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ON THE COVER: What Yamaha rider won five of the first six supercrosses this year, has been on *Dirt Bike's* cover six times in the last three years and has the initials Damon Bradshaw? Give up? So do we. Photo by Ron Lawson, design by DeWest, color separations by D.I.S.C.

BLIND DATE

*Good-lookin' . . .
& a great personality*

By the testosteroneal DIRT BIKE staff

Big four-strokes are a lot like blind dates.

You know within five minutes if you are going to be in heaven or crawling (or crashing) through the nearest bathroom window.

Take the Honda XR600R. It's short, spunky, agile, a little heavy, and wide in the midsection—like Paula Abdul. For the ultimate time with the Abdul 600, you have to spend big chips for baubles like an HRC 630 kit and alloy silencer. Spend enough on her and the Paulamobile will dance to anything, making you feel totally hero.

A Husaberg would have to be Julia Roberts—exotic, beautiful, thin in all the right places, light, fast on her feet, well-built, lots of fun, and hideously expensive. Few can afford her.

After spending some quality time with the '91 Husqvarna 610, we found it to be a lot like Sophia Loren. There was lots of quality there, no doubt, but it had an old-fashioned feel and the plastic needed a total make-over. An older guy might like the Husq-loreñ, but we younger guys like more exuberance and excitement in a dance partner.

So, when Husqvarna tried to set us up with the '92 Husky WXC610, we recoiled in horror. Joe called up images of Dan Quayle taking the oath of office with his free hand on the doomsday but-

ton. Ron stabbed himself in the web of the thumb with a pencil. Tim chewed on a piece of aluminum foil. "Really," they coaxed, "you'll like it. The bike is gorgeous this year—great legs, lots of fun, a thinner midsection . . . and it has a great personality."

After an hour of browbeating the staff and questioning our manhood, Husqvarna finally convinced us to accept the date.

NOT SO CONTINENTAL

Husqvarnas have always been oh-so continental. Europeans have a certain way of doing things, and you couldn't knock them off their line of thought with a demolition ball. Change comes slowly, if at all. If what works in Europe doesn't work in America, then Americans ride the bikes wrong. Yanks should quit being troublemakers and learn to ride like they do in the Old Country.

That type of thinking almost killed the Euro marques, so KTM and Husqvarna had to make some changes to make their bikes attractive to American buyers. Cagiva, Husqvarna's parent company, reversed a trend that was almost as old as Rome itself and went to the Orient for componentry, sort of like Marco Polo. Japan now contributes Showa suspension, Nissin brakes and Dunlop tires for each Husky (along with Mikuni carbs on two-strokes), blending Oriental function and Continental elegance, in hopes that Americans will find Husqvarnas appealing again.

If you've caught our WXE360 (November '91) and WXE125 (May '92) tests, you know they succeeded with the two-strokes, but what about the thumpers? We liked the '91 WMX610 (tested in February '91), once we got used to the soft suspension, funky clutch and long-feeling chassis, but that's like saying we enjoyed our date once we learned to appreciate opera. To be successful in America, Husqvarna would have to produce a bike that anyone would be comfortable with from the first moment.

To do that, Cagiva made a whole lot of changes to the 610. The motor got a larger-diameter clutch with a revised actuation system and new organic plates. To

speed clutch work, the left case is now a two-piece unit. The crank was lightened to make it rev quicker, and its rod has improved lubrication. A new airbox has a larger filter and tool-less access. A new two-into-one-into-two exhaust system combines good flow and quiet running. Chassis mods are numerous, with the most notable being Showa suspension at both ends. A new, more progressive linkage mates with a lighter swingarm. Wheelbase is a tad shorter, due to less trail on the fork. Besides Nissin components, both brakes have 20mm larger discs (260mm front, 220mm rear). The left seal on the rear hub is improved, and special handlebars cut vibration.

CAN WE DANCE WITH YOUR DATE?

She looks sweet in the press photos, but you have to see this bike up close to

The Dunlop 752s hook up well on this sort of goo, but the front is pretty scary on looser or harder soils. Turning is much better this year, despite the skinny front tire.



truly appreciate it. Detailing is awesome, making the Honda look like a just-awakened Roseanne Arnold.

Most thumper blind dates are ended trying to get 'er started. The WXC is the easiest-starting big thumper ever (aside from the electric-start bikes), but its kick-starter is placed high on the case, making it a bit awkward. The 610 has an automatic decompression system for starting, plus a manual one. Cold, it fires on the first kick, after priming it with four or five kicks with the manual lever engaged (gas on, choke on, no throttle). Hot, it almost always starts on the first kick.

Fit is awesome. The bike feels super-thin in the midsection and the seat is rounded at the front. Peg/bar/seat relationship is great and feels natural to a wide range of riders. It's a little difficult to go from sitting to standing, though. We



Jimmy Lewis was the Husky 610's blind date for photos. Within five minutes, he was asking if he could take her home, then to the ISDE Qualifiers, Hare & Hound Nationals and the Australian ISDE.

took it for a test spin and promptly bottomed the fork, so compression was cranked in two clicks. The shock was cranked in one click for good measure.

With the introductions done, we got down to the nitty-gritty—motocross, desert, tight trails, tighter trees, rock-infested stream beds, hills, cliff jumps—the usual. Suspension action is soft on the small, high-speed hits, like it should be. The

shock soaks up killer hits and huge whoops without a whimper, but the fork bottoms on G-outs and cruncher landings. Motocross taxes the fork big time, so we raised the oil level to 130mm, rather than put in heavier springs and lose the subtlety over rocks and roots.

We couldn't get our date to dance, except in really loose sand. Stability, as expected, is typical Husqvarna. It likes going straight, even on huge rolling whoops. Loose sand isn't a whole lot of fun, though. The front end feels very heavy, and it wants to wander and knife in at every opportunity. The Dunlop 752 is simply too skinny to float as it should



Kevin Hines has signed with Husqvarna to contest the WXE350 in Nationals and Qualifiers. Here he styles our 610, but he has to adjust his riding style to the Hoosier's "plow-through" way of doing things. ►



BLIND DATE



HUSQVARNA 610WXC

Engine type	.....SOHC, 4-valve, liquid-cooled 4-stroke
Displacement	.....577cc
Bore and stroke	.....98.0mm x 76.5mm
Carburetion	.....40mm Dellorto
Fuel tank capacity	.....2.4 gal. (9.1L)
Gearing	.....15/48
Lighting coil	.....Yes
Spark arrester	.....Yes
EPA-legal	.....Yes
Claimed weight	.....256 lb.
Running weight w/ no fuel	.....266lb.
Wheelbase	.....58.9 in. (1496mm)
Rake/trail	.....27°/4.4 in.
Ground clearance	.....14.6 in. (371mm)
Seat height	.....36.8 in. (935mm)
Tire size and type:	
Front	.....80/100-21 Dunlop 752F
Rear	.....110/100-18 Dunlop 752
Suspension:	
Front	.....Showa inverted cartridge, adj. reb./comp, 12.0 in. (305mm) travel
Rear	.....Showa aluminum piggyback, adj. prld./reb./comp., 12.5 in. (317mm) travel
Country of origin	.....Italy
Suggested retail price	.....\$4890
Distributor/manufacturer:	
Cagiva North America	
5 Washington Ave.	
Fairfield, NJ 07004	
(201) 882-9141	

PARTS REPLACEMENT COST

Piston	.....\$152.30*
Rings	.....31.00
Air filter	.....10.43
Clutch plate (drive)	.....8.08 (8)
Clutch plate (driven)	.....6.22 (9)
Front sprocket	.....17.70
Rear sprocket	.....32.15
Front brake pads	.....47.00
Rear brake pads	.....35.94

*Includes rings, wrist pin, clips.

with all that weight on it.

Turning is the big surprise. With the decreased trail, the bike is much more willing to bend around trees and follow rutted corners with minimal input from the rider. It's still pretty long for snaking through trees, but the Nissin-powered brakes make it much easier to brakeslide-pivot through the tightest sections. They don't fade, as in the past, either.

GET YOUR MOTORS RUNNIN'

At first, we were disappointed with the WXC's motor, but it loosened up with a few tankfuls of gas. We remembered last year's WMX as being a rocket, and this bike didn't strike us as being fast. You see, the WXC and WXE are imported into America; the WMX is not for '92 (Husqvarna doesn't feel it can compete with the Japanese in the MX market here). The WMX reportedly has a different head and hotter cam than the off-road models. Pete Murray, a resident tester and Euro-bike madman, plans on slipping a WMX cam into his WXC for more ponies up top. For motocross, this might be a good idea, along with heavier fork springs and an aftermarket silencer.

For play riding, hillclimbing and off-road racing, the WXC motor is really sweet. It will plonk along at insanely low speeds, then pull itself out of trouble with a tweak of the throttle. There are no glitches or spikes in the powerband—it just builds speed until terrain or fear force you to let off of the throttle. Top-end is very healthy.

Clutch action and pull are in the ballpark, but brutal slipping in really tight uphill sections overheats the clutch, and the lever migrates towards the handlebar

with alarming speed. Shifting is on the notchy side, but we have yet to miss a shift. Neutral is easy to find, too.

ALL IS NOT WELL, THOUGH

Blind dates are rarely perfect, and the WXC isn't, either. Two annoying glitches surfaced. First, Husqvarnas come with formed radiator hoses where normal bikes have T-fittings and automotive-quality coolant hoses. Well, she overheated on a long, sandy uphill section, and one of the formed hoses blew before the

radiator cap could release the pressure. So we had to partially dismantle the bike on the trail, find the leak and deal with the run in the hose (who's got some nail polish in his toolpack?), then use our drinking water to replace the lost coolant.

That's nothing, though. Problem number two is pretty major. Despite being over 10 pounds lighter than our XR630R, the WXC610 has a very heavy feel in the rough. Where any two-stroke and even the 280-pound XR will float over bumps, the WXC just wants to plow right through terrain like the farmgirl from hell. Part of this is from the long chassis and nose-heavy weight bias, part comes from the super-subtle suspension. It is very hard to loft the front wheel over obstacles, even with a stab at the clutch (which is pretty pointless on a thumper, anyway), and it's virtually impossible to preload over one bump to miss the next. The ol' girl just wants to plow a furrow through things the Abdul XR glides over gracefully.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO GO OUT AGAIN?

Husqvarna turned Sophia Loren into Christina Applegate in one fell swoop. It has the motor of doom, easy starting, subtle suspension, agile turning, a slim mid-section and curves in all the right places. It's probably the best-looking bike to ever sit on a showroom floor, and it has a great personality. If Cagiva would get rid of those cheap hoses and give the ol' girl some levitation lessons (or a shorter wheelbase or a more rearward weight bias), any thumper fan in America would go out with her.

Again and again and again. □

