

Suzuki PE175

THERE ARE SOME occasions when the tester feels superfluous. He knows that whatever he says about a particular bike is not going to make one iota of difference to anyone, since public opinion has already decided on how it views the bike in question and a mere journalist is going to do nothing to change it.

Such a bike was the PE175. The bike was full of faults if one compared it with the best bikes of its genre, but no one cared. It handled safely, went well, was utterly reliable and completely race-worthy as it left the showroom floor. Best of all, the discount dealers would sell you one for about £775, a price which left the importers of serious enduro bikes aghast.

Prior to the 175 this sort of figure would only purchase a converted trail bike or one of the Italian pseudo-enduro bikes which were spasmodically offered for sale. The PE was neither and the customers knew it! Suddenly, every enduro programme was filled with endless numbers of PE175s.

It is easy to become disparaging about the little Suzukis quite simply because they appealed to the budget end of the enduro market and so many clubmen raced them. But regardless of price the PEs proved to be consistent medal winners, even if they were never contenders for the outright award.

Most important of all, the little PE brought enduros to the attention of Yamaha, Honda and Kawasaki, and after the PE had shown just how many bikes could be sold in this category the rest of the Oriental giants followed suit and introduced their own contenders.

The PE exemplifies both Suzuki's greatest strength and weakness in building off-road racers. The baby PE is nearly the fastest, lightest



The standard suspension got rather agitated when the baby PE was ridden in this fashion.

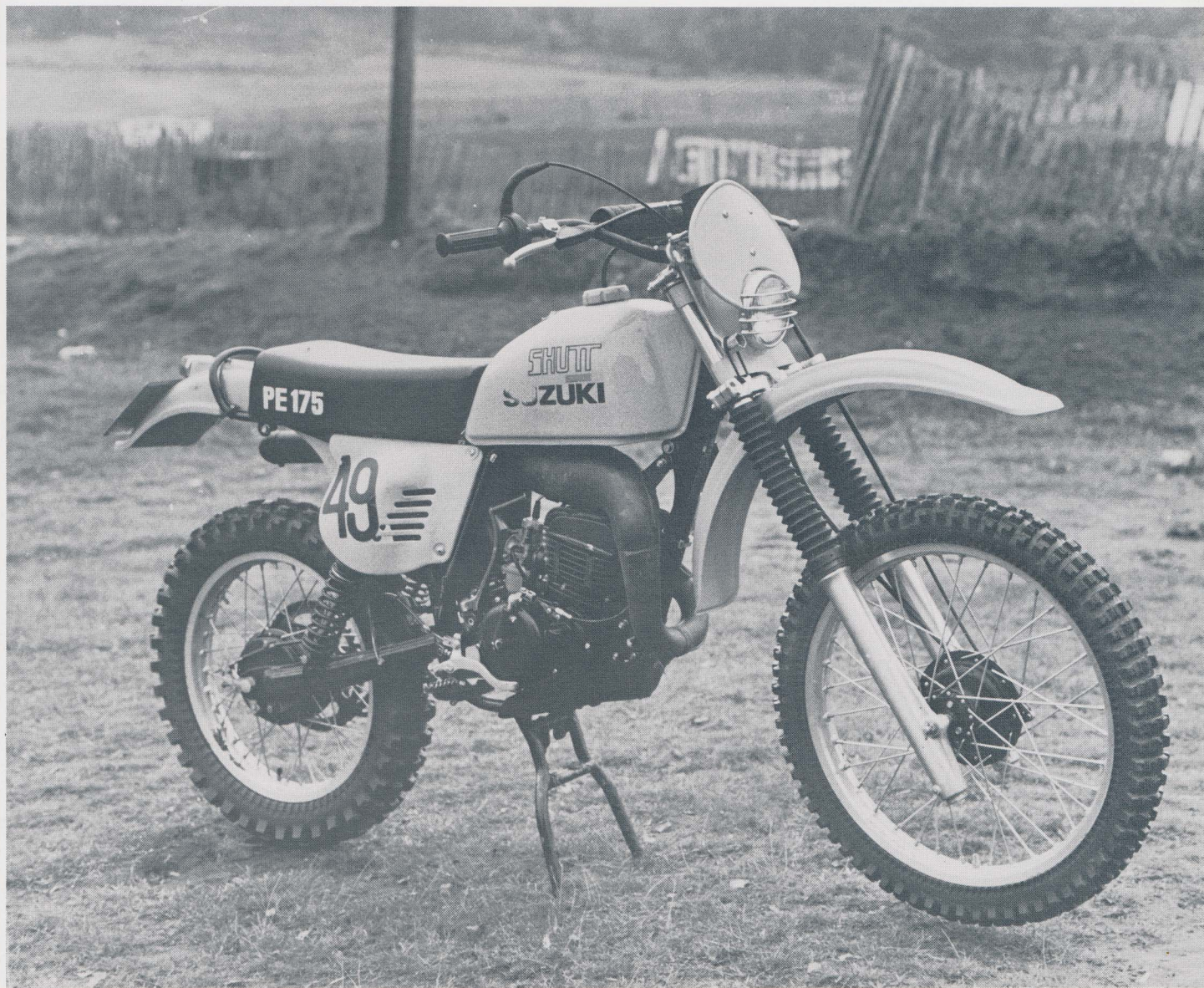
The 175 PE was one of the great bargains of its era and was by far the best-selling enduro bike in Britain.

and best-handling 175 on the market, but just misses the mark in each category. Only in cast-iron reliability is the PE the clear leader.

Yet, despite these apparent failings, the PE175 is the best-selling 175 enduro bike in Britain (and is probably the most popular overall bike as well), simply because it can't be faulted at the price. In fact, to be fair to the bike, it couldn't really be

faulted if it were £200 more expensive, for in many ways it is the perfect clubman's mount.

The 175 is a new model using experience gained from the successful PE250 and also the RM series motocross bikes, which have dominated the 125cc class almost since its inception. Physically it is one of the most unimposing racing bikes on sale today, with a 35in saddle height and slim







proportions giving an impression – and a correct one – of a motorcycle which can be mastered by anyone.

In typical Suzuki fashion the PE fires up with a couple of prods of the right-hand-mounted kickstart. The motor is ridiculously easy to spin and can be started either in gear, with the clutch withdrawn, or in neutral. Easy starting and a primary drive kickstart facility are both of great value if you have stalled your bike for the 984th time in a tough enduro.

The power band is surprisingly wide for a 175, thanks to the crankcase-mounted reed valve, and it is possible to chuff along in first gear without the motor gassing up or press on at speeds nudging 80mph in sixth. The power delivery is silky smooth and this makes for a very relaxed ride as well as assisting traction. Unfortunately, the impression is of a rather sedate motor, which isn't at all fair to the bike.

In our test we ran the 175 against a 250 motocross machine and it was about 10 yards slower over 250 yards, which for a fully silenced 175 carrying road legal appendages is not bad at all. Where the 175 does suffer is on uphill climbs or on heavy going, where there is no substitute for power. Nevertheless, it is capable of dealing with any serious enduro terrain in a quite effortless fashion.

As a member of the RM family the PE should handle superbly, but in standard trim it doesn't. Someone at Suzuki made a marked error of judgement in choosing the spring rates, since both front and rear are far too soft for serious racing. The suspension is fine for pottering about, but once the rider begins stuffing the bike into corners or throwing it down banks with some enthusiasm, everything bottoms out with monotonous consistency.

The problem is not a great one and can be easily remedied with stiffer springs and heavier fork oil, but it should be right as standard.

It is a pity about the softness of the springs, for the action of the Suzuki front forks and the

The 175 was at its best in really heavy going.

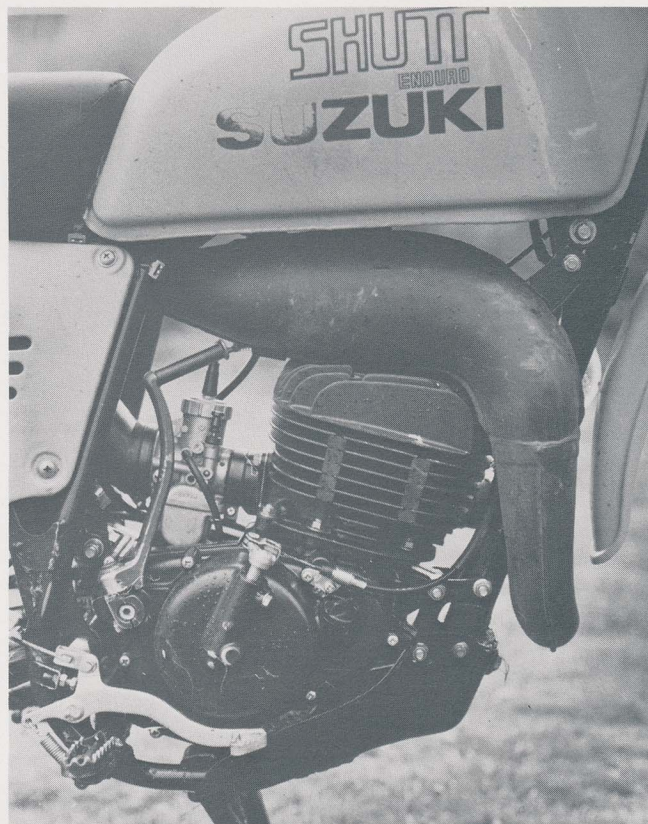


Although appearing to be more sophisticated, the 175 forks were, in practice, inferior to the 'old' 250 pattern which they superseded. Front brake was typical Suzuki – superb.

Kayaba rear dampers is exemplary. With 9in of travel on the front and 8in on the rear the PE will be competitive with the best once the suspension is tuned properly for racing.

On fast, smooth going the lack of suspension was not nearly so noticeable and the very low saddle height made the PE an ideal tool for speedway-style sliding – just the job for the shale tracks in the forestry.

Studying the PE in detail reveals that the Hammamatsu factory has taken the job of producing a true enduro bike seriously. At 2.6 gallons, the petrol tank is large enough to permit a completion of one loop of a forestry event without refuelling, which helps both the rider's speed and the organization needed to support him.



The 175 power plant was not the best of its day, but was a gem for a clubman rider – and the bike sold on this fact.

A new crankcase shield is fitted, with an extension to cover the vulnerable clutchside engine case, and the rear chain tensioner – still unfortunately the roller type used on the 250cc, which is prone to seizing under severe conditions – is now protected by a guard.

Both front and rear wheels are semi-q.d. The left-hand side adjusting slider is now tapped so that the rear wheel spindle screws directly into it, whilst the spacer is permanently attached to the adjuster. Both are nice touches, which show that someone has done his homework in Japan. In lieu of a toolbag the PE comes with a multi-purpose tool which enables all the routine maintenance needed in an enduro to be done. This is mounted in a specially designed bracket incorporated in the

front light assembly.

Finally, and most welcome of all, is a centre stand (loud cheers from puncture-prone riders like myself!). This useful accoutrement is fitted in addition to the more usual side stand and is intended only for serious work in the *parc fermé* in the event of disaster striking. This means that it has to be released from the frame by means of a spring-loaded clip, which is both awkward to use and, as we discovered, liable to break.

My co-tester was Colin Shutt – an expert-rated rider with a vast experience of enduro machines. Colin pressed the 175 to the limit by forcing it up a near vertical hill which was heavily rutted. In fact, the hill is an observed section in a one-day trial, but the feet-up boys ride DOWN it. Not surprisingly the 175 finally expired and Colin started to slide back. The centre stand dug into a rut and the retaining spring immediately straightened, leaving Mr. Shutt well and truly stranded with the centre stand down, unable to move either up or down the hill.

The problem may be readily solved by bending the end of the stand round so that it slides over ruts rather than digs in, but it is a point to watch.

To sum up, the PE175 is probably the best all-

round buy on the market today. It is fast, reliable and potentially a good-handling bike, and there is no bike which can match it for sheer value.

Suzuki PE175

Engine: Single-cylinder two-stroke with reed-valve induction

Capacity: 172cc (62 × 57mm)

Compression ratio: (corrected) 7.6:1

Carburation: Mikuni WM32 SS with enriching lever breathing through oil-soaked foam filter

Transmission: Gear primary, wet multi-plate clutch and six-speed gearbox

Drive: $\frac{5}{8}$ in × $\frac{1}{4}$ in DID racing chain. 48 × 12 sprockets

Ratios: 1 – 3.090:1; 2 – 2.214:1; 3 – 1.647:1; 4 – 1.250:1; 5 – 1.045:1;
6 – 0.875:1

Electrical equipment: PEI electronic ignition with flywheel magneto.

5in headlamp with 6V 13W bulb

Fuel capacity: 11.8 litres (2.6 imp gal)

Frame: Single down tube with duplex cradle – chrome-moly throughout

Suspension: Suzuki front fork; 9in travel, hydraulically damped;

Kayaba rear dampers giving 8in of travel

Wheels: WM2 × 21in front; WM3 × 18in rear with dural rims

Tyres: IRC shouldered enduro pattern

Brakes: 5in Suzuki conical hubs front and rear

Wheelbase: 55.9in

Ground clearance: 11in

Saddle height: 32in

Handlebar width: 34.6in

(all unladen)

Claimed dry weight: 216lb