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# JUMPING THE GUN

SUZUKI GS425 EN



Opening up Suzuki's GS400 to 423cc gives it the edge over the rest of the 400cc machines. But does 25cc really make all that difference. Swinging through suburbia, *John Nutting* finds out. Photography by *Philip Sayer*.



The 400 cc class is at the crossroads of road going motorcycling. Many would regard a four-hundred as being all the bike you'd need for going anywhere you want. After all, they'll all do 100 mph, can pull two up comfortably at the legal limit without gasping and still run with reasonable economy.

On the other hand you wouldn't find many seasoned enthusiasts who'd give a thought for riding a 400. Take a look in the parking lot on club night. Are there many who ride four-hundreds without the lingering desire for something bigger. For starters, a 400 can't hold a decent cruising speed and still have something in hand. And a passenger just kills the performance. What's more, they're just too rinky dink for REAL motorcycling.

Perhaps it's because 400cc bikes are at the crossroads that the competition is so fierce in the class. Yamaha, Honda, Kawasaki and Suzuki offer twin cylinder models that are all similar in specification and are basically oversized 250 cc machines; all are overhead cam six-speeders too. Only the Yamaha is any different in that it doesn't have a balancing mechanism in the engine, not that it makes much difference, it gets along just fine without.

Then there are the two-stroke sports bikes offered by Yamaha and Kawasaki.

It's against this background that Suzuki introduced the GS425EN last September at the Earls Court Show. Like the GS400 that it supercedes, it's a double overhead camshaft parallel twin. And ostensibly, by overboring the smaller model the move is to provide extra poke from what was a dull performer for its sophisticated specification.

In fact, the move up from 398cc is more subtle than that. Manufacturers are hard enough pressed to find new ways of marching ahead of their opposition. But one of the simplest ways is to pull the bike out of the normal bracket it's pigeonholed in.

Kawasaki did it with the 650 four and so did Yamaha when they upped their RD350 to 400cc. Now Suzuki are stepping out of the fold and creating a new class.

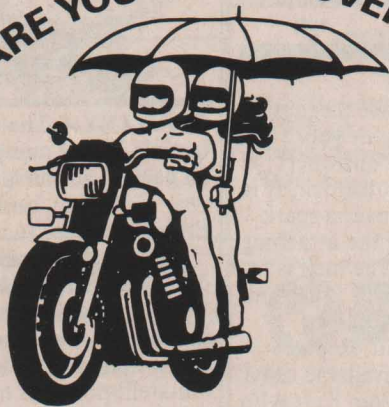
But if Suzuki have given their smallest four-stroke a new lease of life on the showroom floor, they've managed it with minimal mechanical modification. The capacity is upped to 423cc by opening the bores to 67mm diameter from 65mm, which was the same size as the GS750 four, on which the GS425 is closely based.



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Retained is the double-overhead-camshaft cylinder head and valve sizes and camshaft timing are unchanged from the GS400C. This particular model had been perked up by the use of higher lift, shorter overlap cams and leaner main jetting, plus a coupler tube in the two exhaust pipes, all of which are carried over to the GS425 EN.

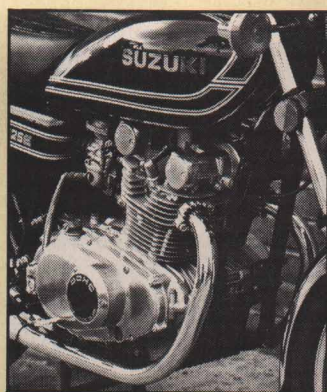
Casting an eye over the rest of the bike you'd be hard pressed to find many other changes to what is an already well appointed, and very under-rated motorcycle. Between the instruments there's the same gear indicator found on the bigger Suzuki four-strokes which instead of the LED indicators has separate numbers lighting up. The mirrors are more easily adjustable and closer examination reveals that the hand switchgear is plastic along with the throttle control adjusters.

Most obvious change though, and which gives the bike its E suffix, are the five five-spoke cast alloy wheels. These, along with the stylish black with red lining finish produce a smart yet sobre appearance.

Despite having sporty twin overhead cams, the GS425EN is still a general purpose







mount, and Suzuki have wisely desisted from injecting extra power at the expense of flexibility. Whether this will give character to what is still an imageless machine remains to be seen. Last year I rode a GS400C from London to Northumberland and back in a weekend and the only lasting impression of the bike was of rowing the thing along at an indicated 85mph. It felt unburstable and utterly smooth, but at the same time frustrating.

The GS425EN is much the same. True it has more performance but not really enough to make it a cut above, say, the XS400 Yamaha or the CB400 Honda twins.

What it does have however, is a much more pleasant running engine. This is due in large to the method of counterbalancing, which consists of a shaft, gear driven from the crank in the front of the cases. The crank is a 180-deg type with the pistons running like a two-stroke twin and the balance shaft opposes the normal couple created by the crank. The engine fires unevenly, like Yamaha's twin, but it has a distinctive burbling exhaust note and in fact runs remarkably in a vibration free fashion. Yet it has to be noted that the Yamaha twin, without balancing, is almost as smooth.

Coupled by spur gears, the power is delivered through a crisp-shifting six-speed gearbox. Overall gearing is identical to the GS400C, giving just over 100 mph in top gear at the tachometer red line of 9,000 rpm. The old bike would be hard pushed to reach this speed without the rider resorting to chin-on-tank antics but the GS425EN has more in hand, though not much. Maximum power is increased to 40 bhp at 8,500 rpm, 3½ bhp more and at 500 rpm lower in the rev range

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while torque is increased by a similar amount.

Even two up, the 425 would pull just over an indicated 90 mph in top and with a solo rider about 100 mph would be the best you'd get. However the GS400 was more noted for its low down power and the 425 is better in this respect.

It'll pull hard through the gears from 3,000 rpm and there's no real need to rev the engine hard. In fact the lack of any decent transmission shock-absorption puts a 2,000 rpm bottom limit as the off-beat power pulses chatter the rear chain at these revs but could otherwise comfortably pull from lower.

Despite the extra power the engine needs to be revved hard when cruising at high



The new mirror mounts work well, but bars feel awkward. Gear indicator display is easier to read.

speeds. Beyond 7,000 the urge seems to tail off and the use of the gearbox is really necessary. An advantage of the extra bulge in the torque curve is that the fuel consumption is improved. We got almost 54 mpg on three-star fuel which on the three gallon tank gives a range of over 160 miles.

The GS425EN is fairly normal in its size and weight, having a wheelbase of 54¾ inches and a dry weight of 375lbs. In handling there is very little to criticise; the steering is first class whether carving through dense traffic or winging down country lanes. The frame is similar to the bigger Suzukis with a well-braced loop that makes up for the softness of the suspension.

The strange thing is that although the ride comfort feels good over the average road surface, the suspension is generally harsh and unforgiving. Potholes and sharp dips are transmitted undiminished. It appears too that while the damping is below par for the heavy spring rate used, it doesn't help the smoothness of the ride on rough going.

Despite this the overall

feel of the bike is good, even though the seat has been improved.

Would that I could say the same for the riding position. Suzuki are still fitting the same wide and straight handlebar that made such a pig's ear of the earlier bikes, and still does for the fours. If it were narrower like on MZs it would be okay, but being 27½ inches wide it forces the wrists to an awkward angle. The American, higher handlebar would be a far better choice for this bike as everything else works just fine.

Starting is electric and we experienced no trouble with it at all, though you couldn't leave the choke on while you put your gloves on in the morning or the engine would

stall. The fuel tap is automatic, being operated by intake vacuum.

In normal use the bike needs hardly any attention. The cam chain is automatically tensioned, though I'd like to see a cover over the spring that takes up the slack; it looks too easy to fiddle with and could wreck the engine if tampered with. Oil level is shown on a sight glass on the side of the cases while ignition is sensibly still by contact breakers and coils for easy adjustment and utter reliability for the average rider.

Poor though is the rear chain, which couldn't withstand the attacks of road dirt and salt, and wasn't the endless sealed type as indicated in the amusing handbook.

The handbook reveals another drawback of the GS 425EN, and that's rear wheel removal. To get it out, the whole left side exhaust system has to be taken off. For an up-to-date bike this is absurd when all that was necessary was to lift up the silencers slightly to clear the wheel spindle.

Neither is the front disc brake up to scratch in the

wet though to be fair it worked well enough otherwise, as did the rear drum in all conditions. I would also like to see a better headlamp fitted; the 35-watt unit only emitted a feeble glow compared to some of the qh units now being used elsewhere.

Though it's got everything going for it, the GS425EN at £999 could still do with a bit more macho in its image. Taking the bores to 69mm like the GS850's would give 449cc and a substantial boost in power through the range. As it is, Suzuki have taken the cautious path. Will it be enough?

#### SUZUKI GS425EN

Price:	£999
Engine:	Dohc 180-deg balanced twin
Capacity:	423cc
Bore & Stroke:	67x60mm
Lubrication:	Wet sump
Oil capacity:	3.7 pints
Comp ratio:	9 to 1
Ignition:	Contact breakers and coils
Carburetion:	Two 34mm CV Mikunis
Max Power:	40bhp at 8,500rpm
Max torque:	25.7lb-ft at 7,000rpm
Primary drive:	Spur gears
Clutch:	Wet multiplate
Gearbox:	Six speed
Mph/1000rpm:	11.2 in top
Final drive:	Daido 50UB roller chain
Electrics:	12v 10ah battery 3-phase alternator 35/35w headlamp
Fuel capacity:	3.08 gallons inc 7pt res.
Tyres:	Dunlop Gold Seal F7 3.00S18 (f) K95 3.50S18 (r)
Brakes:	11 in disc (f) 7in drum (r)

#### DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase:	54¾in
Seat height:	31½in
Grnd crnce:	6in
Handlebar width:	27½in
Fork rake/trail:	62deg/3.7in
Weight:	375lb dry

#### EQUIPMENT

Trafficators:	Yes
Electric start:	Yes
Trip odometer:	Yes
Locked steering:	Yes
Locked fuel cap:	Yes
Locked seat:	Yes
Headlamp flasher:	Yes
Mirrors:	Yes
Others:	Gear indicator

#### PERFORMANCE

Top speed:	100mph
St. ¼ mile time:	15.2secs
0-60mph time:	7 secs
Speedo error @ 60mph:	n/a
Fuel Consumption:	53.8mpg
Range:	167 miles
Importer:	Heron-Suzuki GB Ltd, 87 Beddington Lane, Croydon, Surrey.
Manufacturer:	Suzuki Motor Co Ltd, Hamamatsu, Japan





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