

Suzie's DOWN TOWN FIFTY

Suzuki's sheep in wolf's clothing makes thirty look fast. Merril Boulton reports on the X-1 fifty

Mopeds are getting bigger, more sophisticated and more expensive, but are they getting better? With a blanket restriction of 30mph the one thing they can't do is offer the 16-year-old a decent performance, so instead they tempt him with disc brakes, cast wheels and full motorcycle specification.

The latest sportster from Suzuki, the ZR50KEN, or X-1 for short, demonstrates just how far the humble moped has been developed to cater for the tastes and needs of first time bikers...

Arriving at Suzuki's Beddington Lane workshops, after a 120 mile hack on the GS425, very well clobbered and with a large tank bag, it suddenly dawned on me that there might not be any room to carry such things on a moped.

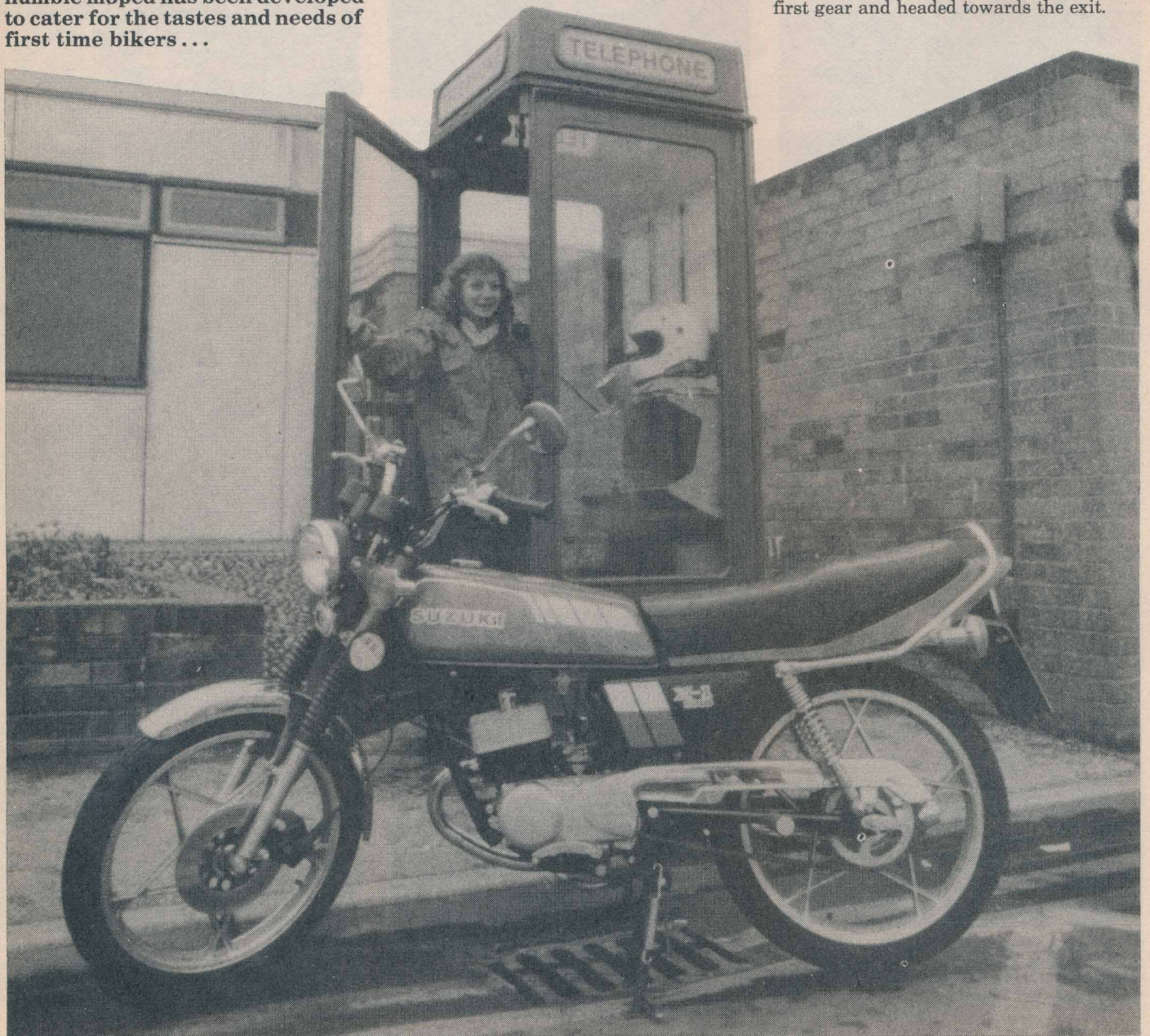
I was pointed vaguely in the direction of a group of bikes and, expecting something about knee-high, I walked straight past the X-1 and back again. "That's a 50?" The sales blurb doesn't lie about it being a bike for bigger riders, it really looks more like a 125.

This could be decidedly dodgy in a traffic

situation when car drivers also think it's a 125cc machine and cater for it as such. It solved one problem though, my tank bag fitted snugly on to the large 1.9 gallon tank without impeding the handlebars.

As I sat on the Suzuki, it didn't feel like a moped and I found myself subconsciously thumbing for the starter, which of course it doesn't have or need.

Having been warmed up previously, the motor started first kick. It sounded lively and revved willingly at the slightest touch of the throttle. I pushed it off the centre stand (there is no side stand) snicked the bike into first gear and headed towards the exit.



One hundred feet later I was in top (fifth) gear!

As I buzzed on to the public road, I couldn't help but feel apologetic towards the other drivers who had to follow obediently behind me along the narrow lane where there was no room to pass. Did they realize I couldn't go any faster? As learners have L plates and new cars have running-in signs, wouldn't it be sensible for mopeds to have a 30mph plate as they need extra consideration, too?

With this shuddery feeling of someone continually on my tail, I kept the throttle wide open and sat tight.

To begin with the journey seemed never-ending, I felt as though I had time to inspect every inch of tarmac and drain covers were like mileposts. But after a couple of miles, as I wound down from a two hour blast, I became more patient and began to take in the details of the bike. In many ways they were similar to the bike I'd just ridden.

The handlebar console was virtually identical to the GS425 — the speedo, rev counter, ignition switch and idiot lights were all present. Switches I'd used automatically. The indicator, horn button, hi/lo beam were all positioned conventionally on the left-hand side. Twin mirrors were there, too.

My legs weren't cramped, the gear and brake pedals were well placed, my arms relaxed on the bars, in spite of the tank bag, in other words, the riding position was very comfortable. As many sixteeners are fully grown, if not six feet tall, Suzuki's 'enlarging' formula is a very valid consideration.

Blinking brightly

I was grateful for the indicators which blinked brightly at the dark grey motorised shapes that loomed all around on that damp and dismal winter evening. To be able to signal clearly does give other people a chance to notice and drive around you when you can't drive around them. As always on a small bike, the headlamp was rather dim, running directly from the engine. But it served its purpose, to be seen rather than to see by, while huge rear lamp and reflectors safeguarded the rear.

By the time I arrived home through the busy commuter traffic, my apologetic attitude had become one of aggression. I had to stick to my guns to keep my place in the road. It surprised and frustrated me how many people insisted on overtaking, even though there was no space between me and the car in front for them to move to and in doing so they would nudge me into the gutter. So, I tried to keep well to the middle of the road if I saw a parked car looming up or anticipated making a right turn. As driving instructors are always telling their pupils when they stall at the traffic lights, 'Don't panic, make them wait' so I did.

Because all mopeds are restricted to 30mph, there is no competition between them on top speed. But what is more relevant is the time they take to reach their allotted maximum speed. Many automatic mopeds take a frighteningly long time to get on the move and this can be especially hair raising when pulling out at a busy junction.

Though the Suzuki didn't exactly knock me back with acceleration, it did enable me to just about pull away in line with the other traffic and get into the right position on the road before it all came whooshing past. Although there is only limited power, having a gearbox does help, but it means a

lot of hard work. As soon as the clutch is let out, it has to be pulled in again, and again and again until fifth gear is reached. Speed builds up in small bites until the needle points to an indicated 33mph and that's it.

Superfluous though the rev counter may be, while it was there I made use of it. It red lines at 10,000rpm although the only time the needle crept anywhere near there, and then very reluctantly, was when revving the motor at the side of the road out of gear. I could feel a whisker of a so called power band from about 3000rpm which fell flat on its face again after about 4000rpm in the first three gears. Top gear would hold 30mph at 6000rpm creeping up to an indicated 40mph at 7000rpm on downhill stretches.

No more go

In fact, except for going up the steepest of hills, the Suzuki spent most of its riding hours in top gear, the lower ones only initially being used to pull away. There was no question of changing down to get a spurt on, unless doing under 10mph, for when I tried this the bike slowed down, the engine screamed and the rev counter needle pointed to its 'no more go' area of 5000rpm.

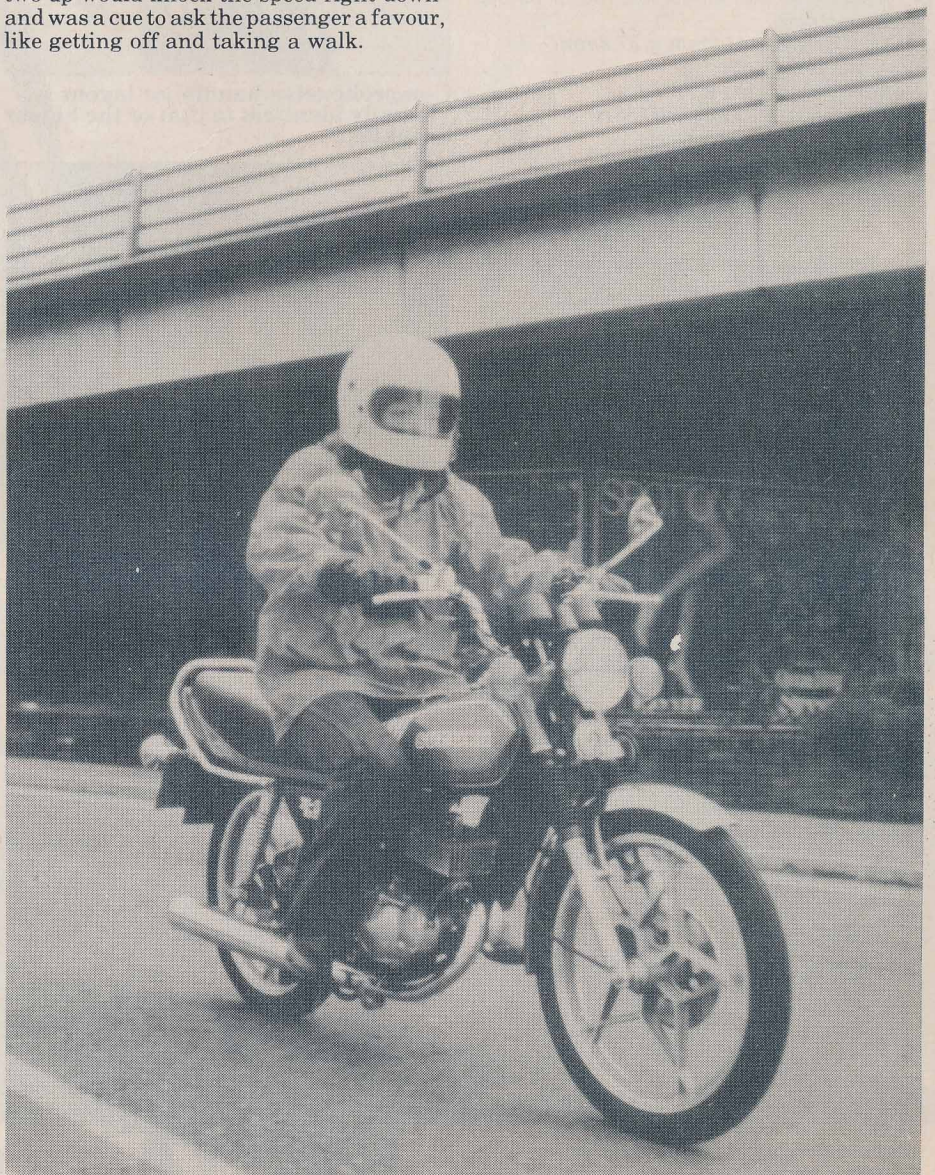
Carrying a pillion passenger lopped about 1000rpm off all the above figures, although with some coaxing it would eventually arrive at 30mph in top gear. Tackling hills two-up would knock the speed right down and was a cue to ask the passenger a favour, like getting off and taking a walk.

Trouble was, in this case, he was too comfortable enjoying the ride on the back to worry about such things. A pillion passenger is well catered for on the Suzuki X-1 but in view of the effect on the already limited power, it's not advisable to get too ambitious about carrying people. Not only are there footrests, but a broad, well-padded seat and a grab rail — very accommodating.

The rear suspension units are not quite so hospitable, for they are not adjustable and have to cope as best they can with a change of weight. The result was a very springy rear end which gently rocked the passenger, but because of the limited performance was of no real consequence to the overall handling of the machine.

The front forks seemed fairly sturdy and absorbed the worst of fluctuating surfaces, although they too were spongy and would bottom if ridden heavily over a sharp obstruction such as a pothole. The steering was very positive and when one has to make the best of limited resources, the Suzuki was very easily manoeuvred through traffic queues, making full use of its tight turning ability.

Since I got into the habit of keeping the throttle wide open, I was reluctant to roll it off and lose the speed again, even for the corners. This is where the fun started, for the Suzuki would easily cope with being thrown



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into a few tight bends.

There is one particular roundabout on my way to work that comes at the bottom of a hill, so with practise I could build up some speed and actually have to crank the Suzuki over a bit to get round. The tyres gripped the road well in the dry, leastways they withstood this abuse. In wet conditions, the tyres didn't misbehave, mind you, neither did I. So as long as they're treated with respect they provide adequate road grip in wet or dry.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Engine

The Suzuki accelerated with reasonable urge to its maximum speed of around 33mph. The lively sounding engine was a reliable starter with an overall fuel consumption of 97mpg.

Type: Two-stroke, air-cooled, rotary valve, single-cylinder.

Bore x Stroke: 41.0mm x 37.8mm

Displacement: 49cc

Compression ratio: 6.77:1

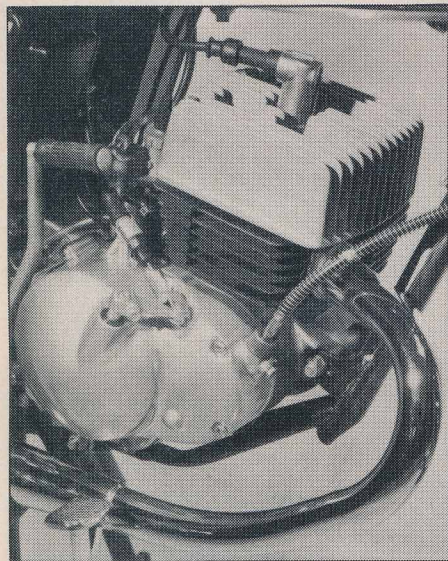
Carburettor: Mikuni VM15SH.

Idle: 1200rpm.

Lubrication: Autolube.

Starting: Kick only.

Fuel: Two-star.



Lively two-stroke engine provided reasonable acceleration plus good fuel consumption

Frame and Forks

Handling was good and suspension allowed a comfortable ride. Pillion passenger too enjoyed a pleasant if springy ride. Single downtube, cradle frame. Telescopic front forks. Rear swinging arm with hydraulic shocks.

Castor: 62 degrees.

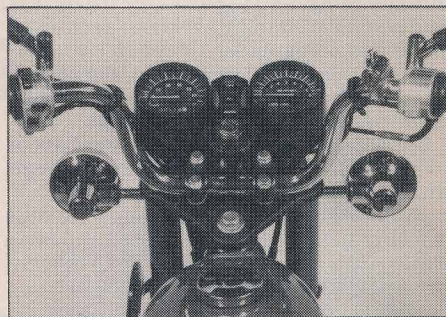
Trail: 81mm (3.29in.).

Steering: 43 degrees left and right.

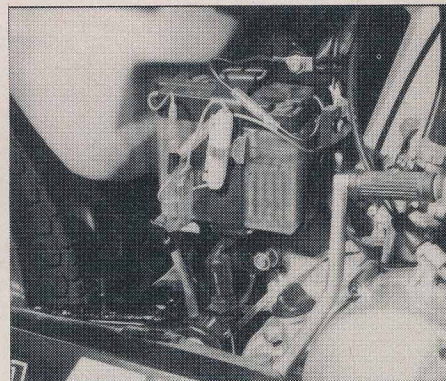
Turning radius: 2.2m (7.2ft.).

As with the rev counter, many people think a disc brake is an unnecessary goody on something like a moped, even though it is a good marketing proposition. Apparently we all fall for the 'mod cons' sales chat. Superfluous it may be, but there's no denying that together with the rear drum brake, the Suzuki had excellent stopping power. Of course, in wet weather the rider must be wary of the deficiencies of a disc brake.

Back to the handlebars for a second, because if anybody has to wheel their bike through a narrow alley to park, they'll appreciate the mirrors, which have a spring loaded catch at the base of the stem. This means they can be pulled round out of the way and returned to exactly the same position without the hassle of getting the



Comprehensive handlebar layout is virtually identical to that of the bigger Suzuki's



Six volt battery supplies power to the very high standard horn and indicators

Transmission

Five gears seem too many to change within such a short space of time, especially with the restricted top speed, but they were evenly spaced and smooth in operation.

Clutch: Wet multiplate.

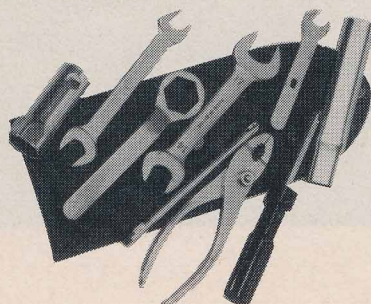
Drive chain: Daido or Takasago No. 420, 106 links.

Transmission: Five-speed, constant mesh.

Primary reduction: 3.842 (73/19)

Final reduction: 3.750 (45/12)

Overall ratios: 1st 45.59, 2nd 27.99, 3rd 19.87, 4th 15.59, 5th 13.29.



spanners out to readjust them.

More sophistication comes in the form of the autolube system, which automatically mixes the two-stroke oil with the petrol. And with a consumption of 4-500 miles-per-pint of oil and 97 miles-per-gallon of petrol, running costs for this sporty-looking moped are not high.

The helmet lock is something of a joke, for it is fitted on to the handlebar and looks like it wouldn't take much more than an Allen key to remove the whole attachment, plus whatever had been locked to it.

I would guess that many sixteeners will find the Suzuki X-1, with its streamlined styling, mag alloy wheels and sophisticated bits and bobs, hard to resist. In a very competitive market — the ZR50KEN X-1 is selling at a very competitive price, £379.

Electrics

It's good to see a high standard of electrics even though it's a moped. Indicators and horn were essential and worked very well.

Ignition type: Magneto.

Ignition timing: 2mm btdc.

Spark plug: NGK BPES (long reach).

Generator: Flywheel magneto.

Battery: 6V 4Ah.

Headlamp: 6V 18/18W.

Parking lamp: 6V 3W.

Tail/Brake: 6V 21/5W.

Turn signal: 6V 18W.

Warning lights: 6V 1.7W.

Wheels and Brakes

Tyres offered adequate grip in wet or dry conditions and brakes were excellent.

Cast alloy wheels:

Tyre sizes: Front — 2.50 x 184 PR, rear — 2.50 x 184 PR.

Rec. tyre pressures: Solo — 21psi front, 28psi rear; pillion — 21psi front, 32psi rear.

Brakes: Front — cable operated disc brake; Rear — internal expanding shoe brake.

Dimensions

Aimed for the larger rider, the X-1 certainly achieves this goal looking more like a 125.

Very light and easy to handle.

Overall length: 75.2in.

Overall width: 26.6in.

Overall height: 40in.

Wheelbase: 48.4in.

Ground clearance: 5.5in.

Dry weight: 179lb.

Tank (inc reserve): 1.9galls.

Reserve: 2.1qts.

Two-stroke oil: 2.1 pints.

Transmission: 650cc (ATF 20/50W)

Front forks: 80ml.

Equipment and Finish

About the only equipment this machine lacks is an electric start (not that it needs it). It has the lot — pleasant styling, good finish and caters for the moped rider as a proper motorcyclist.

General

Test machine: Heron Suzuki GB Ltd, Beddington Lane, Croydon CR4 TD.

Price: £379 inc VAT.