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FIRST TEST: 1982 KAWASAKI KX125!

DIRT BIKE

NOVEMBER 1981 • $1.50 UK80P

SUZUKI RM80: BUDGET BUILD-UP

760 MAICO: MONSTER BIKE

BULLETPROOF CLUTCH TRICKS

HONDA XR200 ENDURO: SHOCKING CHANGES FOR '82?

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NOVEMBER 1981 **DIRT BIKE** VOLUME 11, NO. 11

HONDA XR200R

IT TRICKERY

SIDEHACKS

SUZUKI PE250

On the cover: — David Bailey at work on the all-new '82 KX water-cooler. Photo by Rick Sieman.

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"If they could ever just put it all together," moaned the Kawasaki freak. "One year they've got the motor of death, but the suspension is straight out of the Stone Age. The next year, they've got the hot ticket on suspension and the motor is such a dog you have to run it on a 20:1 ratio of Alpo to Chuck Wagon. When will they ever get it all together?" It appears that 1982 will be the year.

At this point, a very brief history of recent KX125s is in order. In 1979, the KX had a strong, torquey motor with grim suspension and a questionable geometry. For 1980, they came out with the Uni-Trak rear end and a great chassis. It was head and shoulders above anything else offered. Except it wasn't much faster than a two-story building. Woe and wobbly woes. Tuners gnashed their collective teeth and eventually gave up on trying to extract horsepower out of the '80 engine—lost cause, and all that.

In 1981, the engine was good and strong, but the forks were poor and it was the only major 125 that was not water-cooled. Sales suffered once more.

Rather than give up the green ship, Kawasaki regrouped and rethought the entire package. What we have, then, is the 1982 version of three years of trial and error. And the new bike is mostly free of error.

We had the opportunity to test the first 1982 Kawasaki KX125A8. Our machine was a pre-production bike. Not a prototype, but basically the bike they'll be selling shortly after you read this test.

A pre-production bike is unusual in that there might be minor changes, but the format of the unit is locked in. In this case, it's locked in water. Yup, you got it. The KX125 is finally water-cooled. But that's not all. Most everyone expected Kawasaki to go with watercooling on their 125, as all the rest of the competitive 125s had already gone their route in 1981.

CHANGES

Technically speaking, the bike is all new, sharing almost nothing with the previous efforts. The frame, suspension and engine are all new, as are attendant goodies.

Right off, you can see that the KX is water-cooled. Their radiator is on the left side, directly below the gas tank. In fact, part of the tank is molded out of the way to clear the cooler. To balance it out, the right side of the tank is constructed lower. A large, plastic scoop directs air to the vertically mounted radiator. A view from the right side can fool a casual observer, and only the tiny finless engine gives things away.

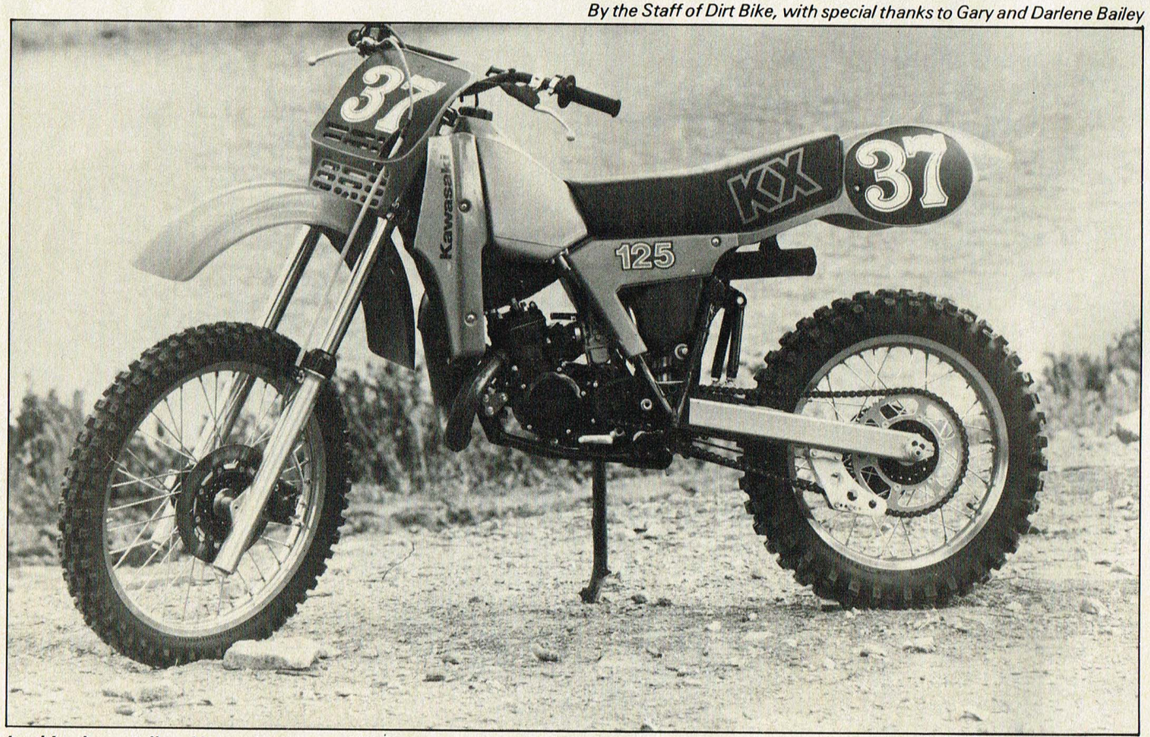
All-new 41mm forks ride up front. These appear to be a perfect compromise between the more-or-less normal 38s now found on 125s and the heftier (and heavier) forks on the bigger bikes.

1982 KAWASAKI KX125A8 MOTOCROSSER

ALL TOGETHER NOW

Team Green ripens

By the Staff of Dirt Bike, with special thanks to Gary and Darlene Bailey



Looking long, tall and lean, the newest KX125 is the most "together" effort yet.

1982 KX125A8

Oh yes, the forks were excellent in all respects and required no fiddling to get satisfactory performance.

At the rear, a revised Uni-Trak gives 12 honest inches of travel. The linkage has been changed to give a true rising rate suspension; we got the rear dialed in with minimal tuning.

The entire engine is new, with different cases, barrel, gears, crank, bore and stroke. Just about the only thing attached to the engine that looked like leftover was the shift lever.

Some weight has been shed on the frame, and previous weak spots that gave trouble on the '80s and the '81s have been reinforced and gusseted. Even the hubs and brakes have been changed at both ends. A nifty disc rides up front and it's hydraulically actuated, rather than the rumored mechanical setup.

Even the swingarm is lifted directly from the works bikes, with a rotating axle slug trapped strongly between two-inch bolts. Sano. At 23 inches, the swingarm is one of the longest in captivity. It's also been strengthened by making the rocker pivots out of a separate plate, then welding the whole works together for greater strength; again, just like the works bikes.

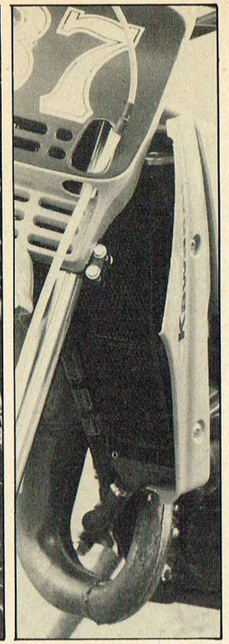
All of the plastic is fresh and well thought-out. Wider fenders and a narrower midsection are a plus. New bars, levers and controls make an appearance. In actual fact, this KX125 is a totally new machine from the basement to the roof.

THE POWERPLANT

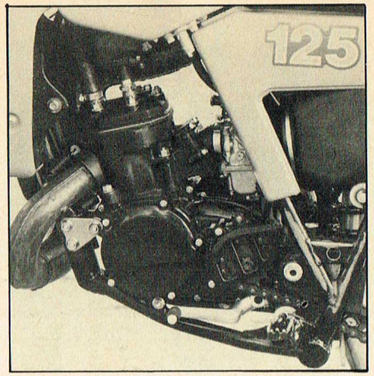
In the 125 class, you can't give away anything to the competition. Last year, the KX125 revved to a dizzying 12,000 rpm and made good power. This year, peak power is slightly above 9,500 rpm, but the engine will overrev to 10,500 without too much protest.

As with most of the water-cooled 125s, the finless engine looks tiny, squatting there in the frame. You won't be able to use last year's piston in the new bike, as the bore and stroke have been changed. Now the engine is closer to square; which means that the piston and the stroke are almost the same measurement.

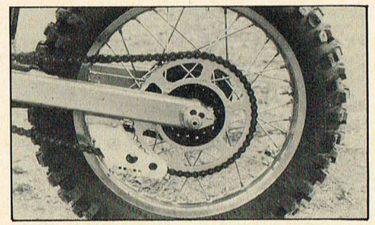
A bunch of new things can be found on the KX. First off, the carb is a bizarre item. According to our incredibly accurate *Dirt Bike* calipers (plus or minus .0001-fathom accuracy), the bore is oval, with a height of 38mm and a width of 29mm. This gives the carb about the overall value of a 34mm carb. So far, we've only seen oval bore carbs on some four-stroke bikes. This is a first on any production two-stroke. The theory behind this is achieving maximum volume of flow while keeping the air speed on the high side.



Front and rear view of the left side-mounted radiator. A large plastic scoop directs air in the screen-cooling grids.



As with most water-cooled engines, this one looks tiny. Power is big, though.



Works-type rotating slug with pinch bolts makes for a rigid swingarm.

With the good low end, clutch fanning out of the turns is minimal.

A six-petal fiber reed feeds the gas/air mix to the cylinder. These are single-stage reeds about the size of the new Suzuki 125 items.

Jetting is weird but seems to work just fine. Look at these numbers:

Pilot	15
Needle jet	372 R8
Slide	3.0
Main	160

It's almost unheard of a two-stroke coming with a pilot jet that small! Perhaps the higher inlet air speed of the oval carb contributes to that. We'll check into it further and let you know if we find anything more on the theory. You'll find quite a difference in the main jet requirement from one altitude to another. At Ponca City, Team Green ran a 165 main jet. In Axton, Virginia, where we ran our test, we used a 160 main jet and could have used a 157.5, if we had one available.

The why and how is not all that important. What *is* important is that the KX125A8 has an excellent engine. It's faster and has a better spread of power than any 1981 125 we tested. Of course, we still don't know what the competition is going to have for 1982. But for now, the KX clearly has The Motor.

Power builds very strongly at low rpms for a 125, and the midrange is absolutely ferocious. The bike can be revved out nicely, too, if called upon. We'd say that the new KX engine has all the low-end punch of the 1981 KX, more midrange snap than the Suzuki, and a bigger blast on the top than the YZ. All in all, a truly impressive powerplant. It looks like they got it right this time.

DISCO BRAKES

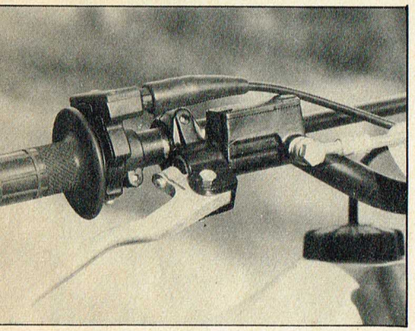
While not a first on dirt bikes (Rokon had one in the late '70s), no *major* manufacturer has ever offered disc brakes on a motocrosser. The disc itself measures 9½ inches in diameter and is well tucked in. There should be no hassle with rock or slide-out damage. We ought to know! Team *DB* dropped the KX a few times, under extremely embarrassing circumstances, during the testing.

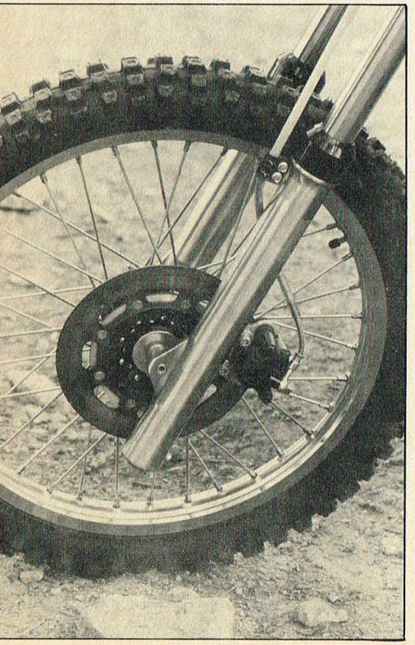
A tiny hydraulic cylinder is mounted on the bars. This actuates the pads down low. The braking mechanism is wisely mounted behind the fork leg and the line is snuggly routed around the fork leg to a clamp. Then, a stiff poly tube wraps around the line and guides it up to and through a slot in the number plate. From there, a flexible braided-steel aircraft line leads to the hydraulic cylinder. A nicely contoured lever lets the rider put the pressure to the whole unit.

Feel on the disc is superb. You don't have to worry about wheel lockup, as with the double leading shoe setups on the Honda and the Yamaha. Like a street disc setup, the lever only pulls back so far, then stays there. More pressure yields more stopping power, but the lever will not move in much closer to the grip. This is a plus, as the brake can be adjusted to exactly where the rider likes it and it works right there. The front wheel *can* be locked up, if the rider tries, but only for the first pass or two. Then, strong braking *without lockup* is the norm.

We had a chance to ride the bike under wet conditions and can report with confidence that the brake is virtually unaffected by mud and water. David Bailey, who's been riding with a disc brake for almost a year, told us that one revolution of the wheel with the lever under pressure is enough to clean the disc off and give normal braking. The works bikes have a small shield protecting the fittings and brackets on the disc; the production unit does not. It would be nice to see a cover of some sort, just to keep the wayward rock or footpeg from wreaking havoc. At first, we were bothered

David Bailey raced the KX-A8 at the Lake Sugar Tree track and lapped everyone up to second place in a 20-minute moto.





A neat hydraulically actuated lever pushes fluid through a braided steel hose. Disc itself is well tucked in and unaffected by mud and water.

1982 KX125A8

by the way the flex-steel line over the number plate flopped around, but we forgot all about it after a few laps.

BIG, FINE LEGS

New for Kawasaki is a set of 41mm forks. While no information was available (pre-production, you know), we put a tape on them and found that they offered 11 inches of "up" travel, with another inch of negative travel on the rebound spring. On paper this gives 12 inches. In practice, you get slightly over 11 inches of excellent travel. No more is needed. And no accessory fork kits will be needed. The forks are correct—as is. We ran no air in the forks and had no desire to tamper with oil weight and levels. They were just dandy, as delivered. No fork boots are on the legs.

Twelve full inches of travel are at the rear. At full stroke, the Bridgestone 4.00 x 18 tire just kisses the bottom of the fender. No problem when fresh, but when the rubber stop gets hammered a bit, or if a larger tire is fitted, there could be some scraping. We had no problem, but we suggest keeping an eye on that area.

Grease fittings are now on the bottom rocker links. This should help make maintenance a bit easier. Still, as with any link system, it's best to take it apart and grease it on a regular basis.

If the tire does scrape later on, some height adjustments are available; the swingarm has a rotating adjuster that can alter the wheel position relative to the swingarm. This may or may not come on the final production bikes. The factory has stated that this assembly is horribly expensive to make, requiring line boring after welding, and all sorts of attendant grievances.

There are four adjustments for rebound damping on the Uni-Trak shock ... most people ending up happy with number two or three. Preload is adjustable by a screw-ring on the bottom of the shock. The right way to do it is to remove the shock, but most riders simply lay the bike over on its side and whack away with a punch and a hammer.

Steering on the KX is very dependant on the rear end preload. If you choose to run too light of a preload, the shock will tend to pack down a lot on the number three setting, causing the steering to suffer. We ran a generous preload and used the number two damping setting. Rear-end action was almost as good as the Suzuki Floater setup. Not quite as good on the really gruesome bumps, but a lot more responsive on the small bumps, with none of the kickup under heavy braking that the RMs display.

Overall, the bump-absorbing ability of the KX is not as good as the RM125—but only fractionally less. One big plus: under braking, the KX rear wheel stays on the ground more and better than the RM. Of course, we're comparing an '82 to an '81, as the '82 RMs will not be out until around February of next year. A very interesting shootout appears to be shaping up.

DOWN THE TUBES

And around the tubes. This year, all the tubing is different. The walls are thinner and the steel is better, making for a lighter, stronger frame. Dimensions are not startling. Wheelbase is 57 inches, with the axle fairly far forward, and about ¾ inch of additional adjustment is left over. No doubt, the shortish wheelbase aids turning, but the bike is still very stable at higher speeds.

A single downtube splits into a cradle; the cradle couches the engine nicely and offers decent protection. Rumor has it that this chassis will also be used on the KDX175 and an all-new KDX125. The 125 rumor has not been verified.

Much more thought has been put into this chassis than the previous effort. Formerly weak areas have been considerably beefed up. The new KX is a great deal lighter than the 1981 bike. No doubt much of the weight savings was garnered at the chassis.

The airbox can be yanked out of the frame without removing the saddle of the new bike. It's still impossible to rotate the carb all the way over to get the float bowl off for normal service without removing the airbox.

Motor mount bolts appear to be much stronger than in years past, and the vibration level, as would be expected, was considerably lower.

HANDLING

As with all single-shock bikes, the KX125A8 is very sensitive to minor changes in shock preload for maximum steering accuracy. Once we got the rear end dialed in, the KX proved sharp through the turns.

As the shock settled in, we were forced to keep cranking up the preload to retain the sharp steering. After seven or eight hours of riding, this condition stabilized. No rake and trail numbers were available on the new KX as of this writing, but the bike worked the corners well. Not as nimble as a YZ125, but surely sharper than an RM.

None of the steering head shake of the RM was noted in the KX when coming down from speed. It was a very stable, easy-to-ride bike. The Kawasaki seemed especially at home on higher-speed sweepers, with the rear end drifting out a bit.

All things considered, the KX was a neutral handler with no bad habits. It responded to rider input in a predictable manner. No surprises and a skosh on the forgiving side.

GLITCHES

No bike is perfect, but some of the things that irritated us on the pre-production KX may be corrected in the production machines. Then again, they may not. At least with the information herein, you'll stand a fighting chance at knowing what's up.

Our test bike ran like a banshee until the O-ring in the exhaust head pipe started to leak. Then, much of the low-end snap went away. This is a problem they had on the 1980 KDX bikes and cured on the '81s. To see it reappear on the '82 KX seemed odd.

The saddle was so soft that the foam appeared to be pre-collapsed at the factory. Additionally, taller riders will slap their tender butts on the raised edges of the rear fender, when they get way back for the bumps.

None of the test riders cared for the shape of the bars. They were swept too far back, forcing the rider to tug at the bars to get to a standing position. Also, the pegs felt too far forward. Combined with the shape of the bars, it was not easy to go from a sitting to a standing position on the KX. This has been a trait on the Kwackers for the last three years. And it encouraged sitting down too much.

The filter is smallish and made of the old, fuzzy-foam stuff. The first time you clean it, the hairs from the fuzzy foam come off on your hands. Poor. Accessory-filter people will sell a bunch for this bike.

Shifting was good, in general, with an occasional reluctance to upshift when gassing it down hills. Don't ask us why. It just felt weird there. The rest of the time, the rider could merely smack the lever through the gears without much thought.

As with most of the water-cooled bikes, the engine took a long time to warm up before it would run clean.

Bridgestone tires came stock and gave us 6.0 performance, on a scale of 1 to 10. We spun out a few times as the rear tire simply let loose when exiting simple turns under power.

It's almost impossible to get the radiator cap off in its location behind the air scoop. You'll need a long, slender pair of pliers with wide jaws—unless you have a grip of steel.

BITS...

Clutch feel is so light that you can literally pull it in with your little finger.

Levers are dogleg and fit the hand well.

You might have to bend the brake pedal out a half-inch or so to reach it comfortably with your boot.

...AND PIECES

Gearing is spot-on for most motocross conditions, as delivered. Low gear is now tall enough to be used rather than wasted in useless wheelspin and overrevving.

Smallish grips met with rave reviews from the testers. They appear to be a combination between Yamaha and Honda grips.

An all-new-design straightpull throttle is exclusive on the Kawasaki line this year. It's good and the action is smooth.

A spiffy "rock-up" type work stand comes with the bike. Very nice.

Keep an eye on the rear sprocket bolts for the first half-dozen rides. Spokes stayed remarkably tight.

The bike is handsome and draws looks everywhere. Even the decals stay on the tank!

THE BOTTOM LINE

No doubt about it, the KX125A8 is a fine bike. We'd rate it better than any of the 1981 125s. It's fast, stable, turns well and is fun to ride. Finally, Kawasaki got it all together. It's possible that this just might be the hot 125 of the year. If it isn't, whatever beats it will have to be staggeringly good. □

KAWASAKI KX125A8

NAME AND MODEL	Kawasaki KX125A8
ENGINE TYPE	Single-cylinder, water-cooled, reed-valved, two-stroke
DISPLACEMENT	N/A
BORE AND STROKE	N/A
CARBURETION	Mikuni oval bore 38mm x 29mm
RECOMMENDED JETTING:	
MAIN JET	160
NEEDLE JET	372R8
PILOT JET	15
SLIDE NUMBER	3.0
RECOMMENDED GASOLINE	Premium, 92-plus octane
FUEL TANK CAPACITY	N/A
FUEL TANK MATERIAL	Plastic
LUBRICATION	Oil in gas, pre-mix, 20:1
RECOMMENDED OIL	Kawasaki lube
OIL CAPACITY	N/A
AIR FILTRATION	Oiled fuzzy foam
CLUTCH TYPE	Wet-, six-plate
TRANSMISSION	Six-speed, left side-shift
GEARBOX RATIOS	N/A
GEARING, FRONT/REAR	13/50
IGNITION	CDI pointless
PRIMARY KICK SYSTEM?	Yes
RECOMMENDED SPARK PLUG	NGK B9EV
SILENCER/SPARK ARRESTER/ QUALITY	Silencer only/not too quiet
EXHAUST SYSTEM	High-pipe, right side
WHEELBASE	1490mm (57.0 inches)
GROUND CLEARANCE	350mm (14.0 inches)
SEAT HEIGHT	930mm (36.75 inches)
STEERING HEAD ANGLE (RAKE)	N/A
TRAIL	N/A
WEIGHT WITH ONE GALLON GAS	205 pounds (dry 199 pounds, oil in forks and gearbox)
RIM MATERIAL	Aluminum alloy
TIRE SIZE AND TYPE:	
FRONT	3.00 x 21 Bridgestone knobby
REAR	4.00 x 18 Bridgestone knobby
SUSPENSION, TYPE AND TRAVEL:	
FRONT	41mm KYB forks, 305mm travel (12.0 inches)
REAR	Uni-Trak, single-shock, with aluminum swingarm, externally adjustable rebound damping, 305mm travel (12.0 inches)
INTENDED USE	Motocross
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	Japan
RETAIL PRICE, APPROX.	N/A
DISTRIBUTOR:	Kawasaki Motor Corp. 2009 East Edinger Ave. Santa Ana, California 92705
PART PRICES	N/A
OVERALL RATING, 0 TO 100, VARIOUS CATEGORIES, KEEPING INTENDED USE OF MACHINE IN MIND:	
HANDLING	98.5
SUSPENSION:	
FRONT	98.5
REAR	97.5
POWER	99.5
COST	N/A
ATTENTION TO DETAIL	97.0
EFFECTIVENESS, STONE STOCK	99.2