

THE SUZUKI EDITORS' MINI-MX

A DAY AT THE RACES

... with the DR crew.

Kenny Zahrt blazing the way for ol' DR.

Well, it was that time of year again. New model RM 125 time, that is. Which for everyone in the "motojournalism" industry means, of course, Editor's Mini-Motocross time. That's Suzuki's unique, imaginative and quite fun-filled way of introducing those little buggers to the world.

What it all means is that Suzuki invites all the motorcycle press types down to a track, and treats them all to a day of racing atop their new RM 125's. This year, in honor of the release of the RM 125B, it was held at Indian Dunes.

Two different race formats are used. The Grand Prix, in which only actual staff members of the various publications may take part, and the rag team, which consists of three-man teams from each publication switching off on one bike. The rag teams are where all the "ringers" turn up, or hired guns, depending on which term you prefer.

In the wake of Christmas vacations, usually ever-alert Dirt Rider was caught napping in the preparation for this championship event. More accurately Paul showed up at the Dunes bright and early on race day and began hunting around for prospective riders for the honor of upholding the DR emblem.

Hatounian was nowhere to be seen. He later claimed that his editor had given him the wrong time to be there. Off by a mere couple hours, but what kind of excuse is that?



Ro-o-o-ost!



Paul looks around for the key time clock.



The rider switch. A study in precision.

But abundant were the prospects, in quantity, if not necessarily in quality.

Assistant Editor Ned Owens of *Modern Cycle*, had been elbowed off the Racing Mag's team when Editor Rick Hunky decided to go with a couple ringers for the "points."

So Paul nabbed Owens as the number two man for the DR banner.

A bit more finagling and routing about finally produced a third member. Paul wasn't sure of his merit but was in a desperate situation. After all, what kind of rider could he be with a name like Zahrt? Kenny, I think he said his first name was.

With the rag team all set for action, Hatounian finally decided to show up with his flimsy excuses, and was relegated to the Grand Prix.

In the first rag team heat each rider was to go three laps then hand the bike to the next member of the team. The top three teams qualified for the main. The youngster, Zahrt, was put in the first position, with Owens and Paul running second and third to try and pull it out.

Amazingly Zahrt pulled the holeshot on the field, and took off with the lead on the entire pack. Talk about beginner's luck.

Breathing down his neck was Danny LaPorte, with whom, if things had gone

otherwise, we'd have had to taken protest. After all, LaPorte is a pro.

But the wind currents seemed to be in our favor that day and not only did Zahrt hold LaPorte behind, but began to lengthen his lead. The pack roared around after their first lap and the P.A. boomed "Dirt Rider in first place and pulling ahead." If only I'd had a tape recorder.

Now Owens was donning his helmet. Time to get serious. No more fun. This was for the money now.

Two laps down and that boy, Zahrt, wouldn't let up. Three laps and he roared in seconds ahead of LaPorte in second place. The switch went smoothly. Owens dialed on the throttle and eased out the clutch. With a small spurt of backward shot gravel, he headed for the first turn.

Other bikes were coming in and switches were being made. More riders were heading for the first turn, but Owens had a sure lead.

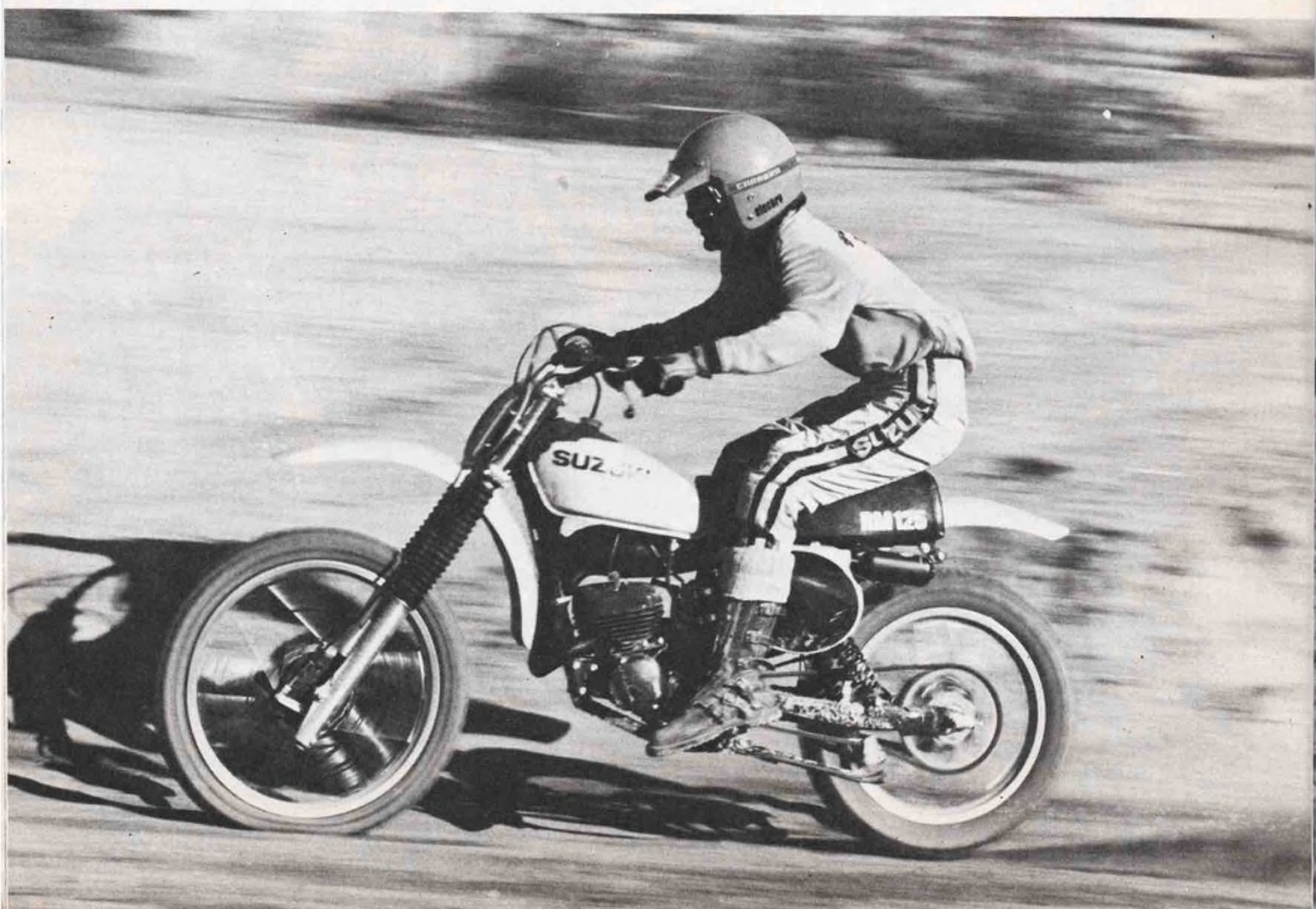
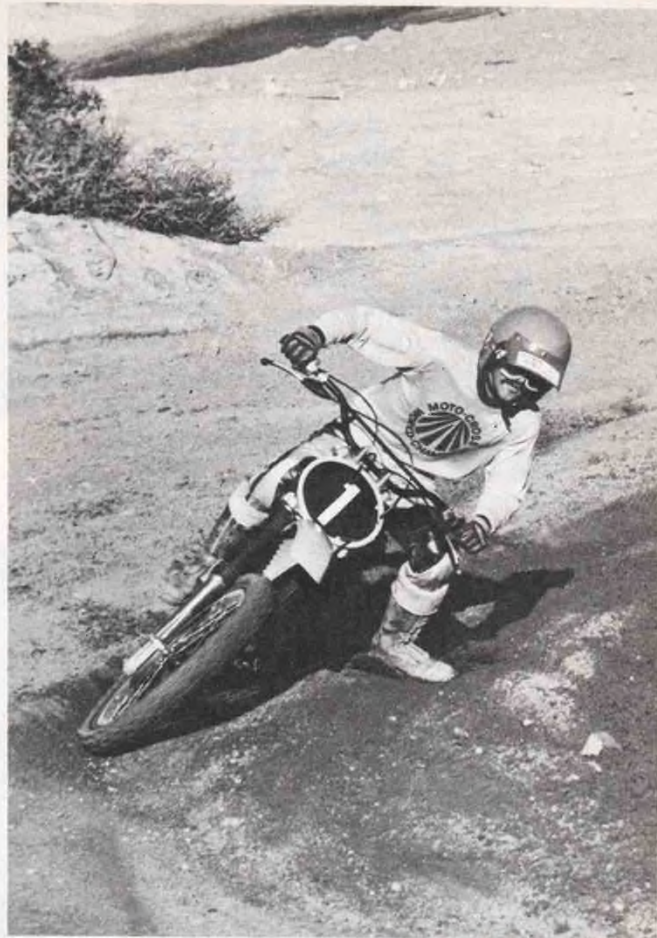
By the second turn, Owens' lead was not quite as sure.

By the third, it was downright shaky.

After the first half lap, the ol' DR #1 bike was back in second. Hold on . . . better make that third. Uh . . . fourth.

Cheez, if you can't depend on the Racing Magazine, who can you depend on?







Owens dices it out.

Fortunately Zahrt had opened up a large enough lead that Owens sank no further, and even managed to get back a place. It was down to the anchor men. Paul had to hold down third for the team to qualify for the main.

I wouldn't spread this around, but I have a suspicion that Paul placed himself back in third just so he wouldn't have this kind of pressure, on the assumption that everything would have been said and done by then. But so it goes.

Paul began his round with a fair sized lead in third. But you put these enduro types on a motocross track, and what can you expect? After the first lap, Gary Hymes, riding for Cycle News and LaPorte's partner, began closing in at a rapid pace. Paul's hold on third suddenly seemed to be a very finite thing.

After two laps Hymes was right on Paul's rear. The DR team members were concerned that Paul might be worried about pulling in early at a check.

But then a break. Hymes overshot a berm and ran off the course. Ha, that shrewd Paul was just playing with him. What a card. With less than a lap to go he again let Hymes catch up to him, only to cross the finish line, still with third, by a fraction of a second. Whew, that Paul sure knows how to put on a show.

After catching our breath, it was time for Hatounian to capture the first Grand Prix. All the racer types from the various publications were entered in the first Grand Prix round. Whether that had anything to do with why Paul put Hatounian in that particular round or not is unclear at this time.

Suffice to say that Hatounian was up against some stiff competition. And so what if he'd just had the last of his pins pulled from his broken hand the day before, and hadn't ridden a bike in a month. Hatounian was told to go bring back the victory.

We suggest that somebody might have sabotaged the DR bike between rounds, because Hatounian was one of the last riders to enter the first turn. As the pack thinned out, he staked a firm claim on eighth of the ten positions and, amidst Paul's cries from the side line, "We're going to dock you a week's pay!" he set his sights on Jody Weisel and Rick Hunky directly in front of him.

But as the intense race unfolded over the six lap race, he began to lose ground, and eventually began hanging on by one hand. So he was going to make it dramatic, huh. The pace gets a little too fast for him, and he's probably going to blame it on his bum hand. But we're not going to buy that. We all saw him use his left hand to pull in the clutch at least a couple

times in the last two laps. Just because there was a cringe on his face each time, doesn't sell us.

So Hatounian pulled off an eighth.

Paul went in the next Grand Prix round, and he'll be the first to remind you that he qualified for the main by taking fifth. What he'll probably forget to tell you is that the second round had all the dregs in it, the also-rans from the each publication.

In the ten man main, he pulled off a ninth place, after losing a lap from stalling by forgetting to turn on his gas. Who lets these enduro guys in here, anyway?

Finally it was the finals of the rag teams, and the individual DR performances were pretty much of the same as the first. Except that Zahrt opened up a much wider lead, Owens lost it quicker, and Paul endo'd on his final lap. The DR banner took fifth of the six team field, due to the Dirt Bike team locating the only mud bog in Southern California.

But all that was just a prelude. The real action comes now, at the post-race party. Yes, sir, Suzuki sure has their (hic) psyche strategy down pat.

But I'm not (urp) going to get into that now. . . . I'm just going to mosey on over for another couple Margaritas, before the (hic) bar closes. . . . I think . . . just as soon as . . . this room stops . . . ah . . . spinning.



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THE SUZUKI RM 125B

The 125 motocross class is getting big. Bigger now in fact than ever before. And Suzuki knows this. About a week ago, we were invited by Suzuki to a preview showing of their new RM 125B, for a day of riding impressions. A couple of us had considerable time on the "A" model, so a chance to burn some laps on the new B, got us interested.

We were impressed, to say the least, when we set eyes on the new 125 the day of the showing. The most prominent feature, the forks, look much "beefier" than previous model front-ends, with a noticeable increase in travel. Gaining two-inches over last year's forks, the new front end now sports the ever popular "leading axle" set-up, which is becoming the standard for motocross machinery.

The rear end is also taking a jump toward the latest features of the 125's "bigger brothers," with the adding of remote reservoir shocks. The rear end of the B also took a two-inch increase in travel over the A model. Only the ride would tell the real story about it all. Suzuki also mentioned that extensive changes have been made to the motor for an increase in mid-range and more power. Instead of getting into the nitty gritty of it all, we'll save that for the full-blown test next month, and just give you a general riding impression.

THE RIDE

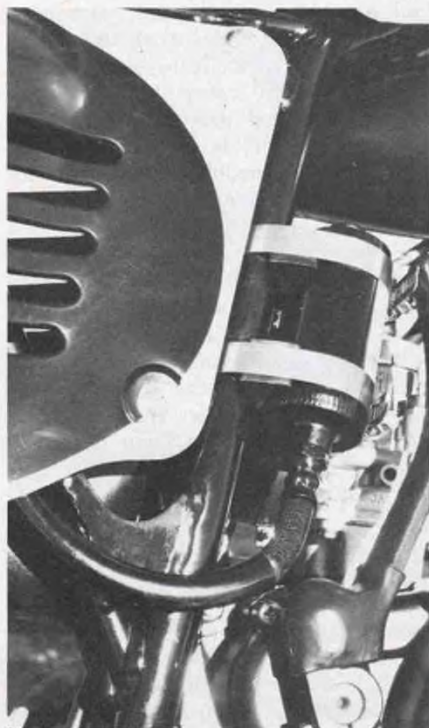
Swinging a leg over the tall saddle, the new RM is a slim, well thought out piece of machinery, with no apparent protrusions to the rider's body. Bars feel just right with comfortable, easy to reach levers.

Start up the high-revving motor, click it into first of the six-speeds, and you're off. Acceleration is awesome for a 125! The bike felt good! Hit the berm around the long sweeper turn and another big surprise hits us. It really turns nice. Last year's A had a tendency to wash-out at high speeds through turns, but you can pretty well forget about it with the B. Much of the new feel can be attributed to the new off-set axle.

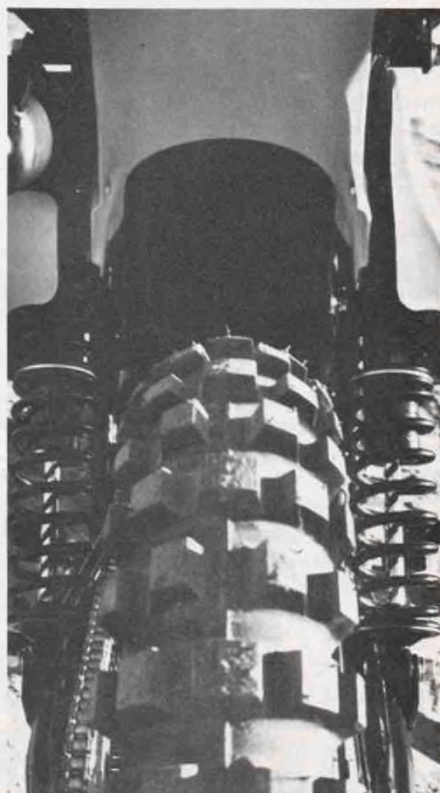
The motor delivers plenty of power for competition in the 125 class. The bike could easily be successfully raced against the modified 125 bikes and keep up. The motor changes have produced a noticeable increase in mid-range with more controllable acceleration, compared to the A. The fabled "slipping of the clutch" is not as necessary as in the past. Even some of our bigger test riders, who usually compete on open class bikes, felt the 125 had loads of power for its size.



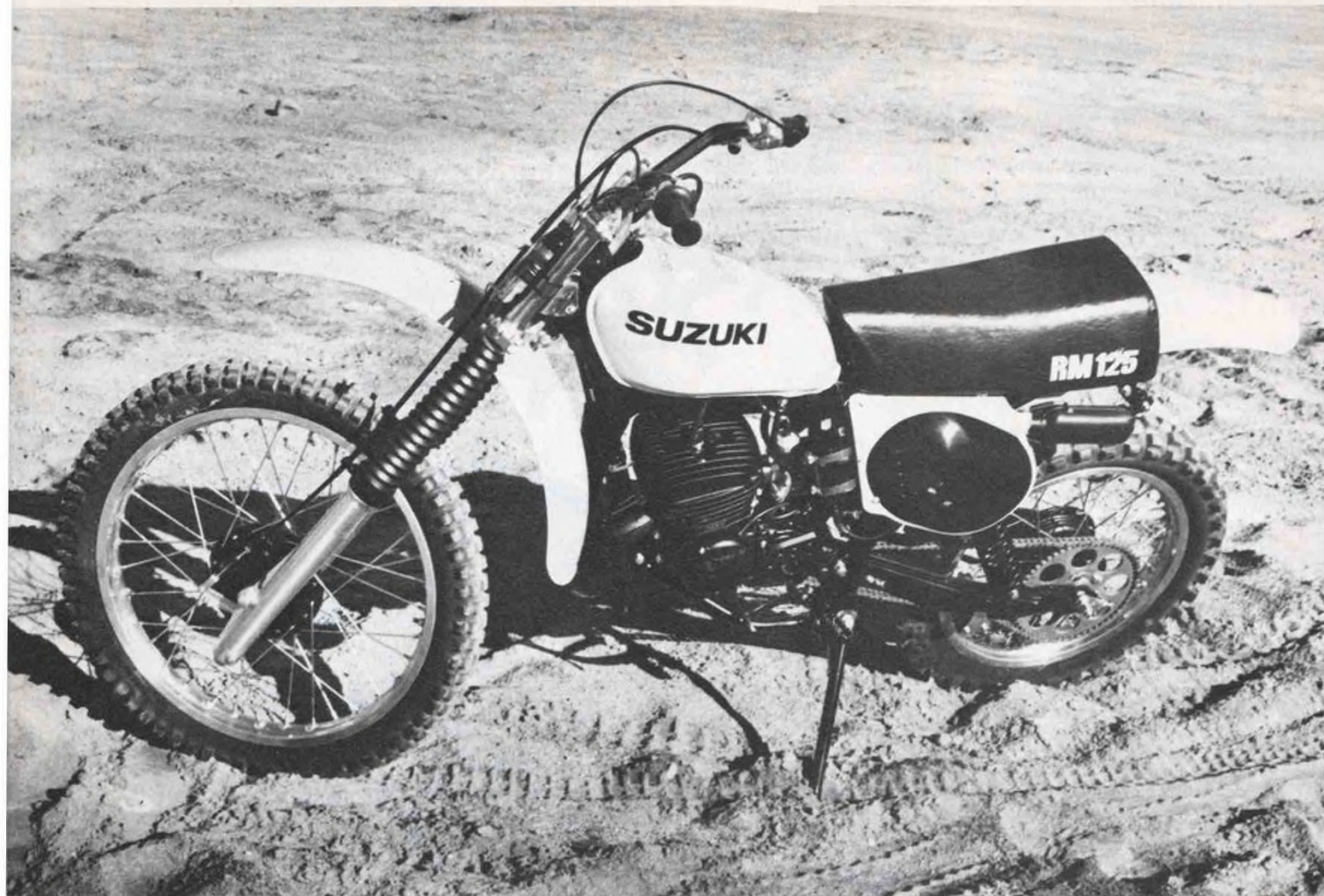
Leading axle forks are up to 9.1" of travel.



Remote reservoirs for the shocks this year.



The rear travel has increased to 8½".



The brakes were excellent, particularly the front. The new conical front binder is a first for the Suzuki motocross line, and is plenty strong enough for a 125 rider. The rear brake offers the same quality as the front binder, giving the rider the confidence to dive deeper into turns, knowing he's got the equipment to back up his daring moves.

Suspension (particularly the front) is the big change. On initial impressions the new nine inch air pressure forks are very plush, giving you a lot more confidence over the rough ground. Spring rates seemed just right for us and bottoming was never apparent. Although the track where testing took place was not really adequate to give an overall evaluation of the suspension, we felt the rear shocks worked quite well and didn't seem to fade under 20 minutes of hard riding. The rear end produced very little wheel hop over the rough at speed.

All in all, this is a fine instrument for the 125 class, and should produce some real results on its release. It will definitely be the bike to beat and the bike to buy. Next issue we'll have a full test on it, where we'll look deeper into the reasons behind these first impressions. ●

The B engine produces much better mid-range, giving a more controllable feel to the bike.

