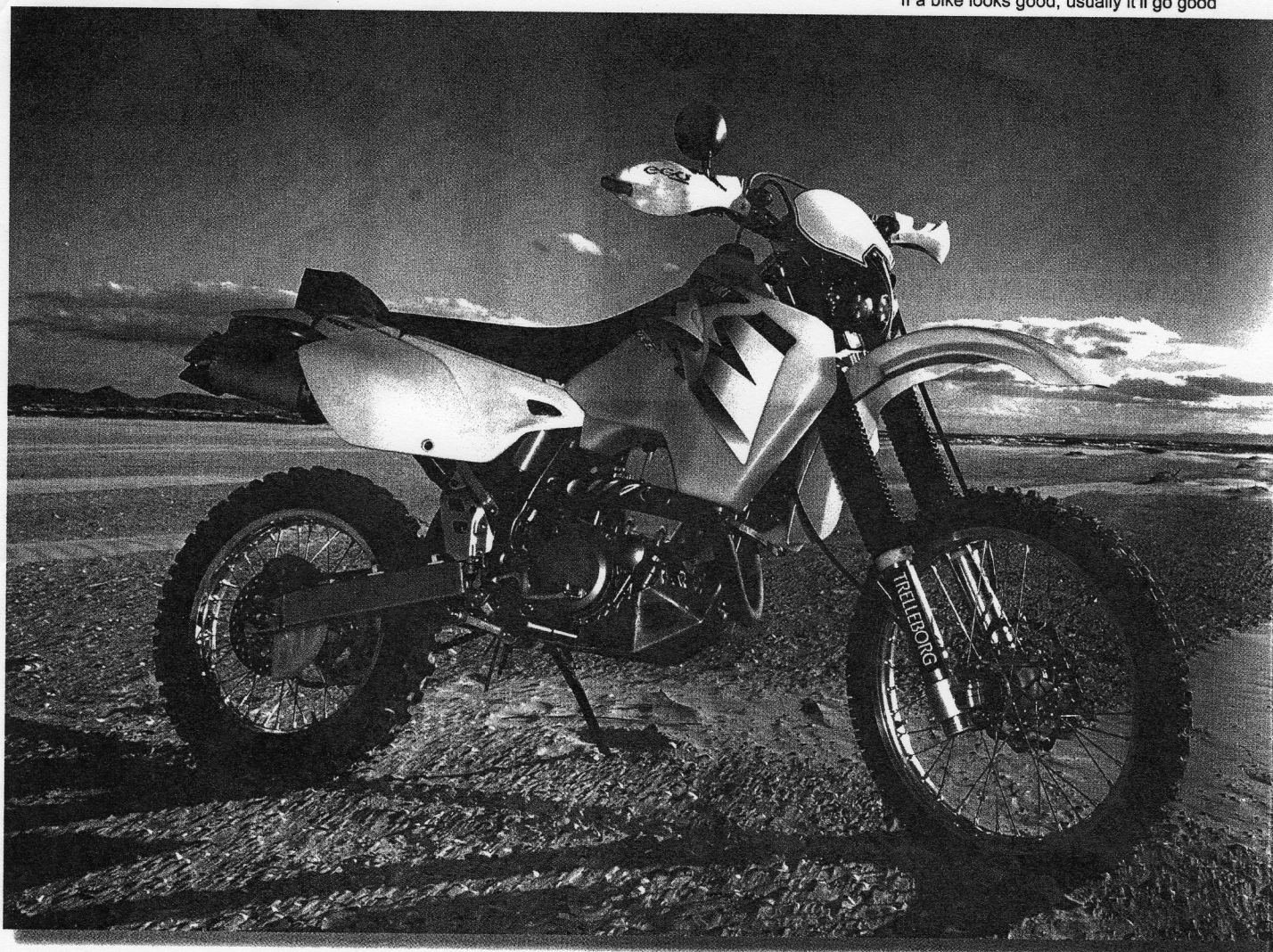


If a bike looks good, usually it'll go good



Stage

Three

Suspension, legal bits, steering damper, brakes and fuel

Hard as it is to believe, but thieving mongrels have been after our DRZ400. Not the slimy-little-turd types who sneak around in the dark, but the blatant industry types who have read about it in *Sidetrack* and want one just like it. Without doing the work.

"When you're finished with the Suzuki I'll have it," suggested Honcho X (not his real name).

"But you work for Company Y!" I replied.

"Don't give me the ^&%%\$ about this. That's a nice looking bike and I want it."

"Well you can wait. I've got it for 12 months and then I'm buying it. Call me in five years." The cheek of it.

Mind you, I can understand X's desire. Work on the DRZ is raging ahead and the bike just gets better and better. It's a rewarding experience when everything you do produces a strong result, although there has been the odd hiccup along the way.

Frank's Suspension

Because we built two DRZ400s for the 2000 Safari I know pretty well exactly what to do to get the suspension to really



work, at least I do after spending a full day with Biketek's Frank Pons – 02 4620 9020 – testing different forks, shocks and swingarms. The point with this DRZ though is to provide solid information to our readers, so instead of skipping straight to the high-end suspension solution, we're taking it step by step.

First off we dialled it in using the damper adjusters and the correct shock spring preload, which costs nothing but time and energy. For this issue we have taken it one step further, with Frank doing a straight revalve on the forks and the shock. The Suzuki definitely needs a heavier shock spring, but we wanted to see what could be achieved on valving alone. And ... there was a country-wide shortage of springs last month.

What Frank did was stiffen the rebound and compression circuits on both the forks and the shock. In standard trim they fall through their strokes too quickly, and return much too quickly, especially in the rear. Frank did a shim shuffle and the bike was back on the dirt the same day. The result was pretty good. The forks feel a lot firmer in the mid-stroke yet are still plush and forgiving over rocks. There is a lot more control in the damping so the front end is now more stable, allowing the DRZ to carve a more accurate line. The shock is streets ahead, so much so that we'd recommend that all DRZ owners send their shocks to Frank for a revalve. The rebound is now much stiffer so the back tracks like an arrow. We did run into problems here though. With the stock spring the bike still had too much static sag, so blokes being blokes we wound the bugger up until we had about 5mm. That'll sort it, mate!

I spent hours the next day trying to get the harshness out of the forks. They'd been fine the day before; what had happened? Around 2pm the lights came on and I realised the shock preload was too stiff and that this was affecting the front. I explained all this to Frank on the phone.

"You dickhead TK," shouted Frank with glee. "Don't you know how a spring works?"

Obviously not. Frank went into educator mode.

"A spring is designed to work best with a certain preload, which is why it's so important to get the right spring for the rider's weight. If you dial in too much preload the force required to compress the spring increases hugely. 1mm too much can require 10Nm more force to get the shock to react, and this multiplies quickly. What you've done is dialled in the spring to take about 100Nm more force to compress it, making it as harsh as buggery. Put it back to 20mm of static sag quick." Which was a lesson well learnt.

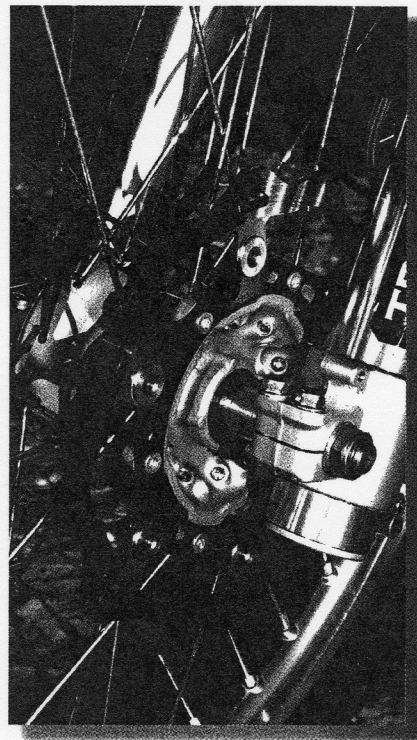
Before we leave the suspension, Frank also extended the shock length by 4mm, which jacked the back up 12mm. Again, this is highly recommended with the DRZ, giving quicker steering, more ground clearance and sloping the seat towards the front.

Wave Lines

Some of the latest bikes have fantastic front brakes so it was quite natural for us to chase up a stronger front stopper for the Suzuki. The first replacement was the front brake line, dumping the rubber one in favour of a braided stainless Galfer – 02 9609 1054 – unit. Instant success. There was a much firmer feel at the lever – because the braided line doesn't expand as much as the rubber one does – and the power of the brake increased as a result. Not satisfied, on went a Galfer floating wave disc, which is a pretty trick bit of gear. There's a lot less surface area than with the standard disc so the Galfer unit was 200g lighter, which isn't a bad thing when you consider that this is unsprung weight. The Galfer is 1mm thicker than the stocker so we had to adjust the lever back in a touch, then I headed out to give it a run.

You'd think that a smaller surface area would give less braking power, but once the stock pads had scuffed the new disc up it was clear that the brake was stronger, and had a lot more feel. Combined with the effect of the new line, this meant that the front stopper was way, way better equipped for the job. Galfer's Greg Moon recommends using the standard pads to bed a new disc in, and this is almost complete on the DRZ. To top off the front brake transformation we're planning on running Galfer sintered pads, which we know give even more bite.

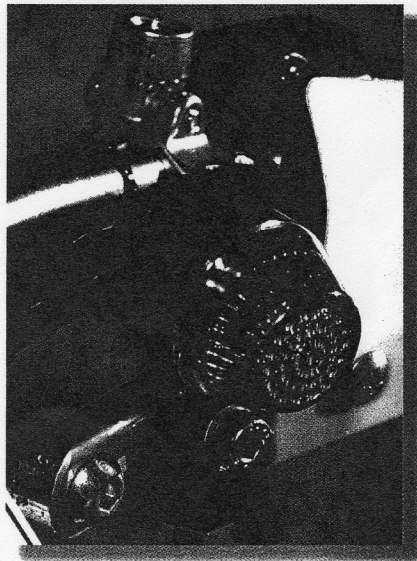
All this for a front stopper that's already okay? Ride a KTM 525 before saying we're mad.

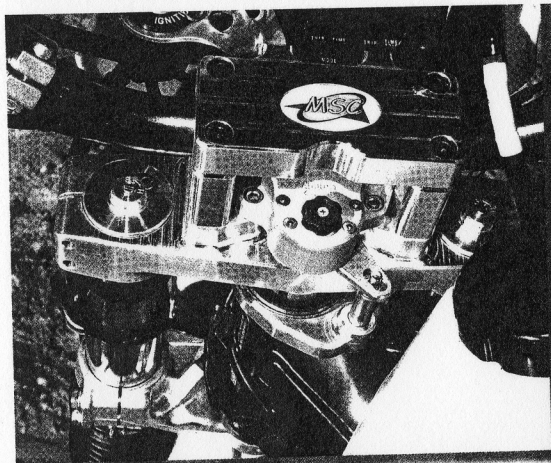


Shortened and rubber-mounted mirror

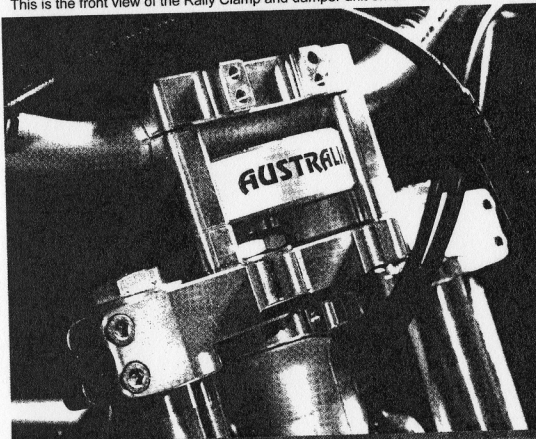


We cut a thread into the Barkbuster to mount the indicator

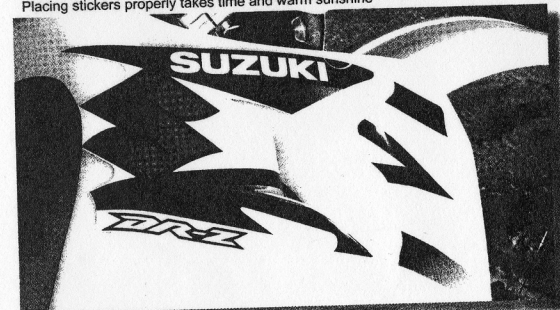




This is the front view of the Rally Clamp and damper unit on an XR650



Placing stickers properly takes time and warm sunshine



TUNING

With the DRZ heading for the desert after Christmas, fuel capacity has become a major consideration. Aqualine - 03 5729 5556 - Safari tanks are the toughest around at the moment, plus they have big enough capacities to cope with serious distances. We measured our DRZ tank, accurately, at 28 litres, which will give the 400 about 450ks between drinks. With one of the bigger Nomad rear tanks this would allow us to cross the Simpson unsupported and even make a serious dent in the Canning Stock Route. Despite this, after being on the bike for a few minutes you hardly notice the tank is there. Good design work.

We went for the 'natural' colour because it allows you to see the fuel level at a glance. On top of this, a light colour makes a bike look smaller and lighter, and if it looks it, it also feels it. Funny things, brains. When we measured the tank we marked off level points at every five litres, so we now know exactly how much fuel is in the tank at any time. You can read about how Aqualine tanks are made and mounted on page 50.

Legalities

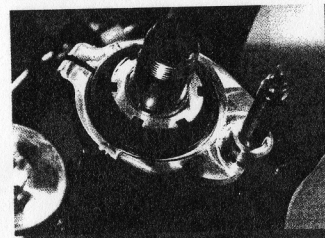
Bike can attract the wrong sort of attention at times so we figured it was best to keep the DRZ as legal as possible. Off Road Imports bring in a discount line called Dirt Works, and included among many other products are small, very flexible indicators. At \$10 a pop they aren't going to break the bank and may well keep the blue lights from flashing. We wired them into the Suzuki's loom using good quality connectors in the same vein as we described in the last issue. There was a bit of concern about the hole where the wires exit the indicator body so we used Silastic to act as a water sealant and to give the wires a little more support.

The stock DRZ mirrors are shockers but the law says you have to see backwards. We grabbed an old Yamaha mirror, cut it down, then roughed up the remaining 20mm stumps with a file. A short piece of hose was then slid over both stumps and wired in place using a rare special tool - especially designed to drive blokes mad. Clamps would do the same job.

Stickers

When we stood back a few days ago the DRZ looked great, but there was nothing on it to say it was a Suzuki! This was not good, so we sourced a set of tank and radiator stickers and matched them up to the Safari tank. Naturally enough, a little careful pruning and shaping was involved to line the stickers up, but the result is quite tidy.

Here are some sticker-fitting tips. Spend time doing it. Make sure that both sides are the same in height and angle, and make cuts where the sticker will pass through too tight an arc to bend without wrinkling. Do all this before removing the backing! It's best to fit them in warm sunlight, or use a hair-dryer to make them more pliable. Remove the backing and if you have to touch the sticky side do it well away from the edge where your grubby fingers could weaken the grip and cause the sticker to lift later on. And if you have stickers with clear panels don't touch them because your fingerprint will be there forever. Start with one edge, smoothing the sticker



The MSC spigot clamps in place - no welding!

on and using a rag to rub it flat. Be careful to avoid wrinkles and air bubbles, because they'll stand out and ruin the effect. If you do get air bubbles, prick them with a pin and squeeze the air out. This will all take time, but if you do a botched job you'll be looking at it for years to come.

Damper, Anyone?

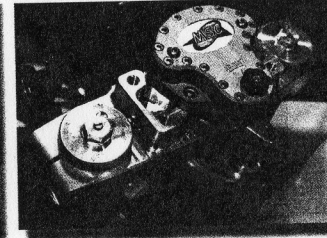
Although the Suzuki is reasonably stable and pleasant to ride, the long hours we intend riding it meant that we wanted a steering damper. Yes, you can live without one, but it does make life a lot more comfortable - the bike becomes less physically demanding, a lot more stable at speed, less inclined to climb out of ruts, more confident in sand, stacks better in rocks, and is generally less taxing during hard riding. Gotta have one!

The snag came when I rang Simone at MSC - 02 4374 1655 - to order a damper.

"We've got these triple-clamps that Mark's been working on. They raise the bars and tuck the damper out of the way under the bar clamps."

Hmmm. Those bars need to come up... We'll take two; one for the DRZ and one for John Hedericks' XR650. The dampers and clamps duly arrived and were fitted in a flash. There is no cutting, welding, grinding or general mayhem involved at all. You remove the bar clamps from the bike and lift the bars away to the front without even loosening a lever. Undo the steering-head stem nut and the top triple-clamp bolts, then lift the stock triple-clamp off and put it in a box. The spigot for the MSC damper then slips over the headstem on the frame and is tightened in place with a single allen-head bolt. Next the new and very sexy billet MSC triple-clamp is slid into place, and the steering-head stem nut is re-tensioned and the fork clamps tightened.

The damper unit itself is then sat in place on the new clamp, and bolted home with the control arm over the spigot. The two risers are then sat in place along with the



The damper has an improved valve

lower bar clamp, the bars and top clamp are sat in place, and then the whole lot is bolted together using the four bar clamp bolts. It really is that easy.

The bar position is now spot on. We'd wanted them higher than stock and the PHS CR-bend bars went most of the way to achieving this, but the risers on the MSC have brought them up another 5mm and it is now absolutely right for reach, strength and comfort. Mark has made some interesting and user-friendly mods to the damper since we last had one - an MSC damper that is. He's revised the damper valve for increased damping and bigger steps between adjustments. The softest setting is still very light, but the hardest is now fairly stiff and we'd be hard-pressed imagining a situation where the right amount of damping couldn't be simply dialled in with a twist of the knob. Finke aside. Those who do want to opt for a heavier oil in the unit - 10wt is stock - can now use the two bleed/filler holes in the top, instead of having to lift the complete top as was the case in the past.

The workmanship in both the damper and the triple-clamp is absolutely superb and is a credit to Mark and Simone. MSC will also do triple-clamps of varying offsets so if you want your bike to turn a little better or be more stable at speed, give them a call and discuss the possibilities. They have clamps and dampers for most dirt bikes; well worth the money.

Next Issue

We're actually chasing a pair of '96-'98 RM250 twin cartridge forks. If you can help out - they must be in good nick - give me a call on 0400 155 191. These will be passed on to Frank and then bolted home on the DRZ. Magic. And wind pressure at speed is becoming a hassle so a low screen is on the cards, plus we're going to mount our pushie-panniers for extended touring. We may even find the time to ride it. Where's that map of Tasmania?

We've had a few calls about where to get the DRZ's Barrett muffler. The distributor is Husky Imports, ph 02 4735 4610

with the best fit. There is only one choice, Australian Made

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