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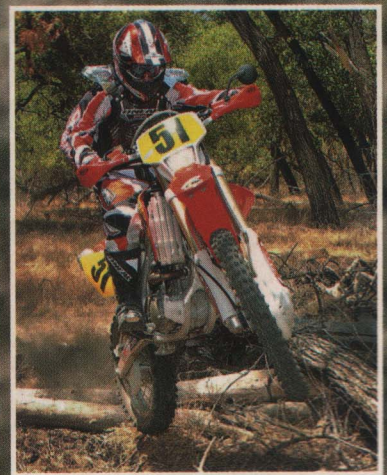


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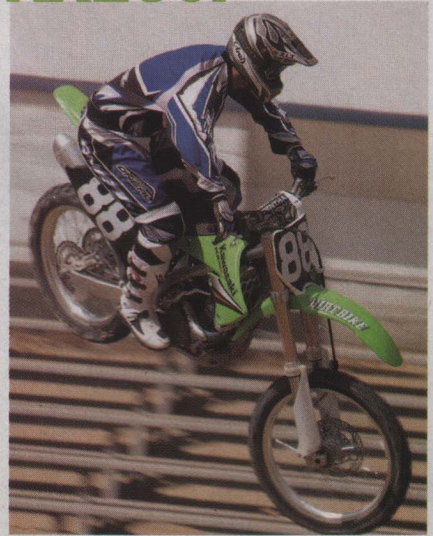


2005 KAWASAKI KX250F

Last year's secret weapon isn't so secret any more

► Napoleon said it's always better to overestimate your foes. Honda and Yamaha should have listened. Last year no one gave the Kawasaki KX250F (and its twin Suzuki RMZ) quite enough respect. It was overlooked as the crowds rushed in to see the new Honda CRF250R. And it was considered too new, too untried and too full of bugs to compete with the sitting king, the Yamaha YZ250F. Now a season later, the Kawasaki is the winningest 250 four-stroke in its class. It has a supercross championship and it even has a cult following in off-road circles, lead by Jeff Fredette. The KX250F was the sleeper of 2004.





The Kawasaki used to be the absolute torque king of the lightweight class. For '05, the powerband might have been moved up slightly in the rpm range.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE BUGS?

The 2005 KX250F has arrived and riders will be taking it a lot more seriously this time around. It's basically the same bike it was before. It has the same designed-by-Suzuki dohc, four-valve motor in a designed-by-Kawasaki perimeter steel frame. It's still a super-light machine with a 13,500 rpm redline. It still uses Kayaba suspension, and it still uses wheels and levers straight off a KX125.

Probably the biggest single reason that the KX wasn't taken seriously at first was the perception that it was full of bugs. It ran hot, it broke gearboxes and so on. Kawasaki went after those prob-

Performance was never the problem with the KX250F—reliability was. The '05 doesn't boil and bubble.

Suzuki designed the motor and Kawasaki designed the chassis. No one seems happy, so the approach probably won't be used again for a competition bike.

lems as you might expect for a second-year model. The radiators are 40 percent longer and carry more coolant. Kawasaki didn't opt for a stiffer radiator cap—it's still rated at 1.1 kPa, which is between 13.5 and 17.8 psi. Last year, almost everyone went to a 1.6 cap from the KX500 to deal with the bubbling. The water pump cover is more rigid and has a separate oil-filter cover so that you don't have to drain the coolant when you change oil.

Pro riders had some significant gearbox trouble in '04. Third and fourth gears couldn't take a sudden load, such as a hard landing. Slower guys had no such trouble because

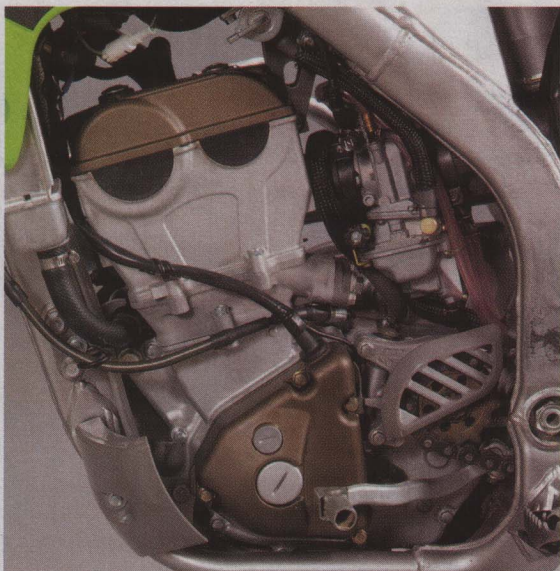
TYPICAL TEST CONDITIONS & SETUP

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Altitude | 500' msl |
| Temperature | 90° F |
| Fuel | Mobil 91 |
| Jetting | 178 main, OBEKS #3 needle, 40 pilot, 1.75 fuel screw |
| Fork..... | 10c, 14r |
| Shock..... | 100mm sag, 11c, 10r |

they don't jump in fourth gear. But those two gears are stronger anyway, with a new peening process. As far as performance goes, Kawasaki gave it a new ignition and did a little head work. The only chassis changes are a beefed up steering head, new fork seals and new footpegs.

RUN IT UP

Kawasaki didn't have to work too hard on the bike because performance was never the issue. The '04 KX250F had amazing torque for a 250 four-stroke. It still does. The bike has excellent bottom and mid-range power and it still revs out. Riding a 250F is an absolute blast. You can wring it out to what seems like illegal levels. It's okay; no one is going to pull you over and chew you out for motorcycle abuse. You can also get around the track without screaming the motor, although you won't get around nearly as fast. The Kawasaki, in particular, lets you cruise at a more relaxed pace if you feel you must. It makes its power a little lower, and that's why off-road guys like it. The biggest difference between the old and the new KXF is the way the motor



UPPERS

- Broad powerband
- Starts easily
- Doesn't boil
- Light, small-feeling
- Better seat foam
- Better clutch adjuster
- Separate oil filter cover

DOWNERS

- Steel handlebar
- Loud
- Useless oil sight window can break
- Kickstarter too long

acts at redline. The bike doesn't sputter and cut out suddenly at 13,500 rpm. It just stops making power. Our test bike ran absolutely perfect with stock jetting. It always started easily (by four-stroke standards) and dealt with the summer heat rather well.

The big picture has changed slightly for '05. Honda found more torque in its CRF250R so the Kawasaki has a challenger for ruler of the lower world. If you put both bikes in third gear and roll on the throttle, the Honda might even get a nose ahead. We don't know what Yamaha has up its sleeve, but we're pretty sure that the three machines will be closer in performance than ever.

COMPACT CROSSER

Kawasaki will still rule in the small-rider sweeps. The bike is a little more compact than the Honda or the Yamaha. The biggest shortcoming of the 250 four-stroke has always been that it's a big jump up from an 85. In fact, that's the best argument for a 125 two-stroke. Even the Kawasaki is a big wake-up call for the average 13-year-old. But the KX's rider position is a little tighter than that of a Honda or Yamaha. Beyond that, it handles like a little bike. If we didn't have the NASA-certified *Dirt Bike* scale on hand to tell us otherwise, we would swear that the KX is the lightest of all the 250Fs. You can throw the bike around like a real, honest-to-goodness 125.

We'll even go as far as saying it's the best-turning 250F. The Yamaha has always tracked well in turns but seemed heavy and cumbersome. The '04 Honda liked to push the front end just a little and the new one is only slightly better. The KX will probably remain king of the inside line for '05.

But once again, the suspension will be its weakest point. It's certainly not bad, but the Honda and Yamaha were better last year and we're guessing that will be the case again. The Kawasaki has a cushy feel on little stuff that feels great at nine-tenths. But it gets a little busy at full-race speed. The front end is softer than the rear end. If you stiffen the fork, it gets a little harsh. If you soften the rear, you lose a little of that great cornering ability. It's one of those bikes where everyone had a different setting, but in general, most wanted to firm up the front.

TOILING AND BOILING

The biggest news about the new Kawasaki is what it didn't do. The bike

Talk about exceeding all expectations; the KX250F was the winningest 250F of 2004.



Off road guys have had surprising success with the KX250F—Cole Calkins and Jeff Fredette have led the charge.

didn't boil over, even during 90-degree days of racing. It still runs a little hot according to the rider's knees, but don't expect everyone to run out and strip the local dealers of 1.6 radiator caps like last year.

We didn't break any gearboxes, either, but we'll wait and see what Ivan Tedesco does. Everyone thought that the stiffer seat foam was a big plus, but shorter riders noted that the bike did get a little bit taller. Bigger riders, on the other hand, still like the fact that the handlebar mounts are reversible. Spin them around and you get almost a half-inch more room in the rider compartment. But somehow, Kawasaki didn't get the memo on

| KAWASAKI KX250F | |
|--|---|
| Engine type | Liquid-cooled, SOHC 4-stroke |
| Displacement | 249cc |
| Bore & stroke | 77.0 x 53.6mm |
| Carburetion | Keihin FCR37 |
| Fuel tank capacity | 2.0gal (8l) |
| Gearing | 13/51 |
| Lighting coil | No |
| Spark arrester | No |
| Green sticker | No |
| Running weight, no fuel | 217 lb. |
| Wheelbase | 58.1" (1476mm) |
| Ground clearance | 13.4" (340mm) |
| Seat height | 37.4" (950mm) |
| Tire size & type: | |
| Front | 80/100-21 Bridgestone 601 |
| Rear | 100/90-19 Bridgestone 601 |
| Suspension: | |
| Front | Kayaba cartridge, adj. reb./comp., 11.8i (300mm) travel |
| Rear | Kayaba aluminum piggyback, adj. prld, hi & lo comp., reb., 12.2" (310mm) travel |
| Country of origin | Japan |
| Suggested retail price | \$5599 |
| Distributor/manufacturer: | |
| Kawasaki Motor Corp. USA; (949) 770-0400 | |

handlebars. The KX still has steel bars while Honda, Yamaha and Suzuki have gone to aluminum. That alone will make the KX the heaviest of the three 250Fs.

We still love the bike. We loved it last year, too, but we were a little afraid of it. We didn't want to be on it when it melted or snapped. Now, that doesn't seem like it will be an issue. You can get on the '05 and ride it just as hard as anything in its class. It'll still be closer than ever compared to the other 250s, and it'll still absolutely demolish any 125.

We still have a hard time considering that part a *good* thing. □