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DUAL-SPORT ADVENTURE TEST: KTM 640LC4

MECHANICAL CAMEL

It's not just a bike, it's an adventure

By the staff of Dirt Bike



Finally, a KTM seat soft enough to provide long, comfortable days in the saddle! The 2001 KTM 640LC4 is soft all over, which is a good thing in sand dunes. Jerry Bernardo demonstrates.

Lump wheelies to the corral after a 250-mile day. The LC4 has plenty of beans for wheelstands but is a bit notchy when trying to upshift with motocross boots.



When KTM introduced the 520SX and 400EXC, two flagships of the new Racing Four-Stroke line, the suits urged us editor-types to warn people not to attempt to turn the off-road machines into dual sports. They said the engine, and particularly the clutch and gearbox, weren't designed for high-speed, long-range riding. Nope, these are racing thoroughbreds that need constant care. At the time, it seemed plausible yet somehow strange. We thought KTM was simply scared of massive failures and even recalls. As it turns out, the RFS engine is very reliable, so we don't see why the hardcore off-roader wouldn't want street-legality to connect trailheads.

KTM didn't want dual-sporters buying up all of the RFS EXCs and converting them instead of buying KTM's ready-made dual-sports. To us trail hands, RFS is similar to RDB (Real Dirt Bikes). Would you rather blaze trail on a 250-pound dual-sported 520EXC or a 330-pound 640LC4? The KTM guys know the answer to that one, so they organized the Mojave Madness Press Introduction, just so we would try the new 640LC4, 400LC4, the 640 Adventure R and even the \$22,000 Dakar-sweeping 660. Over three days, we'd ride the dual-sports from Victorville, California, to Las Vegas and back via dirt and back roads. We'd cover 600 miles in every condition imaginable, from the sunswept dunes to snow-covered peaks, from dry lake beds to

640LC4 TECH INSPECTION

- Five-speed, right-side-drive engine
- Electric-starting with kicker back-up
- Stainless-steel muffler w/Super-Trapp SA
- Aluminum, rubber-mounted handlebars
- Aluminum rims, O-ring chain

creek crossings, from solid-rock trails to silt beds.

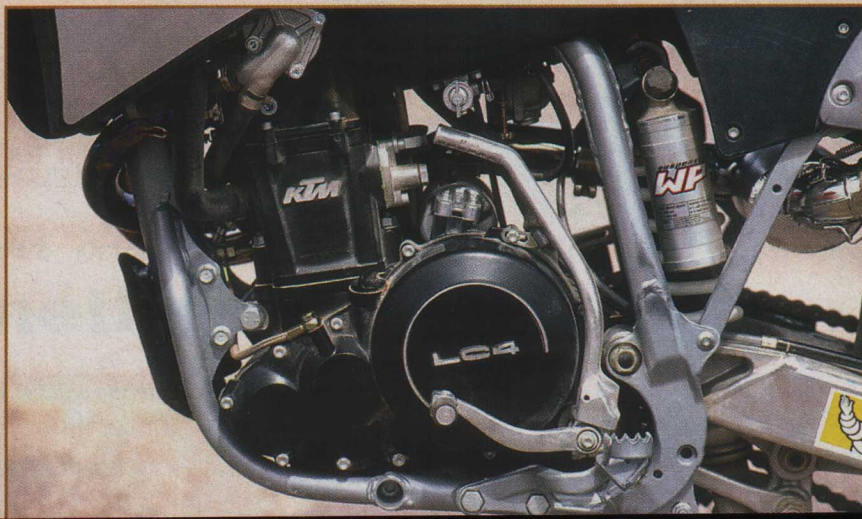
By the time we covered 600 miles, we had a new respect for dual-sports in general and the 640LC4 in particular—because any RDB would've turned our

backsides and hands into so many pounds of hamburger meat on 150-250 mile days. Also, we were perfectly legal (and comfortable) riding through the East Mojave National Preserve on these EPA-approved machines. For the route from Stateline to Victorville, spots of interest we found in the Mojave and Dakar-style GPS adventure riding, see "Mojave Madness: Stories of the American West." For now, though, let's check out the 640LC4 and its kin.

LOOKING UNDER THE HOOD

Basically, the LC4 is the old, off-road thumper with DOT-approved, street-legal hardware and a new ergonomics/plastic package. Rounded and funky at first glance, the Katoom is actually

On really cold mornings, the back-up kickstarter may be needed, but we never abused the electric starter enough to need it. Despite 100-mph gearing, first is low enough for technical trail.



MECHANICAL CAMEL



The stainless muffer has a pre-chamber and the spark-arresters are enclosed midway in the cannister. This makes the back portion a resonator chamber, ala AMA dirttrackers. They may see you, but they'll never hear you!

four-valve head, and a new stainless muffer has SuperTrapp baffles and a pre-muffer for stealth running. And every LC4 has an electric starter with a back-up kick-lever.

POINT IT TOWARDS DIRT

After fitting the LC4 with a GPS mount and downloading the route into the Garmin III, we hit the happy button and then two-track trails. Each LC4 had been fitted with real

ty plush on rocks and washouts, but deep sand whoops gave the constant-velocity carb fits. When you slam into the whoop, gravity closes the throttle slide just as you're trying to whack it open. The resulting hiccup throws your body weight forward. This isn't suspension for moto, either, not by any stretch of the imagination. Both ends are simply too soft for a fast pace in gnarly terrain.



640LC4 HITS

- Smooth, low-vibration, quiet motor
- Spacious pilot compartment, nice seat
- Stable handling, predictable slider
- Plenty of fuel range, high on comfort

much more ergonomically correct than the Honda XR650L, as it has a much flatter seat/tank junction and a more-roomy pilot compartment. The 3.29-gallon tank is shared with the Supermotard and Duke models, and LC4s are available with orange or silver plastic.

Quality components are an LC4 trademark, just like the RFS models. The LC4 has aluminum handlebars on rubber-mounted perches. The chromoly frame and subframe are powder-coated, and LC4s have a linkage and non-PDS shock. The 625cc engine has two oil pumps, a Nikasil cylinder coating and a thermostat-controlled liquid-cooling system with fan for long life. A lean-tuned Mikuni 40mm CV carb feeds the

Michelin knobbies but had not been broken-in fully. The vibration and sound levels were both low, which is good, but the shifting was pretty notchy. Although the 640 came geared-to-the-moon, first proved plenty low for picking through rocky sandwashes. Our 600-mile route would take us over parts of the Check Chase, Barstow to Vegas, the Mint 400, Whiskey Pete's, Vegas to Reno, and the Nevada Rally courses, places where RDBs once tread at speed. The LC4 was totally in its element and completely stable, as long as the terrain wasn't too cross-grain.

Dropping into sand washes, we soon learned to maintain a brisk pace, as the LC4 wants to wallow in really deep sand. The sedate steering geometry makes the front end push in sand turns, so you have to compensate by brake-sliding and backing it into corners. On harder dirt, we felt so comfortable with the LC4's tracking that we gave it our best Scotty Parker impersonation.

WHOOPS, THERE IT IS

As long as the terrain was ripple-free, the ride was great. Both ends were plen-

KTM 640LC4

Engine type	.....Four-valve, SOHC, liquid-cooled 4-stroke
Displacement	.....625cc
Bore and stroke	....101.0mm x 78.0mm
Carburetion	.....40mm BST Mikuni
Fuel tank capacity	.....3.2 gal. (12l)
Gearing	.....16/42
Lighting coil	.....Yes
Spark arrester	.....Yes
EPA legal	.....Yes
Running weight with no fuel	....330 lb.
Wheelbase	.....59.5" (1510mm)
Rake/trail	.....27.0°/4.9"
Ground clearance	.....14.0 in. (335mm)
Seat height	.....37.6" (955mm)
Tire size and type:	
Front	.....90/90-21 Metzeler Sierra
Rear	.....140/80-18 Metzeler Sierra
Suspension:	
Front	.....WP 43mm inverted cartridge, adj. reb./comp., 10.6" (270mm) travel
Rear	.....WP aluminum piggyback, adj. preld./reb./comp., 11.8" (300mm) travel
Country of origin	.....Austria
Suggested retail price	.....\$6998
Distributor/manufacturer:	
KTM Sportmotorcycle, USA	
1119 Milan Ave.	
Amherst OH 44001; (440) 985-3553	

MECHANICAL CAMEL

640LC4 MISSES

- Notchy shifting, clutch needs frequent adjustment.
- CV carb hiccups in cross-grain terrain
- Suspension is super soft in whoops
- Front end pushes in loose conditions
- We'd prefer a side-stand over the center-unit

Weight also slows you down on undulating trails, so you have to work harder to carry a trail pace. We're talking a 90-pound weight difference between the LC4 and 520EXC, so downhill turns and other G-outs require more caution than speed. The same is true for rock gardens—you have to carefully pick your way through while a RDB can pinball over the tops. It can do most trails, but you have to respect its weight and softness.

CONTROLS AND COMFORT

We never used the kickaster, except to hoist the beast onto its center stand.

KTM built a cool rack for the LC4 which doubles as a handle for lifting the back end, but you get the best mechanical advantage by using the kicker to rock it back onto the stand. With both the choke and e-button on the handlebars, lighting the beast couldn't be easier.

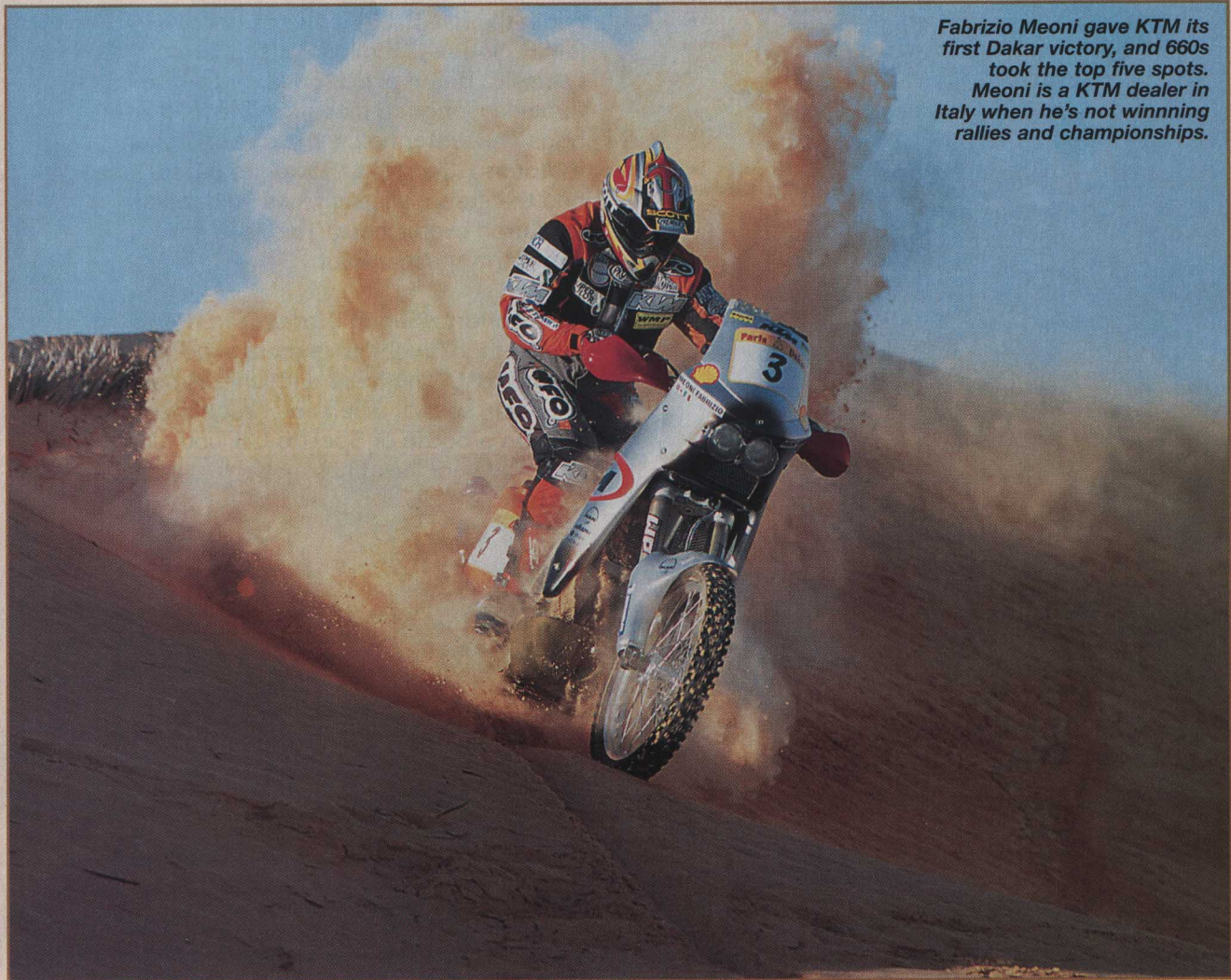
Brakes are by Brembo, and the front disc is a whopping 300mm in diameter! It's pretty easy to overpower the front tire in dirt, so squeeze easy when it's slick. There's a cool protrusion on the left axle boss that guards the front caliper, too. The rear brake is also strong, but it chatters some on rocky downhill.

Throttle pull is pretty light, but the LC4 sure could use a hydraulic clutch, like the 660 has. We had to make huge adjustments on the Domino AOF clutch perch when the engine reached operating temperature or after abusing the clutch on long, technical uphill. Each morning, we'd have to back the adjustment off a lot to keep the clutch from slipping and frying.

GET YOUR MOTOR RUNNIN'

After spending three days and 600 miles on the 640LC4, we got to know it a little better and developed a newfound respect for the bike. Day One had a lot of deep-sand washes and even dunes, and Lump had zero blisters after 250 miles. Day Two was tighter and insanely rocky, and several riders suffered flats, but not Lump. All were fairly-well worked after the 150-mile Day Two loop, so much so that some of the geezers on the Mojave Madness Adventure trucked it home from Stateline. They blew it, because Day Three was LC4 Heaven. We derbied through box canyons with wet-sand floors, dirt-tracked over hilly 4x4 trails and tucked in for top-speed tests on dry lakes. The 3.29-gallon tanks gave us a range of slightly more than 100 miles before hitting reserve. For fire-road flying and adventure trekking, the 640LC4 is hard to beat.

Fabrizio Meoni gave KTM its first Dakar victory, and 660s took the top five spots. Meoni is a KTM dealer in Italy when he's not winning rallies and championships.



FIVE NEW DIRECTIONS
Adventure, KTM style

● KTM's LC4 line now includes the 640LC4, 400LC4, 640 Adventure R, 640 Supermoto and 640 Duke, all based on the same chassis and LC4 powerplant. While the 640 has a 101mm piston and 78mm stroke, the 400 has a 89mm bore and 64mm stroke. Also, LC4s have the 43mm inverted WP fork, while the Adventure R model has 48mm legs lifted directly from the 660cc Dakar bike. This provides more rigidity

and a slightly stiffer platform for the huge 7.45-gallon gastank on the Adventure R. Also, the A-R has a 320mm front disc, like the Duke and Supermoto.

While the dual-sports have traditional 21- and 18-inch wheels, the Duke and Supermoto have 17-inchers front and rear, along with roadrace tires. The Supermoto has LC4 plastic except for a shorty front fender, while the Duke has a low front fender and its own headlight cowling. All models have halogen headlight bulbs, with the Duke and Adventure R having twin headlights.

KTM bills the LC4 as suitable for long-distance touring and on-road use and perfectly suited for touring and off-road. The Adventure R is meant to be perfect for off-road and long-distance touring. The Duke and Supermoto are canyon carvers. As for the Dakar bike, it's a hand-made 660cc single with a hydraulic clutch and more liquid-holding capacity than a camel. Scot Hardin got 99 mph out of it on a dry lake, but it's the bike's midrange hit that makes it the most fun. That and the sweet note of those twin exhausts. It has the boost to back the rear end out any time you want. Just twist the throttle. ● □



KTM's LC4 line is now headlined by the Dakar 660, a \$22,000 behemoth with dual exhausts and more liquid capacity than most swimming pools.



It's not a naval vessel, it's an Adventure R. The A-R carries 7.4 gallons of fuel and has a 48mm fork off of the Dakar 660.



The Dakar 660 has almost as many things to look at and play with as a private airplane. Competitors live by the route chart (complete with handlebar-mounted advance/reverse switches). The GPS has a remote control also.



KTM claims the 640 (actually 625cc, 101mm x 78mm) weighs 299.8 pounds (dry) and puts out 48.3 hp at 7500 rpm. The 400 has an 89mm piston, 64mm stroke, a claimed output of 38.8 hp at 9000 and weighs 299.8 pounds. Wet, we measured the 1999 640 at 330 pounds (plus gas).