

MEN AT WORK

Sport bikes with a little trail heritage

Use care in any high-speed off-road work. The big SP is much more at home on the pavement.

By the Staff of *Dirt Bike*

Street-legal trail bikes are a bizarre breed of machine. They've come a long way since the old DT Yamaha and, like their off-road brothers, are refined and sophisticated. The Suzuki SP250 and 500, while not wild dirt-oriented bikes, are good middle-of-the-road, legal trail machines. Technology is focused around reliability and fuel stinginess and a little toward handling. Both SPs take their street chores quite seriously. Since the majority of the on/off-road market never sees much dirt work, the bikes must be easy to ride, start and operate. Super-long travel and high-revving powerbands fit the dirt-minded but have no niche in the street world. Compromise is the only answer.

ALTERED SEATS

Change has not found its way to the '83

SPs. Both bikes are identical to last year's equipment, except for cosmetic stuff like colors and stickers. Blue seats and gold rims give a nice racy look, but beyond that, very little has evolved. Dependability is their forte. Proven four-stroke engines put out decent power and are quite tractable. Counterbalancers in both engines keep vibration down, and the five-speed transmissions are geared for moon use. Any off-road work will warrant a smaller countershaft sprocket, as tall first gears make for clutch slipping in tight trail usage.

The 500 is the same basic design that has been with the DRs for years. It's a tank and will run forever with almost no maintenance. Starting takes a knack, as the kick-starter is long and bottoms your foot on the ground. After a long initial warm-up, you can start pounding the streets. Wandering off-road should be done with prudence,

as the 500 wallows and pounds your spine into soup on easy trails. Marginal suspension takes a dip in the road fine, but crossing a rutted trail is another story. Too, the semi-knobs tackle the street in okay fashion, but give no security in the dirt. If you're not careful, the 300-plus-pounder will spit you into never-never land.

A good 40 pounds lighter and fitted with better rear suspension is the 250. Fire roads and trails can be negotiated with some confidence. Again, the tires never really grab enough, so slow speeds are the norm. Starting the 250 is a cruise, and vibration is almost nil. On the pavement, the bike is pure joy, but don't expect to smoke the tires, as the power output is decent, though not overwhelming.

Both bikes have nice tool kits that will hold a few trail goodies mounted on the rear fenders. A low seat height lets even



SUZUKI SP250

SP500

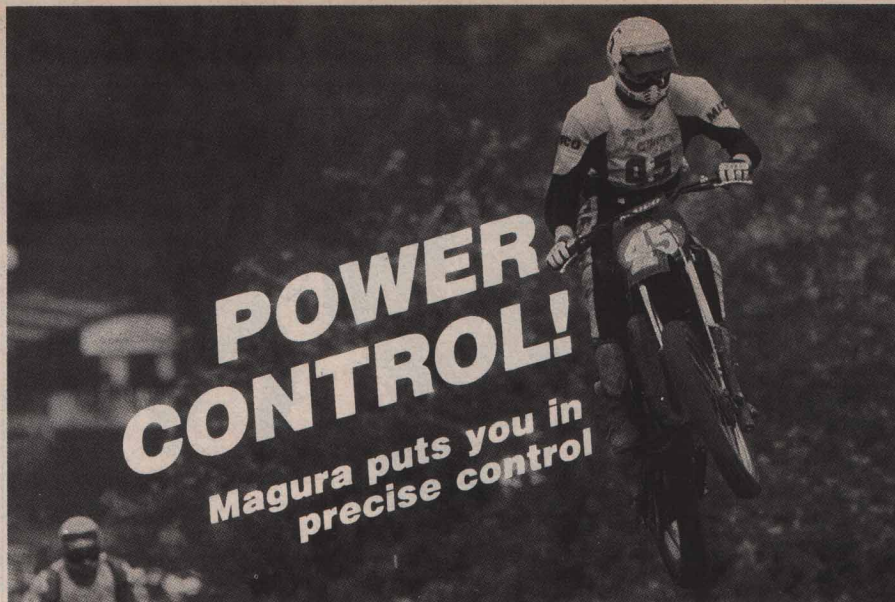
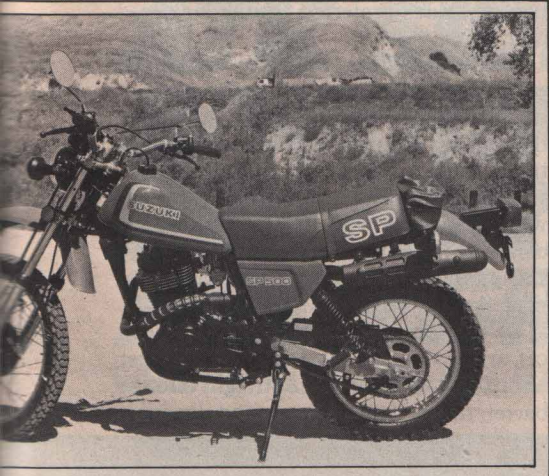
Engine type	4-stroke, SOHC, 4-valve	4-stroke, SOHC
Bore and stroke	72mm x 61.2mm	88mm x 82mm
Displacement	249cc	498cc
Carburetion	Mikuni BS34SS	Mikuni BS40SS
Ignition	CDI	CDI
Transmission	5-speed	5-speed
Fuel tank capacity	9.5 L (2.5 gals.)	9.0 L (2.0 gals.)
Wheelbase	1375mm (54.1 in.)	1455mm (57.3 in.)
Ground clearance	260mm (10.2 in.)	265mm (10.4 in.)
Seat height	830mm (32.7 in.)	870mm (34.3 in.)
Dry weight (claimed)	119 kg (262 lbs.)	139 kg (306 lbs.)
Suspension:		
Front	7.7 in.	7.7 in.
Rear	7.5 in.	7.7 in.
Tires:		
Front	3.00 x 21 semi-knobby	3.00 x 21 semi-knobby
Rear	4.60 x 17 semi-knobby	4.60 x 18 semi-knobby
Intended use	On/off-road	On/off-road
Approx. retail price	\$1670	\$2098
Country of origin	Japan	Japan
Distributor	U.S. Suzuki Motor Corp. 3251 E. Imperial Hwy. Brea, CA 92621	U.S. Suzuki Motor Corp. 3251 E. Imperial Hwy. Brea, CA 92621



Because the 250 is much lighter than the 500, its trail manners aren't that horrible. Better suspension and a chugger motor are pluses.

short riders touch the ground flat-footed. The 250 seat measures at 32.7 inches, the same as a Kawasaki KX80. Archaic throttles have seen their day, as has the tach that is fitted to the 500. There's a second plastic toolbox located on the sides of the bikes to go along with the fender-mounted model. Buddy pegs for the doubles-minded are located at the right spot so the passenger doesn't interfere with the pilot.

In reality, both SPs are street machines fitted with a few trail options. Longer travel, torquey motors and some ground clearance let them travel down a trail slowly. Dreams of jumping off-road and slamming down a rocky river bed, then popping back on the highway, are nothing more than a vision. As it is, the bikes are economical and fun if you use them for sporting and plonking, not aggressive riding. □



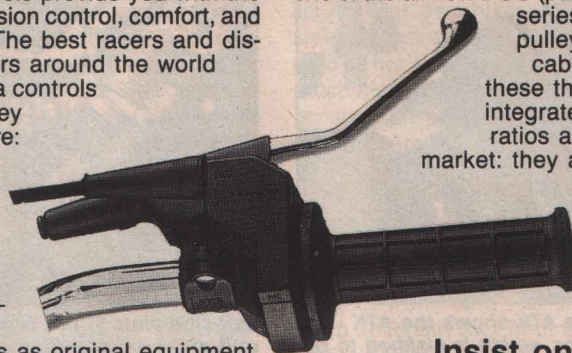
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