

Kawasaki KDX175 Uni-Track

FOR A BIKE which arrived so late in the season – the first of the little Kawasakis did not go on sale until the summer of 1980 – the KDX did amazingly well in its first year. It was immediately greeted as being the definitive answer to the clubman's prayer.

The reasons for this were immediately clear to anyone who rode the bike. One could make the most dreadful mistakes and the KDX would sort them out – a trait which more than made up for the bike's lack of speed. Most enduro riders are far more interested in staying on board their bike than getting the fastest time on the motocross special test!

For the 1981 season Kawasaki followed up the success of the original KDX175 with a new bike whose power had been boosted by a claimed 4bhp. This makes the new KDX an even more attractive proposition and puts it embarrassingly close to some of the weaker European manufacturers.

The Japanese also produced two new models with their KDX250 and 420 enduros. At the time of writing I have not ridden any of the new bikes, but they are all clear examples of Kawasaki's thinking on enduro bikes.

I feel sure that they realize that they cannot produce a bike which is the equal of a KTM or SWM in ISDT competition, but what they can do is make a motorcycle on which a vast number of riders can motor along very quickly.

The original KDX was low and had an easy, neutral handling which made it extremely hard to crash, and the new models seem to be built in the same vein. They are not going to be the choice of the British Trophy Team, but they will win a lot of medals for lesser riders. A case of losing the

battle and winning the war, at least in terms of Kawasaki's profitability.

Perfect the KDX isn't, but the best value-for-money package available today it certainly is. With a retail selling price of only £939, and handling as good as any enduro machine I have ever ridden, the KDX is clearly the best buy in the market place for everyone except a potential class winner in a National enduro.

The KDX is not – and does not claim to be – an ISDT bike. The motor lacks the arm-wrenching surge of a really fierce ISDT motor hitting the power band and the chassis is also devoid of a few of the accoutrements which grace a serious six-days bike. For example, there is no speedometer, centre stand or chain guard. In return for these weak areas the KDX offers an ease of riding and a stability which most riders will welcome with delight, for there has not been an easier bike to ride since the days of the early PE250s.

The focal point of the bike is the rear suspension. Road riders, unused as yet to unconventional methods of rear suspension, peer inquisitively beneath the rear mudguard to see just what does hold the wheel in.

Not that there is a lot to see. Two long steel rods push up from the swinging arm on to a rocker which compresses the large damper hung vertically behind the swinging arm. This system offers a number of advantages over conventional systems, including Yamaha's monoshock. First and foremost, the centre of gravity is dramatically lowered. At 228lb the little KDX is not a superlight

What made the KDX so popular amongst clubman riders was its ease of handling. Most of the time it could be ridden feet up.



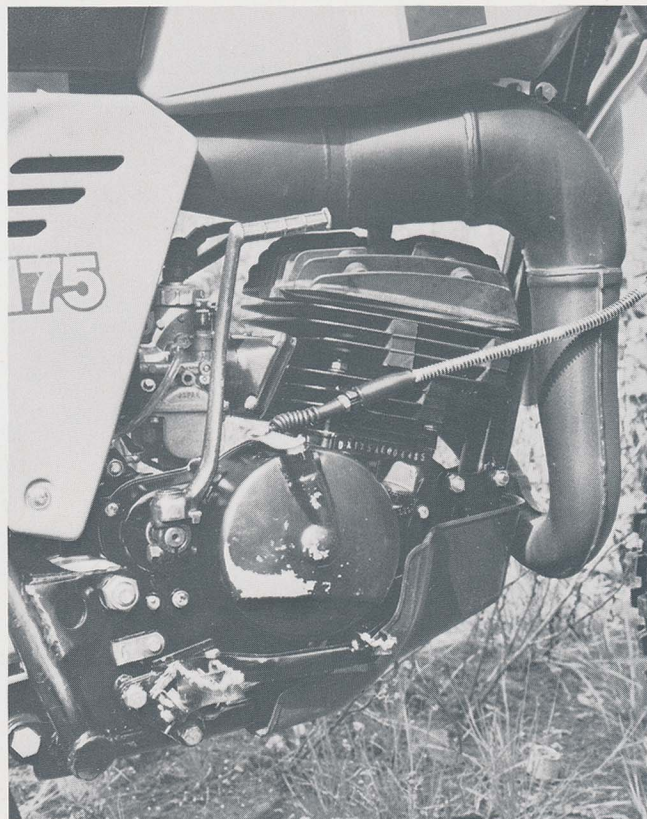


Unique Uni-Track rear end. The 175 enduro was the most successful application of this design in any of the Kawasaki off-road range.

175, in fact it is almost in the 250cc weight range. However, once on the move it feels feather-light; much more so than even sophisticated opposition like the 175 KTM, which feels light when static but which rides like a 400cc.

Using the Uni-Track the bike can also be made very slim in the saddle, since there is no need for a bulbous sub-frame to accommodate twin rear dampers. Again, this makes the bike feel light and easy to handle.

Finally, production bikes being what they are, it is much easier to get one damper working as the designer intended than two. On a factory bike the ride of a twin-damper bike will be just as good as the Kawasaki's system, but few enduro riders ever change their rear suspension and fewer still will modify their bikes from meeting to meeting. The KDX works well just as it leaves the showroom

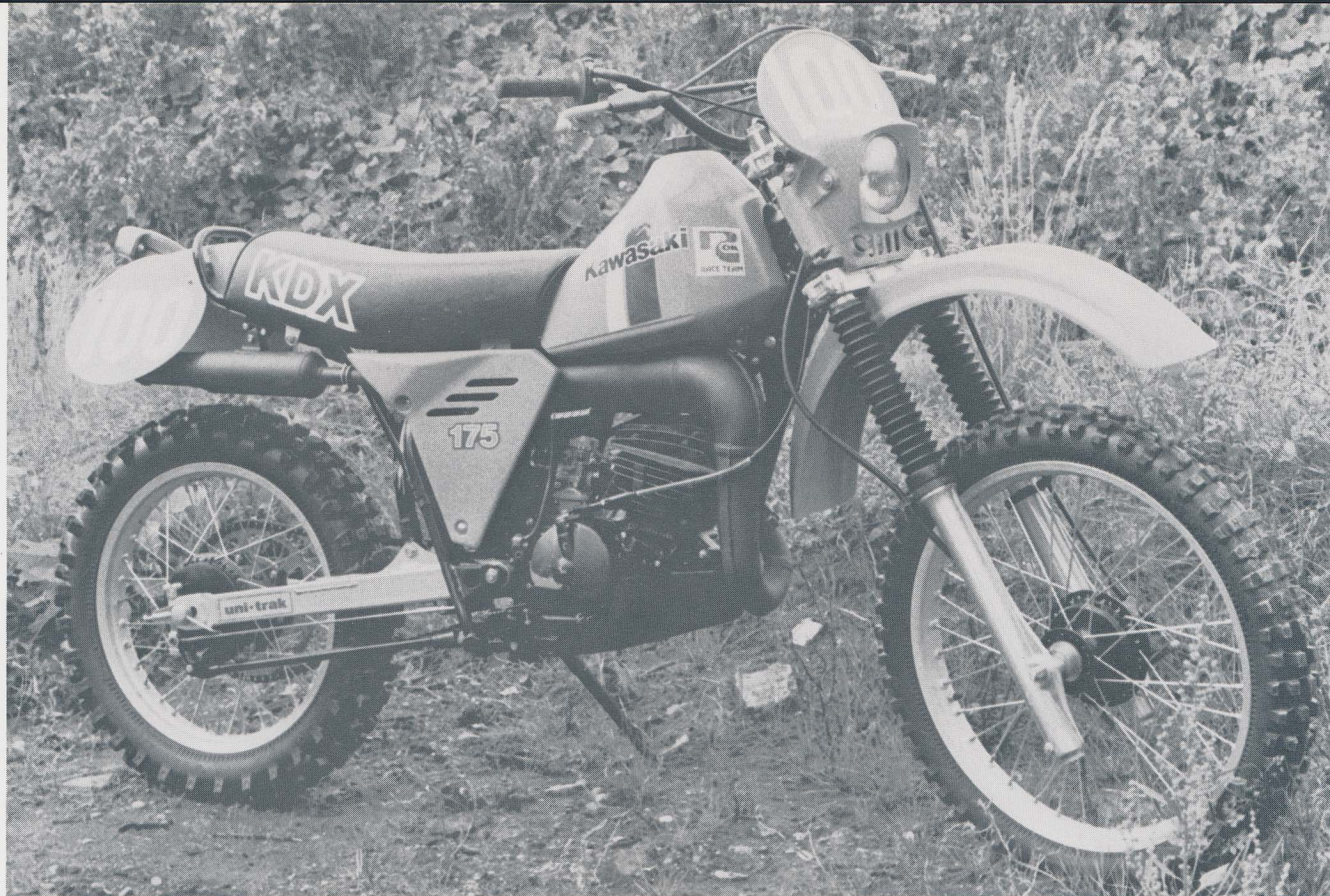


The 1980 version of the 175 motor was adequate but not outstanding. The following year's model was much more powerful.

floor and this is what most riders want.

In practice the KDX rear end performs really well. The bike is at its best when ridden with the rider seated – an essential and welcome trait in any enduro bike – and in this manner the rear wheel transmits plenty of feeling but no shock. Thus, sliding the KDX on a camber is a safe and predictable exercise because one can feel just what is happening to the rear end, whilst leaping the bike off ledges can be done with confidence, safe in the knowledge that the rear wheel is not going to clang to a halt at full compression.

The amount of drive the rear wheel finds is exceptional. The way in which the power could be really whacked on hard whilst still cornering was reminiscent of the behaviour of a four-stroke rather than a 175 two-stroke. When the rear wheel did step out it did so predictably and without



The Kawasaki presented a completely new sight in the enduro world and set many well-loved 'truisms' on their head. Note the very long wheelbase and steep head angle, both considered to be very wrong in enduro design and yet working perfectly in the KDX.

malice. No doubt it is possible to crash a KDX, but one would have to try very hard to do so.

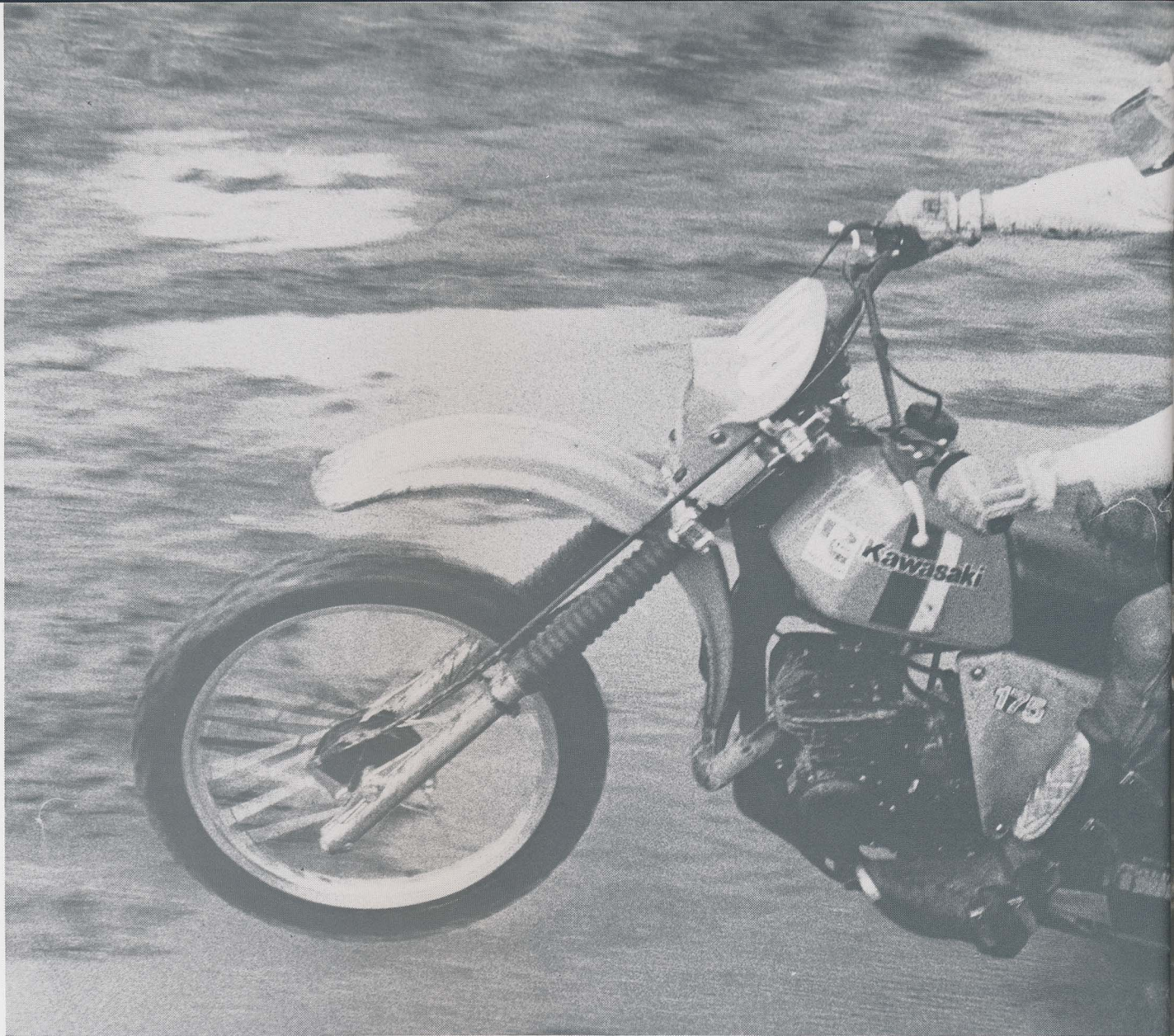
The amount of drive which the bike does find is surprising in view of its rather unusual dimensions. The Uni-Track rear end demands that a long swinging arm is used, which results in a 57.5in wheelbase. Such a wheelbase naturally gives excellent stability in a straight line, but tends not to give such good drive on a 175. That it does is a credit to the Uni-Track system.

A further problem with a long wheelbase is that the bike tends to become sluggish on corners. Kawasaki have solved this problem by tucking the front end in with a very steep 62° head angle. Unconventional though this system may be, it works very well in practice, giving excellent handling characteristics under all conditions. The only criticism I have heard made of the bike is that it is front end heavy. Personally I like this, since full power can be used with confidence at all times. Bikes which loop at the slightest provoca-

tion are of no interest to me in enduros.

The little Kawasaki motor complements the rest of the bike very well. It is not an outstanding unit, but produces plenty of power throughout the range and is very forgiving. Thanks to the Uni-Track rear end the power is converted into drive rather than wheelspin, so in practice the KDX will stay with any of the other Japanese 175s. However, you are clearly not going to burn off an SWM or KTM on forestry tracks.

Having acknowledged this, the KDX has much to commend it to clubman riders. It starts easily and both clutch and gearbox are faultless. Kawasaki dealers are also reporting minimal sales

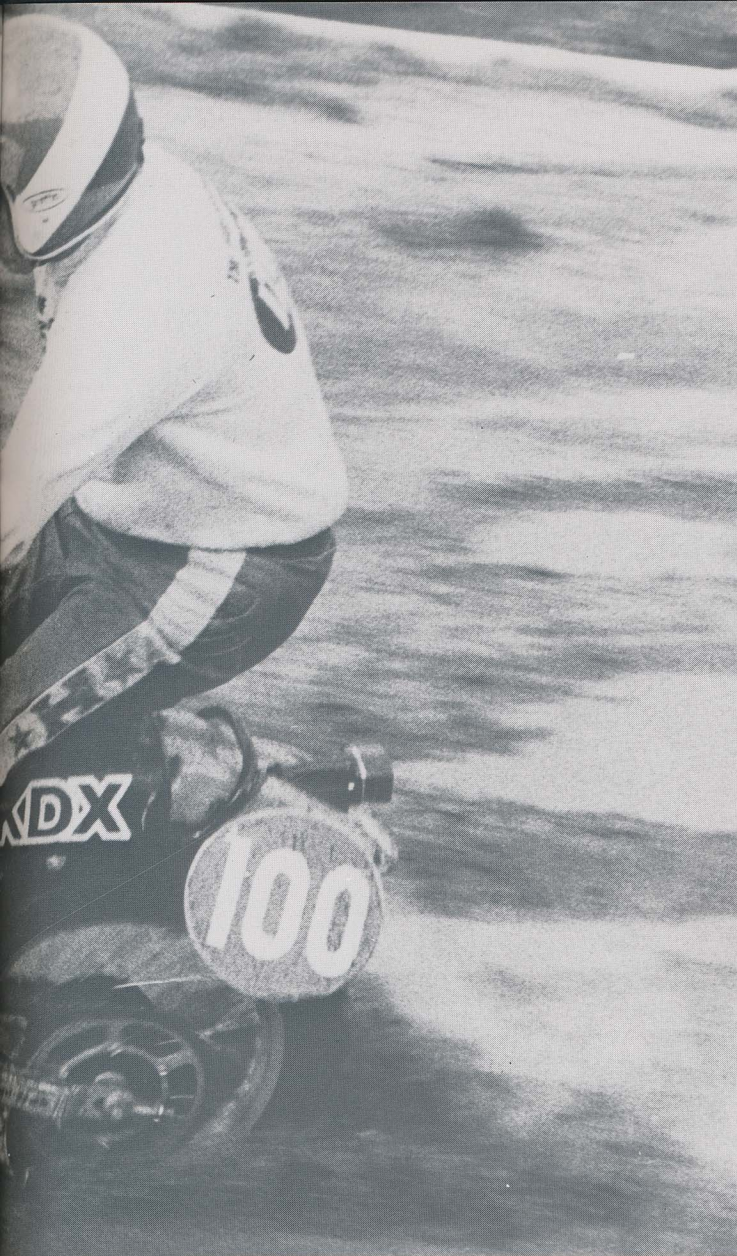


of spares, which is encouraging.

One point to watch is the electrofusion barrel, which cannot be rebored. Provided with clean air this system is first class, but air filter maintenance needs to be impeccable.

Whilst keeping the weight down the KDX's miniscule 5in brakes are a little too small for my taste. They work satisfactorily, but require too much pressure to be comfortable. On forestry tracks I would prefer anchors with more potency.

The running gear on the KDX is excellent. Like all Kawasakis the bikes are very well finished with good-quality paintwork – by Japanese standards – and well-made plastic components. Kawasaki deserve criticism for not providing the bike with a speedometer or metal tank so that it is road legal. It is no excuse at all to say that the bikes are to be used only in off-road events, since they know full well that there are no events in which the KDX can be used competitively which



The KDX was utterly trustworthy at speed.

at the same time do not demand that the machine be road legal. Honda, Suzuki and Yamaha all make their bikes at least almost road legal so that the rider has a 99 per cent chance of using the bike for its intended purpose and still stay within the law, but Kawasaki have taken the cheap way out – a policy which does them no

credit at all.

Our test bike was provided by Manchester enduro expert Gethin Evans, who also brought his 'spare' 175 Suzuki along for comparison. The KDX is best summed up by saying that we fought all day long for who would ride it. It is safe, fast and predictable and the sort of bike on which I would happily race anywhere.

Kawasaki KDX175 Uni-Track

Engine: Single-cylinder two-stroke. Reed-valve induction

Capacity: 173cc (66 × 50.6mm)

Carburation: Mikuni VM34SS with enrichening lever for cold starting. Oil-soaked foam air filter

Claimed maximum power: 24bhp at 9500rpm

Transmission: Geared primary drive with primary kickstart facility.

Wet multi-plate clutch. Six-speed transmission

Ratios: 1 – 2.69:1; 2 – 1.69:1; 3 – 1.29:1; 4 – 1.04:1; 5 – 0.87:1; 6 – 0.75:1

Kawasaki electronic ignition driven from flywheel generator. DC current to lights

Fuel capacity: 10.5 litres (2.3 imp gal)

Suspension: Kayaba leading axle front fork giving 9.84in of travel.

Rear: Kawasaki Uni-Track with Kayaba sealed damper unit giving 9.84in of travel at the rear wheel

Frame: Single spine with duplex engine cradle and Kawasaki Uni-Track suspension

Wheels: WM2 × 21in front; WM3 × 18in rear. Shoulderless alloy in both cases

Tyres: 3.00 × 21in Bridgestone Motocross front; 4.00 × 18in

Bridgestone Motocross rear

Brakes: 4in sls front and rear

Wheelbase: 57.5in

Ground clearance: 11.8in

Saddle height: 37in (unladen)

Weight with one gallon of petrol: 228lb