

Bob Hannah, Honda's lightning bolt!

DIRT RIDER

How to ride the gnarliest trails like a world champ

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APRIL 1983

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BOONIE
BLASTER!**



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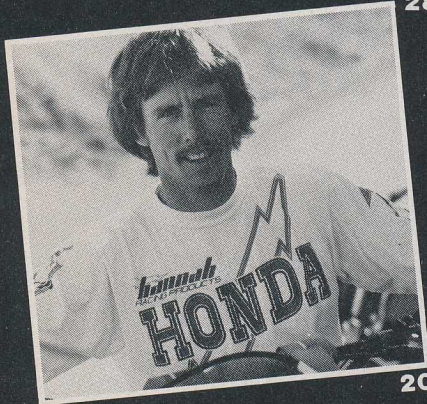
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DIRT RIDER

APRIL 1983, PUBLISHED MONTHLY, ISSUE 5



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If you've got some boonies you want blasted, Yamaha has just the bike for the job, their '83 IT490K. Blastee: John Drury. Photo by Mark Kariya.

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KTM 504GS

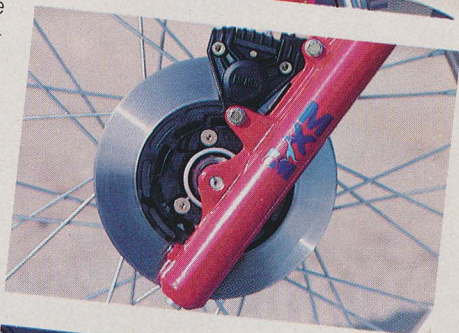
After 1,000 miles of bad road, KTM's "Cadillac" is ready to cruise some more

Barry Higgins was talking about his KTM 504GS: "I ride it, I take it home and park it in the garage, and then I take it out and ride it some more. It's got over 700 miles on it, and I haven't done one single thing to that bike except change the oil and adjust the chain. I mean, that's *it!*" Higgins, you may recall, was America's hottest motocross talent in the late sixties. Now the native New Yorker lives in Georgia where he still wins local MX races as well as competes in other off-road events like hare scrambles and even the International Six Days Enduro. How old is he? No one knows, and Barry isn't telling. How fast is he? A lot of younger riders have found out the hard way.

It would be easy to classify Higgins as the typical 500cc four-stroke rider: a former hotshot who's mellowing out. But that wouldn't be fair (or accurate), either to Barry or the KTM. Both have too much to offer to be pigeonholed so simply.

Such motorcycles used to rule off-road competition. BSA, Husqvarna, Norton and more obscure marques like AJS have historically proven their worth in years long since past. More recently, Yamaha (with Bengt Aberg riding) made a mark in the international motocross scene, but the development of better and better two-stroke motors ultimately rendered the thumpers impotent.

The original big-business attempt at exhuming the allegedly antiquated machines seems to have begun during the Terry Tiernan administration at Yamaha. The TT500. It was a labor of love coupled



Typically KTM, the 504GS is comprised of well-selected, quality components from the Acerbis plastic to Marzocchi forks.

DIRT RIDER SPECIFICATIONS

KTM 504GS

Make/model.....KTM 504GS
 Serial number.....Frame: 8208 11143
 Motor: 164817
 Price.....\$3095
 Number of dealers (U.S.).....312
 Warranty.....None
 Customer service.....KTM America, Inc.
 1906 Broadway
 Lorain, OH 44052
 216/244-2726
 KTM America, Inc. West
 315 W. Bradley
 El Cajon, CA 92020
 619/440-3995

ENGINE

Type.....SOHC, four-valve,
 four-stroke single
 Displacement.....504cc
 Bore x stroke.....89mm X 81mm
 Compression ratio.....9.8:1
 Horsepower/rpm
 (measured).....30.1 @ 6,500
 Torque/rpm (measured).....26.5 @ 5,500
 Carburetion.....36mm Bing
 Exhaust.....Two-into-one pipe,
 four-inch Super Trapp
 muffler/spark arrester
 Ignition.....Nippondenso contactless
 thyristor, electronic ignition
 control, 12v. 190 w. generator,
 three-phase regulator rectifier.
 Lubrication.....Dry sump, oil in frame
 Air filtration.....K&N fabric filter

DRIVE TRAIN

Transmission.....Five-speed
 Primary drive.....32/76(gear)
 Final drive.....15/52(chain)
 Gear ratios.....1st 2.909:1
 2nd 2.000:1
 3rd 1.400:1
 4th 1.118:1
 5th 0.913:1

CHASSIS

Frame.....Chrome-moly, single downtube,

full cradle, removable
 rear frame section
 Rake/trail.....28°/N.A.
 Front suspension.....Marzocchi PA40FD
 forks, 10.4 in. travel (measured)
 Rear suspension.....Pro-Lever,
 Fox Twin-Clicker,
 11 in. travel (measured)
 Brakes.....Front: Brembo single disc,
 9 in. diameter
 Rear: Single-leading shoe,
 7.1 in. dia. drum
 Wheels.....Front: 1.60-21 Nordisk alloy rim,
 36 .156 in. dia. spokes, alloy hub
 Rear: 2.50-18 Nordisk alloy rim,
 40 .156 in. dia. spokes, alloy hub
 Tires.....Front: 3.00-21 Metzeler Moto Cross
 Rear: 4.50-18 Metzeler Moto Cross

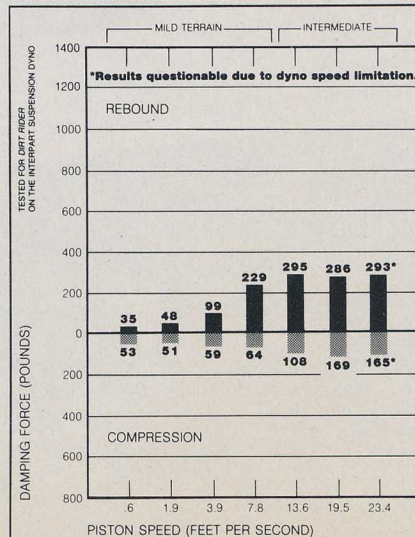
MEASUREMENTS

Weight (wet, no fuel).....292.5 lbs.
 Weight (wet, tank full).....320 lbs.
 Weight distribution.....137/155.5 lbs.
 (47/53%)
 (Fr/rr, wet, no fuel)
 Weight distribution.....154/166 lbs.
 (48/52%)
 (Fr/rr, wet, tank full)
 Wheelbase.....57.5 in.
 Fuel capacity.....3.8 gal.
 Reserve capacity.....0.8 gal.
 Sound test.....101 dBa
 Ground clearance.....10.8 in.
 Seat height.....36.3 in.
 Swingarm length.....21.4 in.
 Swingarm pivot
 to center of countershaft.....2.9 in.

PARTS/COST

Maintenance manual.....Free
 with owner registration
 Carburetor jets.....Main—\$1.72 Idle—\$5.75
 Needle jet—\$1.90 Needle—\$7.25
 Sprockets.....Front: \$16.08
 Rear: \$37.45
 Handlebar levers.....Clutch assy.: \$23.13

FRONT SUSPENSION DAMPING

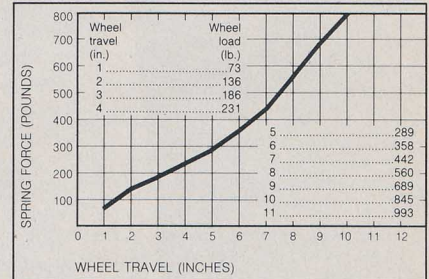


Level: \$14.28
 Brake assy.: \$81.03
 Lever: \$14.28
 Shift lever.....\$27.33
 Piston kit (complete).....\$93.82
 Rings only.....Top—\$9.92
 Middle—\$5.18 Oil—\$21.57
 Clutch plates.....Friction: (8) \$5.97 ea.
 Steel: (8) \$2.90 ea.
 Air filter.....\$18.75
 Brake shoe.....Front disc pads—\$11.77/set
 Rear—\$17.03/set
 Chain.....\$51.10
 Seat.....\$68.72
 Fenders.....Front: \$17.23
 Rear: \$21.13
 Fuel tank.....\$111.25
 Cables.....Throttle: \$4.62
 Clutch: \$6.92
 Front brake hose: \$26.37
 Handlebars.....\$21.87

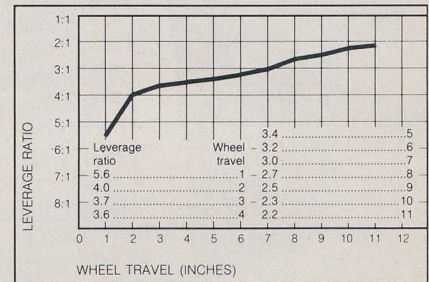
OPTIONS

Front sprockets: (15, 17, 19, 20).....\$16.08
 Rear sprockets: (48, 52, 57).....\$37.45
 2.4 gallon fuel tank.....\$111.25
 Blue safety seat
 or bench seat.....approx. \$70

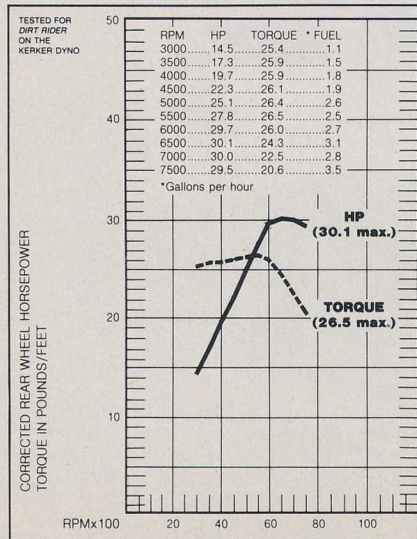
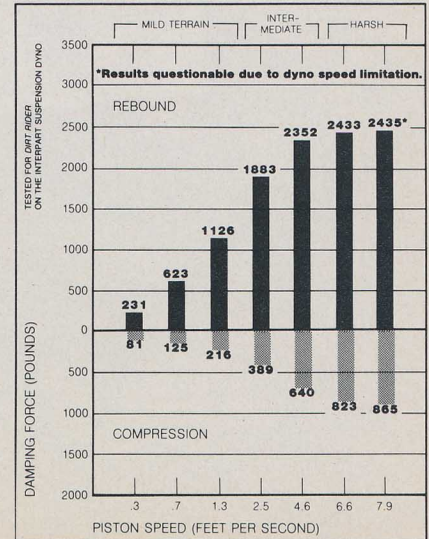
REAR WHEEL LOAD



REAR WHEEL LINKAGE

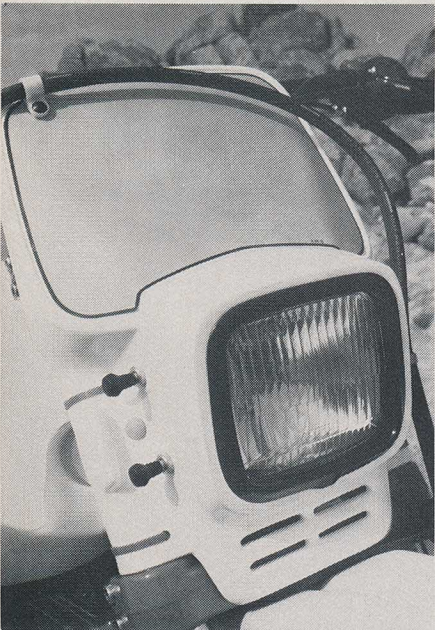


REAR SUSPENSION DAMPING

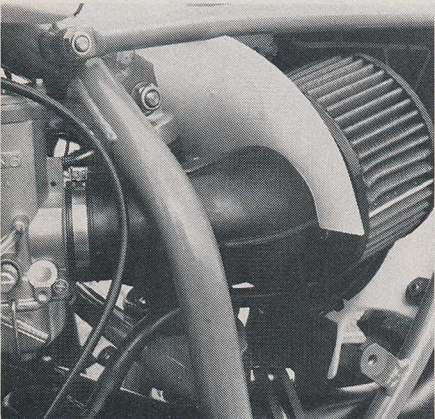




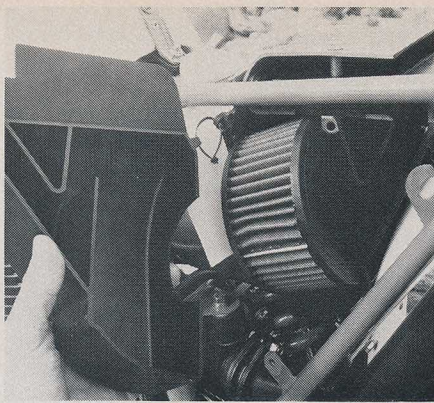
Brembo hydraulic disc provides smooth progressive action. Forks have 10.8 in. travel.



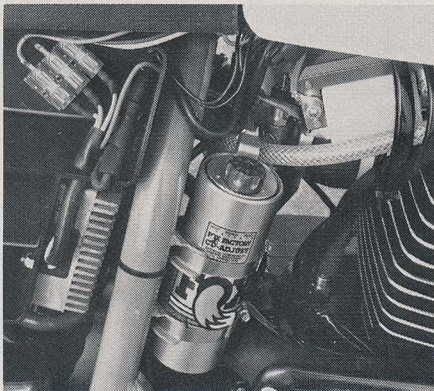
KTM's Acerbis plastic numberplate/headlight looks great, but light switches break easily.



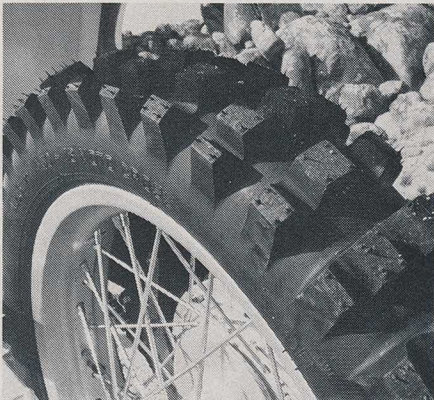
The 36mm Bing carburetor feeds the four-valve head fresh air/fuel from a K&N air filter.



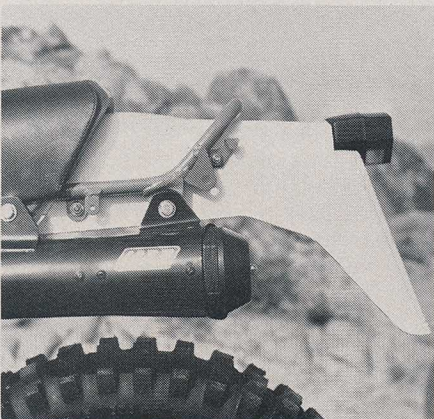
Rubber bands hold the somewhat restrictive airbox together. Not the bike's best feature.



Electrical connections are in airbox. Note Twin Clicker's compression damping knob.



Metzeler's 4.50-18 Moto Cross is responsible for all those rocks the KTM throws.



Rear fender/light looks like a dual-purpose item. Super-Trapp emits 101 dbA.



KTM provides a good quality toolkit. Spark plug wrench is a must-carry item.

with enough marketing research to convince the Japanese beancounters that it would be a profitable venture. Honda followed with the XR500R, Suzuki has SP and DR model 500cc four-strokes, and Kawasaki should have one soon. Can-Am was first to use the Rotax motor (as does KTM now), and Husqvarna has made a modern four-stroke, probably for mid-1983 release in the U.S.

While there definitely is a nostalgic tinge to the thumper revival, there's a practical side as well. Two-stroke engines aren't as emissions clean as four-strokes, a sad fact that has removed all but the tiny sub-100cc models from Main Street, USA. That forced the manufacturers to go back and channel their considerable R&D capabilities toward the development of four-stroke technology. Four-strokes have another inherent advantage: fuel economy. On a long trail ride or enduro loop, that's critical.

In theory, there are only a couple of major disadvantages to the four-strokes. They have more moving parts than two-strokes, and they're heavier. Overhead cams have helped reduce the parts problem, and increased effort on the part of the manufacturers' engineering and research departments will ultimately conquer the weight deficit. Which brings us to the KTM.

TECH BRIEFS

You couldn't classify the KTM 504GS as a lightweight, but no other 500cc production 'stroker falls into that category, either. Honda's '82 XR500R rendered a wet-and-full-of-gas weight of 305 lbs. on the *Dirt Rider/Motorcyclist* magazine scales, and the '82 Can-Am Sonic clocked in at 309 lbs. The KTM's 320 lb. full-tank weight and an empty-gas-tank

reading of 292.5 lbs. aren't two-stroke competitive, either, but in its class, the KTM is roughly in the ballpark.

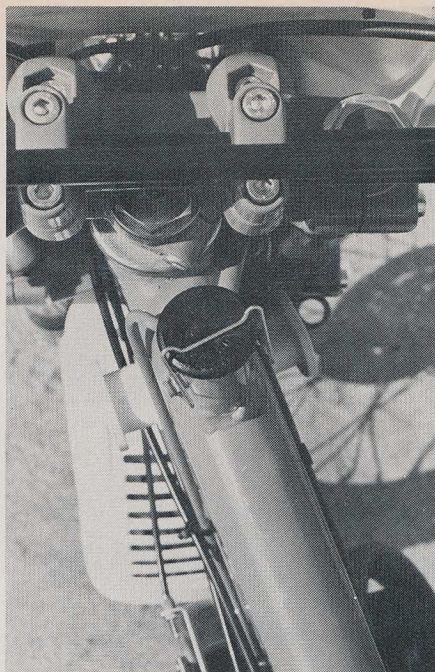
What sets the KTM apart from its peers is its handling qualities. They make the KTM feel lighter than it is. Suspension components account for much of the excellence in handling characteristics, but it all begins with the bright orange chrome-moly frame.

The frame combines KTM/Penton's historically fine turning and stability traits with the practical features of serving as an oil tank for the dry sump motor, protecting the engine cases and adding strength with multiple triangulated cross-tubes under the cradle, supporting the high-stress mounting for the single rear shock and, finally, providing access to the shock by having a removeable rear frame section. The rear section, by the way, is not the same handy feature found on contemporary motocrossers. Due to the wiring harness on the GS model, the section remains connected to the bike after you've removed all the necessary bolts and nuts. KTM doesn't provide quick-release electrical wiring (one of the first modifications we'd perform if we owned one), so when you get it all unbolted, you're left holding a 15 lb. rear frame/fender/airbox/muffler section with no way to disconnect it from the bike. The answer is to lay it against the right side of the machine, trying to put as little strain as possible on the wiring. A nice waterproof multiple connection plug would solve that inconvenience.

Oil is located in the backbone of the frame, and the filler neck is between the fork crown and fuel tank. Oil capacity is three quarts of the recommended 20W-50 motor oil.

A pair of 40mm Marzocchi forks provide front wheel suspension while KTM's Pro-Lever rising-rate linkage and a Fox Factory Twin Clicker shock handle the rear. The forks are shorter travel than the 42mm units provided on the motocross version of the 504; we measured them at 10.4 inches full travel. The larger, longer Marzochis (as on the MX) claim 11.8 inches of travel. They make the front end sit slightly higher, which feels good when riding, but if you didn't have both bikes to compare, you probably wouldn't miss the extra inch and a half. The fork springs are similar to the ones we tested for the January issue of *Dirt Rider* in the KTM 125 L/C MXC. Two springs are used. A 1.4 inch long, 146 lb./in. straight-wound spring sits atop a 24.4 inch progressive-wound spring with 22/33 lb./in. rates. Crossover point from 22 to 33 is at the sixth inch of spring travel. The spring is stronger at the soft end than the triple-rated 15/25/34 lb./in. one found on the 125. Even so, the forks sag a full inch with no one on board.

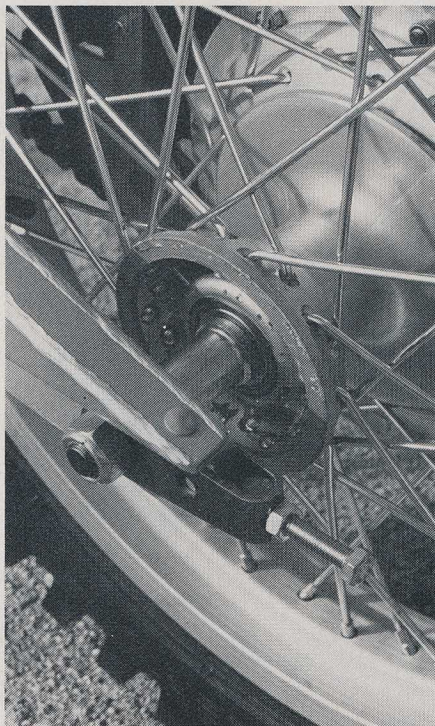
The rear wheel travels a full 11 inches with the bottom-out bumper removed from the shock shaft. Leverage ratios begin with a soft 5.6:1 in the first inch and progress to 2.2:1 in the eleventh inch.



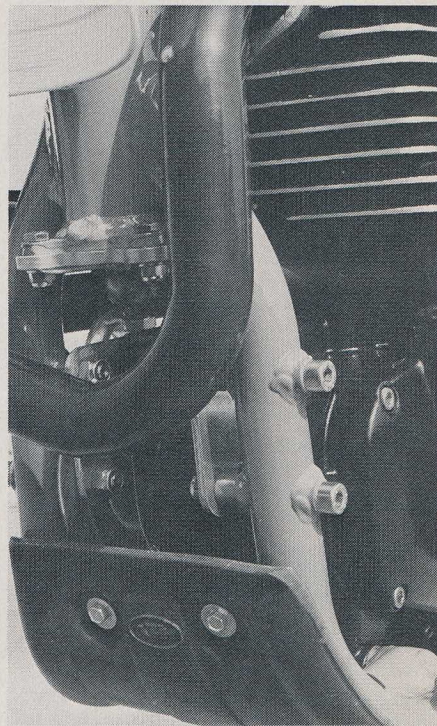
Oil for the dry sump motor is carried in the frame. Overfilling guarantees an oil shower.



You can unbolt the rear frame section, but wiring won't let you remove it completely.



Alloy swingarm joins 40-spoke rear wheel through loseable, bendable chain adjusters.



Note oil fitting at base of downtube, plastic skid plate and lots of allenhead bolts.

Pro-Lever linkage consists of a five-inch stamped steel strut that pivots from the frame, reaching almost horizontally back (slightly down) to meet the bottom shock mount. Two short one and one-half inch links hinge on the strut approximately three and one-half inches back from the frame, reaching up to connect to the bottom of the swingarm roughly five inches back from the swingarm's pivot point. The swingarm itself is an alloy extrusion, massively gusseted at the shock/linkage mounting section. It's obviously very rigid, very strong.

The Fox Factory Twin Clicker shock is a superb performer. The reservoir-mounted compression damping adjustment knob offers eight choices from soft to strong damping. The rebound damping adjuster, concentric with the shock body, is located at the bottom of the shock for relatively easy access. Rebound range is three full turns of the knob, or 36 "clicks." Starting positions are number 3 on the compression damping knob and 12 clicks, or one full turn, on the rebound ring. Included with each 504GS is a complete instruction, sticker and registration

kit from Fox. The shocks are not mounted at the Austrian factory. Instead, they're put into the crate in the U.S., and KTM dealers do the installation as part of the set-up procedure. Recommended pre-load setting is 9.75 inches on the blue 528 lb./in. spring.

The rear wheel is a 40-spoke unit with a 2.50-18 Nordisk alloy rim laced to an alloy hub. Up front, 36 spokes connect a 1.60-21 Nordisk rim to a small KTM alloy hub. Spoke size is .156 inch all around. A 3.00-21 Metzeler Moto Cross tire handles steering chores while a 4.50-18 Metzeler throws rocks at the competition. The rear brake is a rod-actuated, seven-inch diameter, single-leading shoe drum. The front brake is a single hydraulically actuated disc unit with a nine-inch diameter disc.

Providing the thumps is a 504cc Rotax single cylinder, SOHC four-stroke motor. It develops mild, flat horsepower and torque curves with conservative numbers. Maximum power numbers don't begin to compare with current open class two-stroke enduro bikes. The 504 starts with 14.5 horsepower and 25.4 lb.-ft. of torque at 3,000 rpm. At that point, it beats the 490 Maico which produces 11.6 bhp and 20.3 lb.-ft. But the 504 peaks at 30.1

bhp at 7,000 and 26.5 lb.-ft. at 5,500. The Maico's maximums are 40.8 bhp at 7,000 rpm and 30.9 lb.-ft. at 6,000. And that's with a full-of-gas weight of 279 lb. The moral: don't drag race Maicos.

Looking at it from another angle, however, the KTM has good power *everywhere*. If you want results, just dial the throttle. The bike will jump forward regardless of your speed or gear choice. That four-stroke torque curve makes riding the KTM an easy and very pleasant experience. Where a pipier and more powerful machine could produce wheelies, wheelspin or bog the motor, the KTM just keeps on chugging. And it's not just a low rpm torquer, either. Max horsepower is spread over a 1500 rpm range, from 6,000 to 7,500 rpm, and that's compared to other thumpers which develop their ponies at something closer to 5,000 rpm. Riding, that translates into endless rpm; wick it up at a cruising speed of, say, 4,000 rpm, but don't shift until the power starts to fall off at 7,500. The rangey Rotax will wind out with the best of 'em.

Two cams have been sold in the 504GS motors. An older 225° duration intake cam was installed in early '83 models and a new 266° model is in the latest ones. KTM also offers the newer

cam to owners of the early bikes. The 266° cam makes the motor easier to start, and it produces more horsepower.

Driving the camshaft is a toothed belt driven directly off the left side of the crank. The cam controls two 34mm intake valves and two 30mm exhaust valves. The intake side draws the fuel/air mix through a 36mm Bing carburetor and K&N air filter, then blows exhaust gases out through twin exhaust ports/pipes. The pipes join at the right side of the cylinder, then cross over to the left side between the motor and shock, exiting above the rear wheel on the left side through a four-inch Super-Trapp muffler/spark arrester.

Counterbalancers, gear-driven off the crankshaft and located just forward of the crankcase, help quell the vibrations generated by the 89mm piston as it travels up and down its 81mm stroke.

The five-speed transmission is driven through a 16-plate (eight steel, eight friction) clutch. A stock 15-tooth countershaft sprocket is linked to the 52-tooth rear wheel sprocket by the 1/4 x 5/8 inch (520) chain. As it comes, the 504 is geared low, and is better suited (gearing-wise) to woods trail workouts. Optional sprockets can easily convert it to a high-speed Baja blaster.

The airbox houses an excellent choice of filter, a five-inch K&N. The box itself, however, has the appearance of being taken from a dual-purpose bike, which it quite likely was. KTM offers the 504 in full dual-purpose regalia in Europe, and a couple features are apparent on our dirt-only model. Another example is the extra bracketing on the rear frame loop. The airbox appears to be restrictive. Coupled with the K&N, the box could actually be the controlling factor in air flow to the carburetor. (We did not flow test it; these comments are based on eyeball estimates.) The side of the box is held on with small rubber bands and plastic tabs, both of which break easily. A rider might use this system forever and never have any major problems, but it doesn't meet KTM's normal high standards.

The white plastic pieces are made by Acerbis and are of excellent quality. Rear fender styling is unusual, and it's probably heavier than it needs to be. Again, this part looks like it was taken from the dual-purpose 504. The sidecovers look good and function to protect the wiring and airfilter. They're held on with screws that are too long; we'd like to see quick-release fasteners of some type used instead of the screws. The fuel tank is larger than on the MX model, a full 3.8 gallons. The mouth of the tank is a little smaller than we'd like it; it's difficult to peer past a gas can spout when you're filling it to see the level. The headlight/numberplate is attractive and durable, except for the switches. The pull-type switches have plastic stalks, and ours snapped off almost immediately. The front fender is well-shaped for splatter

BAJA BUMMER

This test was scheduled for last month's issue of *Dirt Rider*, but a part failure, rider judgement error and subsequent repair time made it impossible to complete our testing procedures in time for deadline.

Most bikes kick back occasionally when you're starting them, and the 504 was no exception. The problem arose when a backfire broke the kickstarter gear and the idler gear, which connects it to the clutch basket and also drives the oil pump. Rod Bush, KTM's Na-

tional Service Manager, has assured us that the occurrence of 504 gears breaking is rare, that it was caused by a faulty casting, and that KTM will replace broken gears for owners with new, well-cast ones.

But don't attempt to ride the bike with the broken gears. The backfire sheared one tooth off the idler gear and clipped the end off one of the kickstarter gears. We pulled the sidecover off, removed the pieces of teeth and considered removing the idler gear to keep from further damaging the gears (since we were still 45 miles from our destination and darkness was closing fast). Removal of the idler gear would have rendered the oil pump useless, however, so there was no alternative other than button it up and limp in while trying to ignore the loud rapping noise. The ride home further destroyed the two damaged gears and also damaged the oil pump sprocket and the clutch basket, turning a relatively simple and inexpensive repair job into a major problem.

In retrospect, the decision to ride it was wrong. (Stupid, perhaps, is a better word.) And had we been anywhere except in Baja and uncertain of our course, we definitely would have either gotten a tow or left the bike there overnight.

We had completed approximately 200 miles of test riding on the KTM when the incident happened, and since having it repaired by Wheelsmith's Clark Jones, we've clocked another 800 miles with no problems whatsoever with the gears.

To avoid kickbacks from the motor, always use the yellow mark and sightglass on the belt drive housing and keep the throttle closed when firing up the big thumper.

—Charles Morey



protection and aids in engine cooling by being shorter in back with vent slots.

Handlebars are low and have a bend that all our testers liked. Most riders will probably want to trim an inch or three off the width.

In summary, the KTM 504GS is a technically good motorcycle. With minor exceptions, the finest quality components are used. Other than the airbox and an attempt at weight trimming, we wouldn't change anything.

TESTS/IMPRESSIONS

We selected a special "task force" to help us test the 504. Putting a team of two-stroke riders on it wouldn't have promised the perspective we wanted. Instead, we found three riders who own and ride various four-stroke singles and asked them to compare it to their bikes. Without exception everyone admired the KTM's handling qualities and enjoyed the "always right there" power.

One rider owns an Aberg-framed TT500 with a Pro-Tec Stroker kit, Simons forks and Ohlins shocks. Another rides enduros on a C&J-framed stock TT500 with Simons forks and single shock rear suspension. The third guest tester has been riding an almost stock TT500 with Works Performance shocks; he'd just purchased a new KTM 504 (MX version) the week before we scheduled our test session. Ability-wise, we had two "B" enduro riders and one CRC "A" rider.

When compared to the one-offs, the KTM—like every other presently-available production thumper—was overweight and down on power. No one, however, balked at the \$3,095 price tag. They had much more than that invested in their home-builts, and they felt that a rider could buy the KTM and fix it up to perform on par with their lighter bikes. In fact, the KTM offered a far superior starting point, with its good frame, suspension components and motor, than their older model TT500s.

To a rider accustomed to riding two-stroke enduro bikes, the KTM feels bulky and heavy. Our editor took it out for several rides in Baja and in the SoCal desert, and he recalls his first impression: "I had the bike going, oh, probably somewhere between 45 and 55 mph through a typical whoop-de-doo section at Lucerne Valley. It tracked dead true unless I let it launch off one of the whoops a little sideways, and even then, it was a simple matter to straighten it out before things got too far out of control.

"But the single lasting recollection of that first ride is a term that popped into my head while whooping it through that section. 'Desert sled,' a name I hadn't thought of for years and years, suddenly came to mind. The KTM takes to typical desert terrain like a Cadillac takes to Interstate highways. You can find quicker, lighter, more powerful bikes, but if you're going for a long ride—in Baja, say, where we usually do between 500 and 600

