

RMX

Did Suzuki answer the call?

*By Jeff Morgan
Photos by Doug Morgan*

For many years, off-road enthusiasts have been waiting for a proper bike from Suzuki. Finally the wait is over – the all new 2010 RMX450Z has arrived. Suzuki certainly did their part in building anticipation for this bike thanks to its late arrival to the Canadian market. Fortunately for us, we were the first Canadian media outlet to throw a leg over the RMX.

Suzuki claims that the heart of this new off-road ripper is their RM-Z450 motocross bike and, from a distance, the RMX could easily be mistaken for the MX version. It is not every day that one of the big bike brands releases an all new bike, especially these days. While companies are releasing “all new” versions of existing bikes, Suzuki has taken a chance on the RMX.

One thing in Big Yellow's favour is the recent resurgence of off-road racing and maybe, just maybe, they will catch lightning in a bottle with the RMX. They have certainly had suc-

cess on the motocross track but will that translate to success on the cross country course, or on the dealer floor? Unfortunately, the late arrival of the RMX may have a bit of a negative effect on the sales totals for this year.

Our ride of the RMX took shape very quickly; as soon as we got the clearance we swung by Suzuki's head office and grabbed the bike before they could change their minds. A long weekend was all the time that we had, so we quickly loaded up and headed to our private testing facility to put the beast through its paces.

Anticipation was high with this bike and it didn't take long for us to get out on the trails. With the combination of electric start and fuel injection, bringing the four-stroke power plant to life is a piece of cake. Even with the magic and the FI, the RMX does not fire to life at the first stab of the starter, but it doesn't take much. After the initial hesitation, the bike runs consistently, smoothly and quietly.

The RMX comes fairly plugged up from the factory and does have a slightly restricted feel to the engine.





This is largely due to the fact that Suzuki aimed to make this bike legal to ride on pretty much every trail on the planet, including California's strict "green sticker" required trails. With the limited time we had with the bike we were not able to experiment with making the engine flow better but we suspect that with a bit of work it could breathe much better.

The power delivery is nothing that will rip your arms out of their sockets but it does prevent you from getting yourself into too much trouble if you accidentally blip the throttle. That is not to say that the power is not ample; it is a 450 after all. The best

way to describe it would be that it is smooth, with plenty of torque.

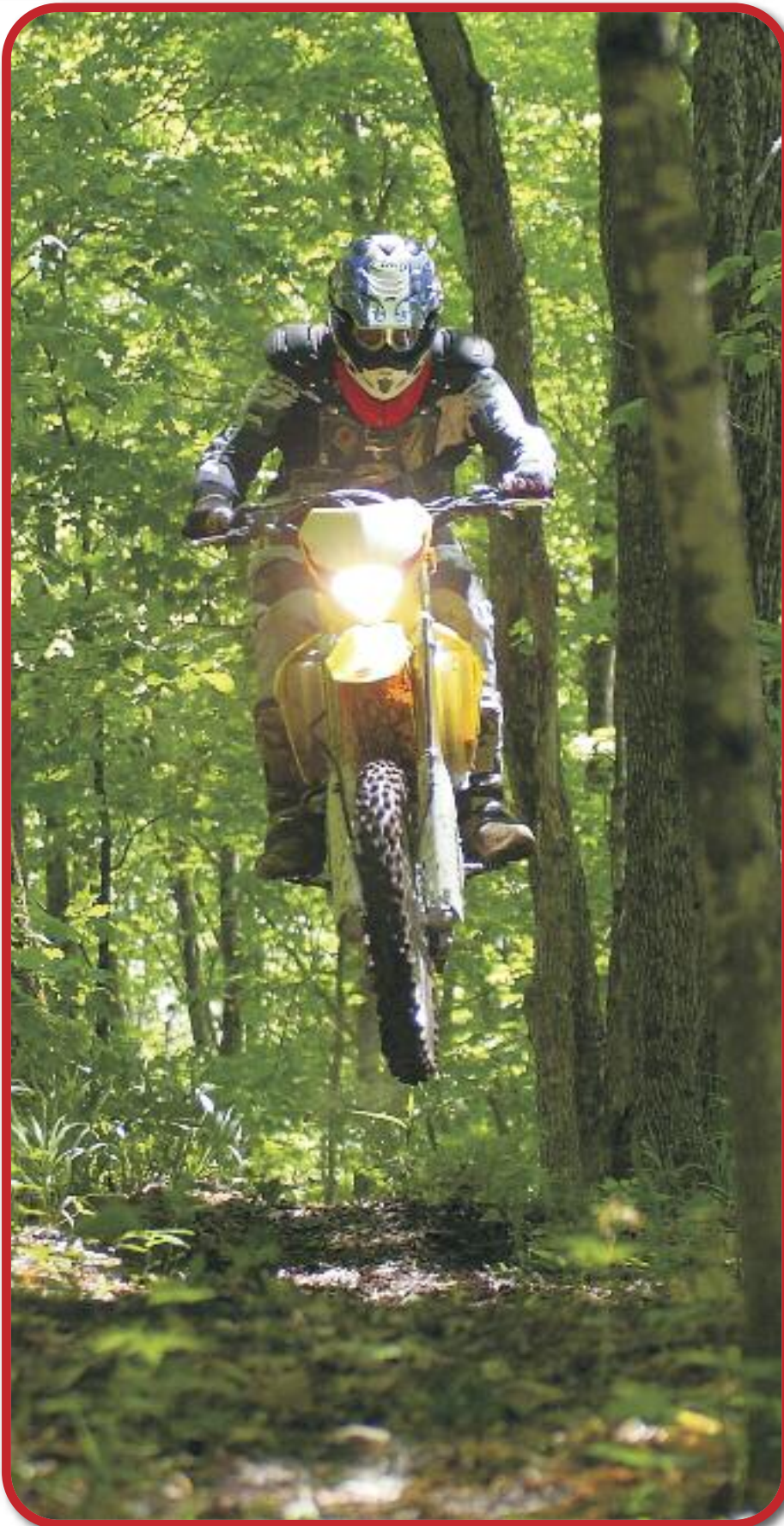
One thing of note about the RMX is that it does have a tendency to stall. One way to prevent this is to make sure that the clutch is adjusted so that it is completely disengaged when you do the one- or two-finger pull. It did help with the issue but did not completely eliminate it and could possibly benefit from a slightly heavier flywheel, or possibly an auto-clutch.

The transmission of the RMX gives a wider gear ratio than the RM-Z but we would hesitate to say that it is a true wide-ratio transmission. First gear was very ver-

satile without being too slow. Shifting gears was accurate and smooth and the gears never gave us any trouble.

The chassis of the RMX is as stiff as you would imagine a motocross-based bike to be and did not offer any type of noticeable flexi feel to it. Perhaps a highlight of the chassis is the narrow feel; this bike is sleek with all the parts fitting together very nicely. On the RMX there were no little boot or pant grabbers to make riding it a nuisance. The body panels, seat and fuel tank look as if they are a straight switch from the RM-Z and, in the case of the fuel tank, it is.

Suzuki opted to run the aluminum



fuel tank from the MX bike on the off-road. This is probably a bit of a mistake due to the small nature of the tank. For motocross it is not that big a deal to have the small tank and can be advantageous to keep the weight down, but for trail riding or hare scrambles this can be an issue. The 6.2 litre tank creates a limited range and will likely have long distance riders looking for a larger option. It does, however, have a low-fuel warning light so at least you have fair warning of the gas situation.

Another small note about the aluminum tank is that it tends to get quite hot when riding and holds the heat for a long time. It didn't affect the performance of the bike but it is something to be aware of.

The suspension duties are handled by a full set of Showa suspenders. The 47mm Showa forks are standard in what you expect to find on a modern off-road bike, with adjustable compression and rebound damping adjustment. The rear shock features two-way adjustable compression and rebound settings.

According to Suzuki the suspension has been optimized for off-road usage and we found this to be fairly accurate. The RMX did seem to be sprung fairly stiff but it didn't behave as though it was too stiff. Both the front and rear suspension performed well and the fork offered a solid feel, with no noticeable deflection.

Despite the portly claimed weight of 272 pounds (still comparable to other Japanese bikes in its class), the Suzuki did not feel as though it was overweight at all and felt nimble enough for a 450 four-stroke. We did experience some push in the corners before we set the sag, but that virtually disappeared once we set things up and it began handling like its motocross cousin with quick and concise turns. We feel that, with a bit more time to fine tune the suspension, this bike would steer as well as any other.

Suzuki followed the off-road fashion with the rear wheel and opted for the 18-inch variety, which is common to the genre. The stock tires worked well in the conditions at our test track, with soil conditions that would primarily be intermediate to soft with a nice spattering of rocks for good measure. The front got solid traction and aided the steering. The rear tire got excellent traction during acceleration, braking and cornering making them a solid combination.

Braking was solid and consistent for the duration of our test and we never experienced any fade. The Suzuki gave a balanced feel and neither brake outperformed the other. Neither one of the



brakes were too strong but still gave a feel that would instill confidence to go into a tight corner with speed.

Other features that grace the new RMX450Z are a digital instrument cluster, quick access air-filter, skid plate and lighting system. Within the instrument cluster you will find a sport and standard mode, in the sport mode the display has been simplified so the rider can focus on the trail. In the standard mode it is a fully loaded display that has dual trip meters, speed, time, voltage and that is in addition to the average speed timer that the sport mode has. And don't forget the all-new coolant catch tank and plastic skidplate for protection.

Ergonomically the RMX is well laid out, with all the controls well placed and comfortable. The Renthal Fatbars offered a bend and rise that we enjoyed and helped keep a roomy cockpit. Clutch pull was not too stiff

and the action was smooth without any mystery grabbiness.

When a company releases an all-new bike it can often be rough around the edges; fortunately this is not the case with the RMX450Z. That is not say that the bike is perfect but, then again, what bike is? We feel that with a few tweaks to suit your local conditions, this bike could be more than enough to keep most riders happy. If you are a hardcore racer then you might consider the RM-Z instead because it is almost 25 pounds lighter and has even stiffer suspension. For the average rider, the RMX will be more than enough bike and with the EFI you can tune the power to suit your style.

Suzuki is used to being on the top step of the podium at motocross and supercross events. Will they be on the top step of any enduros? Only time will tell.

SPECIFICATIONS

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| ENGINE TYPE | 4-stroke, liquid-cooled, DOHC |
| ENGINE DISPLACEMENT | 449 cm ³ (cc) |
| BORE X STROKE | 96.0 mm x 62.1 mm |
| COMPRESSION RATIO | 11.6:1 |
| TRANSMISSION | 5-speed constant mesh |
| OVERALL LENGTH | 2,185 mm (86.0 in.) |
| OVERALL WIDTH | 830 mm (32.7 in.) |
| OVERALL HEIGHT | 1,260 mm (50.0 in.) |
| WHEELBASE | 1,480 mm (58.3 in.) |
| GROUND CLEARANCE | 320 mm (12.6 in.) |
| SEAT HEIGHT | 955 mm (37.6 in.) |
| CURB MASS | 123.5 kg (272.3 lbs.) |
| SUSPENSION FRONT | SHOWA 47mm telescopic forks, pneumatic/coil spring, oil damped |
| REAR | Swingarm, link type, SHOWA piggyback-reservoir shock |
| BRAKES FRONT | Disc |
| REAR | Disc |
| TIRES FRONT | 80/100-21 |
| REAR | 110/100-18 |
| FUEL TANK CAPACITY | 6.2 L (1.6 US gal.) |