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HOW TO
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ISSN 0364-1546



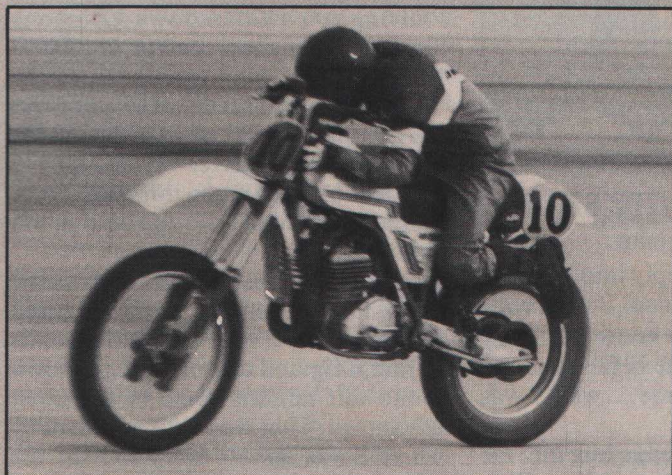
MUD RIDING TIPS & TRICKS
YAMAHA IT250: WHITE KNIGHT

On the Cover:—Kenny Zahrt just barely hangs on to our RM250 test bike, which appears on page 16. Photo by Tom Webb.

DIRT BIKE

JUNE 1981

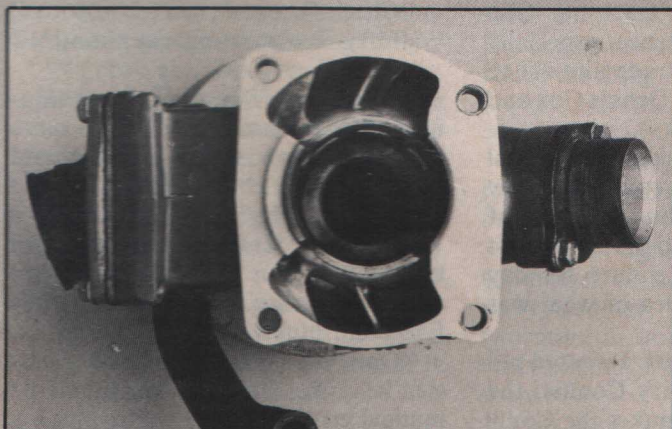
VOLUME 11, NO. 6



KTM 495MC



YAMAHA IT250H



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DIRT BIKE Magazine, ISSN 0364-1546 (Jun '81) is published monthly by Daisy/Hi-Torque Publishing Co., Inc., with editorial offices at 16200 Ventura Blvd., Encino, California 91436. Subscriptions \$12.98 for 12 issues (one year). Foreign subscriptions add \$5 per year and Canada \$4 per year for additional postage. Copyright © 1981 by Daisy/Hi-Torque Publishing Co., Inc. All rights reserved. Nothing in this magazine may be reprinted in whole or in part without the express permission of the publisher. **CONTRIBUTORS:** Photographic submissions must be 5x7 or 8x10 glossy black and white, or 35mm and larger color slides. Please mark each photo with owner's name and address. Manuscripts should be typewritten. Unsolicited contributors must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Unless special arrangements are made in advance, all published material becomes the sole property of Daisy/Hi-Torque Publishing Co., Inc. The publisher does not assume responsibility for unsolicited material. Second class postage paid at Van Nuys, California 91408, and at additional offices. **DIRT BIKE**, P.O. Box 317, Encino, California 91316.



1981 SUZUKI RM250X

THE MUZZLED SUPERBIKE

death of the whoop-dee-do

In the same breath, one can call the new 250 Suzuki motocrosser both brilliant and maddening. Here you have a bike that does some things so well that it literally rewrites the books, then takes a step backwards in others.

Our first impressions on the RM250X were less than wonderful. When sitting on the bike, the front end settles down and uses about half of its travel, while the rear end stays perched up high in the sky. It sits like a giant stink-bug, nose in the ground and butt in the air. Squeeze the front brake lever and pump the forks up and down, and another quarter of the travel goes away. Still, the garage is not exactly a test bed for suspension.

At the track

It took about a half-dozen kicks to get the RM fired up. It remained a reluctant starter for the duration of the test. The kickstarter is on the right side and is located high and forward. Your knee is in your chin if you're of average height. Don't even try to fire the RM up in gear, even though the bike comes with a primary kickstart. The small bit of drag from any normal clutch turns the half-dozen kicks into twice that number. As with most Suzukis, it takes a patient, talented toe to find neutral. The more time you spend with the bike, the easier it becomes.

We warmed up the RM well before our initial ride, but the engine still sounded ratty. Even after a bunch of passes up and down the starting line, the bike ran in a ratty fashion at the lower end of the rpm scale.

There didn't seem to be any punch at all down low, but the engine had a good surge at midrange and seemed to flatten out early on top. Not very impressive. We felt that most of that might be because of jetting; a mental note was made to contact U.S. Suzuki to get the hot setup on jetting—as soon as possible.

Well, we figured as long as the engine wasn't spot-on, we'd at least be able to evaluate the suspension and handling.

Through the whoops, quickly

One of our all-time favorite things

to do with a brand-new bike is to take it on our pet sand whoop-dee-doo loop at Indian Dunes. This particular section of real estate is about a mile long and consists of nothing but moderate to deep sand whoops. The way we figure it, if the suspension works here, it'll live just about anywhere.

Surprise and delight! The rear end of the RM worked like magic! Simply

put, it was the all-time best rear suspension we've ever experienced. To cross a section of nasty whoops on the RM at speed, all you had to do was point it in the right direction and run through the gears with the throttle held wide open. That Full Floating rear suspension most certainly earns its name. The harder you hit the bumps, the better it works.

Only one thing bothered us: we had no idea exactly just how fast we *could* take those gnarly bumps. It's like dope, I guess. More and more until you OD into an endo. Still, we never did the endo and we do not have any idea of the full potential of that fabulous rear suspension.

One thing we do know: it's now clear why Team Suzuki is whipping the shorts off of every other factory in the opening races of this season. Their riders can take the bumps at a greater speed with less physical effort.

Flies in the ointment

All was not perfect, however. Whenever the throttle was chopped over the bumps at speed, the front end of the bike would dive and the steering head would start shaking badly. Sort of an instant hinge in the frame. It was those drooping forks.

We immediately went back to the pits and pumped some air into the forks. Two pounds didn't make enough of a difference; the shake was



The Full Floating rear end sucked up jumps without a wimper.





1981 SUZUKI RM250X

still there on deceleration. Five pounds helped, but then the bike couldn't turn. We experienced severe front end wash-out and pushing in the turns. In deep sand, the front tire would simply tick under and plow. Also, with five pounds of air, the forks were harsh; impact actually sent a jarring shock through the riders' wrists.

Back to the shop

After rolling out the spare Ferraris and such, we pushed the Suzuki RM into the tastefully cluttered DB garage and onto a gold anodized Mark Charles workstand with Confederate flags adding a nice touch to the overall appearance. Hey, class we got.

A quick check of the forks gave us a partial answer to the diving. With the springs and spacers removed and the forks collapsed, we found that the fork oil lever was $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches in one leg and $7\frac{3}{4}$ inches in the other. We immediately raised the fork oil level in each leg to six inches from the top.

An enormous reed could be clearly seen between the carb and the intake manifold. It looked at least 40 percent bigger than anything else we'd ever laid our eyes on. Curiosity got the best of us and we tore it apart. Aha! It turned out to be an eight-petal reed, and a very thin one, at that. The incredibly accurate DB calipers (plus or minus .02 fathoms) revealed that the reeds were a mere 16-thousandths thick. It's been our experience that very thin reeds tend to flutter and get confused at higher rpms and when the throttle is suddenly chopped and snapped open. Thin reeds appear to work best at midrange to low rpm in a mild engine and nowhere else.

We knew that Boyesen did not yet make a reed for the new RM, so we dug into our spare reed box and found a set of KDX reeds that looked very close to the configuration of the RM setup. The KDX items had only three petals on each side, so we cut up one additional set to make a four (single) petal.

The Boyesen's are dual-stage reeds, with a thin (.016-inch) reed that opens at a low pressure drop, and a thick (.028-inch) reed to handle the high rpm work. We've invariably found them to give us a noticeable boost at low and midrange.

We had hoped to be able to stretch the forks out, but the tubes are very short and cannot be lowered in the



triple clamps. On most forks, you'll find some overlap. Not so with the RM250.

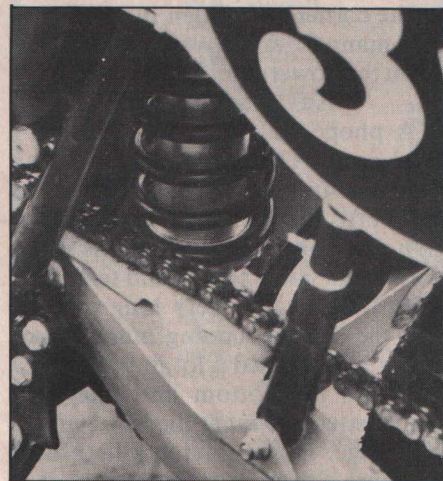
The first acid test

With our minimal changes and some basic nut and bolt tightening, the RM was taken out to Sunrise Cycle Park, probably the roughest track in California, for an actual race. This track is laced with whoopers and stadium-type jumps.

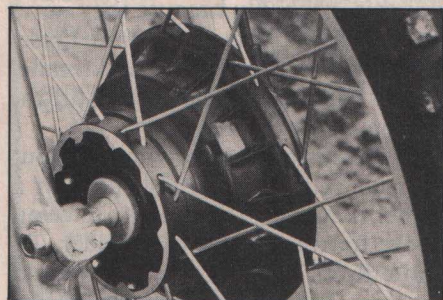
There was a substantial increase in the early part of the midrange with the Boyesen home-made reeds. Much less clutch fanning was required out of the turns. Practice showed us that the raised fork oil level helped the forks a



Spiffy aluminum swingarm appears unbreakable. Chain guide is nicely designed.



Getting to the preload adjustment on the single-shock was a task. The manual tells you to remove the shock in order to change preload; a 45-minute job.



Excellent new hubs are at both ends of the RM. Straight-pull spokes required almost no maintenance.

great deal, but they still dove too much to suit us, especially when braking hard charging into bump-filled corners.

A few practice starts left us puzzled. The RM would pull ratty in first and second, then start to feel good in third and great in fourth. The spread of power was so narrow that each taller gear gave the rider a wider, more usable spread.

After practice, we leaned out the needle in the carb one position and that seemed to help midrange response a bit. We started to get the feeling that the carb was grossly off on jetting, despite assurances from U.S. Suzuki that

the bike was dialed in and set up to the max.

The end of that particular day of racing left the Suzuki with a decent second in class, right behind a basically stock 250 Yamaha, 1980 flavor.

Our initial racing impressions were: tremendous rear suspension, marginal forks, excellent midrange power, poor low-end response, great high-speed stability under power, good manners in the corners, if ridden in an aggressive manner, and a very smooth feel from the powerplant.

Advice and counsel

A phone call to Suzuki created a mild panic. They were proud of their new machine and had a number of local pros mopping up on pre-production stock bikes. A meeting was set up with some savvy people and test riders.

At the end of a very long day, we had the Suzuki running much, much better and learned a lot in the process.

Here's the bottom line: the RMs come jetted too fat at the low end and midrange. This absolutely kills throttle response if the revs are allowed to drop below 4000 rpm.

The local Experts Suzuki had winning on the bike never seemed to notice this, probably because they never got below 4000 rpm at any time. Lesser riders with softer reflexes and smaller juevos will want a cleaner snap off the bottom of the rev range.

In fact, one tends to wonder about the total reliance of using riders of a higher skill level exclusively to develop a bike for the average racer/rider. To quote Ron Turner, a very fast Suzuki development rider: "I ride the 250 like a 125. I never shut it off, and keep shifting all the time. In fact, I ride the RM465 the same way. Keep it buzzing like a 125 and shift."

Hmmm.

That might be fine for Ron Turner, but what about the great mass of riders who are not blessed with a skill level of the working expert? A wide, flexible powerband is a blessing for a Novice- or Intermediate-level rider.

To get the Suzuki working better for us mortals, we dropped the pilot jet from a 60 to a 50, and the needle jet from an R9 to an R8. We also could have lowered the main jet a bit, we're sure, and quite possibly have picked up some peak rpm in the process. When we got the RM250X working to our satisfaction, there was a hint of



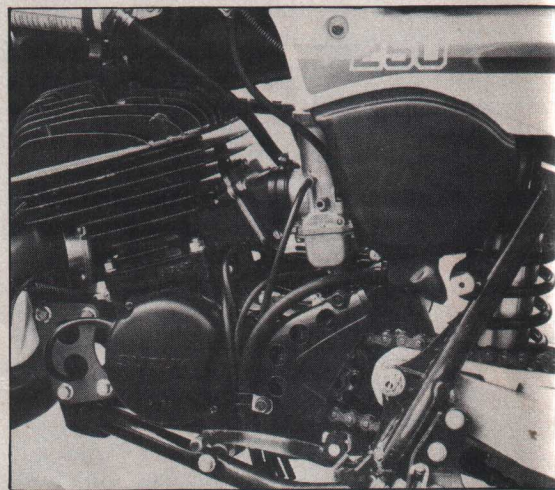
midrange detonation, but nothing alarming. We've noticed that works bikes usually run a bit on the lean side at early midrange and they live with a slight detonation to achieve maximum performance.

When questioned about the overly rich way the 250 was delivered, the Suzuki reps mentioned that the bike was set up "safe." Safe, in this case, translates into sloppy jetting and reduced performance.

Cautious factory equipment

We're interpreting the new RM250 thusly: Suzuki is genuinely giving the rider what amounts to a factory works engine, but they don't think the average rider has enough brains to keep the engine alive and well in the proper high state of tune necessary for maximum performance. So they fudge on the jetting to build in a buffer, or a safety factor. We'd guess that Suzuki might feel the average rider would be more than satisfied with average performance and might not even know the difference.

A cautious approach on what might well be considered the most radical machine of the year.



Smallish engine puts out lots of mid- and upper-range power. Mixing chores are handled by a 38mm carb.

Once the bike was dialed in, the difference in performance was remarkable! The RM250 would easily pull right alongside many Open class bikes. Power delivery was smooth and vibration-free above 4000 rpm.

It took some time to get used to the RM. If you just jumped off a YZ, let's say, and hopped on the RM, you might flounder and find the bike un-

1981 SUZUKI RM250X

comfortable. However, if you take the time to put a solid half hour on the RM at racing speeds, you'll suddenly find yourself turning lap times that will delight you and stun the people you normally race against.

We still don't like the forks

Okay. The bike left an initial poor impression. Then, after working on it and dialing things in, we discovered a works motor nestled in a works chassis. That rear suspension is the best we've tested to date, bar none. As long as power is liberally applied in the corners, the bike turns in a reasonable manner. With less than enthusiastic throttle, the front end can and will go away. The RM has close to 30-degree rake.

Now then. The forks. We don't care what anyone says. They are too mushy, too short and too wimpy for a bike with the capabilities of the RM. During our first few race tests, we actually had the rear end of the bike leave the ground when the forks snubbed into the ground under heavy braking.

It's the opinion of the well-lit *Dirt Bike Staff*, that a state-of-the-art, full-on, lookit-me motocrosser should not come equipped with 38mm forks with 11.2 inches of travel. Especially when the rear end comes with 12.6 of the best inches to be found anywhere.

So there.

Bits and pieces

The shape, general layout and control placement of the new RM tend to let the rider sit well forward over the gas tank, which is as it should be on a modern-day, long-travel bike. At first, the bars feel too high and weird, but you get used to them. After you cut an inch off each side, that is.

Hand controls are straight out of 1970. The levers are very old fashioned and straight-legged. The throttle is short and the cable is routed directly up and out of the throttle housing. One crash and you can kiss it goodbye.

Spiffy new hubs can be found at both ends of the RM. They're not only light, but we had minimum spoke loosening problems. Apparently, Suzuki rewrote the standards on hubs while they were redesigning that rear end.

A massive swingarm is made of aluminum. It appears to be as strong as the average bridge.

We liked the rear brake. No chattering or unwanted stalling. The front brake seemed a bit on the mushy side.

Chances are a better cable would cure this. Suzuki front brake cables have always been on the skinny and flexible side. A good Terry cable would make a world of difference.

An odd dual air filter arrangement, similar to the RM125, gets air to the carb. Two separate filters, each with two layers, are mounted beneath the side plates.

A small point: You need a straight slot screwdriver to get the side plates off, then a Phillips to get the air filter holders off. Why? Did you guys run out of one kind of screws at the assembly line?

Getting to the preload adjustment on the shock can be a hassle. We found that a very long punch stuck through the protective flap above the swingarm would do the job. Of course, the manual tells you that you should remove the shock to make a change in the preload. Naturally, the sensible rider will just flip the bike over on its side and start tapping away at the locking ring and the cam ring.

Oh yes, Take a lot of care when adjusting the preload, even if you do it like the manual says. The rings are aluminum and the body is, too. This means that the smallest bit of grit or dirt can gall the aluminum and destroy the threads.

Rebound damping can be adjusted in a much simpler fashion. Remove a side plate and pry up the rubber cover on the top of the shock. Here, you'll see a black plastic ring with numbers on it. Want more rebound damping? Turn the ring to a higher number. Sharp!

A word is probably appropriate about the Full Floating concept on the rear suspension. Basically, without getting into upper level math, here's what it boils down to. Every bike has a suspension lever ratio. It's merely a set of numbers applied to what's happening at the rear wheel.

If your rear axle moves up one inch and your shock compresses one inch, you have a suspension lever ratio (SLR) of one to one (1:1). If your shock moves one inch and your rear axle moves two inches, you have an SLR of two to one. And so forth. The more mechanical advantage you have, the greater the SLR.

Here's the key to the whole deal. What if...what if!!!...you could vary the SLR to suit your needs? What

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1981 SUZUKI RM250X

if you had a severe SLR at the first part of the travel and it could change into a mild SLR as the shock really got rammed home?

That's it, Butch. Nothing more than a link or two that'll change the pressure applied to the shock. Very simple, when you think about it. Very complicated when you try to get one to work.

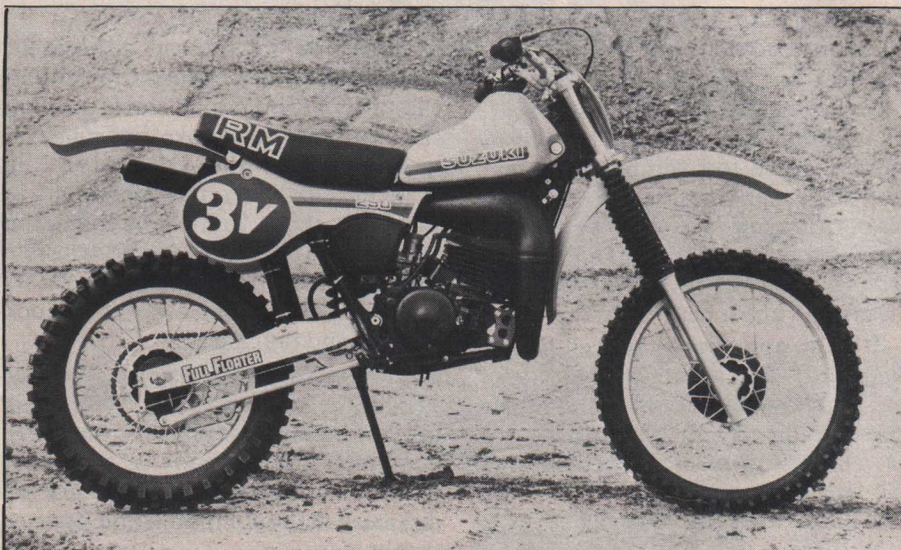
Enough of this! What's the verdict?

Couldn't wait, eh? Had to go right to the end of the test? Animal! Anyway, what we figure is this: Suzuki really and truly did make a genuine

works-type bike for the masses. Only, at the last minute they panicked and decided that the average bozo would just get into a world of hurt with a razor-sharp machine.

So, what you get is a bike with fantastic built-in capabilities, covered up with a layer of protective mush.

The RM250 is the most serious bike we've ever seen, in spite of the factory's efforts to make it inoffensive. Dial it in, tune it up, put on a good set of forks and you've got the bike that Kent Howerton rides. Or as close as you'll ever get. □



SUZUKI RM250X

Name and model	Suzuki RM250X
Engine type	Single-cylinder, reed-valved two-stroke
Bore and stroke67mm x 70mm
Displacement	246cc
Carburetion	38 Mikuni (VM-3855)
Factory recommended jetting:	
Main jet	320
Needle jet	R8
Jet needle	6FJ37-3
Pilot jet	50
Slide number	2.0
Recommended gasoline	Premium 92-plus octane
Fuel tank capacity	9.0 liters (2.4 gallons)
Fuel tank material	Plastic
Lubrication	Oil in gas, pre-mix, 20:1 ratio
Recommended oil	Suzuki C.C.I.
Oil capacity	N/A
Air filtration	Oiled foam, two layer, two filters
Clutch type	Wet, multi-plate
Transmission	Five-speed, constant mesh
Gearbox ratios:	
1	2.076
2	1.750
3	1.352
4	1.105
5	0.913
Gearing, front/rear	14/50
Ignition	P.E.I. pointless
Primary kick system?	Yes
Recommended spark plug	NGK B9EV
Silencer/spark arrestor/quality	Silencer only, average noise
Exhaust system	High pipe, crossover exit on left
Frame, type	Single downtube, split cradle
Wheelbase	1460mm (57.5 inches) plus, two inches available adjustment

Ground clearance	370mm (14.6 inches)
Seat height	37 inches
Steering head angle	29.6 degrees
Trail	122mm (4.8 inches)
Weight with one gallon gas	226 pounds (216 pounds bone dry)
Rim material	Aluminum alloy
Tire size and type:	
Front	3.00 x 21 knobby Bridgestone
Rear	5.10 x 18 knobby Bridgestone
Suspension, type and travel:	
Front	285mm (11.2 inches) air/oil telescopes, forward axle
Rear	320mm (12.6 inches) single-shock full floater, aluminum swingarm
Intended use	Motocross
Country of origin	Japan
Retail price, approx.	\$1979

Distributor:
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Brea, California 92621

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Piston assembly, complete	\$33.67
Rings only	7.80
Cylinder	144.38
Shift lever	11.05
Brake pedal	19.46
Front sprocket	\$12.10

Overall rating, 0 to 100, various categories, keeping intended use of machine in mind:	
Handling	95
Suspension	Front-90, rear-99.9
Power	97
Cost	92
Attention to detail	92
Effectiveness, stone stock	98