

NEW '79 BIKES!

TT500 GOODIE GUIDE

WIRT BIKE

JANUARY 1979 • \$1.25 UK60p

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**KAWASAKI
KX250-A5**

**WHAT'S IT
COST TO
RACE A 125?**

**OVERKILL: 422cc
RM SUZUKI
RAT MOTOR**

**WHO WILL
WIN THIS
TRUCK?**

Retailers: See Page 71 For
Special Display Allowance Plan



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DIRT BIKE

VOLUME NINE, NUMBER ONE
JANUARY, 1979

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First test of the new Can-Am 370 MX-5 . . . PG. 42

ON THE COVER:

Gassin' Gaylon Mosier leaps tall trucks in a single bound. And, you can win what's left of this truck. Photo by Paul Clipper

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE JANUARY 18

1979 KAWASAKI KX250 A5

THE GREEN GUN GETS LEGS

Exclusive! First Test

By the Staff of Dirt Bike

□ Well, well, well. What do we have here? A green sickle with some surprises, that's what. Before you go too much farther and make the mistake of thinking that this is a '78... it ain't.

It's not only a 1979 machine, but the only one in the country as these very words are being written. Oh yes. One more thing. This is not a rehashed version of the '78 model. The 1979 Kawasaki is a totally new bike, from the proverbial ground-on-up. This means a new frame, suspension and so forth. Just about the only place the phrase "reworked" applies is in the engine. It's basically the '78 motor with some porting changes and a different pipe.

One complaint a lot of folks had about the '78 Kawasaki was the fact that it was a bit short on suspension travel compared to the other bikes available at the time.

We certainly have grown spoiled when we bitch and snivel about an inch and a half on either end. Whatever the case, Kawasaki has seen fit to respond to the public's demand by giving the new 250 KX 11 inches, front and rear.

Normally, we moan inwardly when we see big numbers like that in travel. That often means that the bike no longer turns accurately, and that only a six-footer can sling a leg over the bike.

Not here.

Someway, somehow, the Kawasaki people have managed to keep the good turning habits of the '78 version and still give the clamoring masses the inches they slobber after. Even our 5'8" testers didn't have all that much

trouble getting astride the Green Grunter. Saddle height is 37 plus, but it has a low back section.

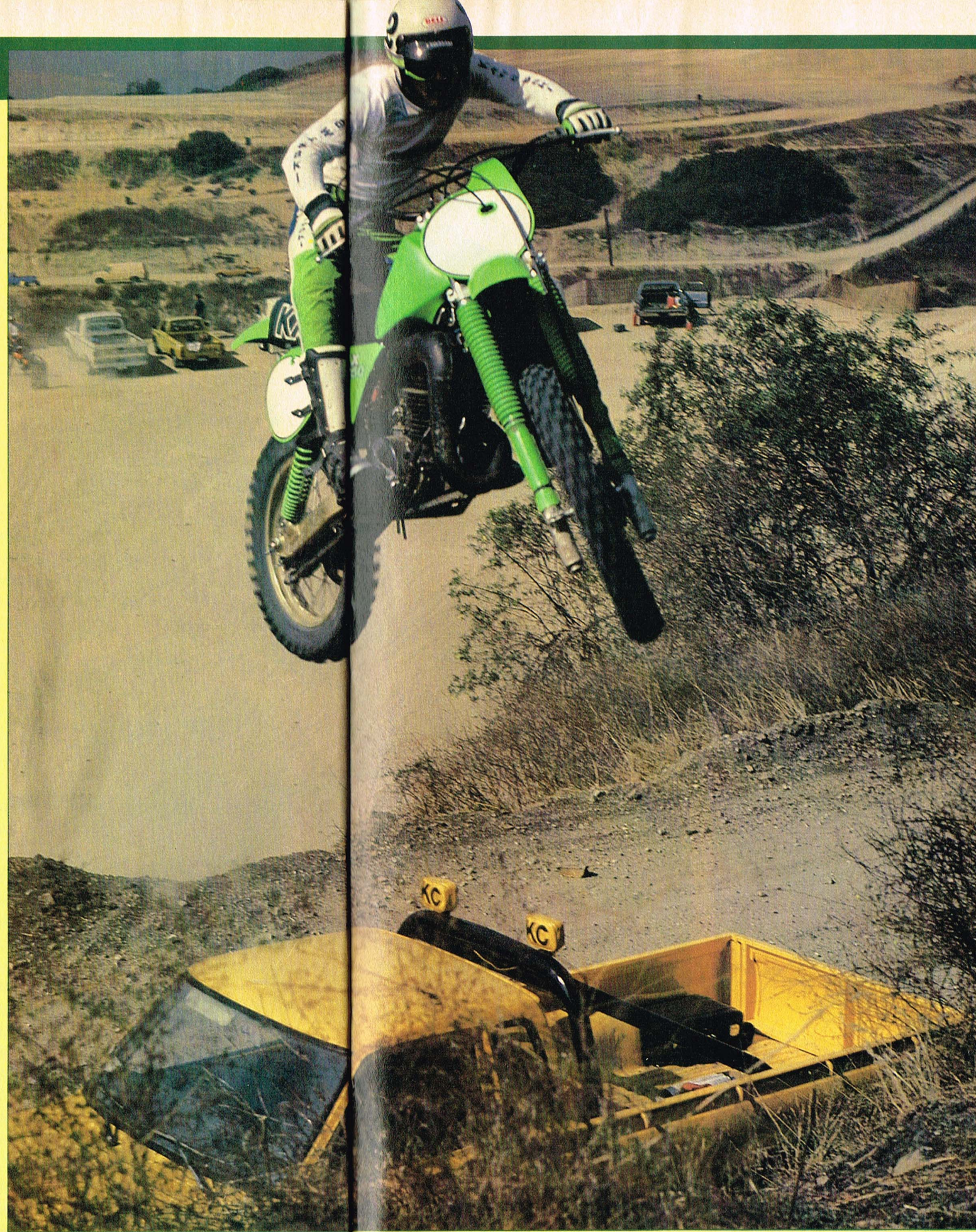
Yup, it's still a grunter. Lots of low-end torque gives the Kawasaki plenty of snap right off the bottom of the rpm range. You'll be able to shift the 250 Kawasaki very early and still have the bike pull without falling on its face and blubbing.

While the engine will rev out more on top than last year's effort, it still flattens out earlier than other 250s. This is not necessarily bad. Actually, the powerband of the Kawasaki makes the bike easier to ride than just about any other 250 available. For the bulk of the riders, that is. A pro will likely want a bike that'll have less on the bottom end and more on the top. This is easily achieved on almost any bike by simple and well-known tuning methods, such as larger carbs, larger (read wider) ports and basic pipe tampering. When all the smoke clears, what you still have is the basic powerband that you started with, but altered to suit the craziness of the rider.

Fast riders tend to be on the loony side and bay at the moon a great deal. These folks just love to keep any engine screaming at the very top, and usually have the talent to survive practices such as this.

More normal folks (like you and me), will be much happier and go much faster with a powerband that's flatter and has no surprises in it. This is not to say that the power curve of the stock '79 Kawasaki isn't frantic enough to win in the pro classes.

Quite the opposite. Gaylon Mosier,



the factory Kawasaki rider who assisted us in our testing, is planning to race a basically stock KX250 in the Anaheim MX finals. Of course, by the time you read this, that particular race will have become history. This places you — the reader — in the enviable position of knowing just how accurate (or how dumb) we are by merely reading your local big-time newspaper to check the results. If Mosier is up there in the standings, then the bike should be pretty much OK.

Barring a crash on Gaylon's part (or some extenuating circumstance), placing the bike on the starting line should be the final and most blatant test.

Unfortunately, we never had the opportunity to get in an actual race with the machine. When you get a chance to test the only bike in the country, you are, quite naturally, expected to treat it a bit differently than you might a garden-variety machine.

Pictures of nervous Kawasaki executives, sitting next to a huge pot of Koffee, fingernails in mouths, come easily to mind. While getting an exclusive is nice, it does carry a heavy burden with it.

For this reason, we cannot give the Kwacker a reliability rating of any sort. Too little time was spent with the bike. We ask you to bear this in mind as you digest our thoughts and impressions on this bike. We can tell you what it felt like to put in some laps around a track, smoke it through a sand wash and pop wheelies down a fireroad, but we cannot tell you what it'll feel like some time downstream.

We can't tell you what'll break. What nuts and bolts will come loose. Or what will bend. Or crack and fatigue.

What we can tell you about the KX is what you might learn if one of your buddies had one and let you mess around on it now and then. Just consider us one of your pals, then, and this test will have more meaning.

BUT, WHAT'S IT ALL MEAN, BUDDY?

OK. Here's how the bike felt.

Starting? No sweat. Usually, one prod did the job. If it took more than one poke, the rider was not putting his heart into it, or was doing something wrong. To get the bike fired when cold, all the rider had to do was put the choke on and stomp away at the kickstarter with absolutely no throttle on. If even a little bit of throttle was used, the bike simply would not start.

1979 KAWASAKI KX250 A5

When hot, cracking the throttle about half way and sharply slapping the kickstarter did the trick — every time. Our bike was received jetted spot-on. No dingles or rattling. Just good, clean power, from the pilot jet to that big brass plug in the bottom they call the main jet.

When the Kawasaki is slipped into gear, there's no crunch, or lurch. The desired gear is merely engaged with the least fuss imaginable. Clutch feel is a bit vague, but will not prove to be a handicap after familiarization. Engagement is rather far out, but adjusting will not eliminate this trait. Clutch feel is much like that of the street Honda bikes.

As you first run through the gears, the spread of power comes on as an abrupt spurt, but as you get in the higher gears, the broad torque curve becomes more apparent. Riders who spend too much time in the lower gears will be doing just that: spending time. The best speed from point to point will be made in the higher gears, making the engine work hard.

You can tell when the Kawasaki is doing its job in the proper fashion. It just gets right down and snorts and grunts and moans in the fat part of the power curve. The exhaust has a slightly off-pitch sound, and a resonance vibrates through the muffler tip. A shudder runs through the chassis and the front end quivers as it gets very light, but stays in touch with the ground. All of these weird, carnal sounds simply mean that the Kawasaki KX250 A5 is working.

With this sort of power curve, gearing will become an important part of the rider's trick list. Gear it right and make the motor fit the track, and you can win with the Kwacker. Show up with the wrong teeth and you might get blitzed from turn to turn on a certain type of track. A smart rider will keep a selection of countershaft sprockets handy. However, at almost 16 bucks a copy (dealer retail), this might prove to be a difficult task. Come on, guys! Sixteen bucks per? Really! Must be made out of that new material from Japan. . . un-obtanium.

Once the rider gets the bike rolling, the input of sensations will register. Forks? Good. Smooth action. No harshness on the stutter-bumps. They swallow the whoops well. No flexing, as the larger 38mm diameter tubes lend rigidity under load.

The rear end? At first, it feels good on the large bumps, especially when landing from a high jump. But, after a few warm-up laps, when the rider begins to gas it hard out of the turns, he finds out that the rear end chatters like

a maniac in charge of a jackhammer.

A shuddering harshness ripples through the rear end and finally attacks the very grips the rider is holding on to. Shifting up doesn't help. Neither does rolling the throttle on smoothly. Something is wrong with the shocks. Badly wrong.

Our first guess of a too-heavy spring rate and excessive rebound damping proved correct. When Gaylon Mosier rode the bike for our photo sessions, he mentioned the very same things.

Later, we were told by the Kawasaki folks that our bike came with the wrong spring and damping rates and that all future production bikes would come equipped with lighter springs and lighter rebound damping.

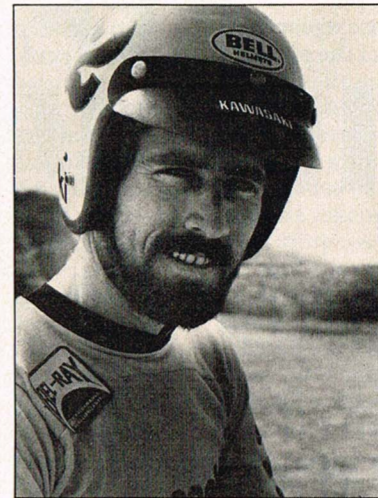
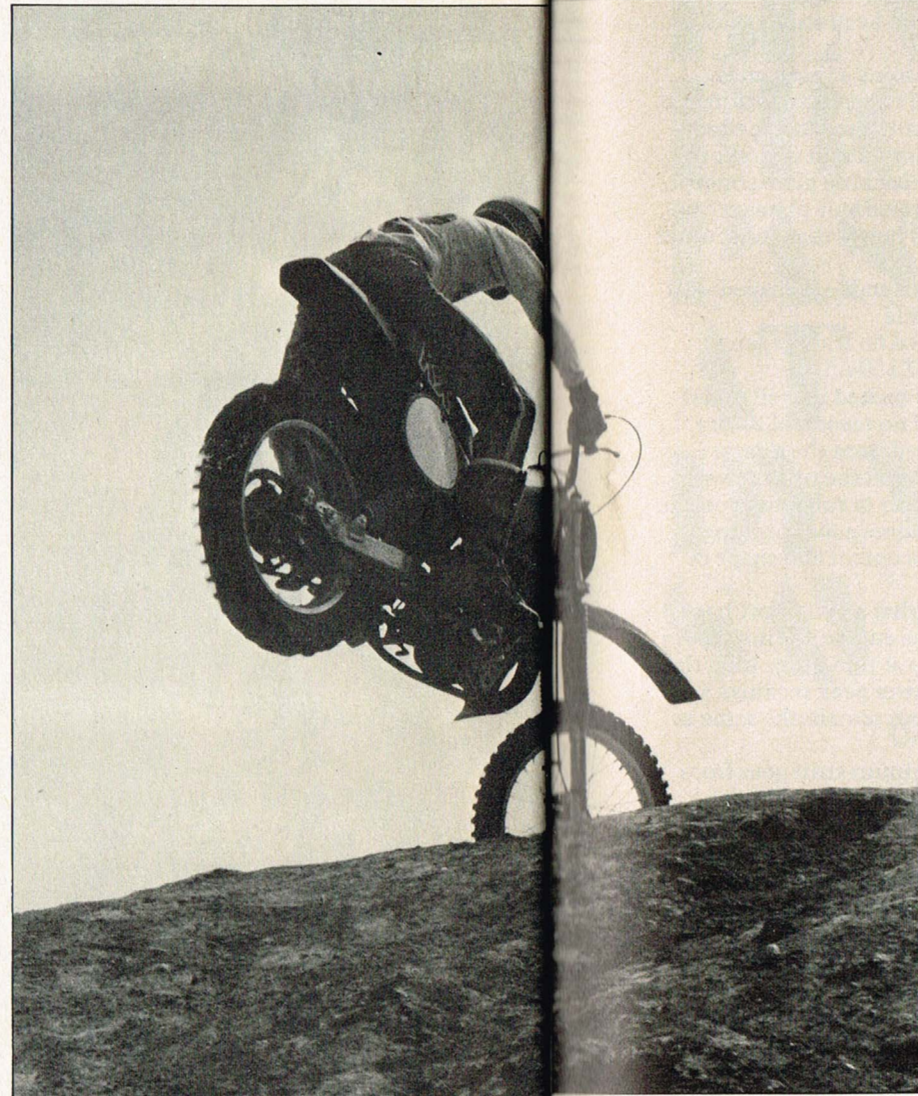
If they follow through on this. . . fine. If not, we'll be the first to tell you and we'll rub it in. No such thing as good taste at the DB inner sanctum.

AS THE WORLD TURNS

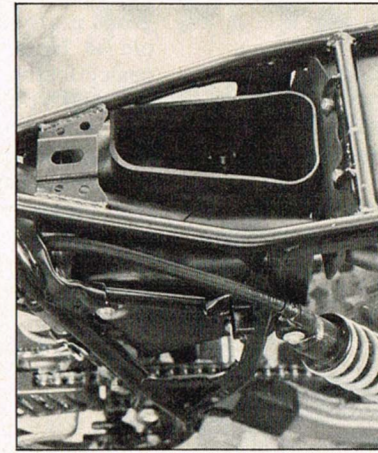
If memory serves us correctly, last year's Kawasaki had some front end washout. The pushing wasn't too bad, but some care had to be taken in slow, flat turns and the rider had to get well forward on the gas tank to keep that front tire from creeping outward.

Still, the light weight and very low saddle height made it easy for the rider to fling the bike around, and the steering was accurate enough to allow the rider to hunt for a berm, or even a small ridge to push against.

Not so with the '79 bike. The rider would have to shift his weight grossly to the rear to make the front end go



Quote: "I'm going to park my works bike and race one of these stockers at the Anaheim MX finals. On a tight, twisty track, it just works better."



Shocks are KYB remotes, with very long hoses. We were told different shocks would come on the production bikes.

Most unusual.

The ability of the front end to conquer sand and loose dirt also helped the bike in soft corners. In places where most bikes would have the front tire dig in and plow, the front end of the Kawasaki would ignore the stuff and steer through it like it wasn't even there.

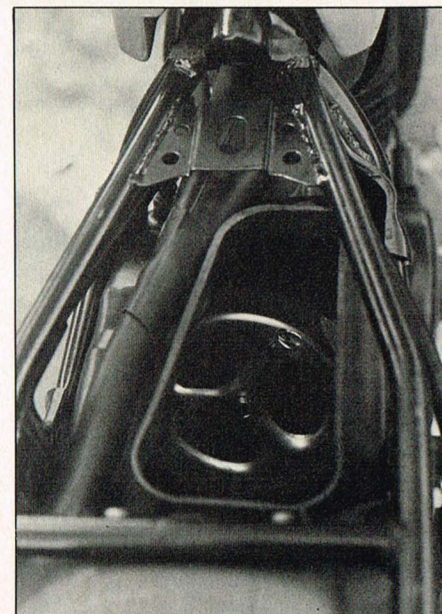
When sliding the A5, both ends of the bike would normally break loose at the same time, unless the rider purposely made a dramatic weight shift forward or back. Our test riders did not have to get way forward on the gas tank to make the front end stick.

BITS AND PIECES

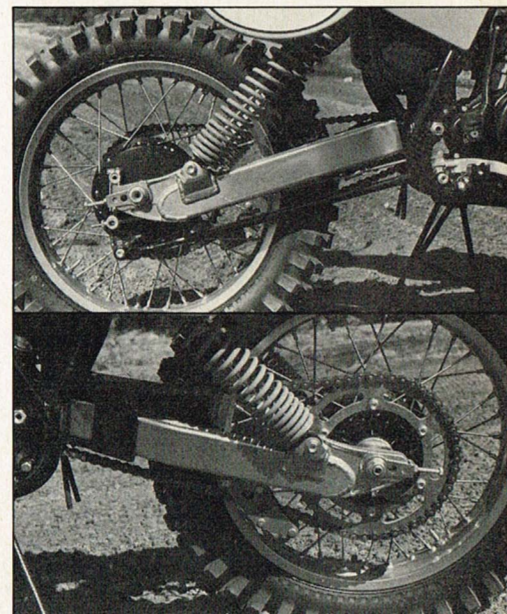
While the 250 A5 shifted reasonably well, we could not slap the bike through the gears without backing off the throttle. We didn't have to use the clutch, but the momentary blip of the throttle was needed, both up and downshifting.

With almost 58 inches of wheelbase, the Kawasaki is a very long bike, but it's a rigid unit. Last year, we heard too many reports of frames cracking on the A4 motocrossers to ignore.

This year, the frame has the same wall thickness tubing (chrome moly), but sports much more gusseting and more strengthening tubes all over the machine. The steering head, in particular, is heavily beefed up, and the rear shock mount area frame tubes



Nifty pin holds air cleaner lid in place. All you have to do is slide the pin back a few inches and the whole works slips out. Neat, huh?



New swingarm is two inches longer than the old one. It's light, strong and flex-free. Plenty of rollers, guides and such line the entire chain.

away. The ability of the front end to bite definitely makes the 250 A5 superior in tight corners, compared to most of the other 250s.

One reason for the bite is that the steering head has been pulled in one full degree. The change to 29 degrees, combined with the overly stiff rear suspension, made the bike a turning fool. It's a known fact among suspension tuners that the spring and preload selection at the rear end have a large effect on just how the front end of the bike reacts in corners.

Adding to the cornering ability of the A5 was the way the rear end tracked under power when exiting a turn. No wild swinging out was experienced, even on a baked-hard track. Part of this can be attributed to the rigid frame and flex-free aluminum swingarm, but even more comes from the increased flywheel weight in the engine itself.

A full 20-percent increase in flywheel size allows the Kawasaki to rev slower, preventing useless and dangerous wheelspin. Maico has

known this for years and their bikes have proven very stable in the turns.

This slow revving is often misinterpreted by inexperienced riders as a lack of horsepower. They tend to associate a screaming blast of revs and a wildly swinging rear end with lots of power. Lots it may be. Correct, it ain't.

We noticed a trait on the Kawasaki that we've never experienced before on any other bike. In deep sand, or very soft, powdery dirt, the front tire would get on top and "float" quickly. Normally, when a bike is started in deep sand from a dead start, it has to get up to a planing speed before the machine gets stable. Getting to that speed usually means that the front end hunts all over the place and the rear wheel swings from side to side as it churns dirt back, rather than hooking up.

With the A5, the front end was on top of the sand (or loose dirt) before the rider had a chance to wind low gear out. And the rear end tracked very straight and also got on top quickly.

KAWASAKI KX250 A5

have sturdy support brackets now.

The frame, even though it retains the same basic shape, must be considered all new. Additionally, the aluminum swingarm is two full inches longer.

Other changes include a new saddle, gas tank, bars and air box. Access to the filter is now through the top, without

the side opening of last year.

Huge 38mm fork tubes replace the adequate 36mm units of the older A4 version. We'd like to see all bikes with long-travel forks have tubes at least this size. The loads imposed on long-travel forks when landing a motorcycle from a jump are not to be believed.

The countershaft sprocket and the swingarm pivot center are quite far from each other. This means that there's a great deal of change in the tension of the chain as the rear wheel lurches up and down. We predicted chain problems the moment we saw the setup, and sure enough, Mosier snapped the chain on the bike at our final photo session.

Of course, as you can see by our cover, the demands he placed on the bike were a bit greater than those of the average racer. To get the swingarm pivot any closer than it is would require a total redesign of the engine cases, something that Kawasaki is obviously not willing to do at this point.

Everywhere you look on the bike, green is seen. Even the grips are green. By the way, no one liked the grips; all riders thought they were way too thick and hard on the hands.

The decals fell off the plastic gas

tank almost instantly. Apparently, no one knows how to keep sticky stuff on plastic yet.

Brakes were strong at both ends; however, we did experience locking up and chattering at the rear more than once. So much for all that crap about the full-floating backing plate concept.

New FIM-dictated side plates are on the A5, and look better than most other efforts.

Fenders at both ends are shaped well and appear durable.

We experienced no leakage, anywhere, on the KX250 A5.

The high pipe tucked in well under the gas tank and no reports of toasty legs were received from the riders. When we completed the testing, we didn't see any wear or rub marks on the paint, showing some good thinking in the location, placement and shape of the pipe.

We were told that a boost port has been added to the engine, giving the A5 much more snap at mid-range than the old A4. Horsepower peak readings and peak effective rpm remain the same as last year's bike.

A sturdy aluminum strut goes from the frame backbone to the cylinder head, acting as a stiffening member. Don't let it get loose, or you'll possibly experience frame cracking.

Those long new forks have air caps, allowing the rider the luxury of tampering with oil levels and pressure changes. We left the bike alone and were pleased with the action of the front legs.

THE BIG PICTURE

How well does the KX250 A5 stand up, compared to the other stuff on the market? Hedging a bit, because we have not ridden all of the '79s yet, we can only compare it to the '78s. The bike turns as well as a '78 Maico, even with the stock tires. While its speed is up this year, there are still at least four 250s we can name that will outrag it to the first turn. It is no longer slow, though.

The nice spread of power will make the bike fairly easy for the Beginner, Novice or Intermediate rider to ride. The price of the bike will make that same rider have brown shorts and cramps in his stomach.

The A5 instills much more confidence than a Honda Elsinore, by the way, and is far easier to ride quickly. With better shocks and a closer countershaft/swingarm pivot relationship, we'd rate it at the very top of the heap. Without these improvements, we must downgrade it slightly and call it damn close to being the best 250 around. Close ain't bad. ■

1979 Kawasaki KX250 A5

ENGINE TYPE	Two-stroke, single-cylinder, piston reed valve
BORE AND STROKE	70mm x 64.9mm
DISPLACEMENT	249cc
HORSEPOWER (CLAIMED BY FACTORY)	40 at 8000 rpm
CARBURETION	Mikuni VM38SS
FACTORY RECOMMENDED JETTING:	
Main jet	172.5
Needle jet	R-2
Jet needle	6F2-1
Pilot jet	50
Slide number	2.5
RECOMMENDED GASOLINE	Premium
RECOMMENDED OIL (MFR.)	N/A
FUEL TANK CAPACITY	2.4 U.S. gallons
FUEL TANK MATERIAL	Aluminum
GAS/OIL RATIO	20:1
LUBRICATION	Pre-mix
OIL CAPACITY	N/A
AIR FILTRATION	Oiled foam in air box
CLUTCH TYPE	Wet, multi-disc
TRANSMISSION	Five-speed, constant mesh
GEARBOX RATIOS	
1	2.14
2	1.71
3	1.38
4	1.16
5	1.00
GEARING, FRONT/REAR	14/50
IGNITION	Electronic CDI
PRIMARY KICK SYSTEM?	Yes
RECOMMENDED SPARK PLUG	NGK B9EV
SILENCER/SPARK ARRESTOR/QUALITY	Silencer only — average noise level for racer
EXHAUST SYSTEM	High pipe, through frame
FRAME, TYPE	Single downtube, split cradle, chrome moly
WHEELBASE	1470mm (57.9 inches)
GROUND CLEARANCE	340mm (13.4 inches)
SEAT HEIGHT AT TANK	940mm (37.4 inches)
STEERING HEAD ANGLE	29 degrees
TRAIL	113mm (4.5 inches)
WEIGHT WITH ONE GALLON GAS	220 pounds
RIM MATERIAL	Aluminum alloy
TIRE SIZES	
Front:	3.00x21
Rear:	5.10x18
SUSPENSION	
Front, type and travel	Telescopic, forward axle, 11 inches
Rear, type and travel	Aluminum swingarm, KYB shocks, 11 inches
INTENDED USE, MFR	Motocross/ off-road racing
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	Japan
PRICE, APPROX	\$2000
PARTS PRICES, HIGH-WEAR ITEMS	
Piston assembly, complete	\$32.60
Rings only	\$10.60
Cylinder	\$100.00
Shift lever	\$4.74
Brake pedal	\$4.74
Front sprocket	\$15.58
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