The electric start version will probably be super popular, guessing from the excitement over the Yamaha TTR250. If the lack of a kick-start lever makes you nervous, you can replace a few parts and have both. You can't go the other way, though. If you want to strip the electric starter off the DRZ400-E, then you might as well replace the whole motor.

The dual-sport DRZ400S will doubtlessly be the biggest seller of all. The old DR350S continued to sell well right to the end. And the Suzuki will be the first new generation dual-sport on the market—Yamaha still apparently has no plans for a street version of the YZ426.

So the year 2000 is shaping up to be just what we predicted: World War 4-stroke. So sit back, open a cool one and enjoy the show. ♦



Considering the success of the DR350S, the new DRZ400S will probably be the hit of the year.