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**DIRT  
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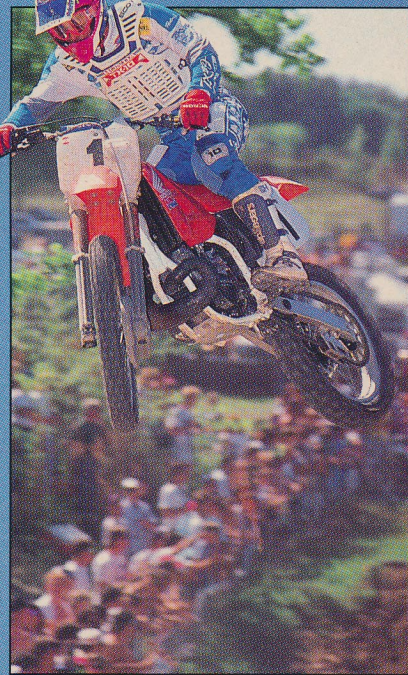
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**ON THE COVER:** Shane Trittler gets vertical on the Race Tech/AMP Research CR125 project bike for the lens of Torquin' Tim, and Jeff Stanton catches big air on his way to a two-one Florida working vacation. Race shot by Chris Hultner; cover design by DeWest and color separations by Valley Film.

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# THE KOMplete KDX200

*Kawasaki's ultimate trail bike: Before & After*

By Bryar Holcomb & the DIRT BIKE Staff



**D**ear DIRT BIKE,  
 You guys must be really ham-fisted, because I haven't overheated the motor or the rear brake on my 1989 KDX200, and I'm arguably the slowest enduro rider this side of the Mississippi!

Marvin Fineblatt  
 Moscow, Texas

Ahem. Like most off-road enthusiasts, we were skeptical when Kawasaki went to liquid cooling on the totally redesigned '89 KDX200. When we receive a bike, we first shoot photographs, before the paint gets rubbed off of the frame, then we hammer it. The KDX200 did overheat during shooting, because of the stop-and-go, low-speed passes required. Think of it as riding in rush-hour traffic—only the freeway is muddy.

Likewise, we boiled the rear brake fluid in mountainous terrain. After a few bleedings, we switched to Motul High-Temperature brake fluid and never experienced the problem again. What we have experienced in the past 18 months is the most dependable bike we've ever ridden. The bike refuses to quit, no matter how hard we try to break it. Stock, it's a super trail bike—inexpensive, quiet, easy to ride, low on maintenance, high on fun.

Massage the KDX a bit and it's capable of winning a National enduro, if you are. We've spent the last year and a half thrashing the 200 while testing various hop-up products. Even with full-on motor mods, we've yet to overheat the bike in normal riding conditions.

**Suspension action is plush but a tad unbalanced. The forks are softer than the shock, reducing effective head angle. Pro Circuit perfects suspension action and balance for \$230.**

Since the 1990 KDX200 is exactly like the '89, except for a new, stronger piston, we're going to devote the meat of this article to our 18 months with the '89. The KDX is Kawasaki's biggest seller of all of their dirt bikes (they'll import 4800 this year and, no doubt, sell them all), and this test will deal more with what to look out for and how to inexpensively improve your '90 or '89, if you choose to do so.

#### LIFE WITH THE MOTOR

Power is concentrated in the midrange with the EPA-legal motor. It'll plonk along happily at a snail's pace without fear of stalling but makes little power in the basement. It climbs smoothly into a meaty mid-range and will rev out, but power drops off suddenly. Stock, it's better to keep it in the meat of the powerband, rather than trying to rev its guts out. As delivered, the KDX is rich on top. We dropped the main jet two sizes and got a much cleaner top-end.

The airbox lid is very restrictive, but removal yields a big flat spot in the midrange. Moose Racing solved the problem by going from an 1172 needle to Honda's 1369 needle. End of flat spot, and a fair improvement in overall power. Likewise, Moose's power-valve spring kit kicks in the KIPS valves sooner for more low-end power.

If you're going to compete in closed-course events, the biggest motor improvement you

can make is a new pipe. The stock dual-walled pipe has internal baffles to reduce sound output and this chokes top-end power. Bryar Holcomb did extensive testing with FMF and the pipe they finalized gave the bike more torque in the basement and considerably more power on top, with only five more decibels emitted from the single-walled FMF pipe. Now the bike will wheelie in fourth!

Testing revealed the stock silencer/spark arrester flows almost as well as many after-market silencers but with a much lower sound output. Let's keep things quiet and our riding areas open!

In a quest for even more power, we sent the bike to DMC for their Power Pak motor mods. They reshape and time the auxiliary exhaust ports, clean and match the other ports and reshape the head without boosting compression, all for \$250. Low and mid-range get a boost from the KIPS spacer (\$32), and DMC's pipe (\$157, silencer \$59) boosts power across the board. We're talking a 15-foot acceleration advantage in every gear. Clearly, the KDX is in a very mild state of tune, stock.

#### HEADSHAKE WHILE ATTEMPTING SPEED

For casual trail riding the stock KDX is plush, as it's designed to be. In really tight terrain it shines, but bottoming is severe in sand whoops or on special tests. Try to dial action in and you'll get a rude awakening. Instead of being in the middle of the range, the adjusters are at extremes, stock (full firm rebound and soft compression).

Moose Racing's shock mod (\$128) softens compression and increases rebound and puts the adjustments in the middle of their ranges. Anyone with more girth than Twiggy will want to go to heavier fork springs. Stock is 15 pounds and Moose goes to 19.5-pound springs (\$54.95) with 7.5-wt. oil at six inches. This yields a smoother, more progressive and balanced ride with plenty of adjustability. The fork rebound is a tad quick, even with the adjusters maxed, due to the stiffer springs, but the overall ride is greatly improved over stock.

#### BITS & PIECES & SNIVELS

- EBC ([818] 362-5534) brake pads work as well as stock and last as long but dissipate heat better. If you experience brake fade, replace the brake fluid with Motul or a high-quality DOT 4 fluid. Don't use DOT 5, as it doesn't absorb water and attacks the internal rubber goodies in the system.





After putting 2000 miles on our '89 KDX and learning its strong and weak points, we're pumped to get our hands on the '90! The new white-on-blue color scheme looks trick, although the bike is barely changed internally. ▶

- Change your tranny oil often. If it comes out milky, you've blown a water pump seal (overheating is another symptom). To change, drain the coolant, lay the bike on its left side, remove the kickstarter and right-side case, remove the water pump and you can get at the seal, which comes out easily for replacement. Carry one or two in your tool box.

- After six months of washings, the air filter's sealing lip cracks. Toss and replace with a Uni or Twin-Air filter at first sign of cracking.

- The bars have three-inch plugs inserted in the ends to deaden vibration. This makes cutting the bars down and installing Bark Busters a pain. Hacksawing through the bars takes a bit longer, then you have to tap the remaining plug in further to make room for the Bark Busters.

- Gas range is 70+ miles, and the tank is tucked in well. Spark plug access is good. Pipe routing is excellent, and we didn't ding a pipe or melt any plastic.

- The mechanical odometer has excellent, snag-free cable routing, but resetting isn't as easy as the old electronic KDX unit, especially when trying to stop on time.

- Tubular case savers also protect the pipe and brake lever, and the folding shift lever is malleable—good news for crashers.

- The chainguide has aluminum bracing for added strength, and the brake calipers are tucked out of harm's way. If you spend

## 1990 KAWASAKI KDX200-E2

Engine type	Reed- and power-valved, liquid-cooled 2-stroke
Displacement	198cc
Bore and stroke	66mm×58mm
Carburetion	35mm PWK Keihin
Fuel tank capacity	3.2 gals. (12.1L)
Gearing	13/47
Lighting coil	Yes
Spark arrester	Yes
Green sticker legal in stock trim	Yes
Claimed dry weight	225 lbs.
Running weight w/no fuel	229 lbs.
Noise output (MIC 20" test)	89 dB
Wheelbase	57.1 in. (1451mm)
Ground clearance	13.4 in. (340mm)
Seat height	37.4 in. (950mm)
Tire size and type:	
Front	80/100×21 Dunlop K490
Rear	100/100×18 Dunlop K695

Suspension:	
Front	43mm KYB, adj. comp., 11.4 in. (290mm) of travel
Rear	Uni-Trak, KYB hard-anodized aluminum piggyback, adj. comp./reb., 11.8 in. (300mm) of travel

Replacement parts cost:	
Piston	\$46.27
Rings	19.46
Clutch plate (f)	5.56 (8)
Clutch plate (m)	6.68 (7)
Countershaft sprocket	17.12
Rear sprocket	31.00
Front brake pads	45.90
Rear brake pads	32.90
Country of origin	Japan
Suggested retail price	\$2849
Distributor/Manufacturer:	Kawasaki Motor Corp. 9950 Jeronimo Rd. Irvine, CA 92718-2016



a lot of time in deep ruts, invest in Fredette Racing's rear disc guard (\$24.95) and chain-guide (\$36.95). Fredette is also a KDX suspension specialist.

- Front and rear quick-change capabilities are excellent. Overall, the bike is very easy to maintain and bristles with Team Green-inspired detailing, like a two-piece clutch cover.

### HOW FAST DO YOU WANT TO GO?

At \$2849, the '90 KDX200 is a great buy for the trail rider and family enduro racer. It has mellow power, subtle suspension, great handling, a comfortable layout and is an excellent total package. For another \$400, the machine's motor and suspension performance can be upgraded to compete with the more expensive 250s for overall enduro wins,

at a price less than the Suzuki DR350. Even if you built the full-race Larry Roeseler Replica (see sidebar), the total price would still ring in under the RMX, KTM, ATK, Maico and Husqvarna 250s. No matter what state of tune you end up with, the KDX200 is the best off-road bargain going.

### WHERE TO GET IT

**DMC:** 5620 E. La Palma Ave., Anaheim, CA 92807; (714) 777-4084.

**FMF Racing:** 25950 Belleporte Ave., Unit 1, Harbor City, CA 90710; (213) 539-6884.

**Fredette Racing:** 8123 W. 189th St., Mokena, IL 60448; (708) 756-7146.

**Moose Racing:** 2595 N. Hwy 67, Seda-lia, CA 90135; (800) MOOSE-IT.

**Pro Circuit:** 4212 E. La Palma, Anaheim, CA 92807; (714) 993-5401. □

## LARRY ROESLER'S FACTORY KDX200 PRO CIRCUIT'S WORKS ENDURO WEAPON

- Top-flight riders like Larry Roeseler want the ultimate machinery, not something that's in as mild a state of tune as, say, a Yugo. With Team Green's sano machine shop and Kawasaki's seemingly endless resources, you'd think Roeseler rides some one-off, barely legal, works KDX. Not so.

Anyone can ride what L.R. does.

Pro Circuit heavily massages the mild-mannered KDX mill and turns it into a 250-eating screamer. Both the top and bottom of the cylinder are milled and the transfers and exhaust ports receive total reworking. The cylinder head gets a new squish band and dome shape, slightly raising compression. These mods cost \$225. Combine this with a works pipe (\$149.95) and silencer (\$64.95) and power is much, much more potent and broad than stock.

Suspension modifications are also extensive. Pro Circuit's cartridge kit is machined to fit the KDX forks. Stiffer springs and re-valving bring the legs up to L.R.'s demands, for a total cost of \$500. (If you use the stock dampers, .35-kg springs are \$49.95 and P.C. stiffens compression and rebound and modifies the compression adjusters for \$45). Shock mods include increasing rebound and altering compression to eliminate harshness over braking bumps and increasing travel 10mm to balance the bike, for \$130. •