

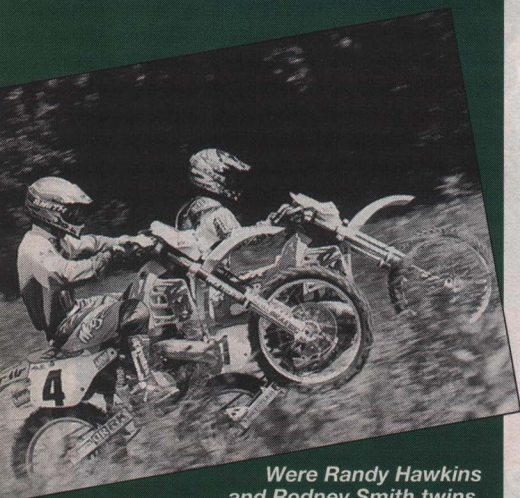


## WAR IN THE WEEDS

# RMX VS. RMX

Rodney Smith &  
Randy Hawkins:  
Nothing in common

By the staff of DIRT BIKE



Were Randy Hawkins and Rodney Smith twins, separated at birth? No, they are RMX riders with different ideas about how to go fast in the woods.

The Hatfields and the McCoys had more in common. Randy Hawkins is from the East Coast. Rodney Smith is from the West Coast. Randy started off riding nothing but enduros. Rodney started off riding nothing but motocross. Randy looks like a #2 pencil wearing goggles. Rodney looks like a walking comic strip in his new, superhero riding gear.

Yet somehow, these two ended up riding on Suzuki's off-road team together. Even so, they manage to be as dissimilar as teammates can be. Rodney and Randy ride two different types of races (Randy rides enduros and Rodney rides hare scrambles) and, most striking of all, they have bikes that couldn't be more different, at least on paper.

Sure, they both are Suzuki RMXs, but that's only because the RMX is the only bike Suzuki makes for off-road racing. Rodney's bike was built by FMF and is tuned on a weekly basis by Mark Hyde. Randy's bike is a Pro Circuit machine tuned by Dale Segal.

We thought it would be fun to see just how different two Suzuki RMXs could be. That's right, we *do* have a strange idea of fun, but that's another, much longer story. With the cooperation of Suzuki's off-road racing department, we got Randy and Rodney to drag their respective machines halfway across the country and meet somewhere in the middle, where we could try the bikes for ourselves. We ended up on Mike Burkhart's ranch in Kahoka, Missouri. Burkhart was about to hold a round of the AMA National Hare Scrambles series and had designed a ten-mile track with an outrageous mixture of tight woods and wide-open grass-track sections. Because our aging, expanding Editor-in-Chief wasn't entered in the race, he was allowed to ride the course ahead of time, on both bikes (at different times, of course).

### RODNEY'S HOT ROD

We figured Smith's bike would be the screamer of the two. Rodney grew up riding all-out works machinery in the 250 World Motocross Championships. The bike would probably be an all-out RM motocross bike with fake lights, just for

looks, right? Wrong. It was amazing how much of the RMX was stock. In the past, the Suzuki guys always threw away the RMX top end and replaced it with RM parts. In fact, they used a number of RM gears in the tranny, too. All the top end and transmission parts on Rodney's bike are the ones that came on the bike.

The top end on this particular bike was ported by Slavens Racing. The bike he brought out was the one that he keeps on the East Coast. He has another bike on the West Coast that is ported by Terry Varner at FMF. Rodney can't tell any difference between the two. Why not? He knows what kind of power he wants, and that's what he asked for. On both bikes, the compression isn't particularly high, so that Rodney can get away with running pump gas when he can't find race gas. Whenever he can, he tries to find Sunoco 95-octane fuel, but can settle for 92.

Smith's bike uses the stock amount of flywheel, although he does use the Wiseco Pro-lite piston, which is slightly lighter than stock. The carburetor is stock, too, just rejacketed. The mainjet is a 178, the pilot is a 55, the needle is from an RM250 (a 1469M in the #2 position). Rodney uses an off-the-shelf FMF pipe and silencer. There's nothing magic or very works-like in the motor.

His suspension components are what come on the RMX, but modified by Race Tech. The front fork springs are 0.40 kg/mm, and the rear shock spring is a 5.0 kg/mm, both slightly stiffer than stock, but not outrageously so. Rodney said he had this bike set up a little on the soft side for eastern races where the speeds aren't very high.

He runs a steering damper, which is unusual for a motocross guy. Well, we suppose he has been an off-road guy long enough now that the normally dormant steering damper gene has come to the surface. It's a WER damper that mounts just below the headlight. Then there's a long list of sponsors who keep Rodney in the particular parts that he likes. The seat is a tall No Skid CEET that Mark Hyde modifies by rounding off the square edges of the foam, giving it a more round cross-section. The brakes and discs are made by Braking, the tires are Dunlops and the handlebars are Answer Pro-Tapers mounted in solid clamps. Motion Pro cables, Uni Filter, Enduro Engineering handguards and Excel rims all have a hand in the bike, too.

### RANDY'S ROOSTER

Randy's bike didn't really have any world-shattering secrets either. Porting, head work, pipe and silencer all are the work of Pro Circuit. Is it the type of porting work that normal people can buy? Dale says yes: "Randy likes his bike to hit a little harder than the average enduro guy would want, so that's how they build 'em for us.

**Two RMXs were never so different, yet so fast in the woods. Actually, two riders were never so different, yet so fast in the woods. ▶**





They will give you whatever you ask for. If anything, I think they probably spend *less* time on our cylinders than they would on one for a paying customer.”

Randy's bike runs a little more compression than Rodney's, and so he uses race gas or aviation 100-octane gas when he can't get anything else. He runs it slightly richer on top, too. The stock carb has a 180 mainjet, although he has a 52 pilot. The needle is the same one that Rodney uses—the stock one from an RM, although Randy ran it in the middle position for this test. Both riders vary needle position and mainjet size routinely, depending on where they are riding. The conditions in Missouri were warm and humid—but then, the conditions in Missouri are *always* warm and humid, unless it's snowing.

Like his teammate, Randy keeps his gear ratios and flywheel stock these days. If he's going to ride a really gnarly, muddy, awful race (you know, the kind of stuff those guys like), then he might have Moose add eight ounces to the stock flywheel, but he never reduces it anymore. His bike was geared one tooth taller (on the countershaft) than stock for this race.

Something else that was new just for this race was Randy's suspension. Usually he uses the stock components, revalved by Factory Connection. For this race he switched to an Ohlins fork and shock. “What's that?” you say. “An Ohlins fork?” That's right. Currently they are very rare and *very* expensive. Randy was just experimenting, although it sounds like he might run the combo more often in the future.

You can tell that Randy has a pretty good relationship with his bosses at Suzuki. They let him do pretty much whatever he wants to do, as long as he keeps winning championships. Along those lines, Randy continues to use a Honda rear brake caliper. He's so hard on brakes that he can boil the stocker, although Rodney apparently doesn't have the trouble.

Just like Rodney (or is Rodney just like Randy? We have to think about that), Randy uses a WER steering damper, Braking brake pads and discs and Answer Pro-Taper bars. Unlike Rodney, Randy's handlebar is rubber-mounted to cut down on vibration and fatigue in long races. The seat is a Tecnosel in the stock height.

#### WHICH IS BEST?

These two bikes should be like the two riders themselves—they should have nothing at all in common. They are pretty different—but not *that* different.

Like we said, we expected Rodney's bike to be a full-range MX bike. Likewise, Randy's bike should be mellow, more enduro-like. Wrong, Bel-Ray breath. If anything, the opposite is the case. Randy's bike runs super-clean and smooth on the bottom, but it hits hard and winds out like

a two-wheeled bottle rocket. The bike is fast, even by motocross standards, but the meat of the power is in the upper-middle rev range and higher. Below that, the bike pulls, but it won't wrench your arms out of their sockets. That's good. Randy Hawkins without arms would look like a T-handle without the T. Also, you can ride it at low rpm all day without having the bike load up. In really bad conditions, the bike would be fine. You can stay far enough away from the hit to keep the bike under control, and when you have room and traction, you can let her go.

Rodney's bike is fast, too, but it doesn't scream on top the way Randy's does. His power starts a little lower and growls through the midrange. The bike comes into the powerband a little more gradually, and it, too, makes crazy horsepower before it signs off. That sign-off comes a little earlier, prompting another shift. Maybe that's why Rodney's bike was geared a little lower—to keep the gear ratios a little bit tighter. The two powerbands probably are the exact same width, but everything happens on Randy's bike about 500 rpm higher.

Oddly enough, Smith's bike doesn't run quite as cleanly as Randy's off the bottom. This probably is because of the 55 pilot jet in Rodney's bike. Randy runs a 52 because he uses aviation gas and can get away with the leaner setting.

**Smith's suspension is by Race Tech. It worked about as well as any Kayabas we have tried. Smith weighs less than our aging, expanding editor/tester, but goes faster. Whether you are fast or heavy, the settings worked. We've discovered that heavy is easier than fast. ▶**

**Hawkins modifies his RMX much less today that he did a few years ago, when he first started winning those National Enduro championships. Now he uses a ported RMX cylinder (not an RM cylinder), and he never shaves down the flywheel anymore. ▶**

# RMX vs. RMX



*Hawkins doesn't look, act or even sound like a motocrosser. Yet his Pro Circuit RMX would keep up with any 250 made on any track.*



◀ **Rodney looks like the motocrosser of the two. Actually, he IS the motocrosser of the two, but his bike is a littler mellow-er than Randy's. Life is weird.**

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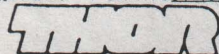
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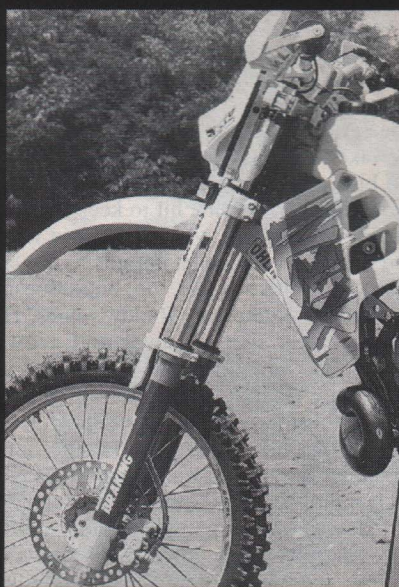
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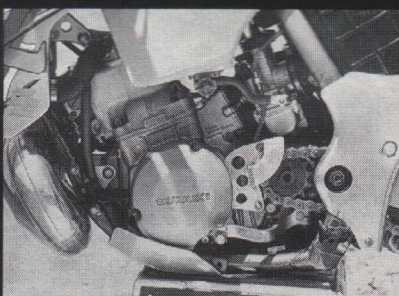
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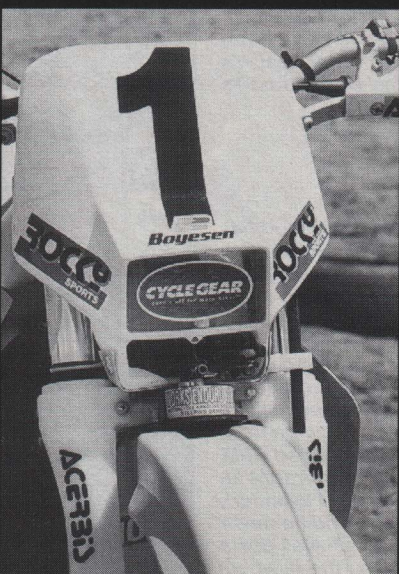
## RMX vs. RMX



Hawkins just started riding with the Ohlins fork and shock. Surprise, surprise: He likes them. So did we.



The heart of Smith's motor is set up by Slavens Racing or by FMF's Terry Varner, depending on whether he's on his eastern bike or his western bike. Both are made to run about the same, which is smooth and fast.



Both Smith and Hawkins use a WER steering damper. If you ride in rocks, sand, at high speed or at low speed, it's a big help. Does that leave anything out?

Another noticeable difference is in vibration. Rodney uses solid handlebar clamps, like those on the RM. He likes that solid connection between his controls and the front wheel. Randy's bars are rubber-mounted and the bike vibrates less. The difference is considerable. That preference makes sense. Randy typically races for six or seven hours at a time in enduros, while Rodney's hare scrambles are rarely longer than four hours.

### WHAT ABOUT SUSPENSION?

This actually was a test ride for Randy, too. He had never ridden with the Ohlins fork and shock before. He liked them. So did we. The fork had an awesome ability to soak up little stuff. We swore that it was too soft when we hit the first small rock on the trail and didn't feel a thing. If it reacts that much on a two-inch rock, what's it going to do when it hits the big stuff?

The fork held up on medium and even large impacts without bottoming. It wasn't until we hit the *really* big stuff that it bottomed, and even then, it did so gently. Randy weighs about 150 pounds, whereas our aging, expanding editor weighs about 185. The fork should have bottomed when it did. Even Rodney got a chance to try the new Ohlins fork and liked it. He didn't think that the Ohlins rear shock was any better than his Race Tech Kayaba, and we would have to agree. Both rear ends worked excellently.

As for Rodney's fork, it actually was a tiny bit stiffer overall than Randy's, and so it was better set up for our aging, expanding editor. The Race Tech fork didn't handle the little stuff as well as the Ohlins, but it was close. Race Tech, in all fairness, had the Kayaba working about as well as a Kayaba upside-down fork can work. The Ohlins fork is only at the beginning of its development. Who knows how much potential it has?

We did notice that Randy was digging up great hunks of earth with the part of his fork that hung down below the axle. The Ohlins has about two inches less ground clearance than the Kayaba. Randy never complained that this caused any ill-handling, and we didn't notice anything, either.

### LESSONS LEARNED

Which one of these bikes would we prefer? They both are awesome, but to tell you the truth, we wouldn't want either one in a really tough race. They're too fast! The truth is that these are two very highly specialized and personalized woods bikes. Rodney's bike is as good as it can be—for Rodney. Randy's bike is as good as it can be for Randy. If you had Race Tech, Pro Circuit, FMF and Ohlins build a bike especially for you, it probably would be about as good as it can be for you. In the perfect world a motorcycle should be dialed in and adjusted to fit its rider. In the more realistic and imperfect world that we spend most of our time in, riders usually have to adjust to their motorcycles.

Take it from us, though. That other world is a pretty fun place to visit. □