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The DR-Z400E gets tweaked with heavier armour, new bars and pegs

Even before the economy went into a spin, the DR-Z400E was one of Australia's most popular dirt bikes. Today the proposition is even more attractive, while the idea of 10-hour rebuilds that include replacing pistons and rings and having two knobby-tyred bikes in the shed is even harder to justify – especially since the dawn of the new age of the four-stroke competition-spec enduro.

If you thought the DR-Z was dead, you only need to look at the new bike sales figures to see this isn't so. While more expensive machines dramatically drop sales in numbers, the less expensive workhorses that any half-hand, backyard mechanic can work on become more attractive options.

Reliable, inexpensive and great to ride – that's the DR-Z400E. But there are a few aspects where it falls short of what we want to get out of it. Tightening up the ergos, getting a bit more out of the engine and tougher armour for the bush is what she needs.



bike
PROJECT BIKE
SUZUKI DR-Z400E



STAGE 2

STAGE 1

COMBUSTION CONTROL

The first thing we did in stage 1 was throw on a Pro Circuit 496 slip-on and added a Uni Filter foam air filter.

Fitting the filter was a doodle once it was oiled up. Although the bottle isn't too pretty, Filter Fix foam air filter treatment is one of the best oils on the market – and I know because I've tried a few.

Although there was a bit of trouble fitting the slip-on last time around, all it took was the removal of a spacer on the header and a bit of persuasive jiggling to get it on. And boy, did that shed a

load of weight the standard pipe was carrying!

The lightening of the rear-end has helped in shock actuation and also made lifting the 138kg bike (with a full tank of juice) a lot easier.

But not only did the loss of the standard pipe shed a load of weight off the rear-end, along with a Uni Filter foam air filter, it cleaned up the low rpm response.

Off the throttle, there is a hesitation in power delivery from fully shut to small openings – just the amount of throttle you apply when snapping the front up on trails. It is nothing major.

Once you get past this spot in the rev range, the engine opens up nice and is fine elsewhere right the way through the range.

Broomy took Project DR-Z on the Watagans Trail Ride and felt the same thing.

Standard final drive ratios, with SuperSprox sprockets and a DID chain, are perfectly suited to the all-round use of the DR-Z. The only place where things could improve is in first gear as the engine requires a bit of clutch when going slow. The only way to sort this would be through a cog change in the gearbox, but it isn't so drastic that this measure is

required. Out on the trails second and third are it, while on the fast stuff third and fourth are perfect. On the tarmac, fifth will get you to almost highway speeds. It's a quite big spread of ratios through the gearbox and perfectly suited to the DR-Z's vast range of applications.

While Broomy agreed there's a fuelling hesitation off the bottom end, he reckons it's just a pilot jet or a fuel screw that needs work to get it cleaned up.

So for stage three, we'll attack the carbie and airbox to get the engine breathing better.





SHOWROOM SUCCESS

Not only is the DR-Z400E a standout all-rounder in the saddle, when it comes to the showroom it is equally impressive.

In a year where off-road bike sales have been hardest hit out of all the motorcycling categories, the DR-Z400E's sales have not flinched but instead come out the other side swinging, with sales up 20% year on year in an off-road market that shrunk 20% in the same period.

The DR-Z400E is the best-selling off-roader in Australia this year, pipping Honda and Yamaha's traditionally better-selling 250 and 450 enduros and also running second in the overall sales charts to Kawasaki's Ninja 250R entry-level sportsbike!

Interestingly, sales for the DR650 are up 22% as well, but Suzuki doesn't sell as many units as the 400.

Why? Value for money and versatility have to be the reasons.



1. The factory handlebars felt flimsy and offered a less-than-optimum riding position. We replaced them with quality Universal handlebars and RHK grips.

2. Fitting a new pair of radiator guards required the horn to be flipped around on the mounting plate. But apart from that it was a quick two-minute job.

3. The DR-Z shed a load of weight after we replaced the factory pipe with a Pro Circuit 496. The move also cleaned up the low rpm response of the power delivery.

4. Replacing the DR-Z's pissy bash protector with a Force bashplate added much-needed protection to vulnerable areas around the base of the engine.

THE PERFECT TRIANGLE

For a recommended retail price of \$8990, you're going to have to live with parts that are of inferior quality compared to those you'd find on a costlier machine. There are a few places Suzuki has cut costs with the DR-Z400E, the handlebars in particular.

The standard handlebars are thin and feel flimsy – not strong enough to take the brunt of a good sized gum out. So off they went and on went Universal handlebars with RHK grips.

Fitting them required a set of risers that took the larger diameter handlebars. While the risers lifted the handlebars by an inch and a half, along with the wider Universals, it created a much better riding position for me.

The job also took a bit of playing around with drilling the lugs for the switchblocks and modifying the ignition barrel plate mounted on the left handlebar mount. But aside from that it was a pisser.

One thing that wasn't was removing the standard grip off the throttle tube. Put the

footy on the radio, load yourself up with your favourite brew and grab a razor blade if you are doing the same, because Suzuki has stuck their throttle grips on with Superman-strength binding solution.

The standard pegs – which I couldn't fault – where ditched in favour of a set of Pivot Pegs for better grip, comfort and control. Riding roadbikes everyday the control aspect is one I'm getting used to. I've ridden on Pivot Pegs before, but it still spins me out having footpegs that move!

The science is there and the proof is in the number of riders that use them, so I'm not going to can them because I'm not used to them. Like knee braces, I'll give them a couple of rides and I'm sure they'll become one of those things I can't ride without.

All in all, the new ride triangle is a much better fit and a sturdier one at that.

WELL GUARDED

Along with the Zeta handguards fitted in stage

1, we've added a Force bashplate and radiator guards to the DR-Z.

The weight saved by stripping off indicators, rear guard, pissy bash protection on the frame and radiators as well as the heavier, standard handlebar offset some the weight of the new engine bash plate.

While the bashplate added protection to all the vulnerable areas around the base of the engine, as Broomy found out on the Watagan Trail Ride, it also added about 10kg of mud as it scooped its way through the bush. With the DR-Z on the heavy side, the Zeta handguards came in handy in the sloppy conditions as the Suzy hesitated to turn as nimbly as it should have and levering, and ricocheting off trees became the best way to do get through the choppy conditions.

The radiator guards required the horn to be flipped around on the mounting plate to fit up, but aside from this it was an easy job to do. Same deal with the bash plate. Fitting up was a two-minute job. Although there were only a couple of bolts holding it in place, it is extremely sturdy.

After a few big runs, and a few small spills, the DR-Z has stood up well to some pretty hard knocks. The pipe has a few dents in it but there's nothing you can do about that aside from welding up a roll cage for the bike. There's not much else you could do about protection on the DR-Z except for some scuff pads or plastic contact sheeting on the frame to stop the paint from wearing away. This may be something you'd want to do to ensure the bike looks good come resale time.

VERDICT

With the DR-Z now pretty well sorted as far as damage control, the ergos adjusted and a few aspects of freeing up the engine done, the next move will be to get the fuelling sorted with some carburettor and airbox work. We'll also want to tighten up the handling with some work on suspension internals and some more aggressive tyres.

While the handling is pretty good in stock trim, it could be refined to make it better on single trail – more compliance out of front and rear-ends. It needs more than firming up on the clickers, and this is something we'll be doing with Terry Hay from Shock Treatment.

As for the tyres, a set of Pirelli Scorpion MX eXTras are on the way and should give us the extra grip we are looking for.

So once the handling is sorted, we should have a pretty well-rounded bike that will do everything – single trail to the red dirt – for about the same price as a competition-spec 450 enduro.

Pretty good value, hey? No wonder it is the best-selling off-roader in Oz! **ADB**



DR-Z ONLINE PORN

The internet is full to the rafters with DR-Z people.

A special breed they are, but ones totally devoted to their cause, with just about everything imaginable to do with a DR-Z is available on the internet.

Standard mods for more power and torque are the number one talking point on DR-Zs.

Want to know how to do a fuelling mod that will extract loads more power out of your DR-Z? Punch

in Suzuki DRZ400 3X3 mod into YouTube and there's a 10 minute video of the step-by-step process of airbox cutting, jet and needle replacement for reportedly loads more power and torque from a standard bike. All for the price of a case of beer.

Next in line are the top ten things to do to DR-Zs so they run forever. Both internal and external mods that will give it the reliability and durability of a Glen Hoffman-fettled desert dueller.

Add to this the loads of parts, both new and second-hand, aftermarket gear for everything from trail rides to continent crossing, and you couldn't ask for any more info on just one model of motorcycle.

It seems the DR-Z is one of those models that attract all kinds of people to it – much like the XR did/does and in a similar way that model trains, remote control airplanes and comic books do sometimes, but not all of the time.

WHAT, WHO AND HOW

STAGE ONE

Zeta handguards	Steve Cramer Imports	www.stevecramerproducts.com.au	(03) 9587 1466	\$142.50
SuperSprox sprockets	A1 Accessories	www.a1accessory.com.au	(07)3806180	\$125
DID Chain	McLeod Accessories	www.mcleodaccessories.com.aucom.au	1300 300 191	\$195
Acerbis LED taillight	Off Road Imports	www.offroadimports.com.au	(02) 4577 7022	\$69.95
Pro Circuit 496 slip-on	Monza Imports	www.monzaimports.com.au	1300 466 692	\$699.95

STAGE TWO

Universal 'bars/adaptors/RHK grips	John Titman Racing	www.jtr.com.au	(07) 3245 7499	\$244.85
Pivot Pegz	Pivot Pegz	www.pivotpegz.net	(03) 6423 1800	\$220
Uni Filter	Uni Filter Australia	www.uniflow.com.au	(02) 4322 2007	\$65
Force bash-plate	Force Accessories	www.forceaccessories.com.au	(03)9792 9599	\$160
Radiator guards	Force Accessories	www.forceaccessories.com.au	(03)9792 9599	\$149

STAGE 3

Tyres, fuelling, suspension and bling.
JUST WAIT AND SEE...