



AUGUST, 1976

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Two wheels

THE MAGAZINE OF MOTOR CYCLING

**STAY
WARM & DRY**

**CYCLE
SUITS**

**YOUR BIG
GUIDE**

SCOOP TEST!

HONDA'S MR250 ENDURO

PLUS YAMAHA IT400 ...

**THE NEW-BREED JAPANESE TRAILSTERS
OUT TO BLAST THE EUROPEANS!**

PHOTOGRAPH BY ...



TWO WHEELS

THE MAGAZINE OF MOTOR CYCLING

Editor: Mac Douglas

Tech Editor: Mike McCarthy

OUR COVER: That's right — a scoop test of Honda's enduro 250 two-stroke — and it's the best Japanese off-road bike we've ridden! Match that up with our workout of Yamaha's not-so-secret IT400C (against our own Yamaha enduro project) and inside it's a damn good coverage of the Japanese bikes settin' up to challenge in European territory! You'll be surprised how good they are! Gone cold on riding? Check out page 37. Our special accessories feature this issue covers all the oversuits we could find in Australia! On page 46 there's the good oil on motorcycling's pollution-free four-stroke future, but part of tomorrow might be automatic. See page 16.



Freelance contributions are welcomed by this magazine and submissions should be addressed to The Editor, TWO WHEELS, 142 Clarence Street, Sydney, 2000. Submissions must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope for their return. The editor accepts no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts, photographs or transparencies.

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A QUICK LOOK AT THE 'CROSSER YOU'VE
HEARD LEAST ABOUT LATELY...

KAWASAKI KX250

BEING ORDINARY AIN'T ALL BAD!



We dug the looks, but preferred the '75 bright green paint job to the latest drab offering — fitted in much better with the "green meanie" theme. New front brake is common to MX range; we remember it as a good thing on the KS125!



Some bikes churn a rider's soul, others destroy his stomach and some just do their job well. Into that last category falls Kawasaki's 'crosser 250, a well thought-out middle-of-the-road racer that's been sadly under-rated far too often!

by Ray Ryan

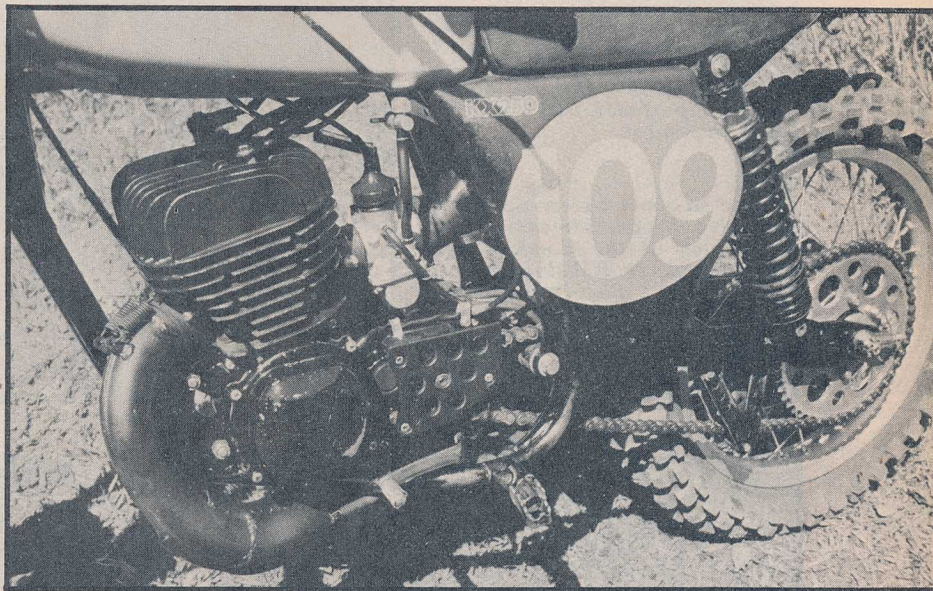
FOR A LONG TIME now, people have been asking us things like... "Why not test a Kawasaki motocrosser?"

Why not indeed? The last Kawasaki racer we rode was a KX450, two model changes in the dim and distant past. During that time, there have been mountains of innovations in motocrosser design, all tidily heaped under the ambiguous title of "development".

Suzuki has produced its dynamite RM250 and 370 models (see last issue for full tests), there's a new gas-suspended Honda Elsinore 250 here, and Yamaha has unveiled its latest YZM 250.

Kawasaki has been at the motocross game longer than most riders realise — ever since the introduction of the old F11M. And since that time it's been damn hard to get hold of one of the green racers for test. This time we stepped aboard a green and white '75 model and it was far from new when we picked it up from Kawasaki (WA) headquarters in Perth. It was in fact the same bike the high flyin' Graham Smith ("Smythe") had ridden only two weeks before in the West Australian Grass Track (sort of like short circuit with shrubbery) heats.

The season's campaigning had



produced a fair share of wear and cosmetic depreciation.

The fork seals leaked like a crushed toothpaste tube, both grips were torn, the handlebars were tweaked slightly, one foot peg was bent and the bike was generally showing its age through peeling chrome and areas of alloy oxidation. The carburetion was

Engine has brace at top and fins are full of rubber blocks — in Kawasaki's case an apparently successful method of keeping down noise without snuffing horsepower. Low pipe is surprisingly good on clearance but spews gunge at exhaust port. Shocks are inverted gas Kayabas but Kawasaki's travel is still shorter than the best offered in the class.

KAWASAKI KX250

far from perfect, particularly in the upper rev ranges, and we had problems with the motor "doing a CR125" and loading up on the old NGK plug that was fitted.

Eventually we fitted a new Champion and sorted out the Mikuni and then someone said "Take it for a month boys".

But the big hang-up came when we eventually returned it. In our assessment the KX is the most underrated 250 yet. It's cheaper than a Suzuki but dearer than a silver/red tanked Honda CR250, and in performance it falls exactly halfway between the two, offering better power than the RM and a stock suspension/handling set-up which'll leave the Elsinore shaking its undamped backside in bewilderment.

Frame design is still basically that of last year's KX, with a set of longer forks, more swing-arm bracing and new, long-travel rear suspension. Frame design is typical of the breed, using a single downtube and made of heavy-duty, thin-walled alloy steel tubing pioneered by Honda on the first Elsinore models. With some well thought out hardware the KX hits the track at a genuine 97 kg (213 lb).

After riding various models and

Seat height is really good and so is relationship with tank — easy to grip and move about on, and there's no discomfort. Overall control relationship of seat, bars and pegs is better than most.

Below:

Despite an obvious clean-up, there's still some disappointments. Overall detail such as the Honda-inspired alloy brake lever, RM-style footpegs and early Suzi-type clutch mechanism was so good we almost expected some trick new axle adjustment technique. No dice — still the system that looks better-suited to a pushbike!

tricked out supercrossers over the last two years we've come to prefer a machine in the 95-97 kg range. It offers a balance between the "big bike feel" and the instant response needed for a seriously competitive 250. The KX falls right on line in that department, but unfortunately the front end still doesn't make it, particularly considering the performance of the new Suzuki.

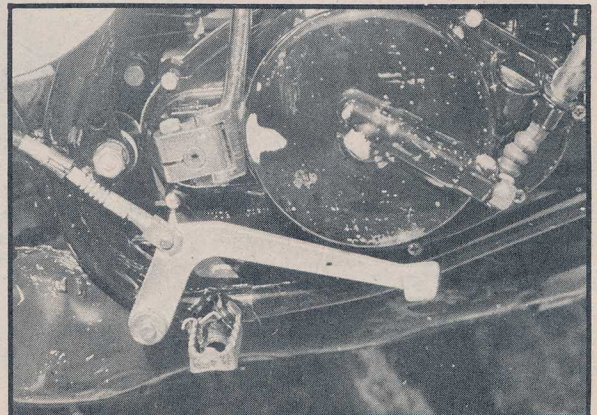
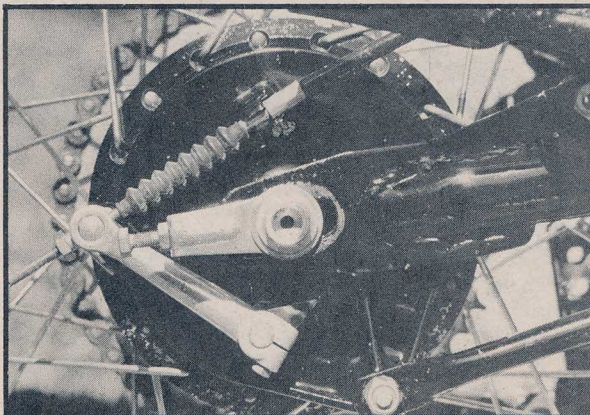
Travel is fine at around 180 mm, but both damping and springing need a complete rethink to keep that front end workable and down when the power comes on the pipe over a rough section. Overstiff compression damping and strong springing are sufficient to tire even the fittest and toughest riders when the Kawasaki hits the anchors for a tight, rutted turn. The lousy fork action would kick the wheel away under brakes and stammer it into a sudden wash-out on corners.

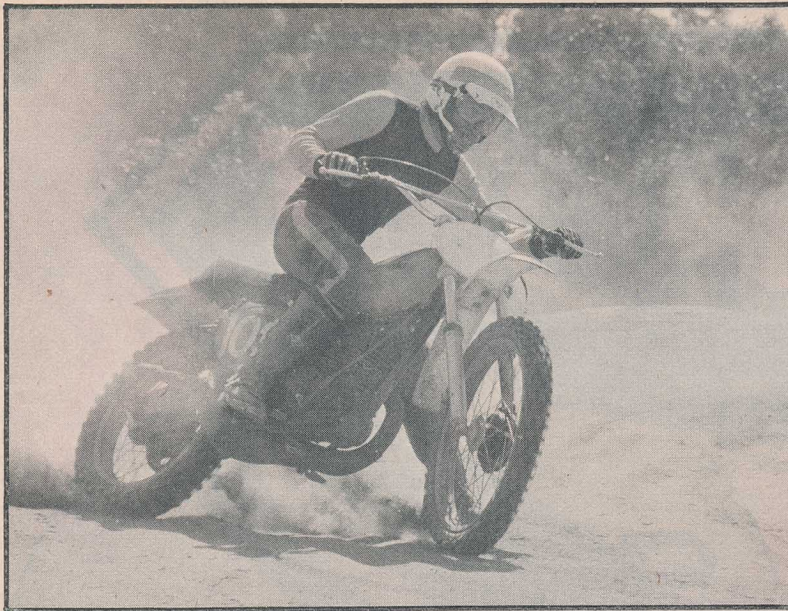
Number One products make a kit for this latest KX model, and a check with the NSW distributors, Competition Developments, showed that the kit is available Australia-wide. If you're into catalog numbers, the part is kit No. 7410, and when fitted together

with heavy-duty fork seals, it all adds up to a front with more than 177 mm of usable travel, and first-rate damping and durability.

Like the Yamaha range of motocrossers, all Kawasakis share a common front brake hub. It's a lightweight, conical design based on the successful KS125 trail bike, but with a magnesium backing plate. Early Kawasaki 'crossers had problems in this area and there was a follow-up modification kit from the factory. There's still far too much slop in the backing plate/fork leg retaining lug on the new bike, and the whole hub jars violently whenever the front brake is dialed on super strong. Sealing is reasonable — we had no waterproofing hassles — but a quick post-ride inspection turned up a neat pile of dust which wouldn't have helped braking efficiency!

The rear brake also uses a magnesium hub, operating through a nylon-lined cable that offers excellent feel. Your foot won't slip from the rear brake lever under any riding conditions and the brakes will stop you on a pin if you're game enough to punch them like the experts do.





Our well-used test bike made a fair feature of ratty front forks — hairy before you got used to them and the resulting full-lock sliders through corners. Bike ran far better on Yokohama tyres than the standard Dunlops.

The only fly in the ointment is the dud front fork action. Under brakes and full acceleration over rough ground, the forward-mounted Kyaba gas/oil rear shocks kept everyone smilin', even the guy in the saddle, and you don't notice travel is a full 50 mm less than the 215 mm claimed by Suzuki on its new RM 250/370 racers.

A year ago we would have raved about 165 mm rear wheel travel, but in '76 when we're mentally stacking the KX up against Maicos, Suzukis and CZs we're sure that a fully cantilevered setup (RM fashion) would offer even better results. Ray Buck, a Kawasaki dealer in Bunbury, WA, has been fiddling with this method for a year

or so now on his own team bikes with favorable results. Ray also jiggles the front end in the way we suggested, and has even gone to gas conversions for the KX front suspension. It all works, but we're not sure the average hotshoe really needs more than what's offering with the stock KX rear set-up.

Wear in the swingarm bushings on our test bike took away the fine edge of control through the rough stuff, but on an overall rating we'd place the Kawasaki along with both the CR250MI (tracking and steering stability) and the Yamaha MX250B monoshocker (through the rutted corners and over the ripples). The KX's handling is ideal for the abilities of at least 90 percent of the motocross community and all the play-racing population. Just don't expect an RM for the Kawasaki's price-tag!

Engine modifications, including a change in cylinder liner material, have made this year's KX powerplant a lighter, more efficient

(Continued on page 82)

SPECIFICATIONS

MAKE KAWASAKI
MODEL KX250
PRICE \$1205
WARRANTY Manufacturing faults only
ENGINE: Air-cooled, single-cylinder, two-stroke. Alloy head and barrel with alumiferic cylinder bore. Piston port induction. Lubrication with petrol premix.
 Bore x stroke 70 x 64.9 mm
 Capacity 249 cm³
 Claimed power 25 kW (34 hp) at 8000 rpm
 Claimed torque 31.4 Nm (23.2 lb-ft) at 7500 rpm
 Lubrication Petrol mix, 20:1
 Carburetion 1 Mikuni VM-34
 Air filter Oiled poly foam in plastic still-air box
 Ignition Electronic CDI
 Starting system Primary kickstart, right hand side
TRANSMISSION: Geared primary drive through wet, multi-plate clutch to five speed, constant mesh gearbox. Left side foot change, one down and four up, with neutral between first and second. Final drive through No. 529 roller chain.
RATIOS (Internal:1):
 1st 2.33
 2nd 1.73
 3rd 1.41
 4th 1.16
 5th 1
 Primary reduction 2.68
 Final reduction 3.69
FRAME: Welded steel, double cradle, single downtube.
SUSPENSION:
 Front: Coil sprung, oil dampened telescopic forks. Approx 165 mm travel. Castor 59 degrees. Trail 142.5 mm.

Rear: Swinging arm with forward mounted, inverted Kayaba gas/oil shocks. Five way variable spring preload. Rear wheel travel 160 mm.

WHEELS, TYRES and BRAKES:

Front: DID lipless alloy rim with single rim lock. 3 x 21 Dunlop Sports knobby. Single leading shoe, conical hub drum brake with magnesium backing plate.

Rear: DID lipless alloy rim, with dual rimlocks. 4.60 x 18 Dunlop Sports Senior knobby. Cable operated, single leading shoe drum brake with magnesium backing plate.

ELECTRICS: Electronic CDI pointless ignition system.

CAPACITIES:

Fuel tank 9 litres
 Transmission oil 1 litre

DIMENSIONS:

Claimed dry weight 96 kg (212 lb)
 Wheelbase 1417 mm (55.8 in.)
 Overall length 2108 mm (83 in.)
 Overall width 940 mm (37 in.)
 Overall height 1165 mm (46 in.)
 Ground clearance 225 mm (9 in.)

HOW DO THE FINER POINTS SCORE? (Out of 10)

Performance 8
 Braking 8
 Suspension 6
 Quality of finish 8
 Ease of maintenance 10
 Rider comfort 6
 Waterproofing 9
 Reliability 8
TEST BIKE SUPPLIED BY: Kawasaki (WA), 522 Murray Street, Perth 6000.

KAWASAKI KX 250

Continued from page 35

piece of metal than the original, high revver. A larger Mikuni carb and a repositioned, underslung expansion chamber complement the new porting to give the KX a smoother powerflow and more torque than previously. Original KX250s revved and reacted very similarly to the first CR250 Hondas, but without the Honda's habit of falling flat at the top end. The KX just kept on driving — and it still does in '76, but with a more genteel, usable power curve.

You can punch the Kawasaki throttle with a white-knuckled fist as you explode out of a berm and it'll simply dig in and fly. There's little lost power through wheelspin as the motor climbs on to the pipe and we found it to be sufficiently tractable for a quick trail ride through the shrubbery during our second photographic session with the bike. In mud or loose sand it performs with predictable ease, and all the traditional Japanese virtues of CDI sparking, Mikuni carburetion and even in-gear, primary kick starting.

All that needs to be done with the Kawasaki to gain it an X in the "Good Powerplant" category is a clean-up around the exhaust port pipe junction. As it is right now,

the blowby results in oily, black gunge that dribbles all over those pretty white-plastic guards and soon coats the barrel finning in a combination of grease and track grime. Vibration is reduced and the entire unit given a little extra rigidity through a Bultaco-type top engine brace which secures the frame tubes to the cylinder head at two points. Maintenance is easy; swapping jets is cool on the big Mikuni carb, as is fiddling with the clutch adjustment on the Suzuki-styled external lever. Plastic sidecover/number plates slip free to give almost walk-through access to the oiled foam air cleaner without any need to remove seats, wheels, engine or frame. The whole bike is unashamedly simple and stands out like a sore thumb in a world where complexity is often masqueraded as sophistication.

Tank construction is all steel with a neat, screw-on gas cap that doesn't leak or seize itself solid and there's lots of careful thought and well executed engineering in the KX detailing department. The latest low pipe is integrally silenced to an acceptable level for both competition or playracing and mounts to the frame with a combination of springs and rubber washers. It's neatly tucked-in, a rider's boot won't catch the chamber when he's pumping some fire into the KX

motor from the right side kickstart lever.

Footpegs are both serrated and spring-loaded with improved mounting brackets. Early KX pegs were prone to total failure and even these new items are a little soft, as one peg was already badly deformed when we collected the test bike. Plastic is used for both guards, sideplates, airbox, number plate and seat base. Control levers are malleable alloy with moulded neoprene rubber dust covers to keep the grit and mud *outside* the bike's cables. One of the wire retaining loops for the front brake cable had snapped loose on our test bike and needed to be taped into place with duct tape. They seem a little flimsy, so keep an eye on this department.

Wheels are DID lipless alloys with rimlocks both front and rear mounting Dunlop Sports Senior knobbies with a massive 4.60 rear tread that completely envelops the tyre carcass. Our test bike ran a 3.00 Yokohama Super Digger up front in preference to the Dunlop and the tyre was an infinitely better choice on the loose sandy tracks so common in WA.

We had no problems with loose spokes during our test period and notice Kawasaki has included small rubber grommets in the front hub. It's an added safety feature to

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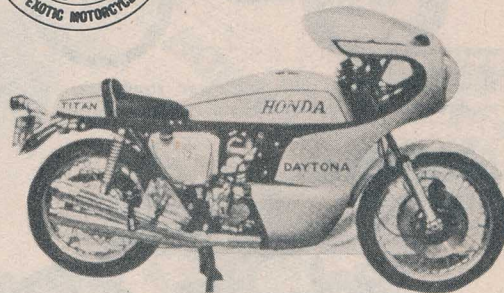
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retain any spokes that may break in action, thereby preventing them from destroying a tube. After two seasons of racing our wheels were still perfectly round with no twists, bends, warps, gronks or flat spots; the new DIDs are far stronger than the old lipped alloy rims which they replace and they make such things as British Dunlop steels look like deck fittings from the Ark.

Waterproofing is faultless. Kawasaki has used the idea of the rubber sleeve over the Mikuni carb, similar to the one on the old DT-MX series Yamahas. Yamaha has since dropped the idea (a bumper fellas!). A kill button is fitted in the usual left-hand position and needs to be taped together for survival from attacks of motocross vibratis.

We liked the seat. It's far more comfortable than any previous Kawasaki attempt at comfort and better than any other Japanese 250 on the market. The seat/tank junction is neat and unobtrusive as the slim tank simply flows on with the same narrow shaping as the seat itself. It's a small point — but one that you'll appreciate after your first 10 lap race.

We rode the KX for more than a month and regard the bike as something of a bargain. It can easily be brought to a level of handling and competitiveness that will surpass the abilities of most of us yet still retain its basic virtues of "down home" simplicity and ultra easy maintenance.

It's not the type of bike which motivates a rider to great levels of ecstasy as he raves about its virtues, and on the same hand it won't keep him awake at night, shaking his head and dreading his next ride.

It's better than merely mediocre and for many riders it might turn out to be the girl next door who grows up to be a beauty queen while you're away.

If only Kawasaki could finally sort out its handlebars and grips, all else might be forgiven. Soft bars and hard grips? Doesn't sound right to us . . . *

VIBRATIONS Continued from page 10

rear tyres, three front tyres, three chains and two sets of disc pads, which isn't bad considering the way I ride (flat out) and the places the bike has been. It still looks new when I polish it!

I think my Suzuki, near standard, has better performance and looks than the new Honda SS. I have done high 12s and nearly 175 km/h over the standing quarter. My best top speed was over 195 km/h checked out with a BMW R90S. The Suzuki was pulling redline in top with 16-43 tooth sprockets on final drive. I found the best carb setting was 26 mm float, middle notch on the needle and NGK B7ES plugs.

I found the switches easy to operate and when I got used to the gearbox I could change without a clunk. You complained about the rear springs on the Honda collapsing, well my Suzuki's are still good and I've had twice the load and on rougher roads, including four crossings of the Nullarbor.

I fitted a QI headlight which is good; there is no need to fit fancy driving lights.

All pillion passengers, even on a run from Melbourne to Perth, agree that the Suzuki is very comfy and the footpeg/seat relationship is good. There is no vibration because of the excellent rubber mounted engine.

The Suzuki handles city traffic easily because of its low speed handling. I also found doughnuts and power slides (in dirt) were easy because of the low down power of the motor.

Anyway for my money I have the best touring bike on the market in Australia. More people should think about getting a Super Spook before laying out \$3000-plus on inferior tourers such as BMWs and GL1000s.

—A. R. (ROCKY) MORRISON, Morwell, Vic.

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