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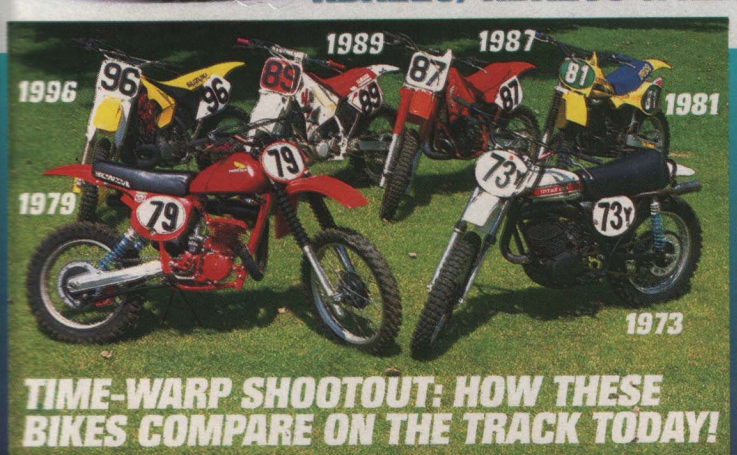

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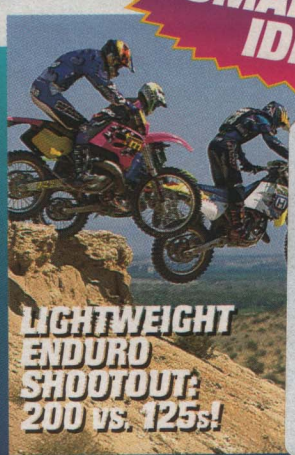

LIGHTWEIGHT ENDURO SHOOTOUT: 200 vs. 125s!

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ISSN 0364-1546

So what does Randy Hawkins ride for fun? When he isn't under contract to ride his RMX, and not chasing a national championship, what is he most likely to swing a leg over?

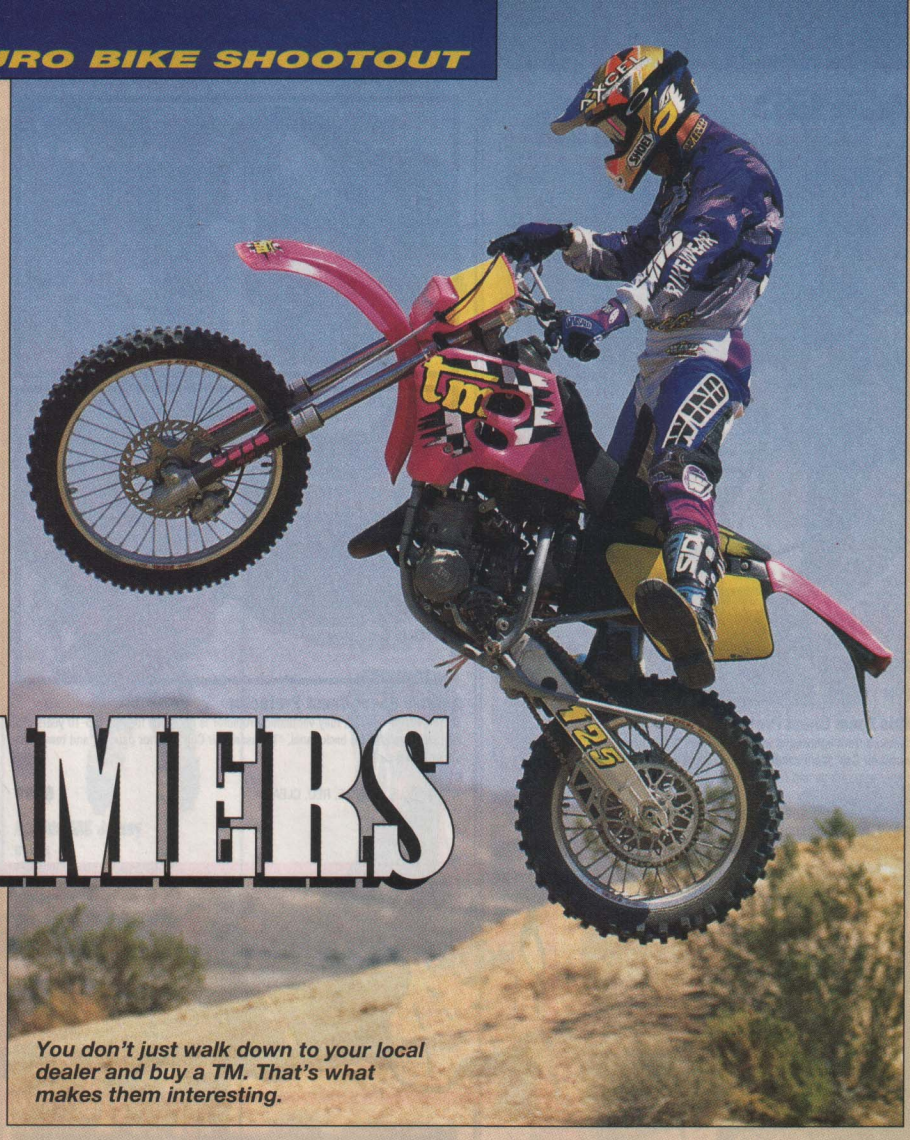
Answer: a 125.

What's this? Hawkins, the most respected woods rider in the country, on a sissy little 125? *No one* rides a 125 in the woods. Read any test of an enduro bike. It says that the best bikes have lots of low-end grunt, that they have smooth, linear power and that they need to be stable. Does any of that sound like a 125? Well, maybe Randy is just weird. Then so are Kevin Hines and Guy Cooper. All of them are closet 125 woods riders. For the most part, they say they can go just as

SCREAMERS

Woods warfare with the Husqvarna 125 WXE, Kawasaki KDX200 & TM 125E

By the woods-weary staff of DIRT BIKE



You don't just walk down to your local dealer and buy a TM. That's what makes them interesting.

How much do you want to spend? A stock KDX would be the cheapest, but the least competitive, route. The Husky, TM and the A-Loop KDX cost you progressively more, all the way into the Insane category.

You would never believe that the A-Loop bike can almost keep up with a 125 MX bike in sheer acceleration. Smooth power can fool you.

The Husky probably is the best-handling bike of the three. It's also the slowest. Funny how those two things go hand-in-hand.

fast on a 125 as anything. So why don't you see any of them going for a national championship aboard a 125? Few manufacturers make 125 enduro bikes. It makes no sense for Hawkins to win a title on an RMX 125 when Suzuki doesn't make an RMX 125. Both Hawkins and Cooper will ride 125s in Europe at the ISDE, where national pride is the motivating factor.

Next question: So why aren't there more 125 enduro bikes? In the U.S., there is no 125 class, but there is a 200 class, and it's filled with Kawasaki KDX200s in various states of tune. Ever wonder which is better, a good-running KDX or a 125? We did. We wonder about all kinds of crazy things (where does dust go when you inhale 150 pounds of it in a desert race?). That's why we are here.

Currently, there are two ready-made 125 enduro bikes available in the U.S. Maybe "available" is too strong a word. You *can* get them, but you have to look pretty hard for a dealer that has one on the showroom floor. The Husqvarna 125 WXE and the TM 125E both are highly specialized European 125s. You see, over in Europe, there *is* a class for 125s. As for our 200cc yardstick, we used a KDX prepared by the A-Loop (maybe you know them better by their old name: Moose Racing). Kawasaki 200s can be anything you want them to be. In stock form, they are pleasant trail bikes. A crew like the A-Loop can turn them into full racers, like they did for Kelby Pepper. Pepper finished fourth in last year's National Enduro series on a bike almost identical to our test KDX.

ALL ABOUT THE HUSQVARNA 125 WXE

Back in '95, Husqvarna came out with an all-new, case-reed 125 motor. No, the company didn't invest all that money to entice Americans into riding 125 enduro bikes. The biggest reason is the Italian dual-sport market; it's huge. After designing a 125cc dual-sport bike, Husqvarna decided to make an off-road bike as well. Accordingly, the motor has some odd features, like an empty compartment where an oil injector could fit. The street model uses an electronic power valve, but that would make little sense for a full-on dirt bike, so the WXE uses the same old centrifugal ball-ramp mechanism that virtually all dirt bikes on planet Earth have been using since '84.

There are a lot of Japanese parts on the Husky. The ignition is made by Kokusan and the carburetor is by Mikuni. The rear shock is a Showa. Oddly enough, the spark arrester is made in the U.S. That's because in Europe, they haven't got a clue what a spark arrester is—the requirement is an American peculiarity. So if

that thing on the end of the muffler looks a little familiar, that's because you have seen it on Husqvarnas for years. The pipe is made in Italy especially for the U.S. market, where we insist that even our dirt bikes be somewhat quiet. The expansion chamber has two walls, with the inner wall made of mesh to dampen noise. Unfortunately, it also dampens power. After doing time on the bike with the stock pipe and muffler (how we suffer), we replaced both units with stuff from FMF. The FMF pipe was two pounds lighter and the silencer is FMF's new ISDE spark arrester (with the pretty picture of the evergreen on the side). Power and noise both increased, but at least power increased more than noise.

The Husky is a super-narrow bike. In fact, it's hard to think of a narrower bike (at least one with a motor). The seat might actually be a little too narrow for those riders with, shall we say, a low CG. At least the seat is made of Kevrex, (whatever that is), and can be removed with one twist of a big Dzus fastener.

Like we mentioned, the rear shock is a Showa, but this year the front is a Marzocchi made especially for Husqvarna—it even has the Husky gunsight logo cast in the lower leg. The switch to a conventional fork accompanied some minor changes in offset, but overall the bike still has some very un-Husky-like steering geometry. In other words, it isn't the longest, slowest-turning bike on earth.

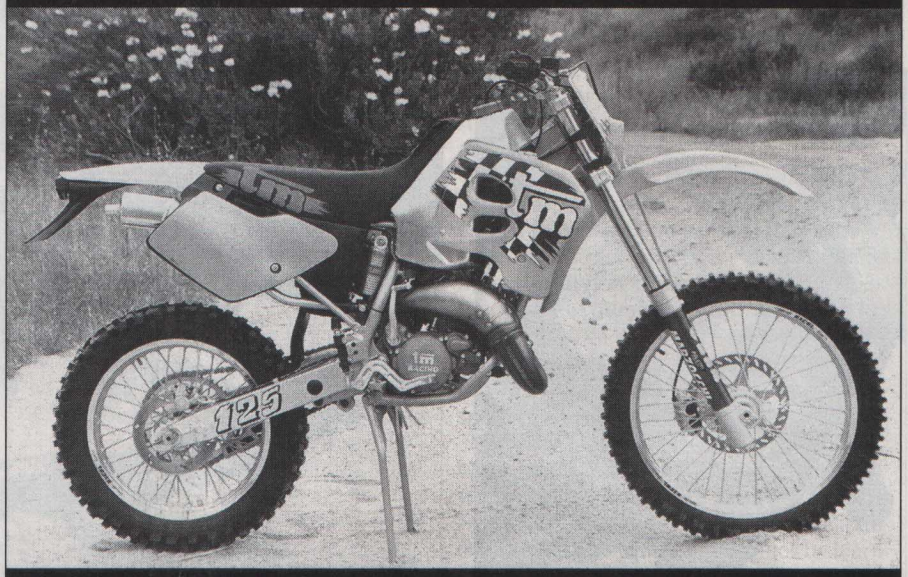
Also, of course, the bike has all the necessary accoutrements for enduro-dom, including a headlight, taillight and kickstand.

ALL ABOUT THE TM 125

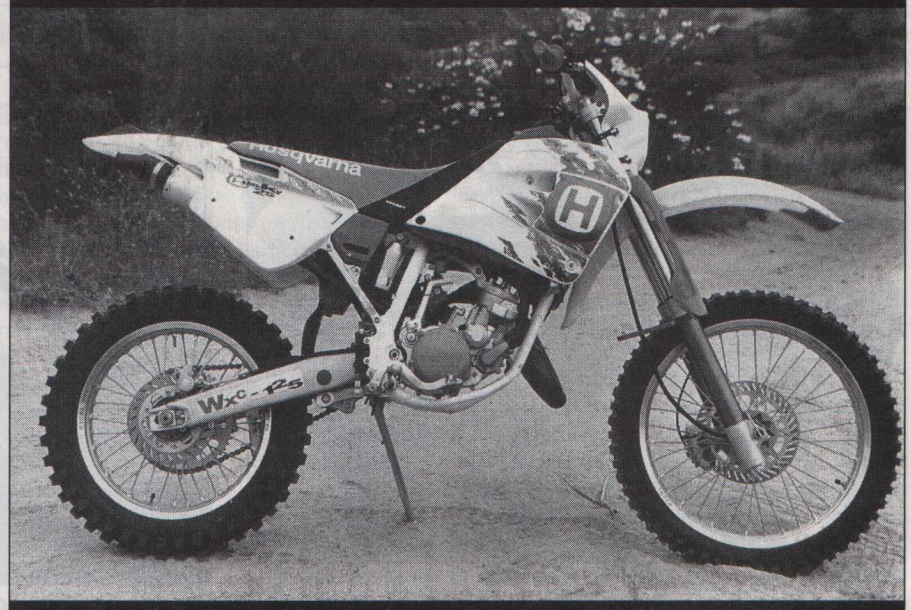
TM is the newest motorcycle manufacturer to enter the U.S. market. For years, the company has been making kart motors in Italy. Then it began making small-bore ISDE bikes in very limited quantity. That's why the TM 125 is so expensive—there are only a few hundred of them made for worldwide distribution.

If you look at the TM closely, it's obvious that this is virtually a hand-made motorcycle. The engine cases are roughcast, and most of the aluminum parts like the hubs and triple clamps are machined from billet. More manual labor probably went into the making of the TM rear brake pedal than into an entire Toyota. The engine is a case-reed, liquid-cooled, power-valve 124cc two-stroke with bore-and-stroke dimensions identical to those of a Honda, Suzuki or Kawasaki 125 (basically square). One thing that sets the TM motor apart is its hydraulic clutch. On the left side of the handlebar, there's a master cylinder, just like the brake master cylinder on the right side, only reversed. A hydraulic line leads to a slave cylinder in the engine that activates the clutch. The advantage is that the clutch is consis-

The KDX started off being the cheapest bike in this comparison. After we were done, it was the most expensive. Funny how that works.



You can buy the TM with a monstrous aluminum fuel tank if you have $200 extra. You can buy it with the Brooklyn Bridge if you have $100 million extra, too.



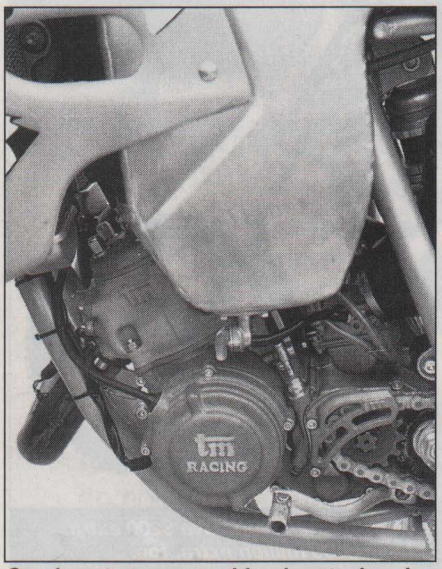
In Europe, the 125 dual-sport market is huge. That's where the Husky's roots are, and that's why it's a mild-mannered alternative to 125 motocross bikes.

tent, never changing its engagement point with heat. It's an idea that will become more and more common in the future, but right now TM is the only dirt bike that uses it. The bike's radiators are massively oversized. Actually, they are the same ones used on the TM 250 and 300.

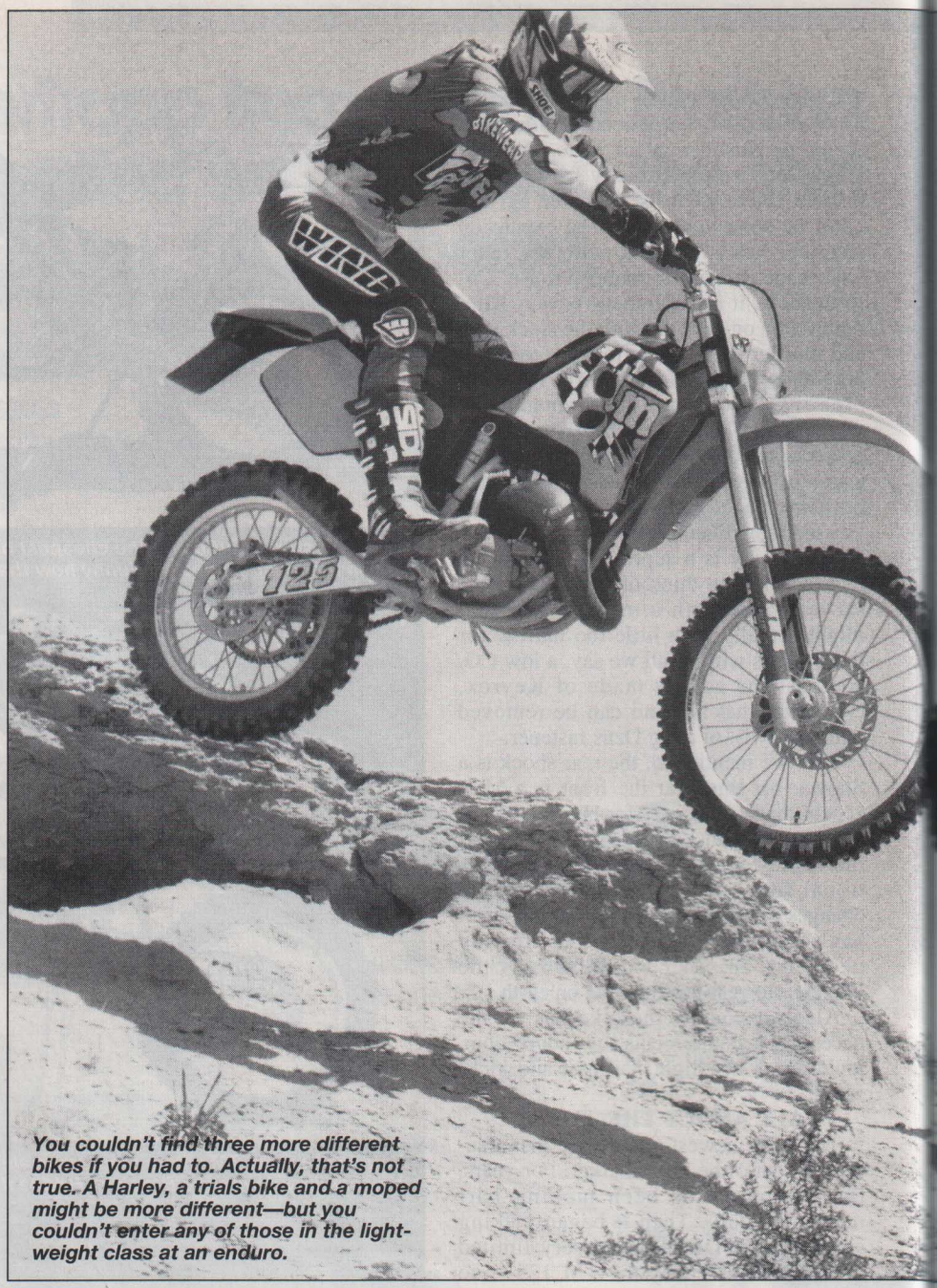
The TM's suspension is a Marzocchi/Ohlins combo, just like KTM uses. Also like KTM (and Husky, for that matter), the TM uses Brembo brakes.

ALL ABOUT THE A-LOOP KDX

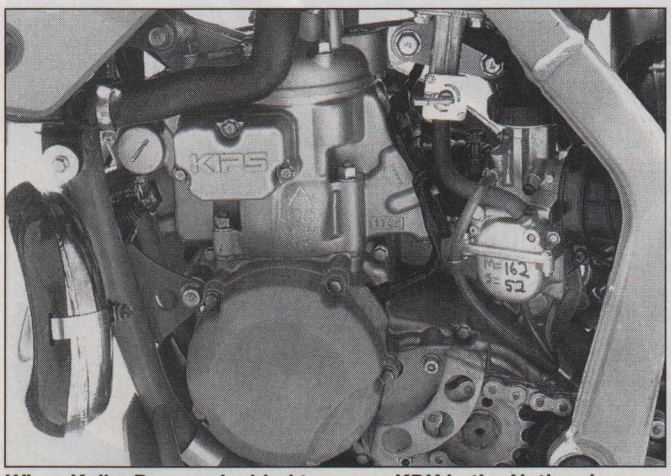
Last year, when Kawasaki signed Kelby Pepper to ride a KDX in the national enduros, some people were skeptical. People who knew anything about the KDX200, however, thought it was a great idea. Yes, in stock form a KDX is a very mild-mannered bike, best suited for trail-riding and "C"-level competition. However, you can make anything you want out of a KDX. Kelby made a racer out of his KDX. When the season was over, he was fourth in the standings and had won the Louisiana round. This year, Kelby



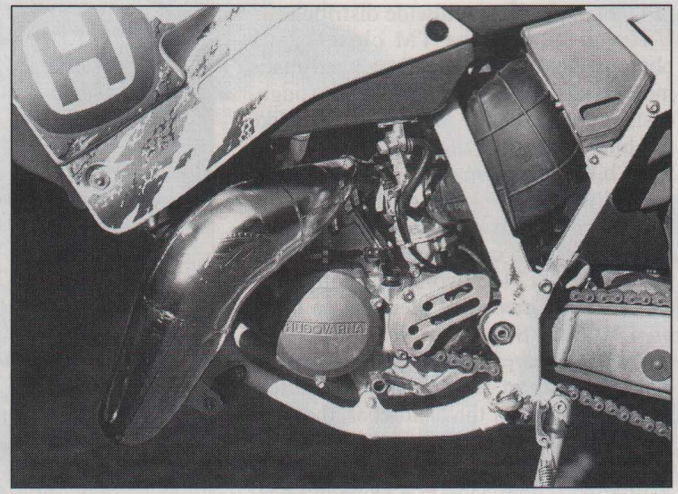
Sand-cast cases, machined parts, hand-welded frames—the TM is just like a works bike from the age when works bikes were something special.



You couldn't find three more different bikes if you had to. Actually, that's not true. A Harley, a trials bike and a moped might be more different—but you couldn't enter any of those in the lightweight class at an enduro.



When Kelby Pepper decided to race a KDX in the Nationals, everyone thought he was nuts. Then he finished fourth. Now they still think he's nuts, but he proved something about the KDX.



We rode the Husqvarna with the stock muffler and pipe for as long as we were morally required, then found FMF stuff to install. Consider the parts mandatory.

started off on a modified KX250, then returned to the KDX after a few rounds. As it turned out, he liked the little KDX better.

A-Loop made a Kelby replica for us. The cylinder was ported and the head was milled 0.010". Then the carb was bored 1.5mm. Of course, the biggest improvement you can get out of a KDX can be had by replacing the pipe and silencer. FMF supplied those parts, as well as a Ram valve. Flywheel weight was increased slightly and heavy-duty clutch springs were installed.

The suspension on a stock KDX is way out of the hunt for racing. A-Loop does its own suspension work. Both ends need at least heavier springs and probably revalving. Our test bike also got the benefit of a WER steering damper.

On top of that, we used a small fortune in bolt-on Moose products that might not be absolutely essential, but sure couldn't hurt. These included aluminum bars, brushguards, grips, a CEET seat foam and cover, a skid plate, chain rollers, a chainguide, an O-ring chain, a disc guard, a pipe shell and sprockets. Brake pads, an oversize front rotor and a solid rear rotor from Braking were also bolted on.

All of this, of course, brings the cost of a KDX up considerably. Including the purchase price of the bike, we had $6800 invested in the project. If you cut out the frills, then you can have the essentials for around $5200. That makes the KDX way more expensive than the Husky, but in the range of the TM.

ON THE TRAIL

It doesn't take long to figure out that these are three completely different motorcycles. How on earth can three machines built for basically the same purpose be so different? Oddly enough, they all get the job done. It certainly isn't like a 250 motocross shootout, where all the bikes are almost interchangeable.

At one extreme is the TM, which is kind of like a full-on motocross bike. At low rpm, the engine doesn't do much. Then it comes on hard, and at full scream the bike will run with just about anything. It is easily as fast as any 125 motocross bike, except perhaps a Honda CR125. However, the TM does have more flywheel and a smoother delivery than a CR. You can climb up a wall of rocks and not have the rear wheel break loose if you are careful. Riders who have ridden 125 motocrossers off-road know how to do it. The TM is easier than most, just because of the extra flywheel effect. In some situations, though, that flywheel can be a disadvantage. When you get the bike into deep sand, for example, or any area where you try to gain revs with a quick stab at the clutch, the bike can seem sluggish.

At the other extreme is the KDX, which is all torque. Right off idle, the KDX makes more power than most 250s. It's a grunt monster. After that, the bike makes good power for a KDX, but it does fall off in extremely high-rev zones. The A-Loop bike has one of the widest powerbands known to man; impressive considering it's only a 200. Power spreads like this are usually reserved for 300s or four-strokes. In fact, the KDX has more in common with an XR400 than with the other bikes here.

At high rpm, though, the TM will pull away from the KDX. You quickly learn that there's no reason to rev the 200 unless you are in a drag race to the next turn. Which powerband is better? It depends on where you are and how fast you want to go. The TM has one speed: full-on, psycho-aggressive, gonzo-war mode. A good rider can turn faster special test times on the TM than on the KDX in most conditions. When conditions are bad, though—muddy, rocky, awful, I-wish-I-were-somewhere-else terrain—then the KDX can be a life saver. It's very forgiving and easy to ride.

Where does the Husky fit in? Right in the middle. By 125 standards, the Husky has fantastic bottom-end. We can't think of any 125 ever made for any purpose that will pull from such low rpm. Compared to the KDX, though, *nothing* has very impressive bottom-end. You still have to hit the clutch to get the Husky to move. The bike then builds to a respectable peak—but compared to the TM, it's no revver. The Husky is a fun, easy-to-ride machine, but a little weak in outright acceleration. With the stock pipe and silencer, actually, it's *really* weak. Once the aftermarket parts are in place,

it's competitive, but it still would be the last 125 into the first turn of a hare scrambles.

The Husky tracks over slippery ground better than the TM, but not as well as the KDX. It has about the same amount of flywheel as the TM, but with less power on tap, it's harder to make a mistake. It's difficult to imagine conditions where the Husky would beat *both* of the other two bikes. In the gnarly stuff it would be behind the Kawasaki, and in the fast stuff it would be behind the TM. Some riders might call it the best of both worlds, but it would be more accurate to call it a compromise.

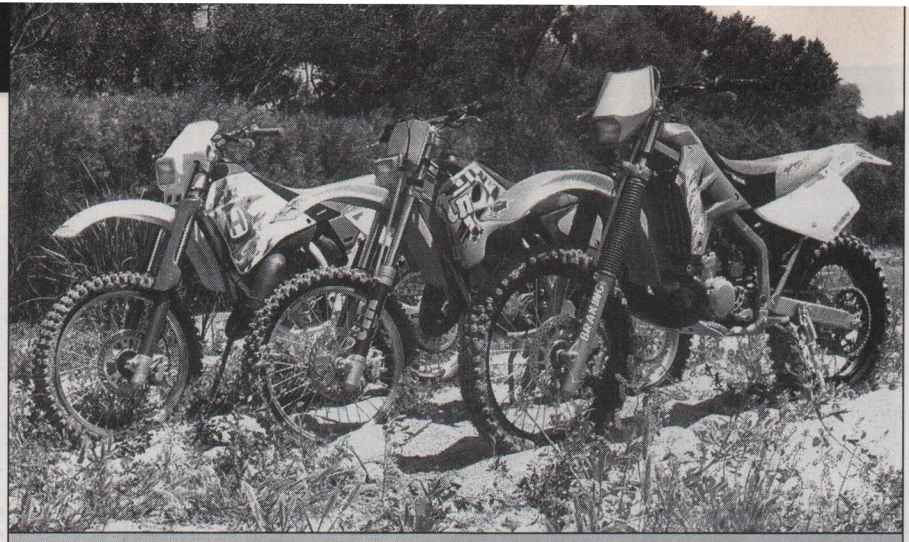
LIVING WITH THE LIGHTWEIGHTS

All three bikes are outrageously easy to handle. That's why people ride small bikes in the first place. Each of the trio is easy to handle for different reasons, though. The KDX is forgiving because of its motor, the TM because of its light weight and the Husky because of its narrow chassis and good suspension. We have to say that the best overall suspension award goes to the Husky. The same fork that feels too soft on bigger Husqvarnas is perfect for the 125. The front end is downright plush on small rocks, but still seems stiff enough to handle big stuff. We even raced the bike in a motocross and never had bottoming problems, back or front.

To be fair, one reason the Husky feels so good is because it deals with less horsepower than the other two bikes. The TM has an almost identical fork, but it feels softer. That's probably because the bike accelerates so darn fast. It just hits things harder. The rear end of the TM is certainly impressive. Like the Husky, it sucks up rocks and roots without asking you to pay too big a penalty when you get to big whoops. We would still like to see it a little stiffer, especially for heavy riders (which all of us seem to be these days).

A-Loop did miracles with the KDX suspension, but in the end, it still is KDX suspension. The fork that comes on the little Kawie only has so much potential. Our bike was set up for tight enduros, so it was excellent on little bumps and rocks, but it wasn't as good with whoops. The front end feels flexy and the rear end seems like it only has ten inches or so of travel. A stock KDX will endo if you show it a picture of whoops, so there's no doubt that the mods helped considerably. However, the fork can't become a Marzocchi overnight, and the shock won't ever be an Ohlins.

The KDX will still hold a straight line through anything, though. It is much more stable than the other two bikes, owing something, no doubt, to the steering damper. Eventually we turned the steering damper to its lightest setting and found that the KDX was still ultra-stable, but the TM is no slouch in that department, either. It goes very straight and has the bonus of turning much better than the Kawasaki. The Husky, oddly enough, was very un-Husky-like in that department. Since the beginning of time, Huskys have been like freight trains, but the 125 dances around a little in the straights and occasionally deflects on rocks. You need to understand that the bike feels so tiny and light that deflection means virtually nothing. Getting the little Husky off-course isn't nearly as scary as getting a big 610 four-stroke heading in the wrong direction—but with the 125 it does happen.



	TM 125E	HUSQVARNA WXE 125	KAWASAKI KDX200
Engine type	Case-reed, liquid-cooled 2-stroke	Case-reed, liquid-cooled 2-stroke	Reed-valve, liquid-cooled 2-stroke
Displacement	124cc	125cc	198cc
Bore and stroke	54.0mm x 54.4mm	56.0mm x 50.6mm	66.0mm x 58.0mm
Carburetion	38mm Keihin	35mm Mikuni	35mm Keihin PWK
Fuel tank capacity	3.5 gal.	3.2 gal. (13.0L)	2.9 gal. (11.0L)
Gearing	13/51	14/52	13/47
Lighting coil	Yes	Yes	Yes
Spark arrester	No	Yes	Yes
EPA-legal	No	No	Yes
Running weight w/no fuel	220 lb.	230 lb.	233 lb.
Wheelbase	58.7" (1490mm)	55.1" (1400mm)	57.1" (1450mm)
Rake/trail	NA	NA	27.0°4.6"
Ground clearance	15.3" (383mm)	14.6" (370mm)	13.4" (340mm)
Seat height	37.8" (960mm)	35.0" (890mm)	35.6" (950mm)
Tire size and type:			
Front	90/90-21 Pirelli Sandcross	90/90-21 Metzeler Unicross	80/100-21 Dunlop K490
Rear	100/90-18 Pirelli Garacross	100/90-18 Metzeler Unicross	110/100-18 Dunlop K695
Suspension:			
Front	Marzocchi conv., comp./reb., 12.2" (310mm) travel	Marzocchi conv., adj. comp./reb., 12.2" (310mm) travel	Kayaba conv., adj. reb., 11.4" (290mm) travel
Rear	Ohlins aluminum piggyback, adj. prel./comp./reb., travel NA	Showa alum. piggyback, adj. prel./comp./reb., 12.6" (320mm) travel	Kayaba alum. piggyback, adj. prel./reb./comp., 11.8" (300mm) travel
Country of origin	Italy	Italy	Japan
Suggested retail price	$6300 (approx.)	$4399	$4249 (before moficiation)
Distr./Mfr.	TM Competition Motorcycles P.O. Box 1037 Chino, CA 91708 (909) 391-3278	Cagiva North America 237 West Pkwy. Pompton Plains, NJ 07444 (201) 839-2331	Kawasaki Motors Corp. 9950 Jeronimo Rd. Irvine, CA 92718 (714) 770-0400

ENDURO DETAILS

The KDX feels pretty heavy, and it *is* pretty heavy. Funny how that works. It's wide across the seat and tank, while the other two feel narrow and are 15 to 20 pounds lighter. The TM's oversize radiators keep it from being as thin as the Husky, but that's okay; it was the only bike that never overheated. The TM also has an optional 3.5-gallon aluminum fuel tank, but we wouldn't pay the $200 that it costs. It makes the bike feel too bulky, plus it hurts your knees a little. The stock tank is good for 40 miles or so. All three bikes have somewhat annoying kickstands. The Husky's sidestand tucks up nicely but doesn't stay tucked up when you ride. The TM's centerstand makes all kinds of noise, but at least it is nice for changing tires. The KDX's sidestand makes the already-wide bike about two inches wider. The TM doesn't have a spark arrester or an odometer in stock form, so you can add those items to the already steep price.

In the end, that's what will decide which bike you buy. If money is no object, and you want the ultimate in performance, you get to decide if you want TM's version of the ultimate or A-Loop's. If you want to spend less and still have a competitive lightweight, you can go for the Husky. If you want to spend *still* less, you can go with a stock KDX. In that case, though, you limit how far you can go, competitively. Which direction do we recommend? The TM is for serious racers only and the A-Loop KDX is for everyone else. That's how we would call it if we were spending your money—and we *love* spending your money. ❑