

Both of 'em

KAWASAKI'S PRODUCTION RACERS

*Come September you'll be
able to own Brad's bikes*

Kawasaki is probably the most racing-oriented Japanese manufacturer, so it is sort of ironic that they are the only one that doesn't offer a line of production motocrossers. Even BSA has a 500 MX.

This September Kawasaki will introduce the F-11M and F-12 250 and 450 motocrossers, developed mostly in this country with the help of Brad Lackey, John DeSoto, Jim Weinert, Pete Lamppu, Jim Cooke and Bruce Baron. The machines we rode were from the advance production run of 200 units of each model that Kawasaki made for their dealers to put under local hotshoes to give the machines some exposure. They are obviously production motocross bikes; the materials used for many of the important parts are not as exotic as the metals used in the "works" bikes, and though the F-11M and F-12 are very sanitary, there are compromises that had to be made.

We were only allowed one day with the Kawasakis, since there are so very few of them in existence. Editor Pete Szilagyi concentrated his riding time on the 250, and the Buzzer spent the day on the 450. Here are their impressions.

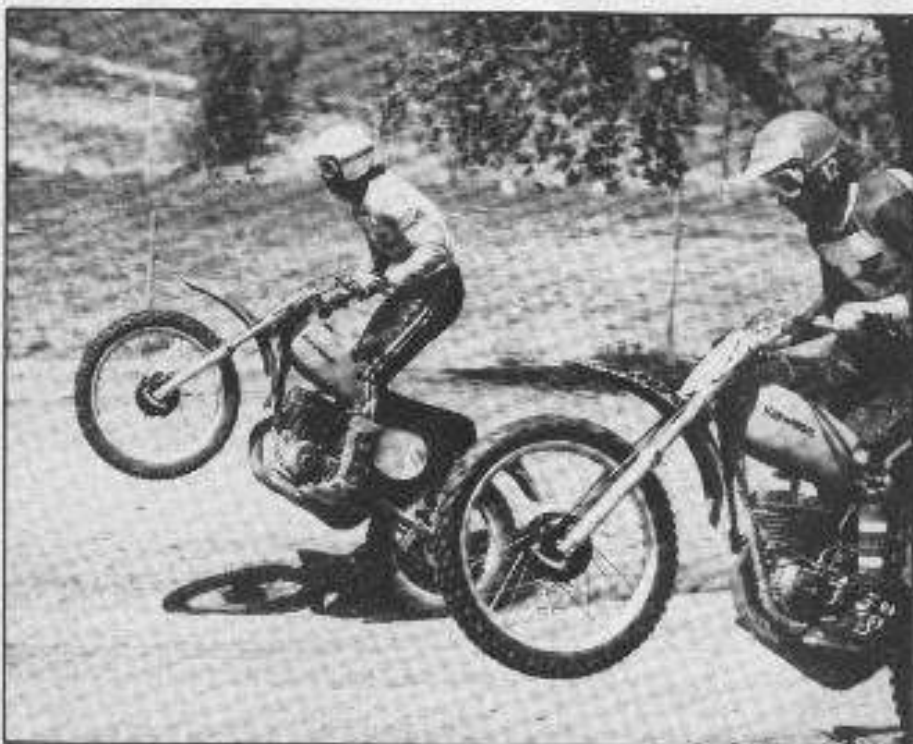
KAWASAKI F-11 M 250

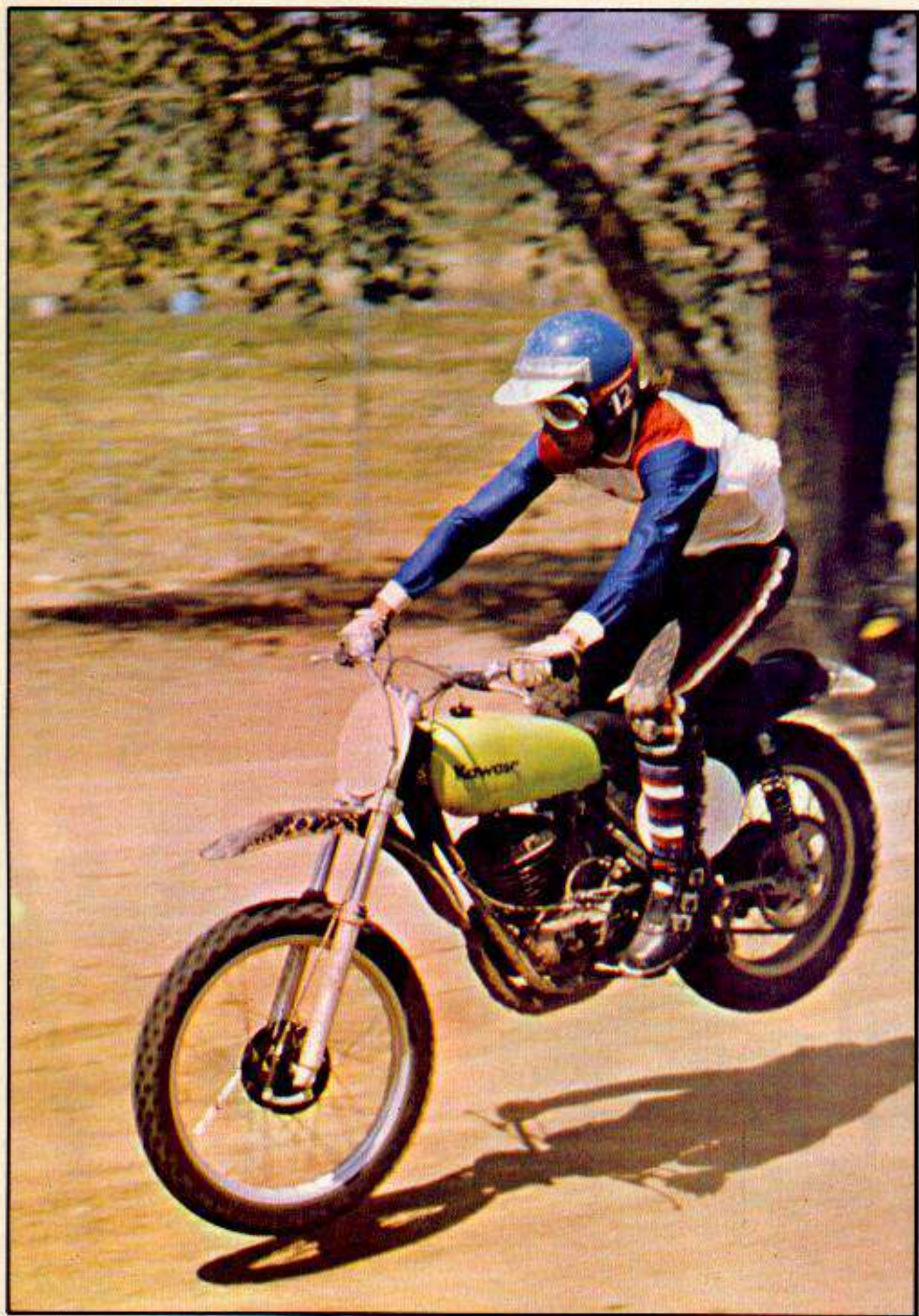
Probably few MX ACTION readers have had the chance to ride Kawasaki's F-11 Enduro—the yellow one with the red and blue stripes on the tank. But we'll predict what

would have happened if you had ridden one. Being a motocrosser, you would have taken that bulky, turn-signal-festooned machine and ridden it like an MX bike, not just at trail riding speeds like the bike was intended. The soft fork and shock springs were moaning and groaning, the license plate went away after the first few laps, here a taillight lens, there a reflector. But you would have been amazed at how well the F-11 handled at speed, even with all the excess weight. For some strange

reason the F-11 didn't want to kill you when you rode it fast, like many other enduro bikes would.

Then you'd get a bright idea. A light bulb in a balloon above your head, just like in the comics... Why not buy one of these little jewels and make an MXer out of it? A brand-new F-11 is about \$850; new shocks, tires, handlebars, pipe and some port work, maybe another \$200 at the outside. Strip off all the street trash and kazanga!, a unique motocross bike that works. The F-11 is the only





Japanese 250 enduro bike that you would even consider turning into a motocrosser, because it's the only one that has the proper frame geometry, forks, and an engine with lots of ponies just begging to be let out.

You weren't the only one with this idea. Many hundreds of F-11s were purchased and turned into motocross bikes; in fact, one of the first F-11 service bulletins that Kawasaki issued to its dealers detailed how to bring the motor up to demi-MX specs.

Kawasaki's R&D Department knew of the F-11's potential. Hell, they had their greasy little fingers in the bike's development through the prototype stages, so when they needed a 250 MX for Lackey and DeSoto to ride in the L.A. Coliseum's "Superbowl" a year ago, they started out with the basic F-11. The development continued through the Trans-AMA series and soon Kawasaki had a 250 that really wasn't an F-11 anymore. It reputedly weighed 179 pounds, approximately 20 pounds less than its rider, Pete Lampu.

As usually happens with an experimental bike, the factory refined it to a point where each machine was an engineering masterpiece, but they were so esoteric and expensive to build that the factory had to start backstepping to reach a compromise bike for the masses.

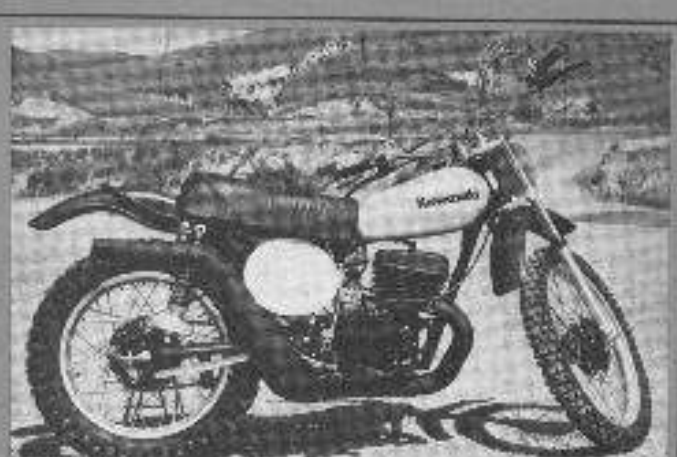
The Kawasaki F-11 M production-crossover we tested had a lot of parts on it that were pulled directly from the F-11 enduro assembly lines: forks, frame, engine center cases, and various shifting and braking doodads. This may sound like an instant replay of the DT-1 MX days when the racer was nothing more than a stripped enduro model, but Kawasaki didn't have to go quite that far into history to make a reasonably affordable, mass-produced works bike.

We were amazed when we rode the F-11 M because it is like no other Japanese motocrosser... a far cry from the Honda Elsinore or Yamaha MX 250. Kawasaki has built a Japanese European motocrosser. We wouldn't have been surprised to see the name "Husqvarna," "Puch," or "KTM" on the gas tank instead of

Kawasaki. The powerband is extremely torquey, almost like an old Greeves and very much like a 250 CZ with a Mikuni carb fitted. There's a lot of flywheel effect and power is concentrated in the low and mid-ranges of the rpm spread. If you buzz the F-11 too much, you soon realize that you're not riding very fast. The idea is to keep the r's between 4000 and 7000 and let the rear wheel put it to the ground.

Because of the power, the F-11 M is a rather unspectacular bike to ride; not boring by any means, but you have time to concentrate on your style instead of just trying to keep the bike pointed in the proper direction. Since Kawasaki chose torque instead of brush horsepower, their 250 doesn't have the neck-snapping acceleration of, for example, the Elsinore, but once you learn to shift early it can be ridden as fast.

With the ratios Kawasaki has chosen for the F-11 M's five-speed transmission, keeping the power in the mid-range is easy. The shift lever has a long throw and you have to consciously nudge it with your foot to change gears, again uncharac-



F 12 450

F 11 M 250



teristic of a Japanese bike. However, the tranny can be slammed from gear to gear without the use of the clutch.

More like a CZ, Maico or Husky than a Pursang or Elsinore, the F-11 M rider sits "on" the machine rather than "in" it. Though the physical dimensions of the 250 (seat height, handlebar design, footpeg placement) are similar to those of other MXers, the rider gets the impression that he's sitting up high. It feels like a bigger bike than it actually is; perhaps the impression is a deception caused by the way the gas tank sinks down over the top frame tube. The seating position is not uncomfortable, but it takes a couple of laps to realize that your mind may be playing tricks on you (especially on the first lap when you're still thinking, "A Jap bike, I better rev the snot out of it.").

Straight line handling over the ruts, bumps, jumps, whoopdies, stray dogs and spectators, left-behind beer coolers, portacans and other obstacles that are part of every motocross course is excellent. Though the 250 doesn't share the

hammerhead shocks with the 450, its only slightly less trick looking units do the job . . . ditto the forks. You won't bottom out either end, nor will your spine feel like it's on fire in the 15th lap.

Kawasaki's new suspension keeps the wheels on the ground in the corners, too. Tracking through the bumpy line is easy, and none of the "Cyclone Cha-Cha" is evident, if you get our meaning. The 250 is a good berm rider; it's neat to get the bike on a high berm as parallel to the ground as your cojones will let you, then turn the bars quickly and grab a handful of throttle. You'll cut right across the inside line (much to the dismay of any riders about to use that line) and throw a giant plume of dirt in the air. There's plenty of power to change lines quickly, but not too much-too soon-too violently. Really nice.

One of the reasons the Kawasaki is so much fun in the corners is the ease with which the rider can change from a sitting to standing position, or plop his weight on the gas tank for traction, or put his weight on the outside footpeg and let his knee ab-

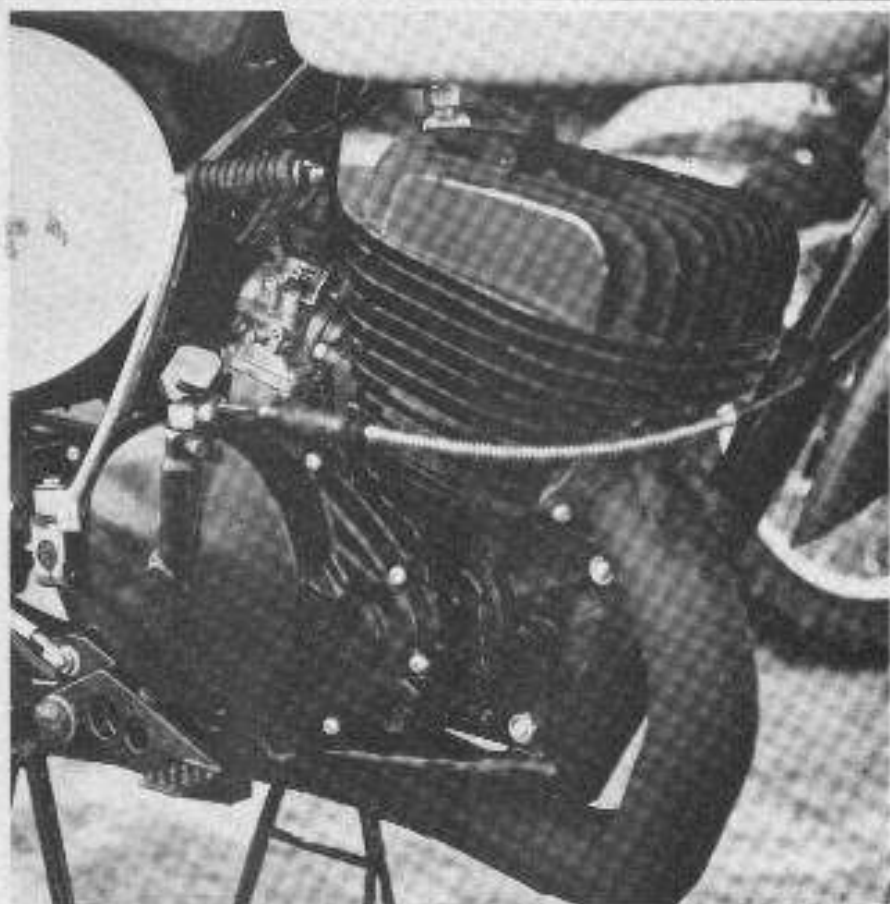
sorb some of the shock. This bike was made for people to ride; real breathing human-type people, not some engineer's conception of the "Average U.S. Motocross Rider."

Contributing greatly to the F-11 M's good handling is its light weight (between 216 and 224 pounds, depending on how much gas is in the tank and how long it's been since it was washed), weight distribution, and the torquey engine response. There's enough weight on the front wheel to keep the front knobby digging in the turns and enough to keep the bike from wanting to loop on each jump or rise. And the engine doesn't rev frantically, so there are fewer surprises when you're riding the F-11 M. This bike keeps your heart out of your mouth and puts it in your back pocket where it belongs.

Although the F-11 M's brakes are essentially enduro units, they stop the bike well in slam-them-on motocross situations. We thought the full-floating rear brake should do a better job of keeping the rear end tranquilized under heavy braking in the rough. Some of us here

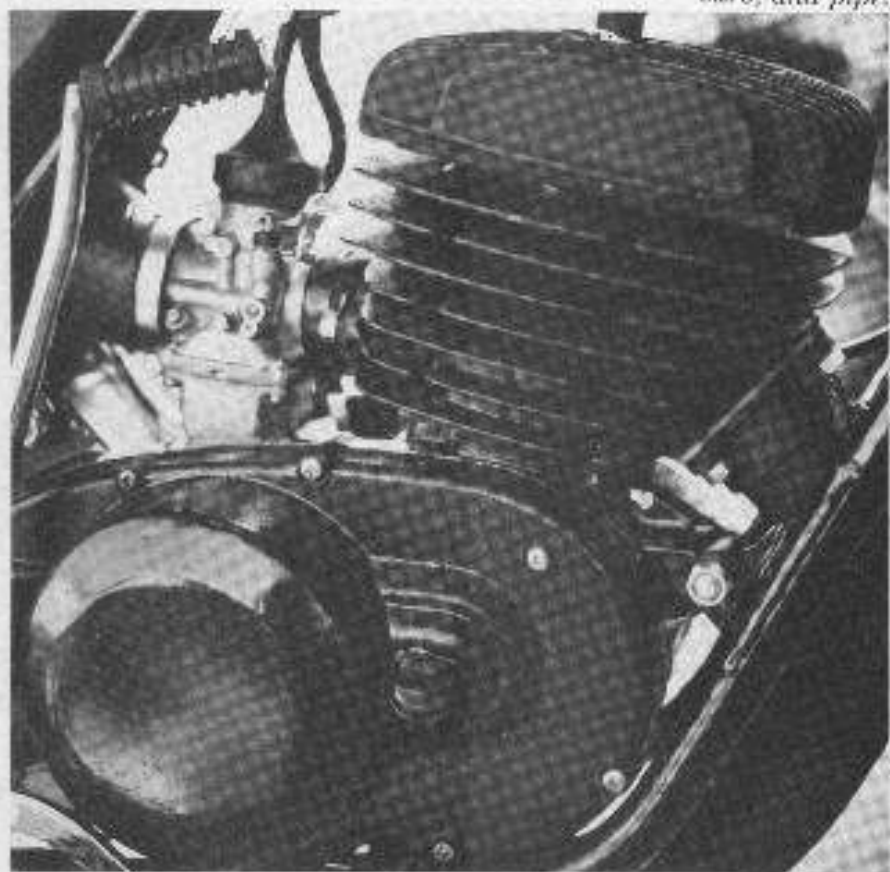






450 engine could be easily mistaken for 400 Suzuki. Kawasaki should have painted it green.

Basic 250 engine is from the F-11 Enduro model, but the MXer has different outer cases, porting, carb, and pipe.



at MX ACTION are beginning to get skeptical about the value of full-floaters, since we've ridden some bikes lately without floating brakes that stop better than bikes with them. Oh well, we should have stayed in college and got those engineering degrees instead of drinking beer and riding BSA Lightnings through City Park.

KAWASAKI F-12 450

Imagine, if you will, you could build your own motocrosser. Before you is a poop sheet on all the characteristics of all the bikes made by all the countries in all the world. You may pick and choose, plug in and modify, design and re-design, until you come up with the optimum racer. Money, of course, would be no object. The result? Who cares. It's too much hassle and you're not going to do it so forget it. For a lot less jack you can buy a Kawasaki 450 and come up with almost the same thing.

Kawasaki has done all the work for you. Evidently they listened to all the fat-mouthing Americans have been giving Japanese 500 class motocrossers and all the nice things we're saying about the European bikes. Then they designed and built a bike that won't scare the beans out of you every time you gas it, will track in a predetermined straight line, won't handle like a schizoid slinky, will stick like gorilla spit on a berm, and is faster than a burning pussycat.

When you first ride the thing it feels weird. You figure, "Gosh golly. This is the same bike what Brad Lackey rides. It must be super-radical and have scary power and handle funny. I'd better cool it." So you cruise around for five laps or so standing ramrod straight on the pegs looking like a farmer with hemorrhoids and having no intention of giving it more than half throttle.

Then the inevitable happens. Some little kid on a 125 Yamaha zaps you right in front of the pits where all the guys are standing around nudging each other and pointing your way. Of course you realize this means war.

The first thing you do is decide to gas it. Right around the next turn is a fairly long straight that will give you ample room to recover should you get in over your head. Let's see now, insurance all paid up, told your

tootsie you loved her this morning, got your blood type stenciled on the back of your helmet, and your dog's got plenty of food and water. OK, easy does it. Find a nice tall gear that will absorb any excess power, sit up on the gas cap, get a death grip on the bars and stretch that throttle cable. Nothing.

No big rush of power; just a slight increase in engine noise and a feeling somewhere in the back of your head that you are going faster, but you're not really sure, yet. Pogo through a turn and try it again. Brooop! Shift. Brooop! Shift. Brooooooap!

Shift again. Boy, you're really going fast. Brooooooap! Brake... Brake! BRAKE! BRAKE YOU STUPID BIKE BRAKE!!! No brakes.

For some ridiculous reason, the 450 doesn't have much braking power. There's something there, but it isn't what you would call goggle-snapping. It seems in their effort to build the first Japanese un-croser, Kawasaki under-designed the stoppers. If you've ridden the 400 Suzook or the 360 Yammie, you know what we mean. One of the big problems with these bikes is that excellent brakes combined with light engine

flywheels create a stalling situation when the rear wheel is locked up. Dead engine cornering techniques having not been perfected yet, Kawasaki, clever dudes that they are, decided to trash the idea of good brakes altogether and let the rider work out his own way of scrubbing off speed.

At least you won't have to worry about killing the engine.

So there you are, moving at an unnatural speed coming into the turn and your brakes have just informed you that what you got is all you're going to get. You've got only



two choices: Flop it down and gas it like you're supposed to or . . . forget it! We don't even want to discuss the other choice.

Then it happens. While you're still looking for a soft spot, the Kaw zips through the turn like it's on rails. Thanks for the miracle.

Coasting down the next straight letting your eyeballs shrink back to their normal size, you almost get the feeling Kawasaki was trying to tell you something. "Don't worry, fella. This baby will hit a berm a lot faster than your cantaloupes are ever going to let you on their own. You don't

NEED the brakes."

The 450 Kawasaki, unlike its Japanese predecessors, is easy to ride. The powerband is incredibly broad with no yahoo mid-range rush to constrict your sphincters. It comes on the pipe around six rpm and holds traction up to your shift point, which is anytime you feel you want to use the next gear. Pete Maly, our crack number one expert test rider, never felt like he was going very fast.

Cont'd. on page 58



Hammerhead shocks for the 450 . . . something new and wondrous? Probably just Kawasaki's version of Yamaha "Thermal Flow" shocks.



Plastic brake pedal on the 450 was probably one of the reasons the brakes didn't work too red hot. So much for "space-age materials."

KAWASAKI F-11

SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE: N/A
ENGINE TYPE, INDUCTION: Two-cycle, piston-port
ACTUAL DISPLACEMENT: 247cc
BORE AND STROKE: 68mm x 68mm
COMPRESSION RATIO: 8.0:1
CARBURETOR: Mikuni VM32SC
CLAIMED HORSEPOWER/RPM: 29.5/7500
PRIMARY DRIVE: Gear
GEARBOX/SHIFTING: Five-speed, left side shift
GEARBOX RATIOS: 1) 2.23:1 2) 1.62:1 3) 1.26:1 4) 1.05:1 5) 0.909:1
AIR FILTER: Oiled foam
ELECTRICAL: Flywheel magneto
LUBRICATION: Pre-mix
FUEL CAPACITY: 1.85 gallons
SUSPENSION: Kawasaki forks and shocks
TIRES/RIMS: front: 3.00x21 knobby/DID alloy rear: 4.00x18 knobby/DID alloy
WHEELBASE: 55 inches
WEIGHT: actual: N/A claimed: 205.8 pounds
STARTING: Primary kick, right side
COUNTRY OF MANUFACTURE: Japan
DISTRIBUTOR: Kawasaki Motors Corp., 1062 McGaw Ave., Santa Ana, CA 92705
COST OF REPLACEMENT PISTON, RINGS: N/A
COST OF REPLACEMENT LINER AND/OR CYLINDER: N/A

KAWASAKI F-12

SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE: N/A
ENGINE TYPE, INDUCTION: Two-cycle, piston-port
ACTUAL DISPLACEMENT: 441cc
BORE AND STROKE: 86mm x 76mm
COMPRESSION RATIO: 6.5:1
CARBURETOR: Mikuni VM34SC
CLAIMED HORSEPOWER/RPM: 38/5500
PRIMARY DRIVE: Gear
GEARBOX/SHIFTING: Five-speed, left side shift
GEARBOX RATIOS: 1) 2.89:1 2) 2.0:1 3) 1.40:1 4) 1.12:1 5) 0.94:1
AIR FILTER: Oiled foam
ELECTRICAL: CDI Electronic
LUBRICATION: Pre-mix
FUEL CAPACITY: 2.0 gallons
SUSPENSION: Kawasaki forks and shocks
TIRES/RIMS: front: 3.00x21 knobby/DID alloy rear: 4.50x18 knobby/DID alloy
WHEELBASE: 55.5 inches
WEIGHT: actual: N/A claimed: 215 pounds
STARTING: Primary kick, right side
COUNTRY OF MANUFACTURE: Japan
DISTRIBUTOR: Kawasaki Motors Corp., 1062 McGaw Ave., Santa Ana, CA 92705
COST OF REPLACEMENT PISTON, RINGS: N/A
COST OF REPLACEMENT LINER AND/OR CYLINDER: N/A

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KAWASAKI

Cont'd. from page 31

till he looked back and saw these giant rooster rails he was leaving behind. We all got the same impression. The giant mounds of horsepower present in most 500 class machines are all burnt off in wheelspin, making things squirmy. In the case of the 450 Kawasaki, each and every pony is being fed through each and every knob to produce a very desirable power-to-dirt relationship. The more power you dial on, the more traction you get, the better the bike tracks, the faster you go.

Ever wonder why the Lackey-Weinert-DeSoto Green Machine always got to the first turn first in the Florida series? Find out for yourself on the 450. Round up the fastest competition you can find, snick the long lever into second and wait for them to go first. Then wind up the throttle halfway and let go the clutch. The bike literally shudders as the knobs start digging in. Again, no feeling that you've just done something you shouldn't have, the bike is very manageable off the line. The rest is easy. Just shift any time you think you ought to and



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Sammy Miller, who helped develop Bultaco's famous Sherpa T and for many scored countless wins with it, added another one to the list by winning America's only International trial... the "El Trial de Flores", staged on December 10th at Encino Country in Southern California. From the winning heritage of the Sherpa T comes the world's best one-day Enduro bike, the famed "Alpina." It comes in four sizes... from 125cc through 175 and 250cc... winner up to the toughest difficulty. And the Alpina is a winner too. Dave Ellis scored his best success with an overall win in Southern California's National "Wattspeak Enduro."

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