



TWO TRIBES GO TO WAR

1986 SUZUKI RM80G VS. 1986 KTM 80

European artisan faces
Japanese technician

of the risk, has turned the tables for the Japanese. Now the Europeans must play catch-up. **CAN THEY CATCH UP?**

KTM, the most advanced European motorcycle manufacturer, wants to be in the limelight again. KTM's pugnacious attitude has allowed them to close the gap on the Japanese.

KTM's front and rear discs, removable subframes, high-quality White Power suspension components, and digital-controlled ignition curves are tricks most enthusiasts would expect from the Big Four Japanese bike builders. KTM shocked the industry by being the first to offer production machines with some of these tricky components. They're serious.

GO WITH THE FLOW

What do the Suzuki RM80G and KTM 80 have in common? They're both after the same thing. Suzuki's following has slowly declined over the past few years. They gave up on the 500 market and have decided to try to increase their market share by building their most competitive 80 ever.

the main to a 160 (stock is 162) and raised the pilot to a 60 (stock is 58).

Hindering the KTM's narrow powerband is a tranny that will not accept shifts under full load. Clutch action and feel are good. KTM's carburetor misjudgment (too big) ruins what could be a decent motor. As it is, the KTM is too pipey.

DO EUROS KNOW HOW TO MAKE MINIS HANDLE?

KTM's 80 handles well. It's low to the ground and easy to throw around. This friendly balance between straight-line stability and cornering precision falls right in with KTM's trademark of neutral-handling machines.

OH NO, THOSE KTM SUSPENDERS!

Hampering the Austrian mini's fine handling traits are poorly mated suspension and spring choices. A too softly sprung

The 1986 RM80G is by far Suzuki's best MXer of the year. It successfully blends horsepower and suspension into a workhorse chassis. ▼



□ Slightly over ten years ago, much to the disbelief of today's motocross enthusiasts, a comparison between an expensive European thoroughbred and a low-cost Japanese motocrosser was taken very lightly. Back then, anyone who followed motocross knew there was no way the budget Japanese racers could hold a candle to the winning Euro machines. European bikes had dominated motocross since its inauguration. When Suzuki, Yamaha, and Kawasaki burst into the motocross market, almost blindly at first, their machines were considered a joke. Someone should have warned the Europeans!

True to form, the old saying that no matter how impossible a task is, you can overcome it if you try hard enough, is still true. The Japanese like to try! They've copied, analyzed, experimented, and taken techno-chances with the motocross market. This go-for-it aggressive attitude to dominate, regardless

▲ How do you sum up the all-new KTM 80? A modern mixture of high-class European ingredients and unguided enthusiasm create an unfinished product.

Like Suzuki, KTM wants to attract a bigger share of the market to their brand. The mini-cycle class helped build a strong clientele for the Japanese, and it can work for KTM.

KTM: HIT OR MISS

European small-bore bikes have never been known for their usable, easy-to-ride powerplants. KTM's 80 is equipped with a typical Euro motor! It has a serious case of overcarburetion (A 35mm Dellorto carb—that's big!). The compact KTM 80 engine hits hard when it comes on the pipe in the upper mid-range. This strong spurt of power never has a chance to materialize as the motor signs off early in the top end. To get the KTM mill to run cleanly, MXA dropped

White Power piggyback shock and wimpy Marzocchi 35mm forks result in serious bottoming. The little Marzocchi forks are harsh, antiquated and flimsy. Luckily, the White Power single shock is a quality unit that only needs respringing and some damping changes to provide excellent rear suspension. It should come that way from the factory.

EUROPEAN ERGONOMICS

Plastic components on the white KTM mini are well made and striking in appearance. Down-sized Magura controls feel much better than the standard Magura units. The rear brake pedal has too big of a boot surface, and it tends to "grab" your foot. KTM's brake components do a good job of hauling the 80 down.

No one complained about the layout or rider mobility on the machine. It tends toward the small category and is dwarfed by a KX80 or CR80R.

RM vs. KTM



Suzuki's redefined miniracer makes them a serious 80cc contender. It covers all rating categories with above-average performance.



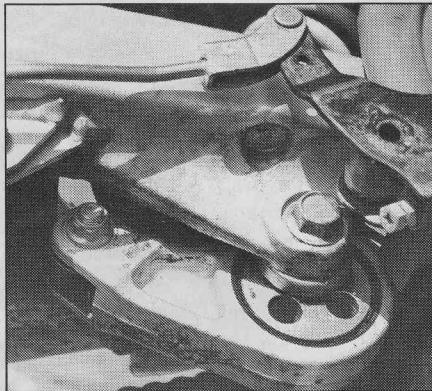
No matter how well a bike handles, a hard-to-control power delivery makes you fight the bike. With usable horsepower and workable suspension, KTM could have shocked everyone.

SUZUKI'S FIGHTING RM80G

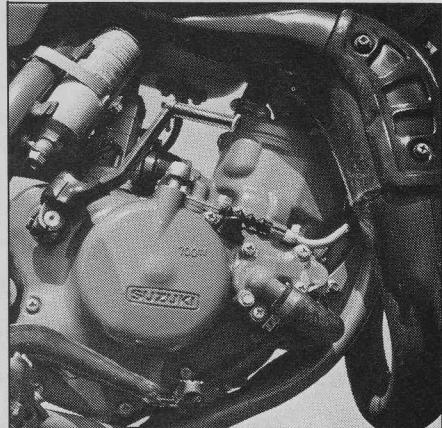
Following in the RM125 and RM250 footsteps, the RM80G has received a major revamping. A redesigned blue motor, oval-tubed frame, new plastic, and eccentric cam suspension looked good on paper. Was this enough to bless Suzuki with a competitive mini?

MID-RANGE AND PULL

Suzuki's '86 RM80 motor hits early in the mid-range and pulls through a wide middle-of-the-road punch. It's fast, easy to use, and very rideable. This is a huge improvement over previous RM80 high-revver motors. Shifting and clutch action are above average. It is easily the most rideable RM80 motor since the RM's inception ten years ago.



It works! Linkage ratios, damping choices, and spring rates hit the ball into the pocket. Suzuki's eccentric cam is a simple rising-rate solution.



No more blue Mondays! Suzuki's well-designed 80cc powerplant gives them the broad power they've tried to achieve for years. It's good.



KTM's compact mill misses the mark with its poor power delivery. When frantic mini riders say it's too pipey, you know it's hard to ride!

STEER THE RM AROUND

A "toward the front" position makes the RM80 a front-end turner. You have to "steer" the bike around the corners. When under power in grooved corners, the Suzuki 80's front end tended to creep out of the line. Straight-line stability is adequate.

HOW GOOD IS THE RM ECCENTRIC CAM?

The 1986 Suzuki RM's suspenders are excellent. Well-thought-out damping and spring rates on the 33mm Kayaba forks and a first-rate rear suspension keep Suzuki's reputation alive. Suzuki might have the best mini suspenders of the year.

JAPANESE ERGONOMICS

High bars and a tall seating position suit most mini riders just fine. Control action and placement are first-rate. Our jetting was a tad rich off the bottom. Front disc feel and strength fade early in the game. Rear brake action is good.



East versus West and continent against continent. The tables have turned over the last ten years, but the battle still rages on. KTM's decision to move into the mini market could be rewarding to them.

HOW DO THEY COMPARE?

- When you put the KTM 80 and RM80 on the track together, how do they compare on horsepower?

HEAD TO HEAD: KTM VS. SUZUKI

No comparison. Suzuki's wide mid-range, fun-to-ride motor overpowers KTM's bog and zap, hard-to-ride mill. KTM's narrow powerband called for perfect, no-mistake riding. Go into the corners on the gas or fall on your face. Pick the wrong gear on the KTM and wave goodbye to the RM.

HANDLING: WHITE VERSUS YELLOW

A tie. Suzuki's taller, better-steering chassis is checkmated by the lower, more neutral characteristics of the KTM. Test riders rated them both good handlers, with rider size and personal preference settling the tie.

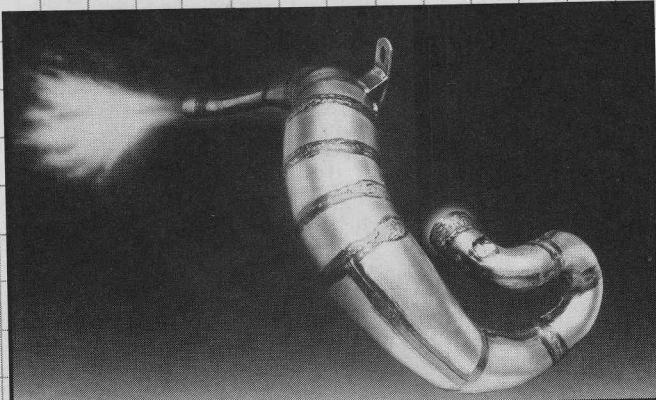
SUSPENSION: KAYABA VERSUS WHITE POWER

No match. Suzuki's RM80 suspenders are top-rate. KTM needs to re-evaluate their spring and damping choices. Rumor has it that next year's KTM 80 will have mini versions of the phenomenal White Power upside-down forks.

BRAKES: AUSTRIAN VERSUS JAPANESE

A toss-up. Suzuki's spongy disc and good rear brake just barely match the KTM units. The Italian-made KTM front disc brake was trouble free. The Austrian rear was short on feel and overly touchy.

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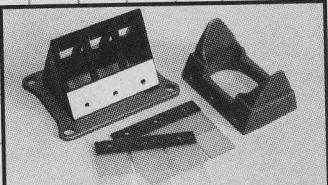
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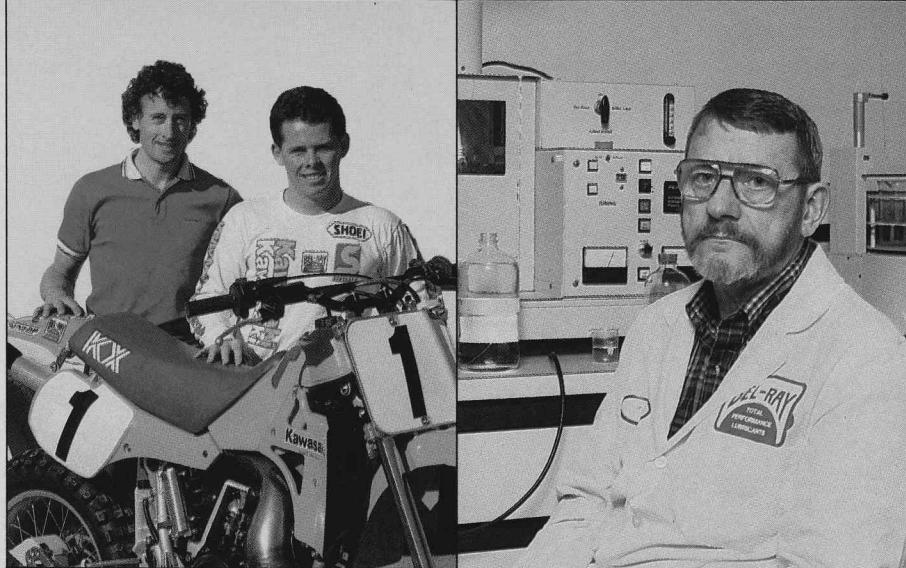
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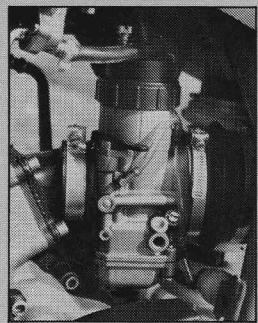
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HOW DO THEY COMPARE?



▲ A 35mm Dellorto carburetor proves to be a bad choice on the KTM. The over-stuffed engine makes for a super-narrow powerband. Boggy on the bottom and short on the top.

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

Give and take. Suzuki tires are so-so. The Pirelli Sandcross tires on the KTM are excellent sand meats but poor all-around choices. Most riders preferred the Suzuki controls over the KTM's. When KTM down-sized the 80 tank, they also down-sized the gas cap. It is too small! Seat foam on the Suzuki breaks down quickly. KTM's seat is on the firm side but holds up well. Suzuki's parts list seems somewhat cheap compared to the KTM's high-quality bolts, European craftsmanship, and top-rate components. KTM put lots of man-hours into its mini. It shows.

THE FINAL CONFLICT: RM80G VERSUS KTM80

Suzuki's 1986 RM80G smokes the KTM. Mostly because of the well-mannered RM80G motor. If the KTM had a more usable powerband and some dialed-in suspenders, it would be a close match.

Who is the KTM buyer? Most likely it would be a mini rider whose family has a long-standing relationship with the KTM marque. They want European manufacturing precision and old world handling. With some work, the KTM could be a competitive machine. But it's much easier to buy the well-rounded Suzuki and race it out of the crate.

STAY TUNED

How will the Suzuki's suspension and motor compare with the minis from Honda, Kawasaki and Yamaha? Find out next month in our giant mini shootout. •

1986 SUZUKI RM80G

HORSEPOWER	92
CORNERING	88
STABILITY	80
FORKS	85
SHOCK	90

1986 KTM80

HORSEPOWER	75
CORNERING	85
STABILITY	82
FORKS	75
SHOCK	78

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