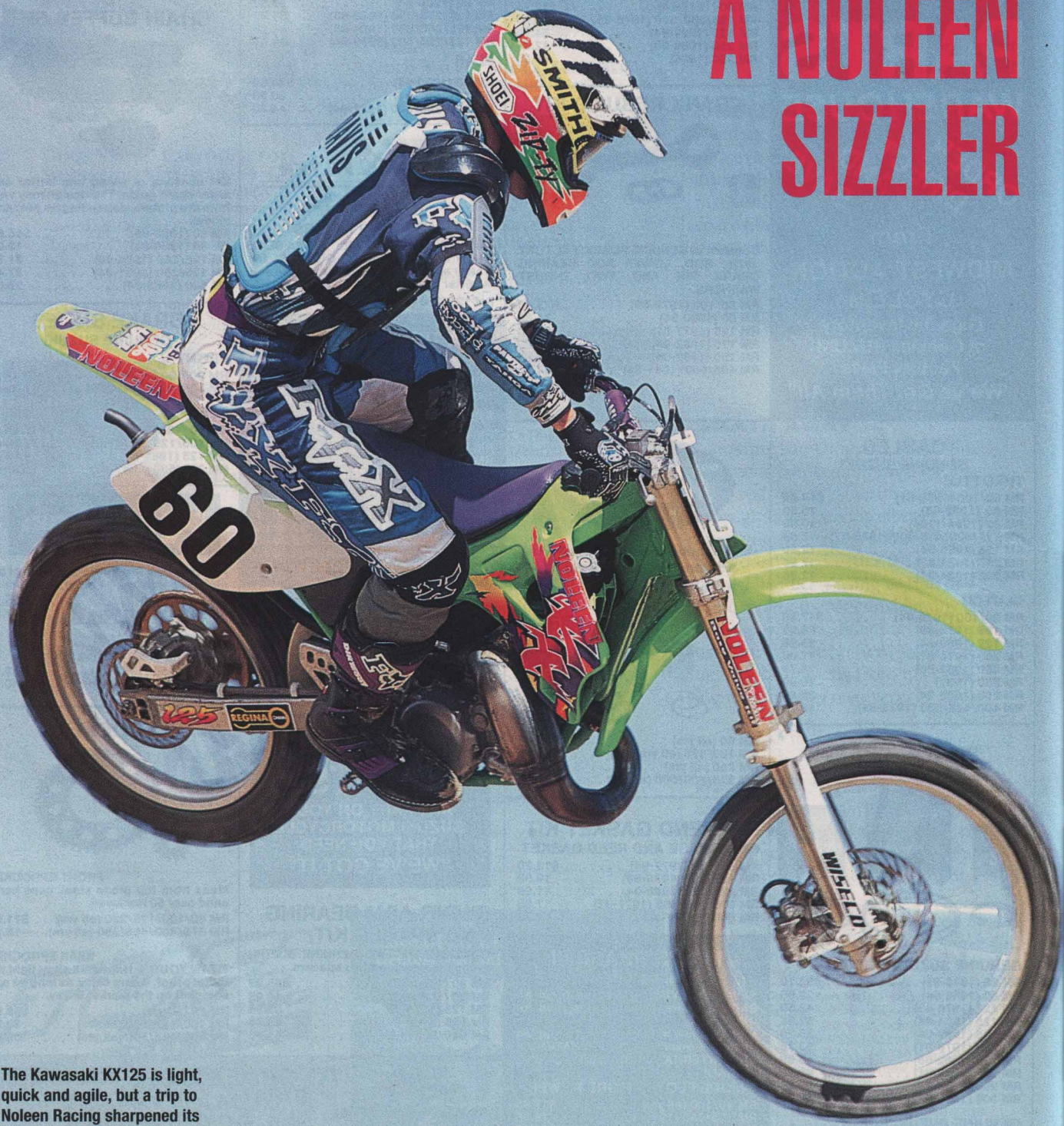


KAWASAKI KX125 HOP-UP

# BUILDING A NOLEEN SIZZLER



The Kawasaki KX125 is light, quick and agile, but a trip to Noleen Racing sharpened its fangs. Now it barks out of turns, and the suspension laughs off big landings. We asked Ty Davis to explore its performance envelope; he answered the question, "Where's the air?"

**N**oleen Racing has a high profile as Ohlins' U.S. importer and an even wider reputation as the nation's most successful privateer motocross, UltraCross and supercross farm team for Yamaha. They are less known for their modified Kawasakis, but some of the most effective KXs we've ridden in recent years have come from Noleen. Our KX125 has found a soft spot in our hearts for its handling excellence and oversized fun factor, but we'd have a soft spot in our heads if we thought it has an engine that matches the Honda CR125R. We wanted more motor to boost the fun factor even higher, and Noleen seemed like the place to look.

### QUEST FOR FIRE

Noleen modified the cylinder and head, juggled brass in the carb and installed one of their pipes and silencers in the search for fire. One of the reasons we chose Noleen was their reputation for very rideable powerbands. We wanted more boost, but we wanted the bike to keep its fun factor while becoming a more effective racer.

Our first ride confirmed our confidence. The Noleen KX is not a high-rpm missile. The power closely mirrors

the standard mill, but it's stronger and more responsive. Like the stocker, the Noleen motor doesn't have a lot of overrev, but the modified engine makes up ground on the stock bike exiting turns. This motor has power from deep in the powerband all the way through the top, and response is instant. Now the KX engine is meaty, quick and easier to ride faster (or slower) than stock. We even ran short of bikes one day while doing some off-road testing, so the KX got a spark arrestor and 50 miles of abuse. Tight, technical off-road conditions were no problem.

### GROUND CONTROL

Earlier in the year we rode an Ohlins-shocked KX125, and although it was outstanding we decided to try modifying the stock suspension units. At first we felt the standard spring rates

were in the ballpark, so we went for a straight revalve. We got a chance to watch as Noleen technicians modified another customer's fork; the amount of handwork and machining that goes into each is impressive. The fork springs are chucked up in a lathe and polished, the cartridge rod is polished, and the cartridge bushing is checked. That is, of course, in addition to shim stack changes and the Base Valve kit.

The shock got similar care and modifications. The machine was reassembled, and we headed for the track. Before we had logged too many motos it was apparent that the fork was too harsh. We had asked for the stock springs, though Noleen recommended stiffer springs for the 125. With the stiffer springs installed the fork was plusher and less prone to bottoming.

The action at either end is not as push on acceleration chop as stock. But it is crisp and controlled, so it feels like you could hit any obstacle at any speed with total confidence. Mike Healey was perfectly confident doing some truly demented passes through stadium whoops at Sunrise Valley Raceway. We were pleased at the range of riders who were happy with the modified suspen-



Noleen bumped up the fun quotient of our test KX125 with a new pipe and muffler, porting, a head modification and revised jetting. They made the bike more serious about bumps with stiffer fork springs and revised damping rates front and rear. The valving change in the front was accompanied by a Noleen Base Valve kit.



Noleen claims that the short silencer is responsible for some of the crisp low-rpm response, but it is definitely a little on the raspy side.



A deep, soft corner like this brings out the worst in a 125, but the Noleen KX125 motor mods generate great bottom and mid-rpm power. Sink it into a berm and it roosts out with no hesitation.

sion. It appealed to both Healey and our novice testers.

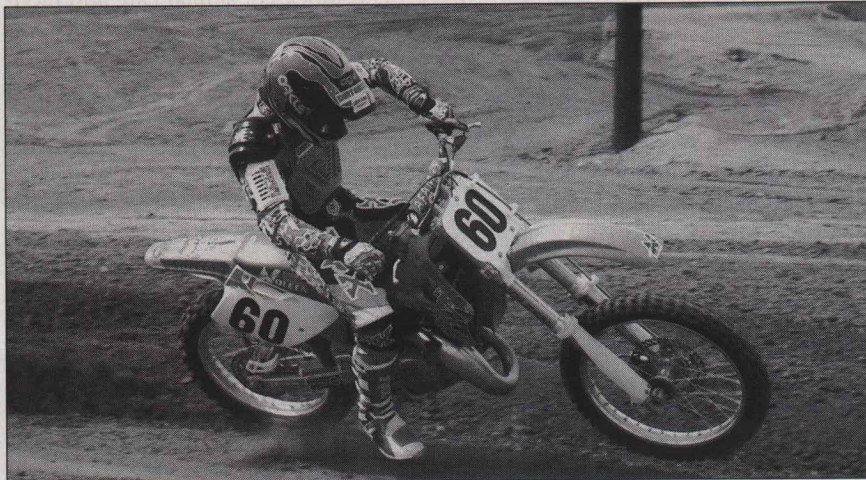
We did find that the stock shock will fade when hot, while the pricier Ohlins does not. The nice thing is that Noleen lets you choose either way.

### FINISHING

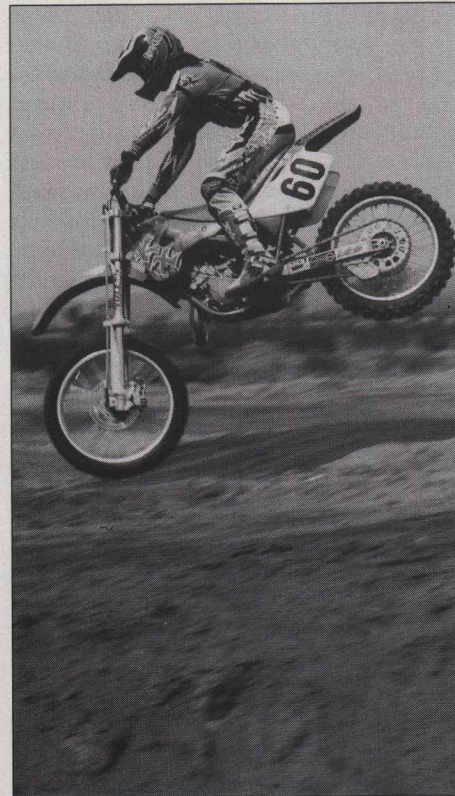
Noleen used some of their tested products to finish up the bike. Bridgestone's M-68 rear and M-49 front tires were installed. An AFAM han-

dlebar and sprockets and a Regina chain detailed the bike out nicely. As a package, the Noleen KX is more focused toward racing than the stock bike. You can count on the suspension when you get aggressive, and the power is on tap whenever the carb slide isn't seated.

The best part of making it more serious is that the fun factor is boosted, not diminished. Noleen makes you smile and lets you roost! **DR**



Packed berms or rut turns show off the power plant's response. There generally isn't much need for a lot of clutch—just drop the hammer and get moving.



Feel free to drop the Noleen KX in on the front wheel anytime. It can handle it. The suspension isn't especially plush, but it keeps the wheels hooked to the dirt in any situation.

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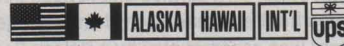


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