SUZUKI PE175X

CYCLE WORLD TEST

■ Suzuki's PEs have been serious enduro bikes from Day One. We marveled at the handling and durability of the first one and haven't been disappointed since. Suzuki completely revamped the PE line for '80 so it's no big surprise they are little changed for 1981. We tested the 400 and the 250 last year but never did get time to try the 175. We last tested a 175 PE in September '78, the first year for the model. One editor was so impressed with the machine that he bought the test bike and still has it.

Last year's update gave the 175 a new frame, patterned after the RM frame, and a truly quick-release rear wheel. These parts, a direct result of input from Suzuki's enduro team, are little changed for 1981. The frame is chrome-moly steel. It has a large single front downtube, a heavily-braced steering head with tapered roller bearings, a large backbone tube and good triangulation to stiffen the junction of backbone to rear downtubes. There are plenty of gussets at the corners, which also reduces flexing. The '81 frame is slightly different where the bottom tubes run beneath the engine. Instead of an aluminum skidplate, the cases are protected by extra tubes. These do a good job of shielding the outside edges of the engine but the center is still exposed. The idea is right, mud and brush can't be trapped and increase the weight of the bike. But, the open belly is a concern for riders who frequently ride in rocks. Another tube added to the frame would complete the job.

The rear wheel, best and easiest to remove of any dirt bike, is fantastic. The supplied six-day wrench is all that's needed for removal and replacement. Forget about removing the chain, unhooking the brake linkage and wondering what happened to all the little pieces that fell into the dirt. All you have to do to remove the rear wheel is unscrew the axle (it threads into a captive nut on the swing arm) pull the axle with the pinned end of the six-day wrench, remove one spacer and unplug the wheel from the sprocket. Chain and brake remain in place, so there's no adjustment needed.

The extruded aluminum swing arm was new last year and is unchanged for '81. It's a strong, good looking item that won't need replacement or modification. An aluminum chain guide does a good job of keeping the chain aligned with the sprocket. Best check the attaching bolts before riding the bike though, we haven't found one with tight bolts yet! Sure disaster will strike if the unit comes loose 10 miles from the truck; the complete guide will follow the chain around the rear sprocket and break the chain, stranding the rider. The chain, listed as a 520 in the spec chart, is wider than a normal 520 and will require the use of a 530 master link. Beware if you're the owner of an '80 or '81 PE 400, 250 or 175 with the stock chain on it. Check to see if you're carrying the right size master link.

Suspension units at both ends look the>

If You Liked The '80, You'll Like The '81

Photos by Steve Kimball and Ron Grieve

Shocks don't have reservoirs, do have dual springs and acceptable damping. Aluminum swing arm is unchanged from last year. Engine has generous finning but power output is mild.

Tail light lens is bolted in securely, didn't fall out during test.

Air cleaner box has effective water dam at front of air intake.

same as '80 components and Suzuki claims they are unchanged. But, both ends work much better than the '80 parts. The forks are compliant and smooth. No shock or jolt when square edged terrain is encountered, no bottoming when ditches are smashed into, no harshness regardless of terrain, just controlled damping. The double spring shocks aren't as good but they're acceptable for moderate to semi-fast use. The bike never tries to get sideways, but harshness is apparent when ditches and such are charged into at speed. Play riders will find them fine, serious enduro riders will need to call Works Performance, Fox or Ohlins for replacement shocks.

The PE175 engine has changed some since '78 but not since last year. Cylinder fins are noticeably longer than the '78 model and internally, the porting has changed. Ignition is a CDI electronic unit that's bullet-proof, the clutch is heavy duty and primary kick starting is standard. The carburetor size has grown from 32mm to 34mm and the pipe and silencer are new designs since '78. The pipe is a double walled unit. The large silencer is forestry legal and has double mounting brackets.

Controls on the '81 PE are also unchanged. The straight pull throttle is plastic, the hand levers are aluminum and feature easily changed pivot mounts, bars are shaped right for the intended use, grips are okay, the brake pedal has a saw toothed top but doesn't fold, the shift lever still doesn't fold, the kick lever has a ribbed surface, and the kill button is waterproofed.

The only way your neighbor will know you have an '81, not an '80 PE175 is the new decals on the plastic tank. The other body parts are mostly the same, the side panels being slightly different.

Lighting is the same at the front, slightly different at the rear. The tail light was a problem on many '80 models, as the lens would fall out after a long stretch of rough ground. The '81 lens is bolted differently and we didn't experience any trouble with it.

The PE175 doesn't feel like the rival 175s. The small feel associated with the others isn't noticed. In fact the PE175 feels like a detuned 250. Fine if the rider is a large person, not so fine if the rider is small, as many 175 riders are. For example, the IT175 is light and nimble, the PE175 feels heavy and sluggish. Comparing the data panel figures tells the difference; the IT175 weighs 214 lb., the PE175 238 lb., both with a half tank of gas. Twenty-four lb. is substantial on a small displacement motorcycle. The overweight PE suffers in a drag race as well, the IT will whip it every time. But straight line drags aren't the only place the PE is slow, it's also slow exiting corners. Low en->


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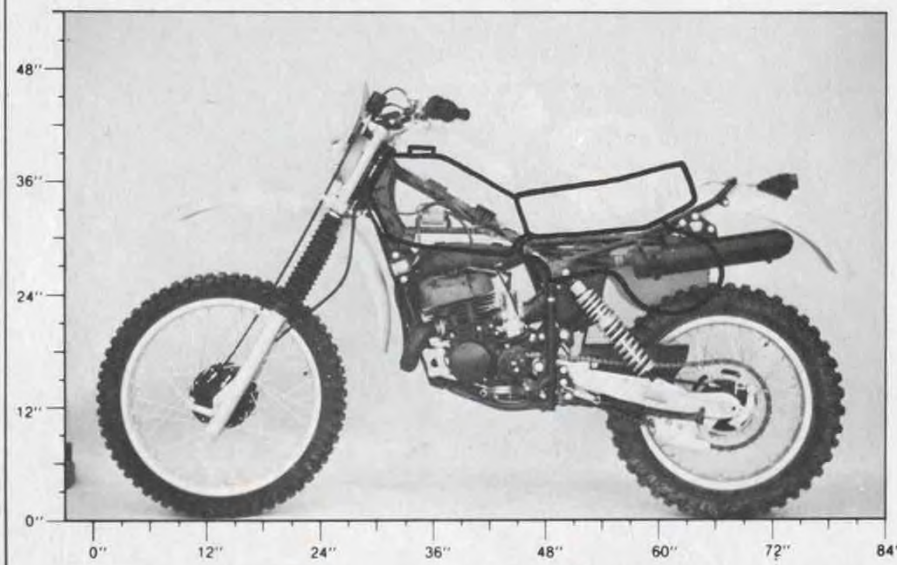
SPECIFICATIONS

List price	$1479
Fork travel	9.8 in.
Fork stanchion tube diameter	38mm
Rear wheel travel	9.7 in.
Front tire	3.00-21 Bridgestone
Rear tire	4.00-18 Bridgestone
Engine	two-stroke Single
Bore x stroke	62 x 57mm
Piston displacement	172cc
Compression ratio	7.6:1
Claimed power	na
Claimed torque	na
Carburetion	34mm Mikuni
Ignition	CDI
Lubrication system	premix
Primary drive	straight-cut gear
Gear ratios, overall: 1	
6th	9.66
5th	11.54
4th	14.35
3rd	16.20
2nd	24.44
1st	34.11
Oil capacity	1.8 pt.
Fuel capacity	2.8 gal.
Fuel tank material	plastic
Swing arm material	aluminum
Starter	primary kick
Air filtration	oiled foam
Frame material	chrome-moly steel
Wheelbase	56.5 in.
Seat height	36.3 in.
Seat width	6.4 in.
Seat length	18.5 in.
Seat front to steering stem center	14.0 in.
Handlebar width	32.2 in.
Footpeg height	16.0 in.
Footpeg to seat top	20.6 in.
Footpeg to shift lever center	6.0 in.
Footpeg to brake pedal center	5.0 in.
Swing arm length	21.2 in.
Swing arm pivot to drive sprocket center	2.8 in.
Gas tank filler hole size	2.1 in.
Ground clearance	12.5 in.
Fork rake angle	29.5°
Trail	na
Test weight w/half tank fuel	238 lb.
Weight bias, front/rear percent	46.2/53.8



gine speed power is poor, the engine requiring 5 or 6 thousand rpm before much forward speed happens. Clutching the bike helps but the engine still doesn't jump into the power band instantly like a motocrosser. The bike can be ridden fast but the rider has to ride the bike for a couple of days and get used to downshifting and riding one turn ahead of the bike, allowing for engine response slowness. Luckily the engine never looses power from heat, a by-product of the mild tuning and large cylinder fins.

The six-speed transmission has ratios that are perfectly matched to the engine's output. Low will take the bike straight up . . . slowly. Sixth will put the machine down a power line road at a respectable speed. Engine jetting is spot on. The engine refuses to load up or act nasty.

We took some fairly long loops on the PE. Fairly long was all we could take, the PE175 is on the thirsty side. The 2.8 gal. tank is only good for around 60 mi. with a fairly fast 150 lb. rider aboard. Add an expert enduro or desert rider and the distance drops to 50 mi. or less. A couple of open motocrosser bikes along on the loops got substantially better mileage!

Forks have 38 mm stanchion tubes, damping and spring rates that match the bike perfectly. Front brake is strong and progressive.

The PE175 has some good features: it looks right, has quick change wheels, good steering, nice plastic components, good forks, waterproof brakes, a quiet exhaust and strong swing arm. It doesn't have competitive engine performance. As it's delivered it can't be considered anything but a nice play bike. To be competitive the owner will have to modify the engine, perhaps advancing the timing or removing pipe internals or raising the ports, which will naturally reduce the low-speed power of the engine even more. Even with a more powerful engine a rider will be wrestling a bike that weights 24 lb. more than the lightest of the competition and light weight, after all, is supposed to be the big feature of a 175. Without the engine mods the PE175 simply isn't competitive against Yamaha's quick and agile IT175 or Kawasaki's torquey good handling KDX175. As delivered the PE175 is best considered a fine play bike. ◙