

Universal four-stroke question #1: With all the resources at the disposal of Honda Motor Co., why can't those guys build a lightweight four-stroke dirt bike that still has good horsepower and overall performance?

Answer: They can.

Universal four-stroke question #2: Then why don't they?

Answer: There's no money in it for them. You see, Honda is a big player. So are Suzuki, Yamaha and Kawasaki. Before they ever get interested in building a particular dirt bike, they think about it. They think about it a lot, which is *why* they are big players. First they think about how much the bike would cost to develop and produce, and then they think

about how much it would have to sell for. Then they study the market. Remember Economics 101? The higher the price for any commodity, the fewer the buyers. Honda figured that the number of buyers who are interested in a fairly high-priced thumper is too little for the company to make any money off the deal. They can use those same resources to develop a new

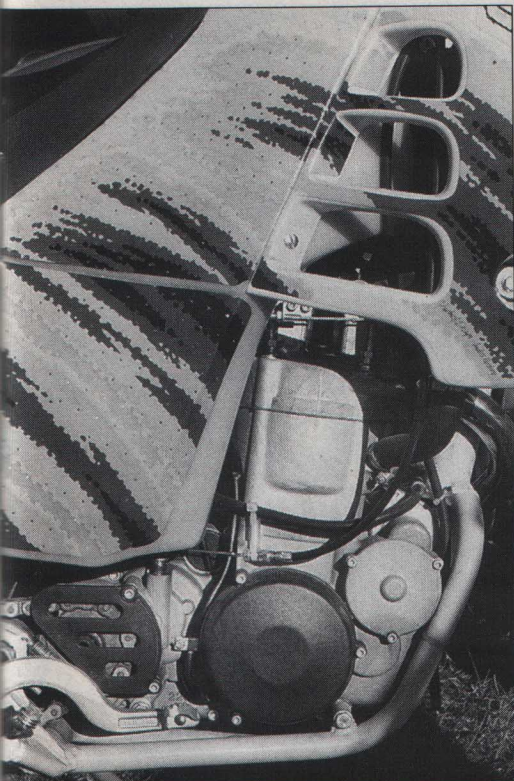
BATTERIES INCLUDED

With or without the electric starter, it's still the lightest

By the staff of DIRT BIKE



Husabergs haven't changed that much since they were introduced to America. They still are light, fast and work awesome in the tight stuff. They are still pretty crude, but life is full of little glitches like that.



The Husaberg 600 motor still is the lightest big four-stroke powerplant you will find in a motorcycle—even with the starter.

600cc street bike, or some other big seller. Husaberg, on the other hand, ain't Honda. This Swedish company could care less if the market is small. Quite frankly, the firm can't produce very many motorcycles in a year, so they *have* to cater to very small markets. The same numbers that are too small to interest Honda look enormous to Husaberg.

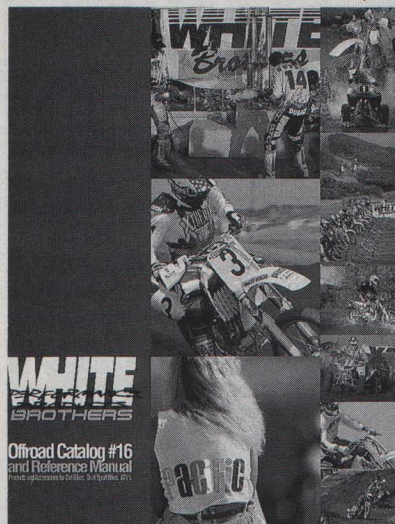
All that makes perfect sense. Things get weird, though, when you consider what Husaberg has been able to achieve, despite being so small. The small group of engineers shouldn't be able to design and build anything all that special. They just don't have Honda's resources. From day one, however, Husaberg has been building bikes that have startled everyone. The bikes make power, they are light and Husaberg always seems to have something else cooking in the back room.

For '95, the something else is electric starting. By February, Husaberg will be selling electric start models that *still* are lighter than any kickstart, four-stroke dirt bikes on the market.

WHAT DID THEY DO?

Okay, break out your adding machine. A Husaberg 600 in enduro trim tipped the official *Dirt Bike* scale at 245 pounds. Not that you would have to weigh it; you know that the bike is light as soon as you ride it. For comparison, the KTM 620 made the same scale read 273 pounds, the Honda XR600R 281 pounds and the Kawasaki KLX650 303 pounds.

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There are two ways to tell if the guy on the Husaberg has an electric-start model or not. First, if the bike has a starter motor cast into the front of the cases. Second, if the rider doesn't invent new and creative expletives every time he stalls the motor.

Now throw in what a battery weighs—we figure about three pounds if it's a heavy one. A starter motor can weigh about five pounds. Add three more pounds for gears and wire and things. So now you have a 256-pound four-stroke with an electric starter. That means it weighs less than any current Open-class (over 500cc) four-stroke. Even if we are cynical and say that the electric starter will add 18 pounds (as it did with the ATK 605), the bike still is the lightest. What about the ATK? That company, after all, was the first to offer an electric starter on a full dirt bike. The current 605 weighs 284 pounds.

Husaberg has mounted prototype electric starters on all three of its models now (the 350, 501 and 600). Basically, there are no changes involved besides mounting the starter in front of the engine and locating a conventional 12-volt battery where the airbox sits on most bikes. Husabergs, if you recall, have air-filter elements mounted virtually all over the bike—with the exception of the usual place under the seat. The airbox is within the right side of the fuel tank, and an extra element was added last year on the frame backbone. That leaves lots of space for the battery. The starter is the same one that Rotax uses on its four-stroke motor, so it *should* be reliable.

GOOD NEWS & BAD NEWS

That brings us to our brief riding impression of the 600. At the Tulsa ISDE, Husaberg had the very first electric-start 600 on hand, along with a standard '95 600. In Sweden, the electric starter has been in use for almost a year now, but only on the 350s. The 600 was built especially for America. The good news was that the 600 fired up almost immediately. Usu-

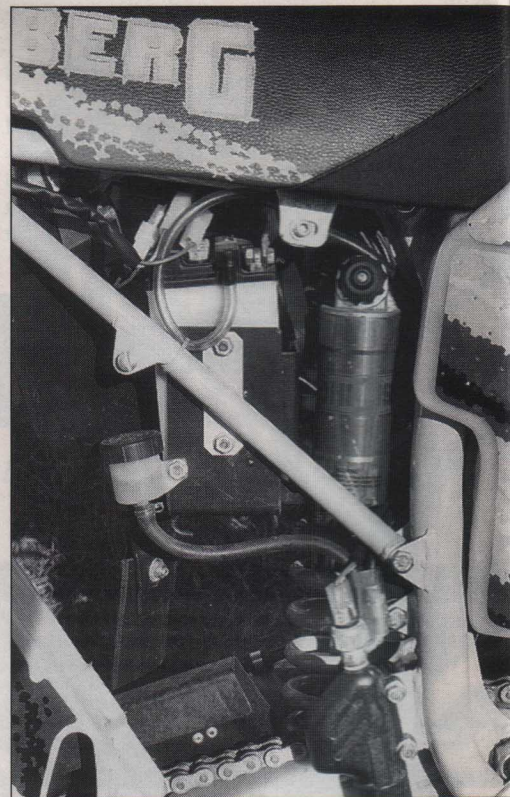
ally the bike is a bear to start—not because it's cold-blooded but because the kickstarter is located so high. With the button, we could care less where the kickstarter was. The button was on the handlebar.

The bad news was that the electric starter broke immediately. The bike had sat in the pits and every single person who walked by had pressed the button. The gears within might have been fine for the 350, but they weren't beefy enough for the prototype 600. Thomas Gustafsson, the designer of the bike, was on hand and nodded as if he expected the failure. "I knew we would have to make it stronger before production," he said.

So for the rest of the day, we rode the 600 without the electric starter. That's not such a bad sentence. For those of you who have never ridden a 600 Husaberg (which means almost everyone), we offer this summary:

Starting: You have to lean the bike over just to reach the kickstarter. If you can actually get your foot on it, the bike starts easily, although it is prone to the occasional four-stroke, no-start fit. When it doesn't want to start, you have to invoke the "try something else" rule. In other words, if you have the choke on, turn it off. If it's off, turn it on. If you are kicking with the throttle shut, try kicking with the throttle partially open. If nothing else works, run it through with the compression release open a few times before starting all over. Something is bound to work.

Power: Outrageous. Not only is the bike stupid fast, it has the world's widest powerband. Right now the 600 is the most powerful enduro bike available. The nice thing about it is that you don't have to use all that power if you don't want to.



Hey, isn't there supposed to be an airbox there? With the air filter located in the fuel tank (as all Husabergs have been for years), there is lots of room for a regular 12-volt battery under the seat.

It's very controllable.

Fork: The Husaberg still uses a Dutch White Power fork, which is okay, but nothing to write Sweden about. It was set up quite well for the Tulsa rocks, but from experience we know that it won't work as well in sandy areas where the whoops grow tall and stiff spring and damping rates are the order of the day.

Shock: In the rear, you will find an Ohlins shock, which is good news as far as we are concerned. Like the fork, it is set up softly for slow riding in tight, rocky areas. Odd, because the engine begs to be opened up and used anywhere *except* tight, rocky areas.

Handling: The Husaberg is a stable bike, and it takes some getting used to in tight turns. It rarely has any headshake. To put it in thumper perspective, the bike is more agile than a Husky 610 but not as quick-steering as a Honda XR600R. It owes much of its agility to its light weight rather than to its frame geometry. It can ride a ridge or stay on a fast trail without effort, whereas the Honda would be a handful simply because the XR offends the laws of gravity so badly.

Comfort: Don't plan on riding the Husaberg across the U.S. It vibrates slightly, and the seat is as hard as a rock. This bike is made for going fast, not going far.

Price: Sorry, Husaberg hasn't yet set prices for any of its new models. □

