KAWASAKI KT-250

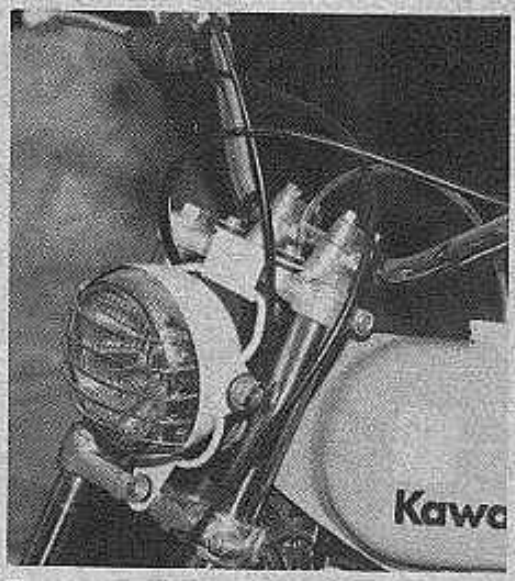
For a first time effort it isn't too bad.

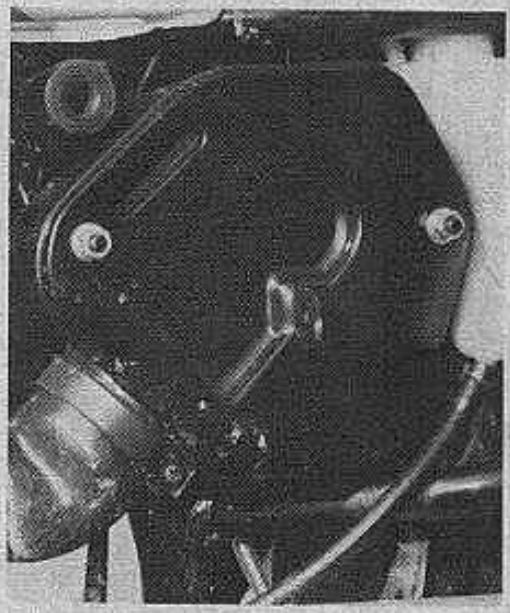
A few short years ago the Japanese jumped on the motocross scene and now every factory in Japan spews out motocrossers in a never ending stream. It looks as if the same thing is about to happen in trials. Yamaha makes a bog-wheeler, so does Suzuki, and both Honda and Kawasaki are about to introduce 250s on the market (Honda already has a 125 trialer that's meant more for fun than serious trials work). Kawasaki is trying to make a market for their bike when it's introduced and so they have provided some of the magazines with pre-production models for testing. *Popular Cycling* was one of those selected.

Like any other motorcycle magazine we are very interested in getting a motorcycle before it is released to the public, and like every other motorcycle magazine we don't have a trials rider on our staff, at least one with the capabilities of doing an expert test of a trials bike. So we did what we always do when we're faced with a problem like this, we get someone who can tell their rear wheel from a pickup truck. In this case we really lucked out. We don't think anyone would, or could, argue the fact that Lane Leavitt is the finest trials rider this country has to offer. He has proved this both in this country and in trials events around the world. But enough of an introduction, let's see just exactly what Kawasaki has to offer.

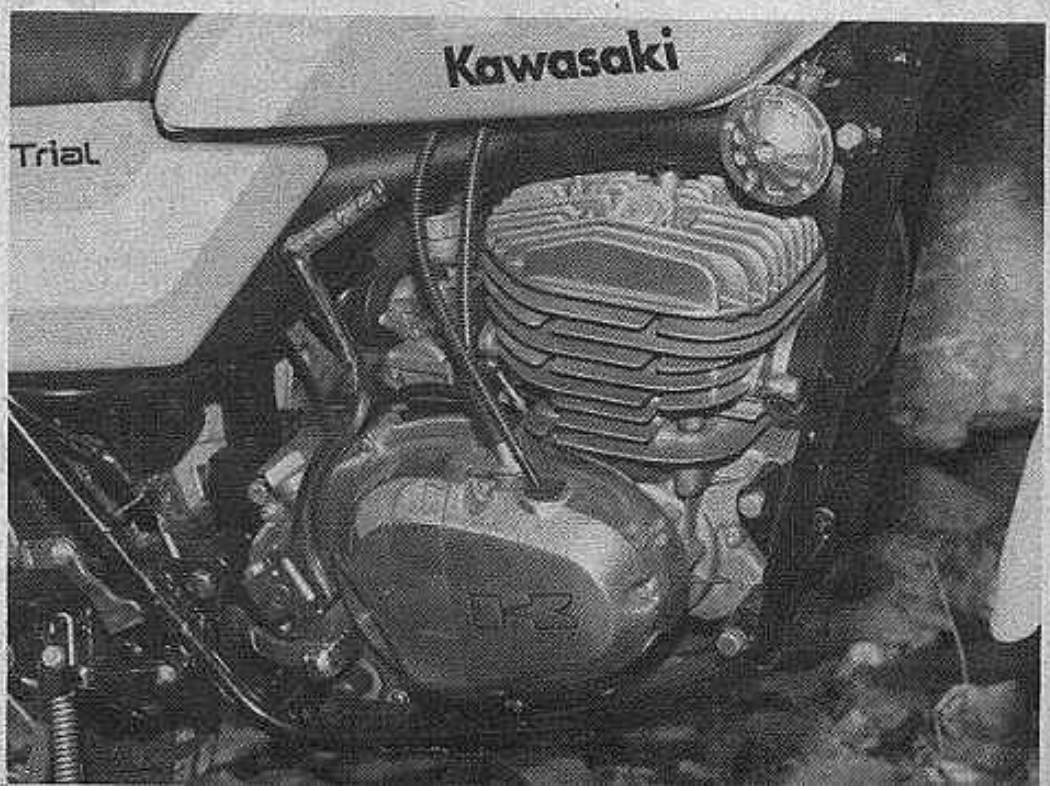
It's interesting to watch an expert in action. When Lane saw the bike, but before he ever rode it, he found a few things he figured would have to be changed. The engine was mounted too far forward in the frame, the swing arm was too long, the bike needed a bit more ground clearance, the engine was too wide, the seat was too short and the footpegs could provide a better grip. He also noticed some good items too. The bike came equipped with the good trials tires, the handlebars were mounted behind the pivot in the steering head for more precise steering control, the rear brake

Street equipment, like this headlight, is of the quick disconnect type so it can be removed when the bike is used for serious trials work.

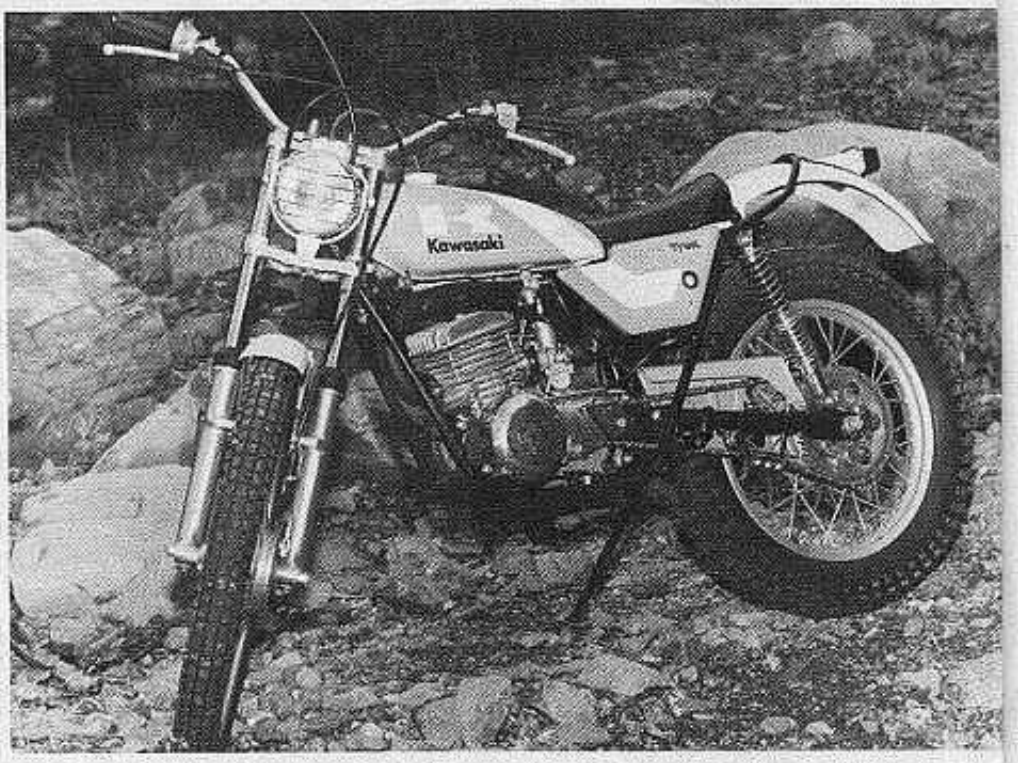




Air box waterproofing is quite good. Said box is filled with a foam element.



Part of the engine's width can be traced to the oil pump located under the side cover with the "K" on it.



The KT comes equipped with the good trials tires plus most of the items necessary to make it street legal.

was rod-actuated, the front brake hub was outstandingly designed, the forks were kicked out at the triple clamps and the bike had plastic fenders, even though they looked as if they would break on first contact with the ground. (This turned out to be false since Lane did contact the ground with the fenders a couple of times. However, the situations he did this in were areas where if we'd have even tried to ride the bike, we undoubtedly would have been killed; you can't believe where a good trials rider can go on a motorcycle.)

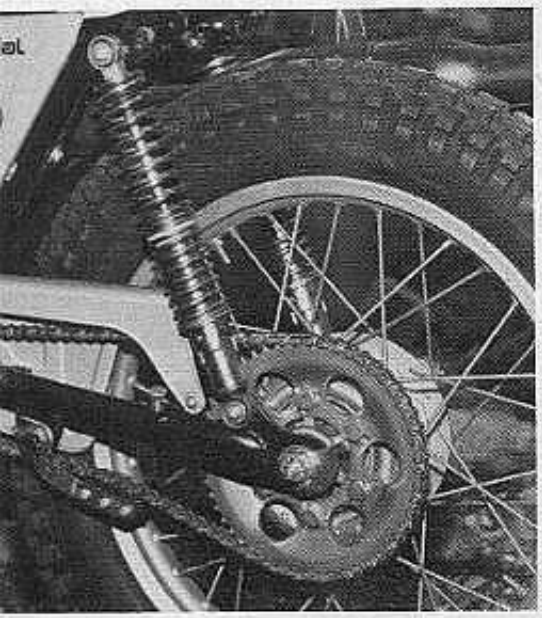
After taking a short ride through some sections, Lane came in to give us some opinions he picked up in that short time. The first thing that bothered him was the suspension, it was much too soft both front and rear. Just going over a foot dropoff found the forks and shocks compressing all the way. Not knowing what the spring rates are because the people at Kawasaki aren't sure (remember, the bike is a prototype), Lane couldn't suggest what rate spring to use, but offhand he figured the springs should be at least twice as heavy as they are. He was totally convinced that the footpegs needed to be changed; as soon as his feet got wet he had trouble keeping them on the pegs. A serrated edge would be much better.

Lane also felt the front end was much too heavy. He decided this was due to a couple of reasons. First, the average, read Bultaco and Montesa, has the engine mounted so far rearward in the frame that the rear engine mounts are almost touching the rear tire. On the KT-250 there's almost five inches between the two. Leavitt also felt the bike was originally designed with a much shorter swing arm but that with it it handled too quickly for the novice rider. Because of this Kawasaki lengthened the swing arm. Lane thinks that cutting a half to three-quarters of an inch out of the arm would help. Another thing is of course the fact that the bike is much heavier than the Spanish trials machines. Any of the European bikes weigh in between 190 and 195 pounds. The KT-250 tops off at 217 pounds.

The engine was also wider than it should be. Again Lane felt there were two reasons for this. The first was obvious. With the only location possible for the oil pump being on the side of the engine, there's an extra three or four inches of width that's not needed. The second reason isn't all that obvious. The primary drive on the Kawasaki is via gear, like all of the Japanese machines, while the Spanish bikes drive through a primary chain. It's much easier to make a thin engine when the primary drive is through a chain. A gear-driven primary takes so much space that the chain drive is the only way to go with trials machines.

Another fault with primary gears is that it makes it hard to fit a large flywheel, something Lane felt the KT could use. It wasn't all that bad but he thought a little more flywheel effect would be beneficial.

After a few more times through the traps Lane had some more observations, but before he made them he also stated that he thought the bike was close to being a competitive machine. Many of the faults he found he thought an expert trials rider could overcome. In fact there was one situation he thought the bike worked better than his own Bultaco. Going up a long, steep uphill stairstep he felt the Kawasaki, because of the long



Trying for a progressive spring rate by using two different springs doesn't make it. In any case the springing is too soft both front and rear.

On long, steep uphill stairsteps the KT works super due to the long swing arm.

swing arm, reached out and climbed as well or better than any bike he'd ridden. He really felt the bike was super in this type of situation.

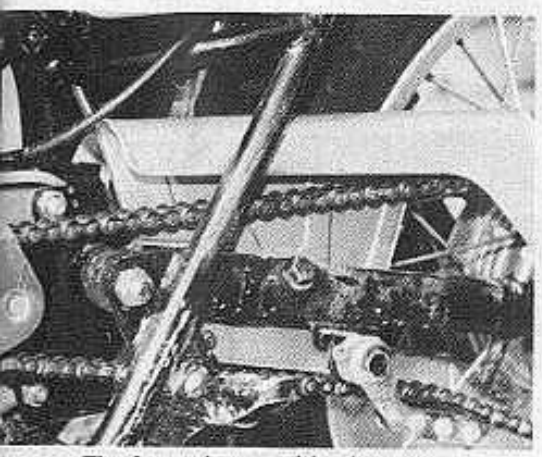
In the stopper department Leavitt didn't especially like the spongy feeling of the brakes, but he was quick to point out that while he didn't like spongy feeling brakes (a matter of personal preference), those found on the KT worked just fine, especially the front.

Carburetion was fine throughout the rev range. And the ignition system was as close to waterproof as you can get. Leavitt rode the bike up a stream to where the water was almost gas-tank high and the engine never missed a beat. When we first went over the bike we felt the air intake was too large and susceptible to sucking in water. Much to our surprise it wasn't. The KT is definitely a mudder.

As well it should be. Don Smith is the man Kawasaki hired to help them with the design of the KT, and Lane informed us that at one time Smith was the second finest trials rider in the world, and the very best mud rider there ever was. Not too shabby in the credential department.

A sore point, literally, with Lane was the seat. It was quite short and not at all well padded. As Leavitt pointed out, about the only time you use the seat in trials riding is when you're going from one section to the next. Then you want to be able to sit down and have a small amount of comfort. He saw no reason why the seat couldn't be a bit longer, and with at least a little more padding provided.

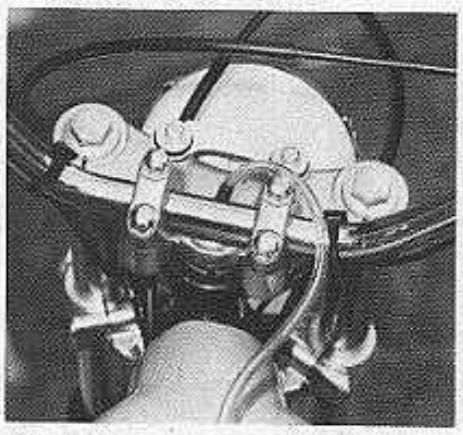
Along with the engine being a bit too wide, Lane felt the frame was too wide both at the footpegs, and at the rear of the gas-tank where you keep your knees. Because the frame stays the same width, about five inches above the footpegs as it is at the pegs, it has a tendency to help move your inside foot off the peg when



The frame is too wide above the footpegs and tends to move the inside foot, when in a corner, off the peg.

you're turning. Lane feels the frame should start to taper back toward the main spine as soon as it gets above the peg location. Because the frame starts out too wide at the footpegs, it stays that way up where the tank and seat meet. Lane would like to see the frame a bit narrower there than it is. Part of the problem can be traced to the pipe, which isn't tucked in the way it should be, and the fact that the side covers don't fit flush up against either the pipe on the one side, and the air cleaner box on the other. If the frame was narrower there both the seat and gas-tank could be trimmed down an inch or two. A trials bike should be as narrow as possible for getting through super-tight areas.

Of course neither Leavitt or us ap-



Handlebars are mounted behind the steering head for quicker and more precise handling.

proved of the lights, but you must remember that this bike is street-legal in some states and Kawasaki wants to keep it this way. The horn isn't all that necessary for trials work either. Happily both the lights and horn can be easily removed. This would also drop the weight some eight or ten pounds.

After we rode the bike we called Kawasaki to find out what, if anything, would be changed on the production model. They were aware of many of the problems and told us of some of the changes that they knew would be made. These include: a six-month warranty, four-ply trials tires, a different pipe that includes a spark arrestor, different hand grips, a foam air filter, 24mm carburetor, the same brakes as the motocross machines, shifting on either side of the engine, serrated footpegs, a tad less compression and a repositioned secondary chain tensioner. These are just the changes they know about, chances are there will be more.

So it's kinda like Lane Leavitt said, they're many things that need to be changed, but it seems that Kawasaki is aware of them all. Lane also gave Kawasaki credit inasmuch as they were the first Japanese company to come out with their own design, the other trialers from the Land of the Rising Sun are more or less copies of the Spanish machinery. And you must remember what else Lane said, it's Kawasaki's first try at building a trials machine and they've come darned close. He figures a good rider would do well on the bike with just some minor changes. You can rest assured that the bike that finally comes on the market will be competitive. The rest will be up to you.

Max. Pts.	NUMERICAL EVALUATION	
10	Starting	9
10	Power	10
10	Powerband	9
10	Transmission	
	(5) Ratios	5
	(5) Operation	4
10	Suspension	
	(5) Front	3
	(5) Rear	3
10	Brakes	
	(5) Effectiveness	5
	(5) Waterproofing	5
10	Handling	
	(5) Low-speed maneuverability	5
	(5) High-speed stability	3
10	Comfort	
	(5) Sitting	2
	(5) Standing	5
20	Miscellanea	
	(5) Quality of craftsmanship	4
	(5) Instrumentation	4
	(5) Electrics	5
	(5) Noise level	4
100 pts.	Overall Rating	85 pts.

KAWASAKI KT-250

Suggested Retail Price: $1185

ENGINE

Engine type	2-S, sgl., piston port
Bore and stroke, mm	86.5 x 64.0
Displacement, cc	246
Horsepower/rpm (claimed)	18.5/7000
Torque/rpm (claimed)	15.2 ft.-lbs./5000
Compression ratio	n.a.
Air filtration	wet, foam
Carburetion	24mm Mikuni
Lubrication	oil injection
Ignition	Magneto/CDI

DRIVE TRAIN

Transmission	5-speed
Clutch type	wet, multi-plate
Primary drive	gear
Final drive ratio	1.51

CHASSIS

Chassis type	double downtube
Overall length, in.	73.5
Seat height, in.	29.5
Peg height, in.	13
Ground clearance, in.	12.2
Weight as tested, lbs.	217
Tires, front	2.75 x 21
rear	4.00 x 18