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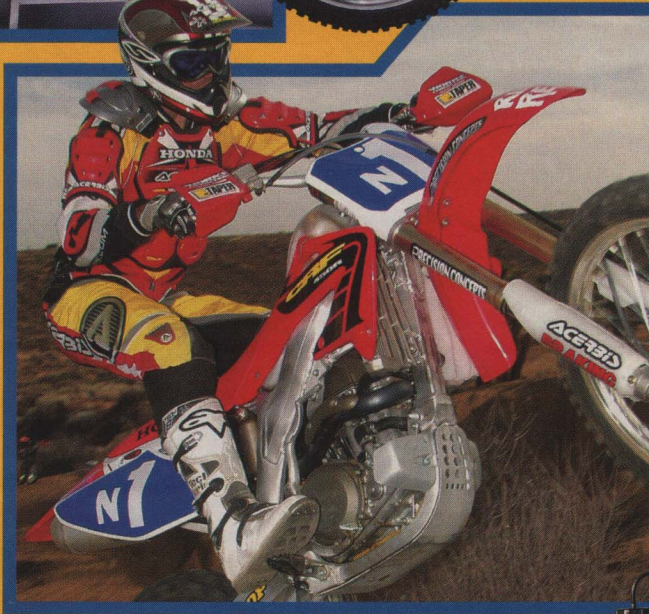
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James Stewart's KX 125

KX 125

Inside the bike that powers Kawasaki's youngest star

By the staff of Dirt Bike



Kawasaki has farmed out the 125 team to Pro Circuit for years. James Stewart was important enough to take back into the Team Chevy Kawasaki truck.

When was the last time a motocrosser made page one of a major metropolitan U.S. paper? Never. When was the last time a rider scored a second and a first in his first two supercrosses? Never. When was the last time that a 16-year-old generated more cheers than the current champion? Never.

There's never been a young rider quite like Bubba Stewart. Between gracing the front page of the Orange County Register and his wild Bob Hannah-like charges through the pack, he's been the center of attention since the start of his short pro career.

The Team Chevy Truck Kawasaki guys know they have something special in Bubba. That probably helped take the sting out of losing Ricky Carmichael to Honda. Accordingly, Stewart has sort of stepped right into the throne room vacated by R.C. For the first time in years, Kawasaki has

taken a 125 program in house. In the recent past, all the 125 riders were farmed out to Pro Circuit so that Team Kawasaki could concentrate on the big 250 stars like Carmichael and Jeff Emig.

"I forget that he's just 16," says team manager Bruce Stjernstrom. "James is a very mature 16. He hasn't let all the attention get to him at all. I think his father keeps him pretty well grounded."

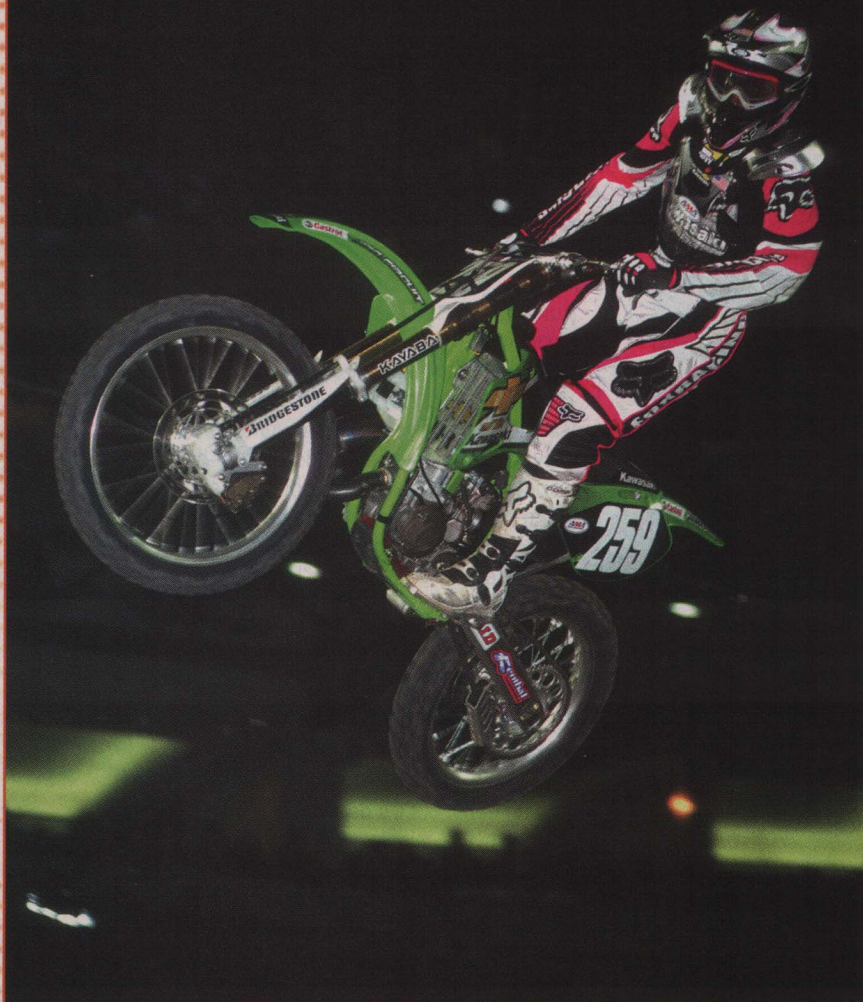
His mechanic Jeremy Albrecht says that Stewart is no kid. "Sometimes I'll have to deal with other 16-year-olds; you know, *real* 16-year-olds. They're just kids. It kind of makes me appreciate James.

"James loves being here," says Stjernstrom. "He's a real student of the game. You can ask him any question about any race from the last few years, and he can tell you who passed who on what lap. He has all the tapes at home and he studies them."

Fans have no hesitation in accepting Stewart as an instant star. But his reception with the other riders has been mixed. "If anything gets him into trouble, it's going to be his aggressive riding," says Kawasaki's Tony Gardea. "He just tries so hard that he makes a lot of contact. I think as soon as he realizes he's going two seconds a lap faster than those guys, he'll settle down."

As the 125 western supercross series continues, you can see that the other riders are giving James less room with every round. At the opening race, they gave him surprising respect and he was able to slice through the pack after crashing. By the fifth round, they had had enough. Bubba was passing the same riders three or four times between crashes and mistakes. Eventually, they fought back, blocking his every move. Even the East Coast supercross riders have taken

To no one's surprise, James Stewart is leading the 125 western supercross series after five rounds. The eastern guys can't wait to have a crack at him at the end of the season.



The KX engine looks pretty stock, but not many parts are off the shelf. Even the gear ratios are different from the production bike.



The swingarm is stock, but not stock for a KX125. The KX250 unit fits right into place but is slightly longer.



No titanium for Bubba, at least not the footpegs. These are stockers with an extra row of teeth bolted in place.



The works Mikuni carb has a PowerJet and TPS. Don't expect to see it on a stock KX soon.

notice and more than one has said that they are looking forward to the end-of-season east/west shootout. One thing is certain: it makes for great racing.

JAMES' JAVELINE

So when Kawasaki brought Bubba's 125 program in house, did they have to start from scratch? "We never really stopped developing the 125," says Stjernstrom. "We've had it on the back burner all along. This year, the 125 cylinder is all new, so that meant we had to do some new development, but so did Pro Circuit. Mike Brown can ride a fast, pipey 125 with no problem. He seems to like them that way. But for James we had to get more bottom and mid-range power. Rick Asch built the motor and we actually had Jeff Emig help with the testing."

"I love testing for the race team," laughs Emig. "Those are great days; you come out and get to ride all day. You say you want a change and someone does it instantly. They bring out plenty to eat and drink. It's just like the old days but without all the pressure. I think we have the bike working pretty well, too."

Kawasaki was so proud of its 125 effort that Bruce and the crew had no problem bringing the bike out to Saddleback in the middle of the week for us to try. It's obvious that Stewart's Kawasaki is an all-out factory effort. The list of unobtainable factory parts is long. The centercases and the cylinder start off as stock parts, but everything else is special. The six-speed gearbox has different ratios set up for supercross. The outer cases are magnesium.



Jeff Emig actually helped develop the in-house KX125 race bike. "I love testing for the race team. It's like the old days but without the pressure."



Grandpa Murray was our chosen one for testing Bubba's bike. "I can't even make the fork move." And he weighs about twice as much as Stewart.

The Mikuni carb doesn't look like anything we've seen before. It has both a PowerJet and a throttle position sensor wired into an ignition that is, of course, programmable. The pipe is specially made by Pro Circuit and the reed valve is specially made by Moto Tassinari. Once the season started, few of the settings changed. "We might change the pipe and the gearing from track to track—maybe the flywheel. But everything else is left in the same configuration."

The frame is a standard, off-the-shelf KX125 frame, just adorned with magnesium triple clamps and a bunch of titanium fasteners. The swingarm is straight off a 250 (it's a little longer). Stewart isn't a big guy (not yet), so the seat height has to be dropped for him. About 8mm is taken out of the subframe, the seat foam is shaved and even the seat brackets are shortened. It all amounts to almost two inches.



Bubba's magnesium brakes aren't much more powerful than stock, but they are considerably lighter.

And under that seat is a carbon fiber airbox made locally by Berg Racing. That, at least, might be available to the public soon, but we're betting it won't be cheap.

Rules in the 125 class call for the suspension to be somewhat available to the public, so the fork and shock are KYB race kit units. The suspension is typical of super-cross stuff: stiff. We put Pete "Grandpa" Murray on the bike at Saddleback—he must outweigh Stewart by 40 pounds—and he didn't think he could get the fork to move. "I expected it to be stiff, but this is pretty extreme," said Pete. "I feel like I could drop out of a building and still not bottom anything. The rear end is a little softer than the fork, but not much."

What about the power? "It's fast, with virtually all the power right in the middle. It's a little soft way down low, but then it hits like you wouldn't believe. At first I thought it signed off early, but it's deceptive. It makes so much in the middle that the top feels comparatively mild. If you hold it on, you kind of reach a second level. It just keeps on pulling."

It makes sense. Stewart has been getting decent starts, even if sometimes he gets in trouble in the first turn. He hasn't been using any start-line gimmicks like the Yamaha and Honda guys. The device that keeps the fork partially compressed until the gate drops has been popping up on some other bikes, but Sternstrom sees that as sort of a fad.

It's remarkable just how free Stewart's bikes is of odd gadgets and weird setup. He doesn't go in for oddly shaped bars, bent levers or strange adjustments. Pretty much anyone could hop on his bike and feel right at home, aside from perhaps the low seat and the stiff suspension. That's probably another testimony to his maturity. His bike doesn't really have any surprises. As Grandpa said: "The bike is great. But it isn't the bike that's winning those races."

What you see on the track is pure Bubba. □