

JEWEL DUALS

Dual-purpose Floaters

By the Staff of Dirt Bike



Liberal use of the clutch and full throttle will take the SP125 through most of the places its big brother goes.



After repeated mild-mannered jumps with the SPs, nothing fell off—including the mirrors and turn signals.

Sometime within the last year or so, Suzuki must have found out what Honda has been trying to keep secret for years—the sales figures on its dual-purpose XL bikes. While the long-legged, all-powerful motocrossers were getting all the attention, the dual-purpose bikes were steadily bringing in the bacon. The two things most corporate executives will agree upon are: Figures don't lie and go with the proven success. Thus we now have the Suzuki SP125 and SP250.

When Suzuki decided to tap the four-stroke on/off-road market this year, the rules had changed. It was no longer, "Give 'em what they want," but rather "Give 'em what they *really* want and top the other brand in the process."

Even a casual glance at the SP125 or 250 reveals that these aren't your average DT-whatever chump bikes. The first thing you notice is the absence of any bogus, chrome-plated shocks hanging off the back. Instead there's a full-floating, rising-rate, single-shock, RM-type rear suspension unit. Leading axle forks up front, lightweight hubs, aluminum rims, folding shifter . . . hey, these SP whatever look almost like real dirt bikes!

ROLL OUT THE 250

A closer inspection of the SP250 motor shows some similarities to the Honda XL250 motor. Dual exhaust pipes, four-

valved head, counterbalancers—in other words, all the hardware necessary to meet the current four-stroke design formula for power and smoothness.

One of the differences we noted between the DR250 (tested in June *DB*) and the SP250 was the carburetor. The SP uses a vacuum-slide operated carb that eliminates the low-speed hitch when the throttle is yanked open that the DR suffered from with its normal cable-slide operated carb. Also, the SP runs a 34mm

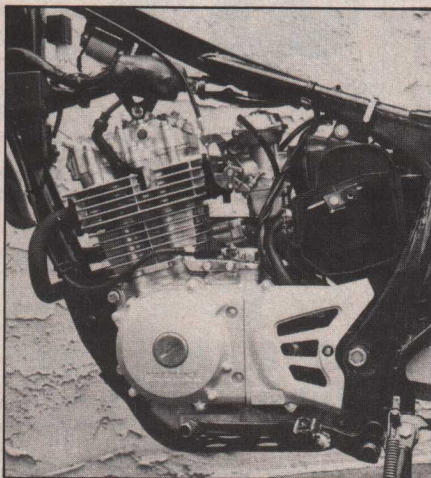
Mikuni, as opposed to the DR's 28mm.

Starting the 250 is your basic four-stroke procedure: choke full on, throttle closed, compression release lever down, and kick. The compression release lever automatically pops back up on the first engine revolution. By then it's settled into a pleasant idle. It usually takes several minutes to warm up. If you can't wait that long, it *can* be ridden away with the choke on, but should be turned off after a few miles down the road.

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

Chances are, the typical owner of an SP will spend as many miles, if not more, riding on the road as on the trails. With this in mind, we left the tie-downs in the truck and rode the Suzukis to all of our favorite riding areas. The average ratio was 40 miles of pavement to get to and from 20 miles of off-road riding. Once you leave the blacktop and hit the first fire road, the fun begins.

On hard-packed, dry surfaces the dual-purpose Bridgestone tires kept front-end washout to a minimum and provided just enough spin at the rear to allow steering with the throttle. Full-on, feet-up roosts were not that common, though, because the SP250 thumper just doesn't put out that kind of horsepower. The horsepower available is smooth, which allows the throttle to be yanked open in the middle



The SP250 motor is similar to the XL250 motor in both appearance and performance.

of a sweeper, without fear of being pitched off.

After leaving the fire roads, we searched out some of our favorite trails and found the SP handled more like a true dirt bike than we expected. It's certainly not going to cause any concern to a wild-eyed motocrosser or a tree-splitting enduro bike, but comparing the suspension and handling to that of the street/trail bikes of yesteryear, it's worlds better.

With seven and one half inches of travel front and rear, riding the 250 at medium-fast speeds through the boonies might cause some occasional grief, but not much more than enduro bikes did back when they had similar travel.

One thing the SP has—that even last year's two-stroke enduro bikes didn't—is a progressive rear suspension. The reason Suzuki's Full Floater works so well on the RMs holds true for the SPs also. Dual-purpose bikes have always come with a suspension too soft for off-road riding so that street riding would be comfortable. With the introduction of its new wave rising-rate rear suspension, Suzuki has eliminated much of that problem on its SP. When traveling over medium-size bumps, the Full Floater suspension does a fairly adequate job of keeping the bike pointed straight and the rider on board, as long as he isn't traveling at speeds faster than a bike carrying turn signals should go.

WHAT ABOUT THE 125?

First of all, don't confuse this Suzuki 125 with the one Mark Barnett rides. They're worlds apart. About as different as the skill level between Barnett and the beginning rider—which is who the SP125 is designed for; the inexperienced rider who is intimidated easily. Although the hard-cores aren't going to give the little Suzuki much notice, a lot of 15-year-olds are going to spend many hours gazing at its brochure, dreaming of the day they will own one, ride it to baseball practice and impress the whole Little League.

What's it like to ride the SP125? First of all—it's slow. Very slow, compared to a 125 motocrosser, but actually, for a 125cc four-stroke it feels fairly peppy. The key to making time on the 125 is momentum. Never let off. Whether on the street or trails, it's keep the throttle nailed, upshift to speed up, downshift to slow down—but *never* let off full throttle. If you do, it's downshift two gears to get back up to speed.

With a six-speed gearbox, there's a gear for every occasion. Plan on using sixth gear only on level ground or downhills, though, and only above 50mph. One of the *DB* staffers rode the 125 fifteen miles to work each day on the freeway for several weeks and had no problems staying with traffic. A 70-mph cruise can even be maintained by a 160-pound rider, as long as he stays tucked in behind the headlight.

Off-road, the 125 will provide plenty of fun for smaller riders. The suspension

Going to the top for a better view of Malibu. The SP250 showed few bad habits for scenic trailriding.





The SP250 and Dennis West show some signs of class as they wheely by Johnny Carson's house in Beverly Hills.



Looking for Mr. Goodberm? SP125 fun "is never having to say you let off."



SUZUKI

SP125

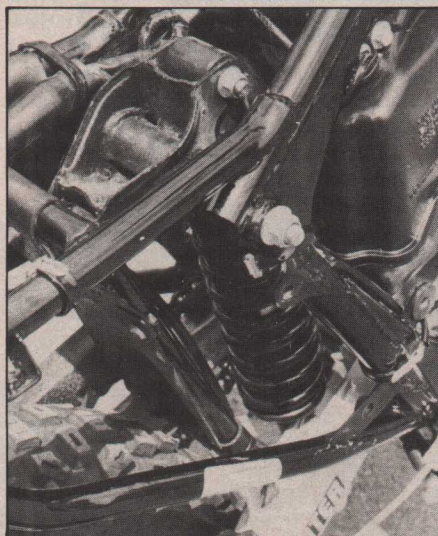
SP250

ENGINE TYPE	4-stroke single, 2 valve	4-stroke single, 4 valve
BORE AND STROKE	57.0mm x 48.8mm	72.0mm x 61.2mm
DISPLACEMENT	124cc	249cc
CARBURETION	22mm Mikuni	34mm Mikuni
FUEL TANK CAPACITY	2.2 gal.	2.5 gal.
FUEL CONSUMPTION	95 mpg	70 mpg
TRANSMISSION	6-speed	5-speed
IGNITION	PEI	Transistorized

SP125

SP250

WHEELBASE	53 in.	54 in.
GROUND CLEARANCE	10.4 in.	10.2 in.
SUSPENSION: FRONT	7.1 in.	7.7 in.
REAR	6.3 in.	7.5 in.
WEIGHT (DRY)	224 lbs.	257 lbs.
INTENDED USE, MFR.	On/off road	On/off road
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	Japan	Japan



A Full-Floater is nestled in between the frame tubes. Obviously it worked much better than the old dual-shock setup.

works well for the speed and acceleration the engine allows. Larger riders will find discomfort after long trail rides because of the close distance between the seat and footpegs. Smaller riders will find the low saddle height of 32 inches a plus though. In the course of testing the SP125, it was always the smallest bike among the group of test bikes.

The trails covered on some rides were pretty rough and steep, but the 125 was always able to go wherever the bigger bikes went . . . it just took a little longer. Patience was the key.

HAPPY WHEELS INFO

There are several reasons why Suzuki, along with several other manufacturers, has gone strictly to four-strokes for its dual-purpose line. First, it was getting increasingly difficult to make two-strokes meet the federal emission level for street-legal bikes. Secondly, the majority of non-racer-type riders prefer the beat of a

four-stroke exhaust to that of a two-stroke.

The new Suzuki four-strokes should prove to be almost maintenance-free. With features like pointless ignition, automatic cam chain tensioner and such, about the only thing left to fiddle with is changing the oil and cleaning the air filter.

For a first-year effort, Suzuki did its homework on the SP125 and 250. If we had to point out "you should haves," two would be the painted plastic fenders that scratch with a simple get-off, and the tool kit container that hangs out in the open without a lock on it. The gas cap gets a lock, but not the tools. We just wonder how long it'll be there when the bike is parked in second class ville.

PROFOUND CONCLUSION

Suzuki has found a spot in a market owned before exclusively by Honda. The SP125 and SP250 are attractive (and red),
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FROM THE SADDLE
(continued from page 7)

blocking three lanes. They were three across and four or five rows deep, all going at the same speed. Now, the General doesn't hold many things in life sacred, but one thing that he places up there with the flag is keeping the fast lane open for those who choose to "dabble" with the 55-mph speed limit.

When he was forced to bring the F-15 down to 54 mph, it felt like you could open the door and run alongside the Great White Van. The General eased the F-15 up behind the last vehicle in the fast lane and flickered his lights a few times.

This was ignored, or unnoticed, by the driver.

The General then gave a few polite toots to his Maserati air horns. Still nothing.

At this point we all reached for something solid, because we had seen The Drill before. The General gave only two warnings, then set into motion more drastic measures. The F-15 was nudged directly behind the offending car until the bumpers touched. This was usually enough to bring most drivers out of their doldrums. When that failed, the General would slowly, surely and steadily accelerate the F-15. Many times, the driver in front would not even be aware of any increase in speed until he (or she) would glance down at the speedo and recoil in horror.

Sometimes, but not often, the driver would hit the brakes and try to stop. This would have virtually no effect on the 800-horsepower F-15, as it would still make the vehicle accelerate even if all four of its wheels were locked up, smoking and being ground square by the friction.

The driver in front of us became annoyed by the initial antics of the F-15, and responded in an unusual fashion. He started alternating between braking and accelerating. This prevented the General from his "touch-and-push" tactics. After only a few minutes of this, the General flipped his cork. With both hands on the wheel, knuckles white and eyes wide, he floored the F-15, and turned the radio up to full blast. We all cringed and braced. The F-15 veered off the road and onto the shoulder, and pulled up alongside the car. The General swore a mighty oath, waved a fist at the now wide-eyed driver, then pulled in front of him, half of the van still on the shoulder. The left rear wheel was busting loose and throwing a veritable avalanche of debris on the following car.

Almost immediately, the car fell way back. Without even losing a beat, the General knifed through traffic, swooping past the rest of the vehicles in the cluster, with masterful disdain. We looked at each other and breathed a semi-sigh of relief.

The General looked over at all of us and said, "Yeah. I know how you feel. There are some real loonies on the road, aren't there? Anybody got a beer?" □

SUZUKI SP125 & 250
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well mannered, and inoffensive to non-bike people. To test this, on one of our test rides through the Santa Monica mountains, we dropped down into Beverly Hills. We tooted around on our little Suzuki dirt bikes down on millionaire row, amongst the Rolls Royces and Ferraris, and we weren't even noticed. The only time we even received a glance was when we wheeled away from stop signs.

The dual-purpose bikes, as we would like to see them, have finally arrived. Yamaha has introduced a new line of XT's with monoshock rear suspension. Kawasaki should introduce a Uni-Trak KL next year.

Our *Dirt Bike Survey* revealed an increasing number of people entering the off-road sport by way of dual-purpose bikes. Hopefully these bikes will progress to the technological advancements of MX bikes. Until this year, Honda didn't really have anyone pushing the rapid advancement of its XLs. With the rumors of Suzuki's Full Floater SPs, Honda saw fit to improve the XLs this year with the addition of its Pro-Link. Thank you, Suzuki, and thank you, Honda.

Competition is a marvelous thing. It has a way of improving things quickly. And that's good. It's good for all of us. □

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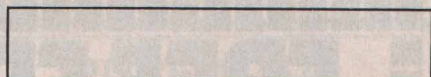
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