

Head of the CLASS



KTM 125 E-XC

THE BURLESON REPORT *Feathery light and snappy fast, the KTM 125 E-XC has the tools needed by a woods racer.*

October in Minnesota marks two conclusions: the end of summer and the end of the AMA National Hare Scrambles Series. As the weather in my part of the country (Columbus, Ohio) turned cold during the first week

of the month, I enthusiastically made the long trip to the Spring Creek MX Park in Millville, Minnesota, for the second-to-last National hare scrambles of the 1988 season. I was hoping for possible snow, or at least wet ground

and good trails, to race-test the new enduro version of the 1989 KTM 125, the E-XC. If you've never had the chance to ride someone else's new bike on fresh snow over ground that hasn't frozen, then you've missed some of the



PHOTO: MARK KARIYA

DIRT RIDER

MAGAZINE

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best fun to be had on two wheels.

DRY DAYS

But snow was not on the menu that weekend. The weather was in the high

60s and race day was clear and sunny. Bummer. I think 1988 has to go down in the record books as the year of dry races. Spring Creek MX park is now owned and run by 1985 AMA National Hare Scrambles Champion and National enduro contender John Martin. John has done a tremendous amount of work on the facility, and had just hosted a successful National championship motocross race there.

The course totalled 18 miles, with three main grass track areas mixed in with trails around the motocross track and sections of the track used to connect the trails and allow for spectating.

Although the weather wasn't what I had hoped for, the bike I had with me was one I had hoped to be able to test—the KTM 125 E-XC. This was the same bike I'd seen win the 125cc class overall at the ISDE just a few months earlier. The E-XC models are the enduro versions that come complete with resettable odometers, enduro-style lights, quiet pipes and U.S. Forest Service-approved spark arrestors.

PURE FUN

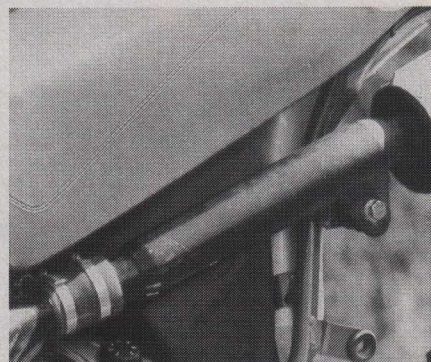
On Saturday before the race, I did some riding while Mark Kariya shot photos. During this time the best and worst features of the KTM showed up. The bike takes so little effort to control that it's easy to do fun stuff. Little, quick maneuvers between the trees, jumping over logs—whatever—are all great; the power is there, and the low weight makes everything seem easy. This bike is pure fun to ride and can be



D.B. in action! The KTM has a potent enough engine for tight woods. It weighs 20 pounds less than a KDX and is a real flicker!



Sorry, the carburetion is grim. Even Burler's fiddling couldn't get great throttle response and good mileage out of it.



With the help of the resonator, the little Katoom is very quiet, while the Sparky meets USFS requirements. The airbox is super waterproof.

totally controlled by the rider—not the other way around. The KTM proved to be light, quiet, nimble and fully enduro ready.

It was also while I was just fooling around that the carburetion problems surfaced. After only 10 minutes of slow riding, doing stunts for Mark, the spark plug fouled. During the afternoon it fouled three plugs. For the race, we leaned out the pilot jet, main jet and lowered the needle, and, while it didn't foul any more plugs, the carburetion was no longer consistent throughout the full range; instead, it developed rich and lean spots. It's a shame that the flawless carburetion displayed with the Keihin on the '89 250 E-XC we evaluated earlier (Oct. '88) hasn't been carried over to the 125. My theory is that the addition of the double-wall pipe, resonator and spark arrestor caused the problems, and that all that combined with the very cold spark plug is the cause of fouling.

POTENT POWER

Even with inconsistent carburetion, the engine makes good power. The E-XC has the same cylinder as the motocross model (the one that had Bobby Moore getting holeshots consistently in 125cc MX GPs last year) combined with a large flywheel lighting coil Moto-plate ignition. The engine pulls nicely down low and will take any amount of throttle and still pull away. Things don't really start to happen, though, until the power valve opens, but then a strong surge of power comes through. If the motor is kept revved up, the bike will move out quickly—not as fast as a

250cc MX bike, but this is certainly where the fun is.

Everyone knows that motocross lap times for 125cc bikes are usually as fast as, if not faster than, 250cc and Open bikes. The reason? The 125s whip through the turns faster. The same was true at the hare scrambles. John Martin had laid out some fun grass track sections, and there the 125 was able to maintain all its momentum. The 250cc and Open motorcycles had to slow for the off-camber turns, but I could easily keep the 125 E-XC floored. Good fun!

The gearbox is a wide-ratio six-speed with a good span that handled all the conditions I encountered. While the KTM's top speed won't set the world on fire, it's more than enough for this type of race. The ratios fit the power perfectly, but I would like to see first gear a little taller.

DETAILING DONE HERE

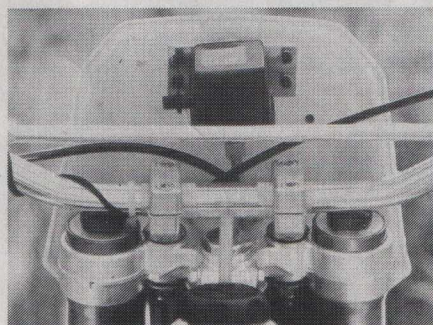
The 125, as is true of all the 1989 KTM models, has higher footpegs than before. I really like these pegs as they keep your feet out of the dirt and your boots don't lock onto them. The difference is that the shift lever is rotated up so that it's at the right height in relation to the new footpeg. Unfortunately, when upshifting, the lever hits a rounded rib on the clutch cover that sticks out for the clutch actuation mechanism. The lever hits the bottom just after engaging the next gear but before completing the throw. However, during practice we discovered that minor filing on the inside of the lever solved the problem and resulted in the

THE BURLERSON REPORT

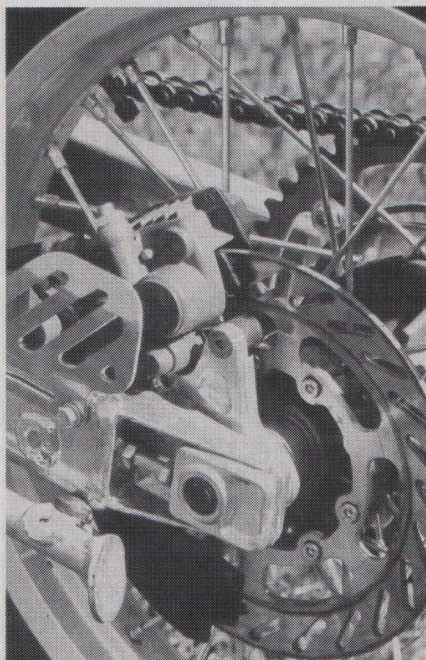
DATE OF EVENT:	10-9-88
TYPE OF EVENT:	NAT'L HARE SCRAMBLES
LENGTH OF TRACK:	18 MILES 4 LAPS
TEMPERATURE:	65°
MOTORCYCLE:	KTM 125 E-XC
LOCATION:	MILLVILLE MINNESOTA
TRACK CONDITION:	SOFT, A BIT UJSTY
WEATHER:	BEAUTIFUL FALL DAY
TRANSMISSION:	6-SPEED ENDURO
FINAL GEARING:	C/S:13 R/W:50
IGNITION:	MOTOPLAT EXTERNAL 35W
TIMING:	1.5 BTDC
FUEL:	SHELL SUZUKO OIL: DURALUBE 40:1
CYLINDER:	STD '89
PISTON:	STD '89
EXHAUST PIPE:	DOUBLE-WALL E-XC
AIR FILTER:	STD TWIN-AIR
CARBURETOR:	DELL'ORTO VHSB 37 CD
MAIN JET:	210
NEEDLE JET:	DP270
PILOT:	40
NEEDLE:	K-31
SLIDE:	40
NEEDLE POSITION:	#4
CARBURETOR PERFORMANCE:	WEAK + RICH DOWN LOW; BAD ECONOMY; FOULS PLUGS
FRONT FORK:	WHITE POWER 4054
FORK SPRING:	4.0 N/M
STD. PRELOAD:	5MM
COMPRESSION ADJ:	5
REBOUND ADJ:	7
OIL:	10W
OIL LEVEL:	160MM
FRONT TIRE:	3.00-21 METZELER MX
PRESSURE:	13 PSI
REAR SHOCK:	W.P. KIMX 89
SHOCK SPRING:	50 N/M
SAG:	95MM
COMPRESSION ADJ:	2
REBOUND ADJ:	10
REAR TIRE:	4.10-18 METZELER MULTI
PRESSURE:	12 PSI
ADJUSTMENTS FOR RACE:	SET FORK REBOUND TO 7, COMPR TO 5. CHANGED CARB FROM 215 MAIN, 45 PILOT. REAR SAG AT 95MM COMPR TO 2. REBOUND TO 10
PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED:	USES A LOT OF GAS - HAD TO STOP EVERY LAP. SMALL FILL CAP IN TANK. FOULED PLUGS IN PRACTICE
ENGINE PERFORMANCE:	GOOD - VERY QUIET, EASY TO RIDE. 5TH IN START W/ 250+ OPENS. CLUTCH + SHIFTING GOOD. CARBURETION RICH DOWN LOW, LEAN MID, RICH 3/4
SUSPENSION PERFORMANCE:	EXCELLENT FIRM BUT NOT HARSH NEEDS A LITTLE MORE REBOUND IN FRONT
RACE RESULT:	1ST SENIOR A
TOTAL TIME ON MC:	3 HRS 12 MIN.
OVERALL IMPRESSION:	FUN LIGHT GOOD SUSP. + BRAKES, GOOD (EASY-TO-RIDE) POWER, GOOD CLUTCH. SEAT TOO LOW, BAD CARBURETION, SMALL INLET ON TANK.



Short riders will like the KTM 125 E-XC's low seat height, but it's hard on transitions from sitting to standing.



The odometer is compact and accurate. You bleed the air from the latest White Power fork by popping up the rebound damping adjusters.



These great brakes look like they came straight off an '87 Kawasaki. The rear's now nonfloating, which improves ground clearance and simplifies maintenance.

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best-shifting KTM I've ever ridden.

Clutch action was excellent. The pull was very easy and modulation was linear, allowing for good control of slippage and engagement. The combination of the clutch action, good shifting and strong, usable power really comes alive on the trails, allowing a fast pace that's easily maintained. Also, the engine is virtually impossible to stall; just easing up on the rear brake has the rear wheel turning the engine over and running immediately. The kick-start leverage, ratio and position make for some of the easiest starts ever.

The exhaust system, used on all of the 1989 E-XC models, has a resonator in front of the muffler and a screen-type U.S. Forest Service-approved spark arrestor. The 125 also has double-wall construction on the main expansion chamber for additional sound deadening. The result is the quietest motorcycle on the start line. Only when the engine is revved up and the power valve opens is any real noise audible. The power is still good, and I didn't suffer from ringing ears as I usually do after a race.

DIAL THAT WP IN

The suspension includes the new, cartridge-style White Power 4054 Multi-

KTM came up with a decent speedo cable design and routing, but the tank is barely good for 35 miles, and the filler opening is too small.

adjuster fork. The standard settings are three on compression and three on rebound, but I increased the compression adjustment because I was going through the travel easily and hitting hard on the bottoming cones. Increasing the compression slowed the travel and kept the front end up better, reducing the harshness. The fork is very tunable and dramatically improves the overall handling manners of the bike.

The rear suspension is controlled by a White Power shock. I also increased rebound control here, all the way to 10, to keep the back of the bike from kicking up. Setting the sag correctly is also very important; too much lets the rear get too deep into the travel and stiffen, and too little makes the rear suspension load the front excessively, simultaneously making the rear unresponsive to little bumps. I found 95mm to be just right. After four laps of the course by almost 200 riders, the ground was getting beat up, but the 125's suspension just floated over it, putting the power to the ground and smoothing out the trails for me.

WHAT ELSE?

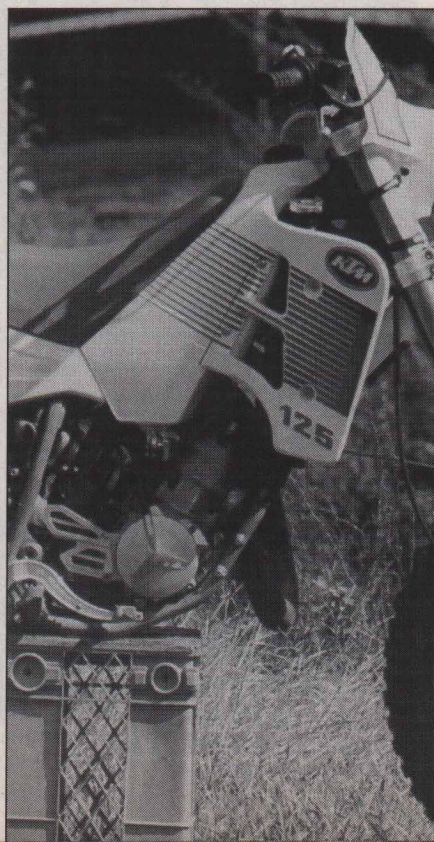
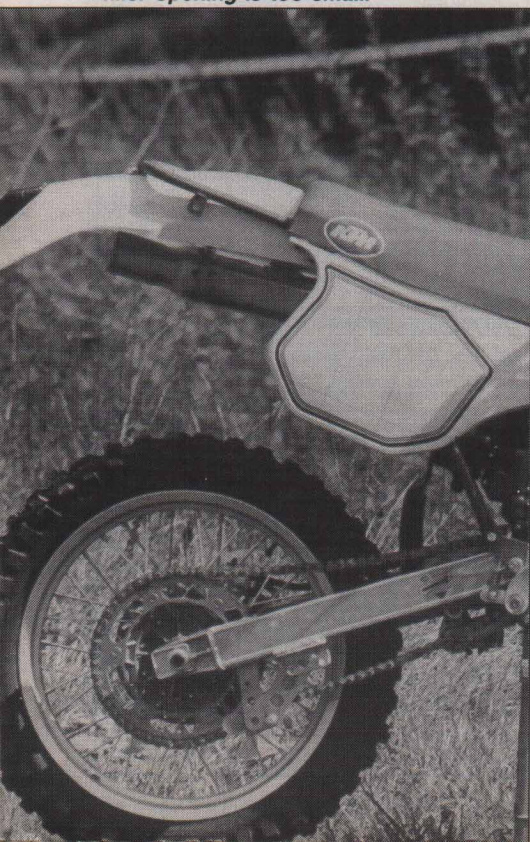
The 125 E-XC comes with a low, red seat. It's nice being able to touch the ground, and getting on the bike is easy, but the seat makes the transition from sitting to standing a longer jump. I found that my normal style of standing a lot was changed to sitting a lot. My old knees resist that much movement, and I would get down deep into the bike and stay there, where normally I would be going back and forth from sitting to standing.

The gas tank holds 2.1 gallons, but I had to stop every lap for gas. On Saturday I had to go on reserve after 24 miles and wasn't confident of making a full 36. The size of the gas inlet on the tank slowed down filling considerably—no quick fills here. Only a small gas can spout will work.

The brakes on the 125 are outstanding. The front lever is adjustable both for static and braking positions. The effort required is very low, making one-finger stops easy. The rear also got high marks for low effort and good control. Overall braking was consistent during the race, and stopping power was high with good control.

Metzeler tires are mounted both front and back. Up front is the universally used 3.00-21 Motocross, with a 4.10-18 Multicross in back. Both offer good all-around traction, high resist-

The bike shines at speed, and the suspension proved spot-on for the tough National hare scrambles at Spring Creek.



ance to flats and a good lifespan.

The 125 E-XC came equipped with the same functional, resettable odometer found on the 250. Fortunately, KTM has done some homework, and the routing of the cable worked perfectly.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The KTM 125 E-XC is a competitive, race-ready enduro mount. Its light weight and great handling make the worst obstacle no worry. Only the carburetion and gas tank stand in the way of letting this motorcycle be as good as it deserves to be. The reasons to ride in the 200cc class are valid: lower cost and easy-to-ride, lightweight bikes. The KTM 125 E-XC meets those needs, as well as offering competitive speed and handling. **DR**



First gear is a little low, but the six-speed has a well-rounded set of ratios otherwise. The Metzeler tires worked fine in the Minnesota loam.

Qs AND As

Normally, I would prefer to race-test an enduro model in an enduro, but the length of the Spring Creek course and the hope for challenging weather convinced me to test the 125. I left all the enduro equipment on the bike and raced it just as if I was in an enduro. The choice was all right; I won the Senior class, was 12th overall and first 125cc.

But before the test, a couple of questions came to mind:

1. Why ride a small bike in enduro-type events anyway?

2. What is the point of riding a 125 now when many areas have only a 0-200cc class?

3. How good would the little KTM that had just won the ISDE be?

The answers to the above questions, as I found out, aren't totally black and white, but I'll do my best.

1. There really are a couple of good reasons to ride small-displacement motorcycles in enduro-type events. The first is cost. Normally, the retail prices of 125cc-, 175cc- and 200cc-class bikes are considerably below those of bikes made for the 250cc and Open classes, and spare parts for the smaller bikes are generally priced lower. Secondly, the overall level of effort needed to ride can be lower for a small bike. The "tail wagging the dog" syndrome has grown to be a big problem with most of the Open machines and even among some of the newer 250cc motocross bikes; they toss out way too much horsepower all at once. Real-life trails call for a smooth technique to avoid getting blasted into the trees. Here is where a small-displacement motorcycle is at its best.

They have enough power to go fast, but not so much that you're fighting the bike. Finally, the fun factor is extremely high on these tiddlers since you feel that you can do almost anything on them and still be in control, and they aren't as tiring as the bigger, heavier, more powerful machines. Which brings us to the second answer. . .

2. The main benefit of the smaller bikes is just that: they're smaller. In this case, not really smaller in size but in weight. The greatest advantage of a 125 is its lighter weight. On my scales after the race, topped up with coolant, gearbox oil and a full tank of gas, the little KTM weighed in at 233 pounds. This may sound high compared to motocross specification weights, but check it out sometime. This is race-ready, enduro style: lights, muffler, a full tank of gas, etc., and it works out to 20 pounds less than a KDX200. The downside of a 125 is the reduced bottom-end power. Still, KTM has made available a race-ready, small-displacement motorcycle that really does offer performance with light weight. Which brings us to the third and final answer. . .

3. Just how good is the ISDE-winning KTM? My post-race feelings went like this: On the plus side were the bike's very light feeling; nimble handling; excellent brakes; controlled and comfortable suspension; good, usable power; and very quiet overall noise level. On the negative side, I tallied too low a seat, incorrect carburetor settings, a small gas tank inlet and a small fuel range. This is an excellent-handling, lightweight, completely enduro-ready package, hurt by poor carburetion and restricted range.

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