



KAWASAKI KXT250 TECATE

THE GAUNTLET IS . . .

HURLED!



With the Tecate 250, Kawasaki presents the long-awaited challenge to the Honda ATC250. How well does it stack up?

By the Staff of Dirt Bike

Ever since Honda introduced the ATC-250 in 1981, the red racer has been dominating racing events all across the country. If a 250 class existed in a three-wheel race, you could be sure that a Honda would take the win—unless some local hot-shoe turned up aboard a one-off, hand-made special.

There have been some radical one-offs in three-wheeled racing. In case you're not up on it, we have seen some heavy Honda competition from a variety of transplanted powerplants. There have been Husqvarna-powered three-wheelers, Maico-powered, KTM-powered, Yamaha, Suzuki, and Kawasaki, just to name a half dozen. Save for one, they have all been privately built and have never made it into production.

Except Kawasaki. A little more than a year ago, green prototypes were being spotted in the more remote areas of California. Soon after we passed them off as just another experiment, Kawasaki Motors admitted that they were seriously considering giving Honda a run for the money, and the green bikes started turning up at races. They did indeed give the Hondas fits, and soon the cry went up: "Where and when can I get one?"

The time is now. Because the first production runs of the new KXT250 are red machines, they may look like Honda clones, but they are a completely different type of animal. Are they better? Maybe so. . . .

ENGINE AND POWER

It's hard to miss the fact that the new KXT is water-cooled. The cylinder lacks the

typical clutter of fins, and a large radiator is bolted to the top of the triple clamps. There's no doubt that watercooling is an excellent way to keep maximum horsepower without wanton destruction, but we've found out from past motorcycle designs that a high radiator is not the way to go.

This still holds true on a three-wheeler, but with the squat frame of such a device, there's precious little opportunity to mount it anywhere else. We'll excuse it for the time being, but when Kawasaki finds a way to mount it lower on the frame, they'll get an A-plus.

The KXT kicks to the rear to start—opposite of the Honda, normal for a motorcycle—and the rear fender is scooped out oddly to accept the stroke of the lever. The fender shape looks strange, but we never noticed it while riding. The only hitch is the

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The KXT is a very stable slider, due mostly to the firm-walled low-profile tires and 10-inch wheels.



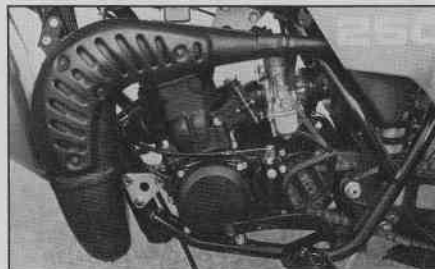
Aerial acrobatics are no sweat on the KXT, but if you plan on overdoing it, you should keep an eye on the frame.



Ten-inch wheels are a radical departure from the norm. Stiff sidewalls on tires make for precise steering.



Front drum brake is not as good as Honda's disc but still manages to stop the KXT.



The KXT is the first production water-cooled three-wheeler, and the experiment seems to have paid off. L/C cylinder delivers more horsepower than ATC250.



The seat/peg/handlebar relationship is just right for the average sized rider. You can actually ride it without feeling too cramped.

closeness of the rear hydraulic brake cylinder to said lever. You have to watch your foot when you kick it through.

Power transmission is through a standard clutch and five-speed box, and the bottom end looks and feels suspiciously like a KDX250. Once the KXT is started and the clutch is eased out, we know it is related to the KDX—the clutch has the same grabby squeal as the enduro bike. This noise is apparently not destructive, but it is a little distracting.

The power delivery is perfect for a three-wheeler—plenty of low-end torque and a healthy mid-range. There's not a whole lot of top-end screamability, but there's no real need for it in a machine such as this.

During our testing, we had an '83 ATC250 along (would you expect any less?), and after switching around and drag racing for a while, this is the way they stacked up: In a nutshell, the Kawasaki is a little faster. They both have good bottom end, but the KXT pulls harder longer in the mid-range, and will bolt out in front of the ATC nine times out of ten. The power is good for just noodling around, but if you feel like racing, you have nothing to worry about on the KXT.

SUSPENSION AND HANDLING

The KXT has slightly more suspension travel than the Honda, but not enough to make a difference. Where the difference comes in is in the quality of the damping and a firmer set of springs. Both ends of the KXT are set up stiffer than the ATC, more what we would expect on a racing machine. This doesn't mean that the suspension is so firm that it's going to beat you to death, quite the contrary. On either end

the first part of the stroke is soft enough to deliver a perfectly plush ride, while the last few millimeters stiffen up to absorb the bigger bumps.

It all comes out in the jumps. The KXT can fly to great heights without loosening your bridgework when it lands. Jumping up the top of sand dunes was no sweat—every time the KXT touched back down, it did it lightly and in control. With the Honda we noticed a slightly better damping quality in the suspension, but the difference between the two should not be noticeable in anything other than racing situations. To help dial in the KXT to different size bumps, the rear shock is adjustable through a four-way range of rebound damping.

The firm suspension also does wonders for the handling. Although the KXT won't handle a slow turn as gracefully as a Honda, high-speed bermshots and slides are a piece of cake. This is a fun bike to take up to speed and just pitch around. Part of this stability can be attributed to the new-design tires and wheels—a ten-inch rim with a low-profile tire, rather than the old standard eight-inch, high-profile setup.

BITS AND PIECES

Rider comfort is good on the KXT. The handlebars are far enough forward to allow plenty of room for moving around, and the pegs are low enough to keep your knees out of your chest.

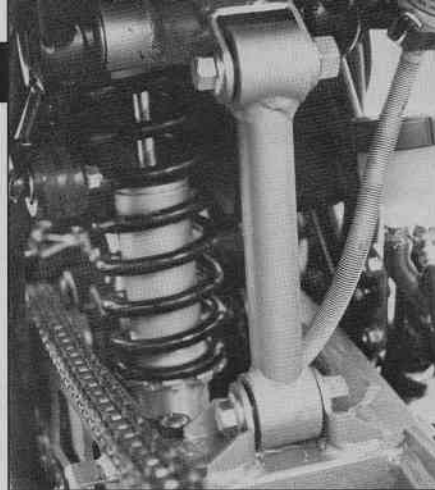
Aiding the feel of the machine is a twist throttle rather than the usual thumb control. A twist throttle is so much better than any comparison between the two is ridiculous. Spending a day pushing energetically on a thumb throttle is enough to gimp your right hand permanently.

The rear disc brake is a fine unit; the jury is still out on the front drum. The action on our front brake was a little mushy, and a fair amount of cable pulsation was felt. Still, it will stop the machine, just not as well as a disc.

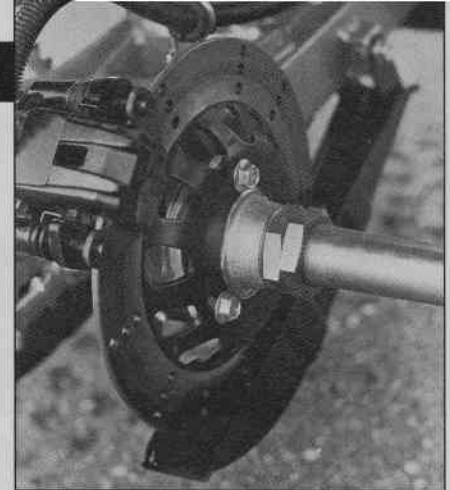
We already complained about the radiator on the triple clamps, now we'd like to say a few words about the radiator guard and headlight mounting. It's ugly. There's no doubt that a lot of protection has been built into that design, but it destroys the looks of an otherwise fine machine. If we were going to race it, we would possibly opt for a cleanly-mounted heavy plastic numberplate and leave all the steel in the garage.

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No doubt about it, the KXT is a fine machine. We had enough snivels about it to keep us from stating flatly that it's better than the Honda (high radiator, ugly guard and headlight, front drum brake), but the basic package is at least dead even with the ATC, and with a little bit of fiddling, the KXT can be a real winner. We predict a success for Kawasaki here, and if nothing else, you can be sure that the KXT will keep the Honda engineers on their toes in 1984. □



Single-strt Uni-Trak is a dead ringer for the motorcycle version. Rebound damping is adjustable.



Rear hydraulic disc freezes the back wheels with little effort. Smooth action comes in handy on a big machine.



KAWASAKI KXT250 TECATE

Engine type	Liquid-cooled, 2-stroke, reed valve
Bore and stroke	70.0mm x 64.9mm
Displacement	249cc
Horsepower (claimed)	N/A
Carburetion	32mm Mikuni
Factory recommended jetting:	
Main jet	230
Needle jet	Q-6
Jet needle	6FJ50-4
Pilot jet	45
Slide number	2.5
Recommended gasoline	Premium
Fuel tank capacity	13.8 L (3.6 gals.)
Fuel tank material	Plastic
Lubrication	Pre-mix
Recommended oil	Kawasaki lube
Oil capacity, trans.	0.7 L (.73 qt.)
Air filtration	Oiled foam
Clutch type	Wet, multi-plate
Transmission	5-speed
Gearbox ratios:	
1	2.133:1
2	1.764:1
3	1.388:1
4	1.100:1
5	0.928:1
Gearing, front/rear	13/42
Ignition	CDI
Primary kick system?	Yes
Recommended spark plug	NGK B8ES
Silencer/spark arrester	Yes/yes
Exhaust system	Up-pipe, through-frame
Frame, type	Single cradle
Wheelbase	1280mm (50.4 in.)
Ground clearance	135mm (5.3 in.)
Seat height	760mm (29.9 in.)
Steering head angle (rake)	24°
Trail	40mm (1.57 in.)
Wet weight, no fuel	286.6 lbs.
Rim material	Steel

Tire size and type:	
Front	22x11-10 Dunlop
Rear	22x11-10 Dunlop

Suspension, type and travel:	
Front	36mm telescopic forks, 220mm (8.7 in.)
Rear	Uni-Trak single shock, 210mm (8.3 in.)

Intended use	Off-road, racing
Country of origin	USA
Retail price, approx.	\$1999

Distributor:	
Kawasaki Motor Corp. USA	
2009 E. Edinger Ave.	
Santa Ana, CA 92704	

Parts prices, high-wear items:	
Piston assembly, complete	\$49.68
Piston rings only	13.26
Cylinder	153.33
Shift lever	19.32
Brake pedal	23.00
Front sprocket	15.64

Overall rating of bike, keeping intended use of machine in mind:	
Handling	Excellent
Front suspension	Very good
Rear suspension	Very good
Power	Excellent
Cost	Excellent
Attention to detail	Good
Effectiveness, stone stock	Very good

This rating system is included to aid in comparison of bikes in the same displacement and intended-use categories. Comparing the ratings of two dissimilar machines (four-stroke vs. MXer, 175 enduro vs. 80cc mini) is a meaningless exercise in futility.

Rating categories:	
Excellent	Very good
Good	Fair
Fair	Poor
Poor	Hopeless