

The hammerhead reservoir configuration helped the rear shocks work smoothly over the bumps. Chain guard is plastic, but doesn't wear down.

The Kawasaki KX 250 Motocrosser

Finally, the green machine comes, possibly a little behind the pack.

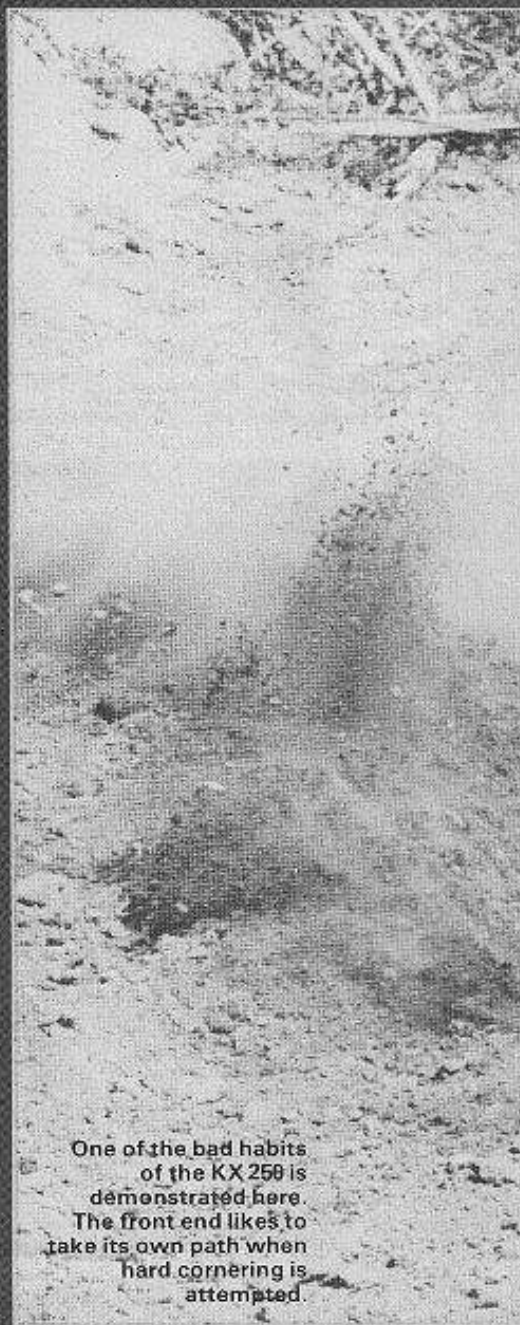
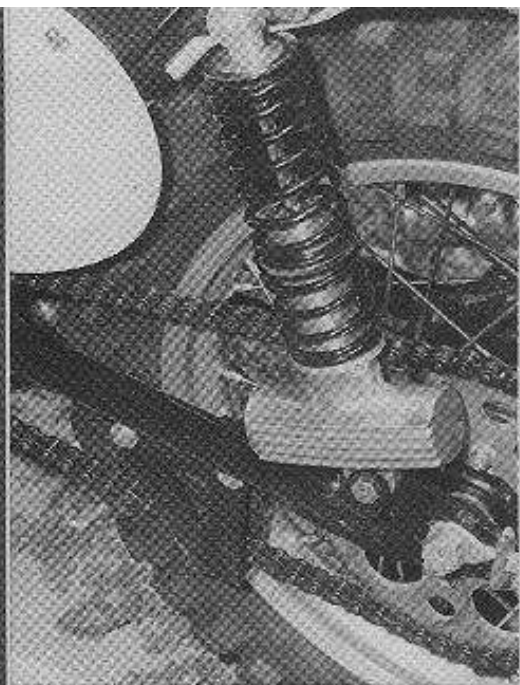
Ever since Brad Lackey was campaigning a Kawasaki three years ago, people have been waiting, sometimes impatiently, for the release of the production motocross machines. Most riders thought that the bikes would be released about the time of the Elsinore introduction. Strangely, there were no indications from Kawasaki that the machine was even coming.

Now nearly a year later, they have just begun to release their new motocross models. The KX 250 was available, so we loaded up the machine and headed out for Carlsbad Raceway. After the pictures were taken, the machine went through a grueling test. Mitch Mayes rode the bike, Billy Payne ran quite a few fast laps, Mickey Quade got a chance, and Rolf Tibblin put it through his own test. With these riders, plus our staff, the machine was running almost nonstop for five hours. In that total period of riding,

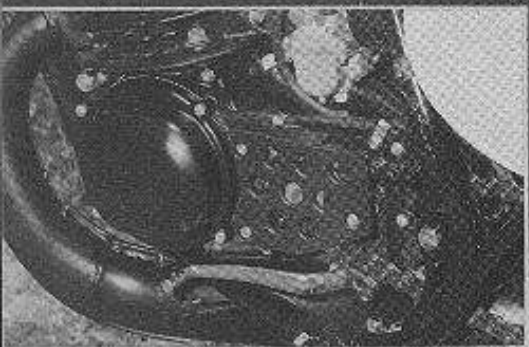
nothing came off. Nothing loosened up or wiggled its way free. But then again, you don't expect anything to stay behind when you're riding.

Everyone seemed to come back off the track with the same impression. The KX 250 is a very maneuverable machine, with a long usable powerband and plenty of torque. More torque than the Elsinore. But matching both machines in a straightaway race, the bikes were almost identical. The torque didn't help that much, except out of the gate, where the Kawasaki took a slight advantage. Once ten feet out, both machines ran neck and neck. We should point out here that both machines were brand new, running from gas out of the same can, with riders of almost identical weight and abilities. They switched machines and the results were the same. It seems as though the Elsinore has found a friend.

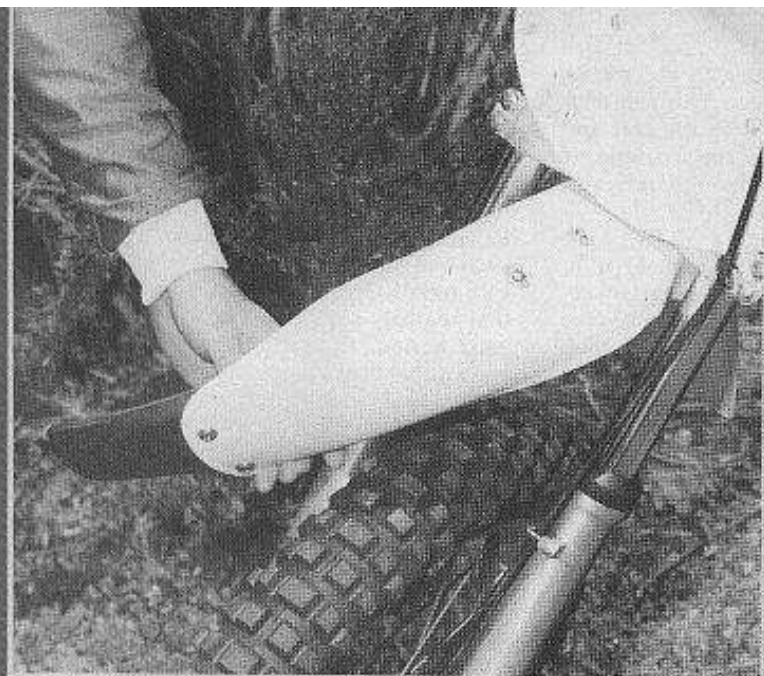
Unfortunately, the torque advantage



One of the bad habits of the KX 250 is demonstrated here. The front end likes to take its own path when hard cornering is attempted.

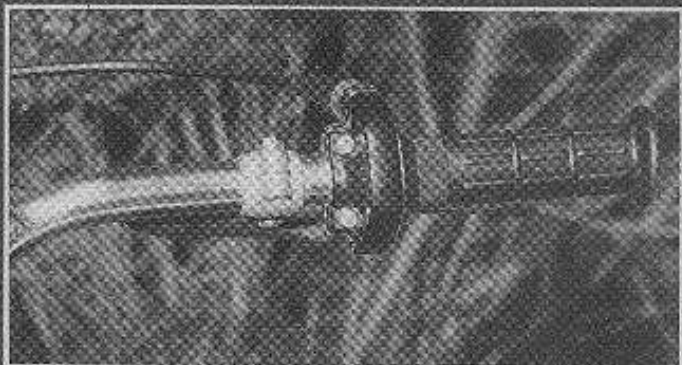


The front forks work well after a little modification. This is the first time we've ever seen a Honda-appearing brake that cooperated like a Yamaha brake, that was mounted on a Kawasaki.



Everybody's favorite, the fenders that don't break when you go out to crash and burn yourself.

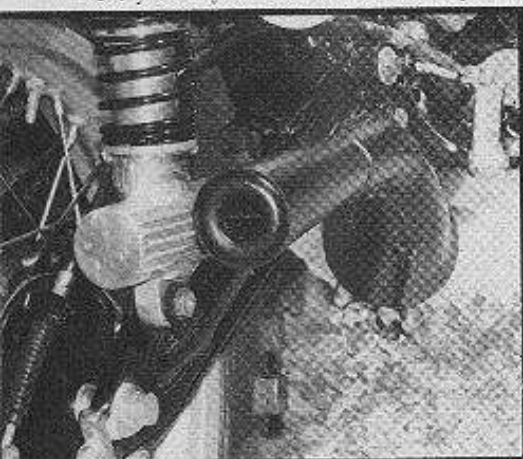
The grips have a strange plastic coating which increases their lifespan. Throttle assembly was high quality.





of the KX 250 is hampered by the machine's abilities on the corners. The front end is exceptionally skitterish. If you treat the machine like a 125, you can have a nice time rounding the corners. But if you try to ride it like a European mount, the front end tends to wash out every time. It's here that the bike is defeating its purpose. You can't use the traditional torque coming out of the corners if the front wheel wants to go everywhere but down your intended line.

We tried different tire pressures, moving fork positions and even replacing the fork oil. Nothing seemed to help. There is a difference in the geometry of the frame that causes the gremlin. If you can adjust to it, and expect the machine to do it every time you reach for a berm, you'll



Even though it was strange looking, the Kawasaki's exhaust pipe emitted too much noise. Doubled as a funnel too, if you cut it off.

get along with the KX 250 just fine. If you can't make a mental adjustment, it will assuredly slow down your lap times. If you have to think about the front wheel every time you try to turn the bike, you're obviously going to ride slower.

There were a couple of other annoying aspects of the bike, one being the kick starter. The Kawasaki is plagued by the same type of rigor mortis as the Honda Elsinore. After a few hours in the dirt, the kick starter will refuse to swing out. This is sometimes caused by lack of lubrication on the small ball bearing that hides in the mechanism. It results in some foul language and a lot of pulling and grunting. One quick cure if you're out on the track away from the pits is to

put a little gas or water on the starter right where it hinges out. This will temporarily free the dirt from the unit and allow you to kick over the machine. If not, you're going to have to revert to bump starting.

Another requirement of the kick starter is a rubber band to hold it in place. If you don't have the starter securely fastened to the frame it will bounce along merrily, slapping you in the back of the leg and making a very irritable noise as it spins the gears. We suggest you use a small piece of inner tube running from the frame member to the kick starter. It helps you to keep peace of mind.

If there ever was a motorcycle expansion chamber with a mind of its own, it's mounted on the KX 250. No matter how tight you get the bolts or how strong the retaining springs are, the chamber is going to swing around freely, looking all the world like it's coming off. When we first started riding the machine, we checked looking for loose bolts or nuts. We finally surrendered. If it wants to swing around, you just have to ignore it.

Although these three points might deter you from buying the KX 250, there are quite a few bonuses that may tell you to look twice. For instance, the machine is exceptionally slim, almost as slim as a trials machine. It gives you the impression that you're riding a 125 instead of a 250. It's light, and can be easily flung around at will. If you happen to get a little out of shape coming off a jump, the Kawasaki is very easily rendered straight and true. Same holds true for large whoop-dee-dooos. If the bike wants to go west and the track is facing north, you can get a good grip on it and straighten it out.

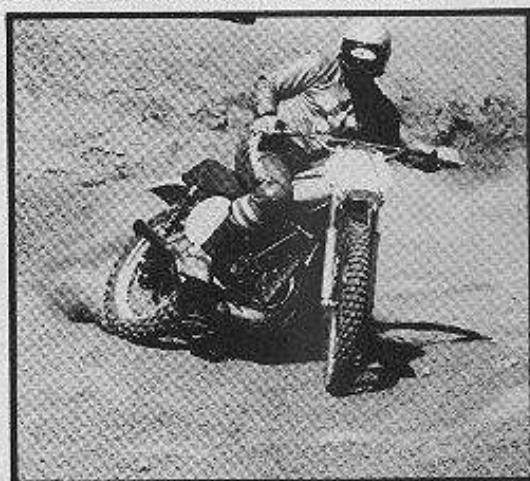
As mentioned before, everyone who rode the machine remarked about the excellent powerband and gear ratios. It's got enough top end to send you down the track at eye-blurring speeds, and enough torque to bring the bike up to speed from a standing stop. The gear ratios seem to be well adjusted for just about any motocross track. Of the four tracks that we tested the machine on, none of them even let us top the machine out. The only place you can find out just how fast it is would be to get on a long deserted road and wring through the gears.

Brakes at both ends were excellent. The front brake was very similar in performance to that of the Yamaha, but it looked suspiciously like the Honda brake. Either way, it worked well for stopping, even if you only used two fingers. The rear has a cable-operated setup, the type that you see often but rarely work. On the Kawasaki it worked. The brake doesn't lock up at the wrong times, nor does it have a mushy feel to it. Everything is positive and precise.

Suspension on both ends were good, but we felt that the front forks needed a little something extra. They did. After

riding the machine for a while we installed one of those little fork kits from Number One products. The forks improved immensely. Before the change, you would hit the larger bumps and the forks would handle the first two or three impacts. After that they seemed to fade away and hit the remainder of the bumps with increasing ferocity. This isn't to say that the bars were being yanked out of your hands. It's just that the forks needed that little bit extra to become just right. The oil inside doesn't have enough time to pass through and prepare for the next jolt. With the kit in, they had ample time and rebound characteristics.

The rear is equipped with hammer-head shocks, the type you saw on Team Kawasaki's machines last year. The



The best way to get the machine through the corners fast is to get your weight way up on the front end.

shocks work well in both the rough ground and on the smoother marbly type surfaces. They don't heat up very much, although you can detect considerable warmth after a 45-minute moto. That's to be expected. They don't handle or react as well as a forward mounted shock setup, but we felt that they were just about the best performing shock system for the conventional settings.

The relationship of the seat to the bars and pegs is just perfect. You can ride all day long and can't excuse yourself because you're aching from pulled muscles due to a badly designed machine. The bars are in a position that gives you an almost instinctive idea of where the machine should go. The pegs are positioned in such a way that you can stand or sit, and they are always where you want them.

The levers are covered with the usual rubber boots to keep out the mud that could clog them. Grips are a new design. They have a small coating of plastic over them. It's not slippery and we suspect that the grips will last longer than those found on many other machines, especially on a fall.

Both fenders are exceptionally pliable. Most have flexy fenders nowadays, so that's nothing new. The KX 250's

fenders are almost a see-through white, so you can check out the dirt collecting under your front fender if you get bored during the race.

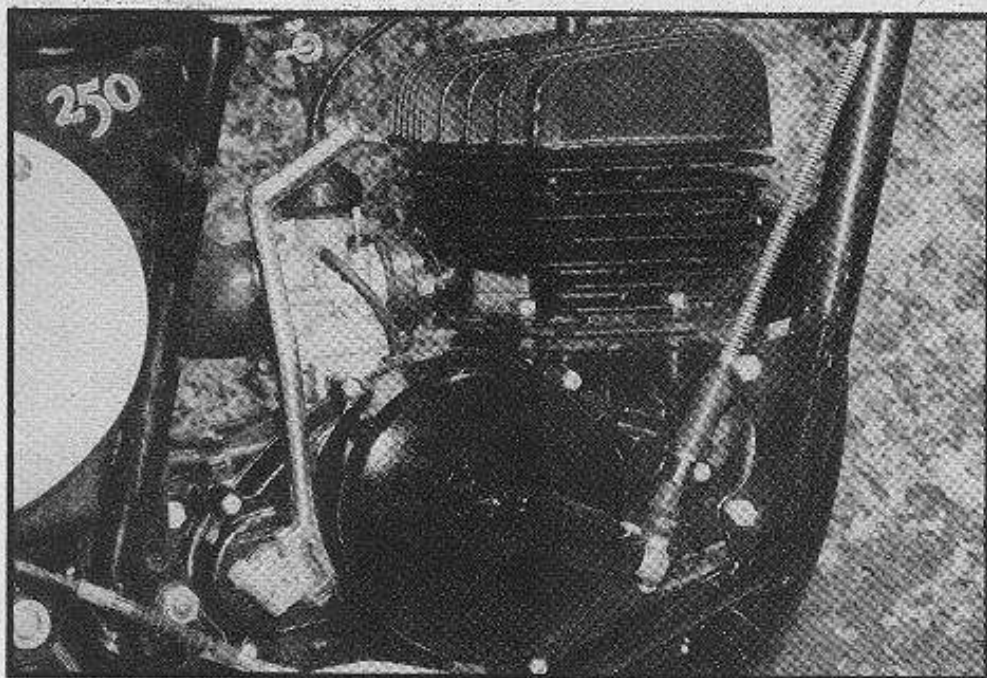
Tires on the KX are nice, although we felt that a slightly wider front skin would possibly help the 3.00x21 arrangement in keeping the front wheel in line. The rear is a 4.60x18, and allows adequate traction in just about any track condition. Both wheels wrap around DID rims, another innovation, but not totally new to the motorcycling world.

It seemed to us that Kawasaki waited just a little bit too long to introduce their KX 250. They probably lost quite a few prospective buyers when the Elsinore came along. But then there's still a large group of riders who have been waiting for this machine. It has quite a few good selling points. It's Japanese, thus very little maintenance is absolutely needed. It's competitively priced, very close to the



34mm Mikuni fed the engine well and was an added boost in getting the bike fired. It was a three-kick machine.

BELOW— 246cc engine gives out enough torque to keep just about anyone happy. Note rubber band that holds on kick starter-optional equipment.



Elsinore, coming in at \$1150. And with the exception of the front end wash, it's an extremely good handler. If you can adapt to its little quirks and learn to secure the kick starter and ignore the exhaust pipe flapping in the breeze, the KX 250 might be the right machine. It's got a few bugs, and none of the competition can claim that theirs don't. Husky has its height, CZ has its weight, Honda has its swing arm bushings and Yamaha YZ has its erratic powerband. When you weigh all the machines against each other, they all get pretty much the same. Kawasaki hopefully put some time and effort into producing this machine. That counts too.



| Max. Pts. | NUMERICAL EVALUATION | |
|--------------|------------------------------|---------|
| 10 | Power | 10 |
| 10 | Powerband | 10 |
| 10 | Acceleration | 10 |
| Transmission | | |
| | (5) Ratios | 5 |
| | (5) Operation | 5 |
| 10 | Suspension | |
| | (5) Front | 4 |
| | (5) Rear | 4 |
| 10 | Brakes | |
| | (5) Front | 5 |
| | (5) Rear | 5 |
| 10 | General Handling | 8 |
| 10 | Miscellaneous | |
| | (5) Starting | 4 |
| | (5) Rider comfort | 5 |
| | (5) Quality of craftsmanship | 5 |
| | (5) Riding maneuverability | 4 |
| | (5) Tires | 5 |
| | (5) Noise level | 3 |
| 100 pts. | Overall Rating | 92 pts. |

KAWASAKI 250

Suggested Retail Price: \$1150

ENGINE

| | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| Engine type | 2-5, sgl., piston-port |
| Bore and stroke, mm. | 69.5 x 64.9 |
| Displacement, cc | 246 |
| Horsepower/rpm (claimed) | n.a. |
| Torque/rpm (claimed) | n.a. |
| Compression ratio | 7.9:1 |
| Air filtration | foam filter |
| Carburetion | 34mm Mikuni |
| Lubrication | in fuel |
| Ignition | Magneto CDI |

DRIVE TRAIN

| | |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| Transmission | 5-speed |
| Clutch type | wet, multi disc |
| Primary drive | 48/13 |
| Final drive ratio | 3.69:1 |

CHASSIS

| | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| Chassis type | single down-cradle |
| Overall length, in. | 83 |
| Seat height, in. | n.a. |
| Peg height | n.a. |
| Ground clearance, in. | 7.7 |
| Wheelbase, in. | 55.8 |
| Weight, lbs. (as tested) | n.a. |
| FR/RR wt. bias, percentages | n.a. |
| Tires, front | 3.00 x 21 |
| rear | 4.60 x 18 |