

KAWASAKI

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde of motocross

□ Don't confuse the Kawasaki KX250 A-5 with last year's A-4 model. The A-4 was low on power, short on suspension and high on price. Kawasaki has taken steps to eliminate those criticisms, and they have been largely successful. The KX250 is a limited production motocrosser, which means that the folks at Kawasaki Heavy Industries pumped out a couple of thousand. It isn't like a Picasso limited edition. If it was extremely limited, then parts would be hard or impossible to come by. The limited production run concept is confusing, and in many ways nothing more than advertising hype. There are more KX250 A-5s being made for the U.S. market than Maico, Husqvarna or KTM 250s.

The 1979 KX is longer (two inches), taller (1.7 inches), heavier (seven pounds) and greener. The suspension has been pumped up 1.7 inches on the front and a shocking 2.3 inches on the rear. The weight gain came from the new, long-travel front forks. It is almost a waste of time to compare the A-5 to the A-4. The swingarm is two inches longer. The shock mounts have been relocated. The gas tank is all-new. The gear ratios in the first three gears have been altered. The trail and rake have been decreased. The crankshaft has been beefed up. The air box was redesigned. The seat, bars, side panels, muffler, steering stem and handlebars are all different.

THE KWACKER PHILOSOPHY

The Kawasaki KX250 A-5 is the best made Japanese 250 on the showroom floors in 1979. Not the fastest, the best handling or best-suspended, but beyond all doubt the most thoughtfully constructed. The gold-anodized rims highlight the gold swingarm, which in turn attracts attention to the dished-out and hollow bolts. The Electro-fusion cylinder is extremely light and has a good durability record. Each piece of the A-5 shows that Kawasaki cares.

KAWASAKI'S CARE PACKAGE

If Kawasaki's motocross record is indicative of one thing, it is summed up in the motor. From the days of the Greenstreak through the first horsepower KXs,

the Kwackers have always been *motors* first and *handlers* second. The A-4 of last year was the exception, but the A-5 reaffirms the rule.

The KX250 motor is the best 250 motocross engine on the market. The power from the Boyesen-reeved, 70mm by 64.9mm, 249cc engine is supple and responsive. Other brands make bigger dyno numbers, but putting it into the ground is what counts. The engine is flexible. It grunts smoothly off the bottom with steadily climbing amounts of horsepower and torque. If you short shift it the torque will pull it out of any hole you can put it in, but if you are trying to zap a duck down a short straight you can rev it a tad farther.

The Kawasaki's strong mid-range pull and rat-a-tat-tat ignition make it a perfect short-course machine. The crisp ignition is the result of totally new timing specs, and pairing it with the increased flywheel inertia is the perfect mating of ponies and traction. Junior and Intermediate riders can go faster with the KX250 motor, while a pro wouldn't be slowed a bit.

SPLIT PERSONALITY

The motor is only half of the story. Wrapped around the black beauty is a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde frame. The Kawasaki handling package can get the job done, and in many cases it is better than half of its competitors. But, it is a compromise package that isn't really spot-on.

The A-5 can be dissected in half, and you have two completely different motorcycles. The front of the machine is a quick-handling and extremely responsive appendage. The rake was pulled back to 29 degrees and the trail was shortened half an inch. Rake and trail aren't the only factors involved in steering response, but they are one and two on the hit list. The Kawasaki is set up with a quick and responsive geometry. A little too quick for most of the high-paid MXA test crew, but competitive.

The rear of the A-5 is dead weight. Remember that the A-5 is two inches longer than last year's bike. That two inches is in the back. Riding the front of the bike is similar to carving hot laps on a one-two-five, but the rear half is unresponsive and



TEST

KX250 A-5



KX250 A-5



The KX250 is so green that it is a wonder the bike is scheduled to be produced in Nebraska next year. It should be made in Greenland.

mushy. If you try to snap the KX250 through a tight inside line, the front end will dart rapidly around the corner, and then begin to hunt and peck while the rest of the bike follows. The short trail and steep rake might work on a lower and shorter machine, but hauling the freight forces the front end to search and wiggle on bermless or flat turns.

GETTING IT IN

The front forks offer 11 inches of travel and they work. Kayaba supplies Suzuki, Yamaha and Kawasaki, and they are a good workaday fork. Dialing in production-line Kayabas is a simple task for a

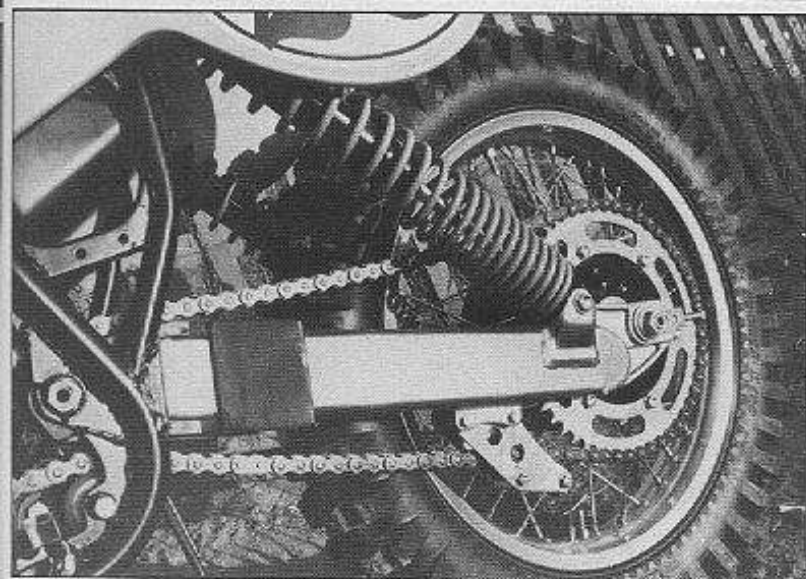
rider who knows his oils and air pressures.

The rear shocks might be all right, but the full-length progressive spring is a joke. The shocks are overdamped and under-sprung. You can push the rear of the KX250 down with your hands and count to two before it returns. Sitting on the bike will coil-bind several of the green spring's windings. We bottomed the KX250 everywhere. Upping the preload only manages to keep up with sag. The springs must go. The local pros' Kawasakis always sport Fox Airshox in SoCal.

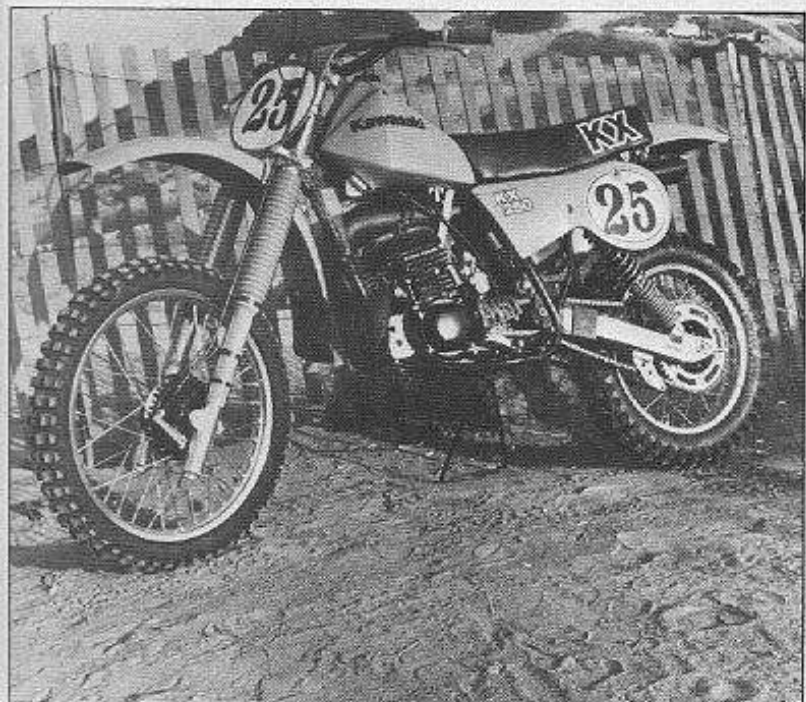
The bike does work. You can get around a racetrack with surprisingly good lap times. The great motor is largely respon-

sible for the KX's ability to motivate, but the whole package is raceable. The geometry and suspension flaws are largely the result of compromises to achieve a working product. It works. It is flawed.

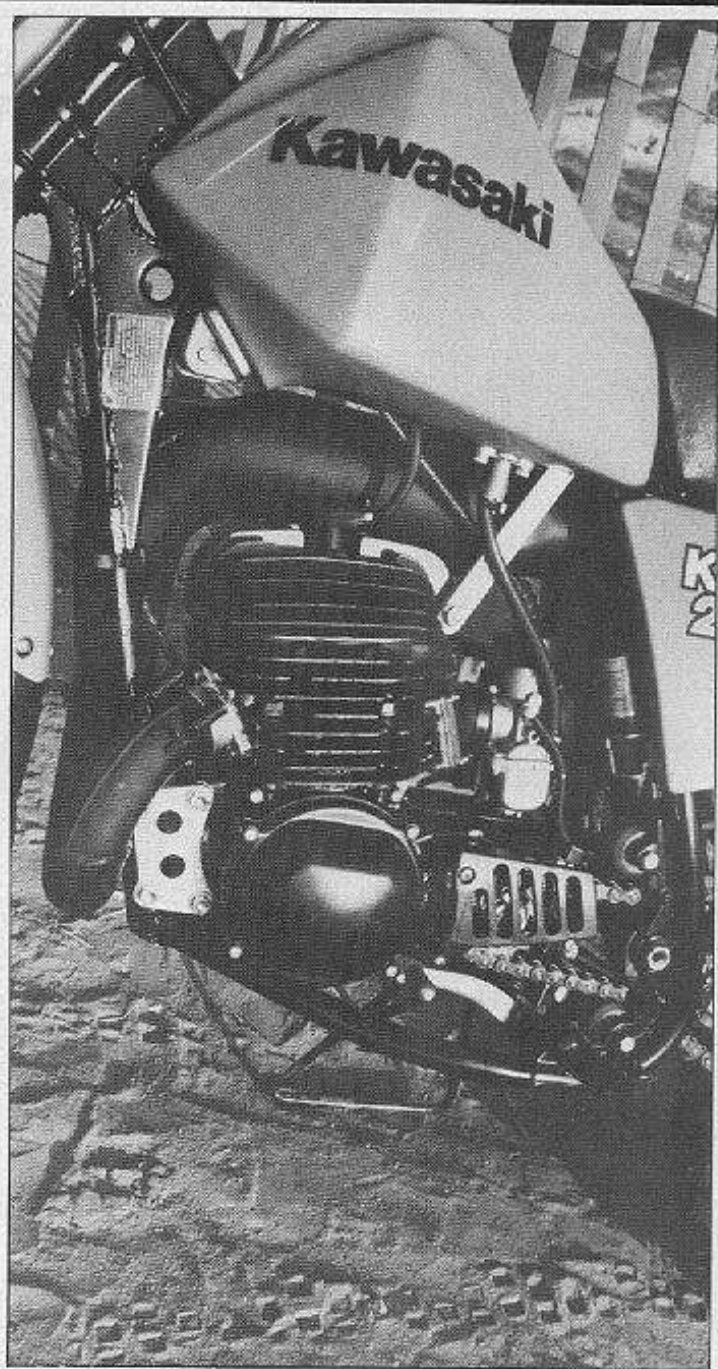
Riding the KX is fun. You climb on board and feel right at home. The seat is tall, but the sagging rear end gets your feet to the ground. The 38mm Mikuni and decent kickstarter will fire it up on one kick. Shift lever position is critical to ensure good gear-grabbing. The tranny works faultlessly, but the lever needs to be adjusted for each rider. The brake pedal tucks up against the right side cases. It is cast out of aluminum. If you wrap it



The lack of chain tensioners is made up for by cleverly positioned rollers. The gold-anodized swingarm is strong and long.



Although not sleek and svelte, the Kawasaki is brutishly functional and handsome.



The maximum 250 motor! The reed-valved KX250 has ponies, torque and spread on every other deuce-and-a-half mill.

around a peg you will have to sell the bike to buy a new pedal. There are no bulges. Everything is sleek and smooth.

Pull the clutch in and learn to listen to the motor. It makes those mellow moaning sounds as it comes onto the power pocket. Short shifting it through the gears, before the revs build up, will reward you with a melody of torque.

As you approach that first hairpin corner, look for the berm and use it. Stay in berms and ruts and the quick front and sluggish handling rear won't be a problem. Slide up on the tank and boogie. Shift up a gear at the base of each jump and loft the KX into flight. Set up for the flat

sweeper by sliding up onto the hump-backed plastic tank. Keep the weight on the front end, unless you know how to dance, and apply the throttle deliberately. If you get the front end hooked up, the rear will move out about a foot and short-track you around the sweeper. Back off the throttle too soon and meet the snow fence! Grab too big a handful and watch your rear end pass you! Down the short chute, the big whoops are ahead. The front end pogos a little, but it's OK. The rear wheel doesn't wiggle or swap, it just seems to plow through the rough. After the first lap you know what to expect and you can start to get more power to the ground.

BITS AND PIECES

The front number plate is a disaster. Our front brake cable hooked over the edge of the number plate and locked the front brake. The KX needs to have another cable guide mounted at the top of the triple clamps. Don't ride the KX without using a zip tie, or something, to keep the cable from hooking up and killing you.

The brake cable-related crash buckled up the side panels. A hammer straightened the side panel brackets, but they are prone to breaking off. The plastic took the abuse, but hazy white streaks were left where it was bent.

The handgrips are a King Kong left-

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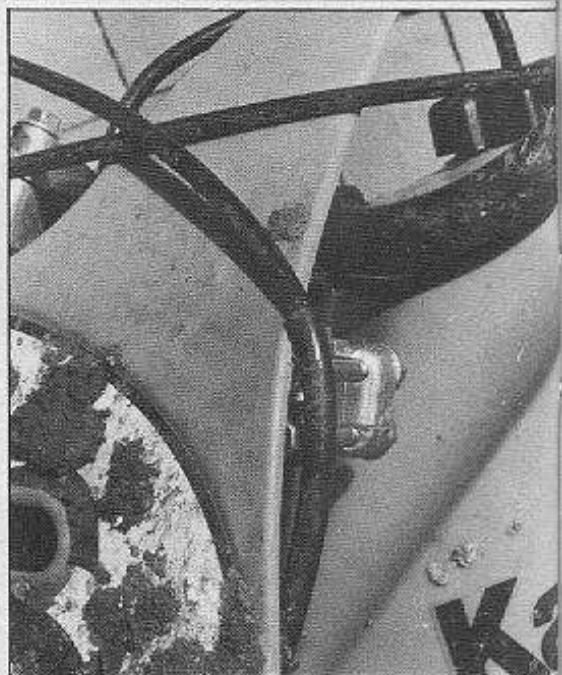
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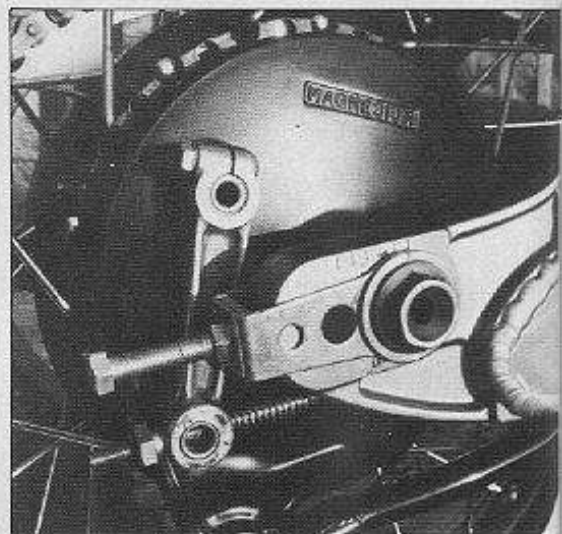
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KX250 A-5



The front brake cable surreptitiously avoids the cable saver number plate and gets wedged behind it. The outcome of this devilish activity is a Flying W, Q and R. It is deadly.



Every bolt is either dished out or drilled out for lightness. The KX weighs 214 dry, which is four pounds lighter than the Honda.

over. They are the fattest production grips around. Toss them into a fat trash bin. Swivel the throttle housing backwards so that the throttle cable exits the bars out of harm's way (aimed rearward).

The rear motor mounts, above and behind the engine, are the only areas of concern for regular KX racers. We broke a clutch lever bracket, and nothing else, during the test period. The KX doesn't use a spring-loaded chain tensioner, but makes excellent use of stationary rollers to keep the chain tight. The chain is a DID TR, which is the best DID chain available. The KX's countershaft and swingarm pivot

Number One

MC-1 is the ultimate 2-cycle lubricant



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strength allows MC-1 to be mixed at higher dilution ratios to reduce engine temperature for maximum performance. MC-1 clings to hot engine parts to help protect and its detergent additives burn clean to extend engine life. MC-1 never separates after blending. Remember, nobody gives you number one... you have to earn it. Sold only through quality motorcycle dealers around the world.

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The footpegs are a little short for most riders, but the riding position is comfortable, and the new bars are an improvement.



KAWASAKI KX250 A-5 SPECIFICATIONS

MAKE Kawasaki
 MODEL KX250 A-5
 COUNTRY OF MANUFACTURE Japan
 RETAIL PRICE N/A
 ENGINE:

Type .. Single, two-stroke, reed-valve
 Bore and Stroke ... 70mm x 64.9mm
 Displacement 249cc
 Compression Ratio 7.6:1
 Carburetion 38mm Mikuni
 Ignition CDI
 Lubrication Pre-mix
 Air Filter Oiled foam
 Transmission Five-speed

CHASSIS DIMENSIONS:

Overall Length 85.4 inches
 Overall Width 34.6 inches
 Overall Height 48.4 inches
 Wheelbase 57.9 inches
 Ground Clearance 13.4 inches
 Dry Weight 214 pounds

SUSPENSION:

Front .. Air/spring Kayaba (11 inches)
 Rear Kayaba gas/reservoir (11 inches)

Gone are the little cooling fins from last year. The forks are overdamped, but thanks to strong triple clamps they work well.

point are not very close together, but the chain was not a problem.

The triple clamps are sturdy and use two bolts at each pinch point. The rigid clamps aid the forks in working as well as they do. The forks worked best with five-weight oil in them.

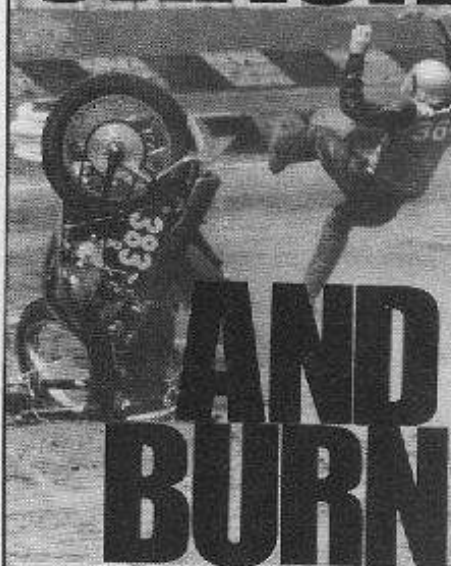
The gas tank holds 2.4 gallons of gas, which will make the rounds of a 45-minute moto. The tires are Dunlop K190s and are an excellent all-around choice for the average rider. The tank decals didn't last one moto. Next year every Japanese manufacturer will be using plastic tanks (Honda included), and to date not one has

come up with tank decals that stick.

The price isn't set by Kawasaki and is left up to the individual dealer, who pays a healthy sum for the bike, but it should be in the \$1800 range. Make sure that your dealer will be carrying a full complement of KX parts, as the parts availability in certain areas is totally up to the interest and motivation of the local dealer.

All in all, the KX250 A-5 is the best Kawasaki motocrosser ever, and another in a long line of super powerplants. The total pleasure unit is good, but hampered by a frame geometry that was designed by a committee. □

CRASH



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