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FORTNIGHTLY

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dandy
XJ650



**Kawasaki
dirt
spectacular**



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custom**

**Learn
carb tricks**

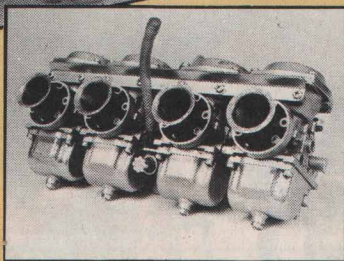
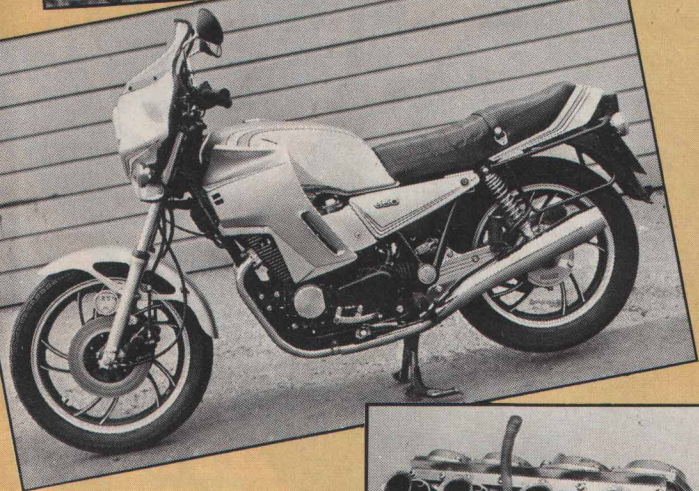
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December 9th-22nd, 1981



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glorious mud —
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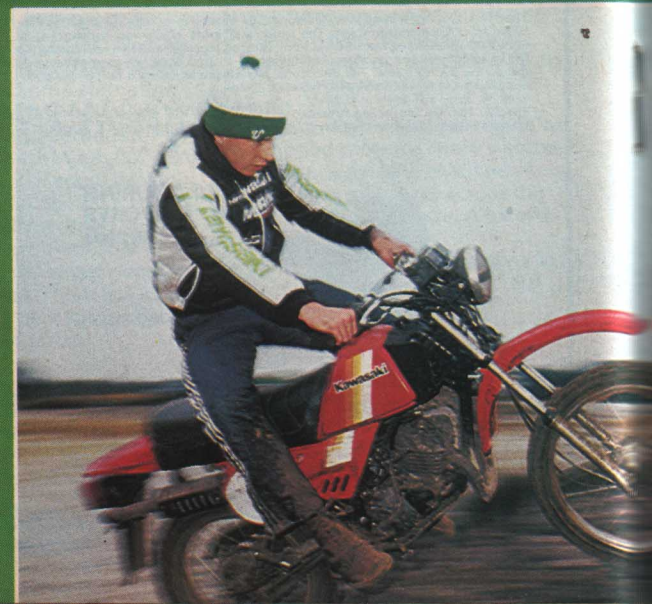
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KE 175



KE 125



DIRT BOOGIE

BY A KAWASAKI QUINTET

KE175/KDX175

THE Kawasaki endurance test at Matchams Park proved a lot tougher than we'd planned.

The 2.3 mile circuit we mapped out in the dry took a big turn for the worse after a night of rain and any energy left by the power-sapping sand and endless whoops was greedily soaked up by deep, wet mud.

Ruts which had only nuisance value the day before now took on the more serious proportions of a morass into which bikes could sink without trace.

Kawasaki UK had brought their works riders Vic Allan and Paul Hunt to help — if you call having your face filled with mud "helping".

What makes a good dirt bike is the right combination of power, drive, handling and rider skill. Those of us with lesser skills often find that a lesser bike is more usable, so it wasn't surprising to find that the small AE80 was easier to handle through certain sections.

Like the steep hill made of deep sand, which held the front wheel like a clamp while giving no grip to the back wheel at all. Here, the more powerful KE175 was all too ready to dig a big hole and sink into it, demanding rider skill in controlling the throttle as well as the general direction of travel.

By further contrast, the KDX enduro bike showed how more power — more drive, really — can be a help. It

blasted up the hill so easily that the problem was arriving at the right speed at the top, where a sharp left-hander took the bikes steeply back down the hill again.

The KE175 features a lively reed-valve engine and good handling, by trail bike standards, both of which were overshadowed by the KDX comp bike which has just a bit more of everything.

The biggest problems for the KE happened where its trail tyres got, literally, out of their depth. Otherwise it was going well until it began to suffer the problem which dogged the first KE we tested.

Dirt or water got into the carburettor and made the slide stick. In addition to that the Matchams sand got everywhere, even into the twistgrip drum making the action stiff and gritty.

The chain needed adjustment every hour and, like all of the others, the brakes were worn out after the first couple of stints.

It had to happen, of course, that the throttle didn't stick open until the brakes had almost disappeared. Fortunately it was only on half-throttle and there was a large, absorbent bush nearby.

Next, it produced a fine example of a flying W in the deep sand pit — which was good because it didn't hurt and bad because it was within full view of everybody. After a stop to get the carb cleaned, Nick Blackledge took

KDX 175



AE 80



On test

DIRT BOOGIE

◀ the KE out — but the slide was soon sticking again.

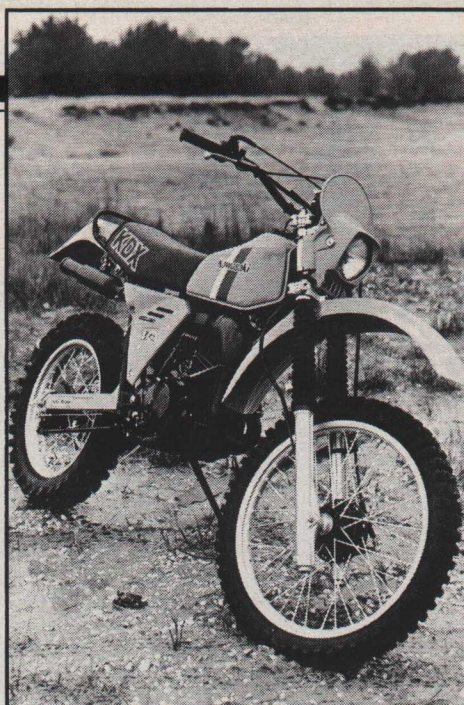
This time it was on full noise through the deep mud and is probably the only time on record that a journalist has increased a lead over Vic Allan.

Stopping to have the carb cleaned and taped up, plus many chain adjustments, cost the KE a lot of time, some 40 minutes all told.

This accounts for its relatively low distance of 70 miles at an average of 15.3mph, despite the fact that when it was running properly it was lapping around 20mph.

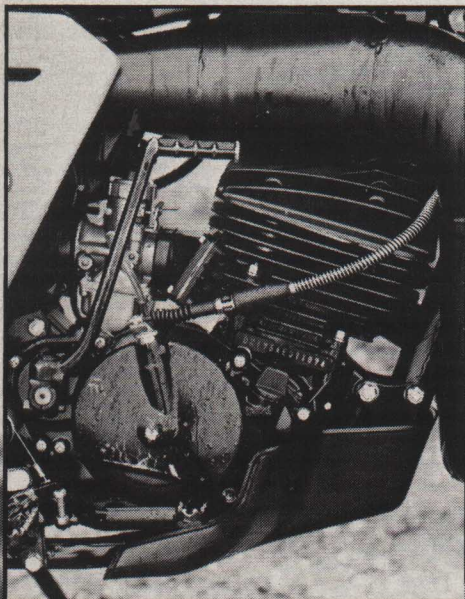
In contrast the KDX rarely lapped at less than 22mph and averaged 24.6mph for its overall distance of 72 miles. It had made this distance only three hours after the start, when the bike's gear selector failed and we were unable to continue.

The only other problems were brake wear and severe chain wear, which needed a link



Long travel forks and Uni Trak rear suspension make the KDX a highly usable machine in the dirt.

Left: The reed-valve 175 gives noticeably more power in the KDX than the KE version.



removing in order to keep chain adjustment.

Otherwise, being taller in the seat, longer in the springs and deeper in tyre tread, the KDX was the nicest bike to ride. It had noticeably more power than the KE, giving the rider a useful surplus and often allowing him a wider choice of gears. If the rider could use the extra power, he could go faster, if not it gave him a handy reserve so that he was less likely to be caught out on the wrong line or in the wrong gear.

The long travel forks and Uni Trak rear suspension do a good job in keeping the wheels down for more traction and steering, making a noticeable improvement over the difficult stretches and the increasing violence of the whoop-de-doots.

From early on in the test, the bike suffered a high-speed misfire caused, we think by the wet section out in the woods. While the bike was loaded up at low revs through the mud and sand it wasn't noticeable. It came in on a faster section which was firm and slightly downhill, making a spluttering end to the 175's power peak.

It seemed to improve from there on, possibly as the bike dried out, and had just about cured itself towards the end of the lap, when the bike arrived in all the mud again.

It took me a little while to get used to the fact that I could go faster on the KDX without falling off. Even so my slowest laps were about the same as my quickest times on the KE. On this circuit it made the difference between struggling to get close to a 20mph average and beating the target by a comfortable margin.

Just as I was settling in to this satisfying new rhythm and thinking how good it all was, Paul Hunt came past — on the AE80!

Purely superior skill through the deep sand, I thought, preparing to zap past on the approaching firm track. Accelerating up to the misfire and then shifting up, I still thought I was on the fastest bike — until the 80 pulled out a short lead and held it.

Coming off the fast section into the woods, the misfire did its usual vanishing act and I could keep up with Paul, just long enough to find out how much rider-skill tips the balance of the performance equation.

I stayed with him through the mud simply

Good by trail bike standards, the KE175 couldn't live with the competition bikes.



because he seemed more interested in staying dry than in going fast. Then the never-ending whoop-de-doo's, with the occasional dip full of black water, proved what I had often suspected.

Without the benefit of a lot of power, or even race tyres, Paul skimmed across the rolling bumps, gently clipping the top of each one. And without any apparent change in speed. Using all the concentration I had left, I emulated this for one or maybe two but then the KDX lifted higher and dropped earlier, turning the next whoop into a ramp.

The take-offs became more elevated and the landings got harder, and I now know where whoops got their name.

By chance rather than judgement, the Kawasaki and I were still pointing in the same direction at the end and Paul was still in sight — but only just. It proved you don't need a lot of power or trick suspension and tyres — I think.

But, while the KE is an excellent machine for casual trail riding or for the guy who needs a street machine as much as a dirt bike, it's a long way behind its KDX partner when it comes to competitive riding. The way the racer takes the difficulty out of any kind of section has to be felt to be appreciated.

John Robinson

Kawasaki AE80

APART from a brief spell messing around on trials bikes some five years ago, I was more or less a complete beginner on the dirt when we started our day-long off-road bash at Matchams Park. Therefore, it seemed both prudent and logical to start the day's riding on the smallest bike available, the AE80.

On the first lap the greatest advantage I found in the AE80 was the relatively low seat height — it made paddling very easy on the numerous occasions I got firmly stuck. Thereafter, when I'd learnt something about dirt riding techniques (falling off twice a lap as opposed to ten times) the 80 turned out to be a willing and capable bike on the rough, even in the more difficult sections.

The 80cc motor pushes out sufficient power to cope with steep climbs, deep sand the stickiest mud. Early in the day it caught me out on several occasions when coming



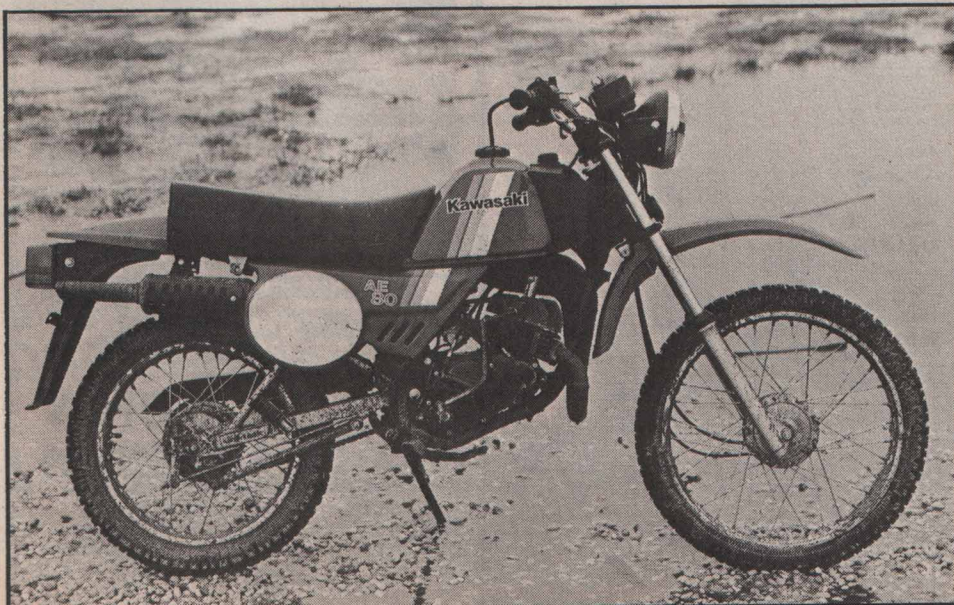
Paul Hunt manages to keep his feet dry while demonstrating just how fast the little AE80 can go.

from sticky going, where there was little grip, on to a drier section of track where the back tyre had more to get its teeth into.

As I was invariably riding with the throttle hard against the stop, the bike would pop a sizeable wheelie, nearly causing me to slip off the back in an undignified heap.

On the straight, bumpy sections of the course, the 80's suspension managed to absorb all the irregularities. However, charging through the whoops had both the forks and the rear units bottoming out most of the time.

The sand at Matchams took its toll before long. After half-an-hour the drive chain was all but dragging on the floor, and after forty minutes I came to an ignominious halt in the middle of a large sandpit when the chain jumped off the rear wheel sprocket. Constant adjustment was needed but the chain eventually broke altogether just before we stopped for lunch.



Amazing performance from such a tiny machine, the AE80's only problem was chain wear.

That was the only mishap though and it's worth pointing out that the 80 uses a considerably smaller pitch chain than any of the other bikes tested. Other mishaps like bent bars, mangled brake lever and twisted footrests were due solely to operator error (roughly translatable as a mixture of over-exuberance and ineptitude).

Over the day's riding, the bike covered a total of 71 miles — one mile more than the KE175. The lap times were pretty close to the two other bikes, between seven and eight minutes being the norm. Only the two pukka enduro irons were noticeably quicker.

Bearing in mind that the AE80 was never intended for the sort of serious and brutal dirt use that we put it to in our test, it performed astoundingly well. For the sort of guy who buys a trail bike for use mainly on the road it would be an ideal choice, especially if cash limitations were a major factor. On the difficult going of the test circuit, it performed just as well as both the 125 and the 175. And that in itself is no mean recommendation.

Jim Lindsay



Nick Davis keeps the 80's nose out of the deep mud.

Kawasaki KLX250

THE ONLY four-stroke of the five Kawasakis tested, the KLX250 sounded and felt taut and new but was plagued by a persistent misfire.

A far cry from the 1978 KL250 trail bike from which it is developed, the enduro style KLX has a purposeful look with its tall seating position, girder style swinging arm and long travel suspension front and rear.

The seat padding has evidently been kept on the thin side to maintain a not too ridiculous seat height. Even so, it was a big climb for my short legs and it soon became apparent that it takes a good rider to do the machine justice.

Engine torque encouraged early upchanges. You found yourself in top (fifth) very quickly. The gearbox earned its keep as a brake too, because sandy Matchams had rendered the drums virtually useless.

Steering well enough under acceleration, the tall green KLX was nose heavy and liked to take over control of the direction it was

On test

DIRT BOOGIE

headed when the throttle was rolled off.

It demanded that you stay well in command and soon sorted out rider weaknesses, which in my case were many. Lack of flywheel effect meant that in the trials type sections care was needed to prevent letting the revs drop too low or it would stall.

Former British moto-cross champion Vic Allan was able to smoothly thump this model through the long course worked out for the test. I struggled.

Dropping it twice on my first lap took a heavy physical toll because the Kawasaki was not too willing to fire up again.

While the forks coped well through the ruts, sand and water, the rear suspension was far too stiff for my ten-stone weight and lowly rate of progress.

Faster riders were able to give it more work to get through by hitting the bumps harder, and by taking the weight bias off the front wheel by giving the engine more throttle.

The enduro tyres offered better grip than trail pattern tyres, but on flat surface corners the front wheel would let go.

Drifting the back wheel under power was the best answer, so here again it was a case of a better rider being able to extract the best from it.

To make life a little more difficult, sand in the throttle linkage on the carburettor made the action stiff and heavy. By this time I had decided the KLX was not a machine for novice riders. It's grown up a lot from its KL days.



Not for novices — although the neat lines of the KLX would make a great posing machine!

KE125

After riding the KLX250, stepping aboard the KE125 was like turning on a pressure relief valve. The 125 was less demanding and gave a softer ride.

The difference in size and weight was dramatic and the brakes somehow managed to keep out the abrasive sand particles while I was on board so that they actually worked.

Sliding around on the seat would have been better minus the pillion strap, and higher bars would have improved matters even further.

As my riding stint wore on, the forward stoop the bars dictated while standing on the footpegs forced an unnatural arching of the

back, which inevitably resulted in back-ache.

Obviously as a trail bike, the Kawasaki expects to spend more than half its life on the road. Our exclusively off-road testing was bound to highlight shortcomings as a trail bike.

The trail tyres struggled for grip, particularly through the muddy ruts. Where the KLX250 could cross ruts under power, the 125 was more or less committed once the front wheel was in one.

Bottoming of the rear suspension and topping of the forks happened occasionally, but on the whole the suspension worked well and soaked up a lot of punishment.

The snappy two-stroke engine gave impressive power. I felt I was quicker on the hard-packed straight on this one than the 250. But then the 250 had to be ridden with restraint because of the lack of brakes.

Always willing to fire up with the minimum of effort, the 125 took less out of the rider when stalled. On the other side of the coin, it demanded more steering corrections on slippery going.

Through slow sections the motor was sometimes prone to slight oiling, but a good thrash when the track opened out would clear it.

Trying to cross some fallen saplings on the 125, I slipped and broke the clutch lever. It caused no real problem. Thanks to the easy revving engine and slick gearchange I was able to rev up, stamp it in first and jump away.

The KE125 is definitely a suitable mount for a novice off-road rider who wants the benefit of an only £7 annual road tax and easy handling. □

BRIAN CRICHTON



The KLX 250 has long travel rear suspension with fairly conventional spring mounts.

Right: A tendency to be nose-heavy didn't help the KLX steer through the slippery bits.



Slightly overshadowed by the more glamorous bikes, the KE125 still put in a worthwhile performance.