

MX/OFF-ROAD SHOOTOUT

DIFFERENT WORLDS

*Husky 360 vs.
KTM 300 vs.
Planet Earth*

By the DIRT BIKE staff





Ever wonder what motorcycles are like on other planets? Think about it: They wouldn't be able to copy Earth bikes so they would evolve along completely different paths. They might run on minced zucchini peels instead of gasoline, the wheels might be side-by-side instead of in-line. Or maybe they use the rider as a stressed frame member, so he wears the engine on his back and has to clinch the rear axle between his toes.

Or they might be *really* different from Earth bikes—possibly as different as are the KTM 300DXC and the Husqvarna 360WXC. Even though the Husky people claim their bike is made in Italy, and the KTM people claim their machine is from Austria, it is pretty clear that someone is lying. These bikes are from different worlds, and neither world is Earth. Well, both bikes run on gas and neither machine can be eaten, but that's about all they have in common. They work very differently.

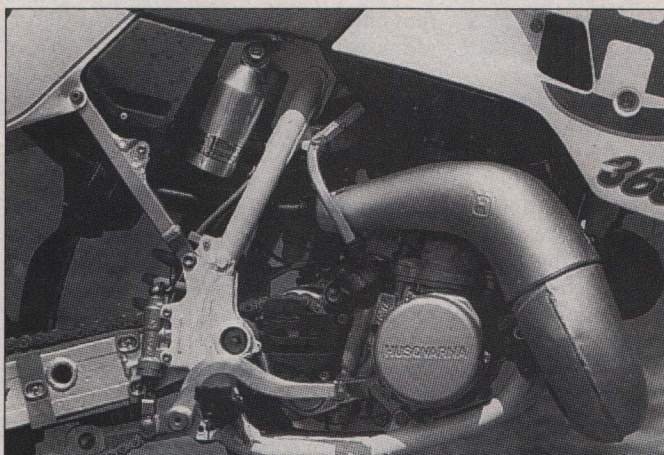
Both manufacturers classify the machines as "cross-country bikes." That's a vague enough category. It means that they can be desert bikes if you like, or enduro bikes if you aren't anywhere near a desert, or even motocross bikes, if it pleases you. No need to pin down anything. We tried the machines in MX environments and in the desert, in tight rocky sections and in wide-open sand washes to see what each really is best at. We wanted to take them to some other planets for testing as well, but we didn't have enough in the budget.

HUSKY FACTS

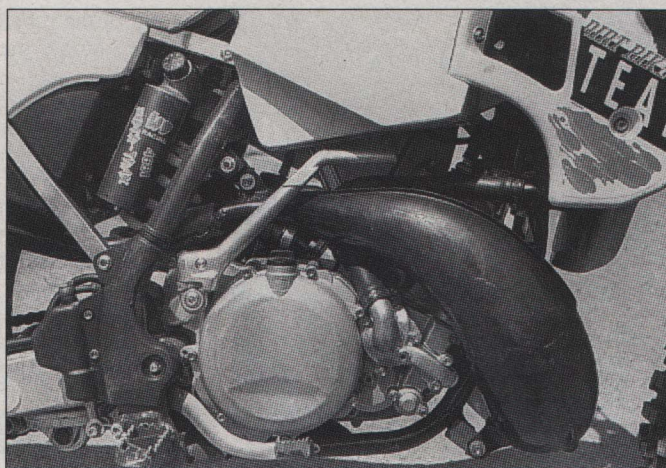
This is a big year for the Husqvarna people. A young, bright Italian engineer by the name of Tiziano Toschi is aggressively dealing with every problem that Cagivas and Husqvarnas have been criticized for in the past. In *Dirt Bike*, we complained about the old Brembo brakes that Huskys had. *Boom*, the Brembos are gone, replaced with Japanese Nissin brakes. We complained that the White Power suspension was harsh and hard to dial in. *Boom*, Huskys now come with Showa suspension. We complained that the detailing wasn't that good and that the bikes were heavy. *Boom*, they have received attention virtually everywhere. They have aluminum subframes, trick, quick-release seats and Cagiva-made aluminum handlebars.

In the case of last year's 260 Husky, people complained that it was a cheater bike, a 250 just bored out enough to get into the Open class with no real power advantage over the 250. *Boom*, the 360 is an all-new machine designed to be a 360 right from the start. It does share many of the same lower-end parts and designs with the 250 engine, but the top-end, the crank, the pipe and the carb all are different. That carb, incidentally, is a Mikuni, another part imported from Japan. Cagiva is coming under a lot of political pressure for using so many non-European parts,

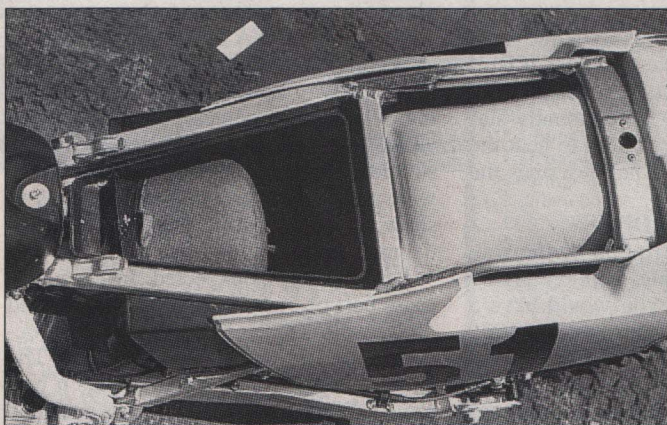




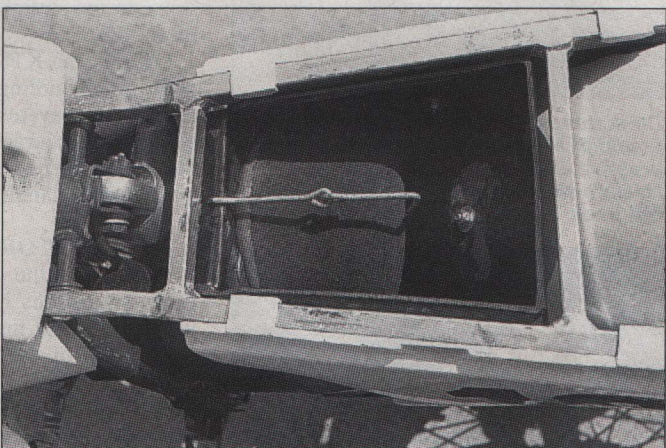
The Husky is one of the most beautifully made motorcycles on the planet. Some parts, though, are form without function. The aluminum pipe guards are supposed to make the bike quieter but don't.



Even though the KTM 300 engine looks exactly like the KTM 250 engine, the powerplants work very differently.



Getting to the 360's air filter requires no tools. It's a trick setup, so you can bet the Japanese will be copying Husky within a year.



Even though you need a 5mm hex wrench to remove the KTM's seat, the filter can be changed with a quick snap. Good stuff.

but it doesn't matter to Toschi. He is doing what he thinks will result in the best motorcycle and letting upper management take the heat.

KTM FACTS

KTM has had a frustrating year. On one hand, the company's motorcycles are better than they ever have been. Just look at their record in recent *Dirt Bike* tests: The KTM 250EXC won our 250 enduro shootout last month, the KTM 550DXC won our desert bike shootout in February and the 300SX and EXC received rave single-bike test reviews.

On the other hand, the company is struggling and barely avoided financial collapse earlier this year. That disaster was averted when a group of independent European importers joined together with a Swiss bank and bought all of the motorcycle division's assets, reopening the doors. Still, the affair scared buyers. When we reported on the bankruptcy proceedings as they were happening, we got sacks of mail from concerned buyers and even a few letters from angry dealers who had customers back out of sales.

Now, KTM is in business and making very good motorcycles. The 300DXC in

this comparison actually is the exact same bike used in the 300SX (motocross model) test we ran in the April issue. There are only five differences between the two models: The DXC has a 3.2-gallon tank instead of a 2.6-gallon gas tank; the DXC has an 18-inch rear wheel instead of a 19-inch; the DXC also has a spark arrester, an O-ring chain and a kickstand. We simply substituted those parts and *presto!* Instant DXC.

KTM's 300 has a lot in common with KTM's 250, too. The engine has a larger bore and a longer stroke, of course, bringing the displacement out to 297cc. Also, the 300 uses an SEM non-digital ignition with a much larger flywheel than that of the 250. For suspension and brakes, KTM uses the White Power and Brembo units that Husqvarna gave up on. We aren't sure what that means, but it's interesting.

WHAT'S SO DIFFERENT ABOUT THEM?

No two bikes could possibly handle more differently and still accomplish the same task. We raced them both in a GP at Glen Helen. Grands prix at Glen Helen amount to hour-long motocrosses with 90-mph winds thrown in for entertain-

ment. First, the Husky went out in the unclassified race. The bike seemed horribly awkward and strange at first.

There's no question that the Husky has the slowest steering geometry of any race bike you can buy. Steering the bike feels so heavy that you might assume that it has a steering damper filled with STP. Not so. Somewhere in Italy there is a test rider who likes his bikes to steer that way—he used to live in Sweden in the days when Huskys were built up there. He probably grows a lot of hair on a full moon and likes red meat. Normal people, however, will take a lot of time to get used to the way the Husky handles.

Once you get past the initial shock, you begin to notice advantages. First, your arms won't pump up as much. The front end is very stable and you have to do very little compensation for impacts and ruts that try to throw you off course. You also learn that the bike actually turns quite well, but with the rear wheel, not the front. You have to enter a turn prepared to slide your way around it, rather than cut and thrust. If there is a rut to follow, the Husky will drop into it easily and stay put, but heaven help you if you have to



Drink three quarts of coffee and eat a pound of M&Ms, then you might be aggressive enough to counteract the Husky's slow-handling manners on an MX track.



MX-style riding suits the KTM just fine. Its bloodline can be traced directly to the 250 SX, a bike designed after Mike Fisher's heart.

cut out of the rut early. Once planted on a certain course, the Husky stays on that course.

If you have actually gotten used to the Husky, riding the KTM seems really strange. You might think that the KTM handles much like a Japanese bike—quick-steering and fairly responsive. Compared to many Japanese bikes, like Suzukis and Hondas, though, the KTM actually really isn't all that much of a corner-carver. However, any bike you ride *after* the Husky will seem hyper and ultra-twitchy. It's kind of like drinking grapefruit juice after an ice cream cone; they don't mix well. Once again, you have to spend a few laps learning how to ride all over again. On the MX-like Glen Helen course, the KTM was almost too quick-handling. It had a little bit of headshake in the straights, but it could carve a mean turn.

Overall, the KTM probably is the most plain-Jane-handling bike on earth. It isn't extreme in any respect; you can't really call it a turn-carver or exceptionally stable. Remember when you used to hear the term neutral-handling? That describes the KTM.

MOTOR MADNESS

If you take the description of the way these two bikes handle, replace a few words here and there, you would have a description of the way the motors work, too. They couldn't be more different from each other. The Husky is slow-revving and mild. The KTM is jumpy and nervous by comparison—but very average compared to a 250cc Japanese MXer.

Husqvarna gave the 360 a lot of power, but put it all in the upper-mid range. The bike doesn't have a strong Open-class hit off the bottom at all. In order to smooth out the surge of power that comes later, the bike has tons of crank mass. It's hard to imagine a bike with more flywheel effect. You can blip the throttle, wait a few seconds, then drop the clutch with no gas and the bike will still take off without stalling.

With all that flywheel and such mild power off the bottom, the Husky is extremely smooth at slow speeds. If you ride in sloppy, rocky, awful, no-traction conditions, you will never find a better engine. We took the bike to the Virginia City GP and learned several things: First, you don't want much power when you are basically climbing a rockpile. You want something that will hold a steady rpm and not spin or break loose with a sudden burst of power. The Husky is perfect for that. It will run all day at double-digit rpm without stalling or loading up. Second, when you are through with the rockpile, you want to have power. The Husky is perfect for that, too. Rev it up a little and it accelerates pretty darn hard, even by 500 standards. It flattens out a little early, so you have to keep running in a narrow

rpm range to make full use of those 360cc of muscle.

Once again, the KTM is completely different. The motor is responsive, fast-revving and semi-hard-hitting. Funny. Earlier in the year when we rode the 300 KTM back to back with the 250 KTM, we thought the 300 was mellow off the bottom. Compared to the Husky, the 300 positively snaps when you open the throttle. We thought the 300 had a smooth and progressively building powerband. Again, compared to the 360, the KTM rips through its powerband to a screeching climax. Everything is relative.

You find yourself blipping the KTM's throttle to maintain a certain speed where you would just hold the Husky steady. How do they compare in outright power? The Husky will outpull the KTM by a slight margin. It has a few extra cubes to play with and it makes use of them.

WP/SHOWA SHOWDOWN

We expected the suspension contest to be a one-way slaughter. The KTM is using While Power shock and fork and the Husky is using a Showa fork and shock. It should have been like the Little Big Horn with nothing but crossed damper rods to show where the outmatched White Power dampers hit the ground.

It started off as expected. In the motocross part of our test, the Showas worked pretty well. The Husky fork bottomed occasionally but didn't hurt anybody. The KTM felt gushy and unstable, plus it bottomed. We figured that both forks needed an increase in the fork spring rate.

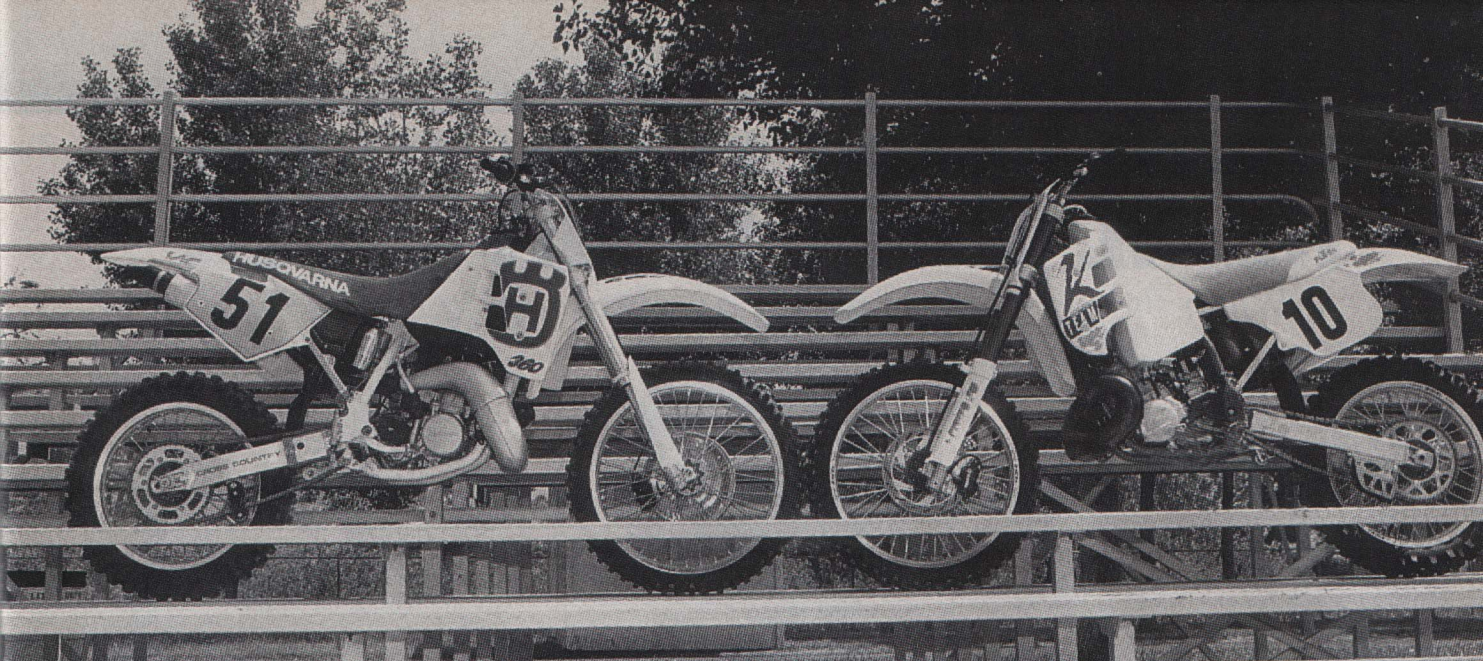
We changed our minds when we took the bikes on a rocky trail ride. The White Power fork sucked up the rocks and bumps superbly, while the Showas seemed to hit every rock and transfer the impact directly to the rider. Eventually, we backed the compression damping adjuster all the way out, but still the Husky didn't respond to the little bumps as well as did the KTM, which had its compression adjusters set at five clicks out. The Husky's fork might have been a little better on an MX track, but the KTM's fork was a *lot* better off-road.

We will call it a dead heat as far as the rear suspension systems are concerned. Both systems like to dance around a little in the rear, and we spun the adjusters until we got dizzy without much improvement over the stock settings.

THE BEST & THE REST

The Husqvarna probably is the most beautiful dirt bike made. The styling is attractive, the castings are flawless and the bike is bristling with neat little features. We liked the clutch cable adjuster, we liked the quick-release seat, we liked the grab handles at the rear of the seat on both sides and the seat cover's leather (well—it looks like leather) reinforcing at points of high wear.

We didn't like the black gas tank that's



so hard to see into. We didn't like the small filler cap and we didn't like the hard clutch pull and always-in-need-of-lube cables. The seat also is a little low, especially if you have long legs—standing up takes too much energy.

On the KTM, we liked the super-easy clutch pull, the O-ring chain, and we didn't like the levers and the fact that the bike always is difficult to jet. We changed needle, pilots and mainjets, but wound up just one step leaner than stock in each case (180 main, 53 pilot second notch on the stock needle). The bike would still foul an occasional plug. These settings might be completely different where you live. They probably are.

THE VERDICTS

When you have two motorcycles that are meant for as many different uses and as many different potential buyers as are these two, you have to have several different bottom lines. Think of this as one of those who-done-its with several different endings.

Motocross. Neither of these bikes is designed specifically with motocross in mind, but the KTM still is pretty darn good at it. With a little stiffer fork spring, it might be considered the best all-around Open-class MXer. The Husky, on the other hand, is too slow-revving and too slow-handling on an MX course. You can get used to it and make it go just as fast as the KTM, but you won't have as much fun doing it.

Western enduro. Off-road, the scales are much more even. We still would consider the KTM the best choice for desert riding, though. Its fork will absorb rocks that send the Husky spiraling off line. Only when it gets really tight will the

	KTM 300DXC	HUSQVARNA 360 WXC
Engine type	Liquid-cooled, case-reed, power-valve 2-stroke	Liquid-cooled, reed-valve, power-valve 2-stroke
Displacement	297cc	348.8cc
Bore and stroke	72.0mm x 73.0mm	78.0mmx73.0mm
Carburetion	38mm Keihin	38mm Mikuni TMX
Fuel tank capacity	3.2 gal.	3.3 gal.
Gearing	14/50	15/48
Lighting coil	Yes	Yes
EPA legal in stock form	No	No
Spark arrester	Yes	Yes
Claimed dry weight	221 lb.	209 lb.
Running wt. w/no fuel	231 lb.	242 lb.
Wheelbase	58.4" (1483mm)	58.3" (1480mm)
Rake/trail	27.5°/4.1"	27°/4.3"
Ground clearance	15.2" (385mm)	14.8" (376mm)
Seat height	37.8" (960mm)	36.2" (920mm)
Tire size and type:		
Front	80/100 x 21 Metzeler Unicross	80/100x18 Dunlop K752F
Rear	110/100 x 18 Metzeler Unicross	110/100x18 Dunlop K752
Suspension:		
Front	White Power 40mm inverted cartridge, adj. comp./reb., 11.8" (300mm) travel	Showa inverted cartridge, adj. comp./reb., 12.0" (305mm) travel
Rear	White power aluminum piggyback, adj. comp./reb., 12.6 in (320mm) travel	Showa aluminum piggyback, adj. comp./reb., 12.6" (320mm) travel
Country of origin	Austria	Italy
Suggested retail price	\$4575	\$4490
Distributor:		
	KTM America 1906 Broadway Lorain, OH 44052 (216) 246-1060	Cagiva North America 5 Washington Ave. Fairfield, NJ 07004 (201) 882-9141
PARTS REPLACEMENT COST		
Piston	\$147.09*	\$114.75
Rings	55.30	13.25
Air filter	27.45	10.43
Clutch plate (drive)	7.02 (7)	11.69 (7)
Clutch plate (driven)	12.50 (8)	6.22 (6)
Front sprocket	21.64	13.25
Rear sprocket	57.75	30.98
Front brake pads	33.07	47.00
Rear brake pads	22.95	35.94

*Includes wrist pin, rings, clips.

Husky steal away the advantage. There just isn't all that much tight stuff in the west.

Eastern enduro. When the going gets really difficult, where you don't dare open the throttle for fear of not finding traction and losing all the ground you gained in the last five minutes, the Husky is the best bike. In the Blackwaters of the

world, the 360 will be hard to beat. We have never encountered a bike that could hold lower rpm without fear of stalling. On one hand, the Husky has the engine of a trials bike; on the other, it can jam with a full-size Open bike when it has to. Yes, it is a strange-feeling motorcycle, but no one said strange can't be good.

It's just strange. □