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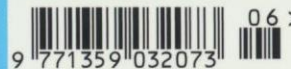
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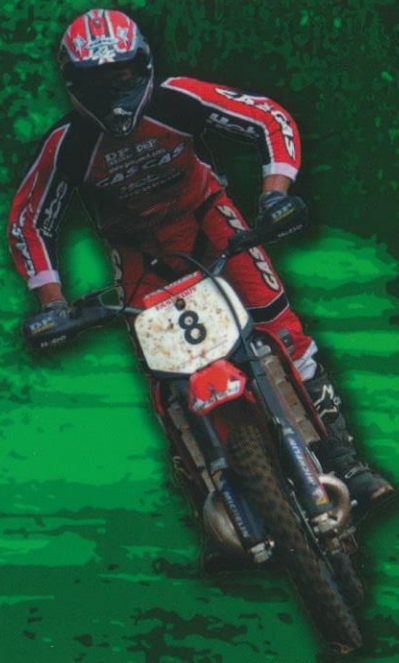


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Sala by  
Jonti Edmunds

# EDITORIAL

## With Friends Like These...

I've come to the conclusion that dirt bike riding isn't the solitary pastime that at first it would appear. It's definitely all about sharing the experience with your friends. I've been forced into this deduction after a four-day trip to France with TBM's columnist Chris Evans. Not for the first time did Chris shamefully try and convince me that diverting via Paris (where he keeps his dirtbike), is the quickest way to the south of the country.

And it might've been, had I not arrived in France (after a 4am start) to discover that his bike was locked to his mate's machine with a shackle-lock, for which - yep, you guessed it - Chris didn't have the key. This particular piece of crucial information being relayed to me via mobile phone once I was already fully committed to the thick of the Paris rush-hour traffic I might add.

Remarkably (and somewhat worryingly) the shackle-lock gave up without a fight, quicker than Chris does on most enduros, and after a brief couple of hours swanning around Paris gathering together the various bits of his 'estranged' riding kit, tyres, medical equipment, cigarettes etc and saying hello to all of his friends (even calling in on some of them - he'lllo Daaaahhling, mwar, mwar), we were off... to find him lunch. By this stage we were running so late I wouldn't have been in the least bit surprised if our next stop had been to call in at Chris's new apartment for a spot of decorating. Instead, we went looking for flowers for a girlfriend of his! Not surprising then that we finally arrived at our hotel in the south of France long after dark, and long after the restaurant had officially closed for the night. You can imagine how happy the chef was as Chris attempted to persuade him off his Mobylette and back into the kitchen.

The first morning of a ride there's always a million things to do - fuel up the bikes, make sure you've got all the appropriate tools in your bumbag, sort out the route etc. But in our case there's the added inconvenience of

having to photograph both bikes before they get dirty. This is a time consuming part of the job, but with two people (one to move the bikes, and the other to operate the camera), it's usually a little easier. Which was why I was rather surprised to find that Chris picked this particular moment to change both his tyres. After fumbling around for 45mins having massacred both rims and one of his knuckles, and while the French guys we were supposed to be riding with shuffled their feet and smoked a whole packet of cigarettes, I reluctantly put the camera down and finished off the job for him.

And that set the tone for the rest of the trip, frankly. Whether it was carrying all of Chris' bulky waterproof gear around for him - after all, I only had a fully-loaded camera bag to carry, whereas Chris had... 'a bit of a dodgy back'; or bailing him out when he left his wallet on a garage forecourt, it just seemed to go on and on.

So it was almost a relief when after days of ferrying him around, I returned both him and his bike to the heart of Paris and set off on my own for the final leg of the journey home. Even the fact that he managed to direct me the wrong way round the Paris ring-road delaying my journey even further, couldn't dampen my spirits. In fact I felt strangely elated. Or at least I did until I arrived at the ferry terminal to discover that Chris had booked me onto the wrong ferry and I was going to have to pay a huge supplement to get home.

As I handed over the last of my euros, the bloke in the ticket booth said to me 'Been anywhere nice, 'ave you?'

'I've been visiting a friend in need...' I replied, somewhat sardonically.

'Oh aye, where's that then? He said, without any hint of irony, 'I don't think I've ever been there...'

'No, and you definitely don't want to' I replied brusquely and drove off...

SI MELBER

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JUNE 2004

NO.106



## MPs DEBATE DIRTBIKE DILEMMA



Right: Alun Michael (Far Right!) prepares to sweep opposition to his policies under the carpet...

Unnoticed by most of the media, Alun Michael, the Rural Affairs Minister, publicly revealed some of his reactions to the DEFRA consultation process in a House of Commons debate on 28 April. Unfortunately only one MP took Michael to task on the contentious issues raised by the infamous DEFRA document, Montgomeryshire Lib-Dem (and keen biker) Lembit Öpik, the rest of the so-called debate being hogged by Bassetlaw Labour MP, John Mann who broadly supported Michael's proposals.

Öpik acknowledged some rights of way were contentious and said that: 'a small number of irresponsible riders must be stopped. However does the honourable Gentleman not agree that the kind of measures he describes could harm the great majority of responsible and careful motorcyclists?'

Unfortunately John Mann, who has a particular problem on his own patch blighted by off-road vehicles did not agree. Indeed he claims that applications to upgrade bridleways could result in 'some of my constituents (being) surrounded by a race track.'

In response to this predictable, if unjustified alarm, Michael acknowledged that 'there are strong and divided views' having received more than '15,000 letters and e-mails' on the subject, (many of them we hope from TBM readers).

He added: 'To a considerable extent that response has been whipped up

by a sustained campaign... that has misrepresented what the consultation paper proposes. That so many describe themselves as 'careful and considerate' drivers does not exorcise the problem.'

Just to make it clear, the minister said: 'The new proposals would limit vehicular rights arising from historic evidence to restricted byway rights - that is, rights on foot, horseback or non-mechanically propelled vehicles (MPVs) - so that the rights claimed over a route reflect (its) historic usage.'

'Similarly we would make it absolutely clear that evidence of use by non-MPVs in the future... would not be sufficient to establish a public RoW for MPVs.'



If this reeks of heel-digging, at least there was clear evidence that he does not, as some feared, intend to reclassify existing unsurfaced byways (eg UCRs) because 'the use of MPVs on unsurfaced byways is not always damaging, nor a nuisance to others.'

He concluded with what one might cynically regard as empty political rhetoric designed to offset accusations of pro-ramblers bias (although of course we trust it wasn't), namely: 'The representatives of motorised vehicle users need to join us in addressing the problems rather than denying that they exist. Similarly walkers' representative must show a similar willingness to engage.'

'Given the strength of divided opinion... it is clear that leadership and action are required from the Government, but I hope that can be achieved through commonsense, co-operation and constructive debate.'

We hope so too Alun...

## OFF-ROAD CRISIS CONFERENCE

Two weeks after the matter was raised in parliament interest groups from both sides of the current dirtbike divide, and one or two stuck firmly in the midst of it, came together in Wales to embrace exactly those principles. A bold initiative of the Forestry Commission Wales, the Welsh Assembly and the Countryside Council for Wales, the Welsh Off-



Road Motorcycle Conference kicked off to an upbeat start when FCW's Simon Hewitt acknowledged the problems faced by the sport claiming that 'Illegal motorcycling knows no bounds, but the only way forward is to be positive.'

This was echoed by the main speaker, AM Environment Minister, Carwyn Jones: 'I know that the growth (of off-road riding) is causing concern but we mustn't forget that less than five percent of off-road tracks are legally available to motorcyclists and we mustn't be blind to the ways legal use can be managed.'

Jones commented on the vexing topic of the recent DEFRA consultation paper and the CROW Act which he professed aimed to 'clarify' the future use of RoW and 'the first step is understanding the needs of the various stakeholders and accept that there are conflicting viewpoints.'

Achieving a consensus, curtailment of unlawful off-road riding and management of activities were his and, he believed DEFRA's goals - although for many of us that sounded a bit utopian (and contrary to Michael's harder line). However the mere fact that the conference had drawn 180 delegates from across such a wide spectrum was certainly encouraging. And indeed what followed proved to be a genuine, if at times slightly unsophisticated means to such ends.

Understanding exactly the various forms and needs of legal off-road motorcycling were expertly and amusingly outlined by Tim Stevens of LARA/TRE, whilst Bob Reid, a Countryside Ranger from North Lanarkshire (which is patently not in Wales), outlined the parameters of illegal motorcycle use, offering social deprivation and lack of recreational facilities as contributing factors (largely ignored by the Minister).

The conference then broke into groups in order to try and identify the hugely diverse impacts that all this had on just about everyone who uses, lives alongside and/or is economically affected by these activities, the idea being that until we all fully understand the nature of the problems, solving them is a non-starter.

Drawn equally from local politicians, rider and landowner interest groups, policemen (some 15 of 'em), recreational officers etc, debate within these groups was often heated but nonetheless productive and our

conclusions were expertly distilled by the (mercifully neutral) conference moderators into a list of 'target areas'. These included, impact of RoW legislation (existing and proposed), the noise nuisance, social deprivation, RoW damage and repair costs, lack of industry responsibility, education, lack of equity and fairness when officialdom deals with different interest groups, piecemeal policing approach and lack of legal off-road facilities.

After lunch, guest speakers outlined what was being done to tackle a few of the perceived problems, the most cogent being Inspector Fran Richley of the South Wales Police who explained how Section 59 of the Police Reform Act was being used to bring the considerable numbers of illegal motorcyclist in his region to book, and proposals for a template that other forces could apply with equal success.

He was followed by Huw Irranca-Davies MP who cited the example of Minnesota USA, a state blessed with tens of millions of acres of open country where a properly co-ordinated, and self-funding system of registering off-road bikes ensured accountability and helped kybosh criminal activity.

Following this it was the turn of three further speakers to take up one of the conference's strongly emerging themes, namely the provision of dedicated facilities for dirtbiking, whether for social good or commercial gain, the most impressive of which was the 1000 acre site (at an as yet undisclosed location) recently secured by a company called Innovate Motorsport. Whilst this writer has serious reservations about ghettoising trailriding and thus making it easier to marginalise if not criminalise those who shun such facilities, such initiatives drew much support.

(No-one noted that the Forestry Commission can now process imported timber more economically that it can grow its own, hence the incentive for using its forests for recreational purposes - and indeed the conference).

Each of the pre-determined delegate groups spent the rest of the afternoon addressing one of the 19 problem areas exposed during the morning, and these were then prioritised by a vote.

Top topic for further action was establishing a 'coordinated, holistic approach' towards the needs of, as well as the problems caused by off-road biking. But behind this rather worthy aphorism, one sensed that a determined, multi-agency approach was indeed the answer.

But it remains to be seen whether such fine sentiments can be turned into a meaningful reality...

MARK WILLIAMS

## SNIPPETS

### STOP THIEF!

It's business as usual down at Sussex Sportmotorcycles after thieves broke in and made off with 12 KTMs (11 MXers and one enduro machine). In addition to the bikes, a substantial amount of stock was stolen which included helmets (Airoh, Lazer, Premier, Arai), boots (Gaerne, Diadora and Alpinestars), racewear and tyres. Also taken was a large amount of 2004 KTM casualwear (the 2003 gear was ignored).

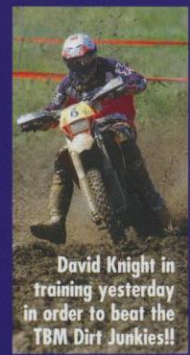
Said proprietor Tony: 'Clearly the thieves knew what they were after and how to get past the security system and heavy duty gate. We have worked bloody hard for two years to build up our business, and in a couple of hours they've taken it all away from us. That said, we've massively increased our security now, and we've got a few surprises in store for them if they ever come back!'

As usual, if you get offered any hooky gear, take down the bloke's mobile number and pass it onto the guys down at Sussex Sportmotorcycles (all bike details in the Free Classifieds section). Likewise, get down to the shop if you can, and give 'em your business. Sussex Sportmotorcycles are on 01444 871553.

### ENTENTE CORDIALE

Rumour has it that top British rider David Knight and 'extreme enduro' rider Frenchman Cyril Despres will be teaming up for this year's TBM-sponsored Dawn Till

Dusk 12hr enduro in South Wales. Though clearly Team TBM's motley crew of liggers, no-hopers and has-beens will be hoping to give 'em a run for their money! Or not...



David Knight in training yesterday in order to beat the TBM Dirt Junkies!!



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# NEWS



## RALLY ROUTE

Next year's Dakar Rallye will begin in Barcelona on 1 January and end in the Senegalese capital of Dakar 16 days later. The organisers have already announced a number of changes to the rules, designed to make the event easier on privateers who make up the bulk of the rally entry. For competitors in 2005 there will be shorter days (but more technical going) and more emphasis will be placed on navigation rather than speed. There'll be a 30percent reduction in the use of GPS points -

placing more emphasis on reading the roadbook - and two stages will be ridden entirely without GPS (though competitors will still carry them, and be issued with an unblocking code for safety). Also, the big twins have been outlawed, and the only twins allowed will be those up to 450cc (Aprilia!).

Already six British riders have signed up for the event and the final number is likely to double that.

Meanwhile Yamaha Motor France have produced an off-the-shelf rally kit designed to fit the WR450F and two-wheel-drive 2Track. The kit costs approximately €5000 and customers can either buy a bike fully built up or fit the kit themselves. More details on this and Dakar entries from UK contact Chris Evans on 07900 826719.

## FOUR-MIDABLE!

Honda has released photos of their eagerly awaited four-stroke trials bike, the first thumper trialler of the modern generation. Scheduled to be launched in Japan as the Honda RTL250F, the SOHC four-stroke looks every inch a development of the current Montesa/Honda Cota 315, as it retains the familiar alloy frame, and a near identical swing-arm, wheels, brakes and suspension.

However, the water-cooled engine is an all-new design and sports (for the first time ever on a trials bike), Honda's PGM-FI fuel injection. Displacement is currently 250cc although big-bore kits are expected to be made available.

The RTL-F has been developed principally in Spain at Honda's Barcelona Montesa factory by top Spanish rider Amos Bilbao. He has 'signed off' the bike for production, which

will commence in late summer for delivery in early autumn. Though the bike will be marketed in Japan as a Honda, in the rest of the world it will be sold as a Montesa Cota, though the number designation has not yet been revealed.

The early launch has created massive interest world-wide, particularly in the UK where importers Sandiford M/Cs have already allocated their entire first batch. Although the price is yet to be set, one well-known dealer has told prospective customers the bikes will cost around £4,300. **MIKE RAPLEY**



## SNIPPETS

### HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

Next year's 2005 Yamaha WR-Fs (250 and 450) will come fitted with the smaller (7L)

motocross fuel tanks after pressure from European enduro riders forced the factory into a rethink. The large 10L items were designed for US riders but the European press persistently slated the bike's tank for being too bulky. Here's what we had to say on the subject back in our first test of the new model in November 2002.

*'For some unknown reason Yamaha chose to launch the new 450 with the same bulky 10L tank as the US bikes get. And this despite the fact that recent history told them that the Europeans preferred the look and feel of the slimline MX tanks. They didn't have to look too far for this knowledge either. Two years ago they switched over to the slimmer tank on the European WR400s because riders didn't like the humpy big tank. And yet they've gone and made the same mistake with the new bike. Go figure...'*

Prophetic or what?

### EURO MASTERS

Mid-Wales Hafren Dirt Bike Club have confirmed they'll be running a round of the European Enduro championships in July 2005. Nice One!



### FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Yamaha are currently concentrating more effort (and resources) on the growing European enduro market. They recently sent a delegation of Japanese engineers over to the UK on a fact-finding mission, with the aim of developing future (fully homologated?) WR models. A spokesperson for Yamaha confirmed that historically the Japanese manufacturer had designed and built their off-road bikes predominantly for the giant US market, but in future the European enduro market would be considered in its own right.

**Mark Williams fulfils a fantasy and heads into Gloucestershire to explore some trails with ex-TRF RoW officer Charley Morris..**

## A Cotswold Caper

In the way that more cosmopolitan types dream about trekking through Tibet or sledging across Greenland, for many years I idly fantasised about trailriding in Gloucestershire. It was a county I drove through en-route to Wales by various different routes, and occasionally still do, although congestion around Oxford, and to a lesser extent, Gloucester itself nowadays generally obliges me to stick to faster roads. So whilst I miss the rolling hills, the bucolic vegetation and the cute little towns and villages with their chunky yellow stone buildings, I still speculate about the tracks that must criss-cross this large, yet quite sparsely populated county. Or at least I did until Charley Morris, himself an ex-TRF National Rights of Way Officer, contacted me with a view to Doing The Rounds on his patch.

At which point I could hardly say no.

And so I didn't... (say no, that is). But in typical fashion, it was some months later before I managed to get it together, and having done so I at least found myself setting out on the first gloriously warm and sunny Sunday of what'd been a decidedly lacklustre Spring. Not that this meant, in the great tradition of Doing The Rounds, that things would necessarily go swimmingly: some confusion about our rendezvous found me waiting, a little peevisly in a lane south of Cheltenham for almost half an hour whilst Charley and his mates were waiting, a little peevisly, in another lane just some 200 yards away.

Eventually I hauled my trailer off on a reece and found them, after which I hastily disembarked the trusty TT-R250, struggled into my

riding gear and was introduced to the chaps I'd inadvertently kept waiting. And now I'll follow suit with you.

### The Venerable Box-Maker

Vic Lodge has been trailriding for over 20 years, which in itself deserved my respect, but this is compounded by his choice of mount, a 1982 XL200 which he's had 'for more years than I care to remember.' In fact having noticed that the gearbox output shaft bearing was on its way out, he'd plonked in a spare engine he just happened 'to have lying around' a few days earlier, and this was its first outing in the well-worn but deceptively able little Honda.

It transpired that Vic makes coffins for a living

which, whilst it might have proved handy given my riding abilities, also prompted the information that there are apparently still some tracks in the county that owe their origins to 'coffin carriageways', having been originally intended for funeral processions.

### A Chippy Who's Not

Well he is a self-employed carpenter by trade, but Mark Read is anything but chippy, in the sense that he's a fairly quiet, unassuming chap who's in fact only had a full motorcycle licence for a year or so but 'used to chase around on field bikes before that.' Didn't we all. And for his first trailbike he bought an all-white MkII Honda CRM which he had to do quite a lot of work on to get right, 'particularly the gearing, as it wouldn't pull very well in second.' Given my interest in such things, he graciously swapped bikes with me during the day so's I could have a chance to form a better opinion of these machines, of which more later.

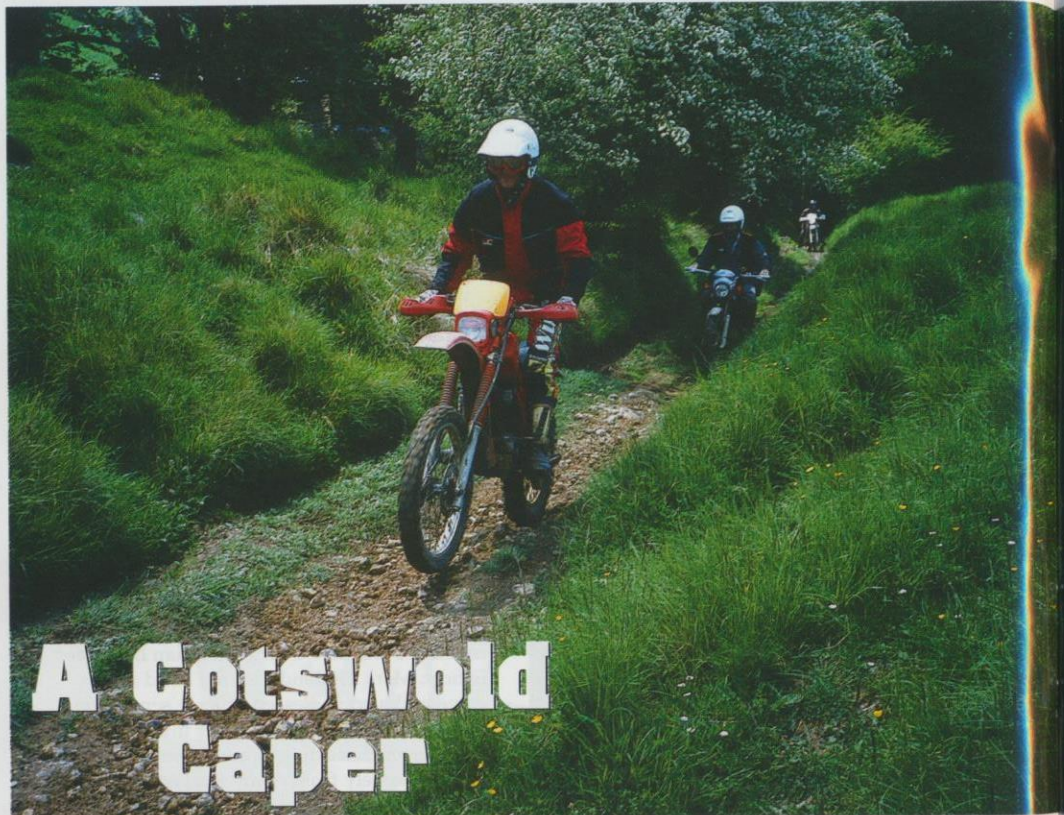
### The Groom on Wheels

Currently Gloucestershire emissary to the TRF Executive and also their Equestrian Liaison Officer, Mark Holland's an old hand at this game and also possessed of a sly sense of humour. Evidently a man after my own impecunious heart, his riding gear appeared to've been sourced largely from Army Surplus stores and his bike, an LC4 which he proudly (?) claims was once crashed by Dave Cornish (show me one which wasn't - Ed), is hung with all manner of storage bags, plastic cases and a large piece of mesh behind the number plate designed to not throw up stones at those in his wake. It looks like, well a sort of gypsy trailie, but clearly does the job admirably well.

Mark, whose last bike was an XR250, was a mechanical design engineer, but decided to make a sideways career leap and train as a driving instructor but failed the exams, so is currently 'vocationally unemployed', and once again showing how much we have in common.

### Master of All He Surveys

Martin Hatfield works as a surveyor for a firm of builders and has been riding off-road for about ten years. He started on an 'enduro-ised' RM125, then moved onto a KTM 250EXC stroker, and today - and rather surprisingly - he was running a trials rear tyre on his fairly new KTM 450EXC - the consequence of having recently competed in



## A Cotswold Caper

the Cirencester Park Enduro where they were mandatory. 'And there didn't seem much point in changing back... doesn't make much difference in the dry,' he admitted, 'and in fact on rocky going it can be better than a knobbly.'

### Charley's All Rights

Also wearing trials rubberwear was our leader, Charley Morris, but on a Beta Alp that's to be expected. His is a well used 2002 model with a few sensible mods beneath a winter's patina of mud which he claims, 'deters anyone from nicking it!' A frequently replenished Scott-Oiler hangs on the nearside rear-subframe and the standard, rather flimsy instruments have been replaced by an aftermarket speedo and a set of idiot lights 'bought from a scrapper'.

Working as a senior service engineer for a printing machine company, Charley did his time as the TRF's RoW officer during the foot and mouth crisis, 'so I had a relatively easy time

of it', but nowadays makes it his business to be clued up on the tracks in his area, and indeed right into Wales. He claims that there are nearly 400 RuPPs in Gloucestershire, plus another 350 UCRs and 150 dual status tracks, some 50 of which are actually BOATs. Which naturally gave him plenty of choice when he was planning the day's route.

### A Little Bit Technical

And so at a little after 10:30 we finally set off from the correct rendezvous, just off the A46 at Shurdington. Charley had assured me that our ride would not be too 'technical', a term which I've gradually realised actually means 'bloody hard going' in trailriding parlance. But things didn't bode well when within a few hundred yards of the off we were charging up a narrow, rock strewn kilometre-long gully known as Shurdington Hill. With an abundance of mud, tree roots and an evil-smelling stream flowing



Charley re-attaches his wayward numberplate...

down it for good measure, it wasn't too 'technical', but it certainly shook out the cobwebs... And reminded me once again that the stock TT-R's gearing is too high for this sort of malarky.

Charley informed me that the nasty smell was the consequence of someone's domestic drainage overspill and that this, along with the fly-tipping we'd passed on the approach to the hill, were matters he'd raised with the authorities who'd yet to deal with them. No surprises there, then.

Once up Shurdington, we rode into the hamlet of Ullenwood and crossed the A436 which took us onto a leafy UCR which looped down to Shab Hill from where we took another UCR across towards Stockwell. And here we found some enterprising farmer has decided to dig a drainage ditch right across the track, which was where both Charley and I tried to sneak around the end of it hard up against the fence, only to lose our back wheels in it. One or two of the others simply tried jumping across it... one or two of them actually made it.

In fact I wouldn't have recognised this track as a legal track - it just looked like an open field to me - but as Charley explained, that's how many of them are in Gloucestershire, which actually suggests how little usage they get, which is a mixed blessing for the trailriding classes.

### Build Your Own Byway

A little further on at Close Farm, the new and obviously well-heeled NIMBY owner had taken the law into his own hands and to deter those nasty walkers, horsey types and yes, even the

odd trailrider from using the UCR that fronted his house, he'd literally built his own by-way around the back of his property complete with legit-looking signposts. As it happened when we stopped to inspect the first of these, Mr Angry appeared, rather unattractively stripped to the waist and wildly gesturing, so rather than get into a confrontation we took his bypass and marvelled at the arrogance of the rich.

A short hack down the A435 to the engagingly named Tomtit's Bottom took us northwards up a flinty UCR between fields glowing with bright yellow rapeseed, to Upper Coberley. This type of track, with varying amounts of pot-holes, rutting and the odd loose, scabbly stone surface

is again fairly typical of the county's UCRs and RuPPs - many of which are handily signposted as such. Certainly not 'technical', but energising to ride and they allow you to absorb the beauty of the landscape which, whilst just a few miles from the cities of Cheltenham and Gloucester, is quite considerable.

From Upper Coberley we rode along another glorified farm track - actually a UCR - to the busy road junction at Seven Springs and the along the A436 - a stretch of my old commute which would become quite familiar throughout our day, and on towards Shipton Solers. Half a mile before we got there however, we hung a right along an old Roman road and half a mile along that we took a left back up and onto the A436.

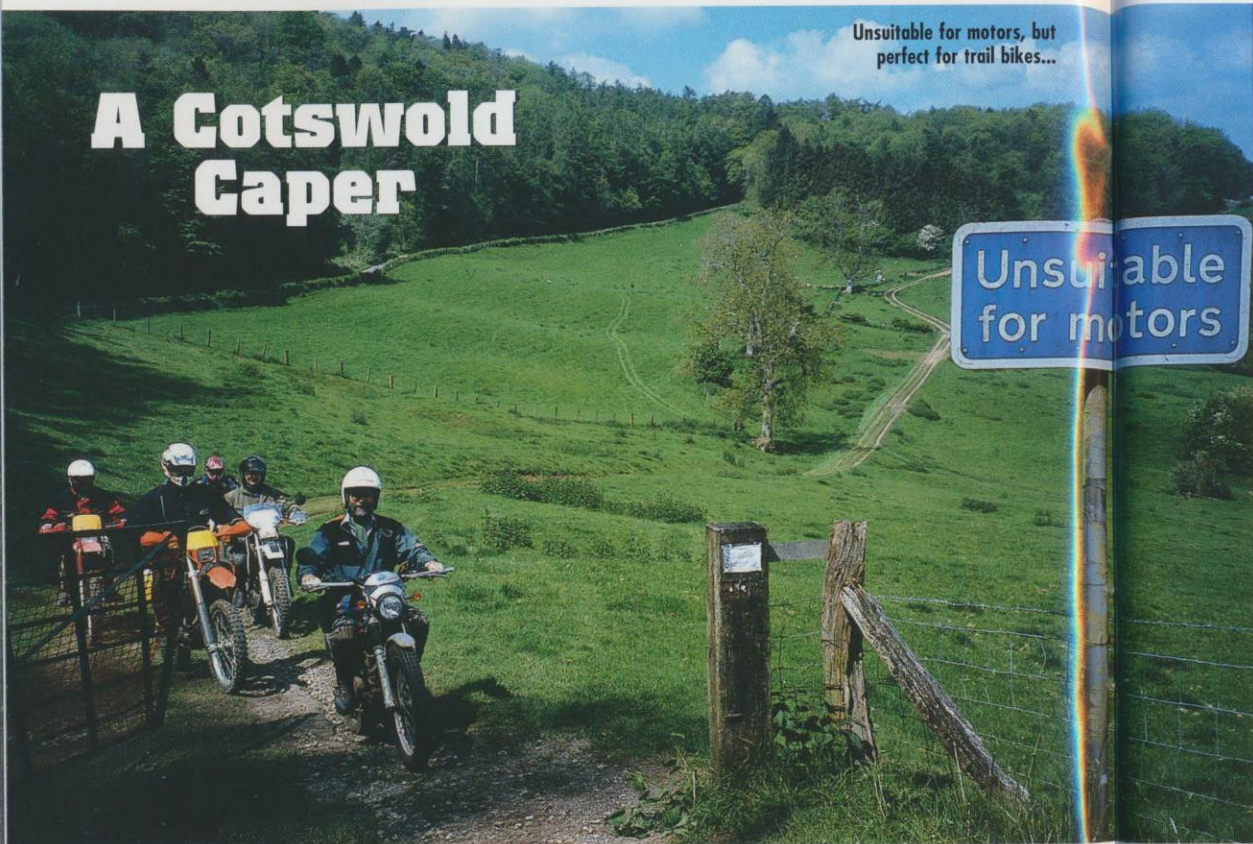
This time we took the main road toward the junction with the A40 and a set of traffic lights that I used to consider faintly spurious, but with increased traffic now make sense, and we crossed over and wriggled through the picturesque village of Shipton Solers. At its north-eastern most end, a gentle lane took us back onto tarmac and eventually into Syreford from where another mile-and-half long romp along a UCR took us just east of Sevenhampton, with fabulous views of the Cotswolds.

### His Number Was Up

A few miles of largely deserted minor tarmac took us through more picture-postcardery, mainly in the shape of Brockhampton, and north onto West Down where a stony UCR led into Wontley Farm and then into the woods behind Belas

## A Cotswold Caper

Unsuitable for motors, but perfect for trail bikes...



Knapp. And here we made an unscheduled stop for Charley to secure the numberplate that had been hanging from one bolt at a precarious angle for a few miles. After he'd cheerfully explained that the plastic subframe which he'd already replaced once had cost surprisingly little, Mark Holland waspishly added that it was just as well Beta spares were cheap 'seeing as how it's always falling apart.'

After we got going again, and not for the first or last time, our route followed that of the Gloucester Way, but even on a warm, late spring Sunday it was rare that we saw anyone walking it. Once we'd got into the wood and scrambled along a muddy but easily navigable track, we doubled back on ourselves to the east and picked up a trail from Humblebee Wood (doncha' just love these Cotswolds place names?) north and eventually east for half a mile or so until we were back on tarmac, heading towards Winchcombe.

We managed to avoid much, but not all of the town's heaving tourism, but past the site of the old ducking school and an imposing church, we snuck out of town on a track via Langley Hill Farm and up some steepish, fairly taxing going towards Greet. Although throughout the day, and largely due to the fairly copious amounts of gates that our trip embraced, the six of us chopped and changed running order all the time, I found myself riding behind Martin and Charley more often than not, and I have to say that the little Beta had no problem setting a cracking pace and never once held us up. This obviously had as much to do with Charley's deceptively easygoing, seated-most-of-the-time riding style as it did with the Alp's competence, but as Martin had noted (and proved on several occasions), the trials tyres were no encumbrance on this going.

But I digress, and I'm going to do so again because I'm sure you're not interested in which

Unsuitable for motors



B-roads we took to our lunch stop in the village of Stanton. Once we got there however, I was slightly surprised to find the place awash with dirtbikes, to the extent that if the locals had to put up with this sort of thing every weekend, no doubt they'd been marching on

Alun Michael's office. In the event it turned out that the Mount Inn was also the chosen watering hole for competitors in the Sam Cooper Union Jack (long distance) Trial, who were riding everything from rigid-frame Matchless to Greeves two-strokes to, well, quite a few Beta Alps, one of which belonged to the ubiquitous Yoshi Adams.

A half-hour wait for sandwiches obliged us to dine on crisps and Mars bars - who says trail-riders aren't sophisticated gourmets? - and once we'd chatted away to Yoshi and a few other cheerful long distancers, we gingerly ascended the muddy little UCR behind the pub which some of 'em were still riding down. It was actually a little bit, er, technical and with its dense tree cover, a bit difficult to actually see where you were going wrong (or at least where I was going wrong). But once we'd got up through the gate at the top there was a nice, fairly straightforward

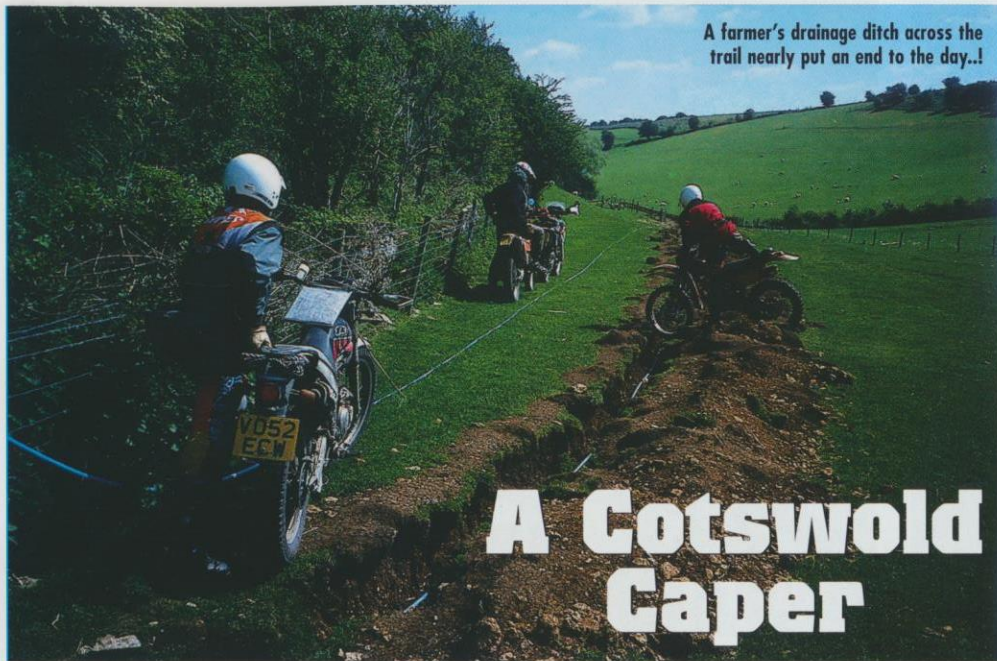
blat along some rutty, occasionally rocky going and down into Buckland.

### Struggling For Grunt

A little bit of roadwork took us from that little hamlet to Laverton, the next one south, where we had to make another steep climb, this time involving rocky gullies with plenty of loose boulders. Here Charley showed the advantages of the trials-derived Alp, whilst I, by now aboard Mark Read's CRM, had trouble mastering throttle control and relying more on the bike's innate auto-pilot than my own judgement. I thought I was going to have a huge off halfway up when I got into second, discovered as Mark had noted that it was struggling for grunt, and then opened the throttle too wide and suddenly hit the power-band. Having nearly lost the front-end, I decided to stick with bottom and just scream my way up in a decidedly inelegant manner.

With me somewhat out of puff, we re-traced some of our route into Buckland, going south behind Gt Brockhampton Farm and then down a mile or so of spirited UCR - or was it a RuPP? - into Stanway Ash Wood. By now Charley had re-sited his number plate for the second time, on this occasion using one of my zip ties, but otherwise the day had been, and would continue to





A farmer's drainage ditch across the trail nearly put an end to the day..!

## A Cotswold Caper

be blessedly trouble-free... Although we all got a bit nervous when Martin announced that he'd never, ever had a puncture whilst out on the trail.

By now we were starting on what was essentially our journey home, that's if you can call an estate car and trailer a home, and after a three-quarter mile UCR from Half Moon Plantation to Taddington, we made our way south through numerous sleepy little hamlets towards Temple Guiting and eventually, Hinchwick. Once there, we took a gently undulating UCR - another stretch of the Gloucestershire Way - complete with some fairly substantial pools of gloop into Condicote and onto a fantastically straight but invigorating stretch of Roman Road known as Ryknild Street. A mixture of flinty track and sandy, moderately rutted going with some ace views, which after some two-and-a-half miles joined the B4068 where we meandered into Upper Slaughter.

Just for the crack, Charley led us through the fearsomely signposted 'dangerous ford' that dissects this almost impossible twee little village, but the river crossing itself was an anaemic construct of brick and concrete which would barely have taxed a Fiat Punto. So from Slaughter we rode east to Naunton in search of something more

entertaining, and were it not for an abundance of gates, the track to Barton would've cut it.

South of Barton we took the RuPP through Cloud Hill Wood, an engaging three-quarter mile yomp through occasionally water-filled ruts and back to the B4068 which we soon hung a left off down towards a long dismantled railway line. Charley had planned to take us south along a longer, roughly parallel route, the dual status Macmillan Way from Cold Aston through Turkdean and onto Hazleton, but by now we were running a bit late so after another mile or so of mixed, slightly slippery UCR which proved a decent test of the TT-R's directional stability (it's pretty good), we headed for Hampen and a dog's leg of a UCR down into Shipton.

After that we had to endure a fair bit of A436 to eventually bring us back to Shurdington Hill again, only this time we went down it, which was just as tricky - if not 'technical' - as it had been making the ascent. A five o'clock finish with some 72 miles on my odo signified the end of just about a perfect day's trailriding, and what's more now that I've been there and done it once, I know that I can relive my dreams whenever I fancy! Thanks guys...

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Challenge Convention



# Taking Stock

**It's Honda's new CRF250X again, but this time it's in stone-stock trim. TBM went to Spain to try it out...**

**L**ow cloud hung between the fragrant pine forests which littered the hillsides, as spots of light rain dotted my goggle lens. The sun had just begun to cut through the haze and warm the morning air. From our vantage point high in the hills we could see right across the valley floor, to the sheer cliff faces on the

other side, deep brown in colour, marbled with red like a well-cooked joint of beef. The view was amazing, simply stunning in fact. But I couldn't really describe it as breath-taking, oh no. Because what was really sucking the air from my lungs, causing my muscles to burn and my heart to bounce off its limiter was the little red motorcycle

Even as it comes out of the box the CRF-X has plenty to offer...

revving its heart out on the umpteenth rock-step we'd negotiated that day.

Honda chose northern Spain to launch their much anticipated CRF250X enduro thumper to the UK's press, guaranteeing some awesome riding and decent light for those all important photographs. The location was perfect. Unfortunately, the date was slightly wayward. Those customers who'd put their money down on an X, and been on a waiting list for what must have felt like an eternity, had received their bikes a good fortnight beforehand. Which is why, itching to take a spin on the Honda, we tested a dealer's slightly modified machine (with a pipe and jet kit) which you'll have read about in TBM last month. The launch, however, gave us the opportunity to see just how the X rode in stock form, as Honda intended it, and how all those lucky punters will have found their gleaming new bikes those few weeks

earlier. It would also give us the chance to answer a few of the questions which have been causing such consternation in the off-road world. Such as, 'will that stock exhaust pipe kill the power?' Only one way to find out...

## Great X-pectations

Awaiting us outside the hotel in Oliana, just shy of the Pyrenees, was a line-up of gleaming, fresh, and just run-in CRFs. As the Honda mechanics ran around adjusting lever and bar positions to suit individual tastes, it was pointed out that the rubber-mounted bar clamps have a slight off-set, allowing you to reverse them to suit your riding position. Unfortunately, even in the furthest forward position, this still leaves the Renthal bars pretty close to the rider. Fine if you're short in the arm, not so good for the taller amongst you.

With the bikes fettle, it was time to get riding.

As on the bike we tested last month, the stocker required plenty of choke, and took a good couple of minutes and a couple of laps of the MX track before it would idle cleanly.

'Aarrgh, not another MX track in TBM!?' I hear you cry. Well, yes, but it represented only half a day out of two days riding, and owed more to scrambles than it did to supercross. There wasn't a double or a tabletop in sight - and what's more, allowed us to alter the bikes and feel the changes on measureable terrain. And the first of those alterations was not only the easiest (removing one bolt) but also the most telling.

Whilst the MX bike comes with a fairly fruity, free-flowing pipe, the X gets a hefty, though commendably quiet, stainless silencer, complete with US-spec spark arrestor. It's this pipe which has caused so much angst amongst prospective purchasers, unsure as to whether it'll rob the 250X of its power. And as anyone who's owned an XR will know, removing the baffle from this type of exhaust liberates more power... but also more decibels. We needed to try out it both ways.

Starting with the baffle in: Heading down the side of a hill, the course switched back on itself before climbing up the gradient. The dusty ground was littered with rocks, and a cut-out bisected the climb 15 feet short of the summit throwing the bike into the air and sapping momentum. With the spark arrestor in place, the tight and twisty approach to the hill made it a second gear climb; nail the throttle all the way as the rear-end bucked wildly, and the X would thrash its way to the top. Try the same in third however and by the top of the climb the motor was just dropping out of the powerband.

But with the spark arrestor removed, the CRF breezed up the hill in third (albeit not quite as comfortably as the 'arrestor equipped bike had in second) and could even be coaxed to the top in fourth!

Honda claim 27bhp for the 250X with the baffle in place, and it was mentioned that its removal adds an extra 5bhp! Hmm, only a dyno will tell for real, but I suspect that this is a touch optimistic. So far, the healthiest 250 thumpers we've tested have been putting out around 26 maybe 27bhp as stock (at the rear wheel), and I suspect that the Honda may be just shy of that figure.

However, the 'Unicam' CRF250 motor is beautifully torquey and unlike some twin-cam mini-thumpers you don't have to keep the motor just shy of the limiter to make good progress. And in many respects the spark arrestor helps keep the

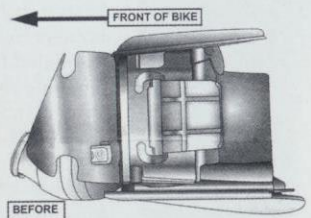
# FIRST CHECK



## Taking Stock

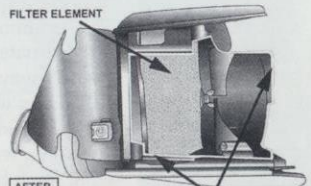
power nice and linear, there's just less of it!

When we tested the Honda last month, we noted that the bike was beautifully stable, as most Hondas are, and although quick steering, perhaps not quite as sharp as it could be. Well, at the request of Honda's Off-road Racing Manager, Roger Harvey, that was easily changed. Pushing the forks up through the yokes 5mm resulted in a far better rate of turn in, which whilst still not up to KTM levels, did at least leave the bike as stable as before. This is surely, in part thanks to the superb Showa suspension which simply shrugged off everything the rocky track threw at it. Although based on the R-model's suspenders,



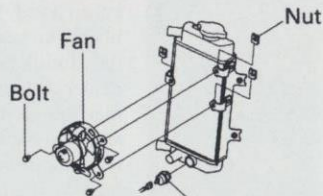
BEFORE

TOP-DOWN VIEW OF THE AIR BOX



AFTER

Cut along this cut line.



Thermo switch

An optional cooling fan is available for competition use. The fan will help avoid the engine damage if the engine is kept idling too long when hot, or when riding in mud or sand or any condition that causes high engine load at low vehicle speed. Extract from Honda Manual...

the enduro units have been thoroughly reworked (with slightly softer springs - 0.42kg as opposed to the R model's 0.45kg - and a subtle revalve) and for a clubman level rider at least, they seemed absolutely faultless.

### X-Trail

Thoroughly MXed out, it was time to take to the trail, but only after I'd asked one of the mechanics to re-fit the bike's spark arrestor. None of the other journo's rode it like this but we reckon you simply couldn't ride the X with an uncorked pipe back on the lanes of Blighty, so I really wanted to try it as you would in the UK.



Above: Minimal kit comes as standard. It'll need a speedo and a horn before you can register your CRF-X...  
Left: But don't remove the baffle if you're using it on the trail...



Above: Easy access airbox door is unique to the X-model!



# FIRST CHECK

X looks all set to become another great woods weapon from the Honda stable...



## Taking Stock

Over the two days the variation in trails was phenomenal. One minute we'd be barrelling down a fire road, Josep our guide setting a quick pace, the next we were trying to negotiate a four-foot rock step. On the faster, flowing tracks you could really pick up the pace and the X's superb chassis and wide-ratio gears allowed you to carry that speed through the turns, flicking from side-to-side with ease. Should you need to scrub off any speed, the excellent Nissin brakes (240mm discs front and rear) provide their usual mix of power and feel. Top stuff.

On the more technical going it was possible to ride the bike's torque and allow the motor to labour slightly, though it did have a propensity to cough and stall if you snapped open the throttle in the wrong gear. So to maintain momentum it was easier to keep the 250 mill revving, especially with the slightly less abrupt power delivery of the fully-silenced bike. Smaller rock steps could

be attacked simply with a good dose of throttle, but bigger sections required a dip of the clutch and, more often than not, the kind of trials skills I don't have.

Although we know that the kickstart-only motocross CRF250 starts easily, there's nothing like having an electric start. Of course, this was highlighted on the toughest of tracks, where I managed to get the Honda stuck, teetering precariously on the edge of the 'cliff-face' I'd just negotiated. The motor stalled, gravity beckoned the bike backwards, but my feet stuck firmly to the rock. The rear Dunlop scrabbled for grip on the damp surface, the motor screamed, and then stalled... With the bars up by my chest there was nothing else for it but to let the gradually slipping bike back down the climb. But as the Honda started its downward journey, the starter button caught my body armour and fired the motor into life. Saved..!

### X-tras

Although Honda have neglected to make the CRF-X road legal, more of which in a moment, they have fitted some well thought out details. First up, is the quick access air filter door in the left-hand side-panel (unique to the X model by the way). With one easy-to-use, reasonably large Dzus fastener, it takes just a few seconds to get at the air filter. Great for

a quick pit-stop in a dusty hare and hounds and a legacy of the XR range. The rear LED light is a work of art, the sidestand holds the bike at a decent angle (unlike those from certain manufacturers), and wiring is apparently in place to equip the bike with an electric fan. A reader (who'd just picked up his own CRF-X) phoned the office to say he'd discovered there's a kit available from Japan (Honda part 19000-KSC-000, fan set/cooling) and his dealer was ordering one in for him. The mounting lugs for the kit are already in place on the right-hand rad and it's probably a worthwhile modification if you intend using your X for regular riding in stop/start traffic. Another extra we would definitely fit would be a decent bashplate. On more than one occasion the frame rails took a real battering on the rocky Spanish terrain, and the plastics 'wings' Honda fit by way of standard engine protection aren't really up to the job.



### X-amination Papers

The news that the X won't be homologated for road use in Europe was greeted with predictable dismay at the launch. The official reason for this 'oversight' is that the bike is built primarily for the US market, (where Honda claim, somewhat surprisingly, that enduro bikes outsell MXers

two-to-one) and it would be too expensive to alter production to make Euro-bound bikes road legal. Hmm. Honda also make reference to the fact that certain other manufacturers whose bikes are homologated require modification by dealer/owner to make them even rideable, let alone competitive. But we can't see a problem with this.

## FULL POWER MR SULU...

Having established that the quiet pipe *does* stifle the CRF-X's power it's interesting to note that Honda lists a series of mods in their dealer bulletins for bikes competing in 'closed course competition'. The changes extend to swapping the cam (part 14100-KRN-670) and exhaust header (part 18320-KRN000, gasket 18291-MM5-860) for the MXer's parts, removing the spark arrestor from the silencer and re-jetting the carb (using a 152 main jet 99101-357-1520, 70 leak jet 99108-KRN-0700 and needle jet 16204-MEN-671). Then you need to remove the air snorkel (it's held on with two rivets) and cut the top off the airbox following the pre-drawn line moulded into the top. (NB in Australia a couple of CRF-Xs have suffered from valves receding into the valve seats due to what's

thought to be the ingress of dirt, and although the fine dust they get in Oz is unlike anything we encounter over here it's well worth checking that your air filter seals firmly if you intend to carry out this mod).

Finally you need to find the 'natural' colour block connector behind the left-hand sidepanel. Here, on the ECU side of the connector, you'll see a pink wire, below which is a blank terminal with a rubber plug. Swap the wire into the blank's location (so that the wire doesn't connect to another wire), and plug the connector back in. Voila. Full power!

A Honda dealer can do this work for you, or you could buy the parts and do it yourself. NB, the exhaust will be outside of current enduro regulations and far too noisy for green laning.

NOW EVERYONE CAN HAVE ... »

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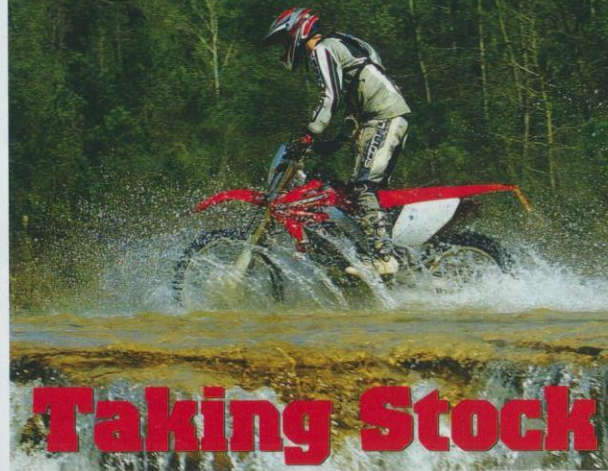


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# KTM

# FIRST CHECK



You buy a homologated bike, and with a bit of fiddling you get a competitive machine. It's not like we have a German TuV system in this country, where you can't change the original spec or fit non-regulation parts. And it would undoubtedly increase Honda's sales. In the meantime Honda should offer a 'road kit' as Yamaha do. It's not as good as bringing the bikes into the country already homologated, but it's a step in the right direction.

In re-entering the enduro market Honda have obviously got KTM in their sights but with the Japanese bikes offering such basic road equip-

ment by comparison, we reckon they're fighting with one hand tied behind their back.

## SPOT THE DIFFERENCE?

	250X	250R
Cam	Intake opens 1mm 10° BTDC Intake closes 1mm 40° ABDC Exhaust opens 1mm 40° BBDC Exhaust closes 1mm 10° ATDC	Intake opens 1mm 15° BTDC Intake closes 1mm 50° ABDC Exhaust opens 1mm 50° BBDC Exhaust closes 1mm 20° ATDC
Exhaust header	3in longer than 250R, for more torque	Short, for more top-end
Transmission	Wide ratio, 5-speed	Close ratio, 5-speed
Primary reduction	3.611 (85/18)	3.166 (57/18)
1st thru 5th ratios	2.385, 1.750, 1.333, 1.042, 0.815	2.142, 1.750, 1.450, 1.227, 1.041
1st thru 5th int gears	31/13, 28/16, 28/21, 25/24, 22/27,	30/14, 28/16, 29/20, 27/22, 25/24
Trans oil cap	670cc after draining, 750cc total	720cc after draining, 770cc total
Clutch	Judder spring and spring seat, one large l.d. fibre disk, and 7 pairs of metal and fibre plates	7 metal plates and 8 fibre plates
Clutch spring free length	Service limit - 38mm	Service limit - 43.7mm
Sprockets	14/53 T	13/51T
Engine dry weight	58.2lbs; extras include heavier flywheel, electric starter motor, extra gears for electric starter, and starter clutch	52.7 lbs
Engine service interval	Racing - same as 250R (transmission oil, engine oil and filter)	Non-racing - 600 miles Every 6 races or about 15 hours
Fork springs	.40, .42, .44 kgf/mm; stock: .42	.43, .45, .47 kgf/mm; stock: .45
Shock spring	4.55, 4.80, 5.00, 5.20kgf/mm; stock: 4.80	5.10, 5.30, 5.50, 5.70kgf/mm; stock: 5.30
Fork height	Top of the fork tube aligned with the top of the upper fork clamp	Fork sticks up 7mm
Fork oil	345cc	379cc
Rake	27° 54'	27° 44'
Trail	115.7mm	112mm
Wheelbase	1483mm	1479mm
Fuel cap	8.3L	7.3L
Coolant cap	1.13L	1.20L
Expansion tank	Yes	No
Weight (dry), claimed	103.5kg	93.5kg
Price	£4995	£4695

## X-planation

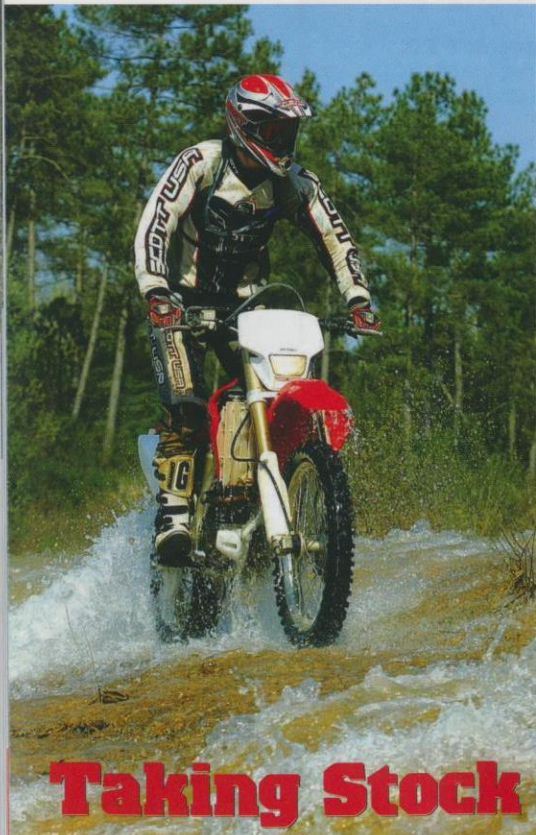
With the CRF-R being such a good machine, it would've been hard for Honda to get their re-entry to the enduro market wrong. So it'll come as no surprise that I rate the X pretty highly. I love the chassis, I know that the motor has potential (even if it may be slightly 'restricted' in bog stock form) and I'm a big fan of Honda build quality. Plus I suspect that some people will buy it simply because 'it's a Honda'. But others may be wondering whether they want the expense, not to mention hassle, of road legalising one.

They may of course choose to save a few quid by buying a road-ready KTM 250EXC Racing or perhaps spend a bit

extra on a lightweight TE Husky or legaliser-kitted WR-F. Personally, I'd take the Honda every-time simply because I think it's a more rewarding ride, but I'd be miffed at having to spend extra on getting it road-legal. Surely that's Honda's job!

And this then throws up another question, one which some readers have already asked. Do you go for the cheaper (£4695), but lighter R-model and bring it up to trail spec, or plump for the enduro-chassised £4995 X and, er... bring it up to trail spec? Well, that decision's going to be pretty difficult and you really need to base your choice on the type riding you do. But I know one thing for sure, stuck on a rock step on the side of a mountain I wouldn't have traded that electric start for anything!

Thanks to Scott at Honda and tour company Moto Adventures ([motoadventures.com](http://motoadventures.com)) for organising a great trip...



## Taking Stock

**First there was the R...  
Then came the X...  
And finally we have  
the E... All of them  
Honda CRF250s.  
As the only other  
250cc four-stroke  
to win in the WEC  
Enduro 1 class this  
season (apart from  
Merriman's Yamaha),  
the Honda HM Zanardo  
CRE250F is an enduro  
bike with a difference.  
Jonty Edmunds rode it...**

In Italy if you're in the market for a 250cc four-stroke Honda, then there are three over the counter 'CRF' options - one more than we get here in the UK. The first is a CRF250R, Honda's popular quarter-litre motocrosser, the second option is a CRF250X, Honda's purpose built, electric start woods weapon. But the third option, and the one which isn't readily available in the UK, is a CRE250F - the bike that HM (the company which distributes Honda's off-road machines in Italy) produce themselves. I say 'produce' because basically all they do is take a motocross model - and convert it into enduro trim by fitting a lighting coil, (with lights), an 18in rear wheel, a side-stand, a rear mudguard strengthener and a quieter exhaust system. Job done, Giancarlo.

But why do HM feel they need to produce their own 250cc four-stroke enduro bike when



# E's are Good

Honda has engineered one for them? The answer is simple. Because HM realise that while the 'leccy start 'X' model is a great bike for the majority of their customers, it isn't an out and out race winner.

Simone Albergoni's CRE250F is however a race winner and at the highest level. Back in March this year at the opening round of the World Enduro Championship in Spain, he put his Honda on the top step of the podium on day two. And as I was to find out when I tried out his bike for myself, it's easy to see why...

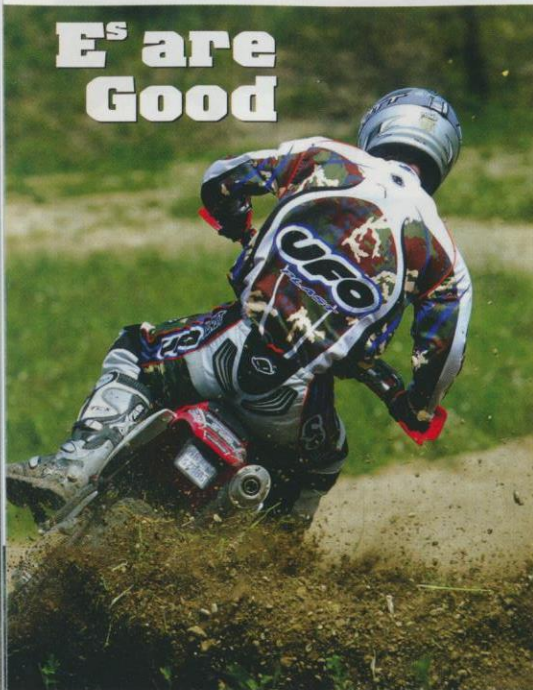
### Born to Perform

I think it's fair to say that Honda's stock CRF250R is the quarter-litre thumper against which all other 250cc four strokes must now be measured. Okay, so its top-end speed isn't quite as eye

watering as Yamaha's equivalent motocrosser and it hasn't had the MXGP success that KTM's new DOHC 250cc thumper is getting, but a quick look at the bike is enough to make you realise that 250cc four-stroke development took a sizeable step forward when Honda released the 250-R. Its size, its light and nimble feel, its overall compactness, its beauty and performance all come together in one glorious package. One which was designed originally for closed circuit competition, but (with a few discreet modifications) lends itself perfectly to enduro use.

But why did HM decide to start with a motocross machine as opposed to injecting a little more life into the big H's X model? Well, despite the fact that there is little wrong with the power produced by the standard X, the R just has that little bit more of it. And in the WEC E1 class a

## E's are Good



little goes a long way. That, coupled to the fact that the R is significantly lighter than the X (there's no electric start or battery), and that its close-ratio gearbox is favoured by WEC regulars for the modern MX style of special test.

The surprising thing about Albergoni's CRE250F though, is just how few modifications have been made from the standard machine. Partly due to the fact that the stock CRF250R is a bike that lends itself (arguably more so than any other current MX dirt bike), to being converted into an enduro iron - and as such requires very few alterations. But also, because the Honda HM Zanardo team are still finding out stuff about the bike due to it being 'new from the ground up' at the start of the season, and they aren't yet sure about how far they can push it in terms of extracting more reliable horsepower.

While the HM enduro team manager Franco Mayr told me that they have been able to extract a modest amount of additional power from the motor, he also added that because they know relatively little about the bike they are reluctant to use these modifications in competition until they are sure that it will remain reliable for the full two days.

## In the Mix

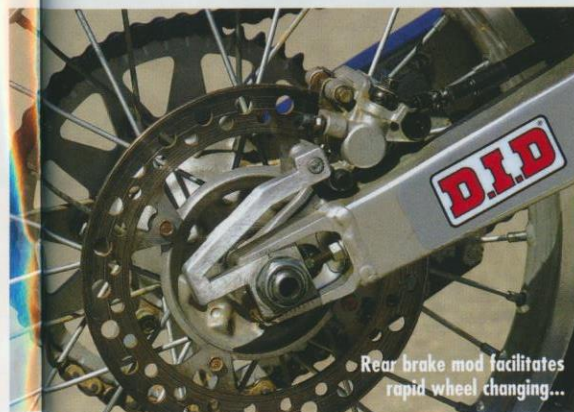
With the first stage of the conversion taking the bike from motocross machine to road legal enduro bike, the second turns it into the machine Albergoni is currently racing in this year's WEC series. In much the same way that Stefan Merriman's '03 title-winning 250cc two-stroke Honda CRE250 first received a general conversion and later a Merriman-specific build, Albergoni's bike is also a two-stage conversion. One big difference though, is that while Merriman told the HM squad exactly how he wanted his race bike modified, due to Albergoni stepping onto four-stroke machinery for the first time at the beginning of the season, the HM team have (until recently), been telling Albergoni what changes need to be made while he adjusts to 'diesel' power.

Modifications to the engine are in fact relatively few. A little work has been carried out to the cylinder head to improve gas flow, different cams have been fitted and a Vertex piston replaces the standard part. And that's it as far as the engine mods are concerned. With the crank and gearbox remaining standard, an aftermarket clutch basket machined from billet is fitted as

The CRE-F has to be one of the prettiest bikes on the WEC circuit...



Below: 250 motor is only lightly tuned by E1 thumper standards...



Rear brake mod facilitates rapid wheel changing...



well as a Titanium (enduro legal) Leo Vince exhaust system to disperse the burnt gasses more efficiently. While some 'small' (but undisclosed) changes are also made to the bike's carburettor.

Also added is a JD ignition. Similar to the units fitted to Stefan Merriman's Yamaha and Anders Eriksson's Husqvarna inasmuch as it offers different pre-determined ignition curves altered via a switch on the handlebars. The result of all these

modifications is power that is claimed to be slightly stronger all the way through the rev range and that lasts a little higher up top.

With considerably fewer modifications made to Albergoni's Honda motor than are made to the Yamaha engines used by the UFO Corse Yamaha team, it seems that while Honda's R model has yet to excel at what it was built for - MX - it is pretty much right on the money as far as a thoroughbred enduro machine is concerned. Weird huh?

The remaining changes and alterations are all the usual motocross-to-enduro tweaks made by one and all - handguards, sumpguard, spindle pullers etc. With Tommi bars, Pro Grip grips, PBR sprockets, DID chain and Pirelli tyres and mousses fitted, the number of changed parts is minimal.

In addition to that there are two minor chassis mods made by the Zanardo team: additional aluminium sliders are welded to the frame in front of each footpeg, in order to reduce the build up of mud. And Albergoni's bike uses non-standard triple clamps - albeit ones made so that the (internally modified) Showa forks are held in place at the exact same angle as standard. These however allow Albergoni to run his handlebars both slightly further forward and slightly higher than stock. Oh, and they're red. Interestingly, the team opt to use neither the original (7.3L) motocross or (8.3L) enduro fuel tank, instead fitting the bike with a very trick looking eight litre aluminium unit built by X-Fun!

## Stop, Start?

Not being a seasoned four-stroke competitor, Albergoni's biggest fear at the beginning of the season was stalling the bike and being unable to re-start it. Like many riders used to the 'easy start' convenience of a two-stroke, having heard horror stories of how four-strokes can sometimes be reluctant to start when hot, and knowing that he wouldn't be using an electric starter, Albergoni softened off his rear brake and increased the bike's tickover in the hope that the bike would be less likely to stall. Both alterations he still uses today and both were immediately apparent when out on the track. In fact, Albergoni runs such a high tickover that with the throttle shut the bike still revs like a two-stroke that has had the throttle cable yanked!

The track used for testing was the unofficial training area used by all riders competing in the Italian round of this year's WEC series. Offering a multitude of flat grassy, flat dirt, flat stony,



The HM bike powers out of turns with the minimum of fuss...

ruted and bermed corners, the area also offered straights of differing lengths that were as rough as they come. With acceleration and braking bumps at either end, so big they could almost be classed as whoops, the track was certainly rough. With the exception of any real climbs, it offered a typically worn out, dry, day two style WEC motocross test. Excellent.

## Fond Memories

After about three corners I remembered exactly why I fell in love with Honda's CRF250-R when I rode it for the first time at the end of last season.

Forgetting just how compact, deceptively powerful and above all, fun it is to ride, the alterations made by the HM technicians have turned what is already a lively, slim, and assertive machine into a bike that any rider would find hard not to enjoy competing on, no matter what his or her level of ability.

Feeling somehow even more alive than the standard CRF-R (in itself no mean feat), the bike seemed to do everything just a little better than the stocker - pretty much what I was expecting really from the WEC race winning quarter-litre thumper. Putting its power to the ground more efficiently, it also dealt with bumps both big and small better than I remember the stocker doing (which was superb by the way), and was generally even better at doing whatever I asked of it.

Despite the suspension having been re-valved to make the compression stroke of both the forks and shock a little more supple and 'enduro like', the impression I got was that it was only slightly softer than the stock CRF-R. It did though rebound with considerable speed.

Retaining the standard springs both front and rear, the ride height of the bike was surprisingly high, yet didn't seem to effect the way the bike put its power to the ground, drove out of corners or indeed the way it handled. With Albergoni not being the tallest of riders, the hard seat foam used, coupled with the relatively high feel of the bike, was difficult to comprehend. Giving an exaggerated feeling of sitting ON the bike rather than in it, it didn't seem to unsettle the machine in any way, and instead allowed the bike's suspension to be fully extended and ready for any bigger hits. Still capable of readily soaking up the smaller bumps and the numerous small rocks that littered the test track, the predictability and swiftness with which the bike changed direction was frankly exceptional.

As far as the motor was concerned the bike certainly didn't feel overwhelming - far from it in fact. Every bit as easy to use as the standard R model's muscle, the fact that it was fitted with a quieter silencer meant that its power felt (if anything) a little duller than an equivalent bike with an open pipe at first. But this was deceptive. The lack of noise certainly didn't equate to a lack of drive. In fact the lively little motor put its power to the rear wheel and drove forward out of each and every turn without stepping out of line once. No matter how aggressive I was with the power I always felt in control, which to me is one of the outstanding points of this bike. Time after time

I was able to get the rear wheel to drive me in the intended direction. And when I did get it wrong, it let me know in a way that felt predictable and safe.

While it certainly didn't feel as if it produced any more top-end power than the standard bike, even with the JD ignition that allows the bike to rev higher, the power that the bike did produce was useable, really useable - the type that I felt confident with. Turn the throttle, get the motor spinning just above the midrange, shift up a gear and the bike simply surged forward and kept on driving. With no hard hitting power or snap to the motor, Albergoni's bike just wanted to accelerate with the least amount of wheelspin and fuss. While at no point did I think 'wow, what an incredible top-end', I constantly had the feeling that if a stopwatch were running I'd be far quicker on the HM bike than I would on pretty much anything else.

One disappointing thing was the bike's switchable ignition curve. I confess I couldn't feel much difference between the supposed wet-weather curve and the (full power) dry one. Having been informed that it had a dramatic effect on the way the motor produces its power - the second curve is supposed to build revs noticeably slower so that the bike is less likely to beak traction in the wet - but since the #1 curve is anything but explosive it didn't feel that much different to me. It was however, my only criticism.

## Summing Up

Of all the WEC bikes I've ridden over the past few years, I have to say that none have been as enjoyable to ride as this one. A bike that is powerful enough to be competitive (Albergoni's already proved that), yet doesn't require its jockey to be exceptionally skilled, strong or fit, his bike is everything I thought the standard CRF-R could be when fettled by the right people.

With only a minimal number of affordable modifications required to turn it from a showroom stocker into a WEC racer, the CRE250F put a smile on my face like few other race bikes. And more importantly perhaps, is a blueprint for British riders wanting to do the same thing with their own CRFs - for enduro or hare 'n' hound use.

Quite apart from the fact that the bike is impeccably well mannered and has deceptively strong and useable power, it was incredibly fun to ride. And that's surely the reason why we all do this sport in the first place...



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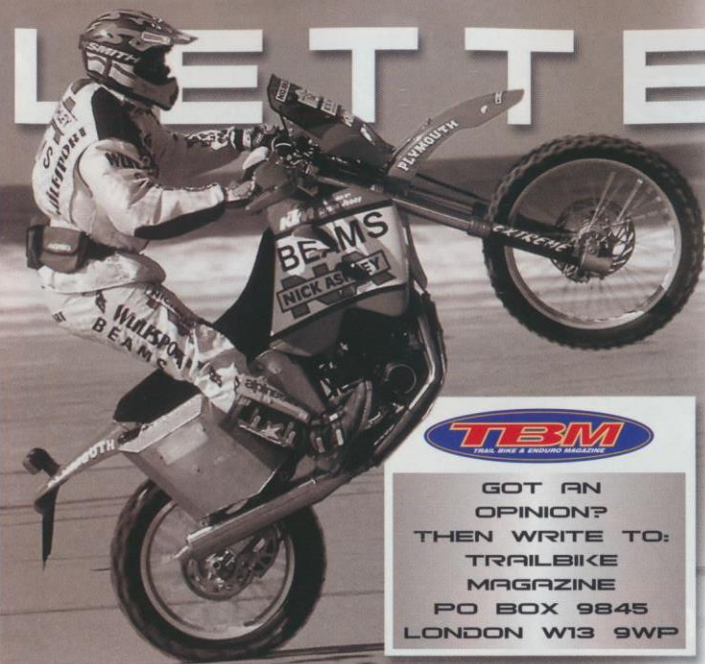
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# LETTERS



**TBM**  
 TRAIL BIKE & ENDURO MAGAZINE

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 OPINION?  
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 PO BOX 9845  
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## Panic Mechanic

Dear TBM

Having spent the best part of two years riding my Italian import XT350 around the green lanes of the Yorkshire Dales, like Mark Williams I too have made the tough decision to part with my Yamaha. The only thing is, I have no idea what to replace it with. If I could afford to keep it and buy another bike then, of course, I would.

I'm looking to go up in engine size to 600cc, and like the styling of the KTM models, the XR650R and the CCM 604E. I've heard that the KTMs require regular servicing and

Maintenance free?  
 Honda's XR650R is probably  
 the most robust big-bore  
 dirt bike out there...



Extracting more low-down grunt from the XT225's motor shouldn't be too hard for Jack, but it probably won't be cheap...

## The Low-Down

Dear TBM

I own a Yamaha Serow. It is only used off-road, as I'm not old enough to ride it on the road. I was wondering if you know of any way I could get more low-down and mid-range power out of it?

Jack  
 Monmouthshire

Unfortunately Jack, most of the mods which would give you more low-down power are likely to cost a fair bit of money. You could try boring-out the motor, having some cylinder head work done, or fitting a longer, narrower exhaust header pipe. Alternatively, if you're simply after a bit more pep off the bottom, a larger rear (or smaller front) sprocket will help. Just don't make too big a change straight away - maybe try one tooth less on the front and see how the bike rides. It won't

maintenance, which I find a bit off-putting as I'm not the best of mechanics. Could you please advise me as to what needs doing, and how often? Which of the three requires the least maintenance?

I shall be eagerly awaiting the next issues to see which bike Mark Williams chooses as successor to the faithful XT. Oh, and could you please explain to me the significance of the axe in Mark Williams' Completely Rutted photo?

I think that the magazine's great, and very well thought out with a wide selection of reports, event coverage etc. Keep them coming!

MJ Pickering  
 Lancashire

Thanks for the compliment, Mr Pickering. When you talk about the KTM models we trust you mean the LC4-motored bikes as these are the only singles they produce over 600cc. However, these models don't really

require any more maintenance than a regular four-stroke dirt bike and certainly no more than the other bikes you've mentioned. Which is to say, regular oil and filter changes, thorough cleaning and lubing, occasional top-end adjustment and a strip-down every once in a while. It's high-revving competition thumpers which need pulling apart on a regular basis!

So which bike do we think you should buy? Well, both the KTM and CCM are well-specced, though the engines are fairly agricultural (the Rotax lump in the CCM 604 being out of production, of course). If it were our money we'd opt for the Honda. It's got a stonking motor, good suspension and great build quality. Just budget for a bigger front disc, because the standard part is too small and woefully inadequate on a bike of the XR's power and weight.

As for Mark Williams' axe, we'll leave you to draw your own conclusions on that one...

# LETTERS



have quite the same effect as engine work, but it will be a whole lot cheaper!

## Family Affairs

Dear TBM

I think it all began on that fateful morning of 1 January - a time to recover from the previous night's over indulgences, take stock of your life, and of course make those pretty pointless New Year's resolutions.

My resolutions consisted of the usual stuff. To go to the gym on a weekly basis; try to be less stressed; try not to moan about my job; and to do the Weston Beach Race. Originally I'd hoped to have achieved the latter by the time I was 30. That was over ten years ago!

Anyway, amazingly enough I've somehow managed to discipline myself enough to frequent my local 'health spa' at least twice a week, have competed in three hare and hounds, and have just sent in my entry for the Dawn to Dusk extravaganza. Is this enduro lark addictive, or what?!

This has all led to some serious 'upgrading' of both motorcycle and kit. Well, it seemed like the perfect excuse to convince my trail riding other-half that she should let me buy the right tools for the job. However, buying a new bike was an interesting experience in itself.

I went into Fowlers in Bristol wearing my roadbike leathers to look at a CCM 404. I told the salesman that I already had an R30, KDX125, a Beta Alp, and was keen to learn more about

the rather tasty looking 404. Other than having a large wad of notes in my hand I couldn't have looked more like a genuine customer. Unfortunately, Mr Plastic-Rocket salesman was totally disinterested in me, to the point of being rude. And so I went down to Albion Motorcycles in Exmouth.

Here Steve, Gary and the team made me feel so welcome that my partner willingly signed me up for a new KTM 200EXC. We received excellent service, so thanks to the guys there. I can't wait to go and collect the bike! It was orange but with a change of panels it will be my (mostly) black beauty.

I'd also like to thank Ride-It promotions for putting up with me crawling slowly (but steadily) around at their events.

Tim Perriam  
Maddog Motorcycle Club,  
Somerset

PS My 19 year old daughter is joining up with me for the Dawn to Dusk. How about an article on family teams?

PPS Have you any information on websites relating to the preparation or experiences of the D2D or Weston Beach Race?

It's good to hear that you've stuck to your New Year's resolutions, Tim, but I'm afraid we don't know of any websites dealing with bike prep for Weston or the Dawn to Dusk. However, we do know that for the 12 hour you'll definitely want to be running mousses as the ground is very stony, and a set of decent alloy-reinforced barkbusters are a good insurance policy against snapped levers. Apart from that, just make sure that your bike is

thoroughly serviced and bring along some spares (levers, filters, cables etc), plenty of fuel, and enough food and drink to see you through the day.

The D2D is an excellent fun event and it's great that you're entering with your daughter. We're all for encouraging more 19 year old girls to ride dirt bikes...

## Crimestoppers?

Dear TBM

My dirt bike was stolen from a friend's garage at the end of last year. Needless to say, it was my pride and joy, which I'd saved my hard earned cash to buy. Although I was covered by insurance it was still a very traumatic time, and, I hasten to add, very long and drawn out by the insurance company. (They finally paid up some months later.) Nonetheless, I was determined to find my bike, and checked around loads of enduro meetings, finally giving up in the belief that it was either miles away or stripped down by now. Until...

I was riding my new bike in a local quarry. A van pulled up and the driver unloaded a bike and started riding around without a helmet. The bike's exhaust had been tampered with and was very loud, and the bloke was riding up and down the adjoining public road flat out.

I was just about to leave, when I noticed a few familiar markings on the bike and went over to take a look. Yep, it was my bike all right. It still had the same graphics kit I'd put on it along with a few other little touches. Rather than simply jumping on the guy's head, I struck up a conversation and found out all the information

I needed to get the police involved.

As you can imagine, I rode home as fast as I could and phoned the police. At this point I'd like to say that the police are very under-resourced, but they went to the bloke's house (coincidentally not 500 yards from where the bike was stolen) the following day, confirmed that it was indeed my bike, and took it away. A few days later he was arrested.

The following is an extract from the letter I received from the police:

'...denied that he had stolen the motorcycle and stated that he had bought the bike in good faith, giving an explanation as to the circumstances in which he purchased the bike.' Unfortunately the police were unable to disprove his story and he was released without charge, having been advised/cautioned in relation to the handling of stolen property. Makes you sick, doesn't it?

Disillusioned  
Somewhere

It sure does. Unfortunately, it's the way of the world that certain people think it's okay to steal something you've worked hard for. And on the rare occasion they do get caught it must be hugely frustrating to find that they get off scott-free by claiming that they 'bought it off a bloke down the pub.' We're just surprised that, in this day and age, you didn't get booked for speeding as you dashed home from the quarry to phone the police..!

## Mods and No Rockers

Dear TBM

Having recently recommenced green laning after a 15 year break and subsequently discovering your magazine, I wondered if you could answer a couple of questions?

Firstly, have you ever run a piece on my favourite bike, the Yamaha DT175MX? If not, why not? And if so please send me a copy!

Secondly, I own a Suzuki DR350SEW. Can you recommend any inexpensive modifications to improve performance without affecting reliability? The bike already runs a Supertrapp silencer and has been stripped of excess road kit.

Tim Bailey  
Hinckley, Leics

The DT was in TBM18, Tim, but I'm afraid we've sold out of that issue. As for the DR350, your best bet is to speak to Taylor Racing on 01249 657575.



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## DIRTY

AFTER A NIGHT CUT SHORT BY A 'FOWL' EARLY MORNING CHORUS, WE EVENTUALLY MADE IT BACK TO PARIS AND IT WAS WITH SOME RELIEF THAT I SENT HIS MELBERSHIP OFF IN THE WRONG DIRECTION AROUND THE PARIS RING ROAD...

T

hey say artists must suffer for their art, but I have always suspected it is their family and friends who bear the real brunt of any suffering. A suspicion more than confirmed to me by my recent trip down to the Lozere in southern France in the company of TBM's Wing-Commander himself - His Melbership.

CHRIS EVANS WEAVES  
A TISSUE OF LIES...

The first inkling I had that it wasn't going to be an easy few days was just a few clicks away from our final destination, Mende. For reasons I hadn't quite been able to fathom, our VW Transporter van seemed incapable of turning off the autoroute to take advantage of France's excellent network of service stations, which meant that as evening approached I was almost beside myself with hunger and looking forward to tucking into a nice juicy trout.

Actually, what I was really looking forward to tucking into was a nice juicy steak, but as I was about to have a crucial medical to decide whether or not I was eligible for a French mortgage, I'd decided to cut out the red meat in the hope of lowering my sky-high cholesterol levels. So trout it was. And as I was sitting there silently debating whether or not I could risk ordering it with a butter and parsley sauce, His Melbership suddenly careered off the main highway towards a tiny and restaurant-free village down in the valley.

'What are you doing?', I cried, visions of my trout slipping through my fingers. To which my driving companion enigmatically replied, 'we've got ten minutes

to unload the bikes and get them onto that sand-bank in the middle of the river. After that there won't be enough light'.

'Enough light to do what?' I wailed. 'Cook my trout?'

'To take photos for the opening spread of course', the Maestro replied, as if it was the most logical thing in the world to do at 8:00 in the evening when you hadn't had a bite to eat all day.

When we got down to the village I could immediately see it wasn't going to be an easy task getting the bikes out into the river and tried to innumerate the many logistical difficulties, but all to no avail. All I got as reward for my careful analysis of the situation was a tart, 'stop whinging and get your trousers off'. At which point I ceased being the jovial, easy-going trailbike holiday organiser and dug my heels in.

I don't know whether it was because it was the sort of order I had heard once too often at boarding school, or simply because I knew that the water was going to be ball-sack shrinkingly cold, but I categorically refused to comply. At which point Melber himself stripped off his trousers - much to the astonishment of the elderly locals who'd gathered around to watch the fun - and surged into the river pushing one of the bikes.

If getting the bikes onto the island in the middle of the river wasn't complicated enough, getting them back again up the extremely steep gravel bank, took on D-Day landing levels of difficulty. And after several abortive attempts it was decided that the only way we were ever going to achieve it (it was far too steep to ride and when we tried, the bikes simply dug into the gravel) was for me to fetch a tie-down from the van and use it to pull

them up the bank while Melber pushed 'em from behind. Despite being weak from malnutrition we were making good progress until the Gas Gas decided to topple over and land on my foot, flattening my big toe. I think nobody was left in any doubt regarding my levels of displeasure - though at least the locals got an unexpected chance to brush up on their medieval English vernacular.

Apart from riding for the next two days in some considerable pain, our time down in the Lozere went reasonably smoothly, only to unravel again, badly, as we headed back to Bligty.

The first sign of trouble was when his Melbership came over all Sunday Times Travel Supplement on me, and started putting the pressure on to stay at the same Gite as he had stopped at on the way back from the Trefle Enduro a couple of years previously. Now I know rose-tinted-spectacle-wearing Brits love these glorified B&Bs, but personally I loathe them. They are invariably run by fascist octogenarians who resent people staying in their bijou residences, but are nevertheless forced to rip off unsuspecting members of the public in order to keep their derelict ruins from falling into the moat.

Melber's choice of hostelry was no exception to the rule, with 'la patronne' venting her wraith on her punters by peppering the rooms with totalitarian 'Franglais' post-it notes ordering you not to have showers lasting longer than 30 seconds, or flush the toilet after 9pm. The best was one that stated, 'it is forbidden to rest on the bed'.

Thank God The Ed didn't want to eat there. Oh no, he had a much better idea. A restaurant 30 minutes away that served 'charming local cuisine'. What he omitted to mention was that there was no choice in what charming local cuisine you could order, and that the starter was a mixed platter of cooked meat and pate (notoriously good for raising cholesterol levels), followed by omelette (to which I am allergic).

After a night cut short by a 'fowl' early morning chorus, we eventually made it back to Paris and it was with some relief that I sent His Melbership off in the wrong direction around the Paris ring road, while I toddled off to have my medical. Incredibly, despite all the 'sausisson' I had consumed the previous evening, I was granted my mortgage. Just!

Apparently all was fine, though the doctor did want to know if I had been put under any undue stress over the previous few days. I hardly knew where to start...

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# COMPLETELY RUTTED



# A

s with so many others in my chequered past, this one seemed like a good idea at the time. Flog the ancient XT350 in the depths of winter, giving me plenty of time to find a suitable replacement before the trailriding season began in earnest.

Well first off it took three months and a ten percent price reduction before I found a punter for the XT, and that's despite advertising it in

## THE BUYING GAME: AS USUAL MARK WILLIAMS DOESN'T KNOW WHAT HE WANTS

this mighty organ. (But having read my catalogue of pratfalls on and off it, maybe our readers were just being smart). Eventually, it went as it came, via the classified ads in my local paper and I have to say the young, first-time trailrider got a helluva lot of bike for his £950. Well a helluva lot of 'running spares', anyway!

But the slow sale and a rather more pressing need to acquire a new primary means of transport, ie a car, meant it wasn't until April that the quest for a new trailie really got underway. But of course in neither case were they 'new' in the strictest sense of the word. For here in the A&E department of economic health which I inhabit, we are obliged to ferret around in the hazardous world of used machinery. And unlike cars or even roadbikes, the hazards are even greater with off-road motorcycles. For not only are you unlikely to secure a

test-ride of any potential purchase, but it's incredibly difficult to assess the accuracy of its advertised condition before seeing it. And let's not forget that, irrespective of year or mileage, where dirtbikes are concerned, condition is king.

And naturally I made it even more difficult for myself by not really knowing what bike I was after anyway. My only real criterion being that two grand was my absolute upper limit, with £1500 being the more pragmatic ceiling, given that some consumables and probably an MoT and Tax would likely bolster its original price tag. Surely I'm not alone in trying to maintain my hobby on a low budget? I certainly hope not because what follows is another TBM Public Service Bulletin for impoverished trailriders...

And if you too are trying to find a used trailie in this pauper's price range that's going to be reliable, grunty and competent on tougher terrain (and perhaps in the odd soft-enduro), what it will eventually come down to is this. Either: a six to 12 year-old, 350-500cc Jap four-stroke without an electric boot (the likes of which I'd just sold); or, a reasonably modern, ie electrically-booted, 250-350cc grey import four-stroke (whose provenance and spares back-up I regard as major deterrents); or something newer from a third world manufacturer (which wasn't designed for serious off-roading in the first place but might be interesting to adapt).

From that catalogue of curate's eggs, nothing really rang my bell and having been softened up by a

# MARK WILLIAMS

few months of long-term 'loanership' of a Yamaha UK owned TT-R250 (about which you may read a fuller appraisal later on in TBM), I didn't personally fancy a kickstart-only four-stroke again - even one as decent as an XR400 or TT600E. However having ridden Rob Davies's KLX300R whilst 'Doing The Rounds' up in the Peak District recently, I was mighty impressed by both its abundance of torque and user-friendly chuckability, but sub-two grand examples are rarer than an open-minded rambler. Even so I was sorely tempted when Rob actually rang and offered to flog me his pristine Y2K bike for £2400 - and what could be a more solid prospect than buying a bike from a copper? Ahem! Pity then he made the mistake of assuming that bike hacks are made of money!

So after much mulling, I began thinking seriously about a small-ish 'stroker which, however unfashionable or ecologically contentious it might be, makes a lot of sense on paper - being light, relatively easy to fire-up and simple to work on when they wear out... which of

course is likely to be sooner than the equivalent thumper. Even so, the choice within my price bracket narrows me down to a 4-8 year-old Pampera, a KDX200/220, a DT125R or a CRM250 one of which is too small physically, another of which is too small capacity-wise (unless expensively de-restricted), which left the Honda and the Kawa.

You may recall the respect I had for the green 'Kidder' when I was long-terming it last year, which included competing in the Hafren Rally where it convincingly out-performed its rider. But notwithstanding power - and reed-valves - it's a demanding little beggar in the steeper and gloppier conditions hereabouts. Still, it went on my shortlist as did the CRM, after a very brief ride on one during the aforementioned Peak District Rounds. His Melbership had also oft bruised my ears on the merits of CRMs, but being an old stick-in-the-mud (quite literally at times), I still have qualms about grey imports. Perhaps this is barmy in the case of the highly regarded, ultra-competent Honda which has a decade of back-up behind it in the shape of unofficial importers, Leisure Trail.

But a call to them revealed that now it has ceased production, good ones are becoming harder to source in Japan and they had nothing available under £1800 for a decent MkII.

Tempted by their well-regarded one month's warranty - which let's face it is sufficient time to throw up any major probs once you've headed for the hills - I'm keeping this as an option, but meantime I began looking privately, hoping that I might find a slightly more modern looking and better suspended MkIII for the same sort of dosh. First bike I looked at - a MkII - actually wore a £1500 price tag, but had a bent radiator and a few cracks in its plastic that bespoke a hard life. So nada to that.

Now, having bought my 'new' car via the internet from a Lincolnshire farmer at a massive saving over the 'book' prices being asked nearer home, I felt emboldened to use the digital highway as my key to off-road redemption. Ugly

## LET'S NOT FORGET THAT, IRRESPECTIVE OF YEAR OR MILEAGE, WHERE DIRTBIKES ARE CONCERNED, CONDITION IS KING...

metaphors aside, the web now has a number of well established dirtbiking sites which are worth visiting such as Bob Mullins'

Enduro page ([www.enduro.freeserve.co.uk](http://www.enduro.freeserve.co.uk)) and Muddy Stuff ([www.muddystuff.co.uk](http://www.muddystuff.co.uk)), as well as the better known but far less specific eBay, so many hours ensued trawling the web.

Interestingly both sites feature many of the same bikes, with lots of them also appearing in TBM's venerable classifieds - hardly surprising if you're trying to sell something asap - but it underlined that there is a relatively small pool of off-road prospects out there.

Indeed 'twas on the web that I found the aforementioned MkII and as for the *best of the rest*, well £1800 for a 13-14 year-old off-roader with provenance unknown before it was imported five years later, which lacks a stock (ie road legal) exhaust system, well that's too rich for me. And though I love the all-red looks of the MkI (like the MX-ers), I gather that suspension-wise they're not a patch on the later ones. And ultimately, are they worth £300-400 more than the XT350 of similar vintage I'd just flogged?

So at the time of writing I'm still dirtbike-less, and wistfully wondering if the kid I sold my Yam to, might just be having the same second thoughts as I am...

Two days trail riding in the heart of French enduro country with two of the latest 450s...



# FRENCH 'n' Saunters

**D**own in the south-eastern quarter of France there's a region known as the Lozere. Like many of France's upland areas it's sparsely populated, achingly beautiful to look at and criss-crossed by stony tracks which meander their way through thousands of acres of forest and National Park. At the heart of the region lies the medium sized (but fairly unremarkable) town of Mende which dates back to late mediaeval times (though there's been a settlement in this area since Roman times).

Despite its relative obscurity and isolated position, Mende nevertheless has an attraction to dirt junkies which far outweighs its domestic importance. Because Mende is slap-bang in the heart of

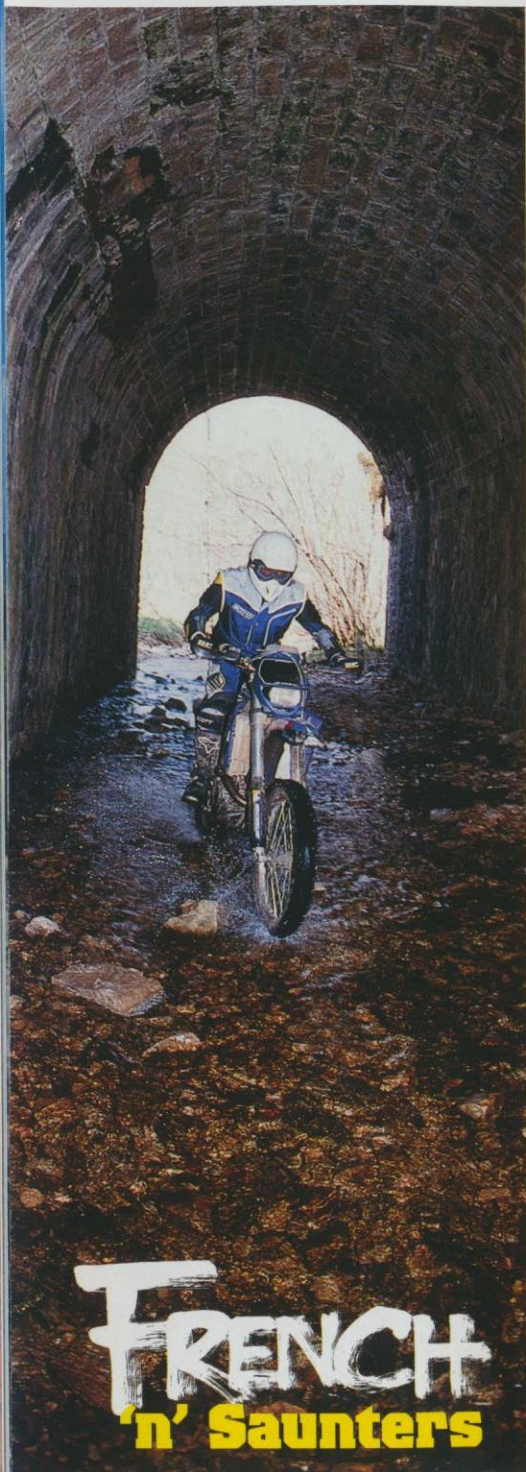
one of France's biggest enduro areas and once a year plays host to the famous three-day Trefle Lozerien Enduro. And we were here as guests of the Moto Club de Lozere (who organise the event), to ride some of the tracks and trails which make up just a small part of that great enduro.

To give you some idea of the scale of the place, every year in June the 'Trefle' attracts more than 500 dirt riders keen to tackle its 630km course (three days of more than 200km - and you never ride the same track twice), which along with its 15 beautifully taped-out special tests make up the event. And that doesn't even come close to describing the atmosphere of the place once the dirt bike circus rolls into town.



GAS GAS EC450 V KTM 450EXC





But this year we hadn't come to ride the Trefle Enduro (collectively, we've done it several times between us) this year we came to sample the guided trail riding which is available to just two approved operators - one of whom is British - our own indomitable, irascible, irrational columnist Chris Evans (what were they thinking of?)

And we hadn't come empty-handed either. A brand new 2004 Gas Gas EC450 and a 2004 KTM 450EXC graced the TBM Winabagel as we headed down the French Autoroute on our way to two of the best day's trail riding we've had this year.

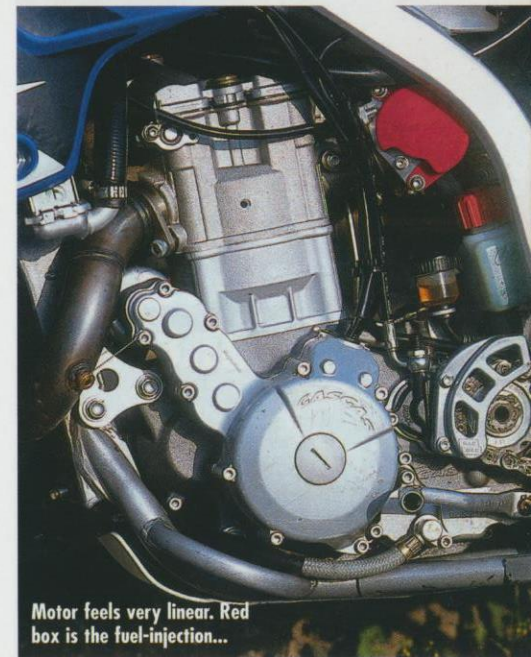
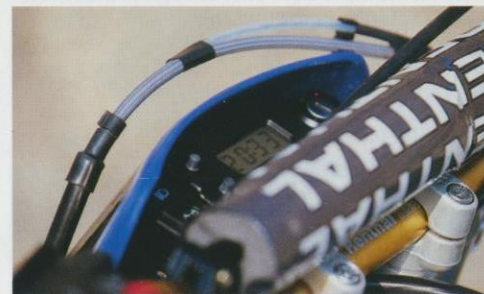
Our guide for the two days was 'Duke' - a pint-sized ex-paratrooper and former WEC outrider, and no slouch on his 300cc two-stroke Gasser. Duke is your typical French expert enduro rider: hard, compact, wiry - and that's just his moustache. He's also fit and incredibly skilful. He dismisses obstacles in his path with little more than a Gallic shrug of his shoulders and knows every kilometre of track like the back of his hand. He also likes to press on a bit as we found out, as we ended up working the 450s pretty hard to stay with him.

With 300 miles of riding planned there was never any doubt that this was going to be a spectacular ride - fast and challenging at times, but rewarding and enjoyable nonetheless. And with plenty of opportunity to evaluate both bikes as well as help select some killer hills for Chris's punters to struggle on later this year, it was too good an opportunity to miss.

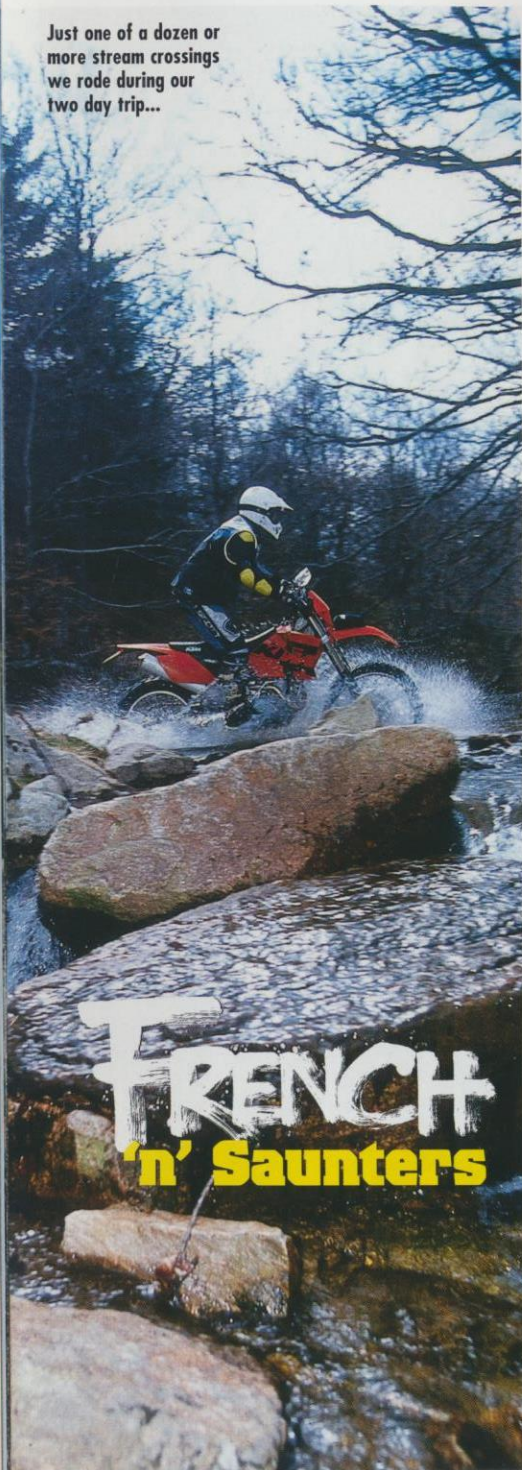
### On Y Va!

Next morning riding out from Mende up into the surrounding mountains along a tortuous ribbon of tarmac, the first of the day's trails began with an easy eight kilometre sandy track which was smooth and open - just the ticket for loosening us up before the real riding began. The real beauty of the tracks surrounding Mende lies not just in their scenic qualities, but also in their variety. One minute you can be on wide sandy pistes, the next you're firing along some cracking single track - sashaying the bike from side to side as you dodge between gorse bushes. Along the way there are stony riverbeds to cross, escarpments to climb (and descend), and numerous little technical trails which defy description. There's even some boggy upland, and a mile long trail of typical British ruts to ride. But the underlying theme is dictated by the geology of the area which is predominantly limestone. Everywhere you look there are craggy outcrops, exposed bedrock and loose rocks - quite unlike the majority of the trails we get back home in the UK.

The tracks themselves are littered with rocks - sometimes loose and moveable, at other times the whole trail has been carved into the bedrock - with evidence of many hundreds of years of usage. One track we rode which descended



Just one of a dozen or more stream crossings we rode during our two day trip...



# FRENCH 'n' Saunters

steeply down through a wooded glade to a crystal-clear stream crossing, revealed ruts left in the rock by the passage of ancient carriage wheels. And on these sorts of tracks - particularly the loose-surfaced climbs - the four-stroke is king.

## Va Va Voom

On a trip like this, 450cc is an ideal capacity to have. It allows you to press on where necessary, or simply meander quietly through pretty little villages without the need for too much throttle. There's plenty of power in reserve for the occasional stretches of blacktop and the torque afforded by a modern 450 allows you to pull a tallish gear (like third, say) on pretty much all but the steepest of ascents - helping maintain momentum and limit wheelspin. Two 450s then, but both very different in their overall design and packaging. Here's how they stacked up...

## General Stuff

KTM and Gas Gas have approached the lucrative 450 enduro market from opposite directions. And while both relish the acquisition of world titles, both factories are pragmatic enough to realise that the majority of 450 enduro bikes are bought by *trail riders who occasionally race* rather than the other way round. To that end both bikes are built fairly strong and neither of them is what you might call featherweight. The KTM tips the scales at 124kg fully fuelled (in standard trim - ours was fitted with one or two extras), the Gasser is around nine kilos heavier - and it feels it. But once on the move both offer enough grunt to feel fairly sprightly on the trail.

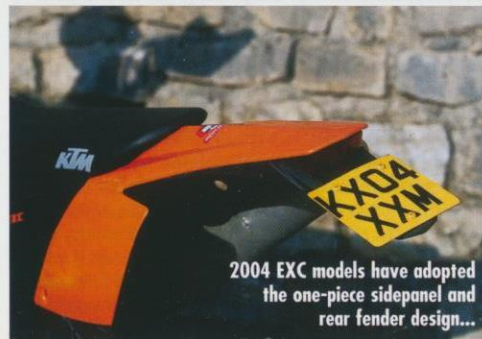
There couldn't be more difference between the look and feel of the bikes either. The Gasser feels long and slightly broader in the beam, the KTM, shorter and narrower. The Gasser's riding position feels neutral and traditional with a bit of a stretch to the lowish bars, pretty much anyone can get on with it. By contrast the KTM's riding position is quite unique with its high set bars and pegs. Not everyone likes it, but once you get used to it, it feels marginally better. Both have very firm seats.

In terms of specification, build quality and more especially design integrity, the KTM wins hands down - and this despite the fact that some readers report that KTM's legendary reliability is not quite as unshakeable as it once was.

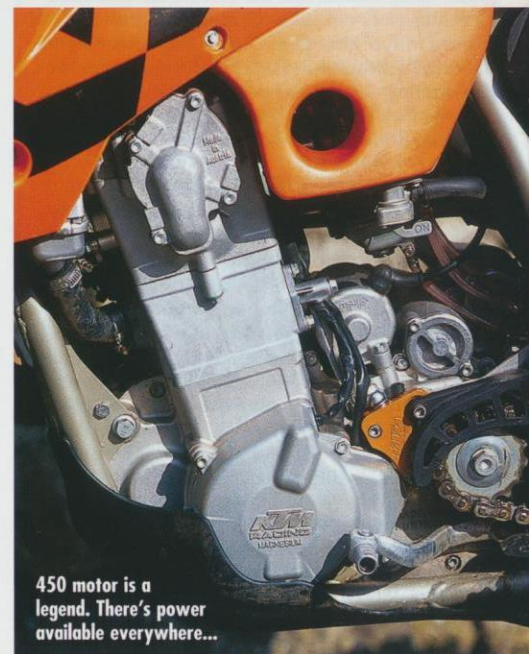
Everything from the KTM's sidestand to its digital instruments and quick-release air-filter are better thought out and better constructed than the Gas Gas equivalent, and you really don't want to go looking too closely at the Gasser's frame, wiring and overall construction. A mixture of bolts, exposed block connectors and shabby finishing make the Spanish bike stand out for all the wrong reasons alongside the Teutonic KTM.

It may seem like a minor point, but to our way

Both bikes were fitted with road-book readers for the purposes of this test. Plastic sumpguard is a KTM accessory...



2004 EXC models have adopted the one-piece sidepanel and rear fender design...



450 motor is a legend. There's power available everywhere...



A BIG THANKS TO: Kiki Boulet, Duke and the rest of the Moto Club de Lozere for a superb couple of days riding...



of thinking this sort of stuff matters with an enduro bike. It can make the difference between the maintenance regime being a pleasure, or a pain. Little details like the KTM's tall threaded rim-lock nuts can save minutes at a time when it comes to tyre changing. And if you're constantly having to swap tools because (for instance) the Gasser has a variety of bolt sizes on the handlebar perches alone, then you're just going to be wasting hours in the workshop.

### Engine and Power

Despite their similar capacities, it's only when you ride these bikes back to back that you find out just how completely different their powerplants really are. The Gas Gas' liquid-cooled, fuel-injected, DOHC, four-valve electric-start motor looks for all the world like a Suzuki DR-Z engine - in other words it's pretty damn chunky in size. By comparison the KTM's liquid-cooled, carb-fed SOHC, four-valve electric-start lump appears much more anorexic alongside it. And we reckon this alone probably accounts for at least four kilos difference in weight between the two bikes. What's more they deliver their payloads in completely different ways.

The Gasser motor is linear and progressive, there's a reasonable spread of torque, a decent midrange and a healthy top-end. In fact it's only once you get the motor really howling that this powerplant truly comes alive in a way that'll

thrill you. Up to that point you simply get driven along by it in an efficient, but slightly soul-less way. It makes respectable power and the EFI provides decent fuelling, and just like the KTM there are six ratios to choose from. But you quickly get used to stirring the Gasser's gearbox if you want to make decent progress - or at least you do if you're trying to live with the KTM.

Because alongside the KTM, the Gasser simply falls a bit flat. Its power delivery feels anaemic and strained at times. And this despite it being the noisier of the two machines. More surprising is the fact that it feels quite a bit more vibey than the KTM - or in any case harsher - and it uses a touch more fuel to get the same job done.

That the Gasser fails to match up to the KTM's powerplant is hardly surprising, given the abilities of the current EXC450 lump. Because this engine is quite simply pure genius. This is a powerplant which is head and shoulders above anything else available right now. Searingly powerful, relatively smooth, acceptably quiet and far more torquey than any other 450 we've tested. It's got everything: a booming bottom end, a real rush in the midrange and top-end power far and away in excess of what we need or can exploit. Roll it on in the corners and the KTM breaks traction and powerslides its way out of every turn. Blip the throttle and you'll lift the front over any obstacle. And get aggressive with it and you'll be amazed at its eye-watering turn of speed.

But this surfeit of power can have its drawbacks. For example the KTM's power delivery is significantly more aggressive right off the bottom than the Gasser's, and this can make finessing technical rocky climbs (and slippery mud) that bit harder than on the EC450. Never was this more obvious than on one particularly long and rock-strewn ascent on day one.

While Chris on the KTM initially got the jump on me at the bottom of the hill with a burst of acceleration which left me wondering which way he went; as the hill became steeper with sizeable rock-steps and plenty of loose boulders to clamber over, it was obvious that he was struggling a lot more. By comparison the EC's flatter torque curve ensured that rolling on and off the throttle produced much less in the way of wheelspin. I quickly caught up with Chris - the KTM scrambling for grip as each burst of throttle sent the tyre spinning off sideways - and the Gasser and I nipped swiftly past.

### Le Pic-Nic

To be honest, this was one of the few times during the first day that the Gas Gas rider enjoyed any sort of advantage. With the majority of the trails being fast, twisty and relatively smooth I'd spent the morning dodging a shower of roost fired up from the rear tyre of Chris's KTM, and grabbing huge handfuls of throttle to even keep him in sight. By the time we reached our lunch

## RIDING THE LOZERE

When Chris raced the Trefle Lozerien Enduro several years ago he fell in love with the area and the fantastic riding it had to offer and started looking at ways of running one of his Sport Adventure road-book tours down there. 'It had exactly what I was looking for in the way of terrain, even if it was a long way south, I knew that many of my punters would be willing to travel that far for the chance to ride such trails'.

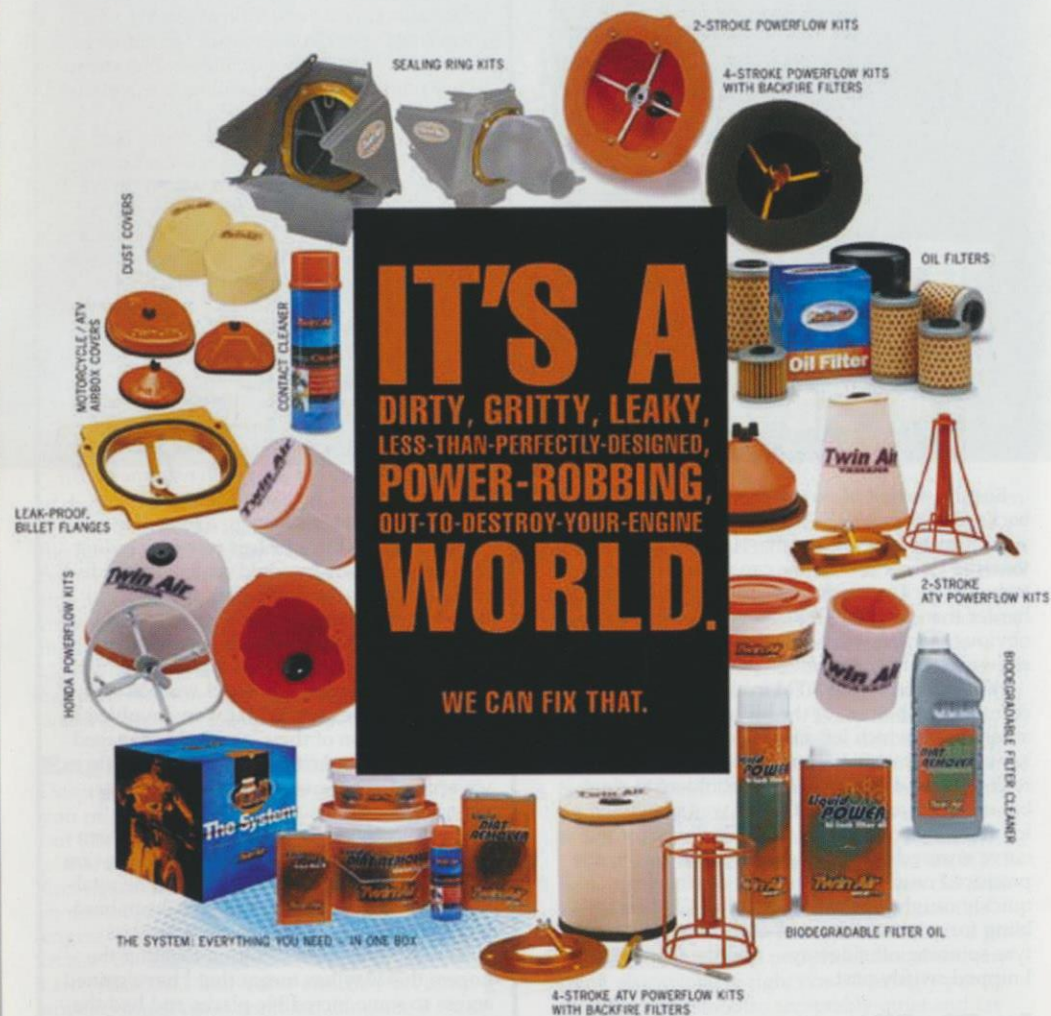
There was however just one hitch - like many of the best areas of France, the Lozere is highly protected, with hard won rights of access jealously guarded by the club that organises the Trefle. 'The more I looked at it, the more I realised that most of the Trefle was run through National Park for which you needed special permission to ride. In addition I had a lot of respect for what the club had achieved and didn't want to mess it up for them. It is so easy to go into the wrong area at the wrong time and put everything in jeopardy.' The final factor Chris had to take into consideration was that the Lozere is a mountainous and deserted area with extreme climatic variations - the sort of area where a little local knowledge can go a long way...

All of which forced Chris into concluding that the only way he could realistically ride in the area was by persuading the locals to help him out. 'It wasn't an easy task and I trod very carefully in the knowledge that they had nothing much to gain and plenty to lose. Fortunately for me, I had worked with a number of the people that were involved in the organisation of their event and managed to get them to vouch for me. Little by little we arrived at an exclusive agreement that reassured us all.'

Chris is obviously delighted to have been able to have got this far but is only too aware that keeping everybody on side will be vitally important for the future. 'It has been hard work winning everybody's trust, but has been worth the effort. 'Putting together the Lozere this way has meant that I have gained access to some incredible places and had the chance to meet and work with some really great people. My hope is that the relationships I have built up will continue to blossom and that the locals won't ever regret putting their trust in me and ultimately in my clients.' For more information about Chris' forthcoming trips call him on 07900 826719 or check out sport-adventure.com.



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stop at a wisteria-clad auberge with an outside terrace overlooking a huge blue lake, I was covered in crud and about ready for a break.

With the exception of the Italians, no-one does 'lunch' like the French. While I'm usually more than happy to grab a simple ham and cheese baguette, the French guys with whom we were riding couldn't pass up an opportunity like this to tuck into four courses - all washed down with beer, wine, coffee, and the obligatory Gauloises cigarettes. It was fully two hours later that we eventually staggered back onto the bikes for the afternoon's ride, and I was stuffed!

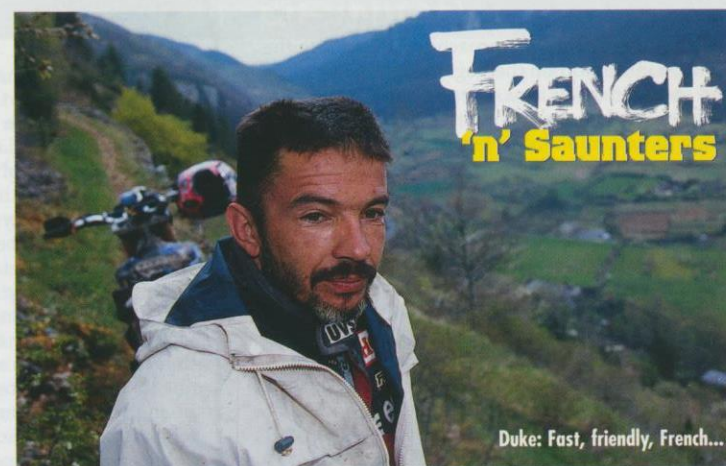
Once again the climb up through the trees was as spectacular as it was unrelenting. The trail circled the edge of the lake snaking its way up the side of a mountain, and was punctuated every so often by a vista somehow more impressive than the last. Despite the view, it was well worth keeping your eyes on the track as the sizeable rock steps came thick and fast, and picking the right line was a priority. By now I'd switched to the KTM and was amazed at how much more pull it offered low down, and how readily that grunt was available with very little effort needed.

But the most noticeable difference between the two was how easily the Katosh would change direction compared with the oh-so-stable Gasser. The KTM seemed like a darting hare next to the Gas Gas's steady tortoise. Clearly this has advantages and disadvantages when riding rocky trails, but you always felt that the KTM pilot had a lot more choice when it came to choosing lines.

### Wash 'N' Go

At the top of the trail we stopped for a few minutes to admire the view before heading off across an open plateau littered with streams which descended via a steep but enchanting downhill beneath a canopy of trees to the start of an

Gas Gas felt much easier to ride in the rocks...



Duke: Fast, friendly, French...

unusually straight trail. Historically this particular track began life as a Roman Road, but much more recently had been the site of an old railway. During the Second World War it was used by the French Resistance to transport munitions across the mountains, but after the war it fell into disrepair and a few years ago was dug up and turned back into a trail.

Despite the warmish spring weather, there was still snow up here and the succession of deep puddles we splashed through were freezing cold. The puddles gave way to mud which in turn became grass and eventually a lengthy section of muddy ruts. It was here that I lobbed the KTM when I lost the front end against the side of one of the ruts - the only time either one of us fell during the whole two days.

But it was symptomatic of the KTM's front end, that I never felt truly at ease with it during the entire time that I rode it. For sure it allows



# FRENCH 'n' Saunters

sized rocks. It was hard enough just keeping your wheels in line whilst picking a good clean route without the hazards of big downhill steps, a couple of large washouts and some off-camber bedrock trying to knock them out from underneath you. All the time there was the constant chatter of moving stones so that it felt like we were riding down the edge of a scree-slope.

I've got to say I was very glad to be aboard the Gas Gas which simply refused to be deflected off

accurate pin-point placing of the front wheel, and it carves turns with a delicacy which the Gasser can't even get near to approaching. But riding the KTM, standing up on the pegs with your head and shoulders well forward, you can never really be sure whether each gentle twitch of the bars is going to turn into a complete front-end wash-out. For certain, on the slower switchback trails with plenty of turns (and steep drop-offs) and where the choice of line was key, it felt so much more secure than the Gasser because you knew it was always going to turn in time. It changed direction on the throttle (which the EC more or less refused to do), and when you spotted a hazard (such as a projecting rock) you could either take avoiding action or simply blip the throttle and jump over it. But on the fast rock-strewn climbs (and particularly the descents) it felt like a liability.

Thankfully a succession of easy open trails led the way back down into Mende at the close of day one, and here the KTM was back in its element - cornering swiftly and confidently, and powering out of every turn trailing a sizeable roost. Then it was back onto supermoto-friendly tarmac for the quick blast back into town and once again the KTM felt easily the nicer of the two machines - quicker, more secure and easier to handle. That night over a delicious steak and chips, the conversation inevitably turned to which bike we would buy. We were unanimous in our praise. Up till then, we'd both have chosen the KTM.

## Bon Journee

The next day all that was set to change as the morning's route quickly departed from the fast 'n' easy trails of the previous afternoon into serious technical going. The opening downhill was typical. What seemed at times to be little more than a goat track, clung perilously to the side of a ridiculously steep ravine littered with tennis-ball

line no matter what you collected with the front wheel. It's at times like these that the sure-footedness of the EC's chassis really comes into its own, and its soft, well damped suspension (a marked improvement over the settings on last year's bike) all help. It was exactly the same story once we reached the bottom and began the awesome loose-rock climb back up the other side of the valley. Despite giving away power to the KTM and having to be worked harder, the Gas Gas simply forged its way to the top of the hill, the rider more or less only having to concentrate on giving it great gobs of throttle.

The same couldn't be said of the KTM however. By the time we got to the top, Chris was already out of breath from fighting so hard with the KTM's wayward front end. And this was pretty much the routine for the rest of the day. Whenever the trail was either fast and smooth,

or twisty and loose, the KTM was the more enjoyable bike to ride. But once the rocks became of a certain size and there was an element of climbing or descending to be done (particularly if the track didn't snake around too much), then the Gasser was the better machine.

Mid-morning we arrived at a huge outcrop of rocks down through which the track descended. With two giant rock steps to negotiate it was a matter of all hands on deck, passing the bikes down between us. We got to the bottom hot but exhilarated, thankful to find that 50m further on there was a stony riverbed to cross - flowing with plenty of ice-cold water.

From there we climbed again to the top of another huge plateau where the tracks were fast and flowing which allowed both bikes to slot into top gear. Once again it was the KTM which made all the running, its firmer damped suspension

## SECOND OPINION

precipice we were riding. And I could do this as happily sitting down as standing up - something my exhausted leg muscles were hugely appreciative of!

This isn't the first time I have ridden a KTM and a Gas Gas back to back and ended up wishing that KTM could just tone their bikes down a tad - just make them a little bit easier for mere mortals to ride. I have a French journalist friend called Museau (which incidentally means pig snout) who has a strange but highly plausible explanation for the two companies' different philosophies when it comes to making dirt bikes handle. Apparently the bloke who owns Gas Gas is a keen amateur off-road rider and when he comes back from sampling his R&D boys' latest handiwork, he invariably says something along

the lines of: 'yes very good chaps, just kick out the front forks a couple of degrees and back off the suspension and it will be perfect'. Over at Mattighoffen it's a different scenario. The geezers knocking out the new models lean out of their office door and shout, 'Heinz, Kurt, we've got something for you to whizz around the test track'. And Kini and Nicoll (dirt biking demi-gods both), take the bikes out for

a play and then say: 'yeah, pretty good boys, just sharpen up the steering a tad and stiffen up the suspension and it'll be spot on'.

What is so frustrating is that if you could combine the best aspects of both bikes you would have an absolutely unbeatable package. As it is, if I had lots of time to spend in the garage and didn't give a damn about reliability or resale value I'd buy the Gasser. Back in the real world the KTM wins out for me. The 2004 model is definitely more forgiving than previous ones and with a little time and money spent on revalving suspension and fitting a steering damper the bike has it all. I just wish those boys over in Austria would let Signor Gas Gas have a quick spin on their bikes before they decided on the final spec... **CHRIS EVANS**





## FRENCH 'n' Saunters

feeling perfectly at home on the high-speed going, though in fairness the Gasser felt pretty good too, sliding through fifth and sixth gear turns with lots of throttle dialled in.

The descent down the sheer rock face into the Col du Tarn is one I remember from the Trefle Enduro and takes some beating. Switchback turns so tight that sometimes you can't even get around them on full lock, so you end up having to brakeslide the rear end round, whilst staring down the face of a 300ft drop. Seriously scary. But the effort is all worthwhile, once you've descended into the picture-perfect village of St Enemie where lunch was taken on the banks of a shallow river in one of the riverside cafes.

The climb up the other side was as difficult as it was perilous, but back aboard the Gasser I stormed up it, even overtaking our guide at one point as he stalled on a particularly tricky turn. Chris on the KTM meanwhile, was struggling with an excess of wheelspin and a shortage of inside leg. And when we swapped bikes part way up, it was noticeable how much more difficult the KTM made the climbs.

### The Final Analysis

And this was our overriding conclusion from the second day's ride. Whenever the trail got technical (which is to say most of the time), the Gasser was the machine which demanded the least from



its rider. It was stable, well suspended and frankly much easier to ride, to the point of being much less of a drain on your reserves of energy.

With the sun setting on a great couple of days riding it was back into the van for the long trip north and a chance to reflect on the two bikes - their relative merits and downsides, and ultimately try and decide where we would place our money. Ideally a combination of the EXC's lusty engine with the Gasser's sure-footed chassis would be best, with the steering geometry set somewhere between the two. But obviously that's not an option, so failing that we eventually came to the following conclusions:

You'd buy the Gas Gas EC450... if you are more of a trail rider than a racer. If your level of riding is 'clubman' or below. If you don't mind spending time fiddling in the workshop. If you can afford to take more of a hit on the depreciation. If you like great suspension. If you don't like headshake. If you like a nice easy to ride blue bike...

You'd buy the KTM EXC450... if you are more of a racer than a trail rider. If your level of riding is 'clubman' or above. If you appreciate aesthetics and build quality. If you want a decent choice of aftermarket parts. If you ride more on the road. If you're not at all scared of speed. If you can put up with headshake or afford a steering damper. If you like a truly great (but challenging) orange bike...

Whichever one you buy, you'll end up compromising somewhere along the line. No question in either of our minds on that count. Both of them are good, but neither is flawless. So perhaps the broader question is: are either of them better than perhaps a 300 two-stroke or even a good 250 four-stroke these days? And that's gotta' be a question for another day and another test. But then again... it's a perfect excuse for a return trip to the Lozere!

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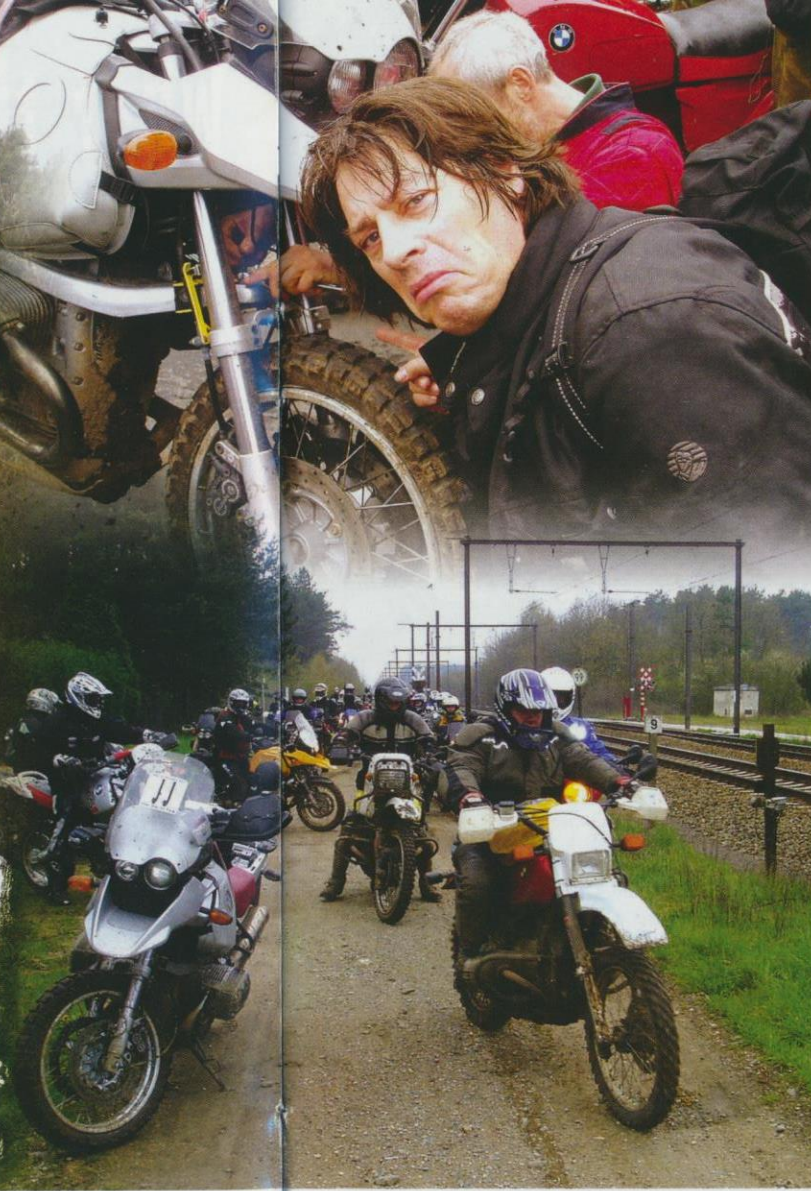


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An international BMW GS rally in the heart of Flanders in Belgium with two days of serious trail riding...? Sounds like a job for Blez...



# Belgian WAFFLE!



STORY & PICS: PAUL BLEZARD

## 'SYSTEM D' FOR 'DROP OFF'

This is ideal for keeping a large group of riders on the right route. What happens is this. You have two people at the front, and two right at the back who never change places. The lead rider simply concentrates on following the right route while the second rider designates the places where the third rider must stop to make sure that all who follow go the right way - basically anywhere where there could be any doubt or ambiguity, parking his bike so that it points in the direction everyone needs to go. The person dropped off then waits till all the riders have passed except the two 'tail-end charlies' or sweepers, who each wear fluoro jackets so that they are easily distinguishable from everyone else. Once he's sure that the sweepers have seen him, the turn-marker continues on his way.

In order for the system to work, it's absolutely essential that each change of direction is marked by a rider, and secondly that each person waits for the sweepers, who remain unchanged throughout (you could use a single back-marker). This means that if any of the riders has a problem you may have to spend a boring half hour or so standing at a junction in the middle of nowhere. But if anyone abandons their post, then the system breaks down because everyone behind that person is screwed...

In between the front and the back you're free to go at your own pace and overtake as many riders as you want, or hang back and let everyone else pass you. Obviously, the more you overtake, the more corner-marking you end up doing.

Provided everyone sticks to the rules, it's a good system which gives everyone a breather from time to time (and people like me a chance to take some photos without holding everybody up!) (The Big Trail Bike club use a similar system on their runs).

Easter has always meant the Cambrian Rally for me but with this year's trail bike rally postponed until October I was keen to find an alternative outlet for my dirty habits. Two things happened which pointed the fickle finger of fate towards Belgium. First, I met a flat-twin fanatic called Chris Stone who told me about a GS rally in Flanders where a large proportion of the participants did an off-road route for which knobbles were essential. Sounded promising... Then, a week later, my old mate Phil Gunn phoned up and said he was going to the self-same event and was I up for it?

That was the clincher - it had to be done!

Fast forward to 3.30pm Good Friday afternoon. Phil Gunn and his Irish mates have already landed in the Hook of Holland with their van. Chris Stone's already landed at Calais on his tricked up R100GS. I am just leaving South West London for my first proper ride on the 1150 since I bought it last November. At 5pm I'm £110 lighter and standing in a spookily deserted Chunnel train with just two other vehicles on board.

By 6pm (7pm French time) I'm refuelled and enjoying a Croque M'sieu and coffee in Calais. Dunkirk, Bruges, and Gent pass quickly by, and

I refuel outside Antwerp at 8.45. Thirty minutes later I'm following Phil Gunn down a dirt track to a pair of well-equipped chalets near the little town of Kasterlee, near Turnhout, where the GS rally is based. When we arrive Seamus Sorohan (organiser of last year's Trip to Tipp - TBM 99) is busy fitting a set of knobbles to his borrowed GS80 in the dark and it's by no means the last time he'll have the tyre levers out... Big Liam Flanagan is the other member of the Irish triumvirate using the same KTM 660 rally bike on which he did the Alto Turia in 2002 and many other events since.

Fellow Brit and Boxer-fan Dick Jakobek found the chalet site on the internet, (€59 each for 3 nights) preferring their excellent creature comforts to the dubious joys of 'tenting it' on the rally site. This was the best decision of the weekend, because when we got down to rally HQ the main marquee was like a giant fridge and didn't seem to get any warmer even when it was choc full of bikers. Dick had persuaded his mate Ian Carruthers, a relative novice to off-roading, to come along on his immaculate BMW Basic 800 twin - Ian had previously learnt the hard way that a GS 1100 is not the ideal machine on which

## FLANDERS' FOREIGN FIELDS

Chief organiser of the event, Rudy Denolf, told me that his fellow members of the GS Riders of Flanders motorcycle club have been informally getting together over Easter for the last 15 years, but that this was only their third official rally or 'treffen'.

They only hold the rally every two years so that they can go and enjoy someone else's event during the 'off' years. The GS Rijders are 'a club within a club' - part of the officially recognised BMW motorcycle club of Flanders. 'We try to do something every month in the club - that is our goal' he told me.

The rally cost €53 including the BBQ if pre-booked, €44 plus €15 extra for the BBQ if, like me, you just turned up 'on spec.' The Flems, being Dutch speakers, were happy to make all the public announcements in English. Damned decent of them...

The same bloke then said 'I saw ze nut voz missing at breakfast, but you were not zere to tell'.

'Well a note might have been a good idea mate', I thought. With my jaw still on the floor, I pushed the bike over to the front of the shop, where a friendly German helped me to re-locate the bottom yoke stud through the gaping hole through which it had fallen. All we needed now was the special BMW nut.

No sooner said than done - the shop mechanic emerged with the very thing within two minutes, then returned again with a torque wrench to do it up to the right setting and topped the job off with the requisite plastic thread cover. Total cost: 5 euros. Total time broken down at the side of the road: zero. Proximity to disaster: a hair's breadth!

I can only put this down to typical Blez karma: the most extraordinarily unlucky things happen to me, but they always seem to be balanced by great good fortune which gets me out of trouble. No one could believe that I had ridden for an hour with no fork nut and for some unknown distance with the front end semi-disconnected. I'm most perturbed by the fact that I never even noticed that anything was wrong! (I've never heard of anyone losing one of these yoke nuts before, but one of the other riders said that it's happened enough times to him that he usually carries a spare with him!)

The variety of trails continued, from wide and slippery to narrow and nadgery and poor Ian managed to eat dirt on both types of going in quick succession before we stopped for lunch.



Above left: That's Blez puffing and panting his way to the top of the hill on board his 1150GS after one too many Belgian waffles for breakfast. Right: Although Blez is renowned as something of a bodger in the TBM office, this Beemer's 'Transit' exhaust system is in another league altogether...

# Belgian WAFFLE!

to start one's off-roading career.

As I went to start the 1150 the following morning, big Liam handed me a lead with a BMW-type plug to insert into my GS's socket. He'd rigged up a neat way of boosting his KTM's flagging battery, with the other end going into another socket on the Austrian bike's home-made dashboard.

Meanwhile Seamus got a jump off the neat battery pack that Phil Gunn had sensibly brought with him. There were several other machines being jump-started when we arrived at rally HQ - old boxers are notoriously marginal in the starting department.

I was going to let some air out of my Twinduro tyres until I discovered that I'd ridden all the way from London with 22psi in the front and 18 in the rear. So after an excellent bacon and egg breakfast, Rudy the chief organiser explained to the assembled couple of hundred riders that there

were two options for the day; a 230km road ride down to 'Battle of the Bulge' territory, complete with rally-style road book for guidance, or the off-road option, which would be led by Dirtmeister Eddy Heylen, (serious tyres required).

I was amazed at the number of riders who chose the dirty option; there were well over 50 of us gathered outside for Eddy's briefing a short while later. He explained (in English) that we'd be using 'System D' to keep everyone together, since it's ideally suited to guiding large groups of riders on complicated routes (see side-bar).

We were only a few minutes from rally HQ when Eddy turned onto the first dirt track and we hardly seemed to be on the asphalt for more than a kilometre at a time for the rest of the day. I was absolutely astonished at the number, variety and length of trails available in this little corner of 'boring' old Belgium. From wide, flat easy-to-ride untarmaced roads with houses

either side, to narrow, boggy tracks and challenging sandy climbs in the middle of a forest.

There was some pretty muddy going within the first few 'clicks', one of which was eerily reminiscent of one of my local trails in Surrey except that this one ended with a really narrow section where a careless rider could easily have ended up in a canal. After an hour's riding we had our first break at a BMW dealership in an industrial estate which we entered via a green lane. As I parked the GS1150 and took out my camera another rider came over and said simply, 'I sink you have a problem'. I had no idea what he was talking about until I saw to my utter amazement that the whole bottom yoke was completely disconnected from the Telelever suspension arm.

### Screw Loose

The only thing holding the telescopic tubes and front wheel to the bike was the top yoke. Blimey!



The first time I saw him on the deck another rider on a GS1150 had fallen off trying to avoid him. The second time his right cylinder took a chunk out of an unsuspecting tree, but no other harm was done.

### Slip-slidin' Away

When we got out of the woods we were confronted by what I found to be the trickiest section of the day. It was wide, flat and straight, but oh so slippery and after legging my own way through I looked back to see a big ol' Adventure 1150 wallowing like a hippo in the mud, on its side.

On tracks such as this, the old 'air-heads' are a lot easier to handle. Mind you, there were some damned skilful riders within the 50-strong group. One Belgian bloke did the whole first day with his girlfriend on the back, and he came through that section feet up and powersliding sideways, catching the bike in the nick of time just as it was about to hit the back of a parked machine - very impressive!

Another bold two-up pair were Trans-Siberian travellers Simon McCarthy and his partner Georgie on Simon's trusty R100GS. Georgie had actually ridden to the event on her own Indian Enfield which she'd bought in India and ridden back to Blighty and the pair of them gave an entertaining talk about their travels on the Sunday night.

60 TBM

### Backmarkers

We stopped for lunch in a small town with a typical Flemish bakery providing the snacks. I was a bit slow to finish my coffee in the bar next door and emerged to find the two back-markers riding up the road and everyone else gone! By the time I'd crossed the road and got my bike going they were out of sight and I thought the rest of my day was ruined. In desperation I stopped and asked an old boy on a bicycle if he'd seen any 'motors' and he directed me back to the crossroads I'd just been through and told me to turn right and then take the first turning on the left. This was marked with a dead end sign but turned into a tree-lined track and just as I entered the wood our run leader emerged from the opposite direction, having just completed a short off-road loop - phew! What a relief to catch up with the group. With the back-markers gone, so is all trace of the route and I would never have found them again.

After some time following a really faint trail through the woods we suddenly emerged into a sandy clearing in front of a dune-like hill and this provided plenty of entertainment for the next 20 minutes. While some poor saps required many a helping hand just to make it up the hill and down the other side, others took advantage of their superior machinery or skill to attack it several times over.



Steve Ramon - KTM Racing Team  
125cc Motorcross World Champion  
with Michelin Starcross MS3 and MH3





## Goals to Newcastle: a BM from Japan to Germany

After all the exertion and excitement we stopped to regroup in the woods a little further on and I had a chat with a Japanese chap called Yoshi with a GS1100. Turned out he'd bought it in Japan and brought it all the way to Germany with him, complete with Japanese number plate.

I was amused by the stickers on his bike which said 'Back Off' and 'Big Off' - 'Off' alone meaning 'off-road' in Japlish. Turns out there's a GS club in Japan, but the big Beemers are a bit too much to handle for most Nipponese natives.

After more woods work an 'Irish pub' popped up like magic by the side of the road. We naturally stopped for a half of Guinness and big Liam attempted to play a metal tray like a bodhrán but it wasn't quite the same as the real thing so we left before the locals turned nasty.

A little further on it was Seamus's turn to be

the centre of attention at the group ice cream stop. He demonstrated an amazing ability to mend a puncture with one hand while eating an ice cream with the other!

One of the Belgians then produced a really neat, palm-sized electric pump designed to plug into a standard BMW power socket. By this time we'd been joined by a bloke who Phil nicknamed 'Eric' due to the Viking-like horns mounted on his extraordinary old 'air-head' which also boasted a sheepskin seat and a bizarre exhaust which seemed to be designed to burn the rider's bum and set fire to the whole shooting match.

I was amused to see a 'No cars' sign on one of the trails and slightly concerned to see a 'No horses' sign on another but apparently all of what we did was all legal and above board. The only irate local we saw all day was a bloke who blocked the roadway to stop us going the last 100m from a trail back to the main road.

He seemed to think his was a private road, but the dirt road detour was actually a lot more interesting than the planned route.

By 4.30pm it was grey and miserable and getting colder so no-one was sorry when Eddy said we were heading for home. We'd done over 60 miles of riding, the majority of it off tarmac, without ever straying more than about 15 miles from Kasterlee. Amazing.

The evening barbecue surpassed all our expectations for taste and quality but the marquee remained steadfastly freezing so we did a pub crawl in Kasterlee, ending up in a bar in the centre of the town till the wee small hours. There we met up with incorrigible traveller Mick Wadsworth and also fraternised with the locals, who demonstrated the dubious delights of 'squeezing through the chair' and other arcane Flemish rituals (did you show them the old Blez trick of just squeezing through the door? - Ed).

## Easter Day

Fortunately Sunday was scheduled for a late start so we were just about sober by the time we had to ride. Once again there was a full-on 'dirty day' for those with knobbies, while those with standard tyres were offered a 'mixed' ride of tarmac and easy dirt, and we later heard that over 50 per cent of those who took part were off-road virgins, but came back gagging for more.

Naturally we went for the full-on dirt deal, which actually turned out to be tougher than Saturday's far from easy ride. Once more there were over 50 of us lined up for the briefing, including a madman with an empty sidecar outfit.

We'd only gone a few kilometres when Seamus's ice-cream-enhanced puncture repair gave up the ghost, so he got out the aerosol can in an attempt to keep going. That lasted long enough to get past several horse riders on a deceptively slippery dirt road but as soon as we returned to the tarmac the tube spun in the tyre. We then had another wait while Seamus borrowed another tube, nipped it, repaired the new hole and then finally got some air back in the tyre! Fortunately everyone stayed at their 'post' marking all the turns, so the System D continued to function correctly and no-one got lost.

There then followed a fantastic series of fairly fast and open lanes in which I found myself going faster and faster, passing a lot more riders than passed me and hanging the back end out on the 1150 for the first time all weekend. With 50 riders on big ol' boxers all blasting along it wasn't exactly TRF-style behaviour, but boy was it fun! (And in Belgium at least, entirely legal, I'm assured).

The fast stuff was followed by a complete contrast as we found ourselves routed, one at a time, up the side of a motorway bridge embankment in a steep and narrow gully. Yoshi the Jap practically turned his 1100 upside down in his failed attempt to get up, but everyone else seemed to manage it, including a girl on a Dakar F650 who gave a whoop of delight as she made it to the top. The descent the other side of the motorway was just as steep and after a brief gambol through some open fields we were confronted by the toughest climbs of the rally, in sandy woodland. They weren't as steep as the embankment, but the crust of the sand soon broke as more riders went up and the first 1150 to attempt it dug a huge hole as his front wheel jammed against an awkward root. It was the only time all weekend that I required any 'outside assistance' and I got stuck again barely 20m further on as I got sucked into another soft, deep slot.





## Belgian WAFFLE!

Fortunately lunch was only a few minutes further on so we all had a chance for a bit of rest and recuperation before returning to the Flanders fray. The post-prandial riding was as enjoyable as anything that had gone before with another great mix of fast and slow going. Dick Jakobek dropped his GS100 right in front of me on one slippery corner but he'd got it upright again by the time I'd got the camera out.

There was some great nadsery stuff through the trees on the mounds that ran alongside many of the canals, one of which had a log across, which made a nice little challenge. There was also a wooden bridge that was only a few centimetres wider than the track of the sidecar, but yer man rode it across with no problems - I was amazed how fast he went on the whoopy rough stuff.

We had a pause in the middle of the afternoon during which I had a chat with Romain Wijnen, our leader for the day. Romain admitted he was surprised at the number of people who had opted for the serious trail riding this year, since they'd had a pretty torrid time of it in the sticky clay of South Belgium last time around. He also told me that the last stage of the run would take us across the border into Holland for a few kilometres.

The going in Holland was reminiscent of trails I know in Sussex but the Belgians said they could also tell we'd crossed the border because the

tarmac roads were better! During our Dutch pause I had a chat with Phil Gunn, who had been taking on all-comers all weekend on his ridiculously under-suspended (but well tyred) R80ST. He'd been much taken by all the special 'airhead' boxers with trick WP suspension at both ends and he particularly fancied copying one that had a mighty 'oilhead' swingarm/shaft grafted onto the engine.

After a few more trails we were soon riding through the suburbs of Turnhout, and 15 minutes of country roads later, we were back at base. We all agreed it had been an absolutely fantastic weekend's riding which had surpassed all our expectations.

For next Easter the GS club of Holland is supposed to be organising something and the MC Vlaanderen boys will be doing it all over again in 2006. Chances are I'll be back for the next version of this excellent Belgian treffen next time around, provided there are some cosy chalets nearby.

*Special thanks to routemasters Eddy and Romain, and to Rudy and all the other members of BMW MC Vlaanderen who made the GS treffen happen. Also to Dick and Phil for organisation and Ian for putting up with my snoring.*

*For more info see: [bmw-mc-vl.be/](http://bmw-mc-vl.be/), and also the GS Club UK website [ukgser.com](http://ukgser.com)*



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# CZECH Mate



**Mark Williams tells the story of the rare and unusual CZ Enduro...**

Like the Morini featured in last month's Archives, the machine featured here owes its genesis to sporting success. But unlike the Morini, it came from a communist country where commercial realities were at best tenuous and at worst, non-existent. Thus making the story of the CZ Enduro's sales success particularly remarkable.

Back in 1974 Jaroslav Falta lay second in the World MX Championship aboard his works 250 CZ, but in the final round in Switzerland his arch Russian foes, KTM-mounted Gennady Moiseev and Pavel Ruliev appeared to deliberately crash into him in both motos.

In both cases, and to huge applause from the crowd, Falta managed to re-mount and plough through the field to win, only to be relegated to second place by the FIM judges after those self-same Russians protested that he'd jumped the starting gate. Twice!

But despite this highly questionable decision the reputation of both the man and machine were already recognized. Falta having beaten most of the established stars such as Roger deCoster and Harry Everts in the previous year's American stadium supercross as well as in the bulk of the Championship events. And on the back of that, CZ started selling a lot of 'Falta Replica' 5-speed 250s and 4-speed 400 MXers. For iron curtain products, they were pretty sophisticated with reed-valve induction, titanium fastenings, magnesium hubs and triple clamps, and extensive use of fibreglass. And they sold by the container load in the US.

Here in Britain, works rider Dave Bickers also achieved considerable success on the 'Czech fire engines' - a name-tag that reflected their bright red frames and polished alloy 'coffin' tanks - and given that the bikes were marketed by the same state-owned 'foreign trade corporation' (Motokov) who'd singularly failed to capitalise on the competition success

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of Jawa's ISDT bikes, it was little less than astonishing that within a year of Falta's victory, CZ were mass-producing a cooking version of the bike for Joe Public in their Strakonice factory.

And when the evocatively titled Model 988.1 first appeared, the motorcycling press could barely believe it. And whilst modified moto-cross CZs had occasionally appeared in ISDT-type events, usually (and ironically) ridden by Russian teamsters, the idea of marketing a glorified trailbike on the back of moto-cross success is a practice continued by manufacturers to this day.

But the CZ Enduro was more closely related to the motocrosser than might've reasonably been expected. The angular, all-alloy engine used exactly the same forged crank and triple roller bearing assembly as the race

## CZECH Mate

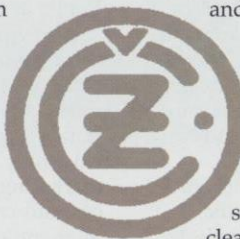


This round-tanked 1975 model belongs to CZ Owners Club chairman John Blackburn and is remarkably original. See brochure below...

bikes, with the same gudgeon pins resting in the same needle rollers, and with the same bulletproof steel-plate clutch and over-engineered gearbox it was as sturdy and durable a motor as you'd find. However the compression ratio was reduced from 11:1 to 9.5:1, it lacked a reed valve and featured a smaller 33mm Jikov carburettor. All of which conspired to reduce power output from the crosser's 29-30bhp to somewhere between 20 and 25bhp at 4800 or 6900rpm, depending on which factory brochure or rider's manual you read!

The single downtube chassis was also remarkably similar to the Falta replica, too, although it lacked the springless pneumatic (and extremely tricky to set-up) shocks which were dumped in favour of more conventional

dual spring items offering four as opposed to five inches of travel. The front forks were also more akin to CZ's roadster items than the air-assisted race jobbies, again offering an inch less travel at seven inches but with no stiction and pretty progressive damping.



Unusually, the swingarm was held in expensive bronze bushings by a hollow, oil-filled pin which took care of lubrication. Ingenious!

Barum S23 trials tyres shod a brace of beautiful non-lipped alloy rims, however despite these high-spec items, the bike offered ground clearance of just seven-and-a-half inches at a time when KTM's, Bultacos and even most Jap trailies boasted at least two inches more. The bonus being a seat height that was in today's Serow territory at 32.5in, or 825mm.

A dry weight of 251lbs was also consider-

ably porkier than the moto-crosser's 220lb, but much of this was accounted for by the decently quiet if hefty, slab-sided silencer and the rounded steel tank on the first, 1975 version (rather than the 'crosser's angular design). Weight-saving wasn't helped by the lighting system, which included a huge Lucas rear lamp, large non-rubber mounted indicators and a 6-volt battery to augment the 60W magneto ignition which fed an 8-volt coil and not one, but two condensers. And as was invariably the case with east European bikes, switchgear was distinctly on the crude side. The large, comfy seat, secured by a single Q/D nut, was built on a steel rather than a fibreglass base, but a flexible plastic 'guard rose high above the front wheel.

A wider, moderately-finned front 125mm brake replaced the MXer's larger diameter but conical hub unit, though the rear anchor was at least visually the same as the 'crosser's 180mm unit and utilised the same, virtually indestructible 5/8 x 1/4in chain and sprocket set-up.

Even given its modest power output, at just £525, the CZ represented exceptional value, being some 50 quid cheaper than Yamaha's DT250, and an even bigger bargain when the importers dropped it to just £466 in 1976! And perhaps unsurprisingly it won plaudits in the press, Motorcyclist magazine in the USA compliment-

ing the bike's 'good handling... and smooth running' and one British hack going as far as to dub it 'the nicest machine CZ have ever marketed in this country and possibly one of the best trailbikes ever.'

But his perhaps ill-informed euphoria betrayed the illusory nature of the bike's 'Enduro' tag, for in truth the standard bike was too underpowered, insufficiently suspended and lacking in ground clearance for serious competition work. However with such a low retail price, at least anyone fancying their chances in enduros could replace many of the crucial elements from CZ's motocross parts book without breaking the bank, although I haven't unearthed any records of big wins by those who did.

The realities of eastern bloc bike manufacturing also reared their heads after a few outings - on

In 1977 CZ updated the trailbike with their classic 'coffin' tank...



### New CZ 250 Enduro

#### SPECIFICATIONS

Engine	249cc, 4-stroke	Power	25hp @ 6000rpm
Compression	10.5:1	Max. speed	100mph
Gear & Shift	5 gears	Weight	251lb (114kg)
Clutch	Steel	Seat height	32.5in (825mm)
Chassis	Steel	Wheelbase	50.0in (1270mm)
Front wheel	19in	Front tyre	19x2.15
Rear wheel	17in	Rear tyre	17x2.15
Front suspension	Telescopic fork	Front fork	41mm
Rear suspension	Swingarm	Rear shock	21in
Brake	Disc	Front brake	125mm
		Rear brake	160mm

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## THE EDITOR'S CHOICE



ENDURO

Big radial-finned cylinder head on the CZ was typical of the late Seventies...

an easy working life - the latest of three expired speedos clouding its true mileage.

When I visit John for photographic purposes, the bike lacked a battery and was without an MoT until he could 'get around to preparing it', so I didn't have a chance to have even a modest bumble on it. But it certainly looks purposeful and I later learnt that club chairman, John Blackburn, regularly takes

John Woods collects Jawas and CZs like some people collect stamps. He's got everything from mopeds to customised cruisers(!) and so it was inevitable that he felt the need to include an Enduro in his stable. John, a qualified engineer who used to work for Lucas, also edits the Jawa CZ Club magazine, the tantalisingly named Torque, so I wasn't surprised to learn that he'd bought his from the brother-in-law of another club official, international liaison manager, Mario Mager.

John, who's owned the bike more than five years, paid £500 for the late-1977 'coffin' tank model which, although not exactly pristine, is almost completely standard. Common mods, like the later motocross air-filter, NGK plug and Rental bars were to be expected, but at some point the silencer and heat-shield had been rather crudely re-painted.

John also has a Mikuni carb for it which he intends to fit in the near future. His bike did however have what appeared to be the original Barum tyres, and in surprisingly good nick, suggesting that his machine may've had

his own, well-sorted 'round tank' model trailriding, and reports that it's entirely practical provided you don't expect to win races on it!



or off-road - the most annoying being the inability of the crude Jikov carb and decidedly agricultural PAL 14/9R spark plug to provoke the engine into life. A decent NGK plug, efficient fuel line filter and rigorous attention to the air-filter would help, but the latter item although it sat high beneath the seat, wasn't particularly well sealed and many owners resorted to after-market items to be on the safe side. A more radical solution was to fit a Mikuni carb, which had the advantage of adding an extra pony or two to the stable.

The left side kick-start and long throw gearchange weren't enjoyed by those of us acclimatised to Japanese fare and although the transmission was extremely tough and actually worked positively enough, the lower ratios were rather too widely spaced whereas fourth to fifth were t'other way round. At least a choice of 17, 18 and 19 tooth front sprockets were included in the price so owners could play around with the gearing to suit their style and riding conditions. Fitted with the stock 18 tooth item, the Enduro managed to keep ahead of its petrol haze at a very creditable 74mph.

Of course first time you dropped the thing off-road, you'd more than likely bust an indicator stalk, and Joe Lucas's rear lamp usually followed suit shortly thereafter - inevitably to be replaced by a more suitable Italian or Japanese item. The large, heavy speedo often vibrated itself into oblivion before too long, too, but the bits that mattered - the engine, frame, suspension and wheels were as tough as a Kremlin interrogation.

Imported here by Skoda at the time, the CZ Enduro failed to find the market it surely deserved, although I recall one of their executives telling me that this was because supplies were limited due to the huge demand in Motokov's prime market, the USA. True or not, Skoda dropped the price and by 1977 CZ had sensibly opted to cosmetically update the

# CZ

Costing just £466 new in 1976, the CZ undercut its emerging Japanese rivals by a considerable margin...



CZ Enduro  
250 cc. Model 988.1

The Enduro is a special one rider machine for the road or the track. Fitted with a sports/special version of the world famous Moto-Cross engine/gear-box unit. Alloy rims and five speed gearbox. Fitted with flashing indicators.

Specification	CZ Enduro
Model	988.1
Engine Type	2 Stroke
No. of Cylinders	1
Bore-Stroke (mm)	75/104
Sweep Volume (cc)	249.2
Max. Horsepower	22 @ 6750
Compression Ratio	8.8:1
Lubrication System	Petrol
Ignition System	5
Electrical System	
Brakes—Front	
Brakes—Rear	
Overall Length (mm/ins)	2070 (82)
Overall Width (mm/ins)	840 (33)
Overall Height (mm/ins)	1120 (44)
Wheelbase (mm/ins)	1140 (45)
Min. Ground Clearance (mm/ins)	150 (7.5)
Carrying Capacity (Kgs/lbs)	114 (251)
Electrical System	80 (17.6)
Alternator	6V/150W
Fuel Tank Capacity (Litres/Imp. Gall)	12.5x25
Types—Front	180x25
Types—Rear	13 (2.81)
	300x21
	450x18

Specifications subject to change without notice. COLOURS AND MODELS SUBJECT TO AVAILABILITY.

bike by specifying the same alloy 'coffin' fuel tank as Falta's bike - held in place by a leatherette strap. A pricey, 'Preston Petty' plastic rear fender was also added. In some markets CZ also offered a 175cc version, but presumably here it would've lost out to CZ's own, slow and heavy 175 Trail model which retailed at a paltry £271 (though it did have autolube and an enclosed chaincase).

And of course for those warming to the joys of off-roading in those early boom years, the CZ Enduro's rough, eastern-bloc edges were increasingly a deterrent. After all, the Japanese were now offering attractive, if not quite as purposeful looking dirtbikes with the benefits of autolube in the case of their 'strokers and reliable electrics across the board. They were also getting much cheaper thanks to beneficial exchange rates and manufacturer's subsidies.



# FROM THE ARCHIVES

By the end of 1978 then, the CZ Enduro had disappeared from the UK importer's price list, although it continued to be sold in the States for some time thereafter.

Nowadays they're pretty rare and those that do exist are mainly in the hands of CZ Owners Club members (see boxout). A fairly decent, though not 100percent original example fetched only £500 at the recent Stafford Classic Bike Auction, although a fully restored one might command twice as much.

And if you're interested in a classic mid-Seventies trailie that's at least as competent as the equivalent Japanese machine and much rarer, then it seems like a CZ Enduro is still a bit of a bargain buy...

Special thanks for their help in compiling this feature must go to various Jawa CZ Owners Club members, see their website ([www.jawa-ca-owners-club.freemove.co.uk](http://www.jawa-ca-owners-club.freemove.co.uk)) especially Arthur Fleming, Paul Mason, John Blackburn and Mario Mager. Thanks also to Canadian spares specialists, Greg's Cycles (Tel: 00 1 403 266 3237).

## CZ ENDURO MODEL 988.1

<b>Price (1975):</b>	£525
<b>Value Now:</b>	£400 (Rough), £900/1000 (mint)
<b>Engine:</b>	Air-cooled, piston port, all-alloy two-stroke, petroil lubrication
<b>Bore &amp; stroke:</b>	70 x 64mm
<b>Displacement:</b>	246cc
<b>Comp ratio:</b>	9.5:1
<b>Max power:</b>	Approx 24bhp@6750rpm
<b>Transmission:</b>	5-speed
<b>Chassis:</b>	Single downtube
<b>Front susp:</b>	Oil damped, 170mm travel
<b>Rear susp:</b>	Dual spring, oil damped, 125mm travel
<b>Brakes:</b>	Front 125mm SLS drum, Rear 180mm SLS drum
<b>Wheels:</b>	Front 3.00 x 21in, Rear 4.00 x 18in
<b>Wheelbase:</b>	55in
<b>Seat height:</b>	32.5in
<b>Ground clear:</b>	7.5in
<b>Fuel capacity:</b>	2.6gals
<b>Dry weight:</b>	251lbs (claimed)

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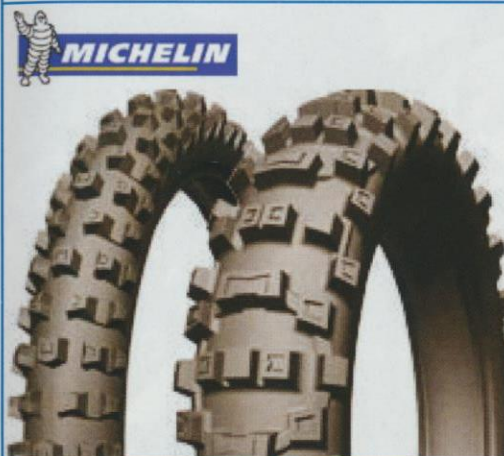
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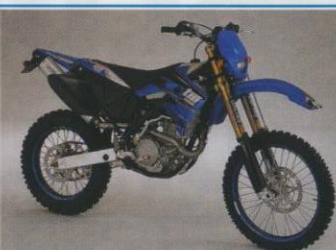
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# MAXXIS FIM WORLD ENDURO CHAMPIONSHIP

## 2 0 0 4

ROUND 3 - UFO GP OF ITALY,  
MATELICA, ITALY, 24-25 APRIL



**W**ith the opening two rounds of the '04 World Enduro Championship having thrown up more than a few surprises, the eight round series landed in Italy during the last weekend in April and again provided some shock results. With the East coast of Italy having been thoroughly soaked due to constant rain during the weeks leading up to the competition, clear skies and warm temperatures the week before the race did little to hide the fact that conditions were going to be very, very wet. Thankfully, with four days of good weather prior to the race, come the start of day one, conditions were much better than most expected. And despite the opening lap's special tests being incredibly slippery, conditions turned out okay. Day two was a very different story however.

With heavy rain falling during Saturday night and most of Sunday, the second day's competition was in complete contrast to the first. With mud and ruts driving a sizeable wedge between those that could deal with the conditions and those that couldn't.

While the conditions saw several of the WEC's

STORY & PICS: JONNY EDMONDSON

top riders struggle, the third round of the series turned out to be the best world championship event in years as far as British riders were concerned, as Paul Edmondson moved to the top of the Enduro 2 world championship, David Knight claimed two more solid podium finishes and British based New Zealander Paul Whibley and Welshman Edward Jones claimed their highest ever WEC finishes.

### Enduro 1

Stefan Merriman was in a class of his own during day one of the Italian GP, so much so that he finished the day as the fastest rider overall having topped the E1 class by well over a minute. Considering that at the beginning of the season few had believed a quarter litre four-stroke would be able to manage such a feat, Merriman's

result proved, that in the capable hands of the Aussie at least, a 250cc four-banger was enough.

Looking like the Merriman of old - aggressive, focused and determined not to let anyone beat him - Stefan seemed to have woken up to the fact that in Spain and Portugal a couple of riders had pushed him harder than expected and so he simply lifted his game to a level that no rider in the E1 class could match. Claiming that he was now much more settled on his Yamaha, and having made some 'front end' changes including fitting a steering damper, Merriman appeared to be back to the blinkered WEC winning machine he was in '03. But it didn't last long.

Surprising everyone by claiming the runner-up spot on day one was 40-year old CH Racing Husqvarna



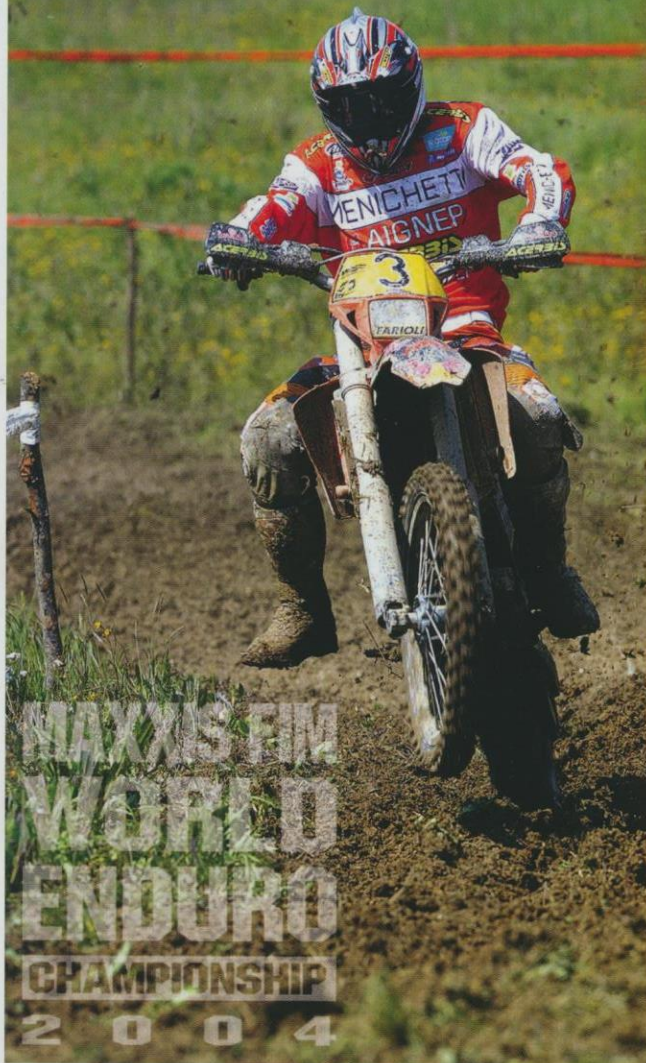
## PADDOCK POINTERS

↑ CH Racing Husqvarna rider Roberto Bazzurri recorded the best 'home result' in Italy as the part-time racer placed runner-up to Stefan Merriman in the Enduro 1 class on day one. Not bad for a rider that's approaching his 40th birthday.

↑ Two-strokes proved that they aren't dead and buried as far as the Enduro 1 championship is concerned as they leapt to the fore when conditions got difficult on day two. With Petteri Silvan (KTM) and Rickard Larsson (TM) claiming first and second in class on day two it was a good day for Scandinavian riders aboard European manufactured two-strokes.

↑ He may have had his day in terms of winning world titles but the ever popular Mario Rinaldi proved that he can still muster the occasional top result by placing fourth on day one in the E1 class. Having struggled to adjust to life as a 'new generation' four-stroke rider in recent seasons, Super Mario's result was warmly received by his Italian fans. Unfortunately on day two he placed 15th after clocking in early at one control point.

Spaniard Ivan Cervantes struggled in the tough wet conditions...



An outstanding ride on day one saw Merriman quickest overall, though he could only manage fifth in class on day two...

MAXXIS

FIM WORLD ENDURO CHAMPIONSHIP

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MATELICA

rider Roberto Bazzurri. The Husky factory's second rider in the E1 class managed to do what his teammate Peter Bergvall has yet to achieve this year by finishing on the podium. Always a rider that can turn it on from time to time, Bazzurri's podium visit was regarded by many as a victory for the older generation of E1 competitor.

But it was a close run thing for the second and third place spots in the E1 class as Bazzurri was chased home by Merriman's team-mate Bartosz Oblucki. In fact it was Oblucki that held the second

spot until the dying stages of the day before a couple of strong tests by Bazzurri enabled him to edge ahead by the narrowest of margins. Despite dropping a place at the last minute, another podium visit for the young Polish rider was still a good result for him and the UFO Yamaha team.

Making podium visits even sweeter for both Merriman and Oblucki was the fact that Honda Italy's Simone Albergoni - the rider that pushed Merriman the hardest and most consistently at the opening two rounds of the series - finished

an incredibly low 13th in class. With no real explanation for his wayward performance other than complaining of vision problems and 'just feeling bad' all day, Albergoni's shock result meant that Merriman edged comfortably ahead in the E1 title race and Oblucki was brought right back into the hunt for third place in the championship.

Making it a great day for the UFO

Corse Yamaha team was the fact that Mario Rinaldi recorded his best WEC result of recent years with fourth. Spurred on by legions of enthusiastic supporters, the eternally young Rinaldi, along with Bazzurri in second, proved that despite the smallest of the three capacity classes being more commonly thought of as the hotbed for emerging young talent, the old men of the WEC could still pull a result out of the bag when conditions suited.

Day two in Italy will be remembered as the day the two-strokes fought back, as both the first and second place positions went to 125cc machines for the first time in '04. Having struggled to match the pace of the four-stroke brigade lead by Merriman, Albergoni and Oblucki at the opening rounds of the series, Finn Petteri Silvan proved that not only was he one of the wisest old foxes in the E1 class, but also a rider that knows more than a thing or two about producing results when racing becomes more of a game of survival.

Topping the class comfortably, ahead of another European-built two-stroke machine ridden by an equally experienced rider - Swede Rickard Larsson - Silvan also lifted himself to second in the E1 championship, 18 points behind Merriman. While the KTM-mounted Finn seemingly had no answer for the Merriman/four-stroke Yamaha combination when the event's special tests were smooth, once the course roughened up and machine weight, or rather the lack of it, became part of the equation, the two-stroke pairing of Silvan and his KTM took the upper hand.

And with Albergoni taking third and Merriman a surprisingly low fifth, Silvan proved that he's not out of the championship running just yet. What the weather does at the remaining rounds of the series will seemingly play a huge part in deciding who the winning rider (and manufacturer) is.

## Enduro 2

The unthinkable happened in Italy in the Enduro 2 class on day one - Juha Salminen got beaten. Having proclaimed at the opening two rounds of the series that he had no real competition in his class, the Finn suffered a day one DNF that had a dramatic effect on the way the E2 class championship would look at the end of the event. Damaging a chain guard and later throwing the chain on his factory

## PADDOCK POINTERS

↓ Spaniard Ivan Cervantes proved that he's not quite the all-round enduro rider many thought he was after struggling in the horrendously muddy conditions on day two in Italy. Having been a podium regular up until the second day's competition, Cervantes' eighth place finish in class showed that when the going gets really tough he doesn't have an answer for those riders with a little more 'enduro' experience.

↓ Marko Tarkkala suffered the worst luck of all riders in Italy. Looking a dead cert' to claim his first ever WEC class win in the E3 category on day one, a sizeable crash put an end to his podium aspirations. On day two excess glue from a freshly fitted twistgrip resulted in a DNF!

↓ The weather on day two in Italy was abysmal. Sorting the men from the boys, many riders found the conditions simply too extreme and they struggled to get their heads around the fact that choice of line was more important than out and out speed. On Sunday heavier rain made conditions much more challenging and caused the organisers to scrap the fourth lap.



450cc four-stroke KTM, Salminen's DNF was just one of a list of incidents that made for a very eventful day in the E2 class.

With Salminen out, three riders had a realistic chance of claiming the class win - Paul Edmondson, Italian Alessandro Botturi and Spaniard Arnau Vilanova. But with Vilanova making the mistake of clocking in early mid-way through the day, and trying to keep quiet about it, it became a two-horse race between Edmondson and Botturi. Both determined to claim the 25 points on offer it was Edmondson, who had set his sights firmly on finishing second to Salminen (prior to the event), that eventually claimed the win. But only just. Not knowing the exact number of seconds he was ahead of Botturi as he entered the day's final special test, Edmondson's decision to back off a little almost cost him the win. Finishing less than one second ahead of the burly Italian, Eddy claimed his first win of the season and boy was he happy to have done so. But better was still to come for the former world champion.

With Italian Alex Zanni placing third, Edmondson's team-mate Paul Whibley claimed a career best finish with fourth in class and 14th overall. It was an eventful day for Whibley though as at one point it looked as if he was going to be excluded from the day's proceedings after pushing his bike into Parc Ferme without its front tyre and mousse (rule changes have banned this for 2004). Taking more

than the 15 minutes of lateness allowed at WEC events to return to the HRFE truck, fit the tyre and return back the Parc Ferme, the jury later deemed the event officials wrong not to have let him into the Parc Ferme when the bike wasn't 'complete' and his result stood.

Next morning with the tyre already fitted to his bike, Whibley didn't have to worry about fitting the tyre with no bike stand, mousse board or levers at the start of day two. As WEC events no longer have a day two morning work period the whole situation was a new one for the FIM jury men.

Confident he could repeat his day one win, despite Salminen being back in the event, Paul Edmondson started as he intended to carry on - by winning the first test. Things were looking good for Paul until the first timed cross-country test when Salminen posted a time some 25 seconds quicker! So with half a dozen tests still remaining the Midlander had it all to do again. And he did.

Not knowing exactly where he was in relation to Salminen, other than knowing that he was leading him, Eddy pushed as hard as he could on each of the day's remaining special tests and beat the Finn fair and square. Something which very few riders have ever managed in the past five seasons. Not only did Paul claim the class win but his double event topping result meant that he was the new E2 class leader.

With Eddy winning, Salminen standing on the second step of the rostrum and Vilanova staying clean on time to claim third, D3-Racing KTM rider Edward Jones proved that when conditions suit him he can produce the goods by finishing sixth, one place ahead of Whibley. Posting the fastest E2 class time on one special test ahead of both Edmondson and Salminen, Edward did his championship ranking the world of good having just managed to break into the points on day one.

### Enduro 3

A very definite pattern is starting to emerge in the Enduro 3 world championship, one that continued on day one in Italy. KTM is unquestionably the dominant brand in the big thumpers with Finn Samuli Aro, Spaniard Ivan Cervantes and Manxman David Knight the three riders to beat. But on day one in Italy all three were very nearly beaten by Husaberg pilot Marko Tarkkala. Having shown flashes of brilliance at the opening two rounds of the series, Marko set a pace that none of the KTM riders could match. Until, that is, he crashed heavily, hurt his shoulder and undid all the hard work he'd put in during the early part of the day.

In the end Aro left the rest to squabble over the runner-up positions and claimed 25 important championship points with a winning margin of some 30 seconds. Cervantes the flamboyant Spaniard was second and Knight placed a further 18 seconds behind in third.

Unlike the opening two rounds of the series, where the gap between the three KTM riders and the rest of the class was a significant one, in Italy Anders Eriksson closed in on the top three to finish just 11 seconds adrift of Knight with Tarkkala a further three seconds behind the Swede. Despite the fact that Anders didn't manage to claim a podium spot, his performance showed that like Tarkkala and Mika Ahola, he is determined to get among the KTM riders and stop them having things all their own way.

Also back up to speed in Italy were the Gas Gas factory Enduro 3 class riders Jani Laaksonen and Sebastien Guillaume aboard their two-stroke EC300s. With Jani having been a long way off the pace of the E3 class four-stroke riders in both Spain and Portugal, and with Guillaume out injured at the opening two rounds, in Italy they both produced respectable results with Guillaume finishing sixth, ahead of Ahola and Husaberg's Bjorne Carlsson on day one.

As with all the classes, the weather mixed things up in a big way on day two in the E3 class, despite the fact that Aro again proved the rider to beat. With many expecting Knight to win in the mud, Samuli managed to do enough to stay ahead of David, take another 25 points, and place himself at the top of the championship ahead of Cervantes and Knight. With Knight's bike running poorly (having taken in water) as the day came to a close, the D3-Racing rider was unable to fight back during the final few tests of the day, instead deciding to nurse his bike to the finish knowing that he had a sizeable lead over the third place rider.

Cervantes meanwhile showed that he certainly wasn't the man to beat when the heavens opened on Sunday. Crashing, struggling and generally making a complete dog's dinner of the day, he not only placed a lowly eighth but threw away what was developing into a healthy championship lead. With Aro having been gifted the championship lead, Knight was also able to close to within eight points of the Spaniard.

Claiming his first podium finish of the year, after team-mate Anders Eriksson made one too many mistakes, CH Racing Husqvarna rider Mika Ahola placed third when countryman Tarkkala had another day to forget. With pain from his injured shoulder meaning that bossing his half-litre 'Berg around was anything but easy, the Finn failed to finish day two due to a truly bizarre reason.

Deciding that the extra grip offered by a new set of handgrips would give him an advantage and make holding on easier in the slippery conditions, Marko's mechanic used a little too much glue when fitting the new rubber parts and the resulting mess meant that the throttle simply wouldn't turn. With each rider allowed just 15 minutes worktime before he has '15 minutes out', Tarkkala waved goodbye to yet more championship points. Sometimes, it seems, being smart isn't always a good thing.

## RESULTS - DAY 1

### ENDURO 1

1. STEFAN MERRIMAN (Yam) 59:44.98; 2. ROBERTO BAZZURRI (Hsq) 1.01:03.46; 3. BARTOSZ OBLUCKI (Yam) 1.01:04.07; 4. MARIO RINALDI (Yam) 1.01:08.76; 5. PETTERI SILVAN (KTM) 1.01:44.72

### ENDURO 2

1. PAUL EDMONDSON (Hon) 1.00:48.19; 2. ALESSANDRO BOTTURI (KTM) 1.00:48.33; 3. ALESSANDRO ZANNI (Hon) 1.01:19.68; 4. PAUL WHIBLEY (Hon) 1.01:32.84; 5. ANDREA BECONI (Yam) 1.01:38.05; 20. EDWARD JONES (KTM) 1.03:47.75

### ENDURO 3

1. SAMULI ARO (KTM) 1.00:13.29; 2. IVAN CERVANTES (KTM) 1.00:42.35; 3. DAVID KNIGHT (KTM) 1.01:00.54; 4. ANDERS ERIKSSON (Hsq) 1.01:11.52; 5. MARKO TARKKALA (Hsb) 1.01:14.31;

## RESULTS - DAY 2

### ENDURO 1

1. PETTERI SILVAN (KTM) 1.04:09.79; 2. RICKARD LARSSON (TM) 1.04:50.69; 3. SIMONE ALBERGONI (Hon) 1.05:07.46; 4. PETER BERGVALL (Hsq) 1.05:15.43; 5. STEFAN MERRIMAN (Yam) 1.05:58.33

### ENDURO 2

1. PAUL EDMONDSON (Hon) 1.04:32.05; 2. JUHA SALMINEN (KTM) 1.04:46.30; 3. ARNAU VILANOVA (Hon) 1.06:35.70; 4. PETRI POHJAMO (Gas) 1.06:53.46; 5. ALESSANDRO BOTTURI (KTM) 1.07:27.13

### ENDURO 3

1. SAMULI ARO (KTM) 1.01:51.72; 2. DAVID KNIGHT (KTM) 1.02:31.69; 3. MIKA AHOLA (Hsq) 1.03:12.76; 4. ANDERS ERIKSSON (Hsq) 1.03:20.50; 5. JANI LAAKSONEN (Gas) 1.04:11.92





# MAXXIS FIM WORLD ENDURO CHAMPIONSHIP

## 2 0 0 4

ROUND 4 - AMV GP OF FRANCE,  
ST REMY SUR DUROLLE, 8 - 9 MAY

80 TBM

'It can only get better'. That was the general opinion among those competing in the French round of the '04 WEC series, held in St Remy Sur Durolle, near Clermont Ferrand, as atrocious weather made for yet another wet event, the third so far this year. With biting cold, heavy rain and even snow during the days leading up to the event, the race that marked the half-way point of the season did so for many of the wrong reasons.

With two long, hard days of competition the Montoncel Racing Competition organised event proved to be extremely challenging for all, with the usual names dominating the proceedings and many of the series' lesser riders struggling to come to terms with the difficulty of the event. It also turned out to be an event that was done 'the French way' as FIM guidelines as to how WEC events should be run were ignored, something that made for a typically French event, one that was welcomed by some competitors while angering others.



### STORY & PICS: JONNY EDMUNDS

#### Enduro 1

With the Italian round of the series having shown that two-strokes could compete on level terms with the four-strokes when conditions were wet, in France many looked to Finn Petteri Silvan to do the winning in the small-bore class aboard his 125cc KTM. What few had considered was how disappointed Stefan Merriman was with his lowly fifth place from day two in Italy. As a rider that is never happy to settle for second best, and one who can certainly ride well in mud, Merriman proved by topping day one in the Enduro 1 class in France that when he puts his mind to it, he is simply impossible to beat.

Topping the class by over a minute, the Aussie ace also topped the overall 'Scratch' classification as well, helped by the fact that he was the first rider

onto all of the opening day's rapidly worsening special tests. On day one in France Merriman was simply outstanding, and for the sizeable French crowd that came to see the event, a pleasure to watch.

Merriman's performance aside, the talking point at the end of the first day's competition as far as the E1 class was concerned was the performance of Petteri Silvan. Placing outside the points when many were expecting him to either win or at least place top three, Silvan dropped seven minutes when he clocked in early at one of the event's controls after a mix up with his times. The initial mistake was made by the KTM time-keeper who sent Petteri off early, but compounded by the fact that Silvan charged off into the check without confirming his times for himself. The mistake not

## Paddock Pointers

↑ Italian former world enduro champion Stefano Passeri gave Sherco's 450cc enduro bike its official WEC debut in France finishing both days and proving the Sherco's reliability by placing 19th and 20th.

↑ The number of spectators in France was guesstimated to be between 10-20,000, considerably more than the combined attendance of the Spanish and Portuguese rounds.

↑ David Knight's first Enduro 3 class win of the season gave both the Manx ace and the D3-Racing KTM team a huge boost as they became the only non officially factory backed rider/team combination to stand on top of an E3 podium so far in '04.

↓ The weather in France was miserable. With snow laying on some of the higher parts of the course, Saturday was wet, overcast and cold. Sunday wasn't much better.

↓ Despite Spanish Marque Gas Gas fielding five 'official' riders in this year's WEC series the Gerona based manufacturer failed to take a single podium position.

↓ The paddock area was situated on the shores of a small lake in St Remy Sur Durolle which meant that everyone in the paddock was walking around ankle deep in mud the whole weekend.

TBM 81



**Main Pic:** Merriman sets about the business of retaining that #1 plate!  
**Right:** Eriksson has yet to shine in 2004...  
**Below:** Larsson flies the 2T flag in the E1 class...



only made Silvan look a little stupid but more importantly cost him dearly in terms of the championship.

Making it a great day for the UFO Corse Yamaha team was the fact that Merriman's team-mate Bartosz Oblucki finished second. Extremely pleased to have finally placed as runner-up to his team-mate after finishing third several times already in '04, Bartosz also made the most of Silvan's mistake and moved to second in the E1 championship. With Bart's all-out riding style contrasting hugely with Merriman's neater, more accurate style, no matter which way you looked at the E1 class results on day one, Yamaha were the definite winner.

But it wasn't all about four-stroke Yamahas at the head of the class as 125cc TM rider Rickard Larsson managed to finish third, backing up his second place finish from day two in Italy. Never a threat to Merriman, or Oblucki for that matter, Larsson placed ahead of Bernard KTM France rider Fabien Planet

and Yamaha France rider Marc Germain. With many expecting Germain to place top three as a known performer in 'French' conditions, the fact that the WEC event was Marc's sixth consecutive weekend of competition meant that in the end there was little left in his tank, and as a result he struggled to perform at his best.

With a few alterations made to the heavily rutted special tests for day two, and with an even larger crowd in attendance, the E1 class saw its closest finish of the season so far as Silvan bounced back from his day one disappointments to pip Merriman for the class win. With just two hundredths of a second separating the KTM and Yamaha mounted riders, Merriman, despite already having a sizeable championship lead due to Silvan's day one antics, was clearly disappointed not to have stretched his championship advantage just that little bit further. For Silvan, day two proved that the Finn has the speed to challenge Merriman in the right conditions,

but also that it doesn't matter how fast you are if you're still going to make costly errors.

Now 40 points behind Merriman, and four behind Oblucki in the E1 championship, even if Silvan wins each of the remaining days of the championship with Merriman placing second he will still fall short of claiming the title. While both riders know that anything can, and often does, happen in enduros, especially with the ISDE falling before the final two rounds of the WEC series as it does this year, Silvan's only real hope of winning the title now is for Merriman to lose it.

Placing third on day two was Bartosz Oblucki. Crashing and working his way back onto the podium several times before the day was out, the Pole, who at the beginning of the series looked like being one of a number of riders that might claim the occasional podium, has proved to be both fast and consistent. Unable to match Merriman's pace, yet now more than a match for the likes of Simone

points. Placing 23rd on day one, Jones lost time on day two as a fractured side-plate on his chain meant that urgent repairs needed to be carried out.

## Enduro 2

Juha Salminen was back to his dominant best in France after what had been a disappointing weekend in Italy for the KTM Racing rider. Knowing that Paul Edmondson would again be fast in the wet conditions, Juha raised his game resulting in no other E1 rider being able to get close to him on either day. Looking much more in control than he was in Italy, Juha placed over a minute ahead of his nearest rival on day one. Unfortunately for Edmondson, that wasn't him.

Determined to try and hold onto his E2 championship lead, or at least place second to Salminen, Edmondson's weekend got off to the worst possible start as a heavy crash seriously de-tuned the Honda rider. Parting company with his Honda in fairly

Albergoni and Roberto Bazzurri who he was battling against at earlier rounds, Bart has effectively come from nowhere to be one of the class' strongest riders. And with CH Racing Husqvarna rider and reigning 250cc four-stroke world champion Peter Bergvall still producing mid-pack finishes, as well as last years 125cc class ISDE winner Helder Rodrigues aboard his Farioli KTM, Bart has proved that new blood is capable of mixing it with, and beating, the big names in the E1 class.

Unfortunately, the French event proved to be a disappointing one in terms of results for the two British riders entered into the E1 class. With TM rider Tim Lewis having ridden all four WEC events this year, and with Yamaha man Rowan Jones having missed only the Italian event, the pair's search for their first championship points proved elusive as both failed to break into the top 20.

For Tim, day one resulted in exclusion as a mix up at a fuel stop forced him to ride back to the fuel check, and fill up. The fact that he had got water into the engine on day one meant that it cried enough on day two, putting him out of the event.

Despite thoroughly enjoying the event, Rowan finished both days without



The steep hill climb on the special test was a challenge even for WEC riders...

spectacular style - both Eddy and his bike were facing the wrong direction after the crash - Edmondson spent the day playing catch up as Salminen disappeared into the distance.

Having fought his way back up to second, bad luck struck again as Paul's chain derailed as he exited a rutted corner on the very last test of the day. After working hard to get himself in a place that would see Salminen move to the front of the E2 championship by just one point, Eddy ended up fourth. A cruel result but one that could have been a lot, lot worse had the two riders behind him in the championship - Italian Alessandro Botturi and Spaniard Arnau Vilanova - placed ahead of him, which thankfully they didn't.

Claiming the runner-up spot, and surprising many by doing so, was the likeable Italian Giovanni Sala. Racing just for fun in '04 after being persuaded not to retire by his thousands of fans that emailed him from around Europe, Sala showed that despite being 40 he could still turn in a good result. Never in a position to challenge Salminen - Sala was as much interested in waving to and acknowledging the support of the French spectators as he was focused on posting fast special test times.

Finishing just two seconds behind Sala, and claiming a career best finish and his first ever WEC podium, was UK based New Zealander Paul Whibley in third. Just two seconds adrift of Sala, Whibley did his championship aspirations the world of good despite failing to finish quite so high up in class on day two. On day one Whibs showed that while he might not be a young Finn or have factory backing he can still get results. And with just four

points separating him from Sala in fifth place in the E2 championship at the end of the weekend, with a few more strong finishes Whibley is more than capable reaching the goal he set himself at the start of the season - of improving on his eighth place finish in last season's 250cc two-stroke championship.

With day two starting as day one had finished - with all the special tests being extremely rutted - Juha Salminen knew that E1 class rider Stefan Merriman would hold no advantage. Having already commented that his classmates offered him little in the way of serious competition, Juha rode his hardest finishing as the fastest overall rider. As Paul Edmondson later admitted, 'when Salminen rides like that there is no way of beating him.'

Thankfully, day two was much better than day one in terms of results for Eddy. Finishing second to Salminen, yet still feeling the effects of his day one getoff, Paul spent the day battling with Spaniard Arnau Vilanova. With just two seconds separating them at the end of the day, Villanova's no score on day one meant that Eddy was able to stretch a 40 point advantage over him in the championship. By placing sixth and fifth, Farioli KTM rider Alessandro Botturi now holds third in the E2 championship, 17 points behind Paul. With consistency being Botturi's strong point, neither Edmondson or Salminen can ignore the Italian as it only takes one DNF to turn the class standings on its head.

As in the Enduro 1 class, two British riders took part in the French event in the E2 category, with one managing to score points. D3-Racing KTM rider Edward Jones placed 18th and 16th, results that perhaps weren't as good as they should have been for

the Welshman, given the conditions. For Chris Hockey the French event resulted in no points as he placed 30th and 28th in class, but thoroughly enjoyed the event.

### Enduro 3

It was no surprise to find that the three riders who finished at the top of the Enduro 3 class in France on day one were the class's most successful protagonists, Finn Samuli Aro, Spaniard Ivan Cervantes and Manxman David Knight.

With just 18 seconds separating the top four riders at the end of the opening day's proceedings, one thing became apparent - that the rider who does eventually go on to claim the title will have certainly earned it - the hard way.

As far as day one was concerned Aro was the man to beat. Despite suffering from a flu bug and coming under constant pressure from Cervantes, Aro kept his cool and collected the win. With Cervantes finishing just under five seconds behind, Knight a further eight seconds adrift and Husqvarna rider Mika Ahola a few seconds further behind that, there was very little else to write home about in the E3 class apart from the fact that Husaberg rider Marko Tarkkala was once again fast but inconsistent.

Day two was where it all happened in the E3 class in France. A day that proved to be one of the most exciting of the series so far. With virtually nothing between them, Aro, Cervantes and Knight (especially Knight), all started day two determined to win. But it was Cervantes who faltered first as he crashed losing around 40 seconds. Leaving Aro and Knight at the top of the class it was then the Finn who made an equally costly mistake and ended up losing some serious ground to Knight. For David things had worked out perfectly - while his rivals had all but taken themselves out of the running, he posted consistently quick test times to hold a sizeable 40 second lead as he started lap two.

Thinking that all he'd need to do would be to ride within himself and not make any mistakes, DK found that lady luck wasn't smiling on him as a derailed chain in the extreme test meant that all of his 'cushion' at the top of the class was lost. In fact he was extremely fortunate to get himself going again. Lucky to have not been forced out of the event by his wayward chain wrapping itself around the gearbox sprocket, what had looked like a straight forward 'get to the finish' type of ride suddenly turned into a 'got to do it all over again' sprint. Thankfully, Knight pulled it off.

With little separating Knight, Ahola and Aro, with the best part of a lap and a half still to go it was a case of he who made the least mistakes would win. With Samuli keen to claim a double win, Ahola to make it as the first non-KTM mounted rider to win a day in the E3 class, and Knight wanting to win to prove himself as more than just a podium finisher, the three riders fought a three-way battle, right up until the final test of the day.

With David arriving with the slimmest of leads (around one and a half seconds ahead of Aro and about five up on Ahola), the final cross-country test of the event would decide the eventual podium fin-

ishing order. It would also decide which of the three could perform best under extreme pressure.

It was Aro - who posted a near identical time to the one he had on his second lap - that, this time, didn't quite rise high enough to claim the win. Next fastest was Knight, around eight seconds up on Aro. And then it was Ahola with a time that was four seconds faster than Knight. But with DK having held a five second advantage over the three-time ISDE winner going into the test, David finally got exactly what he deserved - his first WEC win of the year.

With David's finishing position in the E3 class often obscuring the fact that he has been beaten by very few riders in the overall Scratch classification this year, he now heads into the second half of the series third in both the E3 and Scratch championships. And with his first, long overdue win tucked firmly under his belt, the 11 points he trails Aro in the E3 title chase and the 12 points he trails the Finn in the overall standings is proof that while he might not be on top of the class just yet, he is certainly on top of his game.

With four weeks gone, and four still remaining, if Knight can turn up the heat just a little more between now and the middle of October he might just find himself standing on top of the world.

### RESULTS - DAY 1

#### ENDURO 1

1. STEFAN MERRIMAN (Yam) 52:23.30; 2. BARTOSZ OBLUCKI (Yam) 53:33.54; 3. RICKARD LARSSON (TM) 53:57.52; 4. FABIEN PLANET (KTM) 54:17.94; 5. MARC GERMAIN (Yam) 54:17.94; 23. ROWAN JONES 59:58.53

#### ENDURO 2

1. JUHA SALMINEN (KTM) 53:38.88; 2. GIOVANNI SALA (KTM) 55:14.87; 3. PAUL WHIBLEY (Hon) 55:16.39; 4. PAUL EDMONDSON (Hon) 55:30.82; 5. PETRI POHJAMO (Gas) 55:38.08; 30 CHRIS HOCKEY (Hsq) 1:00:38.02

#### ENDURO 3

1. SAMULI ARO (KTM) 54:40.37; 2. IVAN CERVANTES (KTM) 54:45.06; 3. DAVID KNIGHT (KTM) 54:53.39; 4. MIKA AHOLA (Hsq) 54:58.12; 5. ANDERS ERIKSSON (Hsq) 55:37.69

### RESULTS - DAY 2

#### ENDURO 1

1. PETERRI SILVAN (KTM) 55:05.73; 2. STEFAN MERRIMAN (Yam) 55:05.98; 3. BARTOSZ OBLUCKI (Yam) 56:01.47; 4. ROBERTO BAZZURRI (Hsq) 56:07.20; 5. FABIEN PLANET (KTM) 56:08.38; 28. ROWAN JONES (Yam) 1:06:20.33

#### ENDURO 2

1. JUHA SALMINEN (KTM) 54:28.19; 2. PAUL EDMONDSON (Hon) 55:37.06; 3. ARNAU VILANOVA (Hon) 55:38.55; 4. GIOVANNI SALA (KTM) 56:26.12; 5. ALESSANDRO BOTTURI (KTM) 56:34.10; 28 CHRIS HOCKEY (Hsq) 1:04:33.12

#### ENDURO 3

1. DAVID KNIGHT (KTM) 54:52.41; 2. MIKA AHOLA (Hsq) 54:53.03; 3. SAMULI ARO (KTM) 55:01.93; 4. BJORNE CARLSSON (Hsb) 56:16.22; 5. IVAN CERVANTES (KTM) 56:16.89



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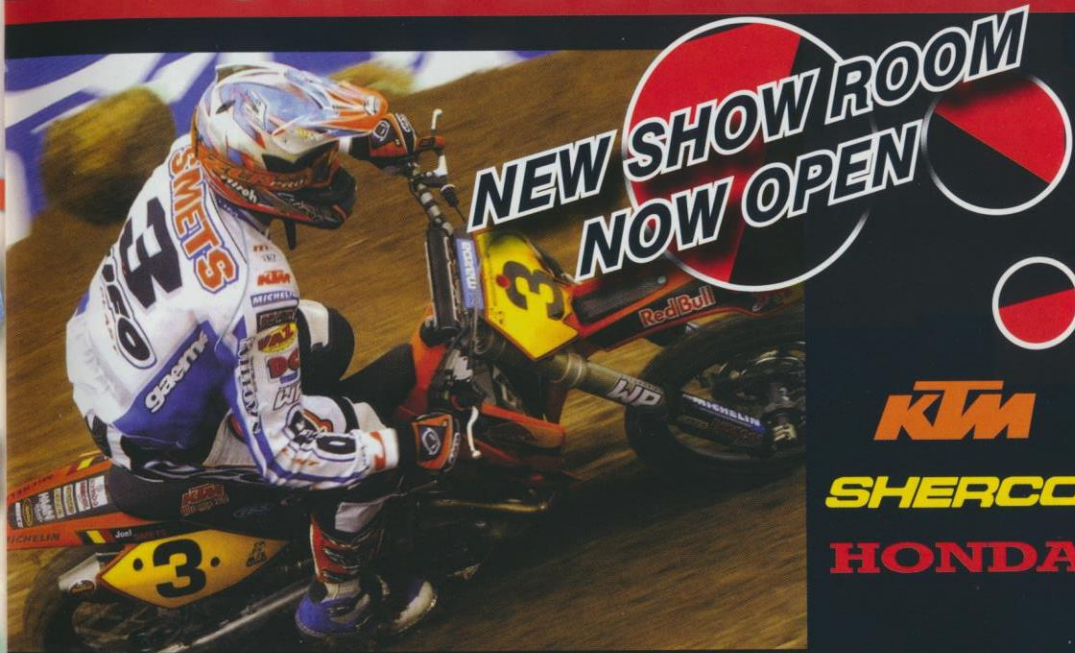
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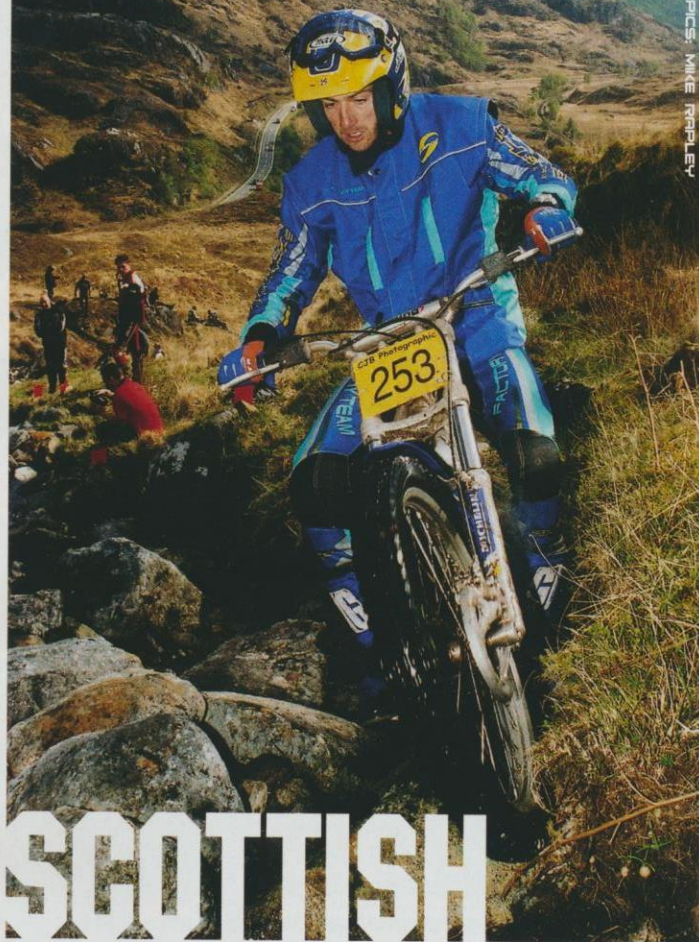
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STORY & PICS: MIKE RAPLEY



# SCOTTISH SIX DAYS TRIAL

**FORT WILLIAM, SCOTLAND, 3-8 MAY  
THIS YEAR'S SCOTTISH WAS TOUGHER  
THAN EVER AS MIKE RAPLEY REPORTS...**

**W**illpower, willpower and even more willpower, is what's needed to successfully complete the annual Scottish Six Days Trial. Plus of course, a significant level of riding ability and a fair dollop of mechanical sympathy. Not to mention a decent level of fitness.

And whilst all those attributes are required every year in early May, this year they were needed to an even greater degree when the 2004 SSDT took place in the Highlands surrounding Fort William.

Let there be no doubt about it, this year's Scottish was as tough as it has been in recent years. The conditions that affect whether the trial is comparatively easy or difficult, were generally at their worst. Long sections, difficult to read



Maria Conway (right) was the highest placed lady...



Juan Knight takes on a rock step...!

sections, a longer course, mediocre weather, very poor ground conditions and a super tight time schedule, combined to make it a real toughie.

The record books will state in black

and white that Sherco factory rider and world number five, Graham Jarvis won the trial with the loss of 12 marks. Those same record books will also reveal that the trial has been won in the past with far larger scores. But what the record books can't reveal is that this year, the conditions resulted in an arduous week that saw just 202 finishers from the near 280 starters, a retirement figure unheard of in recent years.

And it all started so well on the Friday and Saturday when the 20th running of the two day Pre-65 Scottish took place at Kinlochleven with 180 riders entered. Neil Gaunt riding his Royal Enfield 500 won the trial in fantastic weather conditions that saw sunbathers gracing the Scottish hills.

step and out. Not this year though as the section had been extended a further 60 yards - still one section - and that opener set the tone for the day.

Said Nigel Birkett, riding his 35th Scottish: 'We used to go up this far, back in my Suzuki days, but it's a bit of a shock this morning'. Clunes Moor crossing came next which included five hard sections. It's all cross-cambered, with drainage ditches every 100 yards. Foolishly, I took an enduro bike across here one year and vowed never to do so again. And I haven't. On a trials bike it's marginally easier but still one helluva stretch of wet moor and this year it was wetter than ever.

The weather was grim at times and after the moor comes 15 miles of cold and wet road work before another, long stretch of moor with three difficult groups of sections marked out. Then there's another length of road, and another short, but even more difficult moor before an 18 mile road ride back to Fort William. The total distance was 100 miles and the time allowed 7 hours 40 minutes. Over 100 riders lost time, a significant number retired on Tuesday; those that arrived home were cold, wet and very tired and still only two days had passed.

But come the main event on Monday, it was overcast and dull and though the day stayed relatively dry until late afternoon and the sections were generally benign, it was simply the calm before the storm. Jarvis went clean that day, and the next 40 riders were covered by just 20 marks. Everybody was happy, but Tuesday by reputation is notorious and even those blissfully unaware first timers knew that day two would test them to the full.

And so it did. Eight miles out of Fort William came the first section, Witches Burn, a single sub-section, normally up a big rock



Wayne Braybrook took his Montesa to ninth place this year...

Wednesday was bound to be easier! Forget it. Straight down the Mamore Road, a tarmac/dirt road came Callart Falls and the big haul over the top of the mountain and down the other side to the road at the bottom. 'It was so wet and slippery, twice I lost control and chucked the bike away' said Nick Shield who had drowned his Beta the day before and was on his first restart (you are allowed one retirement and one restart for no award, any more and you are out). Trials tyres on the front wheel offer so little grip on slimy Scottish peat, you see.

beck at Inversanda and Loch Shiel, were viciously difficult. And there was a sting in the tail with a new moorland trek within sight of Ben Nevis. On this moor the riders could even see the parc ferme in Fort William in the distance, but none bothered, they were fighting the bobbly grass tussocks and cambered, peaty bogs that tested them for eight miles.

Spanish first time rider Pere Mill retired on Wednesday and though he was not alone, his experience represents why the Scottish is so tough. Pere was exhausted - physically and



It was mostly road work on Wednesday, but it was bucketing down for most of the morning and the sections, particularly the big round white rocks in a fast flowing

to keep on top of the bike maintenance. When the chain is slack it must be adjusted; when the brake pedal comes loose it must be tightened; if the engine pinks you must use the choke. It's no good waiting until it becomes convenient, the rider has to do it straight away, leaving basic maintenance for just a few minutes can prove disastrous.

Jarvis never lost the lead all week, but on Wednesday Ben Hemingway put in the best performance of the day and even though Graham was initially credited with a five he had not lost (a keying error) it didn't upset his concentration as he and the 200 plus survivors tackled another long and difficult day on Thursday.

The Scottish route goes in a different direction each day and on Thursday it's 28 miles down through Glen Coe for two groups of sections along the Old Military Road built in 1730 by General Wade. Then it crosses Rannoch Moor, then roads, tracks and even more rough stuff before Fort William is reached some 120 miles



Regular maintenance is essential on the six days...

mentally - due to the long distances and long days, and because he had not cleaned the front of his radiator out frequently, his bike boiled up. The rider has to be fit and has to take the trouble

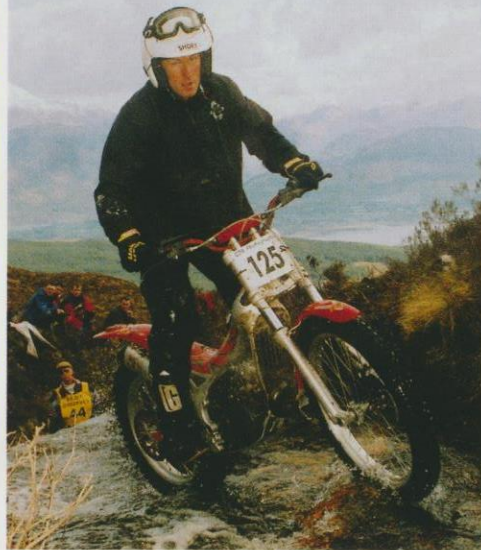
and eight hours later. And it rained, and thundered and there was lightning. Typical Scottish weather in fact, four seasons in one hour, let alone one day.

With torrential rain beating across the exposed hillside at Fersit, the day's last group included experienced Scottish campaigner and respected national rider Paul Bennett who said: 'You can't train for the Scottish, you just have to ride your bike all day, but you can't find terrain like this to train on.' He soldiered on but retired on the last day, and may not be back. There does come a time when it gets too much, and this year's Scottish was definitely too much for many.

However, the weather improved for Friday when it was warm and sunny. Most of the course was on the road round the Moidart Peninsula, though another new stretch of moor had been introduced to keep riders on their toes. Steve Colley and Jordi Pascuet shared the best performance on Friday, but after five days and 150 sections, Jarvis had a substantial lead that only a major machine failure could take away. And with sponsor and father-in-law (and twice winner) Malcolm Rathmell shadowing him wherever possible, Jarvis was well covered for any eventuality.

Colley, out of the reckoning for the win, went through the final day for the loss of just two marks and even though Jarvis, with a 16 mark lead, was unassailable, behind him there was still lots to fight for. At the end of the week Jarvis's team-mate and nephew-in-law Sam Connor took second, while James Lampkin, normally Dougie Lampkin's man-in-the-sections in world rounds, had his best ever Scottish result with third place,

# SPORT



just beating Steve Colley who lost the same number of marks.

To super-fit Jarvis, this year's Scottish was no different from any of the others he has ridden. But ask the average club runner and the story was very different. 'The moors were so wet, the sections were so long and the time was so tight' complained one battered campaigner afterwards.

Speak to the organisers and they say the route was more or less the same and the time allowance identical to recent years. But that's not the whole story. The guys on the bikes know best and they, almost to a man (and woman - for six girls took part), said that the 2004 Scottish was very, very difficult. Yet 202 riders found the willpower, the mental and physical strength to complete it. And will they be back? We'll know this time next year...

## 2004 SSdT: RESULTS

**1 GRAHAM JARVIS (SHERCO) 12 MARKS LOST 2 SAM CONNOR (SHERCO) 28 3 JAMES LAMPKIN (MONTESA) 33 4 STEVE COLLEY (GAS GAS) 33 5 JORDI PASCUET (GAS GAS) 40 6 BEN HEMINGWAY (BETA) 45 7 DAN THORPE (GAS GAS) 46 8 JOAN PONS (SHERCO) 49 9 WAYNE BRAYBROOK (MONTESA) 54 10 DAN HEMINGWAY (BETA) 59  
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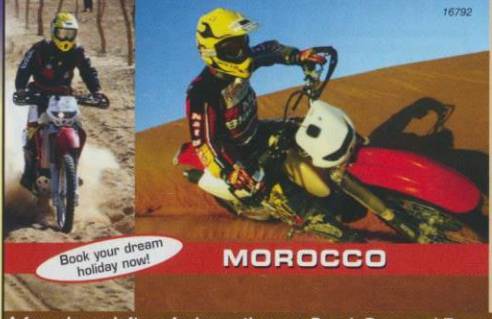
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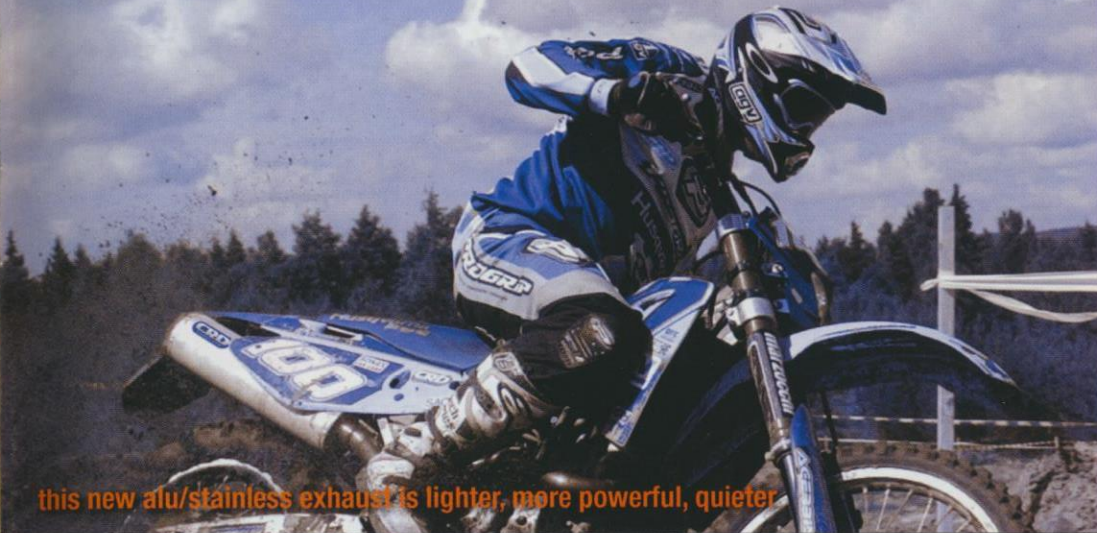
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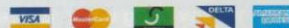
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'I KNOW THAT IT MIGHT SOUND A BIT STUPID, BUT MUD ISN'T JUST MUD. TRUST ME, I SHOULD KNOW... I'VE SPENT ENOUGH YEARS RIDING IN THE STUFF!'

**W** ell, it might have taken me a little longer than I'd have liked - eight days of tough WEC competition to be exact - but at the recent French round of the World Enduro Championship I finally

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did what I knew I've been capable of doing right from the start - I stood on the top step of the Enduro 3 class podium. And boy did it feel good.

To be perfectly honest if I hadn't claimed a win by the halfway point of the WEC series, I think I'd have gone into the second half of the season on a bit of a downer, questioning whether I'd ever be able to beat the factory KTM riders of Samuli Aro and Ivan Cervantes. Having battled with both of them and having given it my all, to have claimed a win has given me a real boost of confidence. As the next two rounds of the championship take us to Sweden and Slovakia before a three month break prior to the final two rounds, I'm just a handful of points away from leading the E3 class. And with a few different engine parts to test before I head to Scandinavia, my goal is to be sitting at the top of the E3 class by the end of June. I know it's going to be bloody difficult but I have proved that I can do it, I just have to keep on doing it now.

Looking back over the past two rounds I guess I should have claimed my first win of the season two weeks earlier than I did, at the third round of the series in Italy. With day one being dry...ish, I basically rode well on the first lap, relaxed a little too much on the second, which you certainly can't afford to do at world championship level, and ended up finishing third.

Things were pretty close between myself and Cervantes in second so I was happy enough. Day two was completely different though.

I now know what it must be like for Juha Salminen each and every time he takes to the start of a WEC event as the rider that is expected to 'perform'. I got a taste of what it is like to have everyone expect you to win on day two in Italy for one simple reason - it was raining. It's funny but what everyone seems to forget is that in the E3 class I have two of the world's best mud riders as rivals - Samuli Aro and Mika Ahola. Everyone assumes that just because I come from the UK where everyone (at WEC events) thinks it's wet all the time, I am expected to win.

The other thing people don't realise is that there are different kinds of mud. I know that might sound a bit stupid, but mud isn't just mud. Trust me, I should know I've spent enough years riding in the stuff. Mud can be boggy, like we often get here in the UK, which I really like riding in, but you can also get rutted, tacky and even quite grippy at times. Or you can get greasy, slip-



pery, horrible mud - just like we had in Italy. Like I said mud isn't just mud.

Finishing second in Italy was a result that I was well happy with on day two. Aro was fast all day, and with the rain filling the ruts much faster than the water was draining away, I guess I did a little bit too much blasting through them as I tried to catch him. As a result my bike started to suffer after sucking in water. I had a few scary moments on the last test, especially when it cut out completely on two separate occasions. I knew then that it was time to play safe and settle for second.

I'm also glad that I had the electric-start on my bike because otherwise I might still be sat in a muddy field in Italy trying to kick it back into life. I also had my best crash of the season - a third gear high-side as I tried to clear my goggles!

After the race we headed up to Bergamo in Northern Italy and stayed with Farioli, the former Italian KTM importers. They are a good bunch of heads and despite the fact that Ivan Cervantes is their top E3 rider, they'll do pretty much anything to help. With two weeks between the Italian and French WEC event there was no point in the

D3-Racing truck going back to the UK so we stayed in Italy for a week and prepared for the French event. I was hoping to go out training with the Farioli riders but they raced a round of the French national championship the week between so they weren't really around to practice with. One thing that I did get to do was take a look at ol' man Farioli's collection of KTMs. It's incredible. He has enough machines to fill a museum, with bikes dating right back to the manufacturer's very earliest days. It has to be seen to be believed.

The French race was the best WEC event this season as far as I'm concerned. Not just because of my result, but because it was a proper enduro with a great course and tests that weren't just marked out on flat grassy fields. While a lot of riders were moaning about the fact that the days were too long and that it was stupid to have heavily rutted stream crossings and corners in the tests, they seemed to have forgotten that it is the *World Enduro Championship* they're riding in. If they don't like tough events the answer seems perfectly clear to me - stay at home!

# KNIGHT SPEED



I was pretty gutted not to have at least finished second on day one in France. It basically came down to the last test of the day - a good time there would have given me the runner-up spot. As it was while I was away changing my goggles and gloves it absolutely chucked it down just before I entered the test, which meant that a good time went out of the window. Just one of those things I s'pose.

Day two was one of those days that I certainly won't forget in a hurry. Starting well, and with virtually nothing separating myself from Aro and Cervantes, mistakes by both of them meant that I had a 40 second lead as I started the second lap. All I needed to do was ride smoothly and the win was mine. That was until I neared the end of the Extreme test, right at the start of the second lap.

Feeling relaxed and knowing that I was riding well, my luck suddenly changed when the chain came off and doubled itself up around the gear-

box sprocket midway across the rocks. Looking down to see what had happened I was pretty much ready to put the bike in the back of the truck and head for home as I thought that the day was over.

Putting the bike into neutral and my size-13 onto the chain I eventually managed to free the tangled mess and set about trying to put the chain back on. As anyone who has ever thrown a chain will tell you, re-fitting them isn't always the easiest of jobs. Trying to put your chain onto the rear sprocket before then rolling your bike backwards is tricky at the best of times, but trying to do it when you're in the middle of a man-made rock section designed to stop riders in their tracks, is all but impossible.

Eventually managing to roll the bike forward and get the chain on again I posted a time that was 48sec slower than my first lap. Incredibly I was still second in class and with nothing to lose I gave the rest of the day everything.

Cutting a long story short it came down to the final two tests of the day, just as it had on day one. Feeling confident, and on my favourite test of the event, I got on the gas half a second too early as I exited a corner midway through the stage and my rear wheel spun out, dumping me on my bum with my foot tangled in the front wheel. Luckily I didn't stall the engine but more lost time was one thing I couldn't afford. I pinned it from there to the end of the test and arrived at the final test of the day one and a half seconds up on Aro and five up on Ahola.

About half a dozen corners into the last test I felt like I was riding crap and the harder I tried to relax the tighter I became on the bike. With Aro finishing the test first, and posting a really quick time, all I remember as I pulled up next to him to try and find out how I'd done was him saying: 'that was 'king fast'. I still didn't know if I'd done it though, not even as I arrived at the final check of the day. With Mika having beaten me by four seconds it wasn't until my bike was safely parked up in the parc ferme that I knew for certain that I'd won the class.

It wasn't much of a winning margin but after the day I'd had I didn't care. I've never won as the result of having had a 'simple day', but as they say 'a win is a win', and as long as I can get a few more before the final two rounds of the series I'll be happy...

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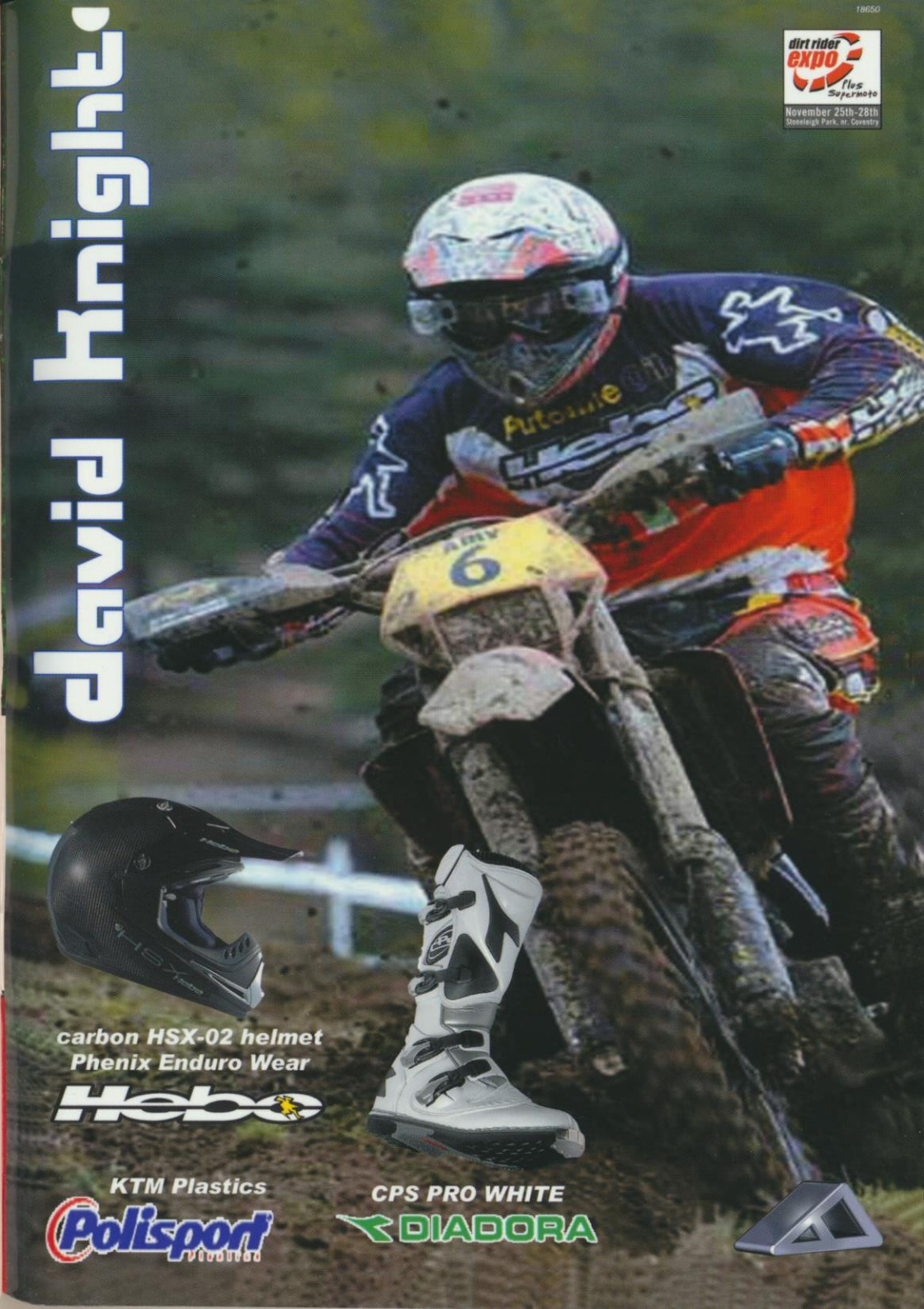
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