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photo: Mr. Bonello

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YZ400F vs. 250 SHOOTOUT CHAMP:
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DIRT BIKE

DIRT BIKE

SUPER
OFF-ROAD HOP-UPS

MARCH 1998



- **HONDA** CRE250
- **KAWASAKI** KXE250
- **YAMAHA** WRE250
- **SUZUKI** RME250
- **SUMMERS'** XR250R

FIRST LOOK AT THE 1998
FACTORY WORKS BIKES:
PLUS McGRATH'S YZ SECRETS



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ISSN 0364-1546



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FIELD OPERATIVE/ R. HAWKINS
CODE NAME/ "JAVELIN"

FOUR-STROKE ASSAULT!



Randy Hawkins
code name: Javelin

Hawkins equipped with breakthrough technology.

Yamaha has outfitted Agent Hawkins with the all-new WR400F. Motivated by 399ccs of high-tech four-stroke thrust, the WR has a wide-ratio 5-speed transmission capable of negotiating tricky off-road sections at any cadence. Built on a race-winning, YZ-inspired chassis, this lightweight thumper is primed for long-haul duty with a 3.2-gallon fuel tank, skidplate, U.S.F.S. spark arrestor and enduro lighting.

WR400F™

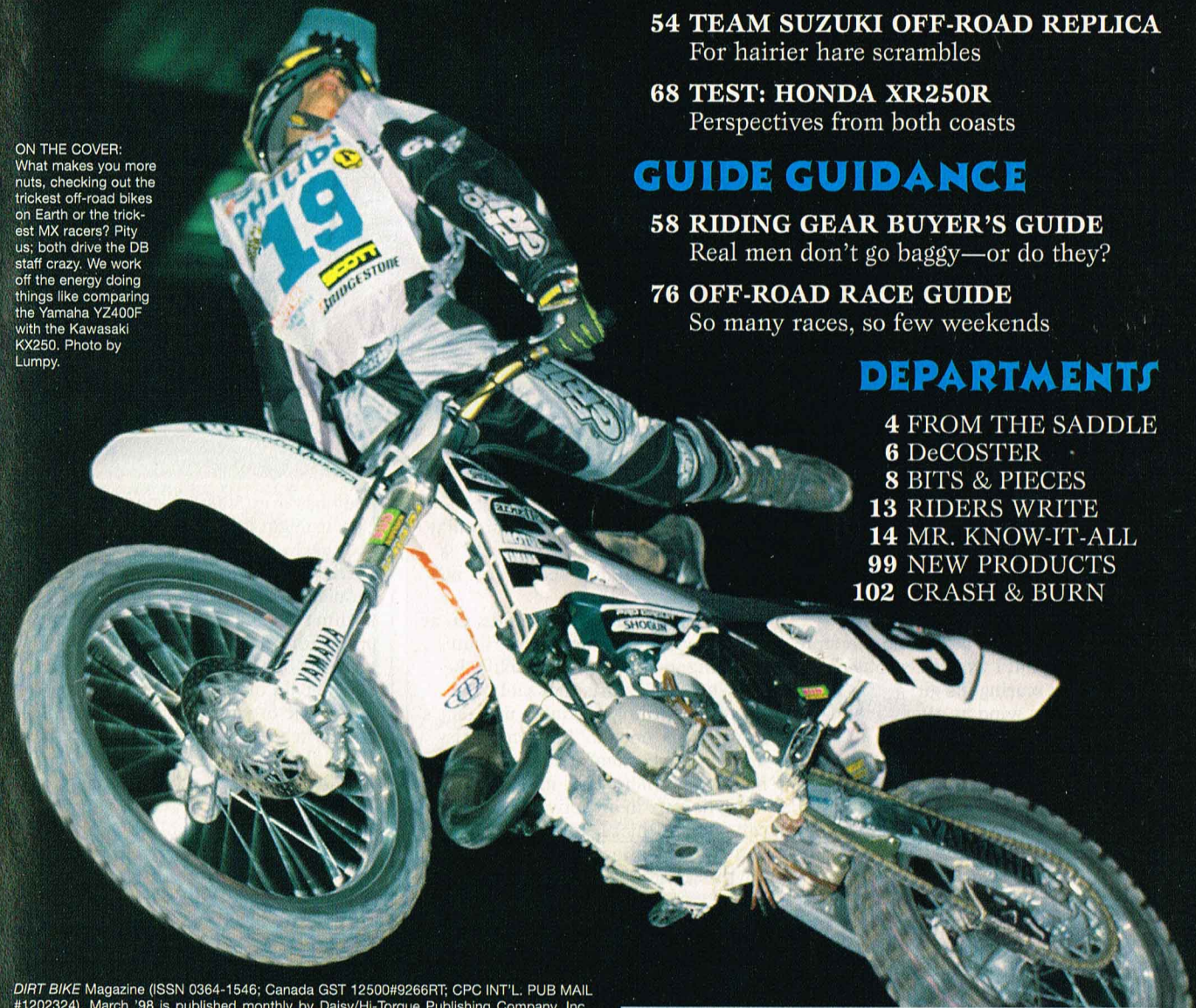
YAMAHA

1998 WR400F model not available in CA. Photographed using a highly skilled professional rider. Do not attempt these maneuvers. © 1998 Yamaha Motor Corporation, U.S.A. (Cypress, CA 90630). Dress properly for your ride with a helmet, eye protection, long-sleeved shirt, long pants, gloves and boots. Yamaha and the Motorcycle Safety Foundation encourage you to ride safely and respect the environment. For more information regarding the MSF rider course, call 1-800-446-9227. Do not drink and ride. It is illegal and dangerous. Visit our website at www.yamaha.com.

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ON THE COVER:
What makes you more nuts, checking out the trickiest off-road bikes on Earth or the trickiest MX racers? Pity us; both drive the DB staff crazy. We work off the energy doing things like comparing the Yamaha YZ400F with the Kawasaki KX250. Photo by Lumpy.



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WARNING: Much of the action depicted in this magazine is potentially dangerous. Virtually all of the riders seen in our photos are experienced experts or professionals. Do not attempt to duplicate any stunts that are beyond your own capabilities. Always wear the appropriate safety gear. *Dirt Bike* does all of its testing and photography legally on public land, or private land with permission from the owner(s), and we abide by the local laws concerning vehicle registration and muffler/spark arrestor requirements. We are not responsible for quality of aftermarket accessories we use.



CANADIAN YAMAHA WR250

The first step is finding one. The second is making it better

By the staff of DIRT BIKE

There's one sure way to create demand for something: tell people they can't have it. For example: Yamaha's motocross team still loves the snappy power that the YZ250 produced back in '94. The cylinder changed in '95 and they say the motor became too tame. So the typical pro MXer just throws away the new top end and uses one from an older bike.

Off-road riders, on the other hand, love the smooth powerband of the new YZ motor. Yet the U.S. model Yamaha WR250 comes with the old '94 YZ engine configuration. So enduro guys all ride YZs instead of WRs. Is something wrong with this picture?

In Canada things are different. There, the '98 Yamaha WR is based on the '98 YZ, *not* the '94 YZ. In fact, you have to look hard at the northern WR to discover that it isn't a YZ. The only differences between a U.S. YZ and a Canadian WR are an 18-inch rear wheel, a lighting coil, gear ratios (all of them), suspension settings and a kickstand. Unfortunately, it doesn't have a larger gas tank. Maybe that's a good thing, considering how badly shaped the tank is on the U.S. WR250.

HERE'S THE CATCH

You really can't ride enduros on a Canadian WR in stock form, any more than you can ride a YZ in enduros. Our WR test bike had been worked over by Kevin Hines at E-Line. He is the same guy who built the CRE and the KXE tested in this issue. That's Kevin's niche; he takes motocross bikes and turns them into enduro bikes. Or, in this case, he takes enduro bikes and turns them into *better* enduro bikes.

The first thing the bike needed was a bunch of bolt-on stuff. It got an IMS gas tank that actually is slimmer than the stocker and holds one more gallon. He put

◀ *There are only a few differences between the Canadian WR and the American YZ: gear ratios, 18" rear wheel, lighting coil and kickstand. You have to supply the big tank and handguards at the very least.*



on enduro engineering handguards and all of his various carbon fiber protectors, from the pipe guard to the fork guard to the chain guide. He also installed a WER skid plate with built-on bash bars to protect the water pump and the ignition.

Here's a note from the redundancy department: he installed an E-Line lighting coil kit, right on top of the existing ignition, which already has a lighting coil. That means that his bike has enough electrical power to light a small stadium. Why double up? Primarily for the additional flywheel weight, but according to Hines, there's another benefit. He says the additional magnets in the flywheel have a tendency to smooth power out more effectively than just dead flywheel weight. He even has dyno charts that show . . . well, something. We are not sure what. The bike with the kit appears to make more power longer. It may be so, but we reserve the right to snicker in

Kevin Hines thought that the Yamaha was the easiest MXer to convert into an enduro bike. The power is already smooth enough and the suspension isn't half bad.

the back of class. The only other things he did to the motor were pretty much the same things he does for KXs and CRs: a V-Force reed cage and a FMF pipe and spark arrester.

Like his other conversions, Hines had Factory Connection do the suspension work. The WR starts off softer than the YZ. Stock, it comes with 0.42-kg/mm fork springs and a 4.6-kg/mm shock spring. Factory Connection left the fork springs in place, but bumped the shock up a notch, to the YZ's stock 4.8. Both ends were revalved for tight, choppy trails.

HERE'S THE BAD NEWS

Sorry to report that the Canadian WR, as tested, is better than the American

WR in every way. Aside from the ridiculous gas tank, the American version has always suffered from nagging jetting problems. For some odd reason, it comes with an antique round-slide Mikuni carburetor. The E-Line WR, on the other hand, runs crisp and clean with stock jetting. The powerband is much smoother, too. Part is due to the more modern top end (the one the MX team doesn't like), and part is due to the additional flywheel. The motor's bottom-end hit is sharp enough to leap over tall stumps with a single blip of the throttle, but it's controllable. You don't ever get more power than you mean to, so it's easy to keep traction in the slippery stuff.

Compared to the CR and the KX, the WR has a middle-of-the-road motor. It doesn't have the attention-grabbing low-end snap of the Kawasaki or the screaming top end of the Honda. It's actually a very good compromise on both fronts. For tight trails, the smooth low-end makes the WR easier to ride than the Kawasaki, but the Honda is tough to beat in that department. In outright acceleration, the Yamaha will be pulled by both the CRE and the KXE. That's pretty much how the three motors stack up in the motocross world, too.

In the handling department, the WR might well have everything beat. It's *sooo* stable. The bike actually makes you lazy. You know that any given rock or root isn't going to do anything to mess you up, so you just sit down and plow through things. You can even take an impact on one handguard or the other from a resilient jackpine and the WR goes straight. On top of that, the bike feels small, light and easy to toss around. It's much more nimble than the American WR—not only is the YZ-based chassis more compact, but the IMS tank makes climbing forward easy. It's one of the best tanks that IMS makes.

In sharp, 180-degree turns, the bike stays planted—it's especially good in rutted turns, where you can just pick a slot and stay put. The footpegs might be a little low or a little far apart, but you learn quickly to keep your feet out of harm's way.

We don't know what the stock Canadian-spec suspension was like because we never tried it. Hines had the fork and shock modified for New England terrain before we laid eyes on the bike. That's fine with us. The Factory Connection stuff was good for twisty trails. The terrain around the E-Line shop is choppy. In places, the whoops actually grow tall enough to rival anything in Florida or California. The speeds are lower, though, so you can't generally clear two or three whoops at a time. Usually, you get sucked into each one, so the suspension can't be too soft. The Yamaha did a great job of not bottoming and not floundering on the



Factory Connection is a New England-based company that knows pretty much what it takes to ride in that area. FC did the fork and shock on all three E-Line conversions.



MX guys like the '94 YZ power, but the new YZ doesn't come that way anymore. Enduro guys like the new top end, but the American WR comes with the older-style engine. The Canadian WR finally matches the right engine with the right rider.

face of the bumps, and still smoothing out little stuff. Compared to the other bikes, the Yamaha was most similar to the Kawasaki—it was only hampered by a slight tendency to move around on its suspension. It's no wonder the KYB components on the KX and YZ aren't that different.

SIGN ME UP

So are we telling everyone to storm across the border and buy up Canadian WR250s? Not really. The U.S. YZ250 is basically the same bike. If you really want to set up a Canadian WR for enduros, you will have a little work to do. It needs a bigger tank, handguards and a spark arrester, and the motor and suspension are still too MX-oriented for trail riding. In other words, it needs all the same things that a YZ needs. The only bonus that you can't get here is the wide-ratio gearbox. That might be useful if you plan on doing a lot of fire roads, but it's of no value on trails.

We know, it's much more fun to want something you can't have. Our advice: buy a YZ, have E-Line work it over and tell people it's the Canadian version. That will really make them crazy.

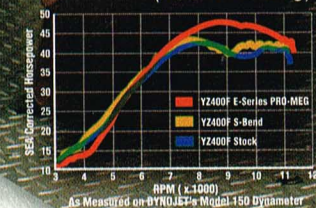
For further information, contact E-Line at (508) 295-0812, Factory Connection at (800) 221-7560 or WER at (908) 637-6385 (For prices, refer to CRE test).

E-LINE YAMAHA WR250

- Gearing:** 13/50.
- Main jet:** Stock.
- Needle:** Stock.
- Pilot:** Stock.
- Fork springs:** 0.42 kg/mm.
- Shock spring:** 4.8 kg/mm.
- Fuel capacity:** 3.0 gal.
- Rear tire:** 19-inch Trelleborg 754 Ten Master.
- Front tire:** 21-inch Trelleborg 914 Maxi Grip.
- Triple clamp:** Applied, stock offset.
- Brakes:** Stock with Fastline hose. □

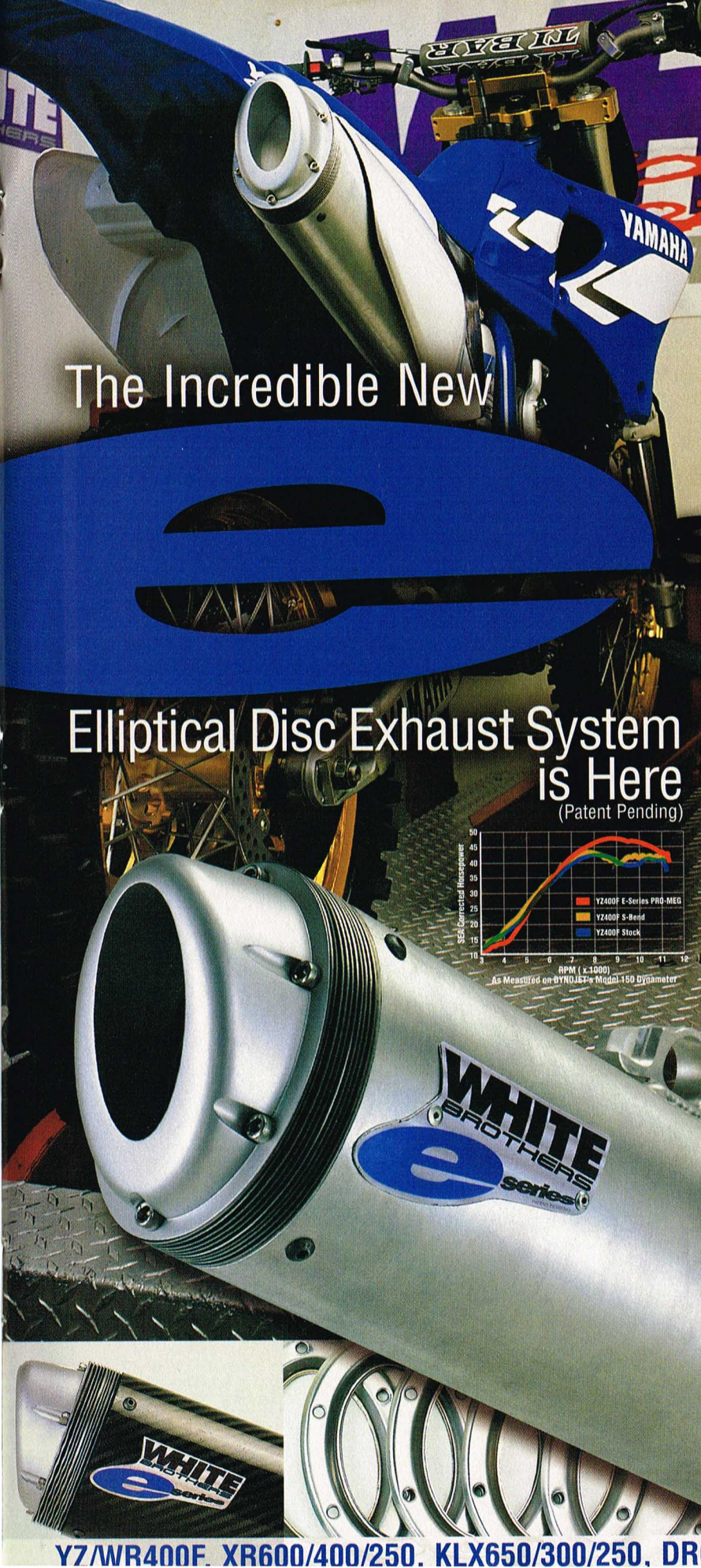
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