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The Cagiva WMX500DE was built between 1986-1988 for the American dirt bike market and designed purely for the purpose of desert racing. The Americans you see, have hundreds of thousands of square miles of trail terrain on their doorstep, much of which is classified as desert, and they like to enjoy themselves by racing across it. This calls for specialist machinery. Trail bikes are all right, but they are generally too heavy and not dirt oriented enough. Motocrossers on the other hand

are a little too peaky, nervous and thirsty for this sort of terrain. What's needed is a machine that combines the agility and power of a motocrosser with the stability, comfort and range of a trail bike. Come on down Cagiva's WMX500DE.

At its heart is a water-cooled, reed-valve, single cylinder, 495cc, two stroke engine from the 1985 Cagiva motocrosser. This is a high compression motor with loads of power and plenty of useable low-down torque. It's fitted with a wide ratio, five speed gearbox, and a generator and lighting coils to bring it up to enduro specification. Either side of the massive 18 litre plastic fuel tank sits a pair of radiators for

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the liquid cooling, and cycle parts include Marzocchi forks, Brembo front brake complete with a floating disc, and a large Veglia speedo calibrated in mph. At the rear there's an alloy swing arm with a 'Soft-Damp' linkage mated to a remote reservoir Ohlins shock, a rear drum does the stopping and Akront alloy rims grace both ends.

The story of how the bikes ended up in the UK is an interesting one. Back in 1988/89 Husqvarna (and off road Cagiva) importer Mike Carter, spotted them sitting around in a bonded Swiss warehouse where they had been sent prior to despatch to the US. It appears these machines had nowhere to go, due to the US importer

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clutch cover for which spares are already unavailable!

Thanks to the nature of the terrain for which it was designed, there's only limited amounts of steering lock available and this makes for a super-tanker sized turning circle. This combined with the 35inch seat height means that if you're going to ride one anywhere outside the American desert, you'd better be either tall or confident in your ability - preferably both. To ride one is like sitting astride a caged bull and

either going bust or simply over-ordering. Whatever the reason, Mike spotted his chance and bought six of them on a hunch. That hunch proved to be correct, and after advertising he received orders for ten bikes. He got back in touch with the Swiss warehouse and another six bikes were duly despatched, and this went on until Mike had brought in 27 in all.

When we contacted Mike he told us of a few problems he'd come across, apparently some spares are becoming difficult to get hold of and some are already non existent. He also told us that the bikes can be difficult to start and have a tendency to kick back, in the worst circumstances this can break the kickstart and

giving its gonads a slap! The MX-derived engine is enormously powerful, wonderfully torquey and stupendously loud, though there's no power band as such, it just keeps coming in huge waves, sweeping you along with its force, and usually catching you out.

If you fancy something entirely different you can pick one up for as little as £400, if you can find one, but a 'good-un' will fetch nearer £800. That's budget money by anyone's standards for something as much fun as this. With lowered suspension, a pair of 17inch rims laced on and some sticky tyres it would make a very outrageous supermoto. Now that's what I call cheap thrills.