

# SUZUKI RM125X: MAGIC SHOCK

# DIRT BIKE

JULY 1981  
\$1.50 UK65P

**YAMAHA YZ250H:**  
IS THERE LIFE AFTER MONO?

**EASTERN KNUCKLE  
BUSTER ENDURO:**  
FORKED RIVER  
NATIONAL



**THREE  
WHEEL  
THUNDER:  
HONDA  
ATC250R**



**HONDA  
CR80:  
MAXI  
MINI**







SUZUKI RM125X



HONDA ATC 250R



SUZUKI PE175



FORKED RIVER NATIONAL ENDURO

On the cover: Steve Schmitz explodes the YZ250H out of a sandy berm at Indian Dunes; and Dirk Vandenberg does the same thing at Dumont Dunes, on the ATC 250R. Both photos by Paul Clipper, who's still shaking the sand out of his shoes.

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# SUZUKI RM125X MOTOCROSSER

## FLAT-OUT FULL FLOATER

Better late than never

**T**iming is everything. Johnny Carson can ease out a one-liner and bring chuckles and grins from the audience. Your Uncle Ernie tells the same joke, word for word, and everybody heads off for a fresh beer.

Yes, timing is critical in the mosickle business, too. Especially in the 125 class, where impulse buyers abound. What's hot and new, sells. Everything else languishes on the dealers' floors.

Kawasaki came out first... their 125 bristling with horsepower. But, alas, it was air-cooled and the reception was less than wonderful. Still, because they did get out early and had an improved engine, they sold more units than they would have otherwise. Good timing.

Yamaha and Honda blitzed the public a month later with all-new hardware. And, as the rumors had predicted, both were radically changed and water-cooled to boot.

The battle was shaping up nicely. Some folks jumped right in and bought a KX, YZ or a CR, while others thought they'd wait just a few weeks for the Suzukis. After all, they *could* be hot this year. And no 125 racer wants to be seen on anything but *the hottest* equipment.

The patient waited. And waited. And waited some more. Excuses were given. Stories fabricated. Delay after delay. There were those in the industry who thought that Suzuki might have committed moto-cide by waiting too long.

But, when the first of the RMs hit the dealers' floors, they were snapped



up and rushed off to the race tracks. Perhaps Suzuki tantalized the racing public so much that it nearly drove them mad with anticipation.

Timing? Or just luck?

**Was it worth the wait?**

If you race on bumpy, rough tracks, yes. If you compete on mostly easy, smooth, high-speed tracks, no.

You see, what makes the RM125 a great bike—instead of just a good bike—is that magical rear suspension. Just like its big brother, the RM250X, the 125 literally eats the whoops and ruts. The harder they're hit, the better the bike works. It feels like a junior version of the RM250 we tested last month, and, for all practical purposes, it is.

**Blanket statements, right up front**

Question:—*Is it as fast as the YZ-125H?*

Answer:—No. In a corner-to-corner race, the YZ is a fraction quicker. Maybe a length at most. But, it's not slow.

Question:—*How's the suspension compared to the YZ?*

Answer: Better; far better at the rear and about the same up front.

Question:—*Which one turns best?*

Answer:—Easy, the YZ.

Question:—*Which one will turn the fastest lap times?*

Answer:— On a rough track, the RM, riding skill being equal. On a turning track filled with tight twisties, probably the YZ. On a smooth, fast track, the YZ.



# SUZUKI RM125X

Available in blue or red. One size fits all.



Available in blue or red. One size fits all.



Available in red, blue and tan.

## Why it does what it does

Now that we've given away all of the answers instead of making you wait until the end of the test, you are under a sacred obligation to find out why these things are.

## That rear end

It's called a Full Floater, which is nothing more than a clever name for a rising rate suspension. For a relatively ungarbled explanation of this rising rate stuff, please steal a copy of last month's *Dirt Bike* and read the RM250 test. We will not repeat ourselves just to inform a non-regular reader. Suffice it to say, the Full Floater is a variable suspension lever ratio setup that works nice and soft on the small bumps and firms up for bumps that take the suspension into the deep part of its stroke.

A single, upright aluminum-bodied shock is mounted rather far forward on the massive aluminum alloy swing-arm and is connected to a rocker by a pair of rods. According to the Suzuki people, the shock is compressed from both ends, rather than being squeezed from the bottom, as in a conventional shock. Hence, the floating load yields the name.

To appreciate the action of the FF rear end, find a nice, miserable section of real estate with some genuine bumps. None of that namby-pamby terrain. We mean stuff that'll push your kidneys right through the top of your helmet.

Now go out and make a pass through this section at a reasonable speed. Then, hit it again at a slightly increased speed. Keep it up until fear or common sense forces you to quit. Because the bike won't. As long as that throttle is kept pegged and the rear wheel is driving, the Suzuki will suck up any bumps in its path.

One word of caution: While you're indulging in this controlled lunacy, do not back off the throttle. If you do, all of the good manners of the RM go right out the window with the dirty bath water and the dead parakeet. Not a pretty picture, to say the least.

One can safely call the RM a "power-on" handler. When you decide to come down from speed, as during breaking for a turn, your weight must be kept well back—more so than with other bikes. The front end has a tendency to squat. Not as bad as the RM-250, but it's still there.



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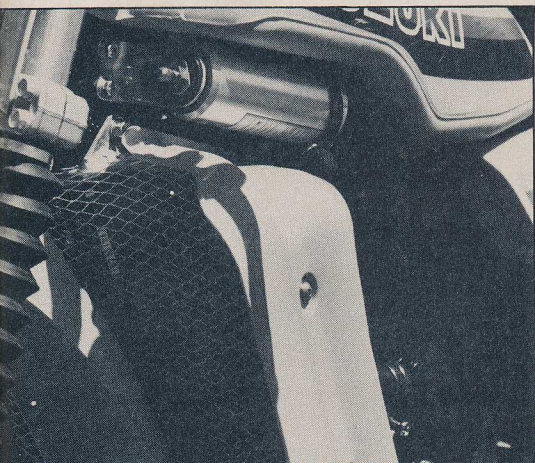
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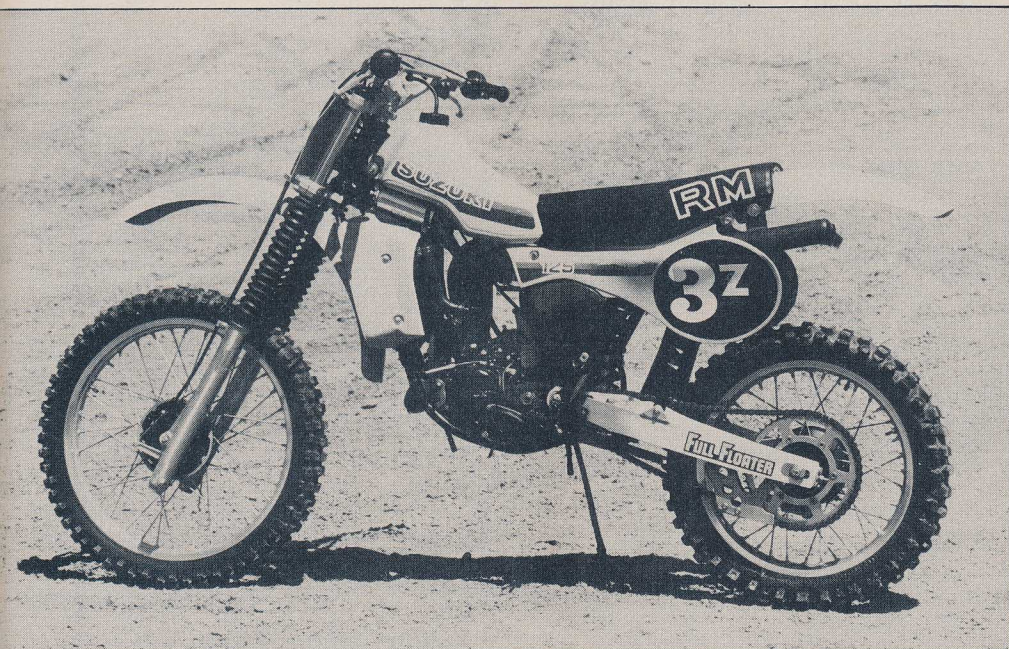
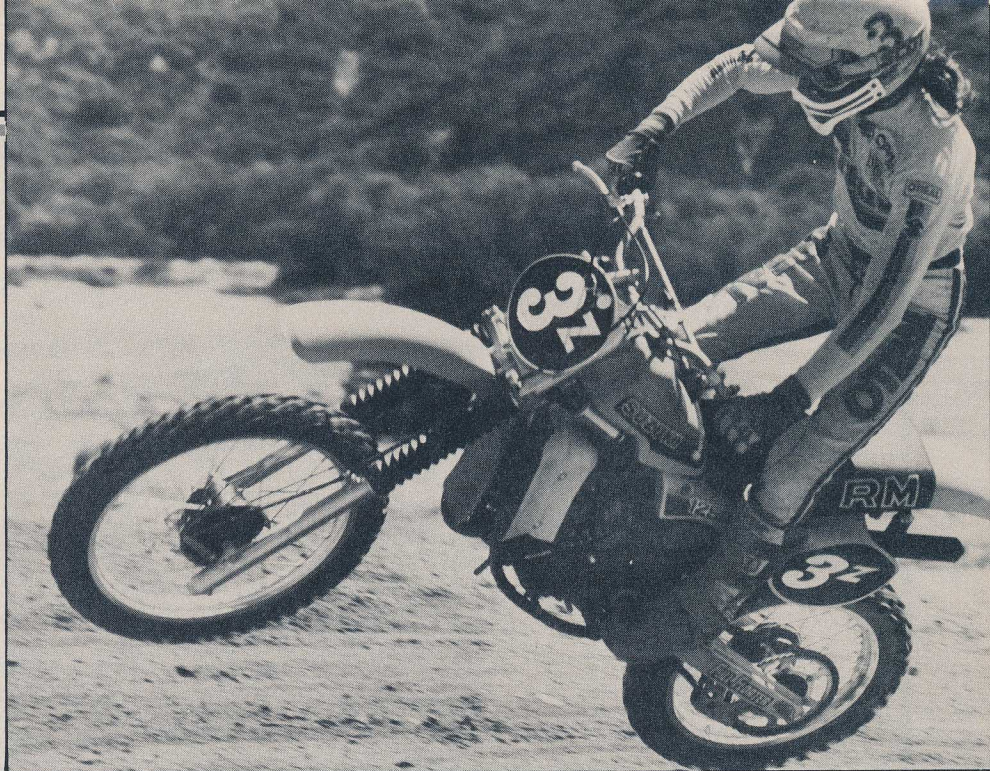
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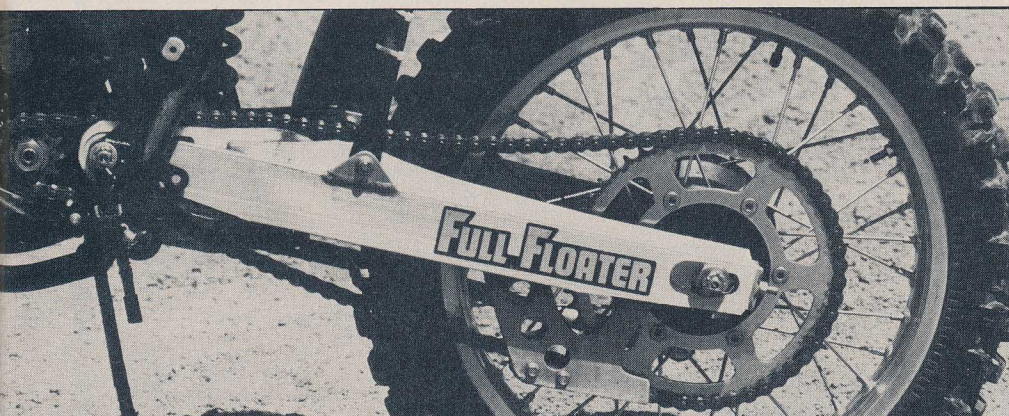




*Although the radiator looks to be in a vulnerable area, we experienced no problems with occasional crashes; but in a muddy, sloppy race, it would pack with mud.*



*The small, finless cylinder looks small but don't be fooled; it's potent. Nestled under the tank is the floater reservoir, quite a distance from the shock itself.*



*Probably the best rear end on the market, the Floater swingarm is an aluminum number—and very rigid.*

### Forks alive!

While we thought the forks on the 250 were adequate, on the 125 they're very good units. The 125 is a lighter, shorter machine, with a bit less travel than the 250. Because the forks perform so well on the 125, it's our guess that they're not all that far off on the 250.

David Riley

We'd have to rate the bump-absorbability of the forks at least as high as those on the Yamaha, which has been our standard of excellence for 125s so far this year.

We ran no air in the forks on our test bike, but we did raise the oil level about 15mm over the stock recommendations. But then, our test riders are heavier than the average 125 rider. This alone speaks highly of the suspension on the RM125. If a pair of two-hundred-pounders can ride and enjoy the RM125 in basically stock trim, then it has to be a decent setup.

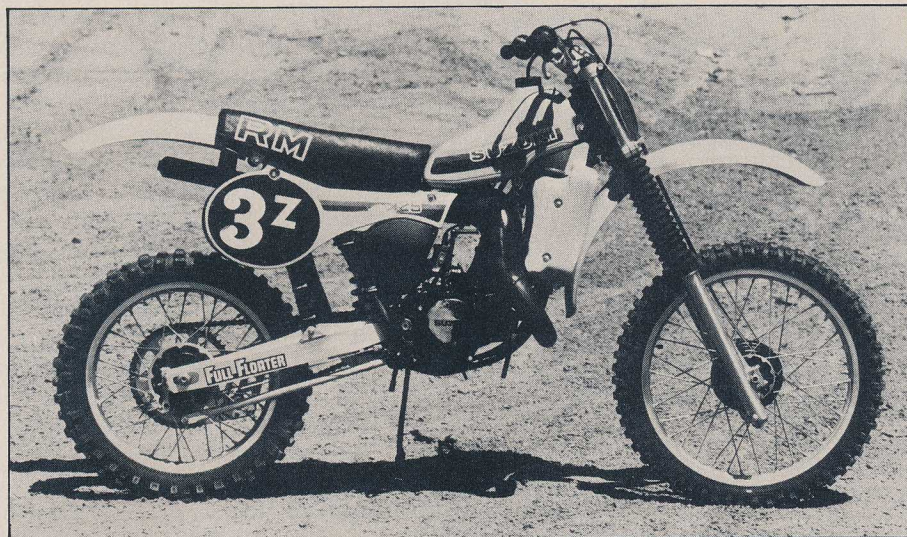
Suzuki recommends 10-weight oil in the forks. Later in the test we tried a 6-weight oil and were pleased with the results. The ability to absorb sharp bumps was improved dramatically, even though there was a slight bottoming on the very worst jumps with the heavier riders aboard. With the lighter oil, the rebound stroke was a bit quicker, but as long as we rode the bike in a thoroughly aggressive manner, this was an advantage. A beginner, or Novice-level rider, might want to stay with the 10-weight oil.

### Stuffing, turning, pivots and divots

You might say that the RM125 turns like it takes the bumps: under power,



# SUZUKI RM125X



## SUZUKI RM125X

Name and model	Suzuki RM125X
Engine type	Single-cylinder, water-cooled reed-valved, two-stroke
Bore and stroke	54mmx54mm (2.126 inches x 2.126 inches)
Displacement	123cc (7.5 cubic inches)
Horsepower	N/A
Carburation	32mm Mikuni
Factory recommended jetting:	
Main jet	230
Needle jet	.06
Jet needle	6FP35-2
Pilot jet	.30
Slide number	2.0
Recommended gasoline	Premium 92-plus octane
Fuel tank capacity	6.5 liters (1.7 gallons)
Fuel tank material	Plastic
Lubrication	Oil in gas, pre-mix
Recommended oil	Suzuki C:C.1 at 20:1 ratio
Oil capacity	N/A
Air filtration	Oiled foam, two layers, two filters
Clutch type	Wet, multi-plate
Transmission	Six-speed constant mesh
Gear box ratios:	
1	2.333 (28/12)
2	1.750 (28/16)
3	1.411 (24/17)
4	1.190 (25/21)
5	1.045 (23/22)
6	0.956 (22/23)
Gearing, front/rear	12/51
Ignition	Suzuki PEI, CDI
Primary kick system?	Yes
Recommended spark plug	NGK B8EGV ND W24ES-G
Silencer/spark arrestor/ quality	Silencer only, fairly noisy

Exhaust system	High-pipe, through frame
Frame, type	Single downtube, split cradle
Wheelbase	1440mm (56.7 inches)
Ground clearance	345mm (13.6 inches)
Seat height	36 inches
Steering head angle	29.5 degrees
Trail	121mm (4.76 inches)
Weight with one gallon gas	204 pounds (dry, 194 pounds)
Rim material	Aluminum alloy
Tire size and type:	
Front	3.00x21 knobby
Rear	4.10x18 knobby
Suspension, type and travel:	
Front	Air/oil, telescopic 285mm (11.22 inches)
Rear	Single-shock, rising rate 312mm (12.28 inches)
Intended use	Motocross
Country of origin	Japan
Approx. retail price	\$1579

**Distributor:**  
U.S. Suzuki  
3251 East Imperial Hwy.  
P.O. Box 1100  
Brea, California 92621

<b>Overall rating, 0 to 100, various categories, keeping intended use of machine in mind:</b>	
Handling	96
Suspension	98 (rear, 99; front, 97)
Power	95
Cost	92
Attention to detail	90
Effectiveness, stone stock	97

or not at all. Try to steer the RM through a flat corner with the power partially on, and who knows where the front end will go? It might move over a few feet, or merely wiggle out enough to scare you silly. But, if you nail the throttle and get that rear wheel driving, the front end will snap right into line and go where your body-lean directs the bike.

Oddly, you can enter that same flat turn with the power completely chopped off, and, if your weight is forward, you can do a tidy little pivot quite nicely, thank you. However, as

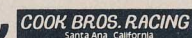
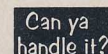
soon as the RM is just about through with the off-power flop-turn, it's best to get right back on the power—and get on it hard!

### Driving forces, motivations and forward motion

We already told you that the YZ was fractionally quicker and ruined the suspense for you. But what kind of power does the RM125X produce? Think back, if you will, to the RM125C bike. Well, it's that sort of spread of power, but a lot more of it everywhere. There is nothing to speak of at the bottom; the midrange comes on at a decent

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Dave R.

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## SUZUKI RM125X

time with proper punch and the engine will rev out nicely. Not overwhelming, but good, useable, 125 racer-type power.

A few folks told us that the air box setup on the RM was on the restrictive side, so we tried a small experiment. After cleaning the bike one day, we removed the right side filters completely and made a pass or two down the pavement. The bike did feel stronger, but naturally, there was a hint of detonation telling us that no air box modifications should be made without the proper re-jetting.

### Watercooling... Suzuki style

It seems that everyone has their own approach to just where that cumbersome radiator ought to be. Most 125 racers agree that watercooling is a necessary evil on the small bikes. Yamaha mounts their radiator on the forks. Honda slips a pair of them up high on the tank. KTM mounts theirs cleverly in a horizontal position under the tank. Suzuki chooses to mount the cooler on the frame downtube. It's lower than the rest, but a bit vulnerable to damage. Kawasaki keeps theirs on the shelf in the back of the factory.

Of the four different approaches, we like the well-thought-out KTM system the best; the Suzuki system the next best, although the radiator is partially blocked off from a clean air flow by the front wheel and fender. To compensate for this, Suzuki has a large cowling that scoops air into the radiator. It also scoops in anything else that might happen to be in the air at the same time. A sturdy screen protects the cooling fins from rocks and debris, but mud can collect easily. With each Suzuki, there's a plastic louver kit that can be clipped in place. This is supposed to keep excess mud from building up. What you end up with is a radiator grill that looks like a venetian blind designed by an Iranian rugmaker. Odd, at best.

Still, the radiator does a great job of cooling. We rode the RM in one race on a very sloppy, over-watered track and a great deal of goop got on the radiator. No problem.

It takes a great deal of time to warm up the RM125 properly. The *Race Preparation Manual* supplied with each RM warns that at least three to five minutes of fast idle are needed before the bike should be ridden. Not only will the bike run poorly if it isn't





warmed up, but there's the distinct possibility of a cold seizure. This occurs when the metals haven't reached their proper expansion and the bike is run too hard. We found it best to warm the bike up at least five minutes at a fast idle, then make a half-dozen passes through the gears to clean the motor out, before reporting to the starting line. Failure to go through this ritual just about guarantees a blubbery, ratty start every time.

Our test bike was dropped a few times. We fully expected to rip off the plastic cowling in a low side, but this never occurred.

#### Minor problems

The rear edge of the saddle, near the fender, ripped open for no apparent reason. Inspection showed that the white plastic base underneath is very sharp and actually cuts through the thinnish vinyl covering. The same thing happened to our RM250. We checked out some other Suzukis and found this to be a common problem.

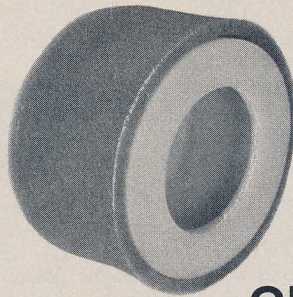
It was next to impossible to keep the rear fender on. It's attached to the back of the saddle by small bolts and, in spite of regular tightening, they kept falling out. We had to resort to Disc-Lock washers and Loctite.

When abused, our clutch started to protest. The hand lever would start losing some of its throw and we'd have to ride for a while without using the clutch, until it cooled down. It would return fairly soon. To play it safe, we suggest that all RM125X owners change the gearbox oil after each race day.

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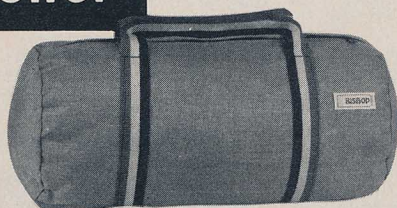
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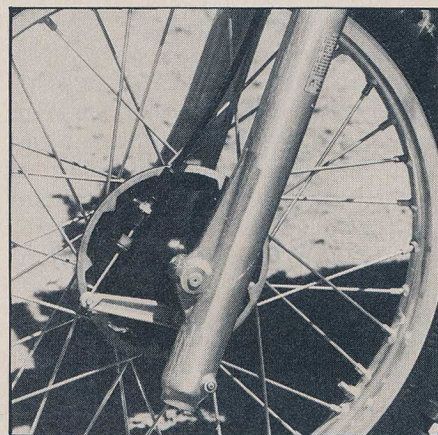
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# SUZUKI RM125X

As we've come to expect, the motor mount bolts on the RM125X were a bit small for the holes. This translated into quite a bit of vibration for such a small bike. It might be a good idea to drill out all of the motor mounts slightly, to the next size up, and slide in some good-quality American aircraft fasteners.

Adjusting the preload on the single shock was grim. The manual recommends that the shock be removed for the operation, but that's a 20-minute job, from start to finish, working at a brisk pace with no interruptions.

We merely resorted to tapping on the jam and adjuster nuts with a rod through the bottom edge of the protective rubber flap between the tire and the shock. In short order, we start garing up the notches, as the adjusters are made of aluminum.



**All-new hubs are found on the latest RMs, with center-pull spokes. The forks, brakes and wheel assemblies are all first-rate.**

A call to U.S. Suzuki got us a reasonable alternative: use a Suzuki steering head adjusting spanner. It's long and supplies enough leverage for the job. Getting one might not be that easy, but you can at least bug your local shop to get one. Jeez! Another tool in the old toolbox.

### Bits and pieces

The reservoir for the rear shock is way up front under the gas tank. It's routed past the pipe and engine, and picks up some heat on the way forward.

Rebound damping is available by flipping off a side panel and reaching in under a black rubber cover on the top of the shock. A knob resides there and has four different positions available. Number two or three should do the job for most riders.

(continued on page 66)

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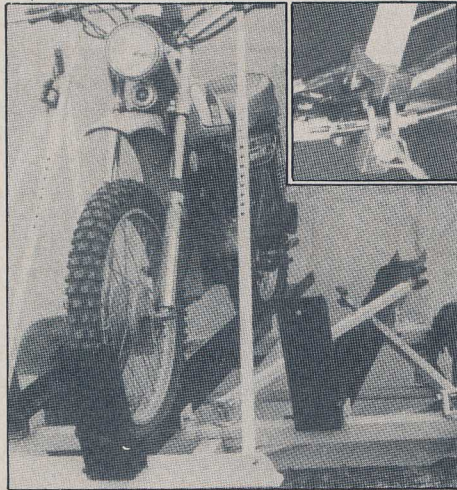
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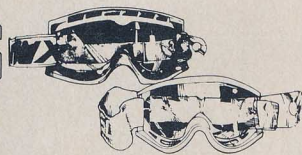
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## SUZUKI RM125X

(continued from page 58)

Brakes at both ends proved excellent. We also liked the new-style hubs. Spoke loosening was no problem.

None of our people cared for the old-fashioned control levers and the stone age throttle cable routing. One flip-flop fall will easily break the throttle guide where it exits the throttle housing—that's the end of the moto for you.

A non-folding shift lever comes on the 125. Tsk, tsk. In *this* day and age?

Plan on taking the arms and pivots of the Full Floater assembly apart regularly. Clean and grease all points. We like Bel-Ray Anti-Seize for this maintenance.

After a few hours of riding, we cut an inch off each side of the bars. Much better. Those bars feel odd at first, but once you put some time in on the bike, learn to stay forward and relax your arms, they aren't a half-bad shape.

Keep an eye on the rear sprocket bolts. Ours took a while to bed in properly.

It would be a good idea to try a Metzeler up front instead of the stock Bridgestone. The rear tire was okay while fresh.

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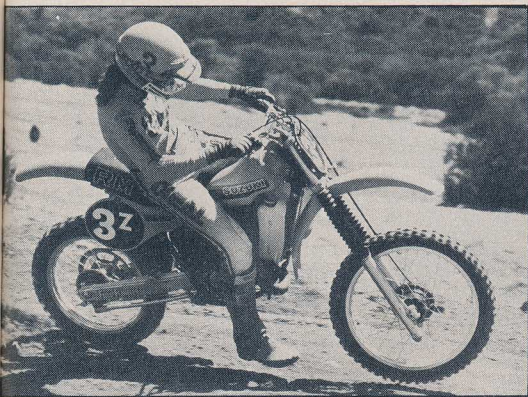
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Well, next month we have our annual 125 MX Shootout, and, since we gave you some tidy bits of information early in this test, you'll just have to wait until then to find out who the King of the Hill is for 1981.

One last thing: There will be more than the Big Four 125s in our Shootout. Possible surprises?



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