

KAWASAKI

KDX200SR



YAMAHA

DT200WR

Two sub-£1500 second-hand trailies, slug it out in the depths of Mid Wales...



£1500 buys you either one of these bikes - but which one should you go for...?

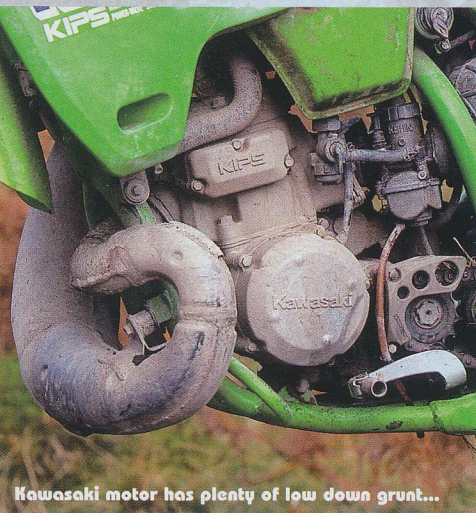
Story: Si Pauey; Pics: Mac McDiarmid



Secondhand TEST



## KAWASAKI KDX200SR



**T**rail riding is undergoing something of a renaissance right now as more and more road riders abandon the overcrowded, over-regulated tarmac for the sanctuary of a day's green laning. And it seems, virtually every one of them rings up our office for advice about buying a new bike. The conversation usually goes something like this:

'Er... is that Trail Rider Monthly? (Aaaaarrghhh! - ed)

Oh, it's just I got your number from a mate of mine (*they haven't actually bought*

*a copy of the magazine - ed*), and I was wondering if you could give me some advice...'

'Go on.....' I say reluctantly.

'Well I'm thinking of getting into trail riding and a mate of mine has got a DR800 with a big-bore conversion to 875cc he wants rid of. And I thought if I get Death or Glory Tuning to take a look at the motor I can probably get them to fit the Nitrous Oxide kit - that should give me about 100hp. What do you reckon?'

'Mmmm' I mumble (for dramatic effect), 'I still don't reckon that'll be enough power. Have you thought about going the turbo route, because you're still going to get left behind by the average trail rider?'

'Left behind?' they say in amazement. 'What do most guys ride then...?'

'Oh' I reply, 'something like an XR250, KDX or perhaps a nice little DT - but you're going to need major horsepower on the road to make up for the time you'll lose in the dirt.'

By then, the penny usually drops, but if they still haven't got the picture, I add one final little touch.

'I did hear that there was a guy with a DR800 for sale' I venture '...and all he wants is a helping hand to get out from underneath it! He's in the woods just down the road from you - at least he was last week... But he might've got out by now.'

### Size Matters

Anyone who's ever ridden off-road knows that the more powerful the bike, the more difficult they are to control when things start getting ugly.

400s and 600s are great fun, but a 125-250 is where it's at in terms of ease of use.

Here at TBM we really rate the 200cc class. In enduros the 200cc KTM, Gasser and good old KDX are a match for any of the 250s for the average Joe, and in trail riding it's much the same. But when it comes to secondhand 200 trailies, the choice is pretty limited.

Honda used to make an MTX200, and likewise Kawasaki with their KMX both of which were officially imported, but by far the best of the fifth-litre trailies are grey imports: the Yamaha DT200WR and Kawasaki KDX200SR.

And we thought it would be fun to get a couple of affordable ones together for a weekend's blast down in Wales.

### How Much?

So what is affordable? Well £1495 gets you the Yam: it's a 1991 model in a fetching shade of white and Barbie-Doll pink. For those that don't already know, the Yamaha is a relation of the WR200 enduro bike. How close a relation? Well it's like a distant cousin (or if you're Welsh, a brother-in-law), except it's fitted with autolube, indicators, road gear and a more restrictive exhaust.

For a hundred notes less, you could opt instead for the Kawasaki KDX200SR (£1395). Like the DT this bike is distantly related to its enduro cousin and has the benefit of oil-pump lubrication, indicators and a speedo, as well as a steel tank. Finished in Team Green colours, the Kwak looks similar to the regular KDX enduro bike, but it's a little bit lower, and a lot less frantic to ride.

Both bikes came from Notts Trail Bikes in Mansfield, Nottinghamshire (01623 428777), and for the purpose of this test were fitted with identical sets of new tyres.

### Gettin' Dirty

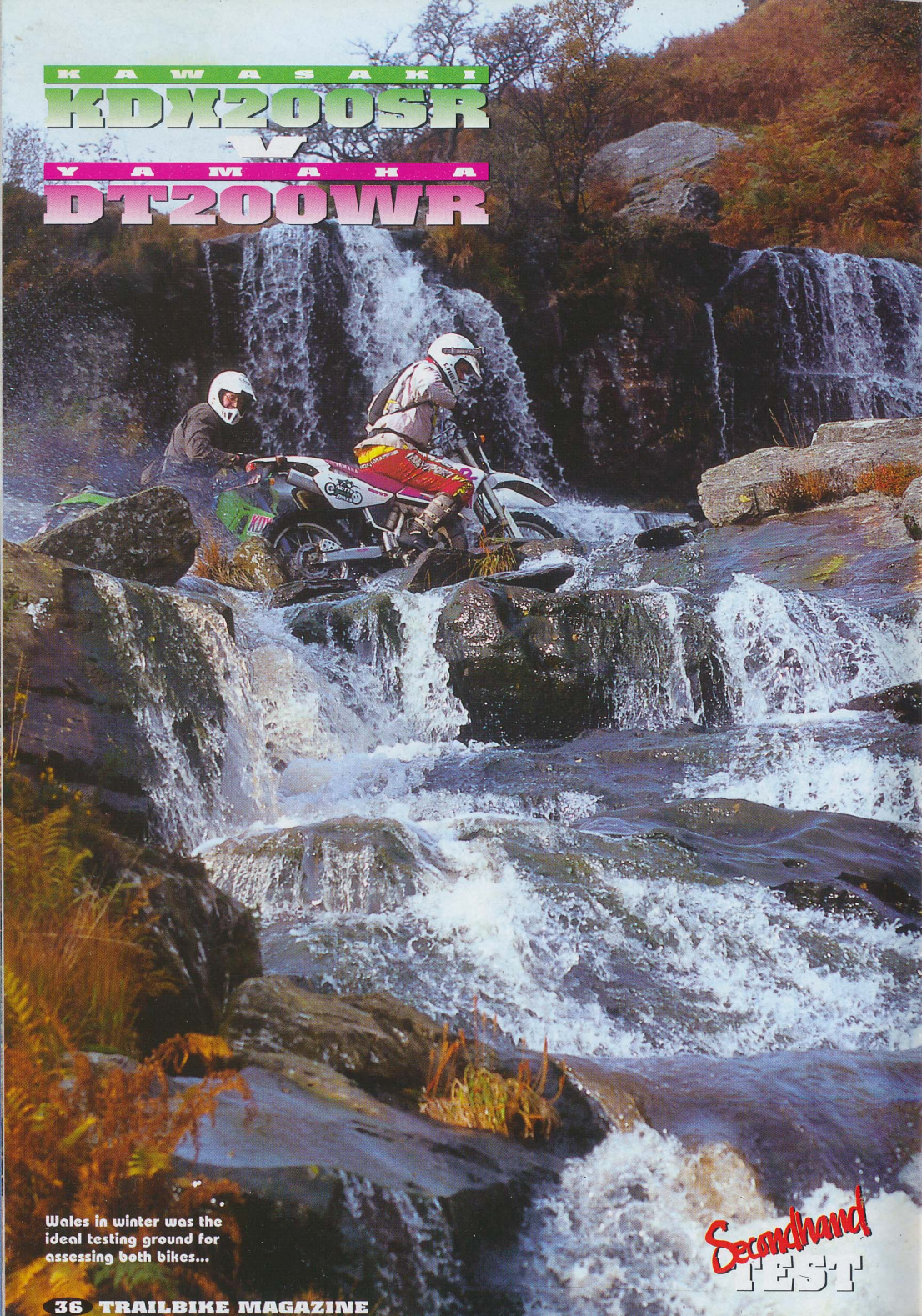
Two days trail riding in the heart of Wales with two mid-size trailies in the company of a dozen other loons riding Gas Gas 300s, Yamaha WR250, Husky WR250, WR400F, KTM 400 LC4, KTM 300s etc. How would our little trail bikes fare in

## YAMAHA DT200WR





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**KDX200SR**  
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Wales in winter was the ideal testing ground for assessing both bikes...

Secondhand  
TEST

this company? We couldn't wait to find out.

Day one took in a traditional run around Rhayader, along the famous Monk's Trod and Strata Florida - and given the weather of late, this meant some seriously deep water. I rode the DT first and before we'd gone very far I had to stop and move the handlebars forward. My first impression of the DT200WR, was that it bore more than a passing resemblance to our 'Budget Racer' DT 125 we've been testing over the last few months. The layout and chassis felt quite similar, even though the spec is actually quite different.

The little DT200 comes with upside down forks (holding a twin piston front brake caliper), while the rear is a traditional Yamaha monoshock design. At first the suspension action felt fairly competent at trail pace, but later in the day a few faster stretches did show up its limitations as the bike bounced around on the rocky trails. Don't misunderstand me, the suspension is more than capable of dealing with any trail obstacles even at speed, but it falls a little short of race bike rigidity - as you might imagine.

The front brake is somewhat strange. At first I thought it was completely useless, much like the DT125's, but as we travelled down a tarmac stretch I discovered that in fact the front brake offered plenty of stopping power, but the lever action required a lot of effort and offered no feedback at the lever. In other words if you yanked on the front brake the front wheel would stop turning, but you wouldn't know a lot about it back in the cockpit. It didn't help that the steering felt a bit vague and had a tendency to go in more of a straight line than I was instructing it to.

The Yamaha is powered by a single cylinder, crankcase reed-induction two-stroke, fitted with an electronically controlled power valve. Our bike had a fantastic little motor. Quiet and vibration free on the road, it was deceptively effective off-road. Our first section of trail took us up some tricky climbs onto the moor. For this first climb a gentle bottom end that doesn't break traction is the key and here the WR really delivered. Once on the moor however, I needed some top-end in order to stay on top of the mud and jump the odd hole, and once again the WR didn't disappoint. The DT's motor may be lacking in power compared with the enduro bikes I was riding with, but what it lacks in sheer guts, it makes up for with seamless linearity, going about its business in a quiet, smooth and effective manner. Overall I would say the motor is incredibly trail-friendly.

On top of the moor, having stopped to dig out some guy on a KTM LC4 (who turned out to be rally star John Deacon), I swapped over onto the other bike and took a turn on the KDX. Once

again I felt the need to move the handlebars forward before I went very far, and by the time we crossed to the other side of the Trod, I knew the KDX was a very different proposition to the Yam.

We've ridden the KDX-SR before and come away feeling slightly disappointed. Unlike the enduro 'R' version which is a great little bike, the SR always seems to feel a bit underwhelming - like there is a good bike trying to get out of a fairly average one. The Kawasaki engine is a single cylinder, two-stroke, reed-valve with a mechanically controlled power-valve, virtually the same as its competition relation, but in terms of performance, they're miles apart.

The SR motor has oodles of bottom end grunt and right off idle felt like a typical KDX (so far, so good); but our bike just didn't seem to have much more than that. From the mid-range onwards the motor felt flat and just wouldn't rev-out. Was this a fault with this particular bike or the model as a whole? Difficult to say. Any £1400 bike is never going to be perfect, on the other hand we've ridden virtually new KDX SRs which feel pretty much the same. Doubtless a less restrictive exhaust and some airbox and carburetion work would free up the extra ponies we know the Kwacker can produce, but as standard, it just didn't cut-it compared to the much freer-revving Yamaha.

Moreover the suspension did little to inspire confidence in the SR. The forks felt skinny, flexy and out of date. The rear shock didn't seem to have much rebound damping and the handling was pretty vague. Compared to the much 'tauter' Yamaha the KDX was proving to be a bit of a disappointment.

As we came off the end of the Monk's Trod our route took us on a section of tarmac road, where I became even more disillusioned with the 200SR. For a trailbike the thing felt dreadful on the road. It vibrated like mad, and the seating was uncomfortable. The seat tended to slope down and forwards and it was hard not to slide into a cramped and uncomfortable position. The one saving grace was that the clutch, throttle and brakes were all much lighter than on the DT.

Later on that day we entered the infamous Strata Florida - another very ancient road - said to be the final resting place of Prince Llewellyn (the last true Prince of Wales). Strata Florida is now better known as a 'check' in the Welsh Three Day Enduro, and as an excellent rocky trail dissected by a series of a dozen or more stream crossings. Back in the twelfth century the Monks from the nearby abbey must have had pretty soggy sandals - either that or global warming really has changed the climate.

As many of you will know, there can be some





incredibly deep water crossings on this track, and our little trail bikes faired extremely well in the circumstances. The KDX in particular showed no signs of succumbing to water, while several of the competition bikes went swimming and had to be turned upside down and pumped dry.

On the other hand the DT had a mild, although not deadly, aversion to water. After each deep water crossing the motor would seem to die momentarily before picking up and carrying on as if nothing had happened. It was more like an annoying bad habit, rather than a problem with the bike and I would hope that an owner could cure it - perhaps with just a new plug cap. However, I have a sneaking suspicion that it might be one of those problems that you could chase around in circles for months.

By now, however, the KDX was rapidly becoming the short straw, so it was with some glee that I pulled rank after lunch and grabbed back the DT200WR. The Yam was a pleasure to zip along the trails. On the tarmac, the strange looking full length, 'hot-pink' seat was comfortable, and the bike was smooth as silk. Off road, the DT was effective and great fun.

What's more, being a trailbike, it gives you that underdog feeling - it's easier to impress your mates when you get through a section on your trailbike, while they get stuck on their rip-snorting racers. This theory proved itself true when the little 200 Yam charged further up a monster hill than all the other bikes in our group, including an XR650, Husky 610, RMX250 and KTM 400! Beat that...

On the downside the DT200 was suffering several annoying little problems. The throttle, clutch and especially the front brake were so stiff that my forearms were really starting to get sore by the end of the day (*yeah, yeah, we've seen your spindly forearms - ed*). And (as I mentioned previously) the DT wasn't too fond of water.

For the final run of the day I swapped back onto the KDX200SR and gave Richard the favoured DT. By now the KDX seemed to have even less rebound damping on the rear end, and it quickly became apparent that the shock was blown. By the time we reached the B&B, the rear suspension system was nothing more than a spring and a swingarm and further riding on the KDX was clearly going to be impossible.

This was a sad demise to the KDX, and a sad end to a test that showed the KDX in a relatively poor light. But despite its very low mileage (just 5000km) it was nearly ten years old and probably overdue for a suspension overhaul. Meanwhile, the DT200WR was a shining example of a good luck story when buying secondhand. For less than £1500, the little Yamaha appeared to be in great shape and easily survived two days trail riding at the snotty end of the year. With a little bit of lubrication and some TLC, I'm sure this DT would give its owner long and reliable service and a whole bunch of fun to boot. But remember not every secondhand Yamaha will be as good as this one, nor every Kawasaki as poor as ours.

I guess the real lesson here is look carefully before you buy. If you're intending to purchase a secondhand bike (whether its a grey import or

not), take the time to check it over thoroughly. If you're not sure of your mechanical knowledge, take someone who is. Make sure you get a test ride on the actual bike you're intending to buy. Remember, it's your money, and you have the right to ensure that the item is fit for its intended purpose - just don't expect a sub-£1500 bike to feel like new.

Finally, consider the advantage of buying from someone who is going to back up their sale with decent service. Alistair at Notts Trail Bikes was confident enough to let us loose on two of his bikes straight out of his showroom, despite the fact they were both nearly ten years old. One was certainly better than the other, but as he rightly

conceded - he would have had to put these problems right for any of his customers, something you won't find when buying something out of the classified pages.

## Summing Up

Every DT200WR we've ever ridden has always put a huge grin on our face, whereas all of the KDX200SRs we've tried have never quite been able to match that.

Clearly the Yamaha won this particular comparison, but if our test proved anything, it's that at this sort of price range, the difference in performance can be as much about condition as specification...

## Second Opinion Richard Bott

The phone rang: 'Si here. Are you going to Wales this weekend?'

'Yes', I replied.

'Great.' He said, 'Si Pavey is bringing down a couple of test bikes - can you write a second opinion piece?'

'Sure can.' I proffered.

The phone went dead but I was very much alive. Indeed I was moist with grateful anticipation of three days in Wales thrashing someone else's bike. I scrolled through the list of exciting dirt bikes stored in my brain. How about a year 2001 Gas Gas or one of those start-on-the-button KTM thumpers?

These happy thoughts were receding rapidly on a wet Thursday night in Rhayader a few days later. It was 11.30pm, I was drunk and there was still no sign of Si P and the test bikes.

All night it chucked it down and the next morning our assembled group began dressing up in lurid clothing and warming up their collection of the latest enduro weaponry. Still not a hint of the bloody Wombat, Pavey.

Finally, just as everyone was about to leave, the 'Bat breezed in radiating unconcerned good humour and threw open the back of the TBM Transporter to reveal a large heap of pungent blankets where he'd passed the night.

Poking out of this marsupial's nest was a fairly fresh looking Yamaha and a decidedly less enticing Kawasaki.

With everyone hopping up and down waiting to go, I grabbed the green bike and set off in hot pursuit of the pack. The wet conditions promised a hard day ahead. As the group's collection of highly strung competition dirt bikes dipped in and out of their power bands, I was pleased to be humming along at a constant throttle opening on a small light-weight trailie.

And so it proved. On first acquaintance the Kawasaki was not thrilling. The paintwork had faded to a grubby green and the bike was liberally adorned with rusty fasteners, pointing to a life spent under the stars. The front forks were soft to the point of collapse, the brakes were soggy and the motor had just enough urge to pull an asthmatic wheelie. But by the end of the day, both the Kawasaki and I were still pretty fresh. In fact in typical Welsh trail riding conditions, the Kawasaki's smooth-ish low down power proved ideal - though it would never shine in an enduro (even in the trailbike class).

From being less than thrilled with the KDX early on, I finished the day concluding that if the price was right it would make a pretty good first trail bike. At this point the KDX blew its rear shock,

so I handed the wounded Kwak over to the Wombat and took control of the Yam.

Those of you with kids will know that Barbie Doll has a boyfriend, Ken, and in the unlikely event of Ken's management letting him ride a dirt bike, this is what it would look like. Slightly off-beam styling combined with lurid toy-store colours. Peeping out from under the sub-frame is probably the world's only pink rear shock: so hideous, it's actually quite funny. Topping the whole thing off, also in a revolting shade of pert pink, is a huge squishy seat that oozes right up the tank and around the filler.

Appearance apart, the Yam was in much better condition - it even had a toolkit. It was sharper to ride too and would easily buzz up to 120 clicks on the road, though it did have an irritating lack of low-down power compared to the Kwacker. This made for much revving and clutch-fanning in situations where the Kawa would just grunt through.

Like the Kawasaki, the Yam proved in no way outclassed by the other more specialist machinery we were riding with, and would make a fine trailbike with the added bonus of being capable of enduros - at a push.

Second prize to the Kawasaki then, particularly after it blew its rear shock. Pink or not, the Yamaha is my winner... **RB**