

125 MX SHOOTOUT!

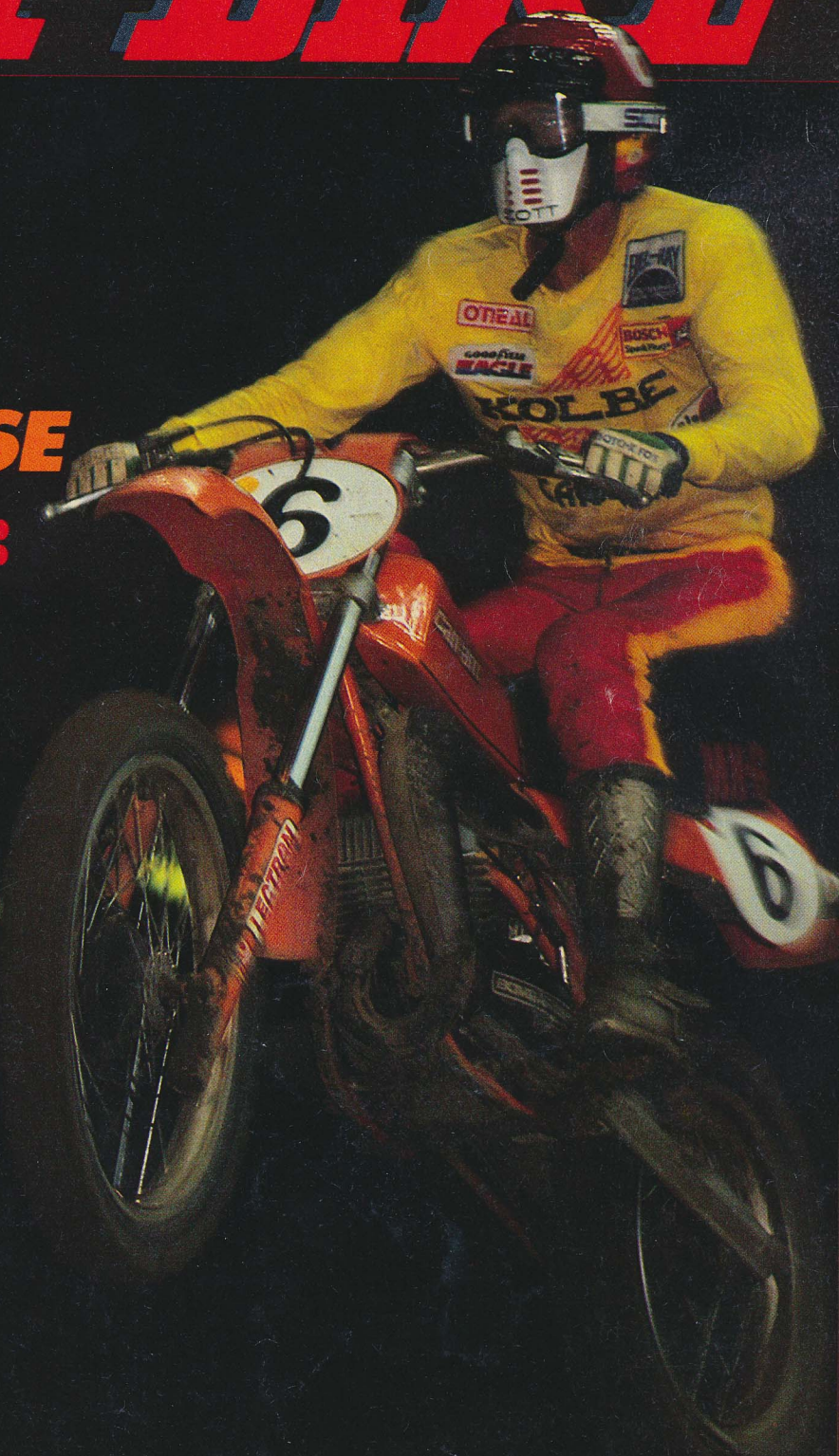
DIRT BIKE

**RACING:
MICHIGAN
STADIUM &
PENNA.
GOLF COURSE**

**YAMAHA IT175G:
SPLIT
PERSONALITY**

**SUZUKI DR400:
THE 370
GROWS UP!**

**ENDURO TOOLS
UPDATE**





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ON THE COVER:—Jammin' Jimmy Weinert made his debut on a Can-Am at the New Orleans 'dome event. Technical problems kept him out of the Pontiac race—see story inside. Dick Miller photo.

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AUGUST 1980

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A year. Has it been that long? My oh my, time sure do fly. And things sure change. Yup. In the August 1979 issue of DB, we did a 125 MX shootout. If you recall, the winner of that particular confrontation was the Suzuki RM125.

Surprisingly close to the Suzy, was the Kawasaki KX racer. Only a grim gearbox and an odd layout kept it from nudging out the RM. Third and fourth were close to each other, but worlds apart from first and second. We gave the marginal nod to the YZ, not because it did anything great, but because the Honda worked so poorly.

That was the picture in '79.

This year, the picture not only gets changed, but even gets hung on a different wall.

Before we get into the actual comparisons of each bike in each category, a word on how things are done is in order. We divided all the different areas of the bikes' characteristics up and assigned points. The winner in each department got 10 points, and the rest of the bikes got whatever we thought they deserved, in relation to the winner. If two or more bikes were judged equal in an area, then we gave them all the maximum 10 points. For example, in the '79 shootout, the Kawasaki and the Yamaha both got

10.0 for ease of maintenance, while the Honda and Suzuki got 9.0s.

More than a few readers took the time to write us and comment on our scoring system. Some of them reasoned that we shouldn't have given an equal amount of importance to something like ease of maintenance, compared to usable horsepower. One reader stated: "I don't care if it takes me six hours to clean a filter, if the bike will holeshot the field. After all, these are racers . . . first and foremost."

Very valid point.

So, we all sat around the well-lit and comfortably ventilated DIRT BIKE offices and decided just what was important and what should be placed well down the list. The things that everyone agreed on were the following:

1. Power. How much and how usable?
2. Handling. Both in the corners and on the bumps.
3. Suspension.
4. Shifting.
5. Braking.
6. Ease of riding.
7. Weight.
8. Durability. Stayin' alive, as it were.
9. Comfort and layout of controls.
10. Effectiveness, stone stock.

We also talked to a whole lot of 125 racers over the year, and almost to a man, they agreed with us. While everyone agreed that price, parts availability, ease of maintenance and attention to detailing were important, to a degree, they insisted that handling, power, etc., were the prime things to consider when purchasing a racer. All of the other stuff was secondary.

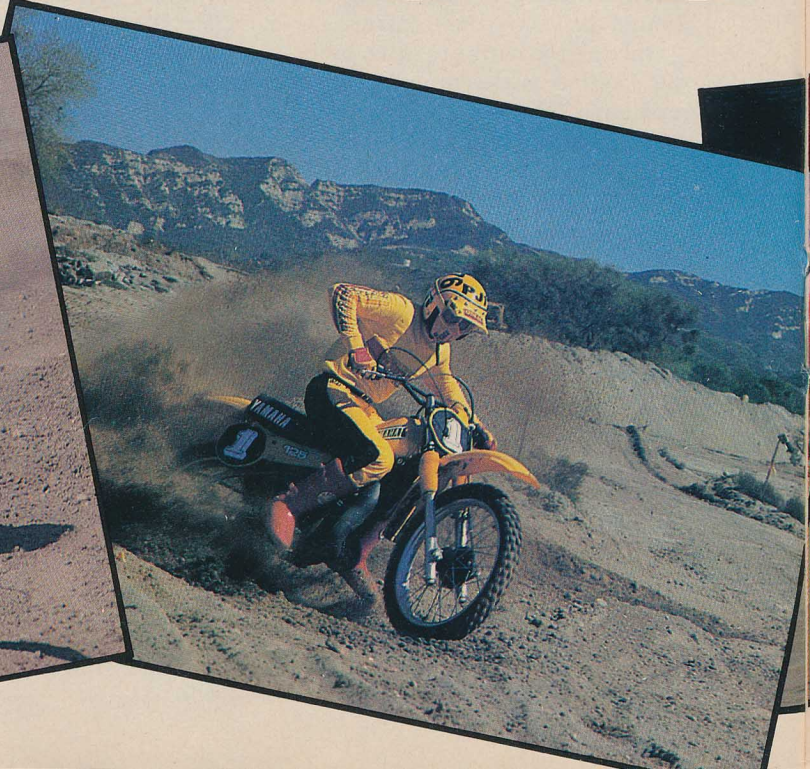
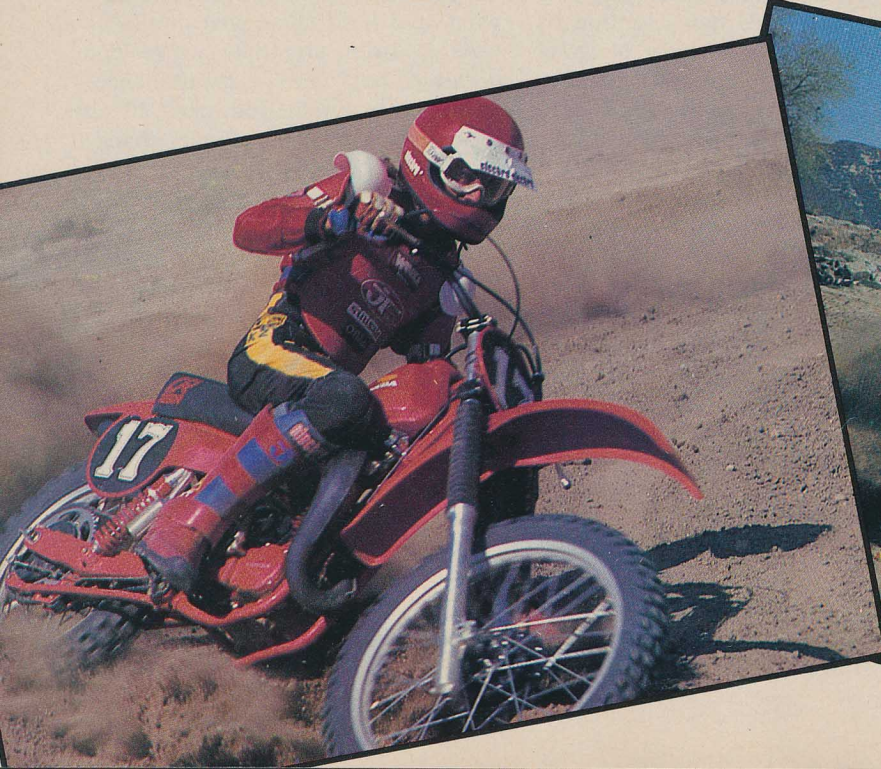
We tossed out a few teasers. What if the bike was fast, handled and ran like a dream, but parts were hard to get, detailing was crummy, the bike was expensive, working on it was a bear and so forth? Would they still consider buying the machine?

At this point, there was usually some thoughtful head-scratching and rolling of eyes. "Well, that would depend on *how much* you mean by expensive. I mean, there is a limit, you know."

Aha! There we had it. When it came to the bottom line, all of that "little stuff" added up and had a certain amount of importance, after all. Not as much as the big stuff, but enough to affect a decision.

So, with this in mind, we juggled our categories and points systems slightly. Much more weight is now being given to the bikes in the "performance" categories, like power, handling, and

125 SHOOT



so on. Points will still be given for things like attention to details, but only half of the points.

In other words, the winner in the serious sections gets 10.0 points for coming out on top. For the less-important categories, it's 5.0 for the winner and less for the field.

As with the Great Shootout of '79, we'll add up all of the points when the smoke clears and give you the winners and the losers. Each and every category will be examined and we'll tell you why the machines got the ratings that they did.

One last thing: We've had these bikes for a long time and they've all been ridden a lot. Some tampering and modifications have been made to improve the machines, as well as the normal tire swapping we go through on most test bikes. If you have one of these machines and are not experiencing what we comment on, it is likely that you may not have the time on the bike that we do. For example, if we say shocks on a particular bike might feel great for a few races, then start to deteriorate badly with time, you can bet on it. Please bear all of this in mind, and we start The Great 125 Shootout of 1980!

Horsepower

We put this first, because it's the question that everyone always asks of racing 125s. The clear winner in the area is the Honda Elsinore. Simply stated, it put out more horsepower than the other bikes in its class. In a drag race under almost any conditions you might run into (or across), the Honda usually emerged as the winner. Even when it lost due to slow reactions from the rider, it was still right in the hunt. A truly impressive motor, especially when one considers that last year's bike was such a toad.

The Yamaha and the Suzuki were evenly matched in the total power output department, so they got the same score. Way down on the list with a very weak rating was the Kawasaki. The bottom line was this: The KX turned out to not only be the slowest bike of the group, but it was also markedly slower than last year's engine.

Usable Power

This is a very interesting category to us. Too often, people freak out at peak horsepower numbers and ignore just *how* the power is delivered. Again, the Honda is the winner. It had more beans at mid-range and upper rpm than the other bikes.

The Yamaha had a big blast of power at higher revs, but almost nothing at the very bottom and an unimpressive mid-range. Our test Suzuki seemed to have a sensible all-around type of power, but the Honda just happened to have more. At the bottom of the heap resides the Kawasaki. Even though it had good low-end power and a smooth mid-range, everything took too long to happen. Without the rider staying totally at a screaming condition, the KX would fall on its face between gears on anything but hard-packed, level ground. In sand, or on uphill, it simply got crucified.

One side note: We installed Boyesen reeds in each of the bikes and they all responded with a broader spread of power and much more flexibility. We continue to be amazed with the impressive power gains these simple reeds produce. The YZ responded especially well to the reeds, gaining a very impressive amount of mid-range. The least gain experienced with the reeds was on the RM, which has a smallish case reed, rather than the more conventional barrel reeds of the other bikes.

Forks, Travel

Disregarding quality of operation for

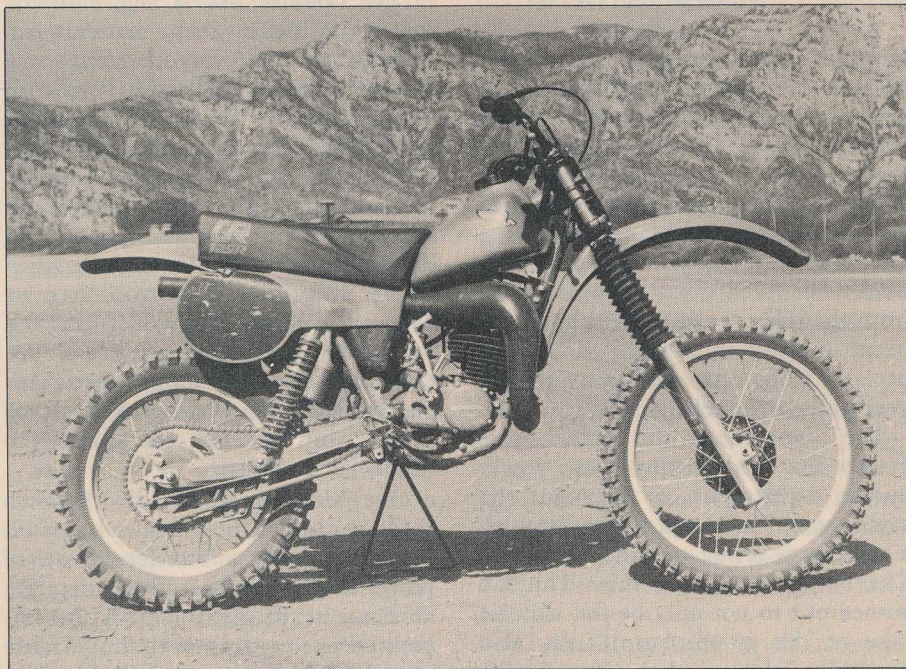
SHOOTOUT!

**HONDA vs.
KAWASAKI vs.
SUZUKI vs.
YAMAHA**

The Battle of The Bullets



SHOOTOUT!



Revamped Honda for 1980 showed lots of needed changes. Last year, it was at the bottom of the stack. Good motor and improved frame changed all that.

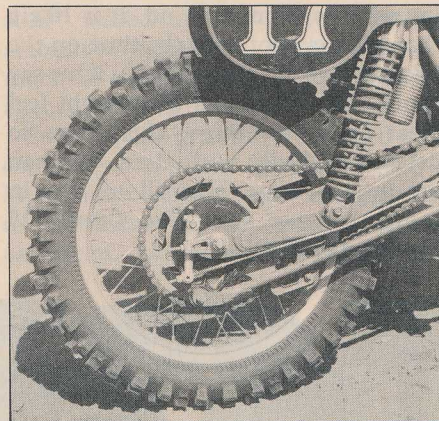


Honda was not the lightest bike, but felt sensitive and agile in the air. Motor was the best of the bunch.

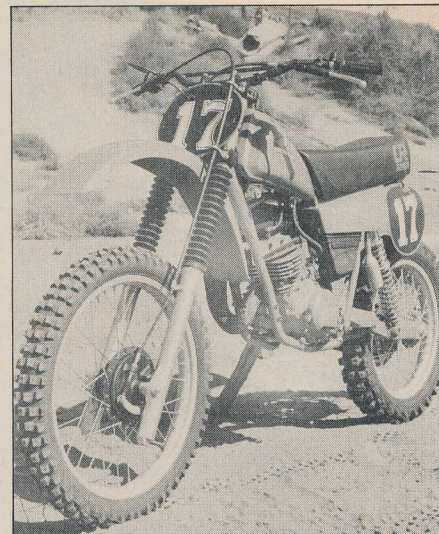
the moment, we merely consider the total available travel at the forks. The reasoning is clear. Modern forks can be adjusted almost infinitely by changing oil viscosity, level, type, air pressure and so forth. Therefore, the travel is an important factor. Honda and Yamaha both get the maximum 10.0 for having 11.8 inches of total travel. Following closely on their heels is the RM, with 11.2 inches, with the Kawasaki trailing at 11.0 inches even.

Forks, Quality of Operation

To most riders, this is much more important than the amount of travel. Surprisingly, the Kawasaki came out on top, even though it had the least available travel. No doubt, much of this good feel comes from the superior rear end of the Kawasaki. It's common



Beefy swingarm was very heavy, but still showed too much flex. Springs sack out early on the Showa shocks. Plan on running out of preload after a few riding sessions.



Forks were decent. Some harshness at the rear was transferred to the front, but with good shocks installed, the forks worked OK for most riders.

"The HONDA will wear the title of the Hole Shot King."

knowledge among savvy riders that the action of the rear end affects the feel of the front end. In other words, if your shocks are crummy, you'll get much of the harshness transferred to the forks.

Whatever, the KX felt just right up front and we never even bothered to change the oil for the duration of the test. It was that good. Right on the heels of the KX, we had the supple forks of the YZ coming in second. The Suzuki had a touch of harshness on the compression stroke that even changing oils never got rid of.

Strangely, all of the top three rated forks are made by Kayaba to the specifications of the manufacturers, yet all three felt different. We're planning an article in the near future to show just exactly what those differences are. Taking up the last spot was the Honda. And, while the Elsinore forks were vastly superior to the efforts of the '79 suspenders, they were not quite as supple as those found on the Kawasaki, Yamaha and Suzuki, in that order.

Tuning the KYB forks and even altering the damping rates is fairly easy, but with the Showa forks found on the Honda, it's much more difficult. As of this writing, Showa has not produced a set of suspenders as impressive in operation as the Kayaba Company. Hmmm. Have we inadvertently hurled a gauntlet?

Rear Suspension, Travel

Yamaha has the numbers here. Eleven-point-four inches, to be exact. Everybody else has 11 even. If you're just looking at numbers, you've got your winner. However . . .

Rear Suspension, Quality of Operation

This is the one that counts. Numbers don't mean all that much when your spine gets shortened by a square-edged bump, or your helmet gets G-ed into the bridge of your nose.

Here, we have one very clear winner, and, as with the forks, numbers don't tell the story. The Kawasaki has the best rear end, hands-down. There's not even room for argument. It earned the 10.0 because it had the ability to take the worst bumps without even much thought or planning on the part of the rider. Just aim that sucker from point A to point B, twist the gas and hang on . . . lightly. The KX ate the bumps for breakfast, nibbled on them for

lunch and got a severe case of the munchies for dinner.

A solid second place was comfortably held by the Yamaha. The mono not only did a superb job, it had an ease of adjustability that the Kawasaki lacked. However, we gave the nod to the KX for sheer excellence. It's a lot easier to live with the mono, in terms of service, accessibility and adjustment.

Our Suzuki had a good pair of shocks. Good enough, in fact, to be a stunner one year ago. Now, with the rush of technology that we've just witnessed, their excellence merely gets them a solid third. The KYB remote reservoir shocks on the RM are not only fully adjustable, but they have a provision for changing oil, much like the Luft kits of last year. Progress.

Honda, as with the forks, stays with Showa shocks at the rear. These are the best Showa shocks we've seen to date, but fall short of the Suzuki by a fair margin. When we tested our CR125 in the January issue of DB, we mentioned that we ran out of preload rather quickly, and suggested that accessory springs might be needed.

Well, as we got more and more time on the CR, we found the shocks needing more and more spring. After using up all of the preload, we added nearly one-half-inch of spacer material to increase (or maintain) the spring tension.

With the increased preload, the shocks worked fairly well on most surfaces, except whoopdies. There, the rear end of the Honda would just pogo right up and off to one side or the other. This was most disconcerting. Normal bumps—OK. Deep whoopers—forget it. We eventually ended up replacing the stock Showa shocks with a set of Works Performance Gassers. The improvement was huge.

Acceleration, Basic Drag Race

Peak horsepower and a sensible spread of ponies don't always add up to a holeshot. Getting that power to the ground is as important as producing it. Here, the Honda proved a consistent winner, with the Kawasaki invariably bringing up the rear.

We found almost no difference between the Suzuki and the Yamaha in a drag race, with the winner always being the one getting moving first and not missing a gear. The Honda will wear the title of the holeshot king, at

least for this year. For those who care, the difference between the winning Honda and the two runners-up usually turned out to be about half a bike length . . . no more.

Turning Capabilities

Front-end washout? Pushing? Bite? These are all terms we use to describe how a bike works in a turn. Of course, rider skill has a lot to do with whether or not a bike's front end will push or plow. Still, when all is said and done, some bikes will snap through a turn better than others.

Our pick for the Hawk of the Corners? The Kawasaki. Even with the stock tires, the KX would cut inside anything else on the track. The ability of the front end to bite and hold, even on flat, hard-baked turns, was amazing.

When the KX125 is first ridden, some riders have trouble adjusting to the feel. You sit far forward and the impression of "sitting on the forks" is very pronounced, as with Maicos of the mid-'70s. We found that any line on the course was up for grabs with the KX. Knife inside, swing wide and cut across, or leave it on and haunt the berms at full throttle. The KX remains stable and very accurate under all of these conditions. We'd have to call it one of the finest turning bikes we've ever slung a leg across.

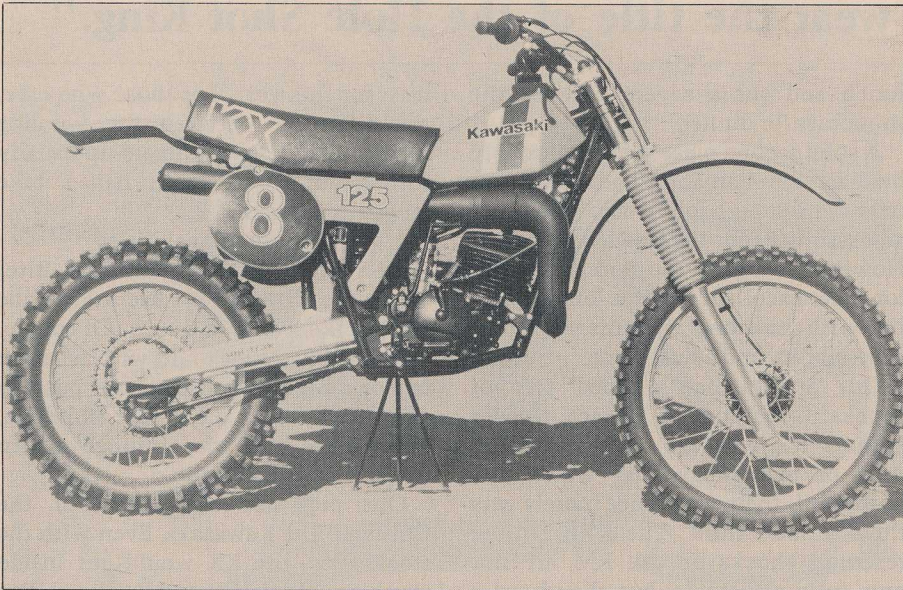
We rated all of the other bikes evenly at 9.5 each. In stock trim, this rating is fair, but with the heavier optional mono spring on the YZ, it would receive a much higher rating. With the standard spring, the YZ is a bit vague in steering accuracy because the rear end wallows in the turns. Remember that bit about the rear end affecting the front end?

All of the bikes are light enough to toss around with arrogance, so none of them can be downgraded for having bad manners in the turns. By raising fork tubes slightly in the triple clamps (this drops the front end), all of the 125s can be made to turn even sharper. The RM responds well to this adjustment. In fact, there's a hint of washout until the forks are raised a bit.

Stability at High Speeds on Rough Terrain

In other words, let it all hang out and hang on for dear life. Full throttle on the worst straight on the track. One hundred yards of nasty whoopers in

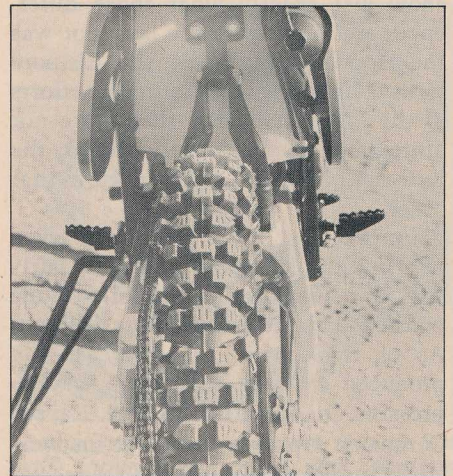
SHOOTOUT!



Kawasaki revealed the first major suspension change since the monoshock with their new Uni-Trak. Though down on power compared to the other 125s, the Kawa was the best handler.



Longish swingarm lent a great deal of stability to the KX. Sliding was easy as long as the power lasted.



Worm's-eye view of the bell crank system of the Uni-Trak. Making preload and damping changes is a real bear; you have to take half the bike apart to get to things.



Even on the flat, hard-packed corners, the Kawasaki refused to hint of front-end washout. Steering accuracy was phenomenal.

"The KX would fall on its face between gears."

around, it would respond well.

Shifting

While this seems like a minor category at first, one has to consider the fact that 125s get shifted almost constantly. In fact, the name of the game is to keep the bike in the right gear and to keep that engine up where it pulls the hardest.

None of the bikes shifted poorly, but all things considered, we felt that the Honda did the best job of going from gear to gear. Once the rider got used to the rather short shifter, the Honda never missed a gear and could be slipped from cog to cog without using the clutch.

We rated the Kawasaki and the Yamaha about even here and downgraded the Suzuki a bit for an occasional upshift failure under full power. All of them shift better than their 250 brothers, by a long shot.

Braking

As our old buddy Dick Nixon used to say, let's make one thing perfectly clear: All of the four test bikes would lock the rear wheel up too easily to suit our tastes. However, we suppose because of the light flywheels and small mass of the spinning parts, that's inevitable. All of the rear ends could be frozen into immobility with the touch of a toe. Erp. Stall. Disregarding all that crap about full-floating rear brakes and such, we found virtually no difference in the rear brakes.

Up front, we found the big difference, and the Yamaha came out the clear winner. Not only is the Yammie brake strong and progressive, the brake lever is the only one that fits the hand properly. All of the others should take a look at the Sun Line shorties and do some head-scratching.

A good 125 rider uses his front brake a lot, and the Yamaha front stopper was above reproach.

The Kawasaki got the bottom rating because of the high effort required to slow the front wheel down. There was a mushy feel that we didn't like. We'd have to rate the Honda almost as good as the YZ. The RM had a decent brake, but the cable inner housing deteriorates rapidly and then the braking action gets sluggish. In fact, all of the Suzuki cables are on the ratty side and should be replaced by any serious rider. Terry cables are a good choice.

Ease of Riding, Includes Fatigue Factor

Weight plays a big part in this rating section. The Yamaha hits the scales with the least load and has a highly rated suspension. The KX had the top-rated suspension, but has to be ridden flat-out all the time just to keep up and gets downrated for that. It's no fun playing catch-up, no matter how swell the bike handles.

Still, all things considered, the Suzuki demanded the most attention from the rider and took the most energy to ride in an aggressive fashion. The front end of the Honda could be largely ignored, but placement of the rear end took some concentration. Every once in a while, the CR would take a sideways hop when exiting a turn that was disconcerting. We gave the YZ the top rating here because it could be ridden aggressively without tiring the rider. In fact, the YZ worked best when being pushed to its limits. If the YZ was ridden at anything less than an aggressive pace, much of the steering accuracy and tautness of the suspension balance was lost. The rider would then flounder until he got the YZ back up to full-honk racing speeds.

Durability

Horsepower makes heat and heat makes wear. Therefore, the cool-running Kawasaki engine gets the nod for durability. We also kept track of the KX125 that Rod Brand has been racing. This heavily modified KX has also proven to be a very strong unit that seems to thrive on abuse. Weak points on the KX are wimpy motor mount bolts, elongation of the Uni-Trak joints after about 25 racing hours and poor crankcase seals.

We ranked the Honda in the second slot. By and large, it was a trouble-free machine. The shock springs sacked early and we ran out of preload far too soon. Pegs started to sag a bit during the second month of riding. Our pipe got a few hairline cracks in the belly section near the mount. Rings didn't seem to last very long and a top end would not stay fresh for more than a half-dozen races. Shifting deteriorated with time.

Our Suzuki took third in the durability area. Fork seals went out early and we experienced spoke problems on a more or less regular basis during the entire test period. Spokes never seemed to seat properly and we were always

breaking one or two every other time out.

The motor lost its freshness after a month and a half, but this was restored with rings. Some mung, spoo and drool dribbled from the cases after the third month of riding. All of the control cables died quickly and regularly, with the throttle cable being especially wimpy. The inner liner in this cable squeaked out of the housing and gave us a full throttle condition once. We went to a Terry cable after that.

Motor mount bolts on the RM were poor and we broke more than a few with routine servicing . . . with a torque wrench! The frame, swingarm and forks held up well. After the shocks started to lose their taut feel, we switched to a very light Golden Spectro suspension fluid to freshen them up. We did this about once a month and the shocks are still functioning well.

Rating the YZ in fourth place was not an easy thing for us to do, as our own test bike didn't give us much in the way of grief. However, we were more than well aware of the early seizure problems of the first YZ125Gs to come off the production line. Yamaha has issued several service bulletins about carburetor-related seizures, and this appears to have solved the hassle.

Actual problems we experienced with the YZ were on the minor side. The saddle is covered with very thin vinyl of some sort that tears far too easily. Motor mount bolts experienced some breakage, especially the three on the front motor mount plate.

Our engine stayed fresh for a long time, but shifting did get sloppier with time. The first-to-second gap got wider with some hard racing hours on the bike. Footpegs started to sag after the fourth race. The saddle bolts are very thin, light things that will come loose constantly unless a new lock nut is used after each time. Our right side panel/plate was too close to the stinger of the pipe and melted through the plastic. We saw this on a number of YZ-Gs.

If our test bike was any indication, though, of a motor holding up well under racing stress, then the early YZ seizure problem may be a thing of the past.

Weight, Dry

While you have to run with some gas

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in the tank and oil in the forks and gearbox, dry weight is still the base line measuring number that sells bikes. Here, the YZ stands tall (and light), weighing in at a feathery 187 pounds. This means that the YZ will be lighter, with a full tank of gas, than the Honda would be bone-dry. Other weights include 195 pounds for the RM, 200 for the Honda and 201 for the Kawasaki.

Comfort and Layout of Controls

Honda and Yamaha are tied here, in our opinion, with both bikes being nicely set up as delivered. Bars are a bit wide for some on the YZ, but the good old hacksaw can cut them down to suit your taste.

Yamaha has some nicely contoured levers and the overall package is narrow. Nothing irritates the rider as



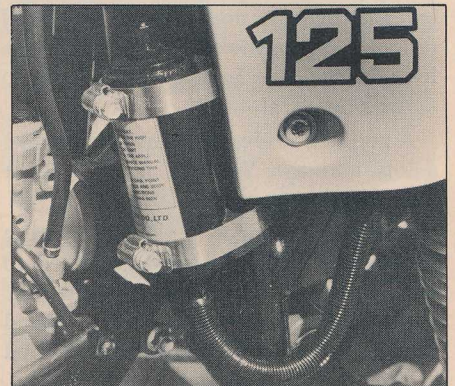
Adjustability was the name of the game with the RM125. By making small changes at the forks or the shocks, the steering of the bike could be altered dramatically. With the front end dropped and maximum preload at the rear, steering was sharp, but the rear end was loose.



Our test RM125 aged rather quickly. Decals died almost immediately and cables, plastic and drivetrain components got sloppy.



The 1980 Suzuki got refined here and there with no major changes from the '79 package. Amazingly, it was still in the hunt, which says a lot for the original concept.



Nice feature: Pressure can be changed in the RM125 remote reservoir shocks and oil can be swapped when it gets tired. We ended up running a very light oil to reduce compression stroke damping, then dialed in more rebound damping.

"The SUZUKI had no real faults, but . . ."

he moves around on the bike. The Honda places the rider exactly where he should be for maximum cornering efficiency, and getting back to the rear of the saddle for weight transfer is a smooth and easy transition.

We downrated the RM slightly—and only slightly—because of the wide, bulging side panels that force the rider's legs outward. Plastic boot wearers are especially bothered by the bulge. Many of our riders complained about the bend of the bars, and the levers are very old-fashioned and hard to reach if you happen to have average or small hands.

The peg position on the KX is quite far forward, and it takes an effort on the part of the rider to pull up from a seated to a standing position. Too, the bars are flat, well back and very close to the rider's thighs when standing or forward on the tank for a turn. All riders liked the narrow feel of the KX, but some objected to the sharply upward sloping gas tank, claiming it bothered them when moving forward for weight transfer. Also, the KX was tall, and average-sized riders had trouble getting a leg over the bike and operating the kickstarter.

Effectiveness, Stone Stock

It's odd, that the overall winner is not the winner in this category. One might think this area would be the single most important one. Yet, one must consider just how improved the performance of any one of these bikes can be with minor changes and basic backyard tuning. The YZ, for example, would win this category if it came with the heavier optional monoshock spring as stock. With the heavy spring, the bike is sharp in the turns. With the stock (lighter) spring, cornering accuracy is not the best.

Even the addition of a Boyesen reed valve on any of the bikes will change the racing characteristics radically. It makes the Honda and the YZ come alive, gives some much-needed snap to the KX and improves the RM a measurable amount.

Still, we do have this BONE STOCK EFFECTIVENESS category, and the Suzuki seems to be the one with the most all-around state of readiness for the starting line—in standard trim. The suspension, while not the finest of the four, is good. No real flaws. Nothing needs to be purchased for the

bike to be competitive, other than tires after the stock rubber wears out.

Handling changes can all be dialed in by the rider without spending any money for optional or extra parts. Varying oil levels, viscosities, preloads, fork position, gas and air pressures will make big differences for the savvy rider. Or the one who takes the time to read (and understand) his manual.

We had to rate the YZ second for that aforementioned spring that comes stock on the bike. That, and the complete lack of low-end and mid-range power. Sure, those trick reeds make the YZ right, but we're talking stock here.

It was close between the Honda and the YZ, but the Honda got nudged back a bit because of the poor quality of springs on the shocks. The shocks themselves are in the ballpark, but, on the whole, the mono rear end does a better job and is easily adjustable.

Horsepower, or lack of it, is what puts the KX into fourth here. You just cannot give away that much power to the pack, no matter how great the bike turns, or how well the suspension works.

Points, Subtotal

Well, here we are . . . the most important categories have been studied and added up. At this point, the YZ is slightly ahead of the Honda and the RM, with the KX trailing.

As we proceed to EVALUATION CHART #2, we'll shift our scale to a maximum of 5.0 points, because, as we mentioned earlier, the racers in our audience think these areas are not as critical to bike selection as the others, even though they have some bearing on an overall decision.

Ease of Maintenance

Maintenance includes a lot of things besides cleaning a filter. Consider changing oil, adjusting preload or damping on the rear suspension, or even removing wheels to change tires. When you add it all up, the YZ emerges as the obvious champ. Getting to the mono for spring preload and damping adjustments couldn't be simpler. Even the air filter offers a quick and easy slip-in setup. By and large, a well-thought-out machine.

The RM earned the second spot and would have been higher if it wasn't such a hassle getting to the shocks,

carb and air filter.

We gave the Honda a 4.4 rating. You had to take an awful lot of things off to do a reasonable job on the air filter. Everything seemed to interconnect with everything else. The CR seemed to use two 10-millimeter bolts for a job that could be nicely done with one hefty 12mm piece. Lots of overkill on brackets and hangers. Fussy.

While the Uni-Trak is undeniably a radical new suspension concept—and one that works—working on the concept is a pain. A goodly portion of the KX has to be removed to get to the shock itself. Changing the preload can be done crudely by laying the bike on its side on the ground and tapping the preload ring with a punch, but it simply should not be that difficult to reach on the stock bike. When the ease of adjusting the rear suspension of a Yamaha is compared with the complication of a KX, one can see the reason for the relative rankings here.

Chassis and Suspension Flex

We felt that the Kawasaki had the most rigid frame and the least overall flex of the test bikes. It pays a weight price for this strength, but, in our opinion, it's worth it in the long run. The Honda came in last here, mostly because of the flex in the rather heavy swingarm. Our Yamaha had some wiggly forks, but was a sturdy bike, and the Suzuki had no real faults.

Starting Ease

Lighting off the YZ usually took no more than a few halfhearted stabs at the kickstarter and things got buzzing. We gave it a 5.0 for this endearing trait. At the fourth-place slot resided the KX, which often took 10 or 12 kicks to get the fire lit . . . with a highly placed kickstarter.

The Honda was no real sweat, but would get cranky once in a while. Strangely, the Suzuki always took six or seven hard boots to start.

Parts Prices

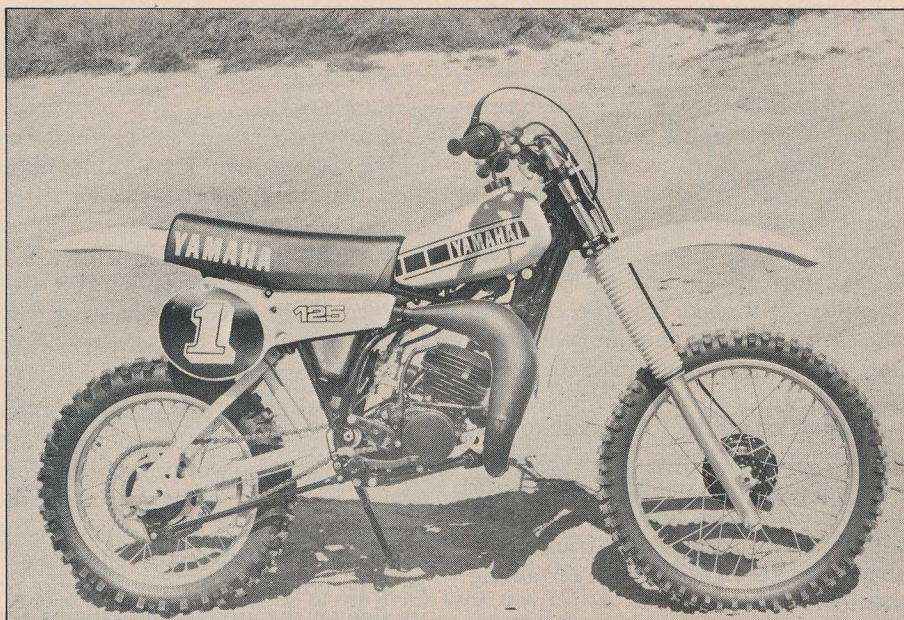
None of the bikes can be considered cheap to operate, but the Yamaha seemed to have a reasonable spread of prices. For example, a complete piston assembly cost a bit over 30 bucks. Some of the Honda parts prices were completely out of line. Example: Over \$20 for a brake pedal, with the corresponding YZ item going for around eight bucks. [Continued]

SHOOTOUT!

Parts Availability

This is a sticky department. You might have no hassle in your town getting parts for your bike. In the next state, that same part might be back-ordered for the next eight weeks. What we did was place calls to major cities around the U.S. and ask if they had more or less ordinary items in stock for the bikes we were testing. "Hey, you got a piston and rings for a KX125 A-6?" And we never told them who we were.

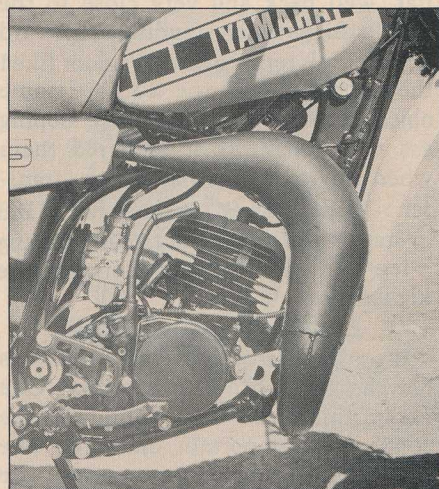
Based on our sneaky phone calls, we top-rated the Yamaha and bottom-rated the KX. Oh, we found some very helpful Kawasaki dealers who were well-stocked, but we also found dealers who were heavily into KZ1000s and could care less about the dirt bikes.



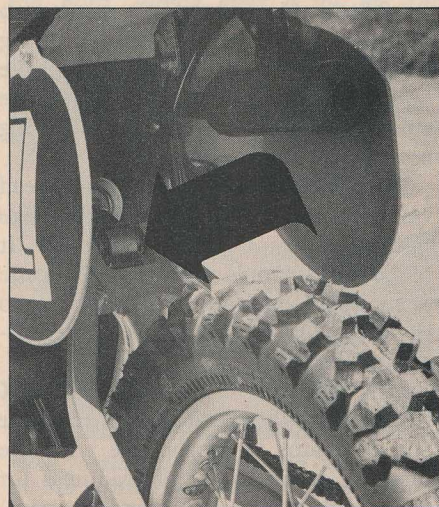
Even though the 1980 YZ looks much like last year's bike, the engineering changes have been massive.



Light, loose and easy to toss around, the YZ is the feather of the bunch.



The YZ125F had a very average powerplant, while the G engine is a genuine screamer.



All adjustments on the mono rear can be made by following the arrow, with the exception of the reservoir, which is mounted up front and in the open.

"The YAMAHA had a big blast of power at higher revs."

Suzuki dealers seemed to be almost as well-stocked as the Yamaha folks and we got an overall good feeling from most of them. Some of the Honda dealers were loaded and others had almost nothing for motocrossers of any displacement.

Hop-Up Parts Availability

If you leave your 125 racer stock, you're probably the only guy around who will. The search for horsepower and suspension is rampant in this class. You'll have your best luck with Yamaha and Suzuki aftermarket parts. They seem to be everywhere. Lots of shops are offering complete engines, and some are even offering totally prepped-out bikes—ready for the Nationals. If you've got the money.

While not as common as Suzuki and Yamaha, there is a sizable Honda hop-up market out there. You just have to hunt a little more to find that magic part you're after.

If you're a KX freak, don't despair. There are pockets of kulture here and there. You just have to find them. Then you've got it made.

Suggested Retail Price of Bike

Pretty cut and dried here. Three of the bikes are tied at \$1329 each, suggested retail. The Kawasaki, for one reason or another, is slightly higher at \$1369. Still, 40 bucks is 40 bucks.

Overall Points

When you add the points from Chart #1 to the points from #2, you get the numbers that determine the rankings of the bikes.

With the most points at 196.5 stands the YZ125G and it emerges the winner of the shootout. Very, very little separated the second- and third-place bikes—less than a point, in fact. The Suzuki probably earned its second place by virtue of less weight and a more sophisticated rear suspension,

because the Honda definitely had motor on it.

The KX ran last because it didn't have enough power. It was slow. With a different (faster) engine in that same chassis, the ratings would have been radically different. We feel that the Uni-Trak concept is good. Very good.

There you have it. Another shootout and a shuffling in the pecking order. But do you think Kawasaki is going to take this lying down? After having revolutionized the suspension game and just missed in the engine department?

And what about Suzuki? Will 1981 see a major revision of the RM line? What can Yamaha do to hold off the obvious charge that Honda is mounting? Could there be water-cooled production 125 racers next year from at least one manufacturer? And maybe two?

Our lips are sealed.

At least for the moment. □

EVALUATION CHART #1

Scale: 1.0 to 10.0

	HONDA	KAWASAKI	SUZUKI	YAMAHA
HORSEPOWER	10.0	8.0	9.8	9.8
USABLE POWER	10.0	8.5	9.8	9.6
FORKS, TRAVEL	10.0	9.6	9.7	10.0
FORKS, QUALITY OF OPERATION	9.2	10.0	9.6	9.8
REAR SUSPENSION, TRAVEL	9.7	9.7	9.7	10.0
REAR SUSPENSION, QUALITY OF OPERATION	9.0	10.0	9.4	9.8
ACCELERATION, BASIC DRAG RACE	10.0	7.0	9.7	9.7
TURNING CAPABILITIES	9.5	10.0	9.5	9.5
STABILITY AT HIGH SPEED ON ROUGH TERRAIN	9.3	10.0	9.5	9.8
SHIFTING	10.0	9.8	9.5	9.8
BRAKING	9.9	9.5	9.7	10.0
EASE OF RIDING, INCLUDES FATIGUE FACTOR	9.5	9.3	9.1	10.0
DURABILITY	9.8	10.0	9.6	9.2
WEIGHT, DRY	9.3	9.0	9.6	10.0
COMFORT AND LAYOUT OF CONTROLS	10.0	9.0	9.7	10.0
EFFECTIVENESS, STONE STOCK	9.7	9.0	10.0	9.8
POINTS, SUBTOTAL	154.9	148.4	153.9	156.8

EVALUATION CHART #2

Scale: 1.0 to 5.0

	HONDA	KAWASAKI	SUZUKI	YAMAHA
EASE OF MAINTENANCE	4.4	4.0	4.6	5.0
CHASSIS AND SUSPENSION FLEX	4.5	5.0	4.8	4.7
ATTENTION TO DETAIL	4.6	4.2	4.3	5.0
STARTING EASE	4.8	4.2	4.4	5.0
PARTS PRICES	4.1	4.3	4.5	5.0
PARTS AVAILABILITY	4.2	3.0	4.7	5.0
HOP-UP PARTS AVAILABILITY	4.2	3.0	5.0	5.0
SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE OF BIKE	5.0	4.7	5.0	5.0
POINTS, SUBTOTAL	35.8	34.7	37.3	39.7
	154.9	148.4	153.9	156.8
OVERALL POINTS	190.7	183.1	191.2	196.5