

KTM GS175

ONE OF THE magic moments in my enduro career was as a spectator. Watching the hillclimb special test in the 1979 Beacons, I was inspired by the effortless delicacy with which Dai Jeremiah guided his 175 KTM up the treacherous slope. With the merest hint of body movement Dai eased the little Austrian bike up the hill at speeds which I would have found difficulty in emulating if I had been flying a Phantom jet!

As well as enjoying the spectacle of a master working at his craft, I also felt a small degree of vicarious satisfaction at having been correct in my assessment of the KTM's potential long before it had begun to enjoy the success which came later in the season.

In many ways it was the near perfect vehicle for traversing rough terrain, of all sorts, very quickly. It had power, handling and strength in sufficient quantities to deal with any situation and, best of all, the package was relatively light.

The only fault with the bike is that it does not function well until being driven very hard. This trait is common to all KTMs and it does pose many real problems for the average rider. The difficulty lies not so much in the physical strain involved in riding at speeds which frighten most riders – the bike almost looks after these – but rather in the mind.

The downfall of many KTM riders is that chilling realization that they are going far faster than they really want to. They roll off the throttle and then the problems begin to mount.

So it was with the 175. A really superb tool for going very quickly, but a rheumatic camel with a foul temper if you didn't. I really liked the bike and just ached for the ability to do it justice.

After 12 years of commenting on and testing

off-road bikes it is not often that I am daunted by reviewing a new bike. However, in the case of the 175 KTM I must confess to a certain degree of trepidation.

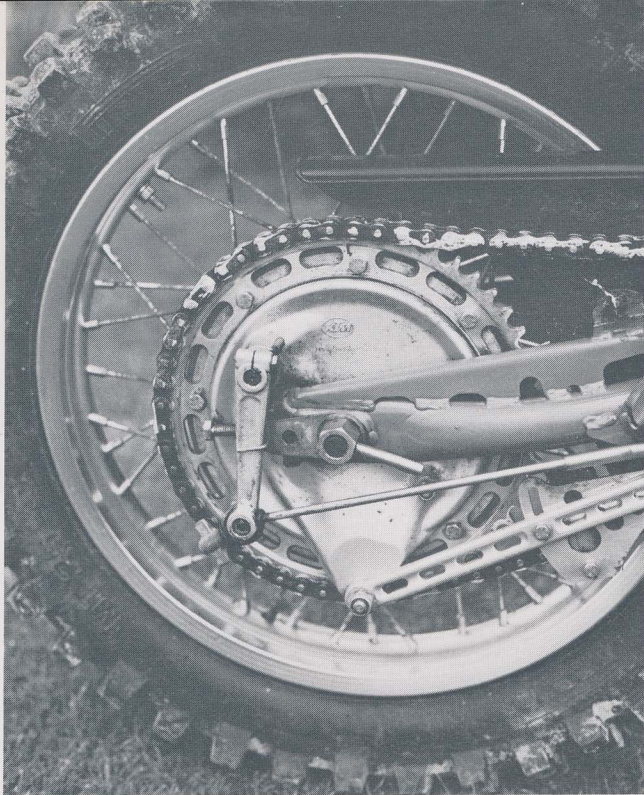
To begin with, the KTM factory enjoys the reputation of being one of the most dominant forces in international enduros. Leading Trophy Teams, including our own British sextet, are mounted on these Austrian machines quite simply because they offer the best blend of reliability and speed available in a production bike.

Nearer home, some of our best riders are KTM regulars. John May, John Knight and, best of all, Dai Jeremiah are all KTM exponents and potential winners of any event. The 175 KTM is new to Britain and is a fresh model in its own right, and in order to get the bike off to a flying start Comerfords have supplied Dai with a 175 identical to our test bike and on which he set the fastest times at the first Trophy Team test day.

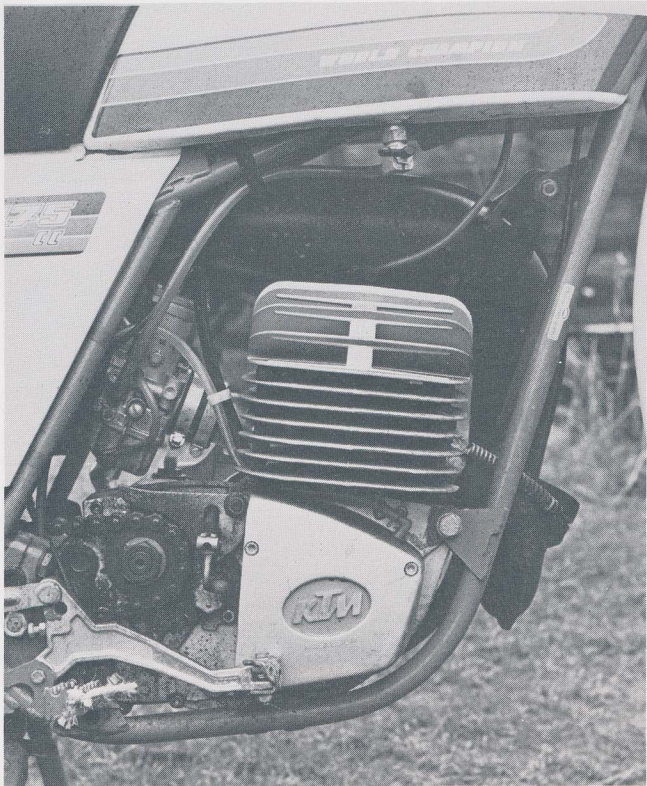
Faced with this sort of formidable pedigree, can a mere mortal dare to offer comment on the bike? Well, let's at least try.

From the outset it must be appreciated that the KTM is an ISDT bike. Nothing more, and certainly nothing less. Therefore, it is no use expecting bargain basement prices (£1200 for a 175 isn't exactly cheap!) or any mildness which might make the bike suitable for green laning or nipping down to the shop for a bottle of cider. The KTM is every inch a racer and this is what the bike does well. In fact, this is the *only* thing the bike does well.

Over the years KTM have refined their 175s so that they are more manageable for mere humans rather than superstars, but they are still not the easiest thing in the world to ride. The kickstart is left-hand mounted and one or two jabs, rather than



Rear brake shows KTM's dependence on parts commonality within the range – and the sort of quality engineering which exemplifies the marque. The $7\frac{1}{4}$ in sls unit would stop a 500cc road bike!



kicks (as recommended by KTM tuning ace Reg May), at the long lever will bring the motor crackling into life. The exhaust note is well muted so that the bike's noise does not travel excessively, but the undampened engine fins and roar of air through the intake system make for a very garrulous motorcycle from the rider's point of view.

With the engine running sweetly – the engine warms up in a commendably short time – first gear can be effortlessly eased in and then quite a lot of clutch slip is required to get the plot on the move. Power band problems are major worries to riders of tiddlers, so it is worth discussing the KTM's strengths and weaknesses in detail.

Our bike lacked the bottom end of either the 175 Suzuki or SWM, and although it was almost impossible to make the bike gas up, even with criminally silly use of high gears and heavy throttle loadings, the lack of a reed or disc valve and small flywheel weight combined to make low revs generally inadvisable.

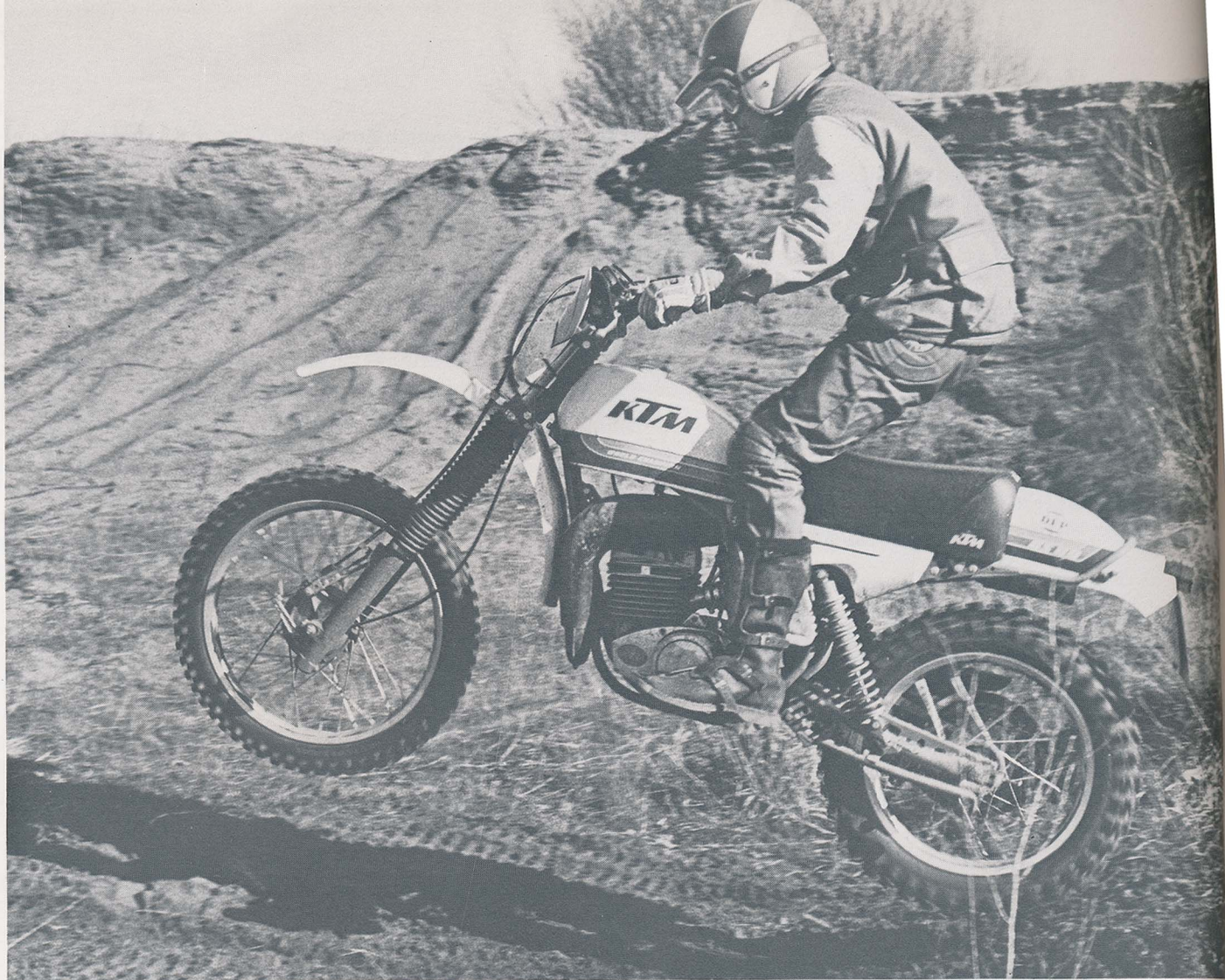
Where the KTM scored was in the mid-range, above 3000rpm, where it would hold a chosen gear under quite astonishing load. Thus, one could attack a really tough hill and feel the motor churning out the torque even under very heavy load. Attempt this sort of tactic with any other 175 and the motor would stall.

Our bike was still tight with only 70 miles on the clock so it was reluctant to pull peak revs. Even so, it showed almost 80mph on the speedometer, which is no slouch for a little bike.

Knowing that this instant urge would be available under all conditions led to a confident riding style. This was helped by the KTM's chassis, which was simply superb. The bike had beautifully neutral handling, which required no conscious adoption of a particular riding style.

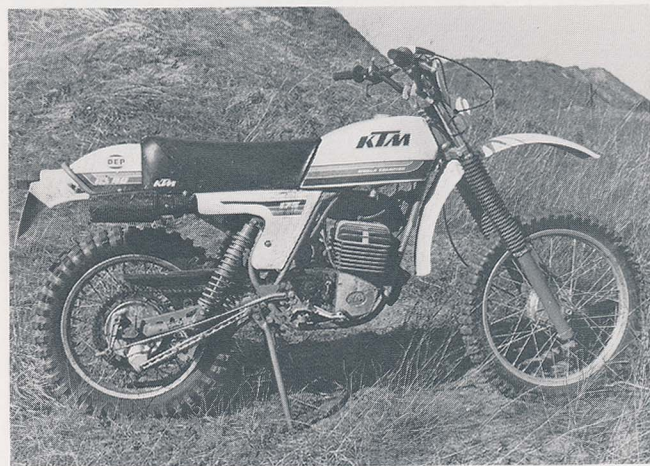
It was uncannily stable in a straight line,

Despite its small size, the KTM had neither reed nor disc valve and yet produced really strong mid-range power. Many riders thought it to be the best enduro power plant of its day – regardless of capacity.



Above and far right
Ridden flat out, the KTM was a dream.

Right
The KTM was every inch a racing bike. One of the finest enduro machines ever produced, in the hands of an ISDT expert, it was a dangerous embarrassment when ridden by anyone of lesser calibre. The author remembers – not too fondly – that he crashed his own 250 KTM faster and more often than any other bike he has ever ridden.





tracked through fast corners as if on rails, and yet was light and easy to manage in the tightest woods. Under the whole range of conditions I chose for the bike there was nothing it didn't do with impeccable reliability.

The only 'fault', if one chose so to identify this trait, was that to get the bike to function well one had to travel awfully fast. At slow speeds the air-assisted Marzocchis on the front and Bilstein

dampers at the rear felt hard and unforgiving. A clubman friend of mine tried the bike and came back quite unimpressed. He complained of the stiffness and 'hard ride', and I must confess that the bike looked most unhappy when potted about.

This is the result of KTM's design policy, which is ISDT orientated, and I would reiterate that when going quickly – by my standards at least –

the bike was the most trustworthy and stable beast that I have ridden for many years.

Complementing a good motor and excellent handling were a pair of absolutely superb anchors. I could really wax lyrical about these brakes and the sense of total security they offered. It was possible to drive at suicidally fast speeds into a corner, haul on everything, tread down two gears and then rocket away without the slightest break in pace: quite exhilarating even for a rider as hardened as I!

Referring back to our clubman tester, he found the brakes to be fierce and prone to locking, which again points to the strengths and weaknesses of the bike.

My own criticisms are few. The saddle was just too hard for me. Even some of the Trophy men have complained about this, so perhaps I am not just simply weedy. The front mudguard is a little too narrow for my own taste. I use an ultra-wide Stilmotor on my own bike and this is much better. Finally, the British-made alloy tank leaks profusely through the filler cap.

This flaw is serious for two reasons. First, because the saddle runs right up to the tank and petrol runs on to the saddle when the tank is full, making it a skating rink for the rider's bum. Second, and equally bad, the filler cap is badly designed, being smooth and small. Since it is permanently wet with two-stroke mix, it is almost impossible to remove quickly, even with dry gloves. With wet, cold hands the task could be most

frustrating, particularly if one were running behind schedule.

To sum up, the KTM is a lot of bike for the money. The best materials, including magnesium for the engine cases and brakes and chrome-moly for the frame, are used throughout the bike, which is the nearest thing to an event winner one could hope to find straight off the showroom floor. It is NOT a playbike and if you are not anxious to win medals, put your money in a more forgiving machine.

KTM GS175

Engine: Single-cylinder two-stroke
Capacity: 175cc
Carburation: 34mm Bing with cable-operated choke and tickler.
Oil-soaked foam air filter
Claimed maximum power: In excess of 30bhp
Transmission: Wet multi-plate clutch with steel and bronze plates.
Six-speed internal ratios
Electrical equipment: Pointless electronic ignition. 55W flywheel magneto by Motoplat. 5in front headlamp with 21W main bulb.
Electrical horn
Fuel capacity: 11.3 litres (2.5 imp gal)
Suspension: Front forks by Marzocchi. Magnesium sliders with air-assisted springs. 11in of travel. Rear dampers by Bilstein. Nitrogen-charged with 5in of movement giving 10in at rear wheel
Wheels: WM2 × 21in front; WM3 × 18in rear. Sun rims in both cases with tyre pins fitted as standard
Tyres: 3.00 × 21in front; 4.50 × 18in rear. Both Metzeler
Brakes: KTM front and rear. 8in sls rear and 6in sls front
Wheelbase: 57.5in
Ground clearance: 13in
Saddle height: 38in
Handlebar width: 33in
Frame: Full duplex with multi tube top spine
Claimed weight: Ready to race 235lb

The SWM 125GS TF1 – a most purposeful design