

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

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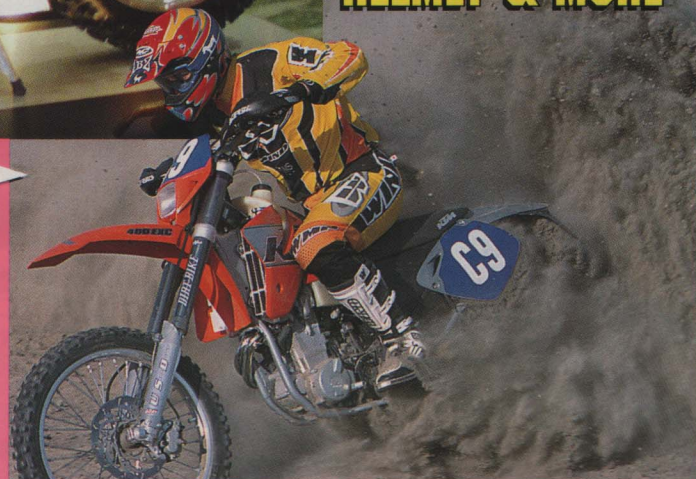
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No penalty electric starter

By the staff of DIRT BIKE

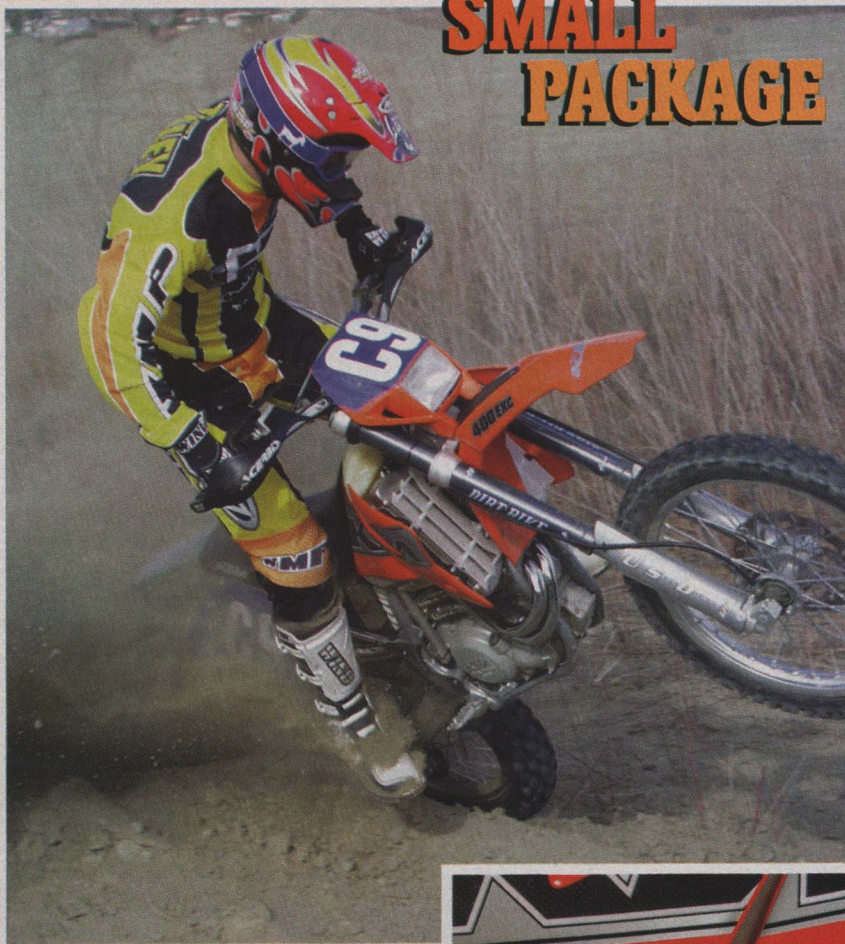
Life is good. It's virtually raining light-weight four-strokes. We're still on a contact high from last month's tests of the two KTM 520s and the Suzuki DRZ400. Now we have the KTM 400EXC. There's three things you should know right up front:

1. It has an electric starter and still weighs less than the XR400, the WR400 or the DRZ400 (kickstart version).
2. It's virtually identical to the bike on which Giovanni Sala won the 400cc world Enduro Championship in 1999.
3. It's awesome.





SMALL PACKAGE



all the way to the top of its stroke before kicking. It's almost always a one-kick operation, but we need to admit that we didn't thoroughly test that aspect. We didn't have the will power with a perfectly functional magic button waiting at the end of the handlebar. The KTM does *not* have a key or a switch to leave on, so you don't have to worry about draining the battery.

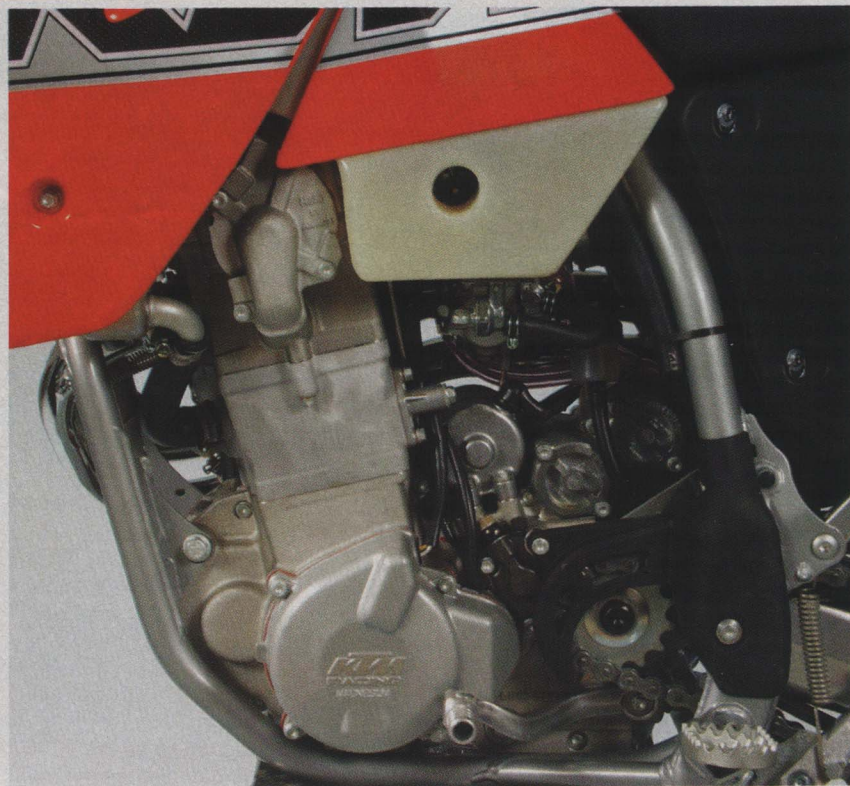
The engine is just like the 520 version we tested last month, aside from a decrease in the bore and stroke. That means it's technically a dry sump motor, although there is no external oil reservoir like on an XR or WR. The oil is all kept in the gearbox and circulated through the engine with an oil pump. There are two different oil filters and two additional oil screens to service when you change the oil. We figure if KTM thinks that clean oil is that important, then the least we can do is change it on schedule. It only takes slightly more than a quart. The engineers also have gone to great lengths to keep oil

Who would have guessed that the KTM is the lightest bike in the 400 class aside from a Husaberg? Remember, it has an electric starter.

ELECTRICITY FOR THE MASSES

Okay, we know. Starting a 400 four-stroke isn't the hardest task in the world. But you would be surprised how many people don't get it. Every time we get some hot, young motocross test rider on a four-stroke for photos, we end up starting the bike for him. Some people just don't have four-stroke brain synapses. That means they can't even ride the bike very hard for fear of stalling the motor and spending the next 15 minutes trying to figure out what the heck a hot-start button is.

In the past, an electric starter always meant a 20-pound weight penalty. But KTM's electric starter adds only about 12 pounds to an already light bike. It also has a kickstarter, and chances are that you'll need it at some point in the bike's life. The EXC doesn't have a very big battery, so KTM admits that it will have to be started the old-fashioned way on cold mornings if the bike has been sitting for a month or so. No problem—if you're a four-stroke guy. The KTM has an automatic decompressor that kicks in if the kickstart lever is brought



There's virtually no way to tell a 400 from a 520 unless you get out a ruler and measure the cylinder. Or unless you ride the two of them.

SMALL PACKAGE



THE BEST

- Light
- Feels even lighter
- Easy to start, even without button
- Great MX-bike feel
- Hydraulic clutch
- High-quality bars, chain

BREAK IN AT LAUGHLIN

We ran the brand new motor long enough to shoot a few photos, then changed the oil and went straight to Laughlin for the Best In The Desert U.S. Hare Scrambles. The first thing we learned is that the weight figure is misleading. It feels *much* lighter than the 265 pounds that the official *Dirt Bike* super scale says. The numbers say it should feel about like a Honda XR400R or a Yamaha WR400. But it feels more like an XR250R. It's super narrow and the layout is more like an MX bike than a four-stroke enduro machine. The fuel tank is compact and low and still holds a half-gallon more than the MX version. We wish Yamaha would figure out how to do that.

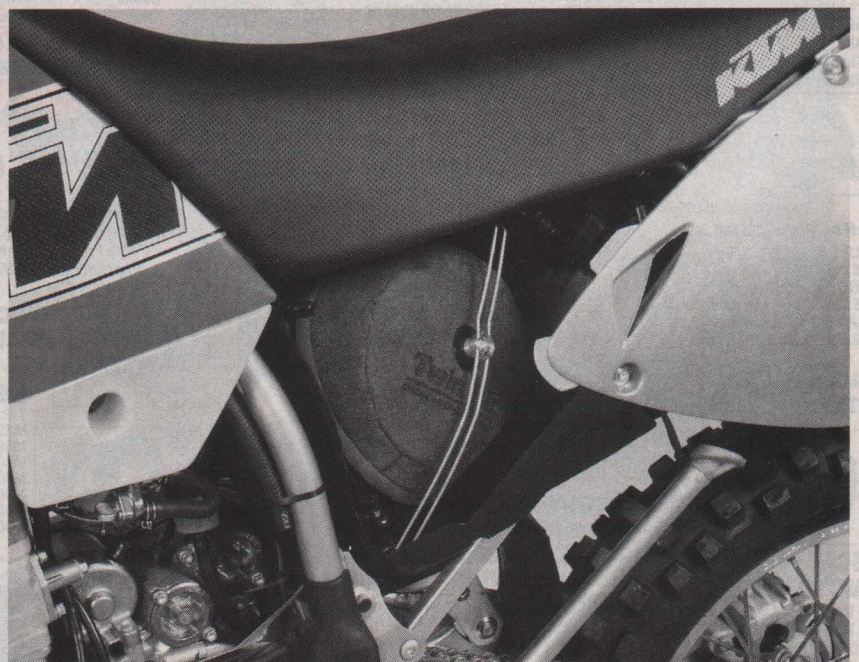
In the suspension department, it's just like the 520 EXC, which is just like a two-stroke KTM. That means it's great in rocks and at low speed. Laughlin's course, however, is medium-speed desert

KTM used as many existing parts from the two-stroke line as possible. Got any extra 2-stroke air filters? Hang on to them.

Where does the KTM fall in the power race? Behind a Yamaha and way in front of a Honda. That's right about where the new Suzuki landed, too.

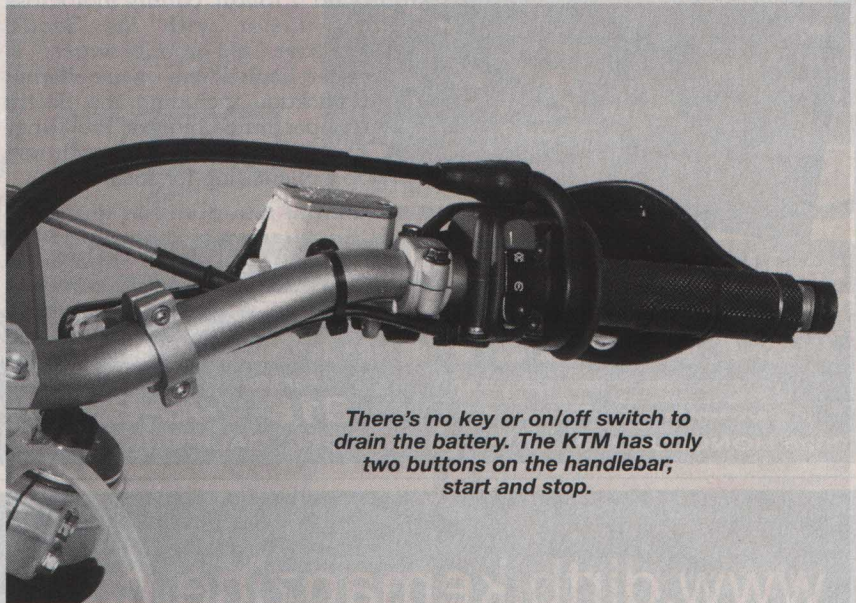
from blowing out the breather. The counterbalancer shaft is hollow and acts as a centrifuge to sling out oil before it gets to the vent.

There's nothing that crazy about the rest of the motor. It has a single chain-driven overhead cam with four valves and a six-speed tranny. The Keihin carb is straight off last year's YZ400, and the Kokusan ignition is designed to select from several different ignition curves, depending on rpm and throttle opening. It's just that the whole package is super narrow; even more so than KTM's two-stroke motors. The only bulky part is the water pump, which sticks off the left side of the head like a big wart.



and it gets pretty rough by the third loop. The KTM's PDS rear suspension was perfect for the first loop, then started feeling too soft by the time that 200 teams had their way with the course for three hours. The constantly growing whoops and bumps never really bothered the WP fork. It just didn't care for G-outs or hard braking in sand, where it was soft for our admittedly overweight (190-pound) testers.

Here's an interesting fact that we've noticed about suspension testing. The heavier the bike, the narrower the range of conditions it can handle. With a 125, you can virtually use the same suspension settings for motocross and for rocky enduros. For 600cc four-strokes, you have to revalve and respring the bike for every application. Despite its light feel, the 400EXC is a medium-heavy bike, so naturally, it's more limited.



There's no key or on/off switch to drain the battery. The KTM has only two buttons on the handlebar; start and stop.



THE WORST

- Tall first gear
- Revs out quickly
- Slightly more vibration than 520

HOW FAST IS IT?

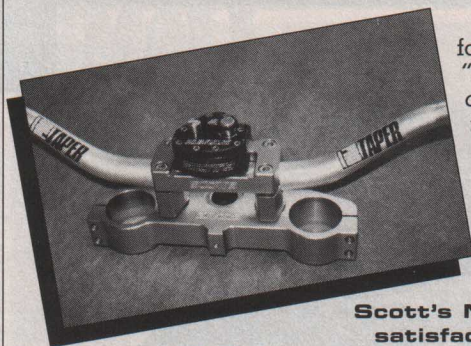
Fast enough. In stock form, the bike falls somewhere between a race-ready XR400 and an uncorked WR400. That's with a stock muffler. But a stock muffler on a European bike isn't nearly as plugged up as a Japanese bike with a huge baffle and a throttle stop. The EXC is reasonably quiet—about perfect for us. The Yamaha WR400, for comparison, is so plugged up that virtually no one will run it with the corked exhaust—and *absolutely* no one runs it with the stock throttle stop. Everyone goes to super-loud aftermarket exhaust systems. So by making a bike that is less plugged up in stock form, KTMs will be far less noisy out on the trail.

Powerwise, there's no reason to change anything. The bike makes decent low end and revs quickly. It's comparable to Suzuki's new 400, but

KTM 400EXC

Engine typeOHC, liquid-cooled, four-valve four-stroke	Tire size and type:
Displacement398cc	Front80/100-21 Bridgestone M77
Bore and stroke89.0mm x 64.0mm.	Rear110/100-18 Bridgestone M78
Carburetion39mm Keihin FCR	Suspension
Fuel tank capacity2.4 gal. (9l)	FrontWP inverted, adj. reb./comp., 11.6 in. (295mm) travel
Gearing14/50	RearWP aluminum PDS, adj. preld./reb./comp., 12.6 in. (320mm) travel
Lighting coilYes	Country of originAustria
Spark arresterYes	Suggested retail price\$6698
EPA legalNo	Distributor/manufacturer:
Running weight with no fuel257 lb.	KTM Sportmotorcycle, USA
Wheelbase57.3 in. (1481mm)	1119 Milan Ave., Amherst OH 44001
RakeNA	(440) 985-3553
Ground clearance15.0 in. (380mm)	
Seat height36.4 in. (925mm)	

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TEST: KTM 400EXC

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most of the power comes on at slightly higher revs. You can certainly find things to complain about if you want. It doesn't have the trials-like low end of an XR, and first gear is a little on the tall side. That means you have to abuse the hydraulic clutch a little in tough, super-slow situations (don't worry, it can take it). For years we complained that first gear on the KTM LC4 models was so low it was virtually a granny gear. That's not the case anymore. On the other end, the 400 hits the rev limiter quite easily. The motor lets you know when you're abusing it by missing and sputtering at high revs.

It's hard not to compare the 400 to the KTM 520EXC that we tested last month. The 520 has so much power everywhere that you don't have problems with the tall first gear and you don't come anywhere near the rev limiter. We tended to expect that from the 400. We had to remind ourselves "it's only a 400, it's only a 400." By the same token, the 520 doesn't have the 400's super-light feel, and you never come close to stalling the 400 motor.

ONLY THE GOOD STUFF

The overall quality of the bike blows us away. The handlebar is an oversize Magura and the clamps can be moved into any of four positions. The Brembo brakes are good, the hydraulic clutch is awesome, the bike shifts perfectly and the air filter is easy to get to. All of the parts are great.

It's hard to imagine anyone being disappointed in the 400EXC. Perhaps the XR crowd would want something that is happier going slow, never needs maintenance and never boils over, etc. The EXC is a racer. But the biggest problem has nothing to do with the performance or quality. It's the quantity. Each dealer will only get about two new four-strokes (of the four different models). Our advice: Make a deposit now for the 2001 models. □

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