Suzuki DR250

Great Steering, Good Suspension, and Lots of Fun.

Suzuki's new DR250 is just like the street-legal SP250—more or less.

Because the DR is strictly a playbike, not for road use unless you're lucky enough to live in a state where if it's got a headlight they'll sell you a license plate, the more and the less are both the result of intended use.

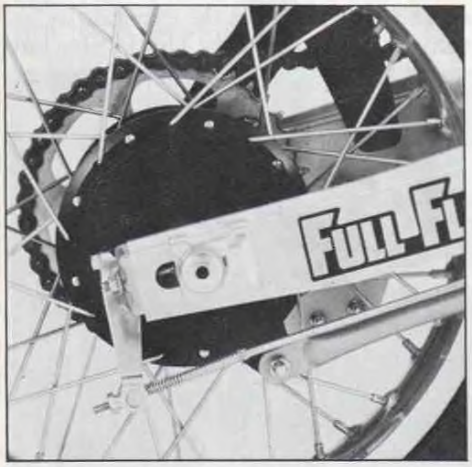
The DR and SP share the same basic engine, but the DR has a twin cable operated slide carburetor jetted so the engine runs right, and that means more punch. The DR has more suspension travel; 9.8-in. front and rear, compared with 7.7 and 7.5 in. for the SP. The DR's stanchion tubes are larger, 36 mm to 35, and the sliders are longer because the travel is. The DR's single rear shock has a nitrogen-charged reservoir, the wheelbase is longer because the aluminum swing arm is, too, there's a higher seat and more ground clearance because of the extra wheel travel and the DR's rear tire is slightly more beefy, at 5.10 nominal cross section while the SP's rear tire is a 4.60.

All this adds up to less, in the sense of a test weight of 263 lb. to the SP's 273. That's not as much less as usual; road equipment normally adds 20 lb. to the basic bike. But because Suzuki has added the right kind of weight, as in the stronger forks and longer suspension, and because the engines are virtually identical and have the same muffler and so forth, and because the DR's little lights aren't that much smaller than the SP's lights and signals, the lack of less weight isn't a drawback.

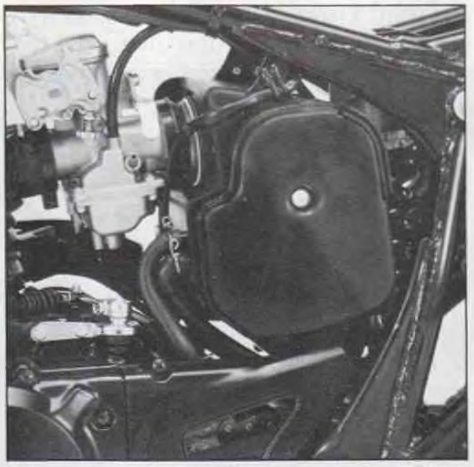
The play version of the 250 engine reinforces all the remarks made about the SP. This is the easiest four-stroke to start in recent memory. The old pros first disdained the lever that opens the exhaust valve and indicates piston position. They don't need that sissy stuff, and true, they don't. The 250 can be lit with a healthy kick no matter where the piston came to rest. But. The semi-automatic system is so neat, so sure, so effortless that even the diehards came to use it. One kick gets it. If the DR has just been run hard up a deep sandwash on a hot day, and it sits for five minutes while the heat soaks into the carb and ignition, i.e. conditions that turn the average Single into an impossible beast, the DR250 may require as many as three kicks.

Internal gears are the same for both models but to make starts and climbs easier, and because top speed and flat-out cruising aren't what the DR is supposed to do anyway, the DR comes with a 13-tooth front sprocket instead of the 14 on the SP. Low gear is thus lower, the ratio spread internally is less and you have (relatively) more power for any ground speed. No problem there at all.

The DR is delivered with air caps for the forks. The rear spring pre-load can be adjusted but it's a bear to get to. The rear shock has adjustable damping. We left all the settings as the factory recommends; zero pressure in front, No. 2 damping in back. These are good settings for intended use and presumed user. The front end is just a shade on the firm side on chopped ground and if the DR gets high enough, the forks can be bottomed. The back doesn't kick and gives the easy ride we've come to expect from the Full Floater but>



DR's Full Floater uses the same hub (we swapped while a tire was being fixed) but the swing arm is aluminum and longer.



DR's slide carb jetted without regard for EPA requirements gives crisper response but engine is otherwise just like the SP. Air filter is reached by removing screw in center of cover.

DR250

again, get high enough or bang into ridges and rocks fast enough and you'll feel the travel get all used up. This is median travel and spring stiffiness and damping for median speeds. A rider who weighs more or less, or goes faster or slower than average could probably dial in some improvement with a different grade fork oil, a change of pressure and so forth.

The longer swing arm puts more weight on the front, which is good for traction. So is the rear tire and the forward seating position and the DR will climb any hill within reason.

However. There isn't really a lot of power and there are grades that are simply too steep for the 250, just as there are silty or sandy trails that call for 4th gear instead of 5th. The modest output limits speed and low gear will be needed more often than a comparable two-stroke engined bike. Once in low, you'll swear it isn't going to be low enough to carry you over the hill, but the good low speed torque produced by the engine will almost always take bike and rider over the crest. Shale rock hills are the exception but it's not the fault of the engine. The tires are a compromise and they simply don't get very good traction on shale.

Said modest output also limits fuel consumption. Off road uses more fuel, bikes and power being equal, but the DR's 2-gal. tank will deliver an average of 120 mi. under a reasonable hand, no worse than 100 if flogged.

We took the DR250 and our PE175 Floater to the mountains for some fast riding through tight trails and some fire road sliding. The PE175 and DR250 are virtually the same speed in a drag when equal weight and ability riders are aboard. When going head-to-head on tight trails the PE has a slight advantage exiting corners because you can hit the clutch and cause a quick leap from the turn on the PE. Switching back and forth between the bikes proved the DR actually steered better than the PE! And the DR is fully competitive with the PE when ridden at enduro speeds in the pine trees.

What the DR does best is steer. The forward position and long swing arm again. The DR lends itself to zig-zags between trees and around rocks and up switchbacks. With an inch or so trimmed off the bars, it would be even better in the woods. We might even trim the bars for open country. Like the SP250, the DR reacts a lot for steering input and we'd rather have less leverage than mess about with the front end settings that work right already.

There's not enough power for classic backing the DR into corners and coming out in a controlled shower of rocks, instead it's like sliding a 100cc bike: it requires a deep and fast entry so the bike can slide through the corner from its speed, not horsepower. And the DR is an exceptional slider once the rider adapts to the mild power output. The bike is totally neutral, making great smooth arcs through the smoother turns. The DR went straight across whoops that had the SP's shock faded. This could be due to the extra capacity of the DR shock, or the DR's lightness or the extra travel or all the above. The suspension works well.

One oversight is the lack of a quick-change rear wheel. The current PE has a system that's wonderful. Earlier PE's had quick detach hubs that were nearly as good and much better than the DR, which demands removal of heaps of nuts, bolts and spacers that fall on the ground and get lost. The DR is a new model and there's no clear reason for not using a better system.

Servicing is the same contrast. The oil filter is accessible and the air filter comes off with a screwdriver and a minute or so, but the rear shock preload is buried deeper than King Tut. A small tool kit is stored under the flip-up front number plate but you won't be able to do more than minimal trail-side repairs with it.

In sum the DR250 runs without flaw, has a chassis and suspension more than equal to the power, handles well and looks good. It's smaller than the DR500, and fills precisely the gap in Suzuki's lineup it's supposed to fill. ◙

SPECIFICATIONS: SUZUKI DR250

price	$1598
wheelbase	55.9 in.
test weight	263 lb.
front wheel travel	9.8 in.
rear wheel travel	9.8 in.
seat height	35.3 in.