



21

YAMAHA

250

192

GPR

34

ERIM

250

SUZUKI

110

WHO'S ON TOP NOW?

Plain as day & clear as mud
in the 250 class

□ As the summer racing season rapidly heats up, it is time to take care of business on the track. Nineteen eighty-three produced a new crop of hot deuce-and-a-halves, but only one is outstanding, only one does everything well, and only one is capable of making the majority of motocrossers terminally happy. We could tell you which one is best in the first paragraph, or you could get sneaky

and slip back to the last paragraph to find the answer without learning *why* it is best. The best 250cc motocross bike of 1983 is best because of what it can do. The losers in the quarter-liter category aren't losers, just bikes with different personalities, habits, and customs. For this day and age, our winner fits the bill. And the listing on the bill reads power, handling, suspension and the pieces.

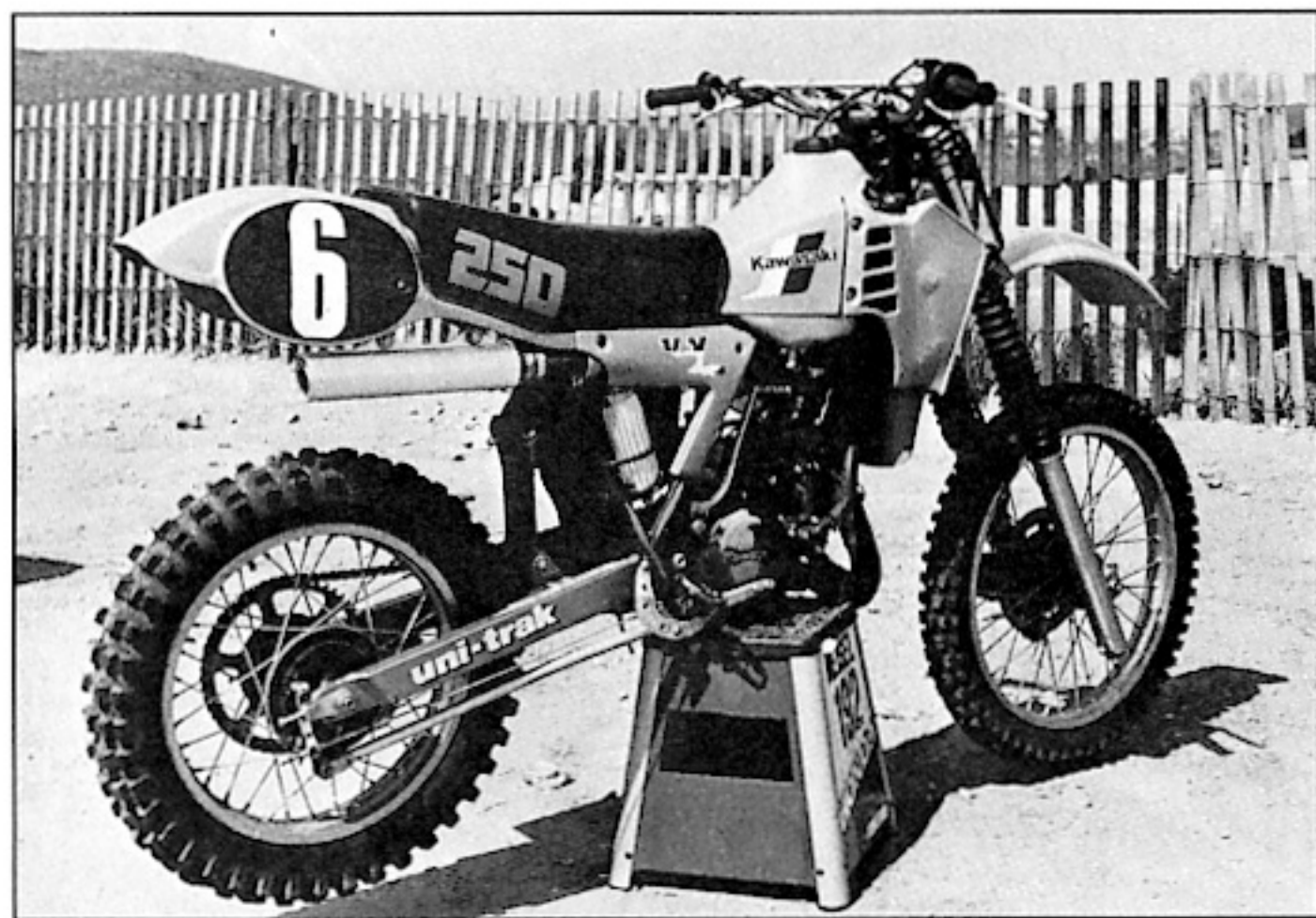




Honda did the best job of putting all the pieces together. The CR250R has motor, handling, suspension and looks on its side.



Yamaha's stylish yellow and black look is highlighted by yellow gaiters, black wings and an astonishingly low seat height.



With the exception of the green decor, the KX has up-to-date and popular looks. Very solid construction.



Suzuki didn't spend a lot of cash making cosmetic changes over last year's model, but it did add a few nice touches to solve problems.

YOU GOTTA LOTTA GALL

The MXA test crew didn't just parachute in (although it sounds like fun), so we don't expect unanimity with our test results. Each test rider had his favorites, personal preferences, and powerband peccadilloes. The test results are a molding of opinions drawn from months of racing, not playing on an empty track or riding with the family on Sunday afternoon, but deep-down-and-dirty motocross racing. Just as some test riders preferred a specific powerband for their personal style, or a type of handling that fit their approach to racing, the MXA wrecking crew expects you to learn more from the test than what is concluded in the final paragraph (if we had put the results in the last paragraph).

IS THE FASTEST THE FASTEST?

Yamaha's vastly improved YZ250K has horses on the Honda, Kawasaki and Suzuki. Not only does the YZ250K have a sparkling quantity of ponies,

but they are chomping at the bit to bust out of the corral. The Yamaha's square bore and stroke (68mm by 68mm) engine hits hard in the mid-range, rockets off in a vapor trail, and signs off before reaching a fulfilled top end. The extent of the YZ's willingness to rev is disguised by the speed in which the engine turns a full revolution through its powerband. The YZ250K is the fastest, but is the fastest the best?

THE ANSWER IS AT HAND

While the Yamaha YZ250K hits hard, has an abundance of American power and excites wrist rocket racers, it isn't the best motor on the track. Honda's CR250R has the distinction of taking all the bows in the power play. Encore! Where the YZ250 is impressive with its frighteningly brutal chunk of power, the CR250R is *magna cum laude* in the 250 class. Honda built a motor that builds power right off the bottom, and allows it to tumble out of the exhaust with an ever-increasing

crescendo of vibes. Honda makes the only 1983 250cc motor that is strong on bottom, luscious in the middle, and decent on top. Luscious is the word for Honda's motor. By no means does it have the sheer acceleration of the YZ, but it uses every ounce it has in propulsion.

ONE'S FAST, ONE'S LUSCIOUS, BUT WHAT ABOUT...

What about the Kawasaki KX and Suzuki RM250? There is nothing dreadfully wrong with the KX or RM, and in head-to-head drag races given riders could make them do the deed. But the KX is limited to its strong low-end churn and decent mid-range, while it forces the rider to shift gears before getting full use out of any hint of top-end rev. The green machine is strongest down low, and weakest on top. Suzuki, on the other hand, made a motor that produces power across a wide range, but never enough ponies to startle anyone. Unlike the spectacular RM250Z of last year, the 1983



ONE GREAT, ONE GOOD, AND TWO OTHERS

Honda's CR250R is a faultless performer on a race track. In comparison with its competition, the red machine is a great-handling bike. With a bizarre set of stats based on a 26-degree rake, the CR pulls the bacon out of the fire every time you put it in there by mistake. It turns, jumps, flicks and clicks with utter disregard for danger. We like a bike that makes us look good, but everybody loves a bike that won't let you look bad. That's the Honda CR250R.

Yamaha's YZ250K is a good-handling bike. Yamaha pulled the pieces together to make sure the YZ250 turned, and if the K model has one trait it is its willingness to tuck and cut. Good weight placement and precise geometry make the YZ as sharp as a knife.

You can't look bad on a CR250R. The Honda does the job; you can just go along for the ride. There is nothing like dangling in midair.

RM250D comes on smoothly, slowly, and quite manageably. Good enough for a workhorse, but the 250 class is restricted to thoroughbreds.

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

Honda has the winning motor for 1983. Its power is broad, constant and ubiquitous. The CR250R is the only 250 that will pull a taller gear even if you're in too tall of a gear already. Great flexibility. Yamaha cops a second place, with a motor that would have been first under any other scheme of things. Honda's usability flat outshined the Why-Zed's punch. Kawasaki is a solid third, and except for the amount of effort required to keep the bottom-end power chugging, it could easily be second. Suzuki's RM250 motor is the easiest to ride, but not the most exciting.

HANDLING WITH CARE

Don't confuse handling with suspension! Everybody does, but the two are completely different areas (although closely related to each other). Handling is the angles, geometries, specifications, weight biases and balances that make a bike do what you tell it to do. A good-handling bike *reads your mind* and does what you want, whether you are midair, berm blasting or flat-out. A great-handling bike *blows your mind!* It does what you want, but before you know that it is what you want. It turns circles without crabbing or washing, and it snakes through ruts without a quiver of doubt. Only one of the 1983 250 bikes blows our minds. Which one?



Kawasaki's tallish feel made the bike want to stand up in the berms, but its firm rear suspension made skyshots and the eventual landings a joy.

How close is it to the Honda in handling? Very close. The YZ barely misses out in the immeasurable category of feel and forgiveness.

Suzuki and Kawasaki are getting the short end of the stick in the handling department, but it's a cruel world. Neither the KX or RM is bad handling. In fact, they do the job quite well, but Honda and Yamaha have outstanding aspects that overshadow the journeyman handling of the Kawasaki and Suzuki.

FRONT FORKS FOR FUN

Without a doubt the 1983 motocross bikes have the worst forks of any bikes we can remember in recent years. This blanket condemnation isn't to say that the forks aren't good, rigid and functional sliders and tubes—it is just that they are studiously average.

As clarification, the facts are simple. Kayaba built the forks on the Suzuki, Yamaha and Kawasaki. They are all equally poor performing. The Suzuki and Yamaha come too soft from the factory, and the general damping characteristics tend towards a light rebound and an overdependence on the gimmicky compression damping poppet valve. Kawasaki has the worst forks because its attention to fork springs, damping and smoothness was the most lacking.



Armed with a hard-hitting and quick-revving motor, the YZ250K was snappy and quick handling. It performed best in the hands of a rider with lots of skill.

Suzuki's stability and steady supply of power made it easy to ride and very manageable. While you're up there you have confidence enough to check the wear on the front tire.

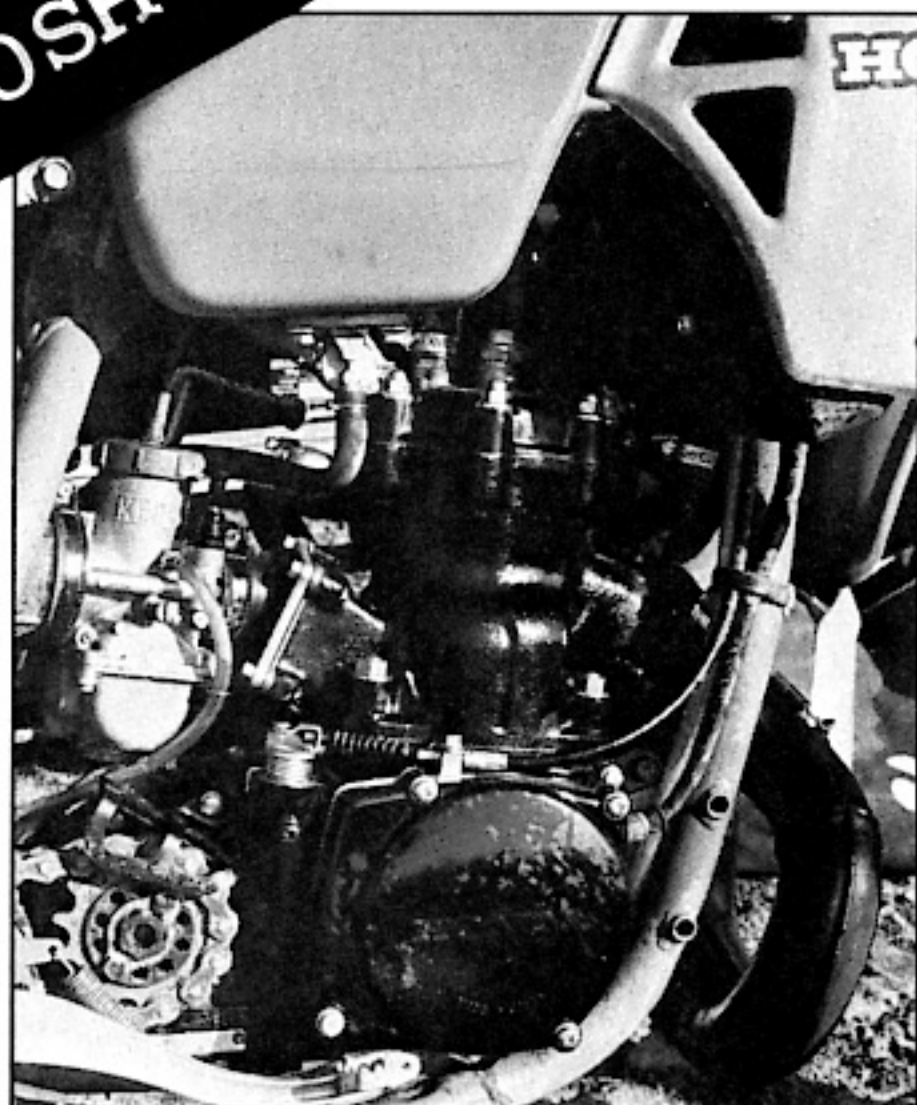
Now, what about Honda. Honda's forks were built by Showa, and the nicest thing that anyone could ever say about the Showa forks of the past was that the chrome was shiny. No more! Honda's Showa-built front forks are better than any of the stock Kayaba units found on the YZ, RM or KX.

WHO'S REALLY GOT THE REAR END DOWN PAT?

First off, Yamaha doesn't win this category. It loses it. It was a decent effort on the Mono-X's part, and the perseverance the YZ engineers have shown in coming up with new rear suspension designs year after year should be applauded, but we'll save our kudos for those who got it right the first time.

Kawasaki, Suzuki and Honda put rear suspension designs on the track that are identical enough in performance to be called a tie. Close enough, but not that close. Let's tell the whole story.

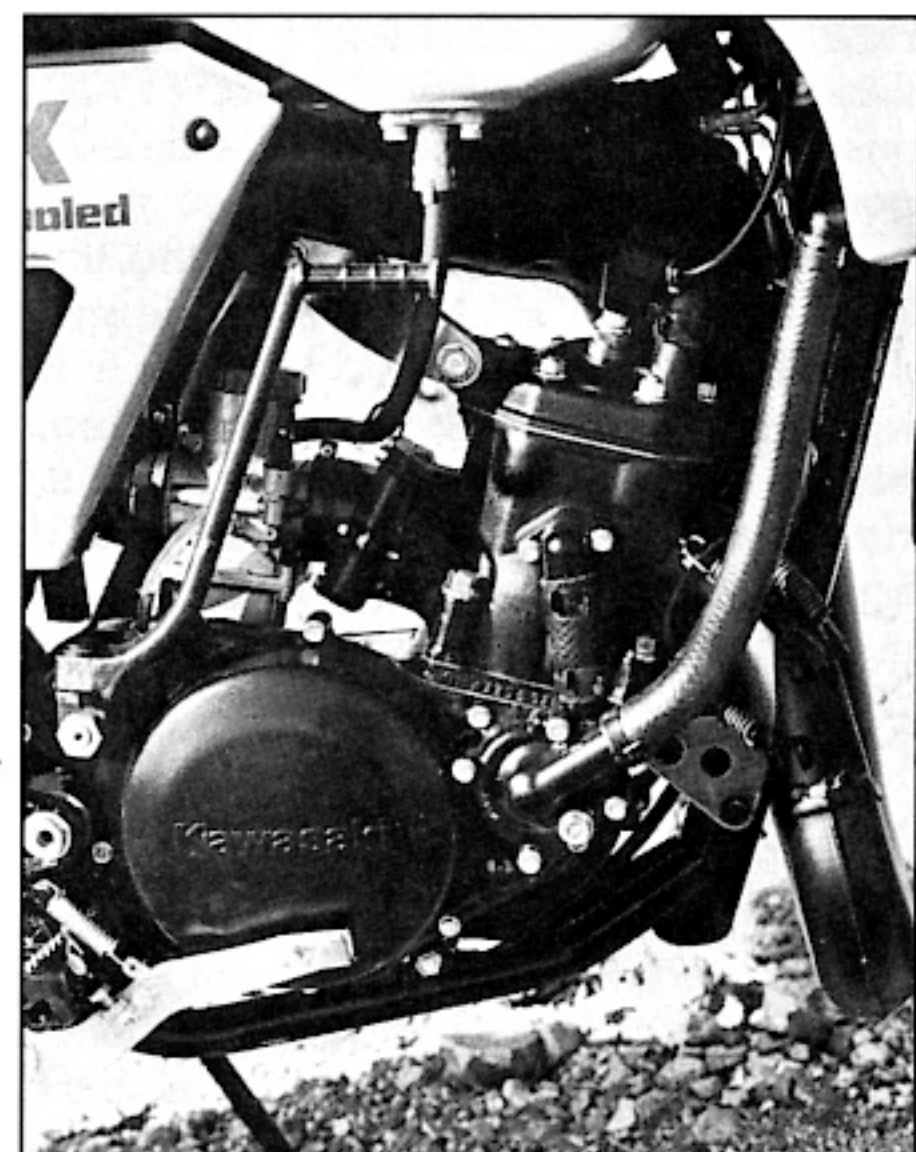
WHO'S ON TOP NOW?



Broad power—Honda's expansive power-band hooks up early and stays in the meat of the motor across the widest range.



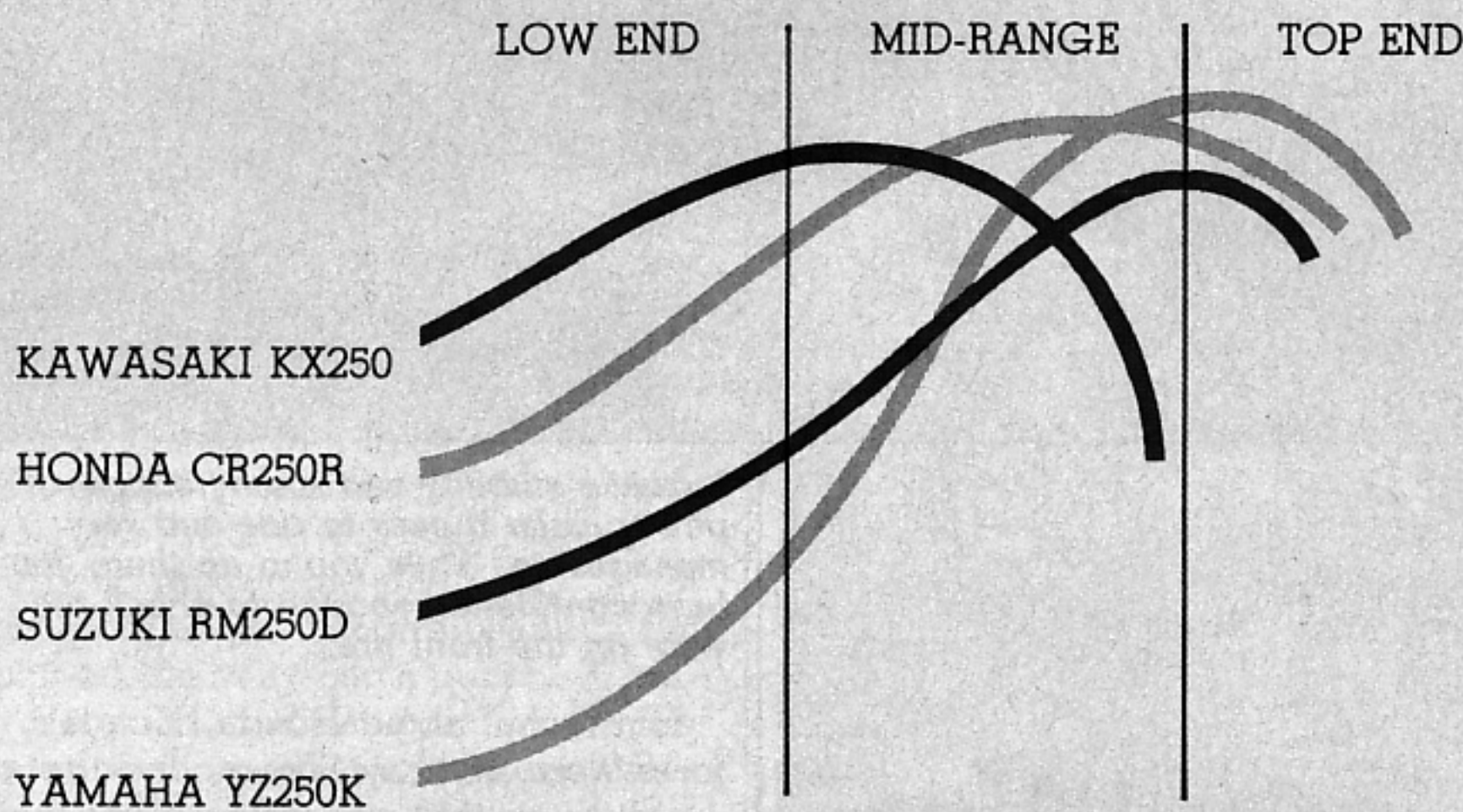
Violent power—Yamaha's YZ250K comes on with a rush and turns over at the highest Rs of all the deuces.



Low-down power—Kawasaki's 250 motor went for low-end churn rather than high-rpm whine. Good torque.

COMPARATIVE POWERBAND CHART

(relative horsepower placement—not a dyno chart)



Steady power—Suzuki mellowed out last year's RM rocket to build power controllably across a decent spread.

Kawasaki's rear suspension performed best of all because it had a steady firmness, resistance to bottoming and a solid feel to it, but we blew up two shocks during a six-month period.

Honda's Pro-Link rear suspension design didn't have the firmness of the KX, but it was supple, responsive and a tad busy. It was at the top of our list for quite a while, but the shock hose blew out and had to be replaced with a braided steel line.

Suzuki didn't impress us at all in the beginning. It felt stiff and awkward, while doing a respectable job. With careful attention to preload and minor fiddling with the clickers, we got the RM250D dialed in early on, and it is the only shock that never gave us any trouble.

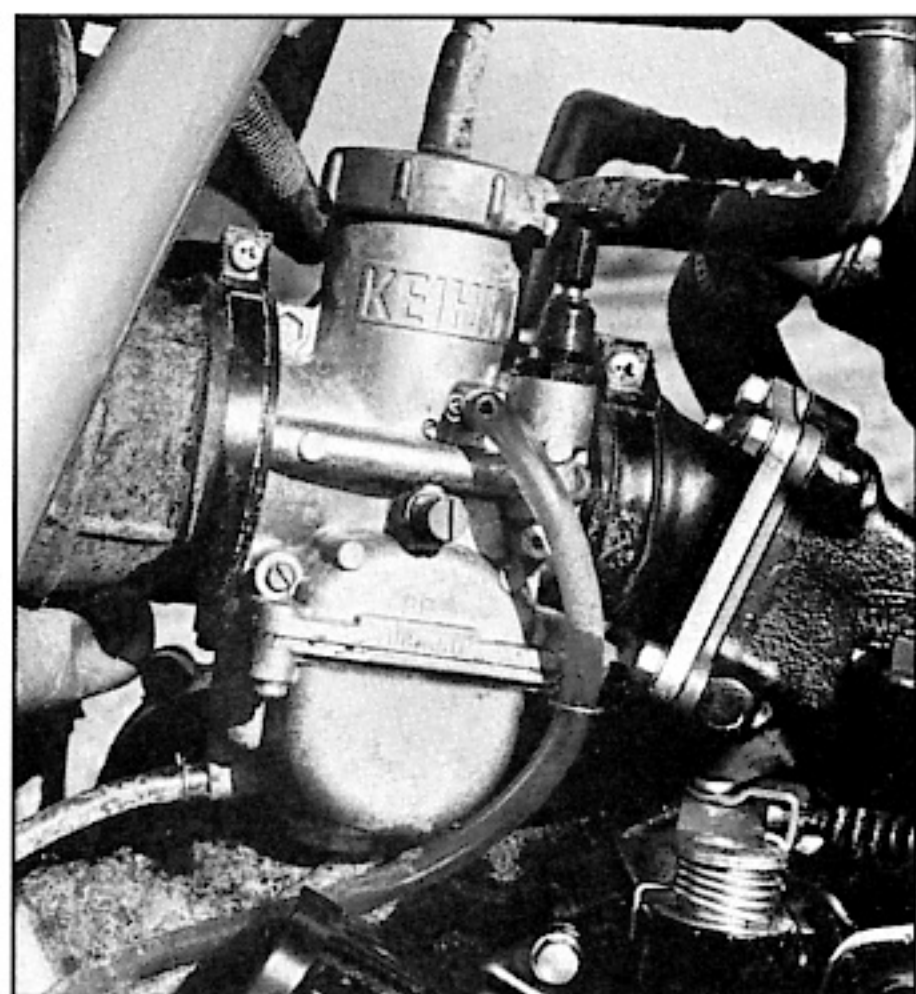
ENOUGH HORROR STORIES; WHAT'S THE PUNCH LINE?

So we were in a quandary. The two we really liked both suffered failures, and the one we didn't find impressive (although it worked well) kept right on doing its job. If you were in our boots, what would you do? You bet! That's what we did also. We fixed the KX and CR shocks and went racing. Kawasaki has the best rear suspension, Honda is second and Suzuki third.

PUT ALL THE PIECES TOGETHER

A motocross bike is more than its horsie power, handling and suspensers. Winners have all the good stuff and losers have pieces of the puzzle missing. Here is what the deuce-and-a-halves left out of the jigsaw puzzle.

Kawasaki made the KX250 too tall. It just doesn't want to get down and do



Both Honda and Kawasaki mix their fuels with a Keihin carb. On the Honda it's hot, on the KX it's not.

WHO'S ON TOP NOW?



Handling is Honda's haven. Getting the CR250R in and out of turns is done with precision, ease and maximum roost.



Kawasaki suffered from poor spring rates, hampering its handling; all of the Kayaba-forked bikes showed similar symptoms.



Yamaha finally shook the shackles of not-being able to turn. The YZ250K can grab the inside line with ease.



Readily usable power with no surprises makes the Suzuki RM250D the hot ticket for Junior-level riders.

the job. It likes to pop out of berms, dangle your feet on the line, and bang your knee on the seat when you're trying to mount it. If sales were of any importance to Kawasaki Heavy Indus-

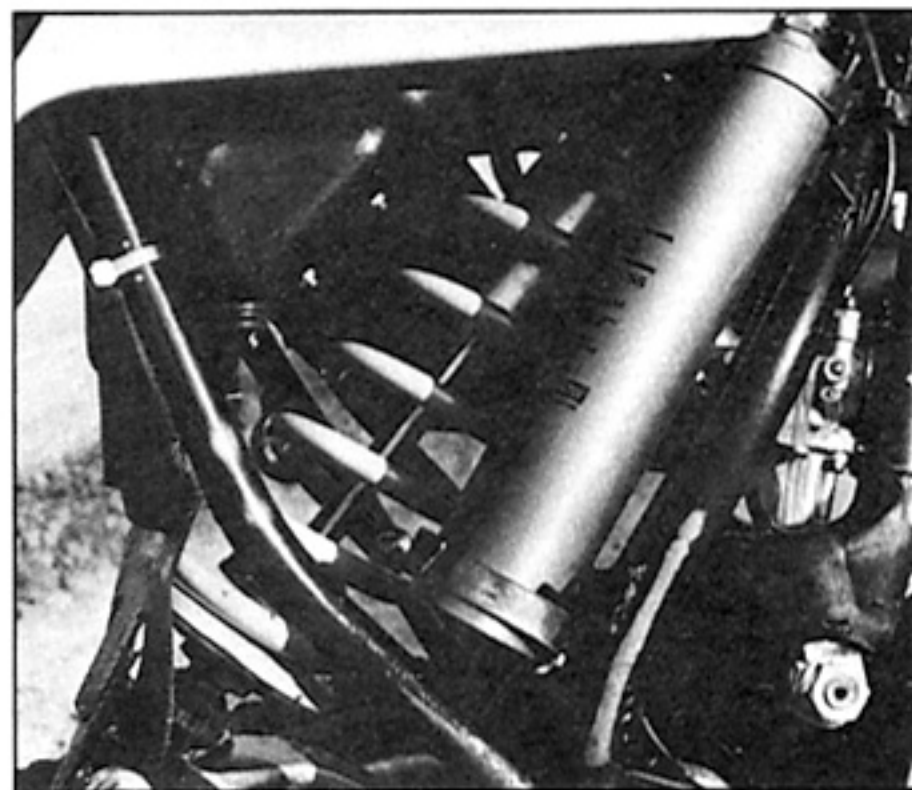
tries, they'd drop the gross green and join the mainstream with some spiffy color.

Yamaha built a good bike that literally falls to pieces every time you ride

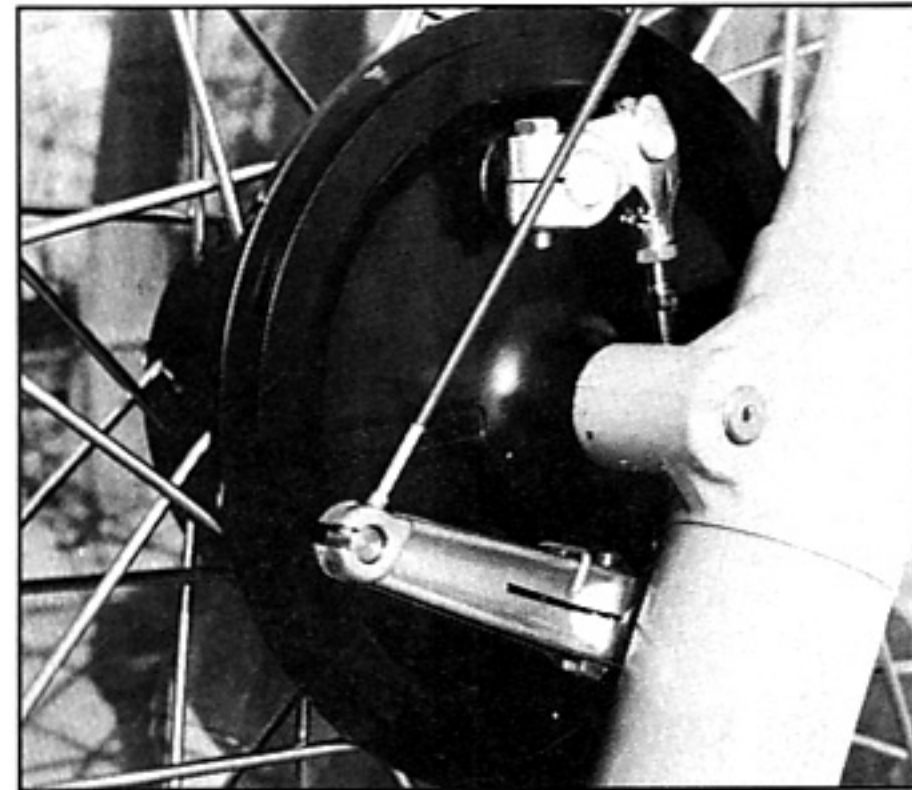
it. It was a full-time job to chase loose nuts and bolts around the bike after every moto. Things fell off that shouldn't have and modifications had to be made to the seat to solve three separate problem areas (and that is just the seat!).

Suzuki needs a cosmetic overhaul. The days of changing the decals from year to year went out with rubber foot-pegs. Racers have come to expect that their \$2200 will buy them the newest, best, most modern and sharpest weapon of berm warfare possible. Taking a step forward in design instills public confidence. Rehashing the old parts in the face of increasing competition from the other three of the Big Four results in reaping what you sow.

Honda did it right. It isn't without flaw, but the motocross culture and Team Honda seem to be on the same wavelength. Even its decals stayed on,



Yamaha's advanced shock design and large reservoir have the most features, but perform the worst.



Suzuki added double-leading shoe front brakes for 1983, but it wasn't good enough to win the brake category.

WHO'S ON TOP NOW?

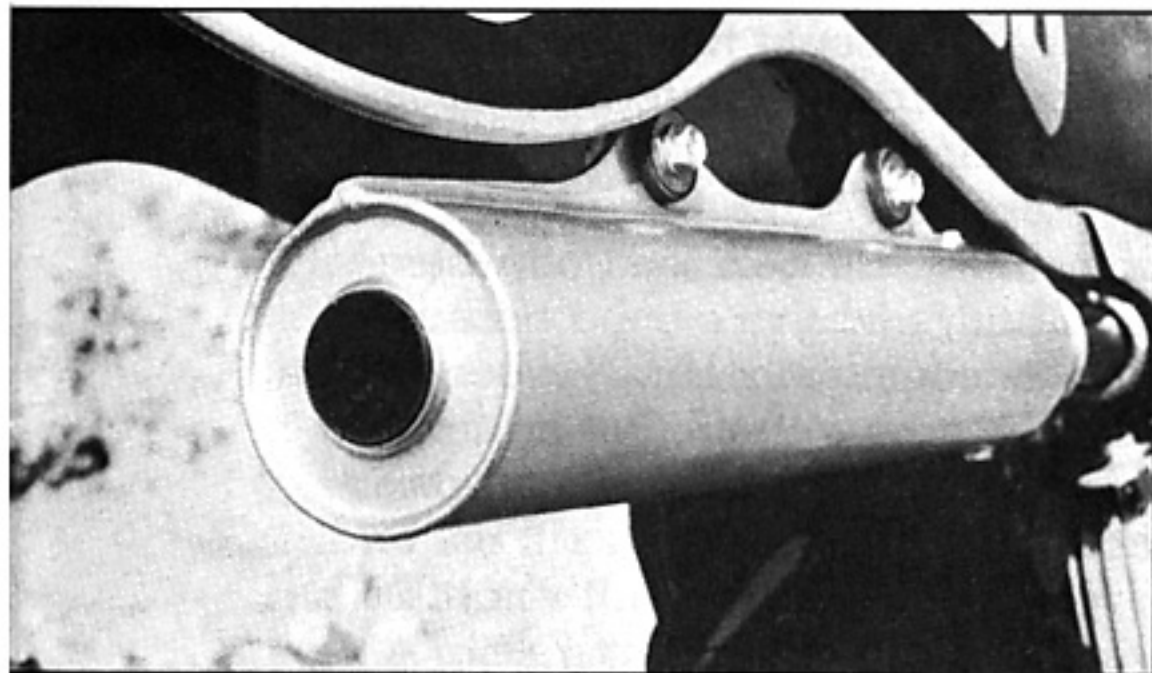
and that is something Yamaha, Suzuki and Kawasaki can't say. The best 250 motocrosser of 1983 is the Honda CR250R.

WHAT ABOUT BRAKES?

Yamaha has the most powerful stoppers. Kawasaki's has the best feel. Honda has good brakes and Suzuki trails in fourth place. The braking category is similar to the power department, where Yamaha had the most power, but Honda had the best power. Yamaha also has the most powerful brakes, but Kawasaki's disc brake is actually a better stopper for most riders.

WHAT ABOUT THE SNEAKERS?

Most rubber companies make good sneakers, but they don't always put those tires on production motorcycles. Bridgestone snapped up the contract to provide OEM tires for Honda, Suzuki, and Yamaha. Big contract, big bucks, and big headache. Last year some bikes came with Bridgestone M22/23 tires, but last year nobody trusted Bridgestone tires, so many riders took off the M22/23 tires and mounted good Metz or Dunlops instead. Later they found out that the M22/23s were the hot ticket on hard tracks. This year Bridgestone introduced a new series of tires designated



Kawasaki has the best silencer, Honda has the lightest, and Suzuki and Yamaha didn't really try.

M32/33s, and everybody left them on thinking they were improved M22/23s. No such luck. Kawasaki was the only company to get smart and sign a deal with Dunlop. So by virtue of the size of their brains, we award the tire category to Kawasaki. And advise Yamaha, Suzuki and Honda riders to buy new tires as soon as those stock sneakers wear out.

WHO WON?

You gotta be kidding! It's obvious who won, and we aren't going to be redundant and say it all over again in the last paragraph. It's in the shootout, plain as day, clear as glass and red hot. □