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ON THE COVER: Shane Trittler explodes a L.A. County Raceway berm for the lens of Torquin' Tim, while Christie Martin puts her best leg forward for Pat Carrigan's Nikon.

KTM provided the photo of the "Mint Condition" 1991 540DXC. Cover design by Dennis West; color separations by Valley Film.

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## **DIRT BIKE'S BOOT BUYER'S GUIDE**

t's possible to ride a dirt bike wearing something other than off-road motorcycle boots, but without them you won't ride very fast. A motorcycle boot gives you a sensitive control of the bike, protects you from it and the forces it generates and keeps your feet dry in adverse riding conditions. Only a boot designed specifically for this complex job can do it well. Boots for dirt biking are sophisticated, high-tech pieces of equipment and boot shoppers must face the fact that there's a fairly direct relationship between price and performance. The more expensive boots are going to be more comfortable to wear, especially for fast riding and racing. They'll also be more protective and durable because they're designed better, are made of better materials and are manufactured with greater care. There's no such thing as a cheap generic boot with the quality and features of the best boots, but there are many good, less expensive boots.

We've listed the better boots in this guide and divided them into two categories—prolevel boots, which represent boot manufacturers' top-of-the-line offerings, and intermediate-level boots, which are of racing quality, but lack some of the features and the premium price of the best boots. We've provided an overview describing features common to

the boots in each category and a brief individual description of the interesting and important details unique to each model. Beginner-level boots are no longer made. Dealers found they didn't sell well because riders who were serious enough to invest in riding boots wanted the real thing. You really can't go wrong if you choose any of the boots in this guide. Certain boots will suit some riders better than others. With these guidelines you will be able to make the best choice for your needs.

#### PERSONAL BEST

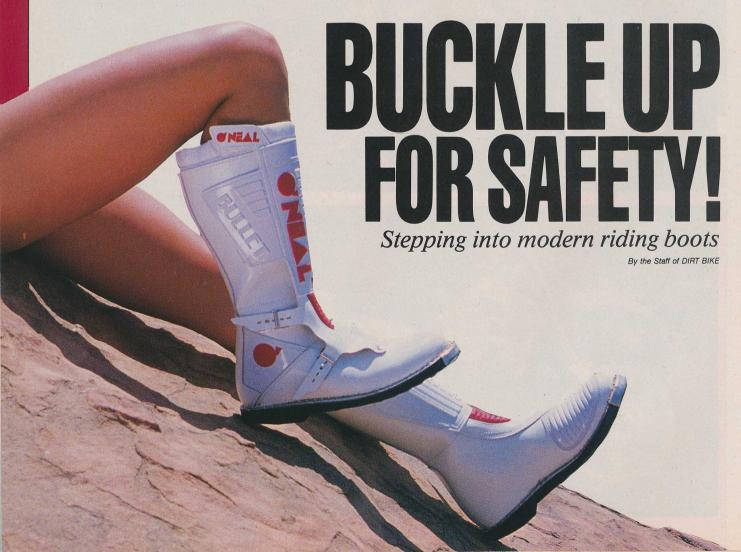
Think about what you really need from your riding boots before you buy. Every boot in this guide will provide the comfort and protection required for every form of riding from casual trail riding to motocross racing (see description for Alpinestars trial). If you race regularly, the level you race at and your views on protection and appearance will make your boot choice for you. Serious racers almost always buy the most expensive boots. Not every rider needs the best boots offered. If you're not a racer, you may never really need the extra measure of ankle support and impact protection better boots offer. If you're a young, growing rider who doesn't race seriously, you might do well to choose less expensive boots because you'll

grow out of them long before you wear them out. If the looks of your riding outfit aren't a major priority, you can choose a less stylish brand to save money.

#### PRO CLASS

Choosing from the boots in this group is fairly simple. Every pro-class boot has all of the most important features in one form or another. The only differences are in the manufacturers' individual choices of design details, like the use of internal or external plastic guards, types of buckles and styling. These boots have better uppers, closures and soles than less expensive boots.

The upper on every boot in our pro category is at least 15 inches tall (in adult sizes) for greater support and coverage. They are made from the best and thickest boot leather available (4mm-thick top-grain leather), which lets the boot builder put the tough, tightly grouped cells of the hide's outermost skin at the outside of the boot for greater strength, abrasion resistance and waterproofing. The less expensive split-grain hides, which are what's left after the top grain is sliced off the hide, are inherently less dense and more porous. Split-grain leather typically has a machine-textured surface so that it looks like top-grain leather. The quality and thickness of top-grain leather gives pro-





**Alpinestars** Rick Johnson Tech-4

JT Alpinestars Tech-1

**Alpinestars Tech-4** 

JT Alpinestars Tech-4

**Alpinestars** Tech-4 "Wild"

**Alpinestars** "No Stop" trials

**AXO Kevlar** Turbo RC

**TUF AXO Turbo RC** 

class boots a smooth outer finish like fine shoes and firmness that offers excellent impact protection and support.

Guards are built into or onto these boots at the shin (with padding behind it), shifter contact area, toe, ankle, heel, arch and inner calf. You'll also find a padded gaiter at the top of the boot to stop water and dirt from falling in and a water barrier behind the closures. Some pro-level boots lack shifter contact area guards on the right boot, which can be a problem for riders of rightside-shift vintage machines. Other than this small oversight, pro-level boots are extremely comfortable to ride in because their close fit and rigidity braces your ankles from shock and twisting. Because of their firmness, you'll find they're not much fun to walk in, so don't go to your dealer, try on a pair and walk around the showroom expecting them to feel like bedroom slippers.

Lever-type closures are better than notched belt designs and are common on this class of boot. They are more convenient to use and tighten the boot as well as close it. Some boots are tightened and closed with a combination of lever-type buckles, Velcro and speed laces that are joined at the top so they can be drawn tight with a single quick pull and then held tight with a lockable tab which slides along both laces.

Soles on the best boots are typically three layers of material chosen for wear resistance, shock absorption and strength. Steel shank supports are used in every top-quality boot



Some boot manufacturers make their boots in small sizes. For really small feet, you'll want to check out O'Neal's Trail Pro children's boots and Mr. Motorcycle's children's boots.

to spread the load of jump landings across the floor of the boot for comfort and protection. The tread on the soles is a one-way grip sawtooth design that allows enough traction to push a bike but slides without snagging on the ground when you put your foot down in turns.

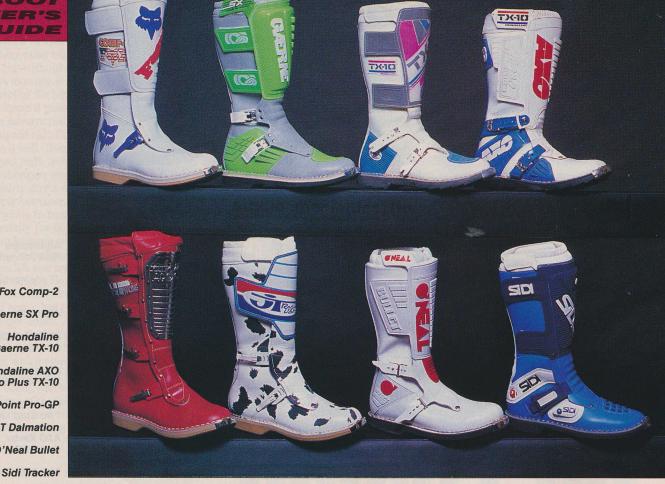
Alpinestars Bad Boy Tech-4. Price: \$235. Color: White/blue/red scheme only. Sizes: 7-14. Notable features: The Bad Boy boot is more than just a Tech-4 with special graphics. All the Tech-4's outstanding fit and protection features are there; the ankle area is even more supportive than the standard Tech4, which is among the most supportive boots sold. If pro-level motocross or insane jumps are your bag, or if you've injured your ankle or want to do everything you can to avoid ankle injury, you should consider this boot.

Alpinestars Tech-1 and JT/Alpinestars Tech-1. Price: \$189.95 (both models). Colors: White/red and white/blue. Sizes: 7-14. Notable features: Alpinestars's next-to-top-ofthe-line model is so supportive and is made so well it can be considered a pro boot. This boot is closed by three lever-type buckles rather than four, and less extensive guards than the Tech-4, but all the pro-level basics are there. The special made-for-JT model differs only in that it has a JT logo on the ankle.

Alpinestars Tech-4, JT/Alpinestars Tech-4 and Alpinestars Tech-4 "Wild." Price: \$235. Colors: White/red and white/blue. Sizes: 7-14. Notable features: The Tech-4 has four lever-type buckles so the boot can be precisely adjusted to nearly any rider's ankle and calf size. The latest Tech-4s have the buckles positioned for better ankle-area tension adjustment. Every guard on the boot is well placed and well designed. There isn't a single gimmicky or just-for-looks feature on these boots. The special made-for-JT model differs only in that it has a JT logo on the ankle. The "Wild" model is identical to the Tech-4 but for its colorful graphics.

Alpinestars Trial. Price: \$199. Color: Blue, red/white only. Sizes: 7-14. Notable features: This is the only off-road motorcy-

## BUYER'S GUIDE



cle boot in our guide designed for trials riding. It's more flexible and waterproof than typical motocross boots but has good support because of the three lever-type buckles. It also has a smooth sole for easy foot positioning on the pegs. These boots would be fine for general riding but they excel in their own environment.

Fox Comp-2 Gaerne SX Pro Hondaline Gaerne TX-10 **Hondaline AXO Turbo Plus TX-10 Hi-Point Pro-GP** JT Dalmation O'Neal Bullet

AXO Kevlar Turbo RC, Kawasaki/AXO Turbo RC, TUF/AXO Turbo RC, Yamaha/ AXO Turbo RC: Price: \$195. Colors: Blue/ white, gray/pink, white/blue, red/white, black/white. Kawasaki and Yamaha (see your dealer) have special color arrangements to match their motocross bikes. TUF has exclusive blue/red, blue/neon green and blue/ yellow color combinations. Sizes: 6-13, child sizes available by special order. Notable features: Lever-type buckles with ratchet-type adjustment make it easy to tighten the boot. The Turbo RC, at 15.5 inches from the floor of the boot to the top of its back, is among the tallest boots sold. Taller is better because the boot can't protect what it doesn't cover. AXO has slimmed the cut of the ankle area for better support and armor-plated most of the boot with sturdy plastic. AXO's latest model of the Turbo RC, the Kevlar Turbo RC, has a wear guard made of flexible heatand abrasion-proof Kevlar on the top part of the boot that contacts the bike. No more melted plastic on your pipe!

Fox Comp-2. Price: \$199. Colors: Red, white, blue, black. Sizes: 4-13. Notable features: Fox's Comp-2 boot is built by Alpine-

stars, a company that builds top-quality boots only. The Comp-2 gets all of the features that make riders who wear Alpinestars products so loyal to them—the lever action buckle, the snug, supportive ankle area and excellent materials and construction. Fox has added speed laces and Velcro closures to the top of the boot and hard plastic to the outer ankle for impact protection.

Gaerne/Answer SX Pro and Gaerne/Answer/Kawasaki SX Pro, and Gaerne/Answer/Suzuki SX Pro. (Editor's Note: Gaerne/Answer will have a radically updated version of the SX Pro shortly. It's going to cost a bit more [probably \$220 to \$235], but Gaerne/Answer claims it's stronger, better-fitting and better-looking than the current SX Pro. It will also have a redesigned buckle system. Look for it in DIRT BIKE's November "New Products" department!) Price: \$199.95. Colors: Blue, white, gray/ pink, gray/green, gray/red. Sizes: 7-12. Notable features: Answer's latest boot by Gaerne has two easily adjustable ski boot-type buckles, speed laces and Velcro as a closure system and extensive external plastic guards. Its special sole has more shock-absorbing ability than most.

Hondaline TX-10. Gaerne/Answer Super ETX. Price: \$199.95. Colors: White/gray/ red, white blue/pink. Notable features: Hondaline TX-10 Gaerne boots are the model that preceded Gaerne's new SX-pro. It's a pro-level boot as far as fit, protection and support, but it has a speed lace/roller buckle/Velcro closure system rather than the new lever closure.

Hondaline TX-10/AXO Turbo Plus. Price: \$199. Colors: White/red, red/white. Notable features: This made-for-Honda AXO boot is the model which preceded AXO's new Turbo RC. It's a bit shorter, less snugfitting and has roller buckles, speed laces and Velcro rather than the lever-type closures on the latest AXO offering but it's still a stylish, well-made boot worthy of pro-level competition.

Hi-Point Pro GP. Price: \$239.95. Colors: Red, white, blue, black. Sizes: Youth, 1-7, adult, 6-15. Notable features: This is another Alpinestar-made boot and it's one of their finest products. It's very similar in construction to the Tech-4 but for its distinctive stainless steel shin plate. The Pro-GP's price and performance are in the high end of the proclass boots.

JT Dalmation. Price: \$215. Color: Dalmation black spots on white only. Sizes: 6-13. Notable features: This is a special madefor-JT Alpinestar boot. It's got the snug, supportive ankle fit and a full complement of internal guards that make Alpinestar boots so desirable with a two-lever buckle, speed lace and Velcro closure system.

O'Neal Bullet. Price: \$184.95. Colors: Red, white, blue, black. Sizes: 6-13. Notable features: O'Neal's Bullet boot is extremely popular because it offers support, fine materials and snug ankle area fit at the low end of the pro-class price range. It uses roller



Mr. Motorcycle Trophy Line

Mr. Motorcycle Gold Cup

O'Neal Trail Pro

Sidi Carla

Suzuki Gaerne MX

Thor Racing

USA MX

Yamaha SMX

buckles (a belt-type buckle with a roller on the buckle to help the belt glide through the buckle so you can tighten it more easily) rather than the convenient lever-type buckles of the other boots in this category but is pro class in every other respect.

Sidi Tracker. Price: \$219. Colors: White, white/lime, gray/red, aqua/royal, white/pink. Sizes: 6-13. Notable features: Sidi Tracker boots use a single lever-type buckle with speed laces and Velcro as a closure-tightening system. These boots use extensive plastic guards which protrude through the leather. The "shock absorbers" that stick out above the surface of the boot are hollow so that they can crush somewhat upon impact to absorb the energy of the blow.

## INTERMEDIATE-LEVEL BOOTS

Intermediate-level boots have all the basic features of racing boots with less emphasis on appearance (color choices in this category are red, white, blue and black except where noted), protection for extreme riding conditions and convenience. There is more variety in the construction of this class of boot in terms of the total list of features each boot has. To choose the best boot for you from this group, consider which features are really important to you and find the boot that has the greatest number of them. Topgrain leather is used for the heavily abused front of the uppers on most boots in our intermediate category, but it's not 4mm thick on every boot. Split-grain leather is used in low-stress parts of some of the boots. You'll

find impact guards at the shin, shifter contact area (on most) and ankle, but most don't have them at the heel, toe and inner calf. The lack of firm plastic in the ankle area and the shape and firmness of the leather used there make for boots that are less snug and, as a result, less supportive than a pro-level boot.

Closures on our intermediate category boots are roller buckles, belt-type buckles, speed laces and Velcro, so you can't adjust these boots to be as tight as the more expensive boots with lever-type closures.

Soles on most intermediate-class boots are the sawtooth type, though a few have a hiking boot-type sole. Sole construction is less sophisticated. A single layer of sole material is bonded to the plate that attaches to the bottom of the boot. Not all of these boots have steel shank supports, which means they'll offer less protection from impacts through the sole, and they'll be a bit nicer to walk in because the sole will give like a shoe, rather than feeling solid-bottomed like ski boots.

Mr. Motorcycle Trophy Line. Price: \$89.95. Colors: Red, white, blue, black. Notable features: This is the least expensive racing-quality boot we know of. They've got ankle guards and a padded shin guard, a tough, reinforced one-way sole with a sole tip to prevent separation and speed lace and Velcro closures, all for less than a good pair of sneakers!

Mr. Motorcycle Gold Cup. Price: \$139.95.

Sizes: 6-16. Notable features: This boot has extensive plastic guards, including a large one-piece plate that protects the entire inner ankle area, plus three roller-type buckles, speed laces and Velcro closures for near pro-level adjustment. It's a remarkable value for the price and the availability of superlarge sizes will let really big riders experience true racing boot protection for the first time ever.

Mr. Motorcycle Children's. Price: \$79.95. Sizes: Child's 10-11 and adult 1-6. Notable features: A real riding boot with buckle closures in sizes to fit the smallest riders. The sole is sturdy and is lugged like a hiking boot.

O'Neal Trail Pro. Price: \$144.95. Sizes: 6-13.Notable features: O'Neal's Trail Pro is another near-pro-level offering. Clean O'Neal styling and all the necessary guards make this a very desirable boot. The boot is tightened by speed laces and closed by Velcro.

O'Neal Mini Pro. Price: \$126.95. Sizes: 1-6. Notable features: This is a mid-priced kid's boot but O'Neal styling and quality make it worth it. This boot is a miniature replica of O'Neal's Trail Pro, right down to the speed lace/Velcro closure system reinforced stitching and the one-way racing sole.

Sidi Carla. Price: \$149. Colors: Red/white, blue/white, black/yellow. Sizes: 8-15 including half sizes. Notable features: Sidi's Carla is a slightly dated version of a pro-level

(continued on page 66)

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## **BOOT BUYERS GUIDE**

(continued from page 43)

boot. Materials and construction are firstrate throughout but the closure system is the basic speed lace and Velcro system typical of this class. It's an excellent value and comes in unique colors and rare extra-large

Suzuki/Gaerne MX. Price: Set by dealer. Notable features: An early Gaerne model with a Velcro-speed lace closure system rather than the Velcro-buckle system of the later Gaerne models. It has the quality construction and reinforced sole common to pro-level boots.

Thor Racing, Price: \$129, Colors: Black white/agua, white/pink. blue/black. Notable features: Here's another high-end, intermediate-class boot. You get excellent construction and styling in a price just above the most basic boots.

USA Racing, Yamaha MX. Price: Yamaha boot price set by dealer. USA Racing prices: \$109.99, youth, \$89.99. Sizes: Adult, 6-13, youth 1-6. Notable features: USA Racing and Yamaha's SMX boot are made by the same manufacturer. It's a cleanly styled, affordable boot. The youth version (from USA only), essentially a scaled-down adult boot, has the same clean styling, speed lace and Velcro closure system and racing-type one-way sole.

### **BOOT DIRECTORY**

Alpinestars (Tech 1, Tech 4). Contact your local Alpinestars dealer or Interlink direct, 26896 Citrus Rd., Rancho Cordova, CA 95742; (916) 635-8000.

Alpinestars Trial. Cosmopolitan Motors, 301 Jacksonville Rd., Hatboro, PA 19040; (800) 523-2522.

AXO Sport America, 24950 Anza Dr., Valencia, CA 91355; (805) 257-0474.

Fox, 909 Dell Ave., Campbell, CA 95008; (408) 378-4884.

Gaerne. Answer Products, 27460 Avenue Scott, Valencia, CA 91355; (805) 257-4411.

Hi-Point. Malcolm Smith, 850 Marlborough, Riverside, CA 92507; (714) 686-1006.

Hondaline/TX-10. Contact your Honda

JT USA, 515 Otay Valley Rd., Chula Vista, CA 92011; (619) 421-2660.

Kawasaki Accessories. Contact your Kawasaki dealer.

Mr. Motorcycle. Donelson Cycles, 9851 St. Charles Rock Rd., St. Louis, MO 63074; in Missouri: (314) 427-5523. Outside, (800) 325-4144.

O'Neal USA, 9160 Jordan Ave., Chatsworth, CA 91311; (818) 998-1049.

SIDI Carla (See Alpinestars Trial/Cosmopolitan Motors).

Suzuki Accessories. Contact your Suzuki dealer.

Thor Racing, 315 W. Bradley Ave., El Cajon, CA 92020; (619) 442-0431.

TUF Racing, 2727 Sycamore Rd., De-Kalb, IL 60115; (800) 225-5883.

USA Racing. Chaparral, 889 W. Mill St., San Bernardino, CA 92410; (714) 889-2761.

Yamaha Accessories. Contact your Yamaha dealer.