

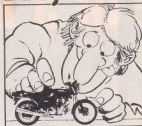
Pride and Prejudice

SUZUKI PE 175N

Regular TWO WHEELS contributor Ray Ryan took the plunge and bought a dirt bike. He knew it was a good thing but its ability to handle anything still amazed. Pity about spare parts though...

CHRIS DIXON of Macklin Motorcycles in Miranda, New South Wales, sold me the Suzuki PE 175N in March, 1980. I was entering one of those "limbo" periods all riders undergo at some time in their life. Motocross didn't stir my soul as it once did, as there was no longer the free time available for the racing trip.

My two regular riding companions, Len Williamson and Terry Dolan, had started the ball rolling when they bought a PE apiece from Chris, leaving me to tackle the trails on my aged ex-Project Honda, the CR/MR 250 Elsinore. My racer had languished in the garage for almost half a year and I didn't shed a tear when its spot was finally filled with the shiny, made-in-Japan PE175N.



I held few preconceptions about the PE. Sure, I knew that it was good but a few heavies warned me that the PE was "deadly in rocks", and that "you'll never finish a real ride aboard a PE", but the decision was already made. It was a matter of logic.

Guys who ride together should have identical machines. Spare parts can be rationalised amongst riders and the level of mechanical intimacy achieved by riders on the same type of bike is a sensible form of insurance out in the bush.

Williamson modded his machine with some aftermarket Trickit shocks and a whirlpool action throttle, while Terry and I left ours "as delivered". There

was never any intention of entering competition on any of the bikes, so the maintenance was somewhat slack compared to what would have been heaped on any motocrosser.

The overall maintenance ritual was simple and irregular. Each bike had been carefully set up when it was delivered, with all major items being checked, reassembled and Loctited in place. The blinkers, battery and speedo from my bike were stored during the time I owned it, while Len and Terry did the same, with the exception of their speedo units.

In short, the PE was never given any abnormal attention and it was subjected to more abuse than would normally be given a bike bought as a dual purpose street/trail riding tool. Each weekend, the PEs would be ridden at full throttle over the worst possible countryside Len could find, to help satisfy his sadistic whims. Each ride was a matter of survival for the rider, but the bikes never once failed to make it back in one piece and never left a rider stranded in the scrub.

Acting on the so-called wisdom which allegedly comes from experience, I drained the forks and refilled them with Bel-Ray and also religiously used Bel-Ray filter oil on the PE filter foam. The swap in oil effected a slight improvement to the PE forks but despite reports to the contrary, none of us ever felt the stock forks were at all far from the mark.

After less than two months of use, the PE rear hub shed its sealing flange, allowing water and dust to penetrate the brakes. The rear brake was useless and the hub was blatantly faulty.

I reported the situation to Suzuki Australia, the NSW distributors and was advised that the entire rear hub and swing arm would be replaced under warranty. It appears that certain PE models were cursed with poorly aligned swing arms which caused the hub to crack, and of course misalignment of the rear wheel resulted. After having the bike checked by the distributors, I was told that the parts were unavailable at that time but they were "on the water".

I waited six weeks before writing a polite, but direct note to Suzuki Australia's sales boss, Miles Stivano.

In his reply, Stivano apologised for the delay and assured me that everything was under control and that



Despite some warnings about the PE's ability to handle rocks, or lack of it, Ray felt these doubts were unjustified.

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the Gods of Japan would soon send my parts. Nevertheless, I was still waiting some weeks later and the matter finally spanned two months before the bike was back, repaired and in rideable condition.

The switchblock disintegrated early in the piece, after Williamson insisted on crushing it to death beneath a tiedown hook, while the right side footpeg gradually diminished in size with each swing of the kickstarter. The later T models have beefier footpegs which resist all attacks from kickstart levers.

When the bike was first delivered, it was still fitted with the restrictive inlet and exhaust plates which are used in order to obtain ADR licensing compliance. Once these were removed, the PE required a slightly richer jet supplied by Chris Dixon, and a minimal fiddling with the carb

needle. After the changes, it ran sweet and strong until the day it was sold.

On several occasions, I rode both Len's and Terry's identical PEs, and found little difference. Williamson's aftermarket shocks were more suited to the rocky country we usually tackled but even the stock KYB gas/oil units were well up to the punishment we handed them. Even after a Four Hour Pony Express event held near Mittagong, the PE was still running like a sewing machine and handling predictably.

On the road, the PE worked well as a sometime commuter and it became the regular "bop down to the bottle shop" machine on sunny Saturday afternoons. I'd hate to ride it 100 kilometres into the city every day of the week but as a legal means of hitting the dirt, it surpassed my own limited expectations.

Naturally, the tank decals fell off when the bike was still in its infancy. Naturally, it would be difficult to start after the fuel had been left on overnight. Naturally, it just kept going and going. Even when it was sold it continued to look respectable.

Both Len and Terry share my impressions of the PE and only Len's growing waistline has finally decreed that he buy a larger bike. His choice

was made a long time ago; a Suzuki PE400T.

Terry has his PE up "for grabs" right now, after ten months of trouble-free ownership. (He has been bitten by the Big Bike Bug). My choice for '81 will not be a Suzuki but my reasons for changing are not due to any inherent shortcomings of the PE models. I confess that I'm wary about the parts supply situation for all Japanese-made machines, and I'm equally concerned about the non-interchangeability of parts from one bike model to the next. The price of Japanese parts has now also reached the Horrific Level and no one importer or distributor has yet attempted to tame the situation.

The PE was a great fun bike and one which I wholeheartedly recommend to any rider, expert or novice. It has few major vices, doesn't fall apart and will deliver the fun times which should be the key of any good dirt bike.

Next year, I'm shopping for a Bombardier (better known as a Can-Am) 250 and am sitting here with my fingers crossed right now.

Will the parts be available? Will they cost me an arm, a leg and my first born male child? Will it be as reliable as my earlier Can-Am MX2, or even the PE?

The PE 175N will be a tough act to follow.



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