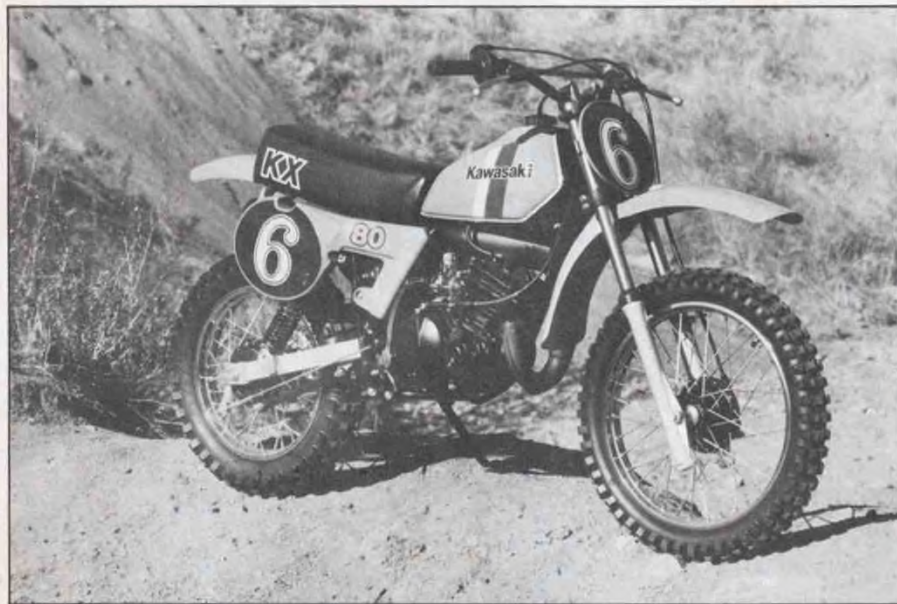


KAWASAKI KX80

THE SPLIT LEVEL MINI-RACER

Take it from beginner to expert

By The Dirt Bike Staff



Todd Sciacqua slings the KX80 through a corner, testing the limits of its sliding capabilities.

How many times have you seen a kid out at the track on a brand-spanking-new 80cc motocrosser, spending the entire day in frustration? You can see him constantly stalling the bike in corners, half of the time scared to death of all the power it has, and even more terrified of the fact that to keep the bike moving he has to rev the engine all of the time. That's no way for a little guy to learn how to ride. When he begins to ride that way, he develops bad habits.

That's commonplace in today's minicycle world. It seems like all of the bikes are screamers, designed in the footsteps of a 125. But with Kawasaki's new KX80, a beginner will stand a better chance in both learning to race and in developing good habits for future years of racing.

Why?

Because unlike all of the other 80s, the Kawasaki has good, strong low-end power that will enable the beginning rider to go around a course without screaming the engine, just using the lower part of the powerband to keep him skooting along at a very acceptable pace. A good example of the KX's low-end potential can be found in pulling a second gear start with it, and trying it with this year's RM80. The KX will take off in second gear, with ordinary clutching and no wild feathering, while if you tried that with the RM, you'd have to scream the engine, slip the clutch constantly, and give it a little bit of help with your legs. The low end on the new KX80 is outstanding. And its mid-range is just as strong as the Suzuki's, too. The only place where you'll start to give ground away to the RM is at the top, where the RM will pull the KX slightly in a straight drag.

As you can see, the new 1980 KX minicrosser is not a Uni-Trak suspended motorcycle. It uses dual oil-damped spring shocks with a boxed swingarm. Putting a Uni on one of the minis is going to take a lot more developmental work from Kawasaki before you'll see it on the 80. But for the mini, the dual springers work just as well. They can handle both large and ripple bumps, with a minimum of swapping and loss of control. As for the front forks, they are even better. Leading axle legs are up front, and handle rough terrain well.

With the good suspension components on the KX, and longer travel distances than in the past, you might tend to think that the bike would no longer turn as well as before. That is not the case with this machine. The KX turns extremely well. Sliding or squaring corners is left up to the rider's personal preference. He does not have to rely solely upon berm hunting to make the bike pivot. It is a very well-handling minibike.

We noticed the Kawasaki KX80 is not a "fussy" motorcycle. Most little screaming 80s have a tendency to load up constantly unless kept buzzing. But the KX was the total opposite of that. It started up very quickly and it ran extremely "clean." It did not have the tendency to load up constantly; in fact, it didn't pack it in at all during our testing.

During our test sessions with the Kawasaki, we slipped in a set of Boyesen reeds. After their installation, the Kawasaki was even better. The already potent low end became stronger, the mid-range better, and the top end increased a bit. And to get that all we did was to pull out the reed cage, unscrew the old reeds, and put in the two-piece Boyesen units! In fact, with the new reeds, we had to be careful about cracking the throttle in on loose, hard-packed surfaces. If the throttle was hit too hard at any point in the range, the KX's rear wheel would break loose and spin. Still, for their overall performance, the reeds are worth it.

Checked flag time

Now, before you go out and buy a Kawasaki KX80, here's the bottom line. The KX is a good starter's bike for two reasons. First, it has a good enough low end to get him started into racing easily and safely. That's a must for developing good riding habits, and the more a kid likes his bike, the better

he's going to take care of it and learn how to keep it going from week to week.

Second, after a guy starts racing and gets better, the Kawasaki will get better with him. What that boils down to is that as the rider gets faster, he learns how to use his bike better, and he'll learn that the Kawasaki is capable of doing what he now can do himself. With those two advantages it's hard to knock the Kawasaki from the beginner's standpoint. This bike is one of the few that will be competitive for the rider throughout his class advances. □

KAWASAKI KX80

Specifications

ENGINE TYPE	Two-stroke, reed-valve
BORE AND STROKE	48.0mm x 45.8mm
DISPLACEMENT	82cc
HORSEPOWER (CLAIMED)	16 at 11,500 rpm
CARBURETION	29mm Mikuni
IGNITION	CDI
TRANSMISSION	Five-speed
FUEL TANK CAPACITY	1.3 gallons
WHEELBASE	46.85 inches
GROUND CLEARANCE	10.43 inches
SEAT HEIGHT	30.31 inches
WEIGHT (CLAIMED)	138.92 pounds
SUSPENSION: FRONT	Leading axle fork
REAR	Swingarm/oil-spring shocks
TIRES: FRONT	2.75x17 4pr knobby
REAR	4.10x14 4pr knobby
INTENDED USE	Off-road competition
APPROX. RETAIL PRICE	\$729
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	Japan
DISTRIBUTOR:	
	Kawasaki Motor Corp.
	2009 E. Edinger Ave.
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