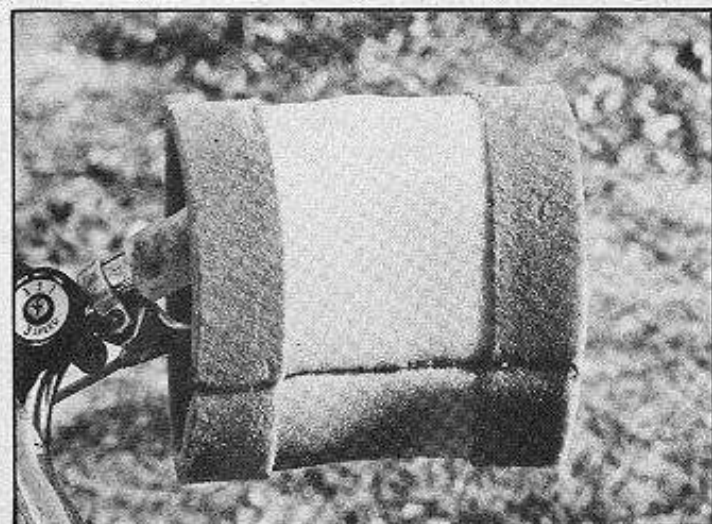
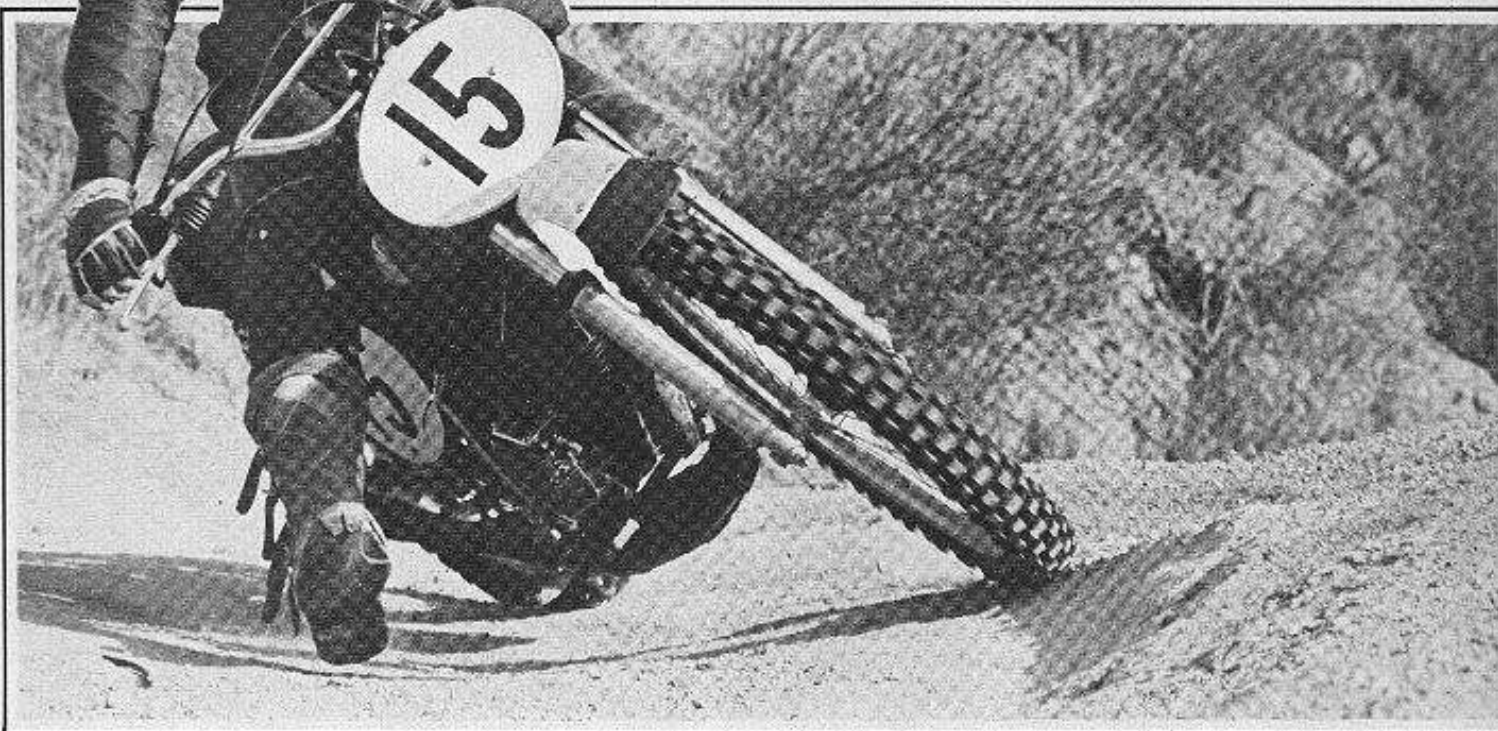


KAWASAKI

KX125

The worst suspension in its class, the best bike in its class—the chassis and power is that much better.

dr
TEST



BASIC ORGANIC homegrown dirt is infinite in its variety. Traversing Ms. Earth with speed, ease, and safety requires a 125 that produces lots of torque over a broad range so not to be intimidated by mud or sand, or be foiled by a bumbling throttle-crazed rider on hard-packed adobe.

Such a motor is called versatile. "Versatile" does not mean "compromise;" on the contrary, the KX 125 is a no-compromise motor. A compromise motor needs 90th-percentile rider reflexes, perfect traction, and a smooth sissified motocross course to achieve its

Air filter element is partly-fuzzed foam and wraps double around the mesh.



potential; or a compromise motor delivers squeamish power in smooth drop-lets for the sake of reliability.

Ah, but the no-compromise KX 125 delivers a sturdy wallop of tractable power at low revs, then continues to climb up to its torque peak with minimal wheelspin when everyone else is tap-dancing and wearing out knobbies.

In a parking-lot drag race, there is negligible difference between the KX and TM, YZ, CR, or Super Combat. But race up a hill, out of a snotty corner, or through a series of sandy switchbacks, and the KX will eat the others for brunch. Probably get better gas mileage, too.

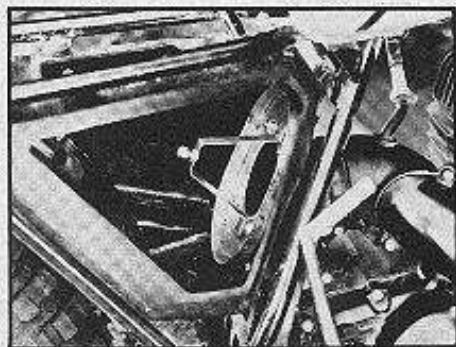
The KX culminates our recent look at the small-bore Japanese racers—the Super Combat (December '74), Suzuki TM 125 (March), Honda CR 125 (April). We don't intend to test the Yamaha MX 125's new paint job, so go back a year to April '74. As for the YZ, we're standing in line waiting for the new six-speed Monocross.

Sweeping statements you want? The Kawasaki, we reckon, is the best buy of the bunch, the most fun to ride, which is quite a feat considering it has by far the worst suspension. Terrible suspension.

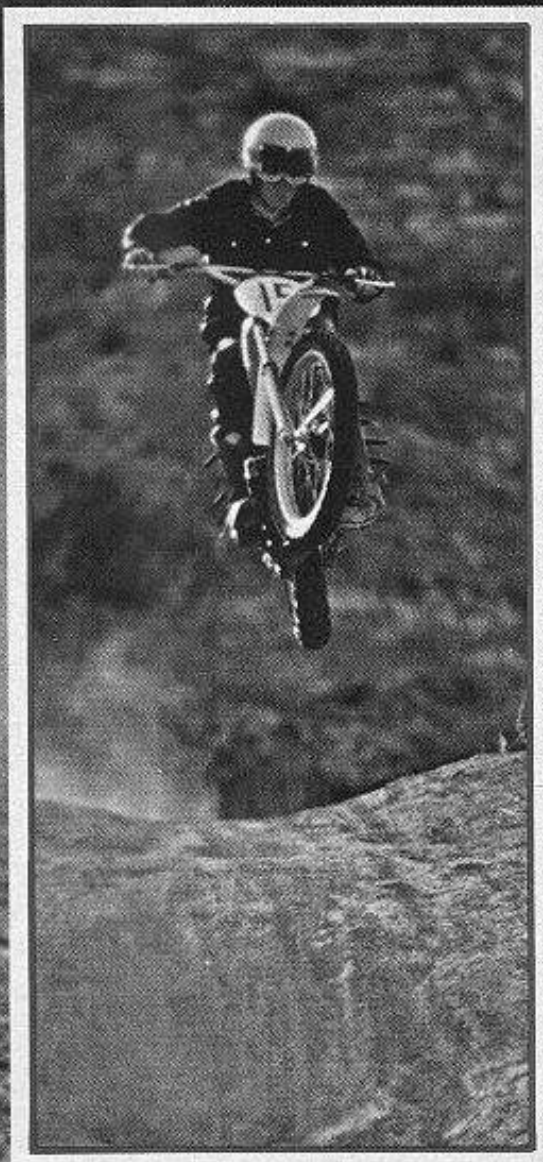
How can we justify this contradiction—the best bike having the worst suspension? Of all the bikes tested, none of the shocks are worth more than four or five races before a sensible rider would become fed up with them. As for the forks, Brian Fabre sung of a \$50.00 fix last month, a fix that would make them equivalent to Honda forks (by installing Honda dampers). Or try out the \$20 Trickit.

Rigidity is another area of superiority: the entire chassis feels more rigid than all the others, and the KX's swing-arm is the only one in the class we wouldn't immediately replace. In short, after fixing the suspenders there's not much to do to the KX but go out and win.

All other things being equal, rotary valve motors are superior power makers. Because intake duration can be more closely controlled, and because more cylinder wall area is available for transfer and exhaust, Kawasaki's 125 ought to have a wider powerband



Plastic molded air box is the best from Japan and needs minimal waterproofing.



and/or produce more peak ponies than the others. Because of their rotary, Kawasaki's past dirt singles have been famous for their tricks on the dyno. In fact, Kawasaki could have titillated the magazine dynophiles easily by making a 25 horsepower reputation in the KX. Horsepower reputations still sell plenty of motorcycles, regardless of the fact you'd be swallowing handfuls of amphetamines between motos to keep on top of the thing.

Kawasaki, who wisely puts much stock in their American R&D staff, completely redesigned the old F-6. One big problem with the F-6 was its bulbous right side, which houses the carburetor. The KX (and its enduro sibling KS 125) now has an almost unnoticeable bulge that won't get wiped off with the regularity of the F-6. Even size 11 boots don't get caught between it and the brake lever anymore.

Slendering the right side profile threatens to cut down on induction potential, but no problems exist. The KX 125 has the finest induction system in the whole batch—easier to service than Suzuki, more waterproof than Honda. A generous plastic air box under the seat that breathes from the top houses an oil-sogged foam filter. The element cleverly folds around the wire mesh to form two layers of 24-hour protection. Then this big rubber hose heads for the carburetor, picking up the fuel line (through a rubber grommet that should be sealed with silicone goo) halfway down. The air must make a sharp turn at the carb mouth but the 26mm VM Mikuni

never once complained about asphyxiation at 10,000 rpm. The jetting on our test bike was spotlessly zeroed in, the cleanest-running bike we've ever tested. We made a note of the jetting in the specs.

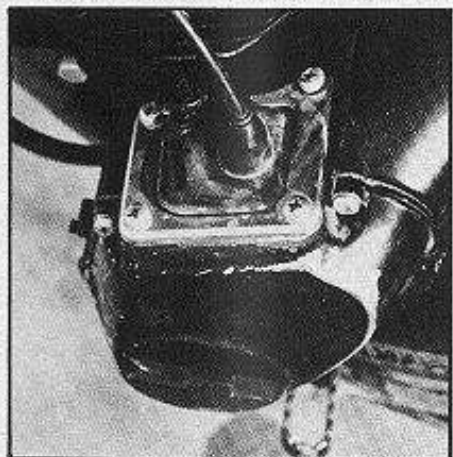
The problems a rotary could have, the Kawasaki doesn't. The benefits are still there: a well-protected carburetor, (our KS 125 test bike had the rubber idle screw plug come off; it is mandatory you goo these doodads), the wider powerband, relative ease of futzing with porting, and one less carburetor to remove when pulling the top end.

One bozo has appeared in the initial KX 125, an inability for the small end bearing to stay intact. Riders were having to assemble their own needle bearings by hand (consult Fabre last month again). We rode the bejeezus out of our bike to discover if the problem existed. So far, nothing has happened to ours or a few other KXs we've seen kicking around here.

More versatility comes from the six-speed tranny, one we are happy to bless with a host of crisp, butter-smooth, positive cliches. Internal gearing is virtually identical to the CR 125 but can obviously pull much higher gearing and still be of use in tighter sections. With stock gearing, the KX finished a desert enduro and by virtue of its extraordinary powerband could pull long sand hills in second gear, past various stalled 250 Yamahas. This is the first no-flywheel motorcycle we've ridden that benefitted from the ability to rev quickly; shifts can be avoided when the motor falls off the powerband by snapping in the clutch with one finger, popping the rear wheel loose and letting the torque do its deed.

Chassis construction is unspectacular—a single down tube splitting into a cradle, plenty of proper gussets, eyesore welding, and a spindly-looking swing-arm. It took some sadistic riding to feel any swingarm flex; only the hardest riders will want to strengthen or replace it.

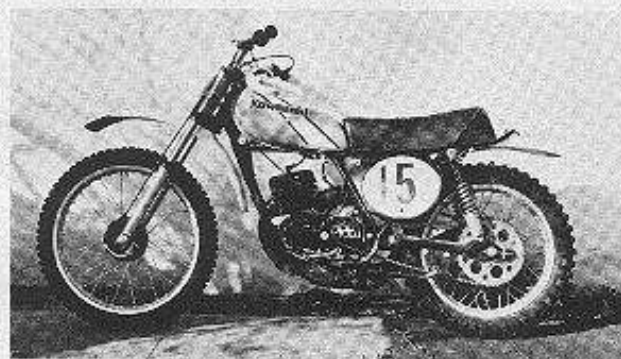
Above all, the chassis, turns, steers,



Carburetor stays safe and warm under cover, but you don't notice bulge when riding.

dr TEST

KAWASAKI KX 125
Kawasaki Motor Corporation
1062 McGaw Street
Santa Ana, California 92705
Price: \$890



SPECIFICATIONS

Engine	Two stroke rotary valve single
Bore/stroke	56mm/50.6mm
Displacement	124.8cc
Compression ratio	8.0:1
Claimed torque	1.74 Kg/m @ 9000 rpm
Claimed horsepower	22 @ 9750 rpm
Carburetion	26mm Mikuni, 1
Main jet	107.5
Air jet	0.5
Needle	4EJ3, 3rd notch
Needle jet	0-2, 8mm
Slide cutaway	2.5
Pilot jet	35
Clutch	Wet, multi-plate
Gear ratios (:1)	2.27, 1.69, 1.33, 1.14, 1.00, 0.89
Primary drive	Spur gear, 22/69 (3.14:1)
Final drive	Chain, 13/60 (4.61:1)
Lubrication	Premix
Fuel recommendation	Premium
Oil recommendation	"Two stroke racing oil," 20:1
Warranty	Zero

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase	53 inches
Ground clearance	7.6 inches
Peg height	12.9 inches
Seat height	32.5 inches
Running weight	195 pounds
Weight distribution	44.7%/55.3%
Fuel capacity	1.7 gallons
Transmission capacity	650cc
Throttle turn	87 degrees

COMPONENTS

Forks	Kayaba hydraulic, 6.3 inches travel
Shocks	Kayaba boingers, 3.5 inches travel
Frame	Single downtube full cradle steel
Pegs	Folding, spring loaded, serrated metal
Hubs	Kawasaki conical
Rims	DID alloy
Rimlocks	1 front, 2 rear
Tires	Dunlop motocross, 2.75x21, 3.50x18
Brakes	Single leading shoe, internal expanding
Ignition	Capacitor discharge
Tools	Yes, including spare plugs and jets
Spark plug	NGK B9EV
Air filter	Oil-soaked foam in plastic air box
Fenders	Plastic
Number plates	1 plastic plus two plastic side panels
Kill switch	Button on the ol' left side
Muffler	Barely better than the CR125's

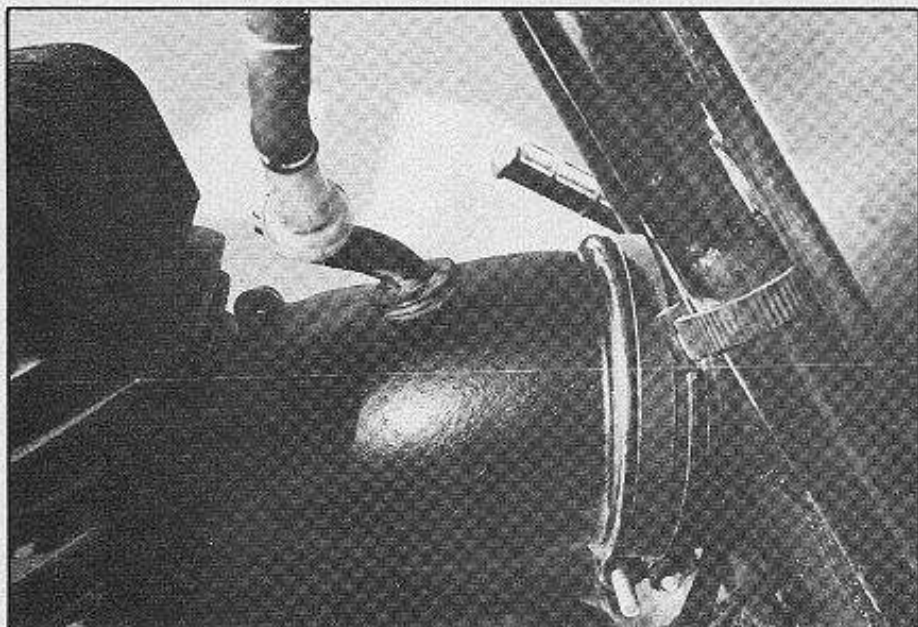


slides, wheelies, plows according to input. It will crash if you give it the distinct order—we never crashed it. It is as neutral-handling a bike as has come from the Orient; any quirks are mostly traced to the Dunlop knobbies, something you'll be looking forward to wearing out. The frame does nothing spectacular on its own accord, which makes the KX a spectacularly successful handling motorcycle. With the suspenders in tune, the KX is capable of harmony few manufacturers achieve with mass production merchandise.

We recollect the brakes on the KS 125 excellent; the KXs are the same units but painted black. The cabled rear doesn't exactly send an overdose of feel into your right boot, so we were locking the rear accidentally for the first few hours. We got used to the feel. The front had to be grabbed more than, say, Yamaha's, but you could compress the fork within an inch of their stops when going into turns. This makes for pleasant braking but unpleasant punishment from those crummy forks.

Of no special benefit other than to remind us of the fact that the Government continues to meddle outside the dictates of reason are brake wear in-

Brakes are the same as the enduro's, only blacker. They are true goggle-stretchers.



Air hose accepts fuel line through rubber doodad; this hole should be sealed.

dicators and legends cast on the side case covers explaining that that long, shiny crank is indeed a "kickstarter," and that the shift pattern is as the Gummint has deemed it from now on shall be: down for low. From now on all motorcycles must shift left-side down-for-low until the Department of Disease, Sickness, and Physical Aberations Committee for the Abolition of Unnecessary Discomfort bans foot shifters since they may cause blisters.

A stock KX 125 comes dressed in the finest duds. We rate the seat, pegs, and controls a fine as can be, the control relationships likewise. It weighs under 200 pounds yet is hardly flimsy. Tires are reasonable but you'll be anxious for them to wear out. Unsprung weight, including DID alloy rims, let the Kawasaki dance over rocks and cobbles. The tool kit includes spare jets and spark plugs and the owner's manual is quite thorough.

Of course, the usual amount of social consciousness went into the exhaust system: it's an carsplitter.

You buy it, you replace the shocks, you replace a good portion of the forks, and you have a motorcycle that will compete with \$1200 worth of Honda CR 125.

