

One Only

If you could have any bike you wanted, which would you choose?

Story & photos by Tony Kirby

I have reliable information that there are people who have to ride just one motorcycle. Imagine that. No ducking down to the different distributors to swap mounts to suit rides, no jumping from one new machine to the next, and no giving them back when they need servicing. Some blokes are really doing it tough. This disturbing bit of news made me wonder which bike I'd get if I could only have one – regular readers will remember that five is the optimum number, although six is better if there's some road work thrown in. But one? How do you choose?

This is in fact a much more serious question than it appears. I've had a run of bad luck with bikes over the last couple of years with a few notable DNFs – not my fault, honestly. The plan for the next two years is to get in some serious adventure riding with plenty of desert work and fun riding, with some High Country thrown in, so I began thinking that maybe one bike properly prepared was better than taking pot-luck with the test fleet. That sigh of collective relief you just heard came from Australia's bike distributors ...

So which bike to choose? I was tempted by a TTR or DRZ250, on the grounds that you can ride them anywhere and jokers on 525s hate it when you pass them, but having ridden

a DRZ50 in the Safari I know what deep sand does to their performance. It can be done for sure, and they're magic in tight bush, but a 250 is hard work in the desert. What about one of the open classers? Not me. Too much bike. I've been ridden by an XR650 at Cooperhooke, and flapped off enough 610s, 570s, 520s and 501s to know that I go faster with less power.

That left the 400s and 450s, given that two-strokes were out of the equation due to refuel distances and the like. I refined my choices even further by setting out some parameters. The bike had to be reliable – proven to be rock solid over long distances in tough conditions. It had to be easy to ride, handle well, have good brakes and no major bad habits. Power was not a determining factor, just so long as the front lifted for wash-aways and it would pull second up the nastiest hill. Kpl was a factor; a thirsty bike was out in a flash. That's interesting priorities; reliability then handling then power, but then we are talking serious cross-country adventure riding here, not cutting laps in the next paddock.

So who did I call? Suzuki. A brand new DRZ400 arrived in a crate a week later, and it will power Team Sidetrack for the next 12 months. If I can keep Rotten, Don and Phil off it – and thereby ensure it is kept in top nick – then I will probably buy it at the end. With real money. Mind you, in 12 months time the bike you see here will be very trick, but we'll get into that as each issue unfolds.

What a Crate

So what do you have to do to your DRZ as soon as you get it home? Plenty. Like every new bike, the steering head and swingarm linkages should be stripped and greased, and the usual suspects hit with Loctite – the radiator shroud bolts and front guard bolts in particular. If the chain guard and that big ugly lump of plastic fall off in the workshop all the better, and if legality isn't a problem then those indicators have to go for sure. If you need blinkers, get some compact aftermarket units.

Suzuki is still making the poxiest mirrors in the universe. They have more moving parts than a mating centipede and you can feel the weight in the bars when you ride. Junk them and get Honda ones instead. The rear guard extender has to go as well; too big, too messy and too easily broken.

Mechanically, things are pretty good straight from the crate. Check that the throttle limiting screw has been removed or shortened to allow full travel. It lives on the carb body behind the spool that the cables attach to and is a mongrel to reach. The best way is to pull the carb out and the best way to do that is to remove the carb/airbox boot completely, then pull the carb back and out. It's tight, but in the next issue we'll show you how to make a lot more room around the engine and generally tidy things up. While the carb is off remove the front boot and, using a sharp knife, carefully cut out the flap that blocks three-quarters of it. Your DRZ will now accelerate ...

We recommend fitting a bashplate and quality handguards to any bike heading bush. I'm keeping the DRZ stock for the Super Test – see page 12 – but it's only sensible to have a B&B plate and Barkbusters on her before she goes bush. Finally, the only place you'd want to ride on those stock Grittys is to the corner store, and even then only when it's dry. If you want good road-trail tyres go for MT21s, otherwise get some knobbies on there quick.

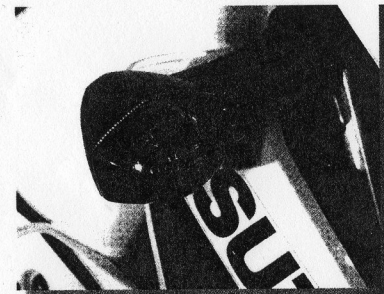
Esoteric Stuff

Getting away from the nuts and bolts for a bit ...

I ride a lot of different bikes and while it may be the drugs – see last issue – I am now certain you can pick different characters in them. It's easy to spot the reluctant ones that have been abused, and then you have ones that scream 'dud' before you even throw a leg over. And we're not talking models here, but individual examples of the same model.

This DRZ whispered to me before she even came out of the crate. When I first hit the start button she leapt into life on the second spin of the crank, giving me a hell of a fright. And she purrs. Sing's. She's got 1.5ks on the clock and I know right now that this one will be a honey. If this is the feeling you get when you have to choose just one bike then I'm becoming a one-bike bloke and to hell with all the fancy tarts lined up in the showroom.

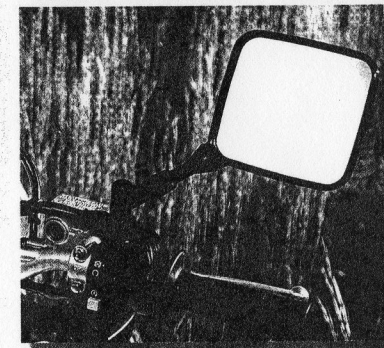
Till tomorrow, anyway.



Although more flexible than they look, the indicators are better off gone



The rear guard extender makes a great bodyboard ...



Shocking mirrors. Too many moving parts means too much weight

Next issue: How to lose between five and eight kilos without even trying, and some simple set-up tips to give your DRZ the edge. And, well, hoping to have one of the new touch-a-bike Aqualine DRZ400 21-litre tanks!