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ON THE COVER: Jimmy Lewis flirts with disaster for Joe Kosch and Situation Impossible. The modified 200s take to the air for JoPapa, and John Ker snapped the XR/CR hybrid photo. Tasteful cover design by DeWest, separations by Valley Film and anti-gravity machine by Super Hunky.

# UNSTOPPABLE

4 days on a 'Berg

By Ron Lawson

What was the trail like in Tulsa? It was like a big pile of automatic transmissions, only the pile was covered with dark, greasy mud. Trees grew out of the pile at weird angles, and there was a trickling stream of water (or maybe it was ATF) showing the best line.

At least some of the time it was like that. Other times it was like riding on the surface of the planet Pain, with strange plants slapping at your knuckles and bizarre trees with hands trying to pull you off your motorcycle.

The event was none other than the Tulsa Trail Riders four-day qualifier on the John Zink Ranch, and I was there because . . . well, I might as well face it. I was there because I was really, really dumb. Greg Surdyke, Husaberg's American Marketing Manager, called up and asked if I would like to ride the 501 in some enduro somewhere. "How about Tulsa?" I asked, effectively advertising a single-digit IQ. I knew what Tulsa was all about. I knew that this event was more than I could handle, even when it was a two-day ride. This year it was four days long. Why did I say Tulsa? I believe it was because I was kidnapped by space aliens the last time I rode there. They performed minor brain surgery, removing most of the memory portion of my *medulla oblongata*. They erased all memories relating to Tulsa or the John Zink ranch, then installed a metal plate so they could transmit bad ideas from outer space. All of this, of course, I can't remember, but it's the only possible explanation for my seeming lapse of reason. It's the only reason that I would agree to ride such a strange bike in such a strange place.

In the end, though, the joke was on my little green friends. Tulsa, despite having some truly hard sections, was one of the most well-rounded enduros I've ridden—and the Husaberg was the perfect bike for it.

## 'BERG NOTES

The Husaberg 501 is a motorcycle built by riders. It is put together in the small town

of Husaberg in Sweden by the people who used to build Husqvarnas. Back then, Husqvarna was owned by a vacuum cleaner company, and the engineers couldn't do all of the things they wanted to because management just didn't understand. Now the Husaberg factory is owned by those engineers.

Husky fanatics will notice a strong resemblance between the Husky 510 motor and the Husaberg motor. That shouldn't surprise anyone. The goal was the same for both projects: Build a four-stroke motor that is lightweight, reliable, lightweight, powerful and lightweight. The Husaberg motor weighs about 70 pounds. Honda, Rotax and even the KTM four-stroke motors weigh around 90 pounds.

All that means that the complete Husaberg motorcycle can weigh about the same as a two-stroke enduro bike. The legendary,

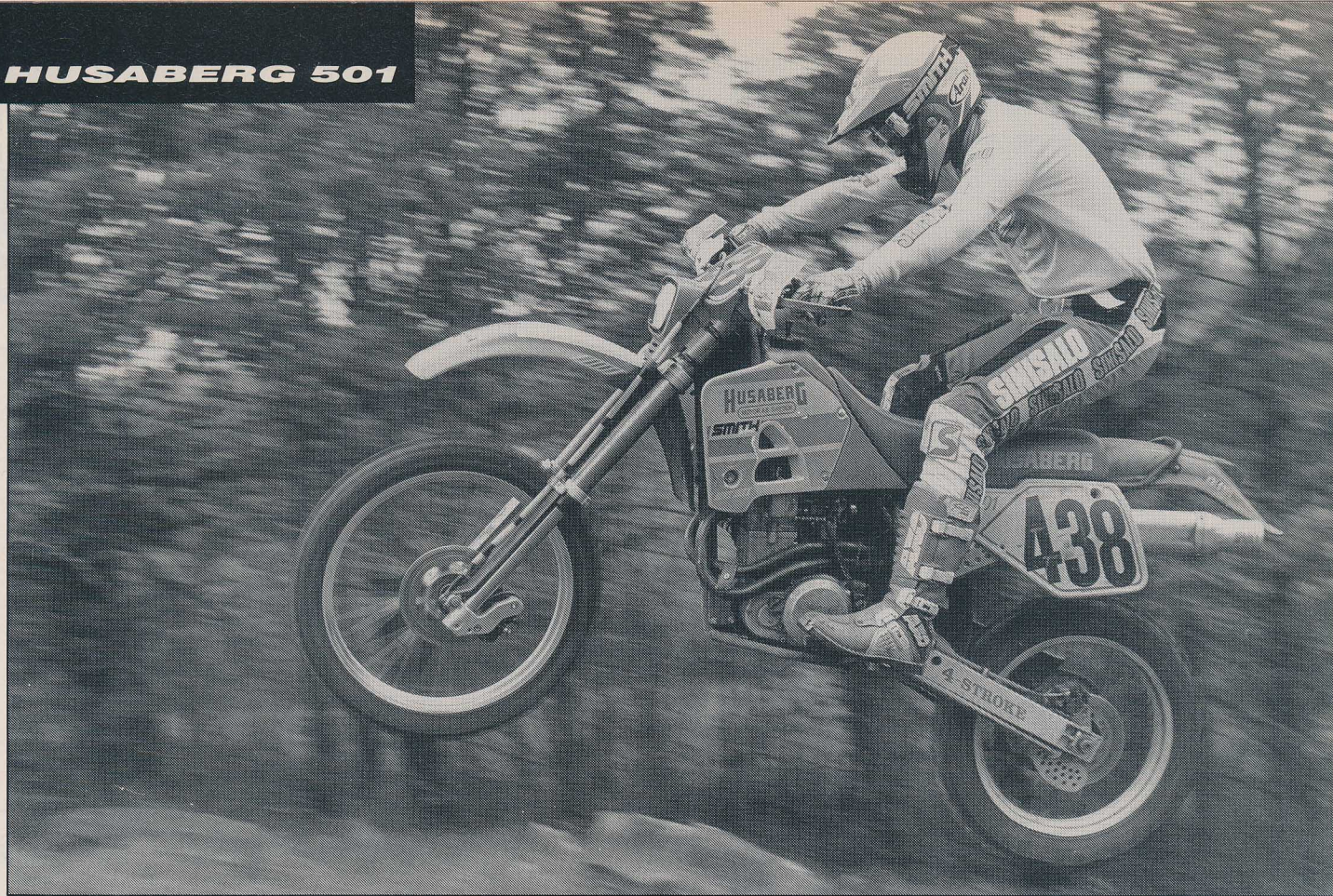
official *Dirt Bike* scale wasn't on hand in Tulsa, but there's no reason the Husaberg 501 should weigh any more than the Husaberg 350. Earlier in the year, the 350 was officially weighed, making the beam balance at 246 pounds. That's the exact same weight as a stock Suzuki RMX. The bottom line is that the Husaberg 501 is the lightest big four-stroke available. Considering that excess weight is the single most common complaint associated with thumpers, the Husaberg already looks pretty appealing.

As for the rest of the Husaberg, it's made of typical European stock. Suspension is by White Power, although valved to Husaberg's specs. The brakes are by Brembo, the plastic by Acerbis. Being a motorcycle manufacturer in Europe means you manufacture an engine and a frame. The rest you can buy out, which is pretty much the same situation



The Husaberg 501 was great. Tulsa was murder.





**Husaberg has managed to make the lightest big thumper on the market. That makes it the only choice if you mix four-strokes and tight woods.**

with the Japanese. Honda, Yamaha, etc., share suspension, brake, even piston manufacturers.

#### LIGHT UP

The second most common complaint associated with thumpers is that they are hard to start. Depending on the time and situation, that might even be the *most* common complaint. Times and situations like ISDE qualifiers tend to bring out those complaints. The rules for qualifiers (there are a ton of them) allow you only 60 seconds to get your bike started every morning. With the complicated procedure required by most four-strokes, 60 seconds would only allow one, maybe two, kicks.

Start procedure on the Husaberg is as follows: 1. Kick; 2. Ride away. You don't have to worry about finding top dead center, pumping the engine, fondling compression releases or paying homage to ancient Polynesian deities. The Husaberg has an automatic compression release, so you simply kick the bike and it usually fires up right away. The kickstarter is located in a very awkward position, high on the left side of the engine, but if you can actually get your foot on top of the lever, you can start the bike.

On the last of the four days, I actually incurred a 30-point late-start penalty. I was replacing the chain and sprockets on the bike during my ten-minute work period in the morning. I rolled it to the line with about ten seconds left, turned on the gas and kicked. Nothing. The bike started just after my time

ran out. I can attribute that to Enduro Law #1: A bike that always starts with one kick will take ten kicks if it's day four of a four-day enduro.

#### TULSA TIME

I sat in my hotel room the night before the first day, listening to rain, thunder and general meteorological chaos assault northern Oklahoma. My memory came back. The John Zink Ranch is filled with those automatic transmission-sized rocks, and when they get wet, riding straight over them is almost impossible. Traction is unpredictable and choosing a direction usually just means letting the bike go wherever it is pointed.

The next day the rocks were wet and the John Zink Ranch was in classic form. Did the magic of four-stroke power make the task as easy as riding on pavement? Did the Husaberg wheelie up the rocks, and did I simply have to whisper in its ear to tell it where to go? Sorry. It wasn't like that.

Through some comic chance of nature that is not my fault, I was born in Tulsa about 15 miles from the John Zink Ranch. I first started riding motorcycles in Oklahoma City. All that, however, was a very long time ago. I've spent years riding in Southern California, where two trees in the same time zone constitute tight woods. Heavy rain in California usually means two drops in 24 hours. Muddy conditions only occur if you are riding through wet cement in downtown L.A. There's no motorcycle anywhere on Earth that will make me look good when it's

wet—four-stroke, two-stroke or any other stroke.

I will say this, though: The only other motorcycle that I would rather have had in those conditions was, perhaps, a Husaberg 350. Power was not something I had a need for. I learned very quickly to leave the bike in second or third gear, hold the throttle at some medium opening and do anything necessary to keep it there. Opening the throttle more was bad because I wouldn't necessarily go where I was pointed. Closing the throttle was bad because at some point I would have to open it again.

The Husaberg has an outrageous hit of low-end power at extremely low rpm. The bike positively jumps as soon as you crack the throttle. The only way to make that burst manageable at slow speed is to leave the bike in a tall gear. That way the hit is spread out over a broader area. In general, it's risky to run too tall a gear, especially on a thumper. You risk the all-too-scary cough-and-die syndrome—but the Husaberg never did that. In fact, in the four days of riding I never stalled the bike.

Husaberg's Tim Surdyke was on hand to give me advice on setting up the machine. One unusual suggestion he made is to run the idle fairly high. There are several reasons for this. First of all, it makes the bike harder to stall. Second, it reduces the amount of engine braking that a four-stroke generates. That is important in the case of the Husaberg because the low-end burst of power hits so hard. With a normal amount of four-



1991 HUSABERG 501

Engine type	Four-valve, liquid-cooled
	4-stroke
Displacement	502cc
Bore and stroke	92.0mm x 75.5mm
Carburetion	38mm Dellorto
Fuel tank capacity	2.2 gal. (8.5L)
Gearing	15/48
Lighting coil	Yes
Spark arrester	No
Green sticker legal in stock form	No
Running weight with no fuel	246 lb. (est.)
Wheelbase	58.6 in. (1488mm)
Rake/trail	N/A
Ground clearance	15.2 in. (390mm)
Seat height	37.0 in. (950mm)
Tire size and type (as tested):	
Front	80/100-21 Bridgestone ED11
Rear	110/90-18 Dunlop K695

Suspension:	
Front	White Power inverted cartridge, adj. comp./reb., 11.5 in. (295mm) travel
Rear	Ohlins piggyback, adj. comp./reb., 12.8 in. (328mm) travel
Country of origin	Sweden
Suggested retail price	\$5495
Distributor/manufacturer:	
	Husaberg America Inc.
	1305 Hwy. 61
	Festus, MO 63028
	(800) 748-8454

PARTS REPLACEMENT COST

Piston	\$479.55
Ring	17.49
Clutch plate (drive)	11.52
Clutch plate (driven)	5.76
Front sprocket	22.19
Rear sprocket	52.05
Front brake pads	35.84
Rear brake pads	30.29

stroke engine braking, the transition from off-throttle to on-throttle would be like getting kicked by a six-pack of mules. Also, in the case of the Husaberg, the fast idle prevents a lean mixture situation that can cause engine backfires. On the *Dirt Bike* test Husaberg last year, the engine backfired so hard that it blew the carburetor right off the manifold.

DAY AFTER DAY

After the first two days, the Tulsa Trail Riders promised that the terrain would become more fun. On the third morning, however, a tornado came through the area and sent most of Oklahoma and Kansas straight to Oz. I was in a state of mild panic. If the third day was anything like the first two days, I simply wouldn't make it. They would find my remains on the idling Husaberg

months later, both the bike and my body leaning against a tree. That's the only good thing about trees, I discovered. When you get really tired in really slow woods, you can actually stop and lean on one. You don't even have to take your feet off the pegs. I did a lot of tree-leaning in Tulsa.

Tornado or no tornado, the third day was a great change of pace. The trail opened up, got a little more "western" and I got new life. I also discovered a lot more about the Husaberg. For example, it's not slow. During the first two days, I never got the throttle more open than that midway position. That could have been all the beans it had and I never would have known. Day three had spaces where I could actually shift the bike into fourth gear—a veritable desert race. The Husaberg's powerband has that

one hit right off the bottom, but after that it's smooth and very predictable. The engine just revs out, smoothly and cleanly, and will run with a good, strong 250 two-stroke MX bike in sheer acceleration. As far as I can tell, the bike has the widest operational rpm range of any internal combustion engine on this planet. It has that killer bottom-end, and then it revs out real high. If you did get in a drag race with a 250 MX bike, the MXer would go through three or four shifts in the same amount of distance that the Husaberg would be shifted once. It's the next best thing to an automatic tranny.

Next, I discovered that the steering is rather clumsy. Because the bike weighs the same as a typical 250 enduro bike, I was expecting it to handle like a typical 250 enduro bike. Wrong. It takes a lot of effort to corner on the Husaberg, especially at medium to slow speeds. There's a lot of Husqvarna blood in the 'Berg. Like the Huskys of old, the Husaberg is stable to a fault. You can clock a giant redwood and barely even notice a course deviation. Headshake is a non-factor.

When I sniveled to Tim about the steering, he scratched his head and suggested that the Bib Mousse front tube might have something to do with it. That was one of the non-stock items we elected to run on the test bike for Tulsa. Riding on those Zink rocks is known to produce a flat or two, so we used a Michelin solid-foam front inner tube. That increases the rotational mass (I love big

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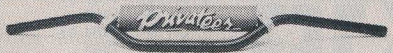
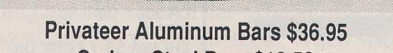
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The 'Berg motor has incredible snap for leaping trail obstacles.

words) of the wheel, and some riders complain that this makes a bike hard to steer. I don't believe this had much to do with the steering problem, because the front wheel does not spin that fast at low Tulsa-style speeds.

On the other hand, the Husaberg was one of the most comfortable bikes I had ever ridden. I didn't notice this until day three, either, because I was so uncomfortable on the first two days. The bike has a fairly soft narrow seat (that's good for long hours in the saddle), the bars are high and the footpegs are low, which makes it very easy to go from sitting to standing.

In the suspension department, I had mixed feelings about the bike. That's one of the fundamental problems with race-testing a motorcycle, especially in a long-term race like Tulsa: You get used to the bike. In the first two days I thought the bike could have absorbed low-speed bumps better—it seemed a little on the stiff side. A couple of clicks out on the compression damping seemed to cure it. In the last two days it seemed like the suspension at both ends was rather soft. Part of the reason, of course, is that any suspension package will wear out, given enough bumps. There were a lot of bumps at Tulsa. Also, the later two days had much higher speed averages, and higher speeds will make suspension feel soft. Overall, I would say that the Husaberg is a good compromise. The people who built it haven't got a clue where you're going to ride, but they did a good job of improvising anyway.

**WHICH LASTED BETTER, BIKE OR RIDER?**

The bike did. At some point on day two I was wondering how I could get out of the race and save face. I thought I was too tired to go on, but it would look really bad if I showed up in the pits with defeat written all over me: "Sorry, guys, didn't mean to drag you and your motorcycle all the way to Oklahoma, but I quit. You can go home now."

That announcement would kill any party. My only hope was that this pristine, \$5500 motorcycle would suck a cow through the air filter and blow itself into little bits. I would have even been happy with a simple drown-out in a mudhole—anything that would get me to hour-out.

No such luck. The Husaberg air filter is mounted up by the gas tank, and no water hole, no matter how deep, could make the bike cough or sputter. I resorted to smashing the gearbox whenever I got the chance. If transmission teeth shot through the cases and embedded themselves in my leg, I would have been delighted. Nothing. The 'Berg just thumped through all kinds of misery, oblivious to my situation.

Some things did break, though. They just weren't serious enough to send me home. On the first day, the front brake went away despite the fact that the pads were only half worn. I rode the second half of the day with no brake and hit lots of trees. At the end of the day, I replaced the entire system—caliper, master cylinder and all.

On the second day, the shock wore a hole in the rear brake's hydraulic hose. I rode the second half of *that* day with no rear brake and hit all the trees that I missed on the first day. At the end of the day, once again, I replaced the entire system. In the following days, I replaced the brake pads once each. Tulsa is notoriously hard on brakes. The Husaberg's lasted longer than most, but replacing the pads at either end requires wheel removal. On virtually every other bike in the world, replacing brake pads is a much quicker, easier job.

Other things that broke? The spring in the folding shift lever didn't make it. A chain roller DNF'd. One of the rim lock bolts twisted off, but I think it was a Yamaha rim lock anyway. If you are looking for some reason to quit a race (like I was), don't look at the Husaberg. You'll have to find your own reason.

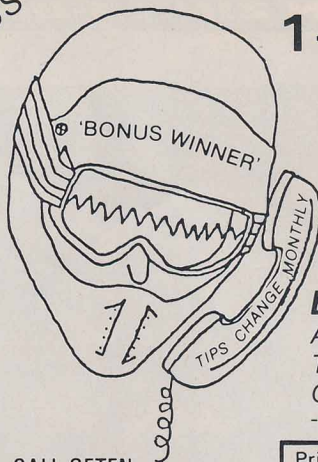
**SURVIVAL MODE**

I'm glad I didn't find a reason to go home on either of those first two days. The second two days were a reward for making it that far. They were genuinely fun. The rocks were only the size of manual transmissions, and the ground was loamy enough to absorb the rain. I had great fun until I saw the results at the end. I didn't go very fast on the Husaberg in the special tests. That's okay, I can live with defeat. Learning to ride the Husaberg requires time and concentration. It's hard to be dropped into the middle of a race on such an unusual machine and expect to beat the world, especially if you don't generally beat the world anyway. The Husaberg is kind of strange—it takes time to learn its habits and develop the proper technique—but once you learn how to ride it, I'm convinced the Husaberg is just as effective an enduro machine as any two-stroke in the world; and it's the only thumper that can make that claim. □

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