

DIRT RIDER

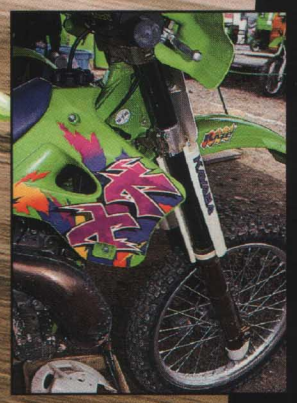
SPY PHOTOS: FIRST LOOK AT THE '95s

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KAWASAKI'S KILLER KDX200:
 Perimeter Frame,
 New Engine &
 Conventional
 Cartridge Fork



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DIRT RIDER

July 1994 Issue 140

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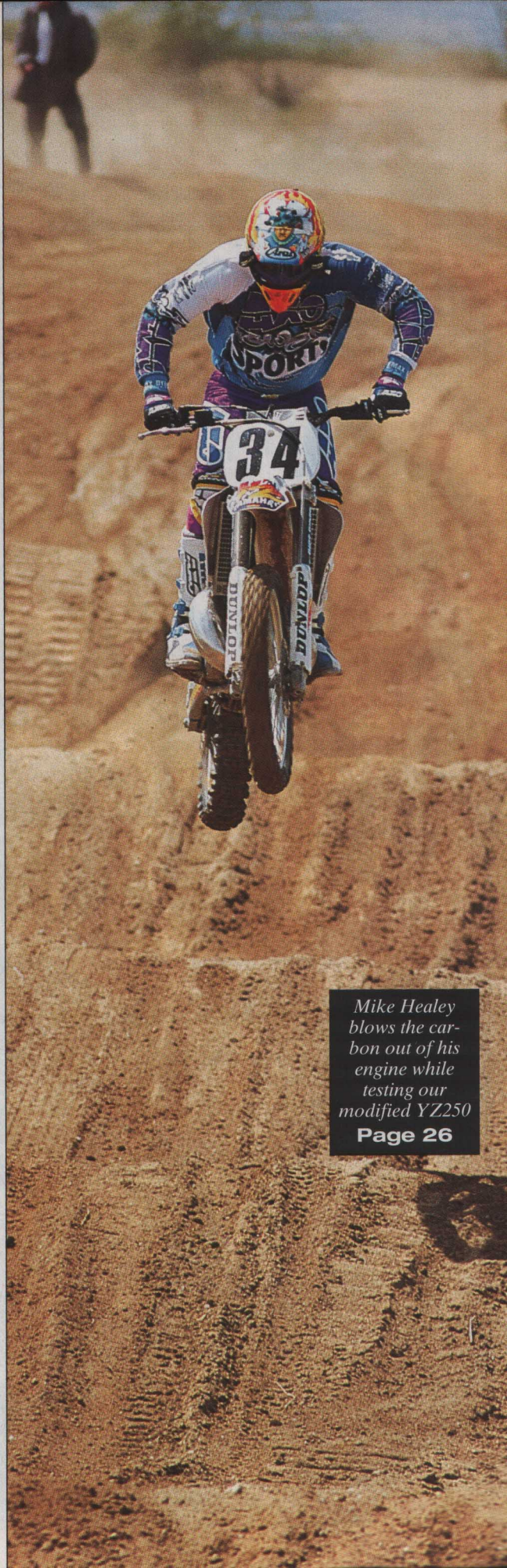
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ON THE COVER: *Our spies gave us these exclusive first looks at what could be 1995 moto hardware from Honda, Kawasaki and Suzuki.*



Mike Healey blows the carbon out of his engine while testing our modified YZ250
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THE BURLESON REPORT

TECATE TESTING

Kawasaki's new KLX250R is on the cutting edge of four-stroke off-road technology. It has a race-bred perimeter frame; an inverted fork; and a lightweight, liquid-cooled, DOHC, single-cylinder power plant. It's a milestone in terms of sheer technological advancement.

It's also supposed to be a race bike, so I decided to race-test it in a real race: the famous Tecate 250K Enduro in Baja California, Mexico.

During previous testing, the KLX showed us that it had the heart of a race bike: it was light and stiff with a very revvy motor. But it had also turned out to be seriously undersuspended, and it came equipped with what must be the softest seat foam ever made.



The KLX250R is blessed with the best chassis of any Japanese thumper. Flex-free and lightweight, it's flickable trail fun in motion.

THE PRE-TECATE BEEF-UP

With this knowledge, we worked with Thumper Racing to make some modifications for the bike to help unleash the machine's true personality. Thumper Racing had Scotts Performance redo the fork and shock to their specs before the race. The stock fork spring is a measly 0.36 kg/mm (Kawasaki's stiffer optional spring is only a .01 increase to 0.37). Scotts revalved the fork and installed 0.42 kg/mm springs. In the rear the standard spring is 5.2 kg/mm, so the shock was also revalved to work with a 5.4 spring.

In addition, Thumper supplied some taller, stronger Burly pegs to get the rider's feet out of the dirt, and they installed a one-inch-diameter down-

turned exhaust tip to improve breathing while decreasing noise.

Our prerace test at Lake Morena (east of San Diego) didn't give us a lot of time for suspension setup, but the modifications we made provided a big improvement over stock.

LIVE WITH WHAT YOU CAN'T

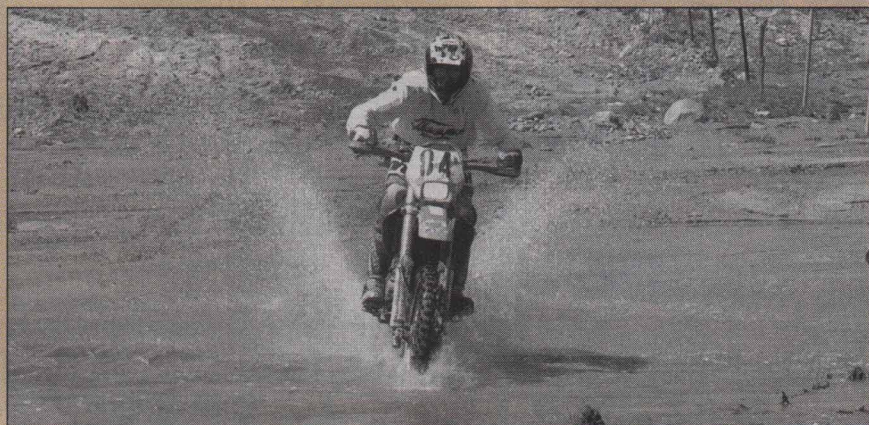
The big problem is the seat. It's so incredibly soft that its only purpose seems to be keeping the rider's butt out of the airbox. In addition, the footpeg-to-seat relation is way too short, making even my knees bend up under my armpits.

One other problem that showed up was a carburetion glitch just off idle that got worse on downhills. I played

KAWASAKI'S



After switching to stiffer 0.42 kg/mm fork springs, we neglected to soften compression damping, and the front rode too high and stiff in the rocks.



With rain before and beautiful sunshine on race day, this was one of the best Tecates ever—flowing creeks and no dust.

KLX250R

with the fuel screw but didn't make any real progress. The Team Green crew worked on the carburetor all day Friday and Saturday down in Mexico looking for a solution.

Without a doubt, the best part of this motorcycle is the chassis. The perimeter frame gives this machine a light, stiff feel. Even with the standard suspension, this bike exhibits none of the "hinge in the middle" feel of other Japanese four-stroke mounts. In addition, the ergonomics—aside from the

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PHOTOS: MARK KARIYA



Dirt Rider contributing editor Dick Burleson drops off a nasty Tecate rock pile during the race-test of the potent new KLX250R.

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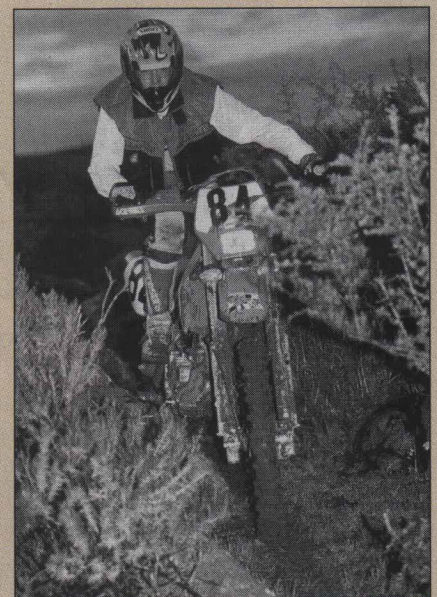
soft seat foam—are outstanding. The main problem was fuel mileage. The gas tank is housed completely between the upper frame rails and provides an outstanding narrow feel, but it holds only slightly over 2.1 gallons. The question was, could I make it to the gas checks with this capacity? In earlier testing on a fast motocross-type track in Texas, I had to go on reserve at 26 miles, meaning that the total range was around 40 miles. The longest section for the enduro was just under 50 miles, so I opted to carry a half gallon of gas on my belt (not considered safe nor is it legal in AMA events).

MEXICO MUY FRIO (VERY COLD)

Friday morning the *Dirt Rider* team of Tom and Mike Webb, me and pro motocrosser-turned-ISDE-hopeful Guy Cooper slid through the border in Tecate and headed to the start area 40 miles south in the hills. Just as the weather channel had forecasted, it started to rain and blow, continuing all day, effectively killing any real setup testing and making us work under the awning in warm clothes.

Apparently Team Green also believes the KLX has the potential to be a serious race bike and had mounted Larry Roesler on one for the race.

Team Green's testing had shown that the clutch could wear out under severe use, and knowing that I was riding the bike, they wisely changed the clutch to KX125 plates and preloaded the springs 1mm over stock. In addition, Team Green technician Gary Hazel



The little 250cc mill doesn't have lots of torque, but it's a willing rever and will go fast in silence if you work at it.

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helped me install a Moose Racing Pacemaker and checked over the machine. The rest of the prep included installing a fresh set of Dunlop D752s mounted on flat-proof inserts.

TRUST ME, I'VE DONE IT BEFORE

Typically, the Los Ancianos club pro-



PHOTO: HYLTON BEATTIE

With the suspension finally dialed, the KLX was awesome in the rocks; the light, stiff chassis inspired supreme confidence.

vided a route sheet that included a lot of resets but maintained a straight 24 mph average. Tom and I programmed our computers Friday night, but we made a slight mistake that would catch us later. The key time was 7:00 A.M., and we had row eight, so a 5:00 A.M. wake-up call ruined an otherwise good night's sleep. When we woke, the rain had stopped, and the sun was burning brightly. What we thought was going to be a survival run promised to be one of the most fun Tecates in memory. Our *Dirt Rider* team lined up for the start, and immediately Tom and I realized we had a major problem. We had programmed the Pacemaker's first display to show the computed mileage, not the odometer, and in the second display, again also the computed mileage instead of the time differential. We went to the first mileage check, couldn't set the odometer and hit the panic button.

The best part of the story is that Guy Cooper also had a Pacemaker and had programmed his correctly. Here I am, an eight-time National enduro champion, depending on the timekeeping of a pro motocrosser—you gotta love it.

Cooper led us into the first check a little hot (one minute), but after that he

did a damn good job. In fact not only did he do our timekeeping for us but led for the entire event.

FIDDLE, FIDDLE

It was painfully obvious that I had not spent enough time setting up the suspension. The front end was too stiff and bounced all over the place, while the rear rode low and bottomed badly. After the first test section, I loosened the front compression setting by three clicks and increased the rear by two, but I knew I needed to increase the rear preload to get the bike riding higher in the rear and make the front work better.

This year the trails were pretty fast, and I had to work the little 250cc motor pretty hard. This engine is very revvy, and the bottom power is pretty weak. Combined with the erratic carburetion, the only way to ride it is to rev it hard. The good news is that the motor is cammed for revs and happily sings its tune all day.

At every reset I would adjust the front end so it was a little softer and the rear a little stiffer until it started to work really well in the rocky, dry stream bed coming into the first gas



H1R RRR

stop. Here we had a 20-minute layover, and the energetic Team Green crew added 6mm of preload to the shock, fueled up the bike and checked it out while I replenished my drink system and got ready for the next section. By now I had the suspension pretty well set up. I ended up with the compression set at 15 clicks out on the front, and with the preload set correctly at 90mm (of sag) on the shock, the bike floated awesomely over the worst rocks.

SO THAT'S WHAT IT'S FOR

With the suspension set correctly, the true brilliance of the chassis shined brightly. The bike tracked straight and true with no unwanted twinges in the middle. And the bike remained light and quick to steer. It would follow a berm or quickly spin in the tight trails.

The motor does its best to make the chassis go fast, but with only 250cc to work with, the feeling is a little like "where's the beef?"

It will be only a matter of time before aftermarket tuners start to sell big-displacement kits for this machine. The engine's design will make it somewhat difficult (expensive) to build up, but any extra bottom and mid power will

be greatly appreciated.

The engine shifts easily, perhaps too easily, as any touching of the shift lever—by the rider or the terrain—causes a false neutral. I found my feet above my butt more than once from the engine going into neutral at the most inopportune times. The footpeg mounts on the frame also ride a little low and bang into the rocks.

YOUR MILEAGE MAY VARY

I carried a half gallon on each of the first two loops and used them both, coming in on reserve at the second gas stop. For the third loop I opted to not carry gas, as the mileage was around 38 and felt I could make the distance. I thankfully made the section with very little gas left in the tank, proving that, as I suspected, the tank's limit in race conditions is right around 40 miles. During easier trail riding, the bike can probably go up to 60 miles. However, I loved the shape of the tank so much that I will accept this distance happily.

Overall, I'm impressed. Of course, I am totally stoked on four-strokes for off-road these days, and the KLX will hopefully make the other Japanese manufacturers step up to the plate

with some state-of-the-art mounts. Kawasaki hit the mark with the KLX250's stiff, lightweight chassis. Some suspension tuning and a modified seat will bump it up to race speeds. All it really needs is some more torque to be in the hunt with any race bike, whether four-stroke or two. **DR**

PHOTO: HYLTON BEATTIE



Kawasaki set a new standard for Japanese four-strokes with the KLX250R. A little more torque and some ergonomic improvements would make it the equal of any race bike.

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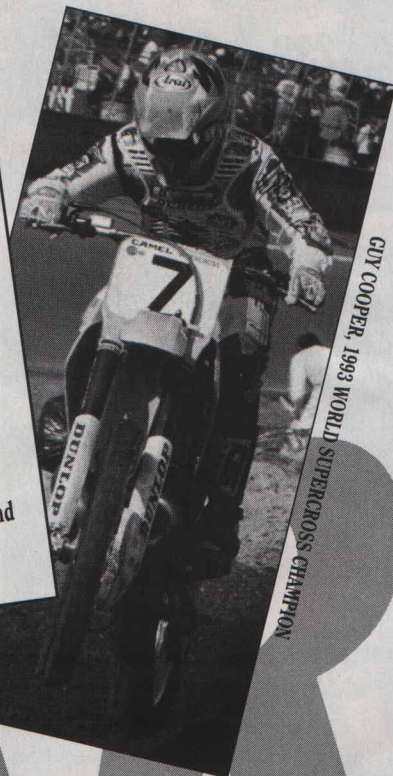
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