

KTM 520SX vs. YZ426F vs. VOR 503 vs. FC501

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ENDURO TEST: KTM 250EXC

ONE-BIKE



SHOW

A 250 Enduro shootout, Reader's Digest version

Once upon a time in the bad old days, a 250 enduro shootout would be a huge undertaking. There were Suzuki RMXs, Yamaha WRs, Kawasaki KDXs, Huskys, TMs and so on. We remember them well; just organizing nine bikes for a photo shoot would be a nightmare. If we knew then what we know now, we could have shortcut the whole process. The KTM 250EXC always won. It was ridiculous. No matter who had the hot new bike with the hot new features, the KTM had the best power, the best suspension and the best parts.

Now the Japanese are out of the two-stroke enduro business. They say that the numbers weren't big enough. Odd—last time we looked at the sales figures for off-road and MX bikes, KTM had surpassed at least one Japanese manufacturer. Maybe the numbers would have been big enough if they had made a bike like the EXC.

Now only European manufacturers make enduro two-strokes. Husky, TM and Gas Gas are taking shots at the KTM, but for most riders they just aren't realistic alternatives because of price and availability. So here it is, the state of the art in enduro two-strokes: KTM's 2000 250EXC.

◀ Mike "Don't call me Junior" Lafferty will alternate between the KTM 250EXC and the 300EXC this year, depending on the event.

How fast is the 250EXC? Fast enough to win national enduros, no problem. National Hare & Hounds would be another thing.



ONE-BIKE SHOW

WHAT'S INSIDE

One thing that gave KTM an advantage over the Japanese in the old days was that the EXC always had current technology. Where Suzuki was peddling 1989 designs for ten years, the EXC always got the same features that KTM's motocross models got. Why not? For KTM, the EXC was just as high if not higher on the priority list.

The same is true now. The 250EXC is the same basic bike as the 250SX motocrosser. The short list of differences all make sense for an enduro bike. The EXC has softer suspension, a quieter silencer (with spark arrester), an ignition with lighting coils and more flywheel, a remapped advance curve for smoother power delivery, a larger fuel tank, an 18-inch rear wheel and the usual lights, odo and kickstand. Just like the 250SX, the EXC got a new pumpkin-shaped cylinder for 2000. For years, tuners like Mitch Payton complained that it was hard to get much more power out of a KTM. The ports—particularly the exhaust port—were already too big. It's easy to grind out material but much harder to put it back. So the new cylinder has smaller ports.

The development of the linkless rear suspension is on-going. After putting up with criticism for the first few years, KTM is finally in the ballpark. The bike still uses a twin-piston WP shock with progressive damping and a progressive spring. A needle in the very top of the shock body engages the first piston when the shock is compressed, thereby increasing damping and mimicking linkage. Now that needle is much shorter—in other words, the shock is becoming less progressive. It turns out that the engineers were trying too hard to make it act like conventional linkage. In front, the fork is a further refinement of the WP inverted fork that KTM added last year. And the bike still has a side-access airbox, a hydraulic clutch and super high quality bits and pieces like the chain and bars.

THUMBS DOWN

- Weak top end power
- Difficult plug & carb access
- Needs heavier tubes & handguards
- Ugly front fender



This is what the KTM does best: woods, dark and deep. The EXC got the same new cylinder as the SX this year.

THUMBS UP

- Great low-end power
- Super smooth
- Suspension ideal for slower speeds
- Excellent bars, rims, brakes
- Fade-free hydraulic clutch
- Compact fuel tank has decent capacity
- Four positions for handlebar
- Powerful lighting coil

ATTACK OF THE LOS ANCIANOS

We knew pretty much what to expect out of the EXC. So this time around we asked former 250 National Motocross Champion Gary Jones to be the man in the saddle. He had never ridden the bike before he swung a leg over it at the Los Ancianos Tecate Hare Scrambles. Here's what he had to say:

"At first I was a little disappointed in the power. The race had a dead-engine, straddle-the-front-wheel start in a deep sandwash. I've always been good at that kind of start. As soon as the flagman so much as twitches, you go. Even if he didn't want to drop the flag, he will.

"I got the bike started before anyone else. For the first 20 feet, I was all alone. Then everyone started creep-

ing up. Open bikes passed me first, then Kawasaki and Yamaha 250s started pulling away. The KTM just didn't seem to have the top-end power to pull through the deep sand. By the time we got out of the sandwash, I was about tenth.

"It wasn't until we got into the really tight stuff that I began to appreciate the power. It's not very fast on top, but in the tight brush, I didn't need top. There wasn't room. The course would go ten feet, turn 90 degrees, go ten more feet then turn again. The best way to deal with it was to keep the bike in a tall gear—usually third—and try to be smooth. I would get right behind those same guys on the KXs and YZs who

ONE-BIKE SHOW

passed me in the wash, and watch them flail. They were either wide open or had the rear brake locked up, nothing in between. On the KTM I was *always* in between, and it was easy to get right behind them and wait for a mistake. The KTM's power is good at super-low rpm, so I could brake hard without pulling in the clutch and not worry about stalling it. I don't use brake slides very often, I would rather just track through a turn. The KTM suits that kind of riding style perfectly.

"If this were a faster desert race or a GP, I don't think the bike has quite enough top end. I think with a different silencer and maybe some rejetting, I could make it better, but I don't think it will keep up with a Japanese 250 MX bike without some serious engine work. But then it might not be as good in the tight stuff. The bike gets better and better the tighter and harder the trail gets.

"The same is true of the suspension. It's best in tight stuff at slow speeds. It was perfect at Tecate. The bike was super cushy in the rocky sections. But it would be too soft for me in a GP."

FOUR LAPS LATER

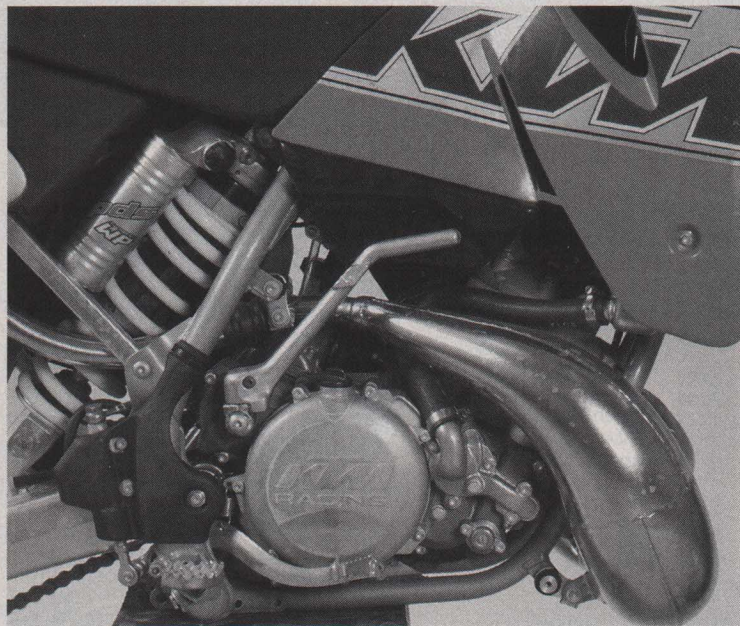
When Gary was done with the bike, it still looked like new. The only modification before the race was the addition of handguards—we used Cemoto's aluminum and plastic guards because they protect the levers in case of a fall. But Gary never falls.

Another former national champion rides a nearly stock 250EXC. Enduro king Mike Lafferty leaves the engine of his 250 pretty much alone. He apparently agrees that the bike is best suited for tight stuff. In more wide-open races this year, he will ride a 300EXC.

It's easy to get more power out of the new engine, according to all those same engine tuners who hated the old bike. It's a matter of decking the cylinder and making some fairly minor port changes. But it's simply not necessary for enduros. And enduro riding is what this bike is all about.

Is it still the king of the two-stroke off-road bikes? Absolutely. The only real contenders in the off-road world all have cams and valves. In that arena, the 250 EXC might have some real competition. In some ways, the bike already has more in common with four-strokes than with other two-strokes—it's a grunter, not a screamer. How does it compare to the new-age thumpers?

Sounds like a shootout to us. Stay tuned.



The PDS rear suspension system is back for a third tour of duty. Now it's beginning to show what it can do.

KTM 250EXC



Engine type.....Reed-valve, liquid-cooled two-stroke
 Displacement.....250cc
 Bore and stroke66.4mm x 72.0mm
 Carburetion38mm Keihin PWK
 Fuel tank capacity3.2 gal. (12l)
 Gearing14/48
 Lighting coilYes
 Spark arresterYes
 EPA legalNo
 Running weight with no fuel.....235 lb.
 Wheelbase57.6 in. (1461mm)
 Rake26.5
 Ground clearance15.2 in. (386mm)
 Seat height36.4 in. (925mm)

Tire size and type:
 Front80/100-21 Bridgestone M77
 Rear120/100-18 Bridgestone M78
 Suspension
 FrontWP inverted cartridge, adj. reb./comp., 11.0" (280) travel
 RearWP aluminum PDS, adj. preld./reb./comp., 12.6" (340mm) travel

Country of originAustria
 Suggested retail price\$5898

Distributor/manufacturer:

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