

AUSTRALIAN

TRAIL & TRACK

February 1980, \$1

Tests -

SWM's NEWEST 250

Detailed changes make it even better

CR80 MINI

Honda's great little red rocket

KAWA KLX250

Something better than an XL?

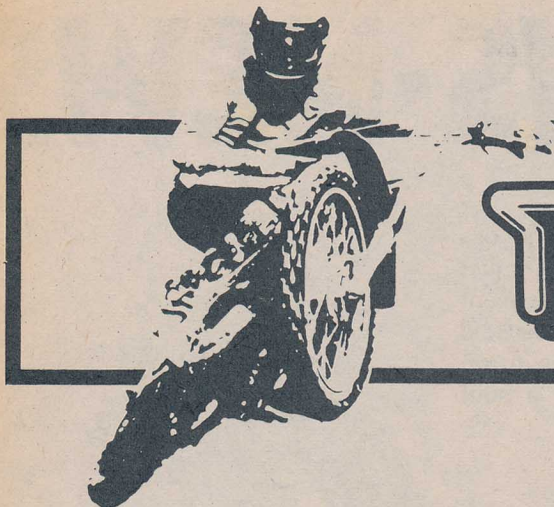
KE175D2

Just how good a street-trailbike?

RM250T

Part 2 - the Yella Terra to beat this year





TRAIL & TRACK

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Cover shot — S.W.M.250 at Mt. Slide
— photo by the usual Mamiya.

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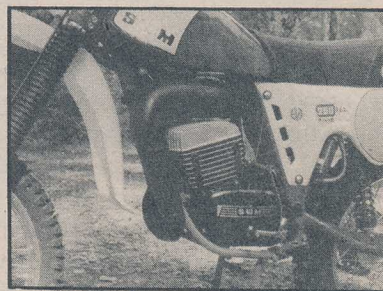
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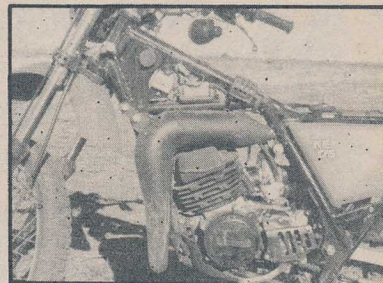
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S.W.M. 250



Kawasaki KE175.



Yamaha IT250G.



Kawasaki KLX250

KAWA KLX 250



It's here...No, it's not...yes, it is, oops, it really isn't.....and finally, with something less than a fanfare we present -

THE KAWASAKI KLX250

and you should find, if you buy one, that the wait was worth the false alarms.

Courtesy of Murray Tainton at Boronia Motorcycles (fortunately a long-time friend) putting himself out one Saturday afternoon for a few hours, we got an all-too-short impression of this new-to-Australia machine.

Going back a few years, T&T was the first to test-ride the now-famous

Honda XL250, and at the time Nasty predicted it would clean up the market in the dual-purpose 250cc category. It did. Now, shortly after Kawasaki produced their KL250, which was an excellent machine, but could have done with a bit more power. The only thing wrong with the bike to all intents and purposes was the release timing of the model, against the XL250S, so it apparently did not sell very well.

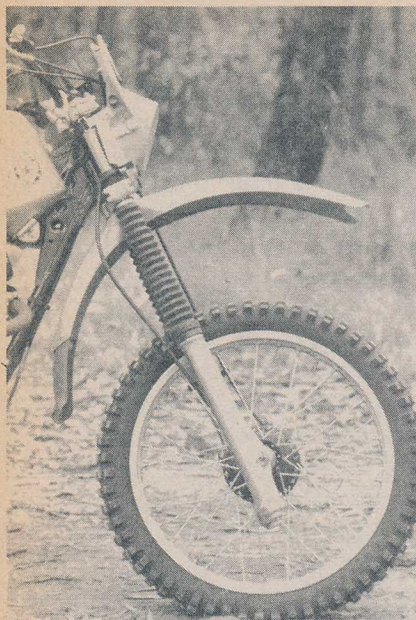
The market leader has had an almost unobstructed run for going on two years, till now. The two machines from Honda and Kawasaki - XL250S and KLX250 - have a few things in

common. Both are fourstrokes; both are very good machines; a few other points are common, but the way the two firms go about their bikes and ultimate results is totally different.

In the future we will try to set up a careful comparo between the 250 fourstrokes, the results will be very hard to pick.

Kawasaki started the KLX250 by realising the motor had to be lightened, as the frame in mind was that from the KX125A5 MXer. Motor weight was pruned to around 75lb, and the old problem of splitting the motor to change the oil filter was resolved by sectioning the cases over

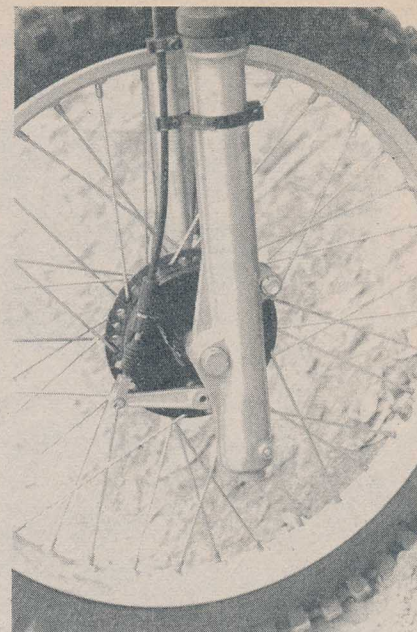




the lid and gloves, the bike sat there, idling away happily, about seven or eight hundred revs, not making any noises, just chugging quietly. Don't you just love the strokers? Being just a bit slow off the idle jet, and without means to really fix it, we used a slightly slower throttle opening to get pick-up, but the moment the motor started spinning, it was willing to spin freely very high in revs.

No tacho or speedo, as such, are fitted; there is a total mileage counter on the right of a smallish oblong odometer, and on the left is a resettable 99.9kms tripmeter. That is the total instrumentation. The usual levers, a finer alloy than usual and quite straightenable, and off/on/off kill button on the right are the only bits on the bars. Normal gearshift of one down and four up is on the left, flip-end lever, very smooth and just a bit sticky to get neutral when stopped; no flip-end on the brake lever; foot pegs well and truly high, just in the right place to suit Murray's five feet six or Nasty's six feet frames; bars to long seat to short fat-skinny 11-plus litres tank - all these things felt good.

Sitting on it, having a bit of a think before disappearing into the rocks, the suspension felt quite different from the normal. We measured the seat height at just on 37" and the



ground clearance at a neat 12" unladen, but to sit on the bike it kind of dropped in the middle. Not much, and kind of shock-absorptive, so although it looks a tall bike, it doesn't necessarily mean it needs a taller rider.

Moving off, the very first thing noticeable, even before the great suspension, was the steering. We commented on the steering on the XL250 as being very light - the KLX250 has steering like a Mick Andrews Ossa. There has been a hell of a lot of fine engineering put into this frame, because the fork angle at

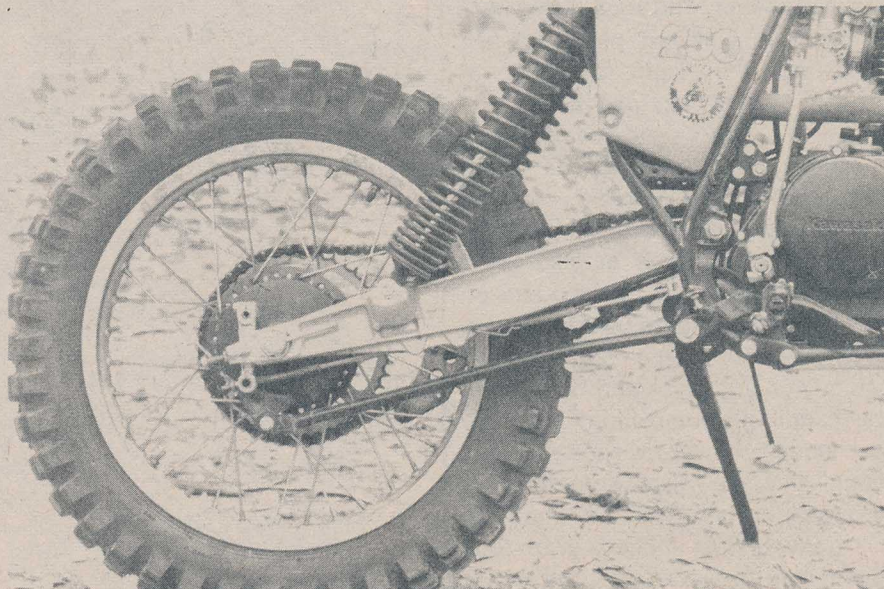
the filter. Now it can be removed easily for maintenance.

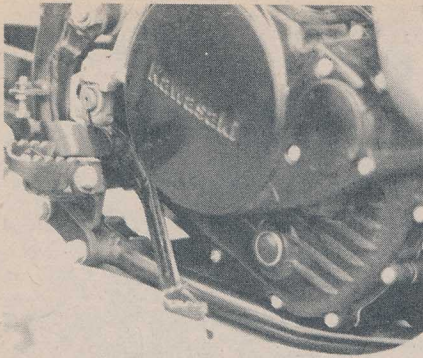
Not much else has changed on the motor - some finning has gone, with other heavy and not-required bits. Now comes the interesting bit - trying to fit a tallish fourstroke 250 into a light 125 twostroke frame. By sectioning the backbone, and dropping the bottom of the cradle an inch, it slotted in, a very neat bit of work. Adaptor brackets from the original mount holes keep the motor located, and though they look just over one-eighth thick the five brackets keep the motor solid and virtually free of vibrations.

Unfortunately our impressions were in a very short time, but we did get the bike long enough to go over and up (and as it was so good, we went back down and up again) a two kilometre section of our private close-to-home test loop.

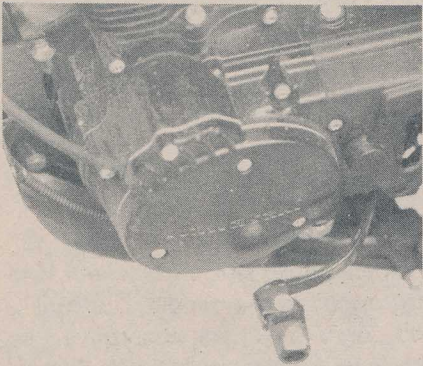
Rocks from golf-ball to basket-ball size are loosely tossed on this part, on loose gravel with one really nasty off-camber part, and unless the front suspension keeps the bike going in the right place it can be a very unpleasant ride. After seeing Murray toss the bike round over some choppy tyre-grooves during the photography, it looked like the bike really handled well, and some trial and error got the back tyre pressure OK at 10lb, front was fourteen. Slipping on

Superb casting of solid alloy swing arm, giant welded-in gusset.





Vulnerable slightly, sharp bashplate edges.



the head is 28 degrees and steep by normal trailbike standards, yet the bike is superbly light without being the slightest bit proppy. Soft long 10" travel on the best set-up rear yet takes much of the load off the front, and 10" Kayaba air/oil leading-axle fronts damp the rough - combined, it is superb. There is a word which fits the handling of the Kawasaki KLX250 - best on a 250cc trailbike ever.

Like everything though, you get sweet and sour. The sour in this case is the motor. It ran perfectly, and excepting the slight off-song at off-idle, was willing and clean. But either the Seiko was suddenly not keeping perfect time, or the motor was badly under-gearred, or the torque peak was too low in the rev range to be effective or all three - whatever, the comments to date on the motor of underpowered are true. Sadly, because even an amateur rider can buy one of these and because of the handling composition, ride very fast indeed. In a few short rides, it would become plain something is wrong with the power. This machine will go very fast indeed, with total confidence to the rider, if the motor

would take the speed high enough.

Apparently some mods to the gearing have been done in one case we know of - a simple up-one-tooth on the front, counter-shaft, sprocket. This will have the effect of spacing out the gears a little, and making the motor work a bit more, and likely get the speed high enough but keep the revs/torque in balance as at present.

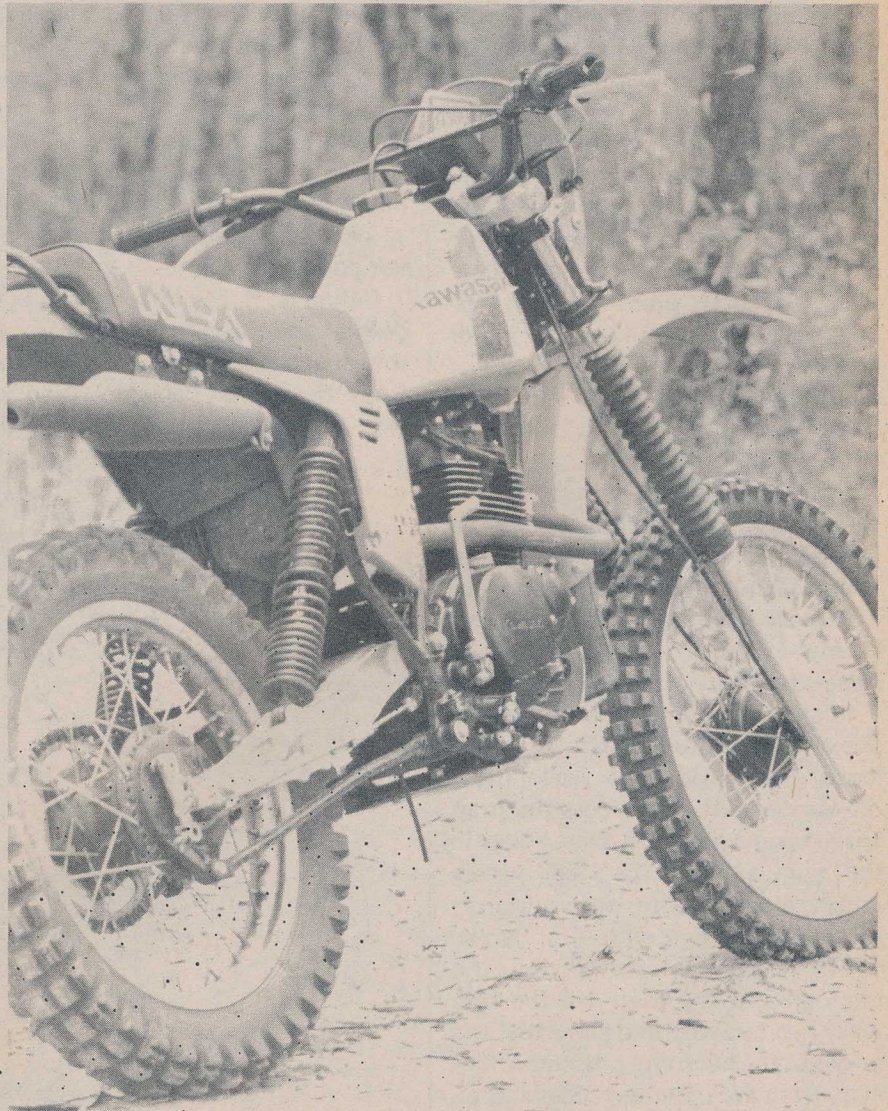
Powroll produce a kit guaranteed to get this motor flying - if this was fitted, with the superb suspension, no other 250 trailbike around would even get near it.

Heading into the rocks, this power spread became apparent, and it needed to be dropped one gear to keep the motor going, sounding right. Strangely, it went not much faster,

just sounded like it was working more easily in the higher revs. However, if it was left alone in fourth (it *is* low geared) it pulled at the one rev level, not fast, but neither did it slow down much. Frustrating, in fact, it could go very much harder. Up the top is a bad right turn, steep and narrow onto another cross-track, and the point of many drops. Not this time, Arthur, just up and round, keeping the power on - for two reasons - one, it needed it, and two, it would take it. If that's not frustrating, what is?

Across the off-angle drains/holes and humps the bike never moved an inch TILL we stood up. The tallish machine is susceptible to body movement, and can easily be moved across the track or around a rock by

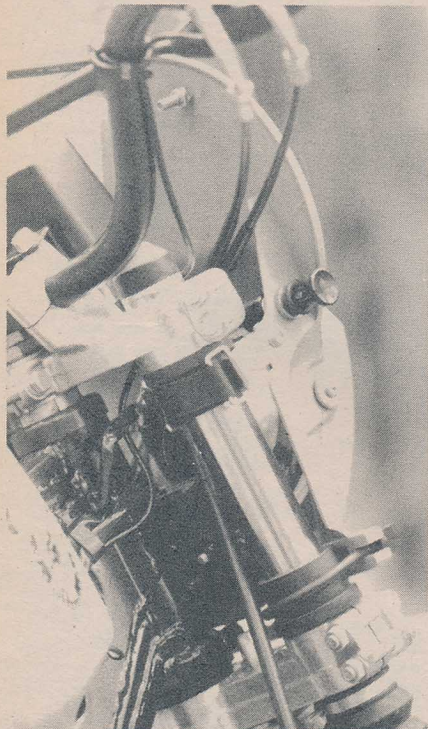
Ground clearance with plenty to spare. Note leading axle forks.





Murray Tainton,
KLX250 Kawasaki.

body shift. There are times when it pays to stand up, and the bike becomes even more responsive then, but for almost all riding, this is a bike which can be ridden sitting. There is no fatigue transmitted to the rider from hard or heavy handling - tremendous.



Poor design and placement, the switch will get broken.

Kayaba provide the back suspension, 5-position with a C-collet, and remote reservoirs in behind both sidecovers. Hitting a few smaller loose rocks, there was no trace of sideways movement, and at this point we noticed a click or two from the front. It is air/oil, and on checking later we found 11psi - Murray maintains 20psi is needed, and probably something like 10-weight BelRay in the forks. No matter, even as was, it did a faultless job, even to the point of deliberately riding over rocks when they could have been avoided still being quite safe. Up this section, which is a medium up-hill, we seemed to be going very fast, but the combination of under-gearing making engine noise, and the superb suspension might have been an illusion. Nothing happened. So, because it went well up the rocks, we turned and went down them again,

getting a chance to see how it dodged and stopped. Despite the small and narrow brakes fitted, it stops without any drama, in fact it stopped equal to it's handling.

The trip down over loose any-size rocks was dead easy, so on the return trip back up it got quite a handful and sadly the same thing occurred - it went up the hill at it's own speed again. Oddly, it would take a higher gear without protest if it was in the torque range, yet go little faster in a gear lower with heavy revving. We would very much like to ride one of these with a kit producing more power.....

Down the gravel road/track across the side of the mountain, with a big hump of bluemetall in the centre and washaways for tyre tracks, switching from side to side was nothing more than body lean. Here another thing became known - there is some vibration from the footpegs, but hardly any from the bars, and on the bitumen it was even more noticeable. Some of it may have been due to the very slack way the chain is run, some was certainly due to the rev rate, possibly some was from the non-standard Metzellers fitted - it was noticeable, but in the dirt was not even there.....

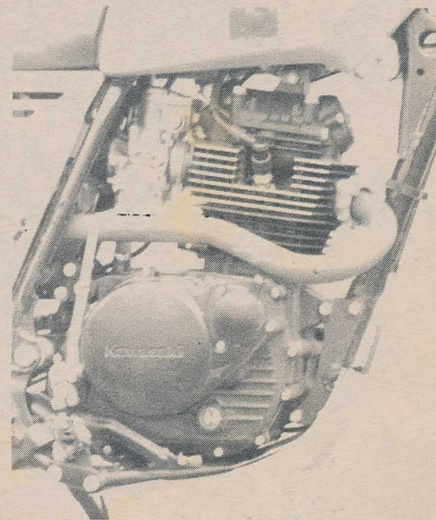
Back in the garage after a too-short impression, we checked the bike over mechanically, and there are many excellent engineering points on it - we found only three points to quibble over. One was the composition of the mudguards, these are fairly thick in section and not very pliable in comparison with some. The front guard had a slice missing, and cracking was continuing in the back of the break. This bike is the first we have seen as a stock item with a deep almost full-cover front guard, and fitted with a mudflap which should not tear off. Ten out of ten, Mr. Kawasaki for this one. The very long suspension never quite touched the guard, but to get a more even fit round the tyre, the two spacers at the back of the four bolts holding the guard on could be removed safely.

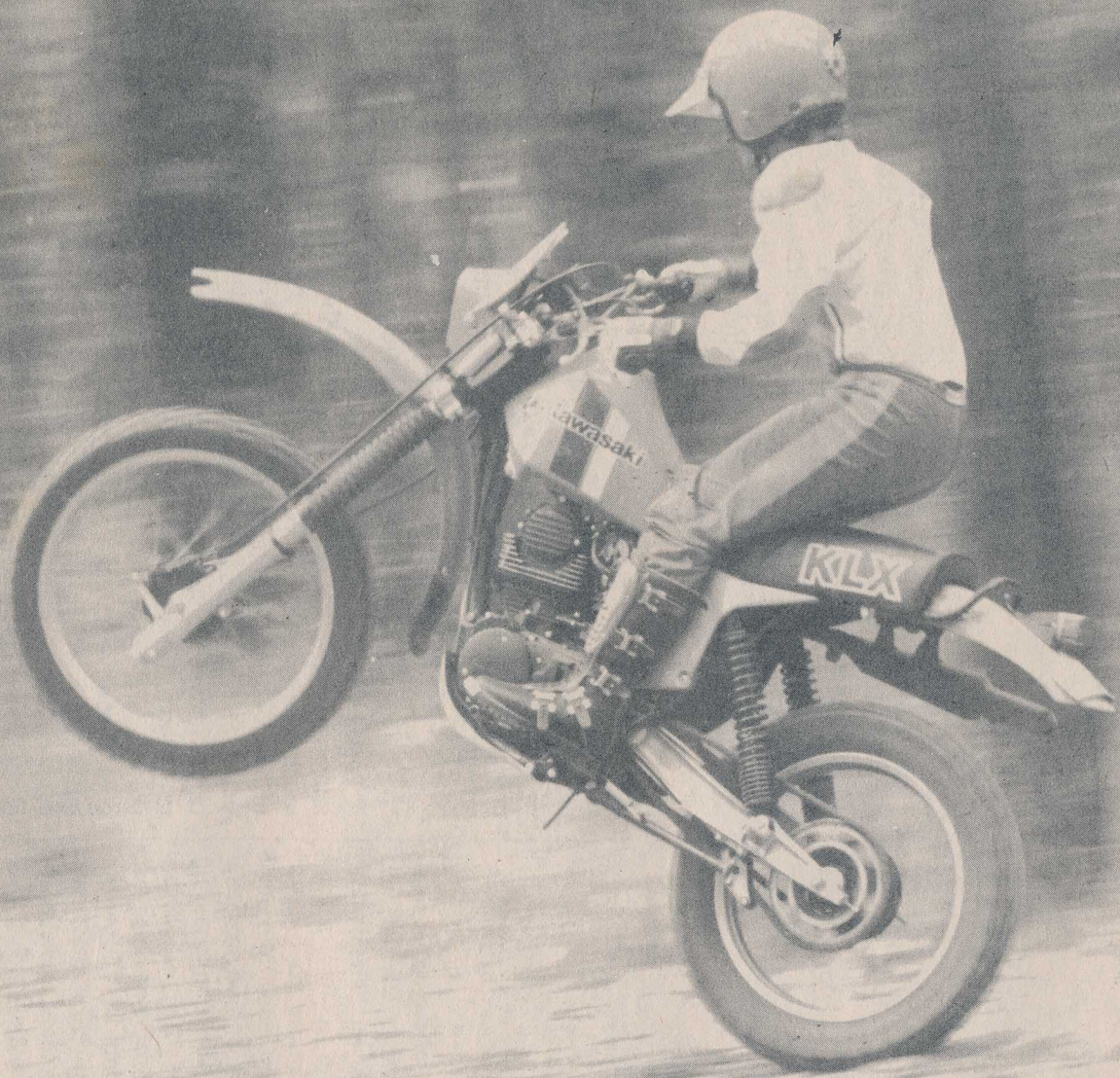
The light kit for this bike is an accessory in the U.S., here it is stock, and the light switch is a simple on/off push/pull in the side of the rubberbanded-on headlight-number-plate assembly. It could be broken where it is if the rider went a little close to a tree - relocate it. It sticks out the right just a tad too much. And the third worry? In the age of bulk wheel travel and problems with chain tensioning, this bike has a lot of the first, and none of the second.

All the chain does is run round a Teflon slipper above and below the swing-arm pivot, and on top of a roller below and slightly behind the pivot point. At the rear there is a fixed metal guard to keep it heading in the right direction for the sprocket, and we could not get used to the slapping of the chain. It touched in a few places, leaving shiny metal, and although it didn't even look like coming off, we were on edge about it. Murray cheerfully said he runs chains slack like this one on his PE and has never had any chain hassles, but none the less, it just didn't seem right. However, there is no question at all that it works perfectly.

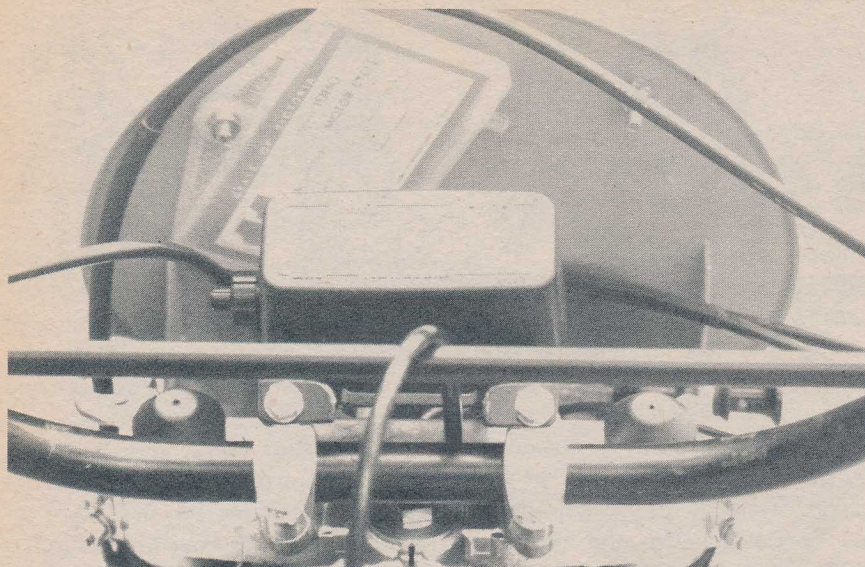
Getting to a bit of mechanical detail and operating ease etc., naturally like any good fourstroke (what bias?) it starts right up, idles as expected, runs as expected so there isn't really anything else about the motor you need to know. It's the now-normal 70x64 bore and stroke, two valve,

The only poor bit, why didn't Kawa provide more power?





Murray Tainton, Kawasaki KLX250



No speedo, but mileage recording anyway . . .

8.9:1 compression and produces a claimed 21.3bhp at 8000rpm. Max. torque is supposed to be 15.5 ft.lbs. at 6500, and it runs a 32mm Mikuni. If you are looking for the choke lever as usual, it's missing. Instead, it has the pull-up idea like many little Mikuni carbys, a short shaft with a knob. What was wrong with the old one, Mr. Kawasaki?

There isn't a fuel filter, the tap is either up for off or down for on, won't get broken tucked in the way it is below the tank either. Access to the very-well-designed airbox is by two bolts at the rear of the seat, and another question Mr. Kawasaki - why aren't the nuts welded captive to the seat frame, making it easy to use one spanner instead of two?

The airbox is rubber, formed to accept a press-on lid of rubber with two holes for air inlet, with a wire reo across the centre, and a duckbill drain at the bottom. Crankcase ventilation is into the front bottom edge of the box, and it would be totally waterproof. We won't say anything about the chain tensioning, except to say that we didn't see what we expected... And in that area is a beautifully-made cast solid tapered I-beam-section swingarm, with one of the biggest gussets ahead of the tyre in any swing-arm. Total rigidity, with bulk lightness is the result, a top example of engineering and the result shows. Pity about the chain

tensioner..... Naturally, there is no provision for pillion on the MX-based frame, although the seat would be long enough if necessary, and it's surely comfortable. Lights are live, and here is a problem we just thought of - the power line exits from the back of the rotor-case, to disappear high beneath the tank over the backbone to the well-covered coil and bits, but the light wires, two of 'em, come out the front of the rotor, and could easily be snagged unless the owner uses a tie to keep them in against the single down-tube. Not good engineering, but a definite compromise on the change from MX to trail. Silastic is definitely needed here.

Headlight is a globe-type for a change, so you don't get stuck any more if the voltage goes high and ruins the sealed beam; it is 6V, 35W, and the taillight is a double-filament stop/tail, stop is not connected. A side point here - there was not a compliance plate for the ADR's fitted to this bike, but we are told reliably they are due for the next shipment. Naturally again, no blinkers or other electrically operated devices here, just bare basics of bike.

An alloy bashplate gives good protection on the gearshift side, but not enough for the ignition side of the cases, and a poor point which needs hacksawing - the formed corners of the bashplate are both square and sharp where they have been cut. The

plate is full-length, and the sump-plug is easy to get at, with no other holes in the plate.

A few more little bits - things like DID alloy rims are expected and there; spokes are tapered steel; two rear and one front rimlocks on 3.00x21 and 4.00x18 non-stock Metzlers (Bridgestone are the factory tyres); all suspension by Kayaba, and nothing need be added about that; high fat-skinny tank, plastic, screw-cap with breather and a nice big filler-hole; plastic sidecovers which don't flap about; quiet noise from the high pipe with silencer and spark arrestor; two bolts hold the pipe solid on the frame at the rear.

Getting the aircleaner element out is easy, just pull the long split-pin when you lift off the top of the airbox; thinking in the small bits which make life easier, like an idle adjuster operable with gloves on, T-bar to pull the rear axle, CDI blackbox up on the headstem behind the numberplate-headlight, plastic chaincover over the countershaft, and the return behind the seat in the frame doubling as a lifting handle.

It's all there - hardly any bad points in the design, 234lbs all up claimed weight, and although it is a different bike to ride and handle than it's present opposition, is at least it's equal. Thinking over prices and work involved, it is usually easier to modify a motor for performance than it is to alter a frame to make it handle.

This Kawasaki KLX250 handles impeccably, stops equally as well, and does all the other mechanical movements on par. It goes very well, but gives us the impression it wants to go even better. For a rider thinking of moving up to the 250 class, and one who accepts the power as vastly better than the average 125, this bike is a definite. For the hot-shot who needs a top-handling bike, a few mods to the motor would make this bike a clear winner. Mr. Powroll, get some bits out to Australia quickly, we need them to make a 90-plus bike into a 100 per cent bike.....

Test bike courtesy Boronia Motorcycles, Dorset Rd., Boronia.