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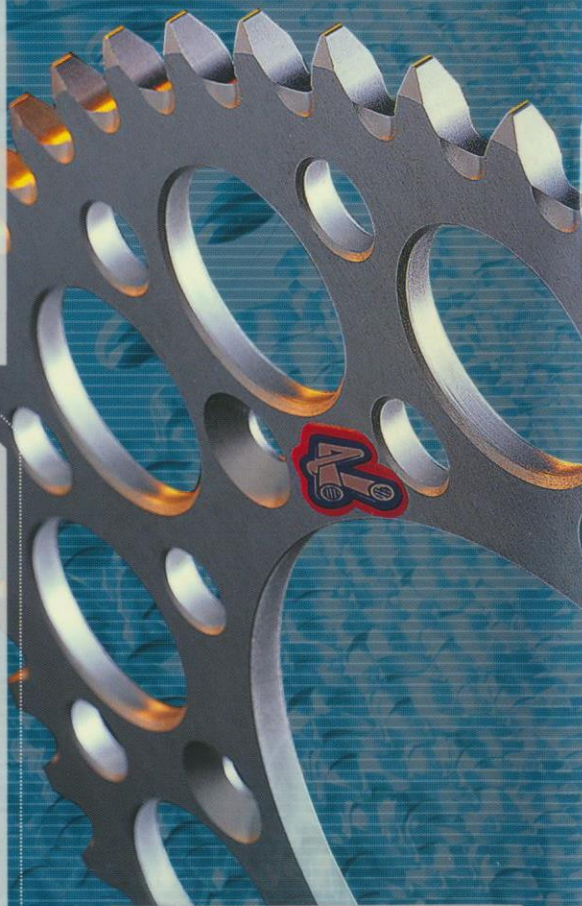
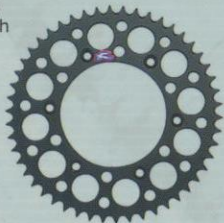


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Inside:

CROSS BREED

Suzuki's RM-Z250
Enduro-ised

ENDURO BIKES

Factory Husaberg FE505
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TRAIL BIKES
KTM 950 v Triumph Tiger
Yamaha TT-R250



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EC 300



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In Praise of, er... praise



It's a funny old world. I've just arrived at the office on a Monday morning to be greeted by the sort of ranting phonecall normally reserved for cold-calling double-glazing salesmen. It concerned our 'late entry' for this year's Welsh 2-Day Enduro, or more specifically the fact that we mentioned getting a late entry to the event in our article. It was a throwaway comment intended to flesh out the background for the story about this year's Welsh - a story which ran to some 11 pages in the magazine.

The caller - a committee member for the Welsh, as it transpired - took great exception to its inclusion however because so many other people had been turned away, and delighted in bending my ear for a not inconsiderable amount of time, about how we'd 'libelled the Welsh 2-Day' (patently untrue), and in her forthright opinion, had acted irresponsibly.

Us? Irresponsible? Shurely shome mishtake. Well I confess that during the event we did swap bikes, exchange time-cards and arrive at scrutineering ten minutes after it had closed, and of course we 'lobbed-it' a number of times both days - as we always do. But that's about par for the course for TBM. Unfortunately, maybe, irresponsible? Hardly.

Moreover she informed me that as this year's Welsh had been 'one of the best ever - or perhaps the best ever' we might have been more fullsome in our praise about the organising committee, marshals, helpers and all the other myriad people who help to put on a great event

such as the Welsh. 'These people seldom get the praise they deserve' she opined.

Indeed so. It's one of life's great truisms that you rarely hear from people unless they've got a complaint to make. In fact it's well known that for most of the time, the majority of the public are more than happy with their lot. Interestingly, exactly the same is true of magazines like TBM. We rarely receive letters or phonecalls in praise of a particular article or review. Instead, we tend to hear from people when they've got an axe to grind. Fair enough, it makes for a lively *Letters Page*.

But it would be quite wrong to assume that these complainants are in some way representative of the majority. The fact is, it's usually the smallest, least important little detail which gets people reaching for the Ventolin inhaler. And it's generally something they 'blow-up' out of all proportion in their own mind, so that (for them at least) it takes on much greater significance than was originally intended. I would argue that this was the case here. This lady took objection to seven little words (about a late entry) in an article which ran to more than 4000 words. And as of yet, we've received not a single complaint from any reader on the subject.

But for the sake of setting the record straight let me make it clear that as a dirt bike magazine which has at its heart the best interests of UK off-roading, we were delighted when the good folk of the Welsh 2-Day Committee generously allowed us into their event (for which we paid our entry fees like everyone else) - even though our entries arrived a little on the tardy side. We'd also like to thank them for putting on a fantastic event this year - for the general coursemarking, marshalling and unseen activities which make an event like the Welsh so special. If you've never ridden the Welsh, you should make sure you do so before you die (though obviously I'd like to stress that you should try and get your entry in nice and early, so as to avoid invoking the wraith of female committee members).

There. I hope that sets the record straight. Praise where it's deserved. And of course when I mentioned to her that (complaint notwithstanding) she must've been pleased with the fact that TBM published 11 pages on 'her' event, that we brought it to the attention of many thousands of readers, and that in the past we'd been particularly vocal and instrumental in attempting to fight off government legislation which could in theory put an end to the Welsh, she simply dismissed it out of hand.

As she so rightly commented, people seldom get the praise they deserve. An irony sadly lost on this particular lady committee member... **SI MELBER**

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BIG RED

New e-start Honda CRF450X Breaks Cover...

To absolutely nobody's surprise, Honda have just launched a 450 version of their hugely popular enduro thumper, the CRF-X.

Based on their awesome CRF450R motocross machine, the 450X will come 'enduro-ready', though, like the 250X model, not road-legal. Again, like the 250, the 450X receives an electric-start, which will drive the clutch side of the crankshaft. This is claimed to provide good lubrication of the starter gears, whilst leaving the engine suitably narrow. Cooling the Unicam motor, the radiators are larger than those found on the MX model, with an expansion tank mounted behind the left-hand sidepanel. The motor is slotted into a new fourth-generation version of Honda's trademark aluminium twin-spar frame.

As you'd expect, there's a raft

of other features which turn the 'R' into an 'X'. There's a sidestand, a halogen headlight, and a basic odometer. The gearbox remains a five-speed unit, though it's now wide-ratio of course. The stainless steel exhaust features a spark arrestor baffle (and will certainly have to be quieter than the MX models' raucous bark), whilst the Showa suspension is softened off for the X version. The rear wheel drops in size to 18in and the fuel tank is up to 8.3 litres. Features such as the neat LED tail-light and side-opening airbox are carried over from the 250X, and to give fine-tuning of the riding position, the Renthal alloy bars will now have three-way adjustment.

With a claimed dry weight of 115.7kg, the Honda isn't going to be the lightest bike in the 450 class, but it may well turn out to be one of the most popular. Expect a TBM test as soon as bikes land...



450X brings middleweight muscle to Honda's enduro line-up...

SNIPPETS

UN-HAPPY SHOPPERS

If you've been struggling to get your hands on copies of your favourite magazines (that's TBM and Supermoto Magazine by the way) through WHSmith, might we suggest you try your local independent newsagent. 'Smiths have re-appraised their entire magazine range, and as such, many smaller publishers (which means virtually all motorcycle titles) have seen their magazines either disappear from the shelves or become much harder to find. To get hold of TBM (or SMM) from any newsagent simply ask them to order you a copy, quoting the ISSN 1359-0324 (or 14760843 for Supermoto) and tell them that they're distributed by Seymour. Or better still, you could always subscribe on 020 7903 3993...

UN-HAFRENY COINCIDENCE

The Hafren Rally, due to take place on 3 October, may now be held on 7 November instead, due to a clash with the seventh round of the World Enduro Championship.

As a result of this conflict, several Hafren Dirt Bike Club members won't be available, so the club have asked the ACU for the revised November date. At the time of going to press, a decision hasn't yet been reached.

BUSH BABY

The Aussies have done it again. As if having a road legal Honda CRF250X (reported in last month's TBM) wasn't enough, now Yamaha have given them a fully road-legal WR version of their two-stroke YZ125 and YZ250, called the YZ-WR!

The new WRs are basically road-going adaptations of the current steel-framed YZ(N)s, with a headlight, speedo, indicators and mirrors being added, along with a street legal muffler and aftermarket alternator to provide power to the lights. The longer/quieter silencer softens off the hit of the YZ, while taller gearing makes the bike suitable



for the street. Yamaha also offer an optional long-range 12L fuel tank for those wishing to travel further afield on their bikes.

With Yamaha switching to an all-alloy chassis for the 2005 MXers, the latest addition to the blue family seems like an excellent way to create a 'run-out' model from their remaining steel-framed bikes. Come on Yamaha UK, bring a few of them into the UK, please...?

GOING LIVE!

Yes, that's right, the official TBM website will be launching in the very near future. We'll let you know as soon as we go live, but in the meantime, we've made it even easier for you to have your say by emailing your letters to us on letters@trailbikemag.com. Go on, tell us what you think of us, what you want to see more of in TBM, and what you'd like to see less of. Or maybe you've got a comment to make on something you've read, an opinion to give

on a particular subject, or just want to contact us to say what a great job we're doing and you want to have our babies. All submissions gratefully received...



NORTHERN SOUL

This year's Yorkshire Enduro, a round of the Motul North of England Enduro Championship, will take place on Saturday 25 September.

Held in the Cropton Forest near Pickering, North Yorkshire, it all kicks off at 10.00am. The time-card event will consist of

several laps of forestry commission land and will feature a cross-country special test.

Closing date for entries is 17 September, with a maximum of 180 riders allowed to take part, and the cost is £35.00. Regs and entry forms can be found on enduro.freeseerve.co.uk or if you have any questions, please call Tim Spencer on 07989 941803, but before 9.00pm only please!

SNIPPETS

STATE-SIDE SALMINEN

Enduro World Champion Juha Salminen took on America's roughest and toughest in the latest round of the Grand National Cross Country (GNCC).

On his first outing in the Yankees' biggest off-road series, Salminen rode well, and despite leading the event at times, eventually finished second. However, the Finn was later bumped to third due to missing out a few of the motocross jumps..!

THE WIGHT STUFF

Hop on a ferry and head over to the Isle of Wight Enduro, taking place at Knighton on 26 September. The good people of SETRA have managed to secure some ground to 'hare and hound' around and the event is open to all expert, clubman and sportsman riders.

On a closed area, the course is approximately 5.5 miles per lap over varying terrain, including a sand quarry, woodland and an MX track.

As if that wasn't enough, ferry operator WightLink is offering discounted rates for all riders and helpers, plus the start time has been changed to 11.00am to give everybody time to get there. The crossing only takes 35 mins from Portsmouth and the event is about 20 minutes from the ferry terminal.

To help out even further, the entry fee has been reduced to £25.00, but entry is limited to 100 riders. Regs are available for easy downloading on the enduro.freeseerve.co.uk website



IT'S SHOWTIME!

Gambling nirvana Las Vegas will play host to the American debut of EnduroCross on the 27 November. Organised by Pro-Motion Motorsports, the indoor off-road race will be held at the Orleans Arena for the first time ever.

Top European riders invited so far include David Knight, Paul Edmondson, Samuli Aro, Juha Salminen and Stefan Merriman.

The race format will be similar to a SuperCross event, with a start gate, class heats and qualifying rounds, with riders going through to the main event. Course terrain will consist of rock fields, boulders, sand, jumps, poles and water sections, similar to obstacles normally found

in enduro events, hare and hounds and the GNCC series.

Tickets go on sale from early September and can be bought online from OrleansArena.com or for more information log onto endurocrossusa.com.



YOU'RE IN THE ARMY NOW

Polish your boots - it's time for the Army MCA Natterjack Enduro on 9-10 October. This event is a round of the 2004 Motul ACU British Solo, Sidecar and Ladies Championship, and classes available are expert, clubman, over 40s, sidecar, ladies and standard service/sportsman.



Taking place in Hants, the enduro will start and finish at the Airstrip, Weavers Down, Longmoor. The special tests will be ready from Friday 8 October and are within walking distance from the start area.

All riders and passengers must hold a current ACU licence or SACU licence. Entry fee is £95.00 and the closing date is 24 September (or earlier if full). Space permitting, entries may be accepted after the closing date but there will be an additional £10.00 administration fee for each machine.

Visit enduro.freeserve.co.uk for regs and an entry form and for more information, email natterjack@team-reme.co.uk.

SNIPPETS

★ IF YOU GO DOWN TO THE WOODS TODAY...

The next round of the Welsh four-stroke Championship is the Radnor Forest Enduro, taking place on 26 September. Held within the forest, the course and special tests have been designed primarily for clubman/sportsman level riders, but experts are more than welcome to enter.

Starting at 10.00am, the number of laps will depend on the class entered. Classes are: solo trail, sportsman, ladies, over 40s, over 50s, four-stroke clubman, four-stroke expert, clubman, open (expert/championship).

Closing date for entries is 18 September and fees are £45.00, rising to £50.00 for late submissions. Regs are online now at enduro.freeserve.co.uk.

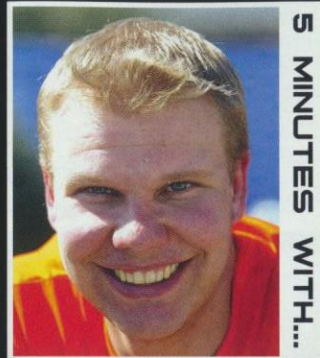
★ GOING FOR GOLD

UK riders David Knight and Paul Edmondson will certainly be trying to emulate the success of the British rowing team when they compete in the Greek round of the World Enduro Championship on 2-3 October.

Round seven of the Maxxis FIM enduro event will held in Serres and the route will consist of three laps of a 65 kilometre course for both days.

Fast Eddy and Knighter are both in second place in their respective E2 and E3 classes, with the pair playing catch-up to Finnish KTM riders Juha Salminen and Samuli Aro.

For more info, check out the event's official website on <http://www.lams.gr/>



5 MINUTES WITH...

in the 125cc class. I didn't finish because I lost more than an hour in penalties. I think Swedish rider Jeff Nilsson won.

WHAT RIDER HAS HAD THE BIGGEST INFLUENCE ON YOUR CAREER?

Kari (Tiainen). He helped me very much when I started my enduro career and is still a really big help today. He got me my first professional contract with Husqvarna and is the team manager of the KTM Racing team that I race for now. He has helped many Finnish riders.

WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER YOUR BEST EVER PERFORMANCE?

I think it was when I won both days of the Finnish round of the world championship in '91. I was still a junior rider and it was a big surprise to beat all the 125cc riders and finish second overall on both days behind Kari. The race was in my home town of Jamsa, it was only my second enduro race after that winter race I did. It was a really hard race for me. I remember I had only just got my driving licence, I think I would have been 18. It was the race that really started my enduro career.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR MOST DISAPPOINTING RESULT?

In Hungary, when I lost the 125cc world title to Paul (Edmondson). I don't really know what happened but I got disqualified from the race. If I had won it would've been my first title. It was so disappointing; it is certainly not a good memory. After the race the jury said that I started one minute too early but that is almost impossible to do. When I looked at the video, after the race, I started together with the correct riders but only I was disqualified.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST CRASH?

It was a practice crash in Spain in '98, when I was racing the 250 Gas Gas. I don't really remember what happened. I was training in a little motocross track close to the Gas Gas factory when a hobby rider started riding the track in the wrong direction. I didn't see him early enough because I was in fifth gear, full gas, approaching a jump. After that I don't remember. I broke my wrist, collarbone and four ribs. The wrist was badly damaged; I had to have two plates put inside and also a plate on my collarbone.

WHAT IS YOUR MOST TREASURED ENDURO MEMORY?

Obviously winning my first world

championship is a really great memory. But I think the best memory that I have is from when I was 10 or 11 years old, when I was riding trials in Finland. I remember winning my first race and getting my first trophy.

WHAT BIKE HAVE YOU ENJOYED OWNING/RIDING THE MOST?

The Suzuki that I started my career on is a really special bike for me. All the rest have been factory bikes, so they are really quite similar. The Suzuki is completely unique. I am restoring it at the moment and I hope to put it on the Dyno sometime soon to see how much power it has compared to today's bikes. I remember that it had a lot of power at the top end but not so much bottom end power.

WHAT IS YOUR PREFERRED TYPE OF TERRAIN?

Sand. Growing up in Finland it is hard not to learn how to ride sand. Despite living in Southern Europe for a lot of my career I still prefer sand.

WHAT DOES ENDURO SPORT NEED MORE OF?

Quite a lot of things still. The races still need the factories to push to make them better. What I don't like any more is that we need to arrive so early in the week before the race. It was a much nicer sport before when we would arrive on Thursday, look at the special tests, make technical control on Friday and then start the race on Saturday. Now we have to arrive on Tuesday and walk the special tests a thousand times. Having more special tests is okay, but I think it was better when we only knew where the tests were on Thursday evening. It would also help the organisers because they would have longer to prepare the special tests.

WHAT DOES ENDURO SPORT NEED LESS OF?

The Extreme special tests. They are not enduro; they are some other sport completely. Maybe it is good for the spectators but not for the riders. If you lose 10 or 20 seconds in this special test, and all the riders get more or less the same time in the other tests, where can you make up the lost time? You can lose much more than you can gain in an extreme test. It's not really enduro sport.





IT ALL ADDS UP

New dirt bike sales figures are on the up after an industry-wide improvement. Sales of 'Adventure Sport' models are enjoying further growth, climbing up five percent year on year.

'Trail/Enduro' bike figures are now down *only* 11 percent, up another six percent from June, and are still ahead of the total motorcycle sales (registrations) which are still down 17 percent on last year.

There's no change in bike models on the 'Adventure Sport' chart, although increased sales of the CCM R30 in fifth place were only to be expected after CCM's recent unfortunate demise, as people take advantage of discounted machines.

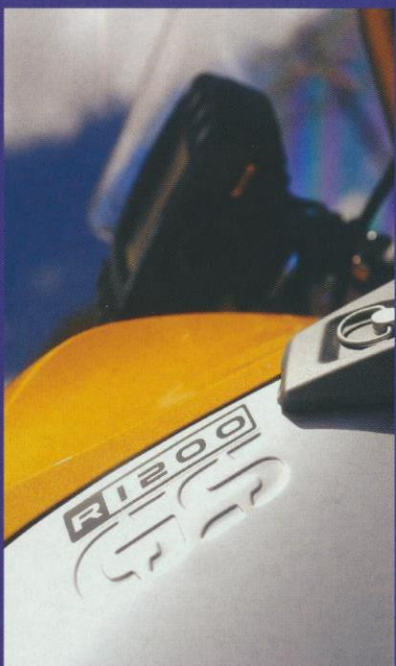
Leading the 'Trail/Enduro' class again by a country mile is the little Honda XR125L, with sales up another 146 units in July. Knocking the KTM 450 out of fifth position is Yamaha's ever-popular DT125, with unit sales of 269. The complete figures are as follows:

Adventure Sport

1 BMW R1200GS	587
2 Honda XL125V	479
3 Triumph 995 Tiger	348
4 BMW F650GS	309
5 CCM R30 supermoto	294

Trail / Enduro

1 Honda XR125L	935
2 Suzuki RV125	337
3 Honda CRF250X	333
4 Suzuki DR-Z400S	286
5 Yamaha DT125	269



HEBO Hopefuls

Don't forget you've only got a short time left to be in with a shout of winning yourself one of ten sets of cool HEBO gear. These off-road packs consist of a high quality fender bag, a very useful bum-bag, a pair of comfortable dirt bike socks, a natty baseball cap and a handy neckwarmer. And to be in with a chance you've simply got to be a TBM subscriber (either new or existing) before 15 September 2004. A full year's subscription to TBM costs just £33 and to sign up, all you need do is call Mel on our Subs Hotline on 020 7903 3993. Go to it...

NITTY GRITTY

Organisers of the True Grit Hare and Hounds enduro due to take place on 3 October at Driffield, East Yorks, have announced a date and venue change.

Now on Sunday 12 September, the three-hour event will be held at Lings Farm, west of Bishop Burton, East Yorkshire.

Using open farmland and woodland, the course will be around six miles and will consist of one three-hour session. The winner will be the first rider to complete 20 laps or the most laps in the time.

Open to expert, clubman and over 40s classes, the entry is £35.00 inclusive of ORPA day licence.

For entry forms and regs, log onto enduro.freemove.co.uk. For general enquiries, email extruegrit@hotmail.com. All emails must be marked with 'True Grit' in the subject field.

MY FIRST BIKE



**GEOFF WILSON IS
(AMONG OTHER THINGS)
CHAIRMAN OF THE TRAIL RIDERS
FELLOWSHIP AND A MEMBER OF
THE COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY LOST
WAYS ADVISORY GROUP**

My first trail bike was my normal road bike of the time, a 250cc Suzuki Hustler in the late 1960s. A more inappropriate bike to take off the tarmac road you couldn't imagine. But it was about as good as you could get for scaling the surfaced mountain passes of the Lake District ... or at least I was convinced it was because it was all that I could afford at the time.

But then, like now, there were major moves being made to downgrade old cart-roads to prevent them being used by motorcycles. The 1968 Countryside Act caused as much panic amongst trail-riders then as the CROW Act 2000 causes today. There was a series of public inquiries taking place in the north west of England that seemed destined to close some of the best tracks before I'd not even had chance to ride them. I'd heard about them from my dad who'd ridden them, and it just didn't seem right for bureaucrats to deny me the chance to enjoy some of the thrills that my dad had experienced in his motorcycling life.

So I decided to get stuck in and fight the battle against the Department of Transport, and I'm still doing the same. But to do that I had to get the feel for the roads that were under threat, and the only way I could do it was to use my Suzuki Hustler. I got a feel for them in more ways than one. The bike got battered and I got bruised, but life was never the same again.

I still ride that first trail today, so the 1969 struggle must have been worth the fight. What's more, the route is in much better condition now than it was back then, and there's possibly a bit of that Suzuki buried in it somewhere.

I don't have a picture of that first trail bike; a bike and a camera were beyond my means. So you'll have to make do with this picture of one of my current trail-bikes next to a landmark on a Yorkshire Dales trail that most riders would say is impossible to get an R80GS BMW and passenger (wife Jennifer) to. In 1969 I reckoned that if I could get my T250 Suzuki up a track it was worth fighting for. I apply the same test in 2004 with my trusty BMW...



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Cooking With Gas

The 2005 two-stroke Gassers are here. TBM checked out the new EC200, 250 and 300cc Enducross models at the UK launch, and found good and not-quite-so-good features to report on...

It's business as usual at Gas Gas when it comes to the 2005 two-stroke models. A few details have changed on the bikes (ally sidestand, new frame guards, small rear master cylinder among others), and a few details have regrettably stayed the same - like the inconsistent build quality (our brand new test bike's headlight came on whenever we touched the rear brake). But overall it's definitely a case of steady evolution rather than revolution from the Spanish manufacturer.

Which to be honest is no bad thing, because two-stroke Gassers have always been great clubman machines for the average Joe. They're not the fastest of bikes, nor the best detailed, but when it comes to handling and sheer rideability, the Gassers remain the pick of the bunch for the

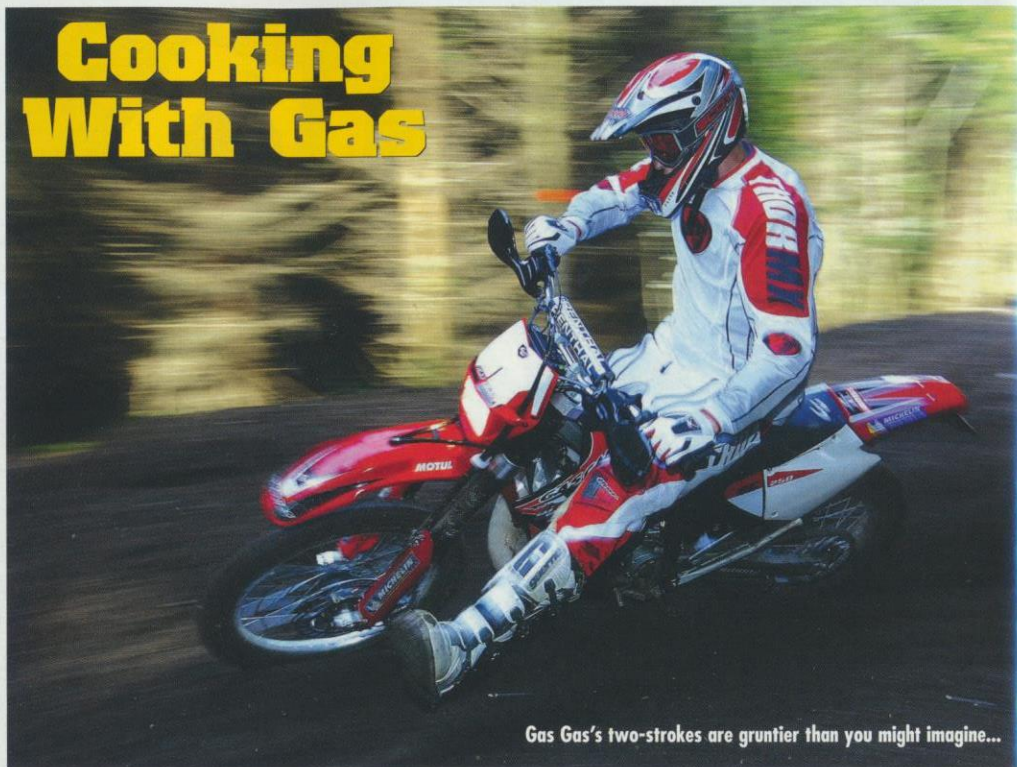


300's smooth and grunty, but will still bite back if provoked...

vast majority of riders. They manage this because Gas Gas have doggedly stuck to their principles of making all their bikes easy to exploit - rather than pursuing the more single-minded goal of ultimate performance. Truth is, there's no other two-stroke I'd rather be riding when conditions start to deteriorate. And when you look back at the sort of summer we've had this year, it's no surprise that the two-stroke dirt bike is enjoying something of a renaissance at the moment.

Interestingly enough it's not just me who recognises this fact, many of you guys obviously feel the same way. Proof of this comes from the fact that a number of UK importers and their dealers have in recent times seen a steady rise in demand for two-stroke models. It's got so bad

Cooking With Gas



Gas Gas's two-strokes are grunter than you might imagine...

that KTM UK aren't putting any two-strokes on their 2005 test fleet because they simply can't keep up with demand. This anti-thumper backlash is hardly surprising says Gas Gas importer John Shirt: 'Two-strokes are cheaper to buy, and anyone can fix them when they go wrong - which is what you want from an enduro bike.'

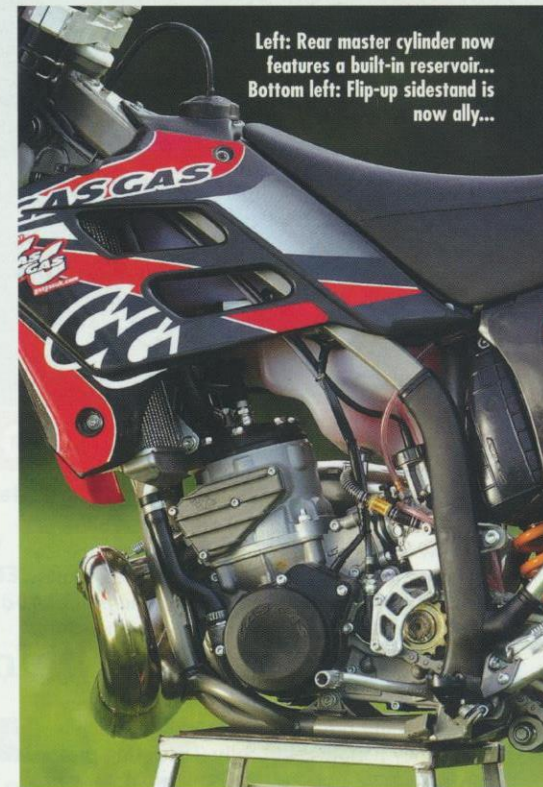
Fair enough, but how easy are they to ride compared with a thumper? For anyone new to the sport who has only experienced the current crop of four-stroke dirt bikes, getting on a two-stroke for the first time may come as quite a shock. For a start they feel incredibly light (and this year the Gassers are even lighter as the factory has managed to shave a kilo off the engines by remodelling the crankcases); and compared with a thumper the power delivery feels sharp but relatively short-lived. But the beauty of stokers is that they ride the terrain in a completely different way to a four-banger. The front-end feels light, the instant power delivery helps keep the front wheel lofted and out of trouble. And they're torquey too. Not in the same way as a four-

stroke, which spreads its torque right across the rev range, but slot up a gear higher than you'd normally choose, and they will invariably grunt their way out of trouble.

In Detail

Looking a little closer at this year's Gassers you'll find that the changes run more than just skin deep - the factory claim to have altered the frame geometry to further 'improve the manoeuvrability' (though exact details of the changes have yet to be released). Likewise they've tweaked the 45mm black Marzocchi Shivers to offer more adjustment at the front. Other changes include fitting a teflon-coated clutch hose, a new Kokusan CDI, the fitment of plastic frame guards as standard, a lightweight aluminium side-stand, a new front fender and redesigned headlight now with a halogen bulb, new lighter crankcases, a new selector drum in the gearbox, a modified cylinder, a compact Nissin rear brake master cylinder (incorporating the reservoir), oh and they've gone back to a conventional fuel-filler cap in

Could it be time for a restyle? Whilst the Gassers aren't bad looking, they do seem a little dated...



Left: Rear master cylinder now features a built-in reservoir...
Bottom left: Flip-up sidestand is now ally...

Cooking With Gas



Eminently rideable, the Gassers are easy to push hard lap after lap...

place of the trials-style filler they had last year - which apparently nobody liked except me. All pretty sensible stuff.

Disappointingly, what they haven't improved upon however is the Spanish build quality and haphazard design (still two different types of fasteners securing the rad shrouds, still the horribly old-fashioned rear light and the basic switchgear). It may seem a small point to be concerned with such fripperies, but in our opinion buyers are becoming more discerning year on year. As an owner you're not just buying a product, you're buying into the complete package and when you consider how stylish dirt bikes like the new KTMs and CRF-Xs have become, the Gas Gas appears old-fashioned alongside 'em. I know we've banged on about this issue in the past, but it really needs addressing by the Spanish factory.

Fortunately the Gassers are still brilliant bikes to ride. The EC200 is easy, the EC250 potent, the EC300 is mellow but strong. Individually they still all exhibit typical Gas Gas traits - which is to say they handle beautifully. The riding position is well thought out, the new tank is narrow and

SECOND OPINION

I'd love to take a visit to the Gas Gas factory. It's not that I have any particular desire to see how the Spanish bikes are assembled, as I suspect this would do nothing for my faith in them. And nor is it that I'd like congratulate the R&D guys on what are possibly the easiest riding clubman two-strokes out there 'cos I think they know that already. No, it's because someone really needs to let the 'Styling and Detailing' team out of the broom cupboard they've been locked in since the late Nineties!

Then they'll be able to get back to their desks, replace the rear light and switchgear with something much more modern, and reprimand the YTS worker who penned this year's graphics! And once they've got that out of the way they can get down to the serious business of getting the bikes looking as good as they ride. Because the 2005 Gassers really do ride very well... **BARN!**

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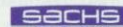
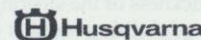


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Cooking With Gas

200 is the jewel in the Gas Gas crown...

unobtrusive. And after a brief flirtation with overly firm suspension two years ago, Gas Gas have sensibly returned to the wonderfully supple settings we all know and love. And frankly it's this combination of forgiving suspension and a well-controlled chassis which makes them so easy to ride. Get a Gasser on a series of deep whoops and you'll understand what I mean. Instead of spearing off into the boonies if you get the wheels out of line, the Gas Gases track straight and true whether you're hitting the face of the whoops or glancing across the top of them. It's this sort of advantage which make the bikes so appealing to a clubman rider. At the end of a physical three-hour hare and hound enduro, this sort of handling trait can make all the difference to a very tired rider.

Despite the claimed geometry changes, I confess I couldn't actually notice any difference in the quickness of the steering over last year's bike, though I did notice that on one particularly bumpy section of the course, the EC300 I was riding was inclined to shake its head a little. It wasn't disconcerting or a problem in any way, but I wasn't the only one to notice it either.

If the geometry changes have made the Gassers more inclined to a little less stability I definitely don't think it will be a big problem on the strength of this one ride. But I'll reserve judgement for a longer, harder test.

In Summary

So there was good and bad news for '05 from Gas Gas. Whenever we talk to Gas Gas owners they all tell us that they love their bikes to ride, but so many are really brassed off with the build quality. Personally this would irritate me deeply, but it wouldn't stop me buying one. If I had to make a choice I'd plump for the little 200 as it's just so forgiving and easy to ride, but the 250 would be the weapon of choice for riders who want something a little more aggressive.

Price-wise Gassers still undercut the Austrian competition but not by that much. For now though, if you're a clubman rider looking for an easier ride in 2005, the Spanish bikes still seem to have the edge. But if KTM went and made their bikes a little more clubman-friendly, well Gas Gas might really have something to worry about...



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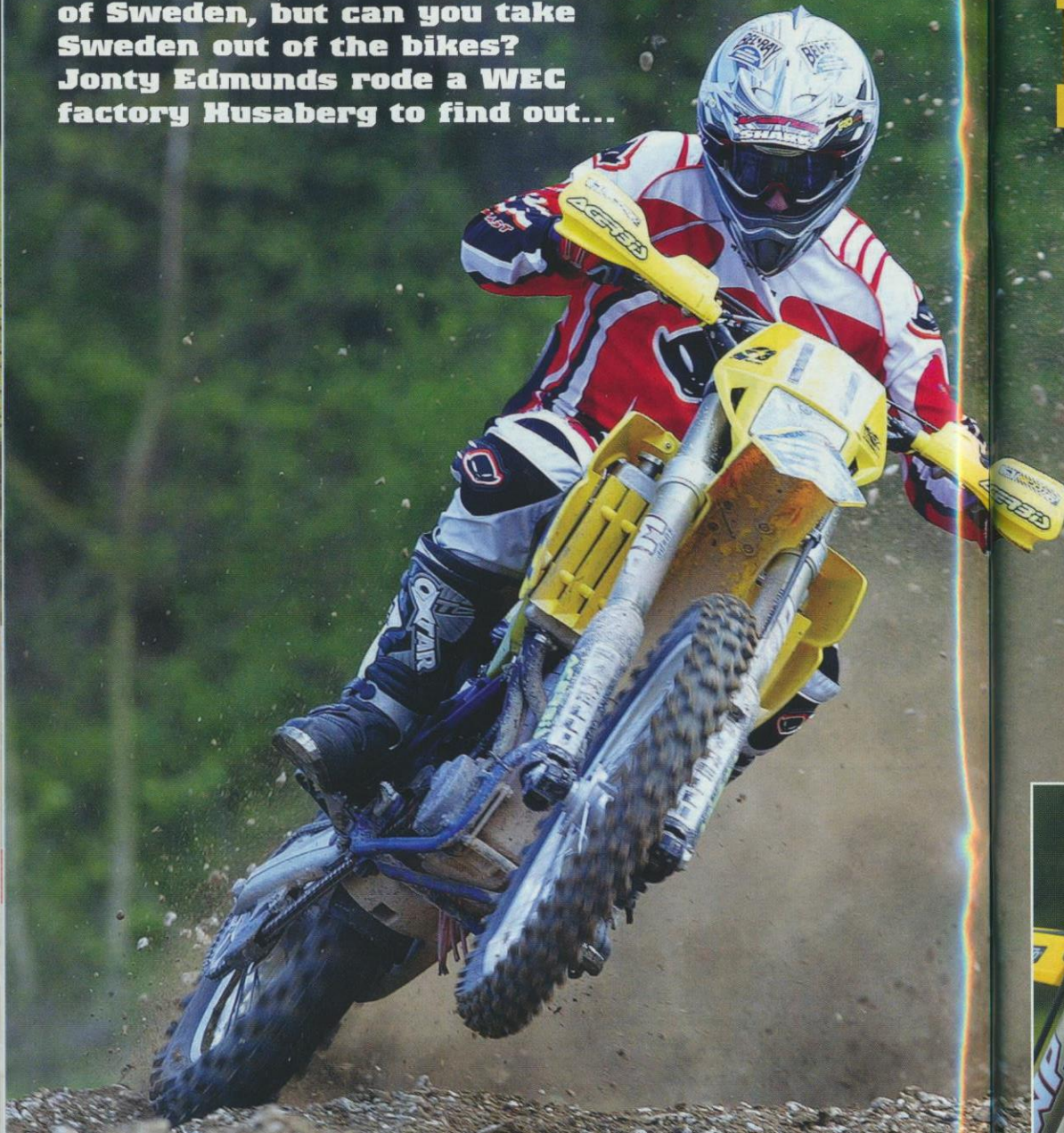


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You can take the bikes out of Sweden, but can you take Sweden out of the bikes? Jonty Edmunds rode a WEC factory Husaberg to find out...



Berger King

I can't really explain why, but I've always quite liked Husabergs. I know such a confession is still deemed by some as slightly left-field, but there you go. Yes they're a little quirky, yes they're a little, dare I say it... agricultural for some rider's tastes, but so what. And in the same way that certain cars 'have it' and others don't, I'll simply just say again that I like Husabergs. And it's not a fondness that has developed quickly in keeping with the rise and rise of four-stroke power - I've long felt something for the unusual yellow and blue single-minded machines.

I've often wondered if this might be because Husaberg's roots are firmly planted in Sweden - a favourite country of mine. There's something about Sweden - the cleanliness of the country, its long and successful history of building four-

stroke motorcycles, the blondness of its women, the crisp and unique way in which all things Scandinavian are designed (including the women!) - that makes me like the country. As Husaberg is now a wholly owned part of the giant KTM Sportmotorcycles group their diluted 'Swedishness' has done little to diminish my fondness for them. However, and strange as it may seem, having never ridden a production-built Husaberg in anger, it's certainly not a bond fuelled by familiarity...

Because of what can only really be described as a 'skin deep' liking for the now Austrian-assembled machines, I have long been inter-



Tarkkala's Husaberg displaces 505cc and features a sensuous hand-made alloy tank...



Berger King

Altered frame raises the Berg's swingarm pivot point and lays the shock down a touch more...



ested in the company's present day race bikes and team set-up. The bikes Husaberg claim are built on 'the courage to rely on technical innovations', their 'competition-minded engineers' and the riders who are 'talented, young and ambitious rookies'.

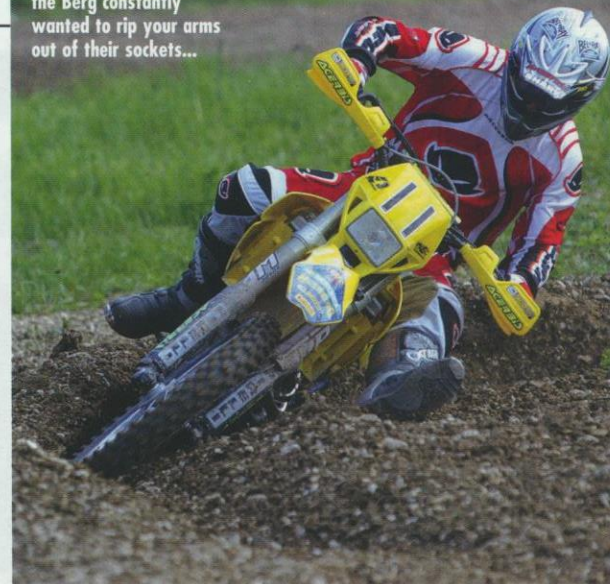
Freshly Prepared

The main reason I earmarked Finn Marko Tarkkala's factory-prepped Husaberg as a bike which I wanted to learn more about is that it started the season as the machine which posed the greatest threat to KTM's dominance in the WEC Enduro 3 class. While that in itself isn't of any great significance (it could just as easily have been a Husqvarna or a two-stroke Gas Gas), what really interested me is the fact that Husaberg are a KTM-owned company.

Some would argue that the bike which pushed the 525 KTMs of Samuli Aro, David Knight and Ivan Cervantes harder and more consistently than any other at the beginning of the WEC season is little more than a yellow KTM. And it's easy to see why people might think that. With all production 'Bergs assembled at the Austrian factory in order to 'improve quality assurance', I wanted to find out if the race team bikes were just Swedish in colour or still Swedish at heart?

The short answer to that question is that the three official Husabergs which compete in this year's World Enduro Championship are a bit of both - part Austrian, part Swedish, part 'Heinz 57'. Beginning life as production machines, the team bikes are rolled off the line and then transported to Sweden. While production of the yellow and blue bikes now runs alongside that of the orange machines, Husaberg's research and development facility is still in Sweden - in the same factory where the first Husaberg prototype

It might look easy but the Berg constantly wanted to rip your arms out of their sockets...



was presented to potential investors and government representatives in 1988! And that factory is where production Husabergs become *factory* Husabergs and are readied for WEC competition.

Berger Meister

The man who leads Husaberg's research and development program, as well as being Racing Manager, is former two-time World Enduro Champion Thomas Gustavsson. One of the key players in the creation of Husaberg, Gustavsson was one of several former Husqvarna employees who set up what is today known as Husaberg Motor AB, when Husky headed south to Italy in the late Eighties. A quiet and softly spoken man, Thomas is one of the WEC's senior figures and when lined-up alongside the more flamboyant Italian team managers of Husqvarna, Yamaha and KTM, you soon realise that Thomas is the type that listens a lot and speaks very little.

Husaberg's presence on the world enduro stage today is a modest but consistent one - just as it has been for many years. KTM money hasn't robbed the company of its identity and Husaberg still has its own, very separate place within the WEC paddock - a place much smaller than the mass of orange trucks and tents which encroach on almost half of any WEC paddock these days.

With its modest sized truck and three-rider line-up, the official Husaberg presence at WEC events is a discreet one - somehow very Swedish. While many of the better funded Italian based

FIRST CHECK

Berger King



teams have lavishly kitted rigs with highly decorative exteriors, Husaberg simply has a truck big enough to carry all its machinery and equipment, with a modest sized Husaberg logo and several smaller sponsor logos adorning its white sides. Under Gustavsson's lead, the team seems to care little about fancy decoration and glitzy extras - again somehow very practical, very Swedish. It also probably operates on a fraction of some of the bigger team's race budgets.

Whilst their WEC machinery is prepared for competition in Sweden, and there's an obvious Scandinavian bias to their works rider line-up, Husaberg's WEC effort is serviced by Italians.

The Kalinen Service Team (KST) take care of everything from refuelling the bikes at checks to feeding and watering all team personnel. The 'Scanditalian' mix is an unusual but seemingly effective one.

The talented, young and ambitious riders that make up Husaberg's '04 enduro line-up include two Swedes and one Finn. Bjorne Carlsson, the team's long serving and most senior rider, has been a Husaberg man for pretty much all of his professional career. He is the only rider of the three to have won a world title, for which he was 'Berg mounted. He rides in the Enduro 3 class. Andreas Toresson in the E2 class is a typical Husaberg rider. Swedish, and with a successful 'home' motocross and enduro career behind him, Andreas has had some success this year but is still very much improving. Then there's Marko Tarkkala, the lone Finn of the bunch. Young, (he's riding in the Finnish Junior Trophy team at this year's ISDE in Poland), fast, and rumoured to be 'going orange' next season, Marko is the brightest star of Finland's up-and-coming riders.

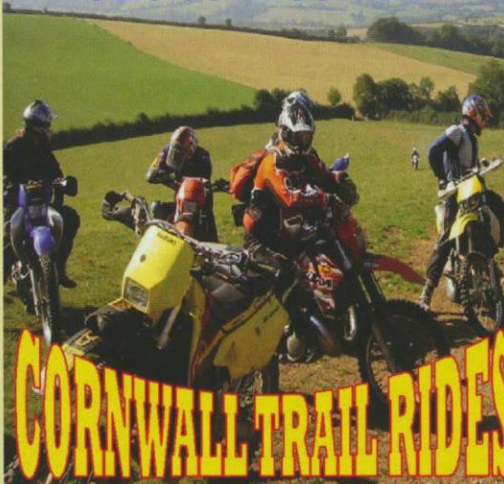
After bursting onto the WEC scene with a third place finish in the 2002 400cc four-stroke world championship, Marko suffered a disappointing '03 season, finishing seventh. So far this season

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as featured on men & motors
Jan 2004 **men&motors**

Jonty corners in the conventional way but Tarkkala sits further back to get the best out of the PDS suspension...

Berger King



he's proved incredibly quick and incredibly unlucky, and at present it looks likely that he'll end this season in seventh place in the E3 title race. Fourth after the first two GPs of the year, a DNF on day two in Italy, a poor second day result in France, and a DNF on day two in Sweden have cast a shadow over what was looking like a very promising season.

Go Large

Switching to a larger engine displacement just one week prior to the opening round of the World Enduro Championship is a move which many might question, especially if you've just spent two months training with a smaller powerplant in the south of Spain. But that's exactly what Marko Tarkkala did at the beginning of this year. Having ridden a machine fitted with Husaberg's 475cc engine in the opening round of the Spanish Enduro Championship, Tarkkala felt that he needed 'more power'. Claiming that he was always riding the 475 'with full gas', the decision was taken to race with a 505cc engine.

The 505 has several interesting modifications over the 501 model used in past seasons, and

according to Marko it's better simply because it gives 'stronger, better power from bottom to top'. With a different camshaft (made in the race shop in Sweden), the bike features an aluminium conrod, titanium valves, and has 'treated' inlet and exhaust ports. The valves may be the same size as stock but the rest of the top-end of Marko's 'Berg is anything but standard.

The CDI unit is also non-standard, just as it is on the factory KTMs, and offers a modified power curve allowing the bike to rev 800rpm higher. The bike is fitted with a Keihin FCR MX41mm carburettor and although Marko has tested both Akrapovic and standard silencers, it's an Italian Quat-D exhaust system which takes care of the burnt gasses.

The gearbox in Marko's bike features standard first to fifth gears but a motocross sixth gear is fitted. This was changed for the simple reason that the bike is built for racing and the standard, higher, sixth gear is virtually unusable for anything other than riding on tarmac. The lower sixth gear now gives Marko one more usable gear, should he need it. And that pretty much completes the range of notable engine modifications, other than



the fact that the engine itself sits in the chassis in a 'revised' position.

The chassis on Marko's bike started out standard but is modified in three ways in the race shop. Firstly the rear (steel) sub-frame is lowered. Secondly the foot pegs are raised, and thirdly the swingarm pivot point is moved higher than standard. The result of this is that the shock is laid down slightly compared to standard. The swingarm, however, remains stock.

When it comes to the bike's suspension, the official Husaberg team are the only WEC squad, other than the two factory KTM teams (Farioli and Racing), to be supplied with 'official' WP dampers. The 48mm forks on Marko's bike are almost the same as those fitted to Juha Salminen's Katosh, which are to all intents and purposes motocross forks with the 'clickers' set softer! But Marko's forks don't have high and low speed compression adjustment, like the WP KTM riders' forks do. The rear shock, although being an officially supplied and serviced WP unit and fitted with a titanium spring, is also different to those used by the factory KTM's. It's still pretty darn fancy looking though!

The remaining changes are those requested by Marko - a higher seat foam and raised handlebars. The bike's brakes and wheels are standard, as too is all of the external bodywork. The front-end of the bike is essentially KTM as the wheel, forks, triple clamps, hydraulic clutch, fender, disc, throttle assembly and headlight are all yellow (or Husaberg branded) versions of those fitted to a KTM. One part which is noticeably different to standard, and was changed for the event after I rode the bike, is the fuel tank. Reduced in width to hold just 7.5 litres, for obvious reasons Marko reckons the bike is now much easier to ride.

Have It Your Way

The first thing I noticed when riding Marko's bike was that it had, for my size and riding style, an uncomfortable riding position. The rear-end of the bike felt very high and the bars very low, giving the feeling that I was somehow sat above and looking down on the handlebars, like I was riding a mini-moto. With a very flat and typically Finnish 'bar and lever set-up, the compact feeling cockpit surprised me due to Marko's size.

Expecting there to be plenty of leg/knee room, it wasn't until I watched Marko ride a couple of laps that I figured out why that might be - he doesn't sit anywhere near the front of the seat. Juha Salminen once told me that to get the best from a PDS shock you need to have your weight nearer the rear of the seat than you do on a Japanese bike, which explained why Marko also corners sitting further back.

The bike's seat foam was also incredibly uncomfortable and hard as rock. Which, coupled to Marko's 'bar set-up, made the bike uncomfortable to ride and clearly a machine set-up for racing around special tests. However, the fuel tank felt big. Not subtle, not compact, just BIG.

Whilst turning incredibly well, almost too well on some occasions, the bike felt stable at speed. Feeling very much like a half-litre KTM to ride (no real surprise there as the 'Berg has the same PDS WP set-up) it was only when braking into turns that the bike unsettled me. Already feeling as if the bike was fitted with a small front wheel, when the front forks compressed under braking the shortening effect on the bike's wheelbase felt as if it was going to pitch me over the bars.

With firm forks and a wooden feeling shock, the bike was a little harder to turn over smaller bumps, stones and roots than Marko made it look. With Marko using the near-as-damn-it same suspension set-up as Juha, the harsh feeling when

riding all but the roughest ground was one I'd felt before. Feeling very wary, and unable to test the front-end on anything but bigger bumps, I simply didn't get as much feedback from the forks as I would have liked.

The rear shock felt somehow 'sleepy', and went from firm to hard-as-hell as soon as I hit any bumps at speed. Although the bike remained stable when accelerating across bumps, I take my hat off to all KTM and Husaberg mounted WEC riders who place near the sharp end of the results. I fail to see how they do it. Okay, at high speeds a bike which is set-up on the firm side is a good thing, but it was the suspension's near complete lack of suppleness and subtlety that I found very difficult to deal with. I guess you either need to be Finnish, Manx or Spanish!

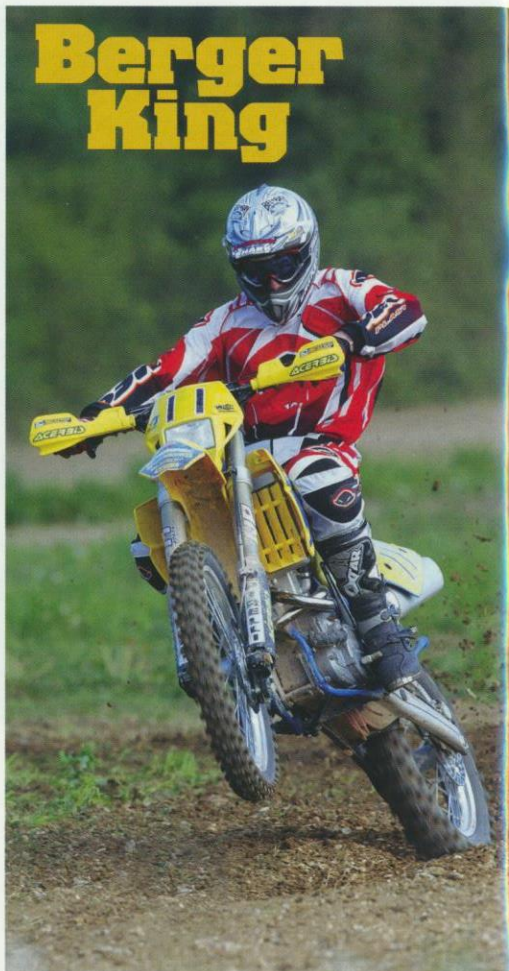
100 Percent Pure Beef

Although the suspension was disappointing, the 'Berg's motor was simply incredible. Amazingly strong off the bottom, on a few occasions the bike came close to leaving a corner without me! Feeling anything but a lazy half-litre thumper, the bike's power was short, forceful and seemed to be trying to encourage me to push it harder. Although the lump would build revs quickly, its strength was, quite literally, in its *strength*. From bottom- to mid-range the motor was awesome.

Not wanting to be revved too much (you'd have to be the Incredible Hulk to ride it like that) the bike also didn't like being laboured in a high gear either. Expecting the 'Berg to chug and pull happily in a tall gear, I was surprised that it didn't really like cruising around and wanted to be dropped down a cog or two.

To get the best out of the motor I found I needed to use the meat of the power from bottom to mid-range in each gear. Because the power was instant and strong (very much like a KTM's), the throttle could be rolled-on around flat, sweeping turns resulting in the bike simply taking off down the next straight like the proverbial scalded cat.

In an attempt to calm all this power, I found myself short-shifting up through the gears to avoid ending up with arms like Mr Tickle. Constantly accelerating, changing up, accelerating, changing up, this thing was incredible and it was only when I was into fourth gear that I felt confident in holding the power on for longer than a handful of seconds. Having ridden Juha's half-litre factory KTM last year I wasn't expecting Marko's bike to be anywhere near as good or as powerful. I was wrong.



I'm Lovin' it

Marko's Husaberg both impressed me and confirmed something that I've been thinking for a while - that modern day 500cc thumpers are awesomely powerful, awesomely quick, and that those who ride them fast are 'a little bit special' - unhinged even. But more importantly, what I'd realised was that Husaberg have retained, for the moment at least, their own identity despite being owned by KTM. They're still a long way from being yellow coloured EXCs. They might be produced in Austria and share many of the same parts as KTMs, but Husabergs are still very Swedish and still a little bit quirky. And what's more, I still like them...

Berger King

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Plain

Sailing?

Mark Williams chose the hottest day of the year so far to go Doing The Rounds across Salisbury Plain...

A 6.30am start followed by a three and a half hour drive is probably not the best preparation for a day's trailriding, but having taken up Rob Thorne's invitation for a ride-out on and around Salisbury Plain, recent experiences with unwelcoming B&Bs deterred me from stopping overnight. In fact I'd reckoned on a slightly shorter drive from my mid-Wales

HQ and anyway I'd cunningly coerced my local trailriding buddy, Roy Simcock, to come along with me so he could share the driving. But like all my best laid plans, we arrived at our rendezvous in Baverstock half an hour late and already hot'n'bothered, the last 90 minutes of our journey having been plagued by heavy holiday traffic south of the M4.



Fortunately, Rob and his pals were very laid-back about our late appearance, and graciously insisted we sat and shared a pot of coffee with them at the Penruddock Arms where we met, rather than tog up and ride straight off after our stressful journey. When I saw the tackle they

themselves had turned up on, I kind of understood why: these were big, serious bikes designed for seriously swift riders and my heart sank a little as I imagined the problems I might have on my diminutive domestic trailie making up for the time we'd already lost.

In the event, and as seems to be the way of these things, it all turned out rather differently, but before we get down to the nitty-gritty, lets introduce our band of Wiltshire Wanderers.

Building Himself Up

Andrew Dawson still owns the TT350 he started his trailriding career on 'and a damn fine bike it is too,' he confirmed. But like so many of us, he hankered after something with a leccy boot so decided to take several steps up the trailriding ladder with the purchase of a Katoom 525EXC - originally owned by our host Rob Thorne in fact - and being a builder, he could obviously afford

to add to an impressive motorcycling stable that includes a Ducati 916 and a FireBlade.

The Snappy Snapper

Since he earns his living as a photographer, I was rather surprised that Bob Rowe wasn't doing a couple of weddings on this sunny August Saturday, but he was actually working the next day so he deserved a bit of a breather. His chosen weapon was a 2002 Gas Gas 450 which he'd had for a year but which had just lost its starter motor a couple of days previously, not that this fazed Bob since it booted up easily thanks to its electronic fuel injection. Apart from replacing valve guides and the gunged-up starter motor - a common fault apparently, due to its location in front of the engine - he's well-pleased with the Gasser and in spite of the problems is thinking of replacing it with an '04 model.

Managing the Store

As we would later discover, Roy Andrews's managerial talents extend well beyond the retail foodstore he overlord, and he too did his fair share of booting a big engine during the day. Only in the case of his four year-old Yamaha WR400F he'd obviously never enjoyed the luxury of leccy start and in the day's punishing heat, it confirmed all the reports you've heard and read about its recalcitrant hot starting. Not that this seemed to bother Roy much as he turned out to be just about the coolest head amongst us, as well as being a deceptively quick rider.



Plain Sailing?

A good example of when not to try out a new shortcut...

Fuelling His Fulfilment

But of all the major-league machines on hand this Saturday, team leader Rob Thorne's four day-old Husqvarna Centennial Edition TE510 was surely the most awesome. Rob works as an aircraft refueller for the School of Army Aviation and having just chopped in another 450 Gas-Gas for the Husky, averred that by comparison it was 'a bit of an animal - but goes wherever you point it.' Well sadly not quite everywhere, as we were later to discover.

Roy the Boy

Lastly, but by no means least the forementioned Simcock The Younger - my fellow Radnorshire Unreliable - was on hand aboard his trusty CCM604E, which had just had its forks re-built by Steve Plain. Having recently swapped bikes with him for the best part of a day, I now realise what a hero Roy is for hustling such a big, heavy brute along the trails in his seemingly effortless manner, although even he was flagging a bit after what was to follow.

And what was to follow proved to be poles apart from any other Rounds that I've done... which is of course exactly how it should be!

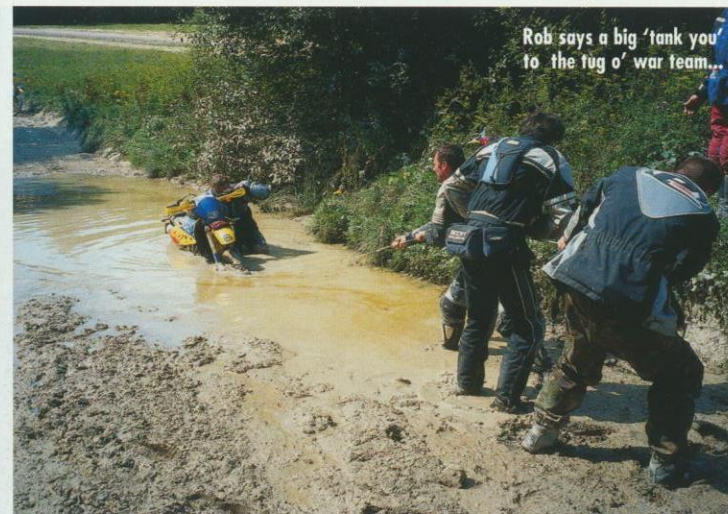
The ride began with less than a mile of tarmac as we threaded north through the picturesque hamlet of Baverstock and up onto the dual status Monarch's Way. Setting the tone for much

of the terrain we'd travel during the day, Monarch's Way rose fairly gently uphill along flinty tracks between gently waving cornfields. But two miles further on we swept into the shady woodland of Middle Hill for a while where sudden darkness after bright sunlight momentarily wrong-footed me as I struggled to readjust my vision and navigate the hard-packed ruts and tree roots.

Fast and Loose

Rob on his Husky was already, as I'd earlier surmised, setting a cracking pace upfront and in no time at all we were out of the woods - figuratively as well as literally - and back into the blazing sun. But turning north west down West Hill, into Penning Bottom and up into Hanging Langford I was pleased to discover that the recent modifications to my TT-R250 (see Staff Bikes this month) made it relatively easy to keep up with him, and pull reassuringly well ahead of Roy who was next in line behind me on a much more powerful bike. Staying in third and occasionally fourth gear as we romped along these variously stony or hard, grass-covered surfaces was easy-peasy, although it soon betrayed the fact that I could usefully dial in a bit more compression damping to stabilise the faster-moving chassis.

After crossing the River Wylve and into Steeple Langford, we rode under the A36 and onto



Rob says a big 'tank you' to the tug o' war team...

a leafy little BOAT at the entrance to which a retired army major - of which there are understandably an abundance of here in squaddie country - had paid for official-looking signs warning motorcyclists to slacken our pace. And it read as a threat rather than a warning, which was clearly his intention. I, like most of the others, elected to negotiate this narrow track in the middle of a trio of ruts, which took some concentration at the lick we were going but after a couple of miles the track opened out a bit onto the chalky, stony landscape of what was now Salisbury Plain proper.

With the ancient remains of Yarnbury Castle on our left, we diced with death crossing the busy, race track that is the A303 and sped along a long, dusty BOAT taking us toward the 'German Village' HM Army use for street-fighting training. This track, which in wetter times is riddled with deep puddles was now riddled with opportunities to aviate the front wheel, which I'm pleased to say my newly revitalised TT-R does with a purposeful flick of a wrist... Big Fun indeed. And on these generally harsh, loose surfaces my decision to fit a hard compound Trelleborg Army Special rear tyre proved to be entirely appropriate.

But the dust thrown up as we cantered along these chalky tracks played havoc with navigation and it was easy to plunge into a deep pothole if one was too close to the man in front. So it proved prudent to hang 30 or 40 yards back when the going got really dusty, as it did

throughout the day. Although not for the first time, Rob managed to find a deep pool of mud just before the aforementioned Village.

Complete with bullet-strafed cars, the 'German Village' (which incidentally didn't used to appear on OS maps), looked more like a small town in Northern Ireland to me, although it was of course fenced off from us plebs and I rather fancy we'd have been machine-gunned had we tried to break through. So we headed north east of Orchestron and deep

into the tank training territory of Honeydown Bottom. And I could tell we were in the firing range because a flock of dead tanks lay simmering in the heat and large red signs warned us of imminent death if we strayed beyond the heavily shell-blasted track. Spooky, and all the more incongruous with the White Horse cut into the distant rolling Wolds.

Compare and Contrast

Beyond the signposted Danger Area we rode directly north across Orchestron Down and then back south and east along the White Horse Trail towards East Chisenbury, a fast, glorious romp over undulating hills interspersed with what were either tractor or tank tracks. Then suddenly, and in complete contrast we elbowed our way up a steep, narrow and viciously overgrown track to West Chisenbury. Thankfully a loping, grassy UCR eastwards soon allowed me to catch my breath again and it was somewhere here that Andy managed to pick up a rusty two-inch nail in his rear tyre. I'm beginning to fear that nail punctures are the Curse of Williams as in three out of my five Rounds, someone's copped a metal spike in their tyres. Although as last month's victim was me, maybe I shouldn't feel too guilty. Andy and Bob patched the tube in short-order and we soon all teamed up again and barrelled northwards from Littlecott Down to the A342.

After hanging a right here for less than a mile we dropped back south onto a BOAT which wound its way onto a grassy UCR running



Plain Sailing?

parallel with a metalled road to Beaches Plantation, and I don't need to tell you which one we rode. A left turn here along another loose, flinty UCR eventually - after cutting across some rough, grassy tussocks which sorely tested my front suspension - brought us to an area below the Sidbury Hill SSSI. With dozens of white chalk tracks criss-crossing a sort of huge tree-girt bowl, this looked like an immense MX circuit, but already running late for our planned lunch-stop, we refrained from engaging in a little play-time, and continued east towards North Tidworth.

Inglorious Mud

And this is where disaster really struck when Rob elected to cut off a corner and go through what was clearly a tank trap - 20-odd yards of watery mud that turned out to be a good three feet deep when his Husky stalled and left poor Rob standing waist-deep in goop. I was right behind him at this time and had a grim premonition that still brown waters do indeed run deep, so I backed off and stopped just a few yards before Rob's rather ignominious halt.

From that distance it looked as though the Husky's airbox intake was fractionally above the water line, so armed with the rope that Bob had handily brought along, we sweatily, slowly hefted Rob's bike out of the quagmire whilst trying to avoid creating any bow-waves that might douse the airbox. Finally back on dry land, and in the blessed shade of a nearby copse, we then tried to re-start the Husky, which initially was having none of it. Although there was little evidence of any water or silt in the airbox (which is revealed by pivoting the battery rearwards - a neat touch), we had to tip the bike up on its rear wheel to drain out the exhaust system, and then drain the carb. Eventually, and with barely enough juice left in the battery, the Husky spluttered into life accompanied by our mutual cheers.

However our reverie was to be shortlived, for after a short blat past Penning's Barn, the Husky gave up the ghost again. Having had little opportunity to re-charge its battery, and failing to respond to Rob's boot, Bob's trusty rope was employed again, this time enabling Roy Simcock to tow the dead bike backwards and forwards



Andy experiences the 'Curse of Williams' firsthand...

along a handy tarmac'd lane just west of the A338. After three or four attempts and much mis-firing, the Husky eventually sparked up and we quickly hooked a right onto the main road for a very late lunch at the garrison town of Tidworth.

Stripping and Searching

Whilst most of us gulped down litres of blissfully chilled water and chemically challenged beverages and ordered up greaseburgers at a highly recommended Greek caff, Roy Andrews and Rob began selflessly investigating the Husky's worsening misfire. This involved stripping the carb to its constituent parts and thoroughly removing anything untoward, including the blobs of brown mud stuck in the bottom of the float bowl. But still the damn thing took lots of bumping and towing before it eventually coughed into life and, by now almost three hours behind schedule and with Rob and Roy A especially hot and bothered, we eventually trekked off on what would necessarily be an abbreviated route.

But even this was too much for Rob's Husky,

and after what was admittedly a good test of our digestive systems along a rutty, overgrown RuPP south west of Shipton Bellinge, his bike sounded like a bag of spanners and he decided to err on the side of caution and call it quits... and enlist the help of the AA. I think we all felt a bit sorry for Rob who'd set up the whole deal and proven an excellent route-planner and leader, but sometimes luck, and an untoward enthusiasm for unexpected hazards, can undo the best of us.

So after a quick conflag over the map with Rob, Roy Andrews took up the baton and we set off by tarmac to yet another neatly kempt garrison town, this time a place called Larkhill where a sandy, flint-strewn BOAT led us up towards Stonehenge in all its touristy glory. But even on this hottest of days and surrounded by parked cars, ice-cream vans and the seething throng, it still exuded an eerie magnificence. Whilst we stopped to take pics, Roy A recounted the story of the locals who painstakingly re-erected the famous stones after the council, in a fit of heritage vandalism, had decided to remove them back in the 1930s.

Another fine romp a couple of miles across the top of Wilsford Down brought us south onto the heavily trafficked A360 again, but we had to suffer only a few yards of this before turning right by Druid's Lodge and taking a winding, partially surfaced council road west towards the tiny village of Berwick St James. With the clock fast approaching five, the baking heat having sorely depleted our energies, the dust caking our throats and noses and a long drive home still ahead of us, Roy S, having long since drained the last of his CamelBack, succumbed to mild dehydration. So at this point Roy A wisely elected to retrace some of the trails we'd travelled earlier so's we could get back to Baverstock before fatigue completely did us all in.

Dazed and Confused

These included the grassy, rutted track to Steeple Langton which Major so-and-so had privately signposted, and I must admit that keeping the Yam in the groove at a steady 20-25mph proved far more taxing than it had done first time round. In fact as we finally got onto the cross country section south of Hanging Langford I fell prone to the crushing exhaustion and problems with concentration I'm told are symptomatic of heat-stroke, and was glad to stop and quaff what little water there was left in my Hydrapak at the bottom of West Hill. Fortunately just three miles

DOING THE ROUNDS

20079

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We didn't stop and take pictures of those old stones, honest...



later we'd exited Monarch's Way, turned back onto the B3089 and into the Penruddock's car park after a journey which, despite the dramas and delays of the day, had led us along 74.3 miles of some incredibly beautiful Wiltshire scenery, most of it off-road.

Looking at the map (OS Landranger 184), I realised the truth of what both Rob and Roy A had separately claimed to me during our day out, namely that on and around Salisbury Plain it's possible to ride for hour after hour, even day after day, along legal trails without ever having to cover your tracks twice... unlike us lot on this sweltering



Plain Sailing?

Saturday. However the downside of riding in an area where there's so much military activity is that if you stray off the legal path - and on the Plain itself that's easily done given the confusing plethora of tank and other heavy vehicle tracks - the chances of coming up against an Army Ranger, or even being swooped on by an Air Corps helicopter, are fairly high. And with their new-found powers to confiscate illegally used MPVs, you need to make damn sure you stick to the right Rights of Way in this part of the world.

But as we gulped much-needed shandies in the pub garden, Andy pulled out his Palm Pilot and shrewdly noted that all you need is to download

the appropriate OS software so that you can prove with pin-point accuracy exactly where you are to any of the Forces of Darkness who might challenge you. In some ways it's a sorry sign of the repressive times we live that we need to invoke the latest technology to keep ahead of the game, but I guess if Rob still had his fuel-injected Gasser, he might be looking at that as a mixed blessing...

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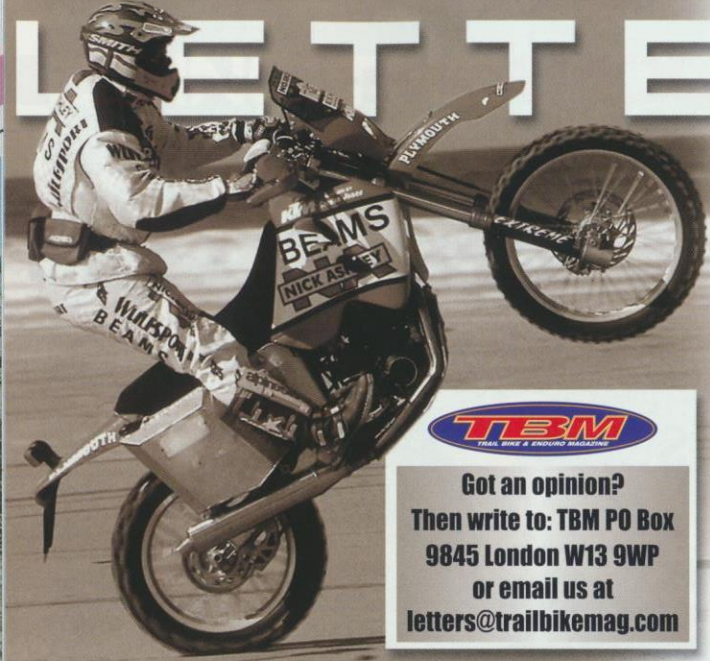


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Slinging in the rain

Dear TBM

Here's a top tip I hope you never need to use: How to make a splint for a broken arm whilst on the trail.

1 - Take kneepads off and strap



them onto arm to support it.
 2 - Use waterproof over-trousers for a makeshift sling.

As you can probably tell, this brainwave of first aid was devised from experience, as I had the misfortune of coming off and breaking my arm. Our makeshift splint was so admired by the ambulance driver and

staff nurse at the hospital (as it was so supportive), it was only taken off when I was sent to x-ray.

So it's a useful top tip at a time when it's difficult to think clearly. Let's hope you or your readers never need it.

Sarah Norton
 Bromley, Kent

Sorry to hear about the arm, Sarah. Using your kneepads to form a splint really is a top piece of ingenuity, and would probably put Ray Mears to shame. Here's wishing you a speedy recovery...



Party Animal

Dear TBM

First off, as Star Letter award winner from the last issue of Supermoto Magazine, thanks for the goggles. They are probably the only things I will ever win to do with motorcycling... and very nice they are too.

Right, the real reason for this letter is that in TBM 108 there is a write-up on the BMW GS1200/Green Dragon Rally of Discovery.

Referring to the last night, Blez makes reference to 'drinking and merrymaking' and also passes comment on somebody falling asleep at the bar. As an entrant in this event (on a CCM404, but not the dry stone wall demolishing one!) I thought you may be interested in this photo that I took of the man himself, partying hard long into the night.

Steve Wright
 Macclesfield, Cheshire

Glad you like the goggles, Steve, and thanks for the shot of Blez. He may talk a good party, but when it comes to the crunch it would appear he's better off taking an early night with a nice cup of Ovaltine...

Dick-tionary Definition

Dear TBM

Yes, it's me again! Your walking, talking spell-checker from issue 105. Firstly, it was good to meet you (The Ed) at the Dakar Conference in London; your expression was worth the trip!

Secondly, oh dear, oh my... Take a moment to re-read your editorial in the August issue. Particularly the first sentence at the top of the right-hand column.

You did, of course, mean Reliant Robin, didn't you? As in a vehicle named Robin, produced by a manufacturer called Reliant, yes?

Thirdly, and at the risk of being labelled an anorak-wearing rivet counter, I would like to try and clear up the confusion over the Suzuki DR500 mentioned in August's letter pages.

True, there was a 500cc version of the DR400S twin-shock 'enduro' spin-off of the GN/SP models (in fact, one was for sale locally last year), and it would not really make a wise choice for purchase, certainly not at the price mentioned. But, there was another DR500, which looked like 'our' DR600. This mono-shock version appeared in the late Eighties and in the US market was called the SP500. It was cosmetically identical to the DR600 and most likely mechanically too (except the barrel and piston of course).

However, if the model mentioned was the later mono-shock model, I still wouldn't recommend it at that price, as a UK DR600 could be bought for that, or even less, with no potential spares or information problems.

I await your next editorial...

Steve Thomas
 Wirral, Cheshire

Thanks for imparting your wealth of knowledge on out-of-

date bikes, Steve - the bottom line being you came up with the same conclusion as we did. As for your comments on the Reliant Robin/Robin Reliant conundrum in our editorial, the name was used 'loosely' in much the same way that a Yamaha TT-R250 might be referred to as a Yamaha TT250R or even a 250TT-R Yamaha. Surely you had that figured out mate... All we can say is that the evenings must just fly by in your house...

The Z-Files

Dear TBM

A word of warning for all DR-Z owners. I recently had the misfortune to high-side my DR-Z on the road. As if stuffing my elbow and my shoulder wasn't bad enough, I also put a hole in the bike's generator cover.

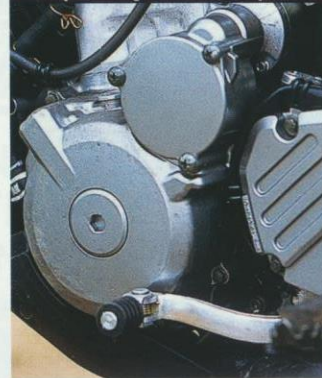
Now how does that happen when it's fitted with a folding gear lever? Well, if you consider the mechanics of a crash like this, the bike hits the ground with little or no forward momentum, so the little bugger doesn't fold.

The really annoying part is that I'm sure I could have got away with a dent and not a ruddy great hole! On stripping down the casing I noticed there was a nice neat little cut in the middle of the piece that was punched out. I compared this with the gear lever and guess what, a perfect fit with a moulding flash on the backside of it.

This shape can only be likened to a blunt chisel, but cuts through magnesium alloy as it were cheese. It's located at the very end of the lever and can easily be felt if you put your finger between the lever and casing.

My advice to all DR-Z owners is to whip off the lever and set about it with a file, to give it a nicely rounded end. It may save you £150!

DR-Z and CCM 404 owners, round-off the inside edge of your gear lever to stop it holing the case in a spill...

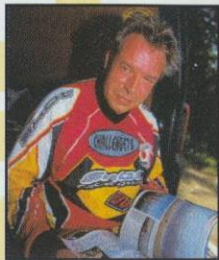


Hans Taylor
 Alton, Hants

Without wanting to sound too much like a second-hand car salesman, 'they all do that, sir'. We mentioned the need to take a file to the back of the Suzuki's gear lever a long while ago in TBM Hans, probably just after the first bike in the country hit the deck with any force. But I'm sure a lot of new DR-Z (and CCM 404) owners will thank you for bringing it to their attention again. Frankly, it's a shocking piece of design, though no doubt it keeps sales of generator covers healthy!

Interestingly, SMR Huskies suffered a similar problem (it was more the cases at fault, than the gear lever) and a raft of heavy-duty covers are now available for them. We've never seen any for the DR-Z but if you click onto thumpertalk.com and take a look in their shop you'll find CFC stick-on case protectors. They're not pretty (and you'll need to get them posted from the States) but they should help prevent it happening again...

You can now email your letters to TBM by sending them to letters@trailbikemag.com.



DIRTY

'HAPPILY FOR MY BANK BALANCE THE 'TO BE THROWN OUT' PILE HAS REMAINED RELATIVELY SMALL'

For those cynics amongst you out there in Readerland who thought (nay hoped) you'd heard the last of the Great Evans Bike Project, I have bad news - it's running bang on schedule! Following the two hour sweaty partial strip-down of my yr-2000 KTM 400EXC alluded

get more use out of their dirt bikes than your humble scribe?

The 'to be cleaned' pile caused momentary indecision until a mate of mine, Clive Dredge, Uber-Gruppen-Fuhrer of Team Desert Rose, came to the rescue. On enquiring if he might have anything as sophisticated as a bespoke cleaning bay, he managed to suppress his 'who does this joker think he is expression' long enough to explain that the best solution would be to fill up a large plastic tub with warm water and Bold Automatic and let the whole lot soak for a couple of hours. The whole lot being in this case, radiators, rear subframe, fork yokes and various other bits of metalwork. Of course I was as sceptical about this piece of advice as I am about all 'bons mots' escaping from Herr Dredge's lips. And then was utterly astonished when all the crusty junk came out gleaming just as he said it would. My delight was only slightly diminished when he later told me that the heavily soiled cycle of his dishwasher would have achieved even better results - a treatment apparently reserved for Madame Dredge's (aka Patsy Quick's) cosseted 660 rally bike.

Which just left the 'to be sent off to somebody who knows what they are doing pile'. In the case of the frame this meant putting old bolts in all the various orifices, (another Herr Dredge tip), delivering it to the sand blaster geezer, picking it up two days later and then drop-

ping it off at the spray paint geezer. Total cost 90 quid, and joy at getting hands on flawlessly finished gloss black work of art.

A top-end engine rebuild kit from Wonderful Wendy at Sussex Sportmotorcycles cost about the same money, and this and the complete motor are now in the capable hands of Egg at K&S Racing. In the unlikely event that everything goes according to plan I should be able to start the rebuild next week and have the whole thing finished in time to bore you to death with the final instalment in next month's issue. If the editor is feeling particularly generous he might even see his way to putting a photo of the beast in the top left hand corner of this column - instead of one of me wearing a gimp mask...

to in last month's column, I returned to the scene of the crime a couple of weeks later with a clearer head and a few more plastic boxes to finish the job. And, sensing that putting it all back together again might be a little easier by introducing a touch of method to my madness, nuts and bolts and various other 'small parts' got carefully placed into labelled freezer bags. Oh the joys of being a part-time anal-retentive!

Once everything was in a million pieces the chaos got divided into three piles - 'to be cleaned', 'to be thrown out' and 'to be sent off to somebody who knows what they are doing'. Happily for my bank balance the 'to be thrown out' pile has remained relatively small, and amounted to no more than all the plastics, the throttle cable and the frame protectors - testament to the large number of kilometres the bike has covered - had actually worn completely through in places. Does anybody else on the planet

CHRIS EVANS GETS TO GRIPS WITH A PROJECT...



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COMPLETELY RUTTED



Having succeeded in persuading a local MP to become an honorary member of my local TRF group early last month, in the obvious belief that it will bestow some credibility to our RoW crusade, I allowed myself a brief moment of self-congratulation. But listening to the Radio 4 news the same day I received his e-mail, I realised that with all the war, genocide, pestilence and large scale injustice taking place in this world, having on about the discrimi-

MARK WILLIAMS PONDERES THE TRUE VALUE OF CELEBRITY STATUS

nation being dumped on a few trailriders by tinpot politicians and the braying NIMBYs who energise them suddenly made me feel rather ashamed.

Fleeting though this moral quandary might've been, it was abruptly thrown into relief when I happened to hear Janet Street-Porter's strident mockney tones on the programme which followed, prompting the thought that I should perhaps direct my concerns at society's slavish worship of celebrity, which nowadays seems to transcend every other human quality. It was one of those well-meaning, slightly earnest but ultimately spurious talking shops Radio 4 specialises in, the subject being anger, and Janet's very good at anger.

What made her particularly incandescent with rage (her exact words) was coming across motorbikes when she's out hillwalking. She shouts and screams at them she said, because they spoil the peace and quiet of the countryside, she said, and that's why she was giving all her support to the campaign - note the word 'campaign' - to stop them.

If you were (un)fortunate enough to be working from home and thus able to listen to morning radio, then your blood might also have boiled at her utterances, much the same as it did if you read her anti-trailriding tirade in the Independent on Sunday last spring. Which considering the nature of the programme, was ironically appropriate. However at this point I should declare an interest, because ages ago in a parallel universe, Janet Street-Porter was a regular and fairly close acquaintance of mine.

As she was married to one of my best friends for a couple of years (Janet is famously known as something of a serial bride), and for a time I went out with the presenter of a TV programme she produced (I was once infamously, if of course erroneously known as a serial philanderer), I got to know her as the highly amusing and extremely intelligent woman that she is. And although I've had contact with her only briefly in the last decade, those qualities still deter me from dismissing her as the hysterical bigot many of my trailriding colleagues might now view her as. And years ago, when she lived in the aptly named Little Britton in London's Clerkenwell, she had a skull and crossbones flying from her house - a nice, rebellious touch for such a powerful TV mogul. Sadly however, such anarchic tendencies have obviously been diluted by the passage of time (and at least two more marriages).

In fact Janet once canvassed my thoughts on a TV motorcycling project, so I don't think she's completely anti-biker, but in a sense this isn't the issue. What's at stake here is the aforementioned and entirely specious power of celebrity endorsement, emphasising, as

MARK WILLIAMS

it does that politicians are as susceptible to their influence as the public they allegedly serve.

Showing my advanced years and an incipient tendency to emulate 'Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells', I can remember a time when Ministers were above, if not actually *disdainful* of such twaddle, but these days most of them court publicity for its own sake and, as such, are virtually indistinguishable from the celebrities they once wisely distanced themselves from.

Now I don't know exactly to what extent Alun Michael is in the thrall of Janet Street-Porter, but it's obvious that she was invited to become president of the Ramblers Association - who certainly did have his ear when he was drawing up the current proposed RoW legislation - precisely because she was a highly visible public figure.

And the conclusion I regrettably reach from this is that in an age where barely articulate, wannabe celebs launch careers after a stint on Big Brother, and dozens of magazines prosper by trumpeting the fictional activities of talentless soap 'stars', we may be on a hiding to nothing if we don't respond in kind. In other words, we need some dirtbiking celebrities to fight our corner.

Pondering this hideous prospect, I couldn't however come up with a single A-, B- or even C-list 'personality' who might fit the bill with the possible exception of Ewan McGregor, who's currently halfway round the world piloting his BMW R1200GS. Sure there are a handful of popsters who occasionally get photographed on roadbikes, but these days their fame is so ephemeral it's hardly worth trying to convert them to knobblies as they'll be back in miserable obscurity before the dreaded Bill is even finalised. Ditto more durable music-biz icons like Radio 2's Harley-riding Johnnie Walker, but after his much publicised cocaine abusing incident, maybe he's not such a good bet. And then there's Ozzy Osbourne, one of the rock world's most enduring luminaries, if not its sharpest intellects. But his passion is for quads which aren't quite the same as dirtbikes... and which he's more famous for falling off than anything else.

These are cheap jibes I know, but there's a serious point struggling to be made here, and whilst

enduro aces like David Knight and Paul Edmondson may be reasonable sportsmen who deserve all the praise we heap on them. Outside the enduro world they have very little clout as off-road ambassadors.

True, the TRF has Lord Strathcarron as its benefactor, another nice guy who's nevertheless become a kind of rent-a-patron for beleaguered biking groups. But his celebrity profile is infinitesimal compared to a Jeremy Clarkson or even a Maserati-racing über-babe like Jodie Kidd. And it's people like them who are called upon whenever a newspaper hack needs some pithy punditry on the inequities of speed cameras or traffic calming. Trailriding simply doesn't have them and the hiking lobby and the NIMBYs - most of whom have fled the cities where they really belong - most certainly do.

Which brings us back to Janet-Street-Porter, or Janet Hill-Walker as Private Eye might possibly refer to her these days.

You may recall that several of the TV shows she launched in the '70s and '80s - like The Tube and the Rough Guides - made the likes of Terry Christian and Magenta De Vine into bona fide and rather more intelligent public icons than the current crop, and there's another lesson to be learnt from this. I think it's our collective duty to trawl through our address books

(plus the TRF's membership lists) and volunteer some likely candidates for the next series of Fame Academy and Big Brother, or at least form a rap-group with highly public anti-feminist tendencies and bad drug habits. When they become famous, as they inevitably will, their breathless pro-trailriding mantras and gaudy off-road leisurewear will do more to further our cause than however many MPs you might've persuaded to join your local TRF group.

On second thoughts, maybe that wasn't such a bad move after all, for today's MP is tomorrow's minister, which means that he, too, may someday be an influential celebrity. So if you can't find the next Jade Goody or Will Young, then sign up your local politician... always assuming he can be persuaded that our votes matter. And that Janet hasn't got to him first...

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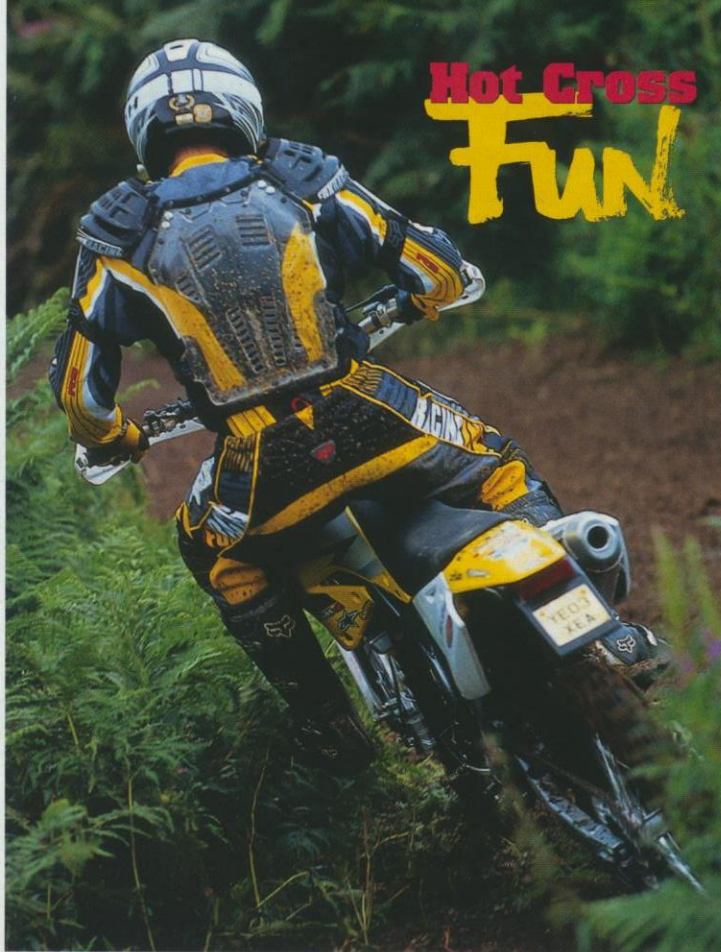
Instead of opting for a dedicated 250 enduro thumper, should you be looking a little further afield? TBM got hold of an enduro-ready Suzuki RM-Z250 and tried to settle the argument...



Hot Cross Fun!

STORY: SI MELBER: PICS: JB





Hot Cross Fun

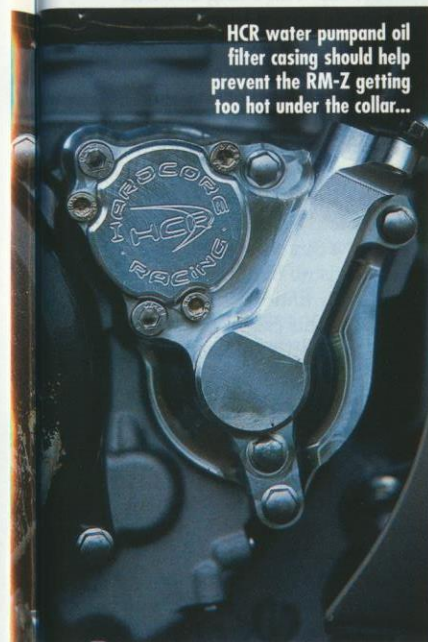
they'd have completely decorated their palm-frond shelter with pretty sea-shells. What's more, they'd already be looking at brochures for sustainable teak garden furniture. Frankly, they'd no more think of competing against one another than they would of barbecuing the island's resident giant turtle: which of course they'd already have christened Gerald, and would have decorated his burrow with sea anemones. In fact, the only time there'd be competition between them is if a lone male rescuer turned up to help. Then you can bet there'd be competitive grass-skirt outfits, coconut-shell bikini tops and arguments over who could find the prettiest flowers for their hair.

That's the great thing about blokes - we can become competitive about anything at all - and you only need two blokes for a competition. Any more and it becomes a full-blown race. So,

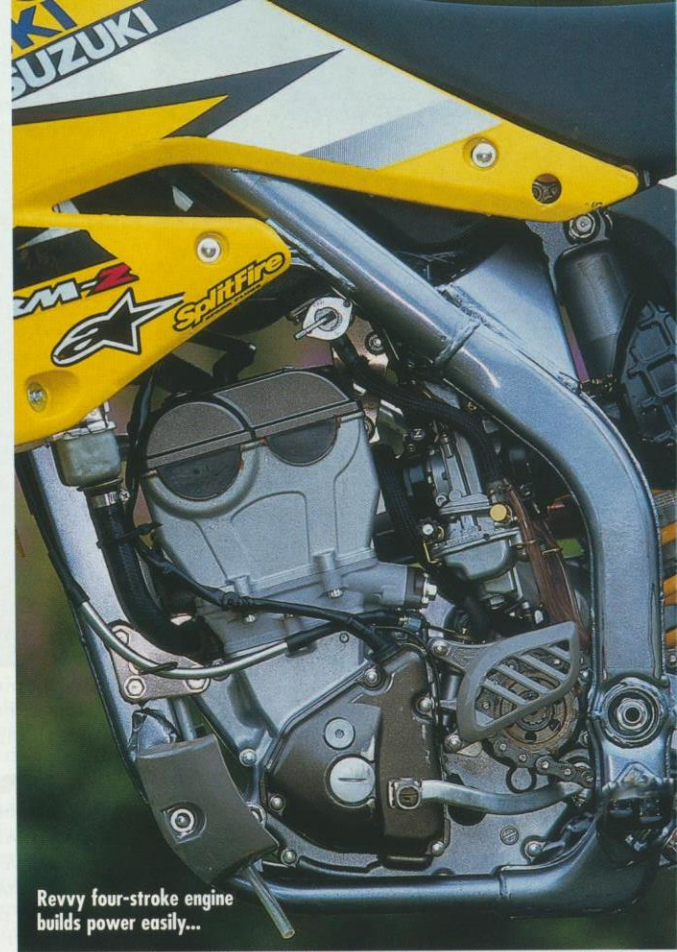
when three of us blokes turned up to test an enduro-ised Suzuki RM-Z250 up near Pickering in north Yorkshire, well it didn't take long for the stopwatch to be pulled out of the van's glovebox and for a mini special-test to be laid out. The rules were simple: fastest time wins, unless that happens to be somebody other than me. In which case it's best of three... Game on!

So What Is It?

You could be forgiven for asking what the hell's an RM-Z250? Certainly not an enduro bike - though it damn well ought to be. It's actually Suzuki's latest offering in the highly competitive 250 MX thumper wars. But such is Suzuki GB's inability to think outside the box (let alone the playing field), that nobody there figured out that with a few subtle modifications, one of these Z-bikes might make a memorable enduro weapon. But that's the trouble with the sort of people who market bikes rather than ride 'em: they don't know their 'Rz' from their elbow.



HCR water pump and oil filter casing should help prevent the RM-Z getting too hot under the collar...



Revy four-stroke engine builds power easily...

The trouble with blokes, as my other half is always pointing out, is that as a subspecies we're just too damn competitive for our own good. She's got a point. If there were two blokes marooned on a desert island with nothing but a single palm tree between them, you can bet that within five minutes they'd have forgotten about finding food and shelter, and instead organised a 'who can shin up the tree the fastest' race. Once they were bored of that, they'd doubtless sit down in the shade of the palm tree and place bets on who'd be first to get struck on the head by a coconut. And finally there would be fierce competition to see who could contract malaria the quickest. Well a win's a win - isn't it?

Women on the other hand are completely different. Two women stranded on a desert island would organise themselves into a 'community partnership' so that each could look after the palm tree while the other was sunbathing or working out. They'd work together and help each other so that by the end of that first week

Instead, it was left to a dealer (and enthusiastic off-roader) to figure it out. Paul Butfield from York Suzuki, did exactly that. He started with a stone-stock 2004 RM-Z to which he added an Acerbis lighting kit (using the bike's existing power supply which is sufficient to run lights), bolted on a hydraulically activated rear brake light switch, together with an HCR water pump/oil filter billet casing (RM-Zs are notorious for overheating, and Suzuki's ingenious 'one-piece' waterpump design on the '04 means that you can't replace the oil filter without draining the coolant!). He topped it all off with Renthal TwinWall bars, wraparound handguards and an electronic speedo, finally altering the gearing to 13/45T with Renthal sprockets. Despite being an extremely quick MX rider, Paul actually built it for trail riding on, and the bike was registered when we rode it. However, we reckoned it would make a better enduro mount than trail bike, and having ridden it I'm inclined to think we made the right decision.

Light Speed

Unless you've slung a leg over one of the current crop of MX derived 250 four-bangers, you really haven't lived - dirt-bike wise. Comparing a bike like the RM-Z with say a Honda XR250, is a bit like comparing a night out with Pamela Anderson to a night in with a curry: Edwina Curry, that is. They may both have a reputation as enthusiastic lovers, but you'd only want one of them sharing your toothbrush in the morning...

It's an age thing... with the bikes I mean. Progress has allowed modern dirt bikes to develop heaps more power from a much more compact powerplant than ever before, and the resultant lack of mass in the motor has in turn allowed engineers to build lighter but stronger frames. The result in the Suzuki's case, is a claimed dry weight of just 92.5kg. Now even allowing for a bit of creative copywriting in the brochure specs, that still means that with the engine and forks full of oil, the tyres full of air and the fuel tank brimmed with 7.5L of highly-taxed unlead-

ed, you're still only looking at about 105-108kg, tops. Add in the extra weight of the aftermarket enduro kit and I reckon 112kg would be a realistic figure. That's extremely light by four-stroke enduro bike standards.

Climb aboard the Suzook's lofty (960mm high) seat and you'll find your knees embracing a slender steel perimeter frame, in the centre of which sits an extremely narrow tank - surrounded by small tapered rad shrouds. This being an MXer there's no electric-start to get your motor running. Instead you need to fold out the ally kick-start and give it a healthy kick. There's an auto-decompressor which means kickstarting is relatively easy, and a hot-start lever mounted on the left bar further helps the process of bringing to life an overheated engine. That said, lighting the Suzook's fire was a less than guaranteed operation - not helped by its fairly high mounted kicker. At 340mm (13.4in) the Suzuki's got plenty of ground clearance which is no bad thing, but inevitably all that fresh air under the engine has to come at a price, and in this case it makes for a tall bike. You obviously notice this not just when hopping aboard the thing, but also when turning it round - and to a lesser extent when you're riding it.

Let's Ride

With most bikes you can usually tell within the first 30sec whether or not you're going to enjoy the ride. I've got to confess the Suzook wasn't at all like that. At first, just zipping around for a few early photos it felt exactly like a converted motocrosser (no surprise there). But what I didn't discover until I'd spent more time on the bike and we'd extended our course to include some fast-ish tracks with water-splashes, a small section of muddy ruts, a couple of rocky outcrops and a technical sandy hillclimb, was just how well this thing handled the sort of terrain which litters a typical enduro. The RM-Z just lapped it all up and didn't demand anything back from the rider. Amazing. Earlier on it had felt a bit too tall geared, too aggressive on the power delivery (a bit too snappy) and just a bit of a handful for a 250. Now it felt fast, competent and incredibly stable. I hadn't expected that last one at all.

In fact the beauty of the RM-Z was that the faster you went, the less energy it seemed to require. At low speed the bike had a tendency to demand more from the rider because of its overly aggressive power delivery. Sure it would rail a turn and hook up pretty well on the way out of slippery corners, but it also required careful handling. But get the thing up into the taller gears on faster going and the RM-Z rewarded you with a huge dollop of ability which in turn

increased the rider's confidence. Despite what you'd describe as firm (though not harsh) suspension, it simply refused to be deflected off-line, never shook its head and handled the bumps with aplomb. In fact, although the 48mm Kayaba forks and KYB piggy-back shock felt more KTM-hard than Gas Gas-soft, with a choice of 16 position adjustment on both the compression and rebound circuits front and rear, there's likely to be a setting to suit more or less everyone.

No matter what sort of terrain we pointed the RM-Z over it just seemed to get on with doing its job of keeping the bike heading in a straight line: no headshake, no instability and certainly no problems on the going we encountered. And yet it cornered swiftly and easily without requiring much in the way of rider input. With a rake of 26.5 degrees and 110mm of trail the Suzuki's geometry is not what you'd call conservative; nevertheless, just like Honda have achieved with their CR-F, Suzuki have somehow managed to find quick reflexes without sacrificing stability. I wish all bikes were this good.

On the Gas

And comparisons with Honda's excellent CRF don't just begin and end with the handling. The Suzuki's engine feels very similar in its power delivery to the excellent CR-F. If anything, the DOHC Suzook feels marginally more powerful at the top end, but slightly less torquey lower down than the Unicam Honda motor, but both make surprising amounts of power for mere 250s. And although the RM-Z requires a healthy dollop of revs to do its best work, the engine builds revs incredibly quickly so that it's easy to get it into its sweet-spot and hook different ratios from there. I know there will be those people who say they don't like a 'revvy four-stroke', but believe me, it's not at all hard to keep the Suzuki motor spinning freely in its upper mid-range thanks to its lack of vibes. And when you do, you're rewarded with slingshot acceleration and a surprising turn of speed. But although the RM-Z's engine loves to rev, that doesn't translate into

Suzook is quick, accomplished and amazingly stable. Not like the Ed then...

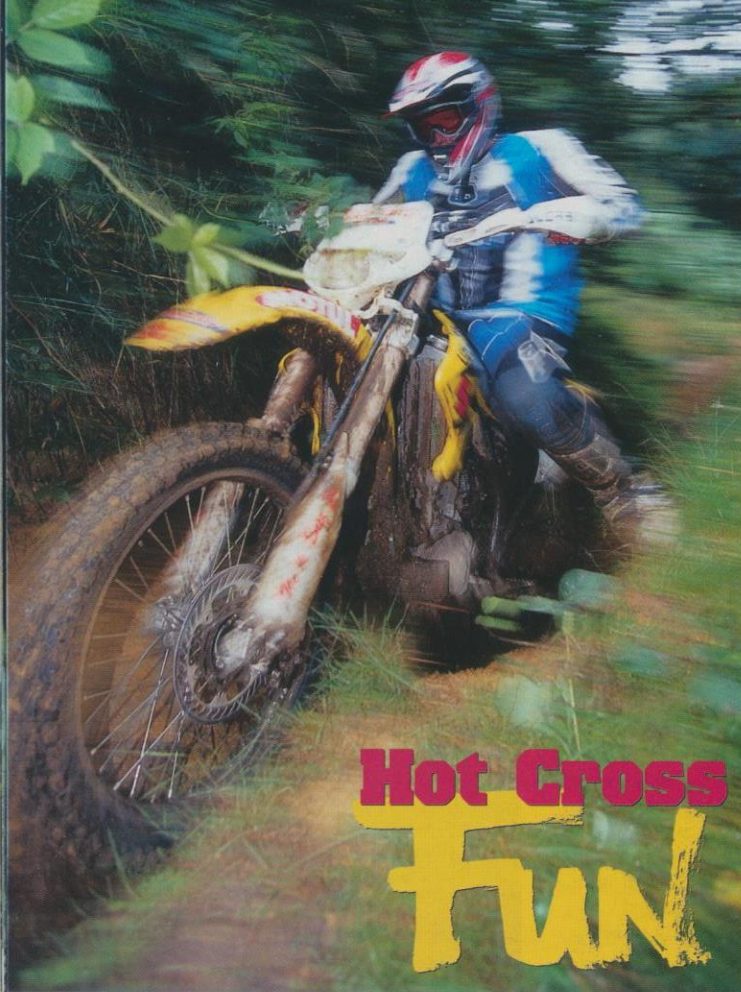


a corresponding lack of traction like it would on say a 450 thumper or 250 two-stroke. That's because despite the stratospheric 13,500rpm red-line and zingy motor, ultimately this 250 puts out a lot less torque than an equivalent 450 at the same rpm. Which means that much like a good enduro 125 stroker, the RM-Z builds power easily

SECOND OPINION

We always have a good chuckle here in the office when people moan about us testing MX bikes. I mean, it's not like we're floating them over 60-foot tabletops and reporting on their ability to clear a triple. Instead, we like to think we base our opinions on their enduro potential. And this RM-Z is the perfect case in point. Sure, it's got a lighting kit on it, a digi speedo and revised gearing but it's still a converted MXer. There's no wide-ratio 'box, the rear wheel's the wrong size and the tank's tiny. But it makes such a good enduro weapon. Although the suspension was still a little firm and worked best at speed, it remained beautifully stable and performed well in the slick conditions. The motor was strong, and all that was lacking was the electric button. So if you're gonna' moan about anything, don't moan about us testing MX machines. Moan about why the manufacturers don't give us enduro versions of these bikes straight outta' the crate... **BARNI**

Hot Cross
Fun!



**Hot Cross
Fun!**

The brakes (250mm front and 240mm rear) are strong and positive, offering plenty of feedback. Interestingly the front uses a kevlar hose - further improving strength and feel. Naturally all the controls are typically Suzuki-light and that includes the five-speed gearbox. What you must remember however is that this bike was built as a motocrosser, so that means no side-stand, no quick-access airbox and a 19in rim out back. The bike's part titanium/part stainless exhaust system is also on the fruity side for enduro use and perhaps a longer silencer might not only help quieten it down, but also endow the bike with some useful torque.

So would I consider owning one for enduro use - or possibly as the owner of this machine has done - build one for the trail? The answer has got to be a resounding yes, though I prefer my trail bikes to be bigger than 250ccs and preferably fitted with a sixth ratio for more relaxed street cruising. That said, there's a world of difference

between this bike and a DR-Z400. This thing is lighter, better specified, miles better suspended and I wouldn't mind betting develops more peak power. It might not be as grunty but in virtually all other respects it'd be a nicer bike to ride. It's simply staggering. As a racer it's even better because it's just so light, so fast and so planted.

But is it any better than a CRF-R? Hard to say really. The Suzook doesn't possess the Honda's style, build quality or bottom-end, but it may be even lighter and more powerful than the Honda. Only a back to back test would split them. But as a hare 'n' hound bike the RM-Z has all its bases covered, and what's more, secondhand Suzukis are miles cheaper than the Honda equivalent.

If you are thinking about buying new, in addition to the full rrp of £4499 for the 2005 model which should be in the shops by the time you read this, you must remember to add the cost of an enduro transformation. Whether that be

and actually puts most of this power to the ground. Consequently you end up going side-ways infrequently, and forwards rather quickly. Nevertheless the RM-Z could still do with a touch more bottom-end for enduro use and interestingly Suzuki offers optional ignition rotors in different weights which according to their brochure allows 'crankshaft inertia to be tuned to suit individual riding styles and specific track conditions.' Nice one.

In fairness, the RM-Z is happy to lug around at low rpm and will chug its way out of trouble when required. The only problem was that if you did accidentally stall it, with no electric-start on hand, you had to go through the whole kick-start rigmarole again.

Other Stuff

In terms of ergos, brakes and other important stuff the Suzook offers up-to-the-minute design,



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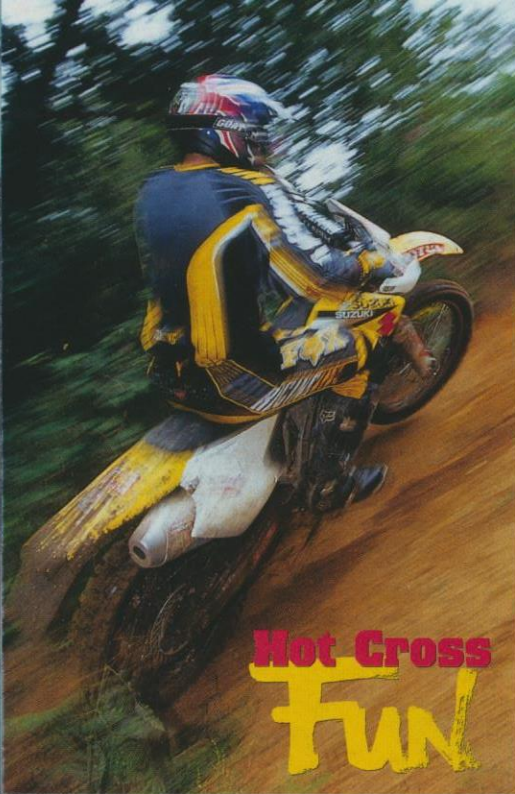
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on the set-up (braceless bars, slightly shorter gearing, 18in rear wheel etc). The bottom line is that a dirt bike is a dirt bike no matter which discipline it was originally intended for.

As for the competition element of our test between the three blokes? Well, modesty prevents me from naming the outright winner amongst us. But let's just say he won fairly and squarely with the quickest time and the lowest overall score. The special test times are printed elsewhere for you to read. In the end it came down to the best of three runs, but the truth is that had the times been a little different, it may well have been the best of five... best of seven... best of...

Thanks Guys: York Suzuki Centre (01904 625404) for lending us their pristine bike, Vic Noble from Motul for helping us arrange this test, and the Farmer in Pickering for the exclusive use of his test track.

Name	ST1	ST2	ST3	Total (in secs)
Si Melber (TBM Editor)	51.5	50.0	49.4	150.9
James Barnicoat (TBM Deputy Ed)	51.3	51.5	50.3	153.1
Vic Noble (Motul Sales)	50.8	50.0	50.5	151.3

nothing more than a headlight or a full-blown legaliser kit from the likes of Pro-Racing, there's going to be some additional spend. On the other hand, Suzuki have addressed many of the 'issues' with the '04 bikes, and the 2005 model features bigger rads, a newly designed oil filter access and tweaks to the porting which they claim give the bike more low-down power.

Frankly, I was amazed at just how good this Suzuki was and yet the bike we rode could have been even better still with a bit more time spent

SUZUKI RM-Z250

Price:	£4495 + conversion costs
Engine:	Liquid-cooled, DOHC, four-valve single
Bore & stroke:	77 x 53.6mm
Displacement:	249cc
Comp ratio:	12.6:1
Transmission:	5-speed
Carb:	Keihin FCR37mm with TPS
Wheelbase:	1475mm
Seat height:	960mm
Ground clear:	340mm
Dry weight:	92.5kg (claimed)
Fuel capacity:	7.5L

TECH SPEAK

Suzuki make great claims for their littlest four-stroke MXer, declaring it to be the 'lightest, most compact, most powerful four-stroke motocross engine of its size ever put into mass production.' Whatever the truth, there's no doubt that there's an awful lot of clever technology packed into those tiny cases. The liquid-cooled, 249cc, DOHC, four-valve per cylinder engine is incredibly short and compact thanks to a dry-sump design and a vertically staggered transmission. The forged alloy piston has cutaway sides and a skirt so short it gets wolf-whistled, while the barrel is composite-coated. The double overhead cams are chain-driven off the crank and ride directly in the cylinder head, the cam lobes operating directly on bucket tappets with shim-under-bucket adjustment. The cams themselves are carburized for less friction and forged from hollow billets. The oil pump has twin rotors, one a scavenger rotor for moving oil from the crankshaft compartment into the transmission; while the other provides pressurised oil to the crankshaft, cylinder head and the underside of the piston.

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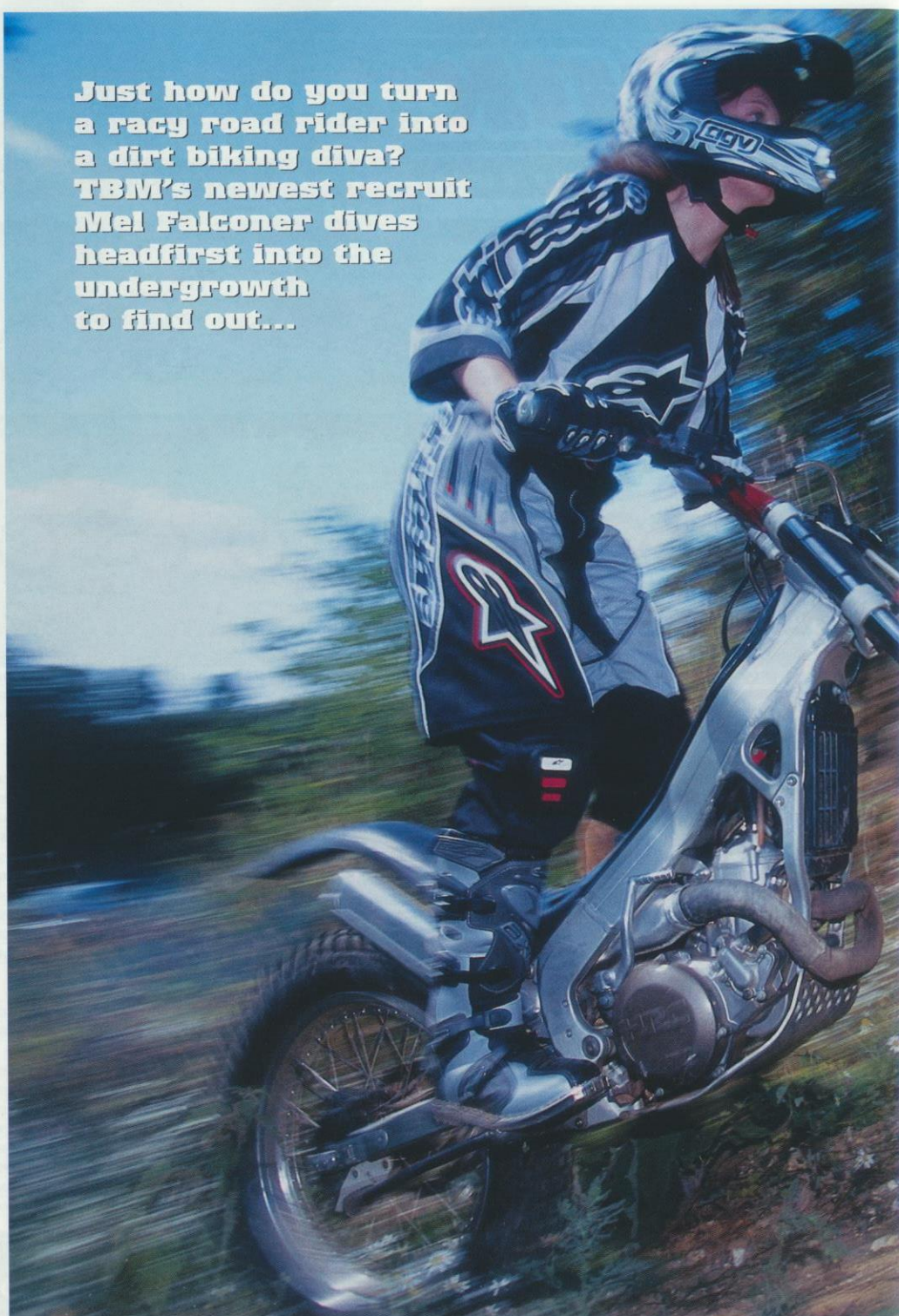
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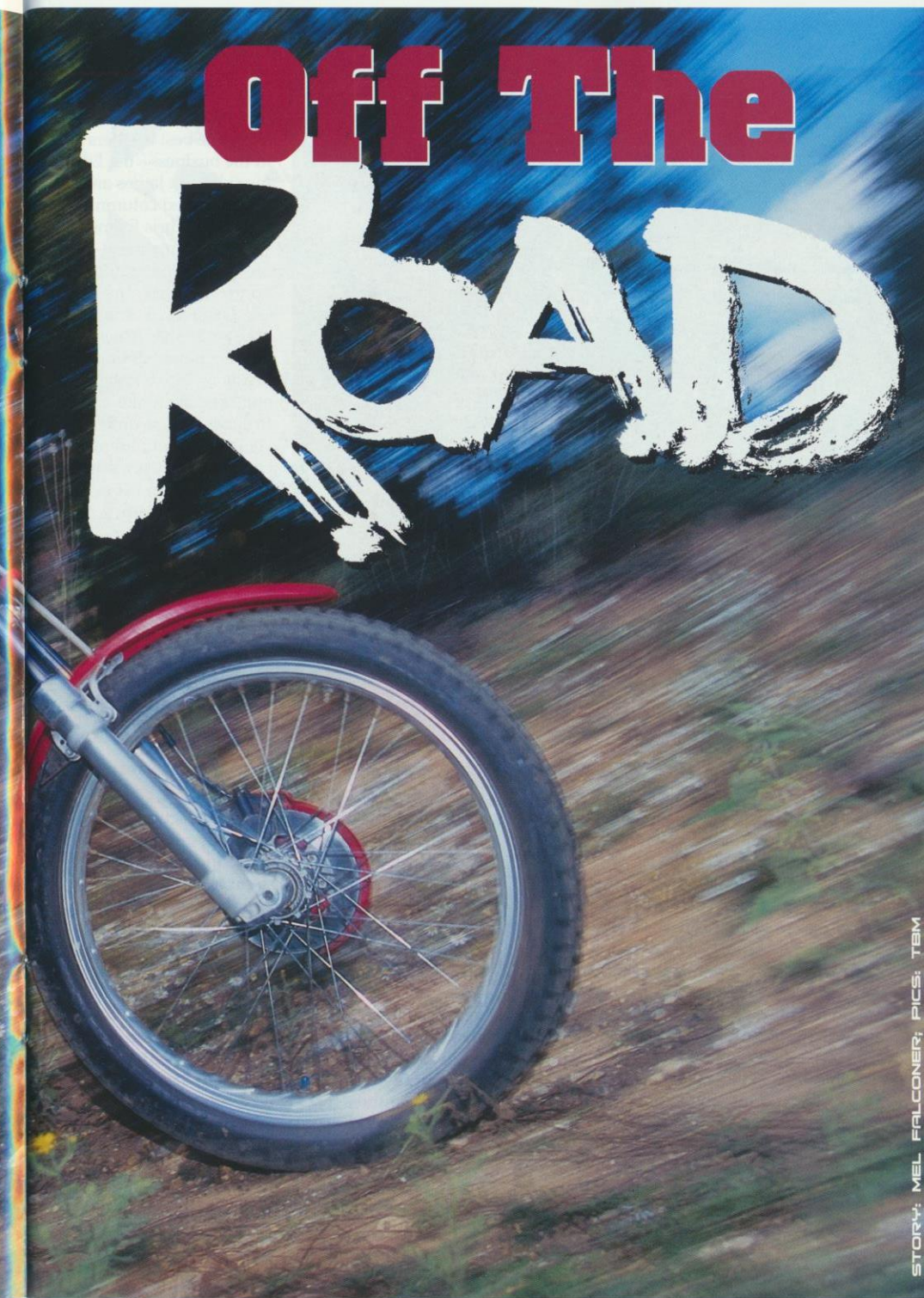
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Just how do you turn a racy road rider into a dirt biking diva? TBM's newest recruit Mel Falconer dives headfirst into the undergrowth to find out...



Off The ROAD



'Okay Melanie. Instead of handling it like a dirtbike, imagine you were holding an iron...'



Rough 'n' Ready

The transition began in earnest a few weeks ago, in the company of, *ahem*, the best teachers in the business - the Ed, his side-kick James and our esteemed columnist Monsieur Chris Evans.

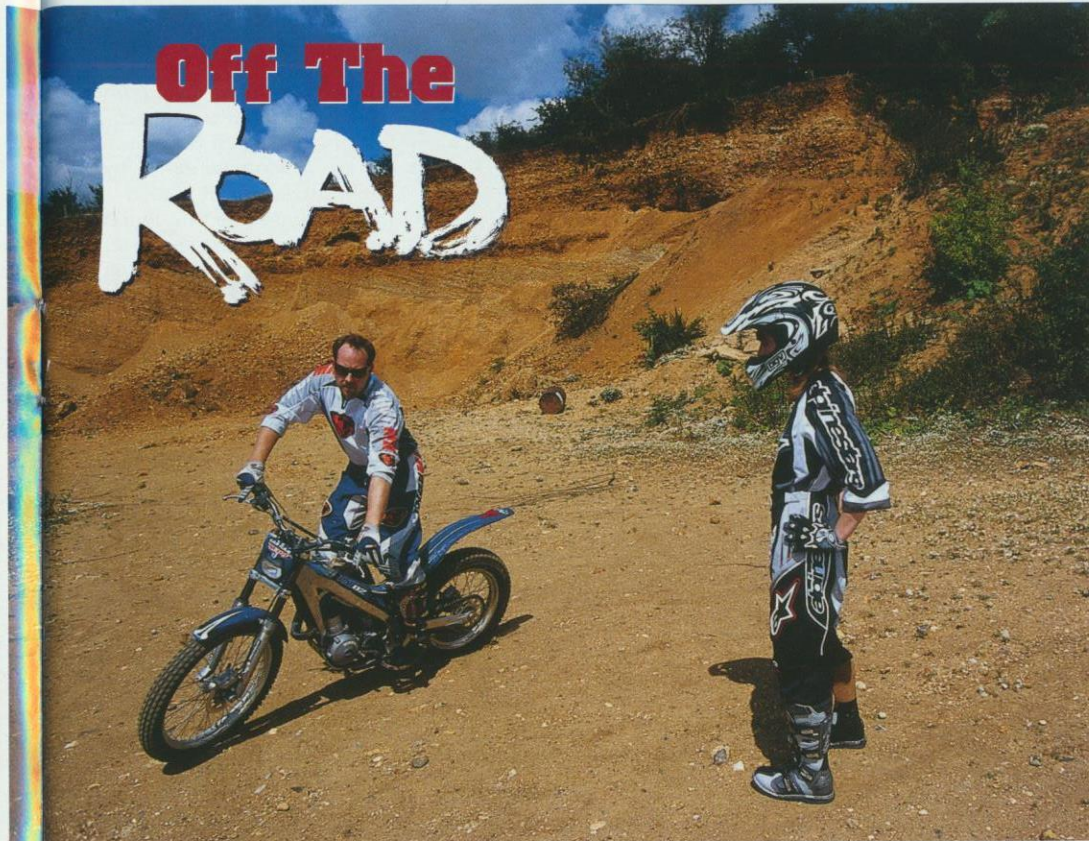
Having only previously wobbled around on the Ed's precious Gas Gas TXT250 trials bike for 20 minutes in the rain before diving headlong into a hedge and bending it like Beckham, I was understandably a bit nervous about a repeat performance. However, I comforted myself with the fact that having watched the TBM boys testing, it seems that crashing is all part of their repertoire.

When we got to our venue, a large red-dirt quarry, I got kitted up and once again clambered onto the TBM trialler. Happily, I

remembered some of my lessons from my first outing and, mindful of damage limitation, was soon pottering around the quarry practicing my turns. Now, this may seem a little pedestrian to some of you, but as I quickly found out, turning on a trials bike is very different to doing it on a road bike. On tarmac I would tip into a corner by weighting the inside peg and counter steering without even thinking about it. Not so on the dirt. First off, it all happens at much slower speeds and so requires more finesse, especially in terms of throttle control. The fact that you're standing up the whole time did feel alien to start with, used as I am to having my pert behind glued firmly to a nice comfy seat. It also felt like I was about three feet above the bike, but, as trials bikes don't have seats, there was no choice.

However, the thing that threw me the most was body positioning. On a road bike, you just lean into the direction of the corner, shift your weight forward slightly and move one bum cheek over a bit if you fancy trying to get your knee down on a roundabout. Back on the trialler, it felt like there was so much more to do in order

Off The Road



WHAT TO WEAR

Donning the right gear to go off-roading is just as important as when riding on the smooth stuff. On my R6, I normally wrap my bod in top-to-toe premium cowhide, but off-road I needed something breathable, lightweight and easily cleanable. Plus, as I found out, off-road gear needs to be baggy (to allow plenty of movement), and be not too warm.

I chose a set of Alpinestars riding gear, opting for their Tech Star range as it came in girl-friendly smaller sizes and looked mighty fine too. What I liked about the jersey was the venting, as it kept me from 'glowing' too much on what was one of the hottest days of the year. A nice touch on the riding pants was the dual pull Velcro waist adjusters on either side, as they gave a closer fit for my figure and were really comfy on and off the bike. Colour options include grey, red, orange and blue.

So, with the jersey, pants and gloves sorted,

a helmet and boots were next on the shopping list. Not one for lairy paint-schemes, I opted for a new AGV AX-6 lid in black and silver, size small - as contrary to popular belief here at TBM, I don't have a big head. Apart from being a decent fit, I liked the styling and the fact it had a double D-ring strap with a separate popper fastener to attach the surplus strap end to.

A pair of Axo RC-6 boots completed my ensemble, again in a tasteful black and silver combo. Being used to soft leather road boots, I was worried MX boots would be clumpy and difficult to get on with, but the Axo's were surprisingly light, with easy-to-do-up buckles that meant I wouldn't break a nail! Other available colours include black, red and white and they come in sizes 6 - 13.

My kit all looks soooo nice, I'm not too sure I want to get it all dirty...

Mention musicals in TBM's office and there's normally a collective groan, followed by badly remembered renditions of 'A Spoonful of Sugar' and 'Wouldn't it be Lovely?' a la Julie Andrews.

Profuse apologies to all those of you who are now humming these tunes under your breath, but there is a point to all this harmonious musing. As a confirmed tarmac hugger before joining TBM's illustrious ranks, I had an idea that riding off-road would be, well, not that much different to riding on it. I mean, how difficult is bimbbling leisurely along country lanes and enjoying the scenery? I was rather looking forward to it all.

But here's where the musical reference fits in: cue 'My Fair Lady'. Little did I realise how much Elisa Doolittle and myself would have in common. Although I will admit to a certain Cockney speech similarity, it was in Ms Doolittle's struggle to transform herself from 'Cockney Sparra' to upper-class lady that I quickly identified with. And no, not the 'lady' part (however much the rest of the TBM crew may wish), but trying to transform myself into a proper dirt bike rider.

Off The Road

Mel crests the big hill on only her second ever go on a trials bike...



to get the bike to turn using the correct technique. Never one to just accept advice and armed with typical sports bike arrogance, I demonstrated I could turn the bike quite adequately by just leaning it in, so what was the problem?

Now at this point, if I were Editor Melber, I would have just let me get on with it and find out for myself why I had to learn to turn properly. Luckily, Si is not me and no doubt had the company liability insurance in mind as he patiently explained why I had to do it his way for what felt like the millionth time. It's just that trying to stick my derriere out in the opposite direction to the way I wanted to turn, (in effect counter-weighting the bike's own mass) keeping the outside peg weighted, plus leaning the bike slightly in as you would do on a road bike (although obviously not as much), was all a bit too much to take in. Especially when I also had to remember to keep my lower arm straight through the turn and the other arm's elbow up at the same time. A definite departure from my usual sports bike 'elbows folded-in' position.

On the Rocks

Feeling like a sulky teenager being told off by my Dad, I got back on and tried again. And at long last, it started to click. Soon, I was turning quicker and tighter than previously and avoiding most of the big pieces of flint that were strewn about the place.

Arguably I should be used to lumps and bumps given the atrocious road surfacing that afflicts most UK highways, but going over loose debris felt quite disconcerting at first as I wasn't sure of the bike's reaction (or mine!)

Mind you, I did now feel more confident and in control of the Gasser using the techniques I'd learned. Because even though I could get round okay using my own style, on some of the sharper turns I leaned in too much with all my weight forward, so the inevitable happened: the front wheel tucked in and I had to plant a foot to stabilise myself. No doubt when I get a little faster, I'll be able to lean the bike into the turn more, but for now just a touch of lean is the right way to go.



After about half an hour of going round in circles, I stopped for a break and to my chagrin, discovered I was well and truly knackered. To be fair, I found I was concentrating a lot harder given that my skills certainly weren't becoming second nature just yet, but it brought home to me just how much stamina is required to ride off-road compared to cruising around on my Yamaha R6. Oh, and I suppose doing some exercise and laying off the gaspers might help as well.

By this time, the Ed was itching to relinquish his parental responsibilities so it fell to Mr Evans to take on the role of guardian angel. With his



Off The Road

divine intervention, my fledging off-road riding career shifted up several gears rather rapidly. You see, Chris isn't a fan of the softly-softly approach, preferring to point towards a hill and let me get on with it, albeit after a few words of encouragement and a quick 'shut the throttle off at the top' warning. So, aboard his good ol' Montesa Cota I got a decent run-up and prepared myself for take-off. After listening to many loop-the-loop horror stories, I was determined (and praying) I wouldn't become one of them.

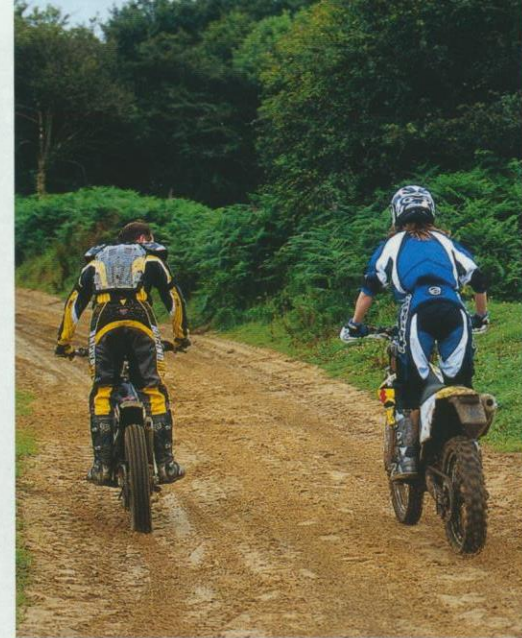
Using a fair bit of throttle at the bottom I began my ascent, keeping the speed and revs steady with my weight forward over the bars, although I didn't remember to keep my head up and look in front - so promptly got my face bramble-lashed as punishment. I then almost lost it once I got to

the top as when I obediently released the throttle, the sudden loss of power made me rock back and instinctively sit down as I reverted back to road bike mentality. But I didn't care as I had just climbed my first ever off-road track! With shaky legs and a big grin I picked my way gingerly down an easier descent on the other side of the hill to where a completely nonchalant Chris was lounging on the grass lighting his usual ciggie.

Get a Grip

Now I had experienced it for myself, I couldn't get over the amount of grip there is on dirt compared to tarmac. It's all very well being told this fact, but having had some scary unplanned loss of traction moments on the road (mostly on ice and diesel I hasten to add), I was a little sceptical.

'It's all downhill from here...



CHECKLIST FOR ROAD CONVERTS

DO: Stand up as much as possible, try and keep your legs fairly straight, your arms bent (elbows up) and your head directly above the crossbar. Find a position which is well forward but comfortable.

DON'T: lean into the turns like you would on a road bike. Instead, sit down, push the bike (down) into the turn, shift your weight to the outside part of the seat (the higher part), and stick your inside leg out and forwards. Keep your elbows up.

DO: try and keep your weight well forward on the bike at all times (except when going downhill).

DON'T: Sit at the back of the seat and think that everything will be alright. It won't!

DO: Buy the best off-road kit you can afford. Make sure it's light weight, washable, comfortable and not too warm (you can always add layers underneath). Opt for a well-known make of helmet, and strong MX boots.

DON'T: Think that you can get away with riding in bulky winter road gear. You'll over-heat in no time.

DO: Always try and ride with friends, and if possible get some coaching.

DON'T: Assume that because you ride fast on the road that you'll become an off-road legend in a matter of minutes...

But after my first successful climb all caution went out of the window as, feeling a little smug, I powered my way up again and, yep, you've guessed it, had to jump off three quarters of the way up, grimly holding onto the Mont for dear life. When mountain rescue finally arrived (in the shape of a rather out of breath Chris), he explained the reason for my downfall. I had not stuck to the easiest path but instead had got all cocky and decided to try a steeper section to the left. At this point I panicked and committed one of the cardinal off-road sins - I chopped the throttle. A mistake I'll try not to make again, although it's a fair bet I will. Suitably chastened, I gassed it back down and then discovered another interesting development - I wasn't controlling my descent as slowly as I would've liked and it all

Off The Road

'Well done love. You couldn't go and stick the kettle on for us could you..?'

next hour zipping about on my own without any further mishap.

Slippery Slope

Armed with my newfound off-road skills, the Ed then decided I was ready to finish off the day in style by attempting to ride up (and then back down) a more challenging section. Challenging meaning a lot steeper than anything I had tackled so far, with a nasty rocky lip just before the crest. Following another brief pearl of wisdom from Chris, this time 'lots more speed at the bottom', I gave the long-suffering Mont some welly and to my amazement managed to scramble up... and then promptly forgot to throttle-off at the top, resulting in nearly carrying straight on up into the air.

Once I had registered this was maybe not such a good idea (I think the Ed's alarmed shouts gave the game away), it was time to go back down the hill. Except that the fear factor suddenly kicked in and despite the Ed's best advice and numerous demonstrations it wasn't happening for me at all. Feeling decidedly like a big girl's blouse, I finally opted for the gung-ho approach and launched off the precipice into the abyss. By the time I reached the bottom, I was wondering, no

doubt along with everybody else, what the fuss had been all about? Well, I am a woman after all.

Probably the biggest thing for me to get to grips with off-road is, well, the grip. Even though there's masses of it, I still need to overcome the mental 'road' block in my head that when the wheels move in a sideways motion, I won't be following suit - well, hopefully not anyway.

Already I'm noticing how riding off-road can improve my existing road riding skills, although making the change from proficient Yamaha R6 pilot to competent off-roader is going to take a little longer than I'd anticipated.

I seem to recall there was a wager on Miss Doolittle to improve her social standing within six months - I wonder who will lose the bet in the TBM offices...

Next Month: In a bid to improve her skill levels, Mel enrolls on one of the Yamaha/Geraint Jones Off Road Experiences. Read it and weep...

felt distinctly unsteady.

In my defence, what Chris had neglected to emphasise (although he'll maintain it's just my female brain not being able to remember more than one piece of information at a time), was when going downhill, you need to lean back instead of forward. This is so your weight shifts to the bike's rear end and it makes it feel a lot more stable under braking, plus if you do hit something or it gets a bit rough, it lessens the chances of diving headfirst over the handlebars.

Eager to put this into practice, I enlisted the help of deputy editor James, who suggested trying a looser, sandy piece of terrain. With James positioned halfway down the descent (ready to jump out of the way if need be), I put the Mont into second, rolled over the lip and leant back, legs straight, with my backside stuck out, using the back brake when my speed threatened to break the sound barrier. It worked a treat, and did wonders for my confidence, as I spent the

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Big Game HUNTING



I hate flying to places, I really do. Now, before you call me a complete wuss, let me qualify that statement. This dislike isn't an irrational fear, brought on by watching 'Airport' one too many times, and nor is it that I particularly object to being herded into an airtight box filled with snotty kids, gobby lager-louts and fat people reeking of burgers. Because the actual flying I rather like and, well, when you can fly across Europe for less money than crossing the Severn bridge you can't really complain about your travelling 'companions'. No, what it is I don't like about flying is that you miss out on so much - so many sights, so many experiences. If you've ever

STORY & PICS: BARNI

looked out of a plane to see a twisting mountain trail or the perfect winding road thousands of feet below and wished you were down there on your bike, you'll know what I'm talking about.

Yep, unless you're heading for the Playboy Mansion, the journey is often just as exciting as arriving at your destination. Which is why, when we needed to get to the French alpine town of Alpe d'Huez for the annual Supermoto des Nations, we decided to ride down there rather than getting a cheap flight to Grenoble.

Last year we chose a couple of supermotos to make the trip (the story appearing in issue 12 of Supermoto Magazine) and it nearly finished us



**1700 miles aboard two big trailies;
TBM headed to France to hunt down some
twisties with pair of big orange beasts...**

Big Game HUNTING



old 2004 model was duly liberated from KTM's Brackley HQ (the '05s not seeing the light of day until later this month).

Ordinarily, as possibly the only other big trailie worthy of the 'trailie' moniker, we'd have picked BMW's R1200GS as the second bike in this test. But having featured the bike twice this year it was decided to give the blue 'n' white roundel a miss and choose something... well, something else.

Triumph's 955i Tiger is just about as different as you can get from the KTM within the big trailie class, what with those cast wheels (new for '05) and fuel injected three-cylinder motor. But very much a road-oriented bike, it might prove just the machine for the journey. And so we put in a call to Hinckley and bagged ourselves a Tiger.

In very un-TBM-like fashion the entire trip was then planned down to the most minute detail. normally we'd have just winged-it, muddled through, and probably have been left sleeping under a bench. But this time the trip succumbed to 'the feminine touch', with new girl Mel organising EVERYTHING

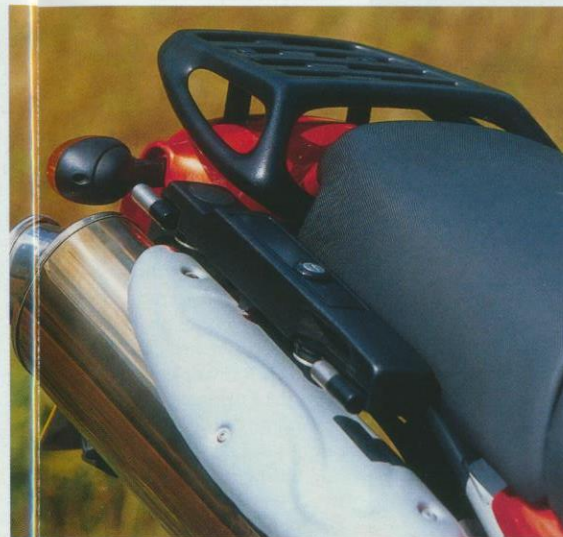
off. It wasn't actually riding the motards which made the journey such hard work, rather the 40-plus degree heat, and having to stop every 45 minutes to fuel up. So this time we wanted something a little bigger (and with a bit more tank range) than a pair of 600 singles for the 600 miles of French autoroute. Big trailies it was then...

Choose Your Weapons

We hadn't taken a ride on KTM's 950 Adventure since the launch back in February last year and this trip seemed like the perfect excuse to put some serious miles on the Katosh. An 800-mile-

(stopping just short of specifying the colour of the loo roll in the hotel toilets) via the wonders of the interweb. Hmmm.

Having made the decision to ride down through France in one day, it was an early start for the run down to Dover. The mean streets of London can actually be quite fun to ride at four in the morning, and the short blast across town on the KTM to meet up with Mel certainly woke me up. However, my lack of sleep soon caught up with me when lugging the fully-fuelled Triumph from its lock-up resting place. With a claimed dry weight of 215kg, the Tiger has a



Above: Triumph's design-features and controls seem quaintly old-fashioned and very conservative - especially when considered alongside the KTM's angular chic. There's nothing much wrong with the fit and finish of the Tiger though...



good 15kg over the 'lightweight' Adventure and with a full tank of fuel it took a good heave to get it out onto the street.

With the Big Cat's top-box well and truly stuffed (full colour-coded luggage is standard on the 2005 bike) it was time to hit the highway. The joys of France ahead of us, it was merely a leisurely 'stroll' down the fog-bound M20, with the Seacat sailing at seven o'clock.

Big Game Country

As the bow doors of the catamaran opened into France we were greeted with warm air and lead-

en skies. Out onto the roads, the KTM carved easily past the gaggle of people carriers leaving the docks, before I grabbed a handful of throttle and pointed it towards the autoroute. The LC8 motor spun up quickly, the Triumph keeping pace behind, and we were soon cruising along in top gear.

There's nothing like three-figure speeds for testing wind protection, and I'd have to say that, with me being just over six foot tall, neither bike is particularly great in this department. Sat upright, the wind buffeted my head around and although it wasn't muscle-strainingly uncomfort-

Big Game HUNTING



hold-ups, Mel ran the seat on its lowest setting. But moving it upwards the riding position was just about right for me. Unfortunately, that position makes you look just like a police motorcyclist - straight back, elbows down, bad moustache etc - as you sit in the Trumpet, not on it.

The Katie's seat couldn't be more different. Hard and flat, you rest on it like you would a dirtbike, and unlike the Ocelot's sculpted seat you can move around on it should it start to feel uncomfortable. Sadly, the KTM's perch is unadjustable. You need to be pretty tall to comfortably touch the ground anyway (Mel found it best to find a handy kerb), though the really lofty rider could opt for the 'in the clouds' 915mm seat of the special order 'S' model. Shorties can purchase a lower gel seat from the options list (at around 80 quid it's well priced) to help them touch down.

It's Grim Up North...

Northern France isn't a particularly inspiring place to ride, and knowing that the Alps are littered with blinding 'big

trailie roads' we pressed on through the grey of the north and into the beige farmland of 'champagne country'. Here the traffic thinned out and the sun put in an appearance for the first time. Hurrah!

Spending hours in the saddle meant that we had plenty of time to properly suss out both bikes' foibles. The KTM seemed slightly more vibey than I remember from the launch. Big chunky vibes resonated through the bars, seat, and rubber-cleated pegs, yet although this was pretty intrusive it didn't really become uncomfortable as such. If you're used to road bikes

able, it wasn't ideal for a long haul. Assuming a slight crouch cured the problem on both bikes. However, aboard the Triumph which was set with the adjustable seat on its lowest position so that Mel's tiny legs would just scrape the floor, meant that my knees were just about level with my goggle strap. Set at the highest position the windblast was markedly worse!

If you unlock the (soft) seat and turn it upside-down, the Leopard's seat-base can be raised or lowered on its frame. It's a basic system, but it certainly works and the 20mm of adjustment can make all the difference. Being five-foot-six in her



Above & left: The KTM is a model of cool, modern design. All the elements work together and are bang up-to-date. Shock preload adjuster swivels out of the way once dialled in. Adventure's dials are clearer and more comprehensive...

you'd probably disagree with me on this one, though. In comparison the Triumph seemed pretty darn smooth, right up until the point that I noticed my hands were going to sleep. Itty bitty high frequency vibrations were getting past the huge bar-end weights and doing their best to turn my fingers a whiter shade of pale!

Mel also complained about this phenomenon whilst aboard the Trumpet, though nowhere near as much as she bemoaned the bike's lack of storage. I'm not talking about the capacious luggage, rather a little cubby hole for coins and cards. At every 'peage', all you had to do aboard the KTM



was undo the Dzus fastener on the tank-top storage compartment, flip the lid, and hand over the ticket you'd stashed within. On the Tiger, however, you were forced to rummage around in your pockets whilst the 'peage bunny' frowned, and irate drivers tooted.

Safari So Good

With the towns of St Quentin, Reims and Troyes far behind us, we stopped for lunch just outside Dijon. Scoffing French sandwiches, we watched from afar as an interested crowd grew around the bikes. Resplendent in its metalflake orange finish,



Big Game HUNTING



the Adventure was receiving most of the attention. And it's not hard to see why. It's a good-looking bike, purposeful yet stylish, with high levels of fit and finish. Dakar-looks combine with relative scarcity to ensure that the 950 gets a second glance wherever it goes.

In the KTM's shadow (both physically and metaphorically) sat the Tiger. The metallic 'Lucifer Orange' paint looked great in the golden sunlight but unfortunately, visually, that's about

all the Triumph's got going for it. The fairing looks outdated, the tank is big and bulbous, and the new wheels aren't too trick either. Oh, and don't get me started on those ghastly looking gaiters on the right-way-up forks. Whilst most of the current crop of big trailies are none-too pretty, that's no reason for Hinckley to follow suit.

The same could be said for the bike's dashboard. With white-faced dials (speed, revs, fuel and temp) seemingly pilfered from the Rover 75 parts bin and set in a swathe of black plastic you're constantly reminded that you're riding an ugly bike. What's more, the idiot lights are too dim and you can barely read the km/h figures in daylight - at night you can't see 'em at all.

Over on the KTM, the digi speedo means that you don't get to see km/h. You can probably change it to read in kilometres but well, frankly, I couldn't be bothered (when it mattered I did a quick conversion in my head!). The figures are easy to read, with a system of bars up the side of the display marking the engine's temperature. Scroll through the modes on the dash and you'll find a clock, and two 'trips' compared to the Tigger's one. The analogue rev counter is easy to read, and the small idiot lights are very bright - great for idiots like us!

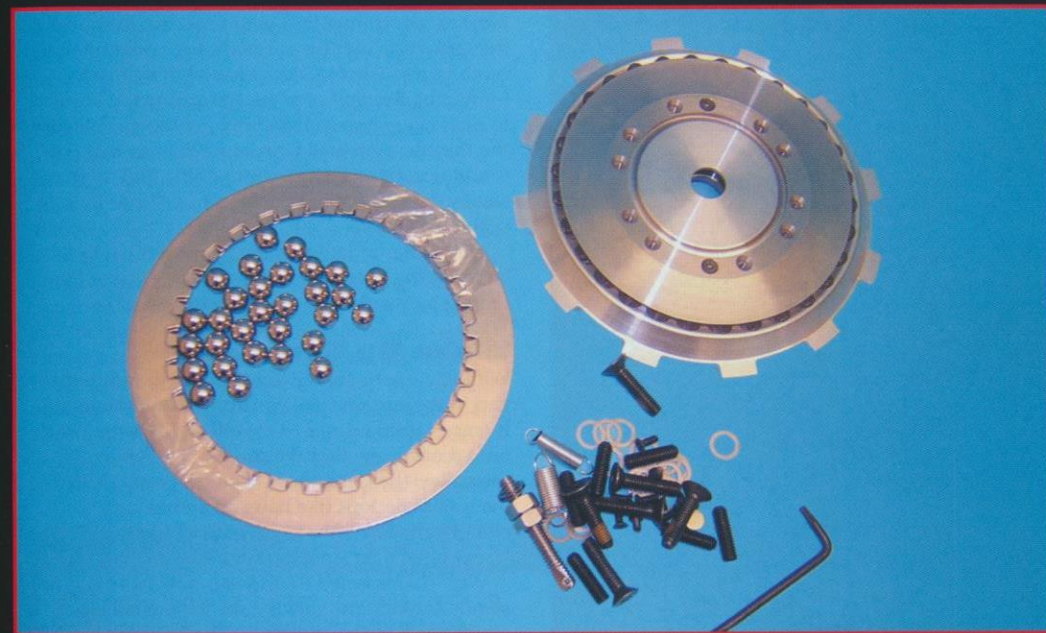
'Corners. Thousands Of Em...'

By eight in the evening we were past Grenoble and had turned off the autoroute, heading for the hills. The road meandered beautifully along the valley, with sheer rock faces to the left and lush forest to the right. Just a couple of small towns

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Big Game Hunting

and the odd queue of traffic disrupted a flowing ride, and before long we were at le Bourg d'Oisans and the turning off the main drag.

The 12km road which leads from the valley floor to the town of Alpe d'Huez high in the mountains, consists of no-less-than 21 hairpin bends. Every year the twisting tarmac climb plays host to the riders in the Tour de France, and spectators daub the road with encouraging words for their heroes, and insults to Lance Armstrong. Quite what they've got against the famous jazz trumpeter I fail to see, but the paint they use certainly doesn't make the road any more grippy. Throw in a splash of diesel from numerous decrepit coaches and you really have to pick your lines well and not get too giddy with the throttle. So it was with some dismay that we found ourselves at the bottom of the 'hill' with a steady drizzle making the blacktop slicker than a politician's smile.

One rather sedate ride later, we were sat in a bar quaffing beer and scoffing pizza, hoping that tomorrow would bring some better weather.

Wake Up Caruthers!

With one eye open, the light spilling through the gap in the curtains looked pretty underwhelming. It wasn't until I dragged myself from the bed and onto the balcony that the sun hit me. Far across the valley, the last remnants of low cloud tickled the mountain tops like hairs on an old lady's chin. High above, the sky was deep, deep blue. It was gonna' be a good day.

With chains lubed (both bikes now have centre-stands as standard, making the job a whole lot easier) we were ready to roll. The Triumph bubbled easily into life, its fuel injection adjusting seamlessly for the change in altitude. Conversely, the KTM's carb-fed LC8 motor was a little more reluctant to fire up, requiring a prolonged press of the starter, and taking longer to settle to a smooth idle.

Gently through town, as soon as the chalets end you're into the twisties. Thanks to its 'over-size dirtbike' riding position you can really chuck the 950 into the turns. Push down on the braceless Renthals, sit on the outside of the seat and the Katosh tips quickly yet predictably into the turns. Attempting a 'knee-down' stance feels as wrong as it does on any dirtbike, and you don't get quite the same level of feedback from the Pirelli front tyre. On the launch I found the bike's Brembos pretty lacklustre, though on this particular Adventure they had an almost perfect balance of feel and power. With a good squeeze on the brakes, the long-travel WP forks dive quickly through the top part of their stroke, but you can always feel exactly what the front-end is doing.

Part of the KTM's great handling has to be attributed to its (relative) lack of bulk and its weight distribution. Holding 22 litres of fuel down its flanks rather than in a regular tank means that the 950 always feels light, and leans progressively rather than falling into corners.

Unfortunately, the same can't be said of the Tiger. The bike flops on its side like a wounded elephant, and takes a fair bit of rider input to get it through the turns. Deciding which cornering technique to adopt was just as hard work. With a low seat and big tank, knee down is probably best but it just didn't feel right. Then again, neither did pushing the bike down beneath me. Whichever method I used, there was little feedback from the front-end and it was hard to tell what the 19in Michelin Anakee front tyre was doing. Thankfully, for 2005 Triumph have stiffened up the front forks (there's certainly less dive than on the KTM) because the original soft units would've been awful on these roads.

Adding to the whole mediocre feel of the Triumph were the Nissin brakes. I can't remember the last time I wrote that Brembos felt better than Nissins, but in this instance the Japanese brakes were hugely disappointing. If you were really going for it into a hairpin, and grabbed a big handful of front brake, the feel and power easily matched that of the KTM's stoppers. But anything less than a committed approach meant

that, as Pinocchio's girlfriend once complained, 'it all felt a bit wooden'. All of which meant that it was a lot easier to get the Adventure down through the 21 hairpins, than it was the Tiger.

Going Bush

The great thing about riding in the mountains is that you don't need to put in any effort to find decent roads. Virtually every turning leads to yet another twisting stretch of tarmac, with stunning views and a precipitous drop just the other side of where the guardrail should be. After one 10km stretch of cliff-face hugging enjoyment, the road climbed higher and higher, before levelling off and cutting through an Alpine meadow. All around crickets chirped, and you could just make out the noise of the mountain streams cascading down the rocks. With a gravel track leading off into the distance, we decided to put in a spot of off-roading. The KTM was made for terrain like this, and (as mentioned earlier) you can ride it almost like you would any dirtbike... that weighed 200kg. The pulses of the big V-twin mean that the rear tyre easily finds traction, right up until you tweak the throttle and tear off sideways in a cloud of roost. As expected, the Triumph was so much harder to ride on the dirt, and I take my hat off to anyone who rides their Tiger on the rough stuff. There's not enough front-end feel, the suspension's not really up to

SECOND OPINION

Seeing the Tiger for the first time was a bit like going on a blind date - it certainly wasn't a looker, but it was honest and reliable and promised a good ride.

Side by side the Triumph's Lucifer Orange paintscheme wasn't quite as bad as it could've been, but it still wasn't a patch on the KTM's citrus-sharp, shimmering finish. Looks aside, at five foot six and weighing in at... well, not a lot, I found both bikes' stature and weight quite a challenge. On its lowest setting the Trumpet's seat was tip-toe height for me and, combined with its bulky heaviness, resulted in difficult low-speed manoeuvring.

Lighter and with a narrower profile, the 'Kibosh' should have been the easier option, but its towering seat height meant I developed an unhealthy obsession for lorry kerbs every time we stopped for fuel on the autoroute.

Despite this, the Adventure was so much more fun than the Triumph; it was friskier, had more low-end grunt, with a better (if quite vibey) riding position, and just felt more capable. I also fell in love with its handily placed,

waterproof storage cubby-hole.

Even though I spent more time in the Tiger's company the only things I missed when I got off it were its mid-range power and smooth delivery. It pulls like Kylie in hot-pants and is in its element on sweeping A-roads.

However, there was nothing powerful about its braking set-up. Only on mirror-flat surfaces did the back stopper work and at first there was no progressive bite, just lock-up. Going into tight hairpins, the Trumpet's front-end was unbelievably vague and the twin discs only came alive with a big handful of lever, not very confidence-inspiring with sheer mountain drops all around you.

Going off-road is a no-no too. The Tiger is a reasonably competent 'sports'-tourer but I'd flinch at taking it up even a gravel drive.

At £1000 less than the Adventure, the Trumpet is a viable option if you're not the dirty type, but for me it's a bit of a Jaffa - lots of potential but fails to deliver. If I wasn't such a shortie, the KTM would definitely be my tangerine dream. **MEL FALCONER**



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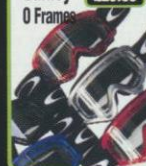
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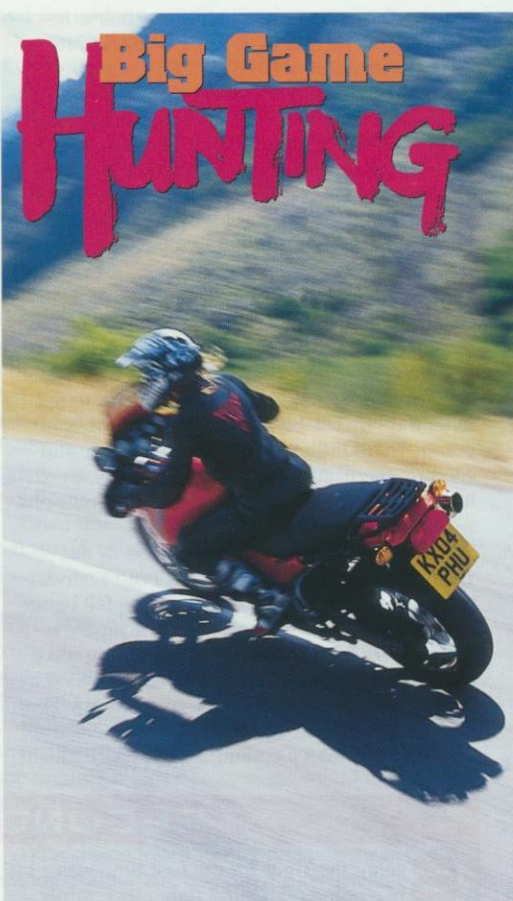


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the abuse, and the peg-to-bar positioning is all wrong. But most of all the motor just doesn't work off-road. The triple is just way too smooth, meaning that when you do get on the throttle everything happens way too quickly.

Whilst it's not ideal for the dirt, the Triumph's 955cc motor is simply blinding on the roads. Although the bike was harder to get through the turns than the Katosh, once the motor had revved quickly through to its mid-range (occasionally helped by a slip of the clutch when driving out of the switchbacks) it simply took off, with a Ferrari-esque guttural roar. There seemed little point in revving it hard as there's no top-end rush, but between the corners you could really haul by keeping the tacho needle buried in the middle of the rev range. Unfortunately, the 'ker-lunk' of the gearshift could probably be heard in the next valley, and had there been any snow on the mountains I'd have been seriously worried.

Similar to the 955, the KTM also comes alive at around 4000rpm, though there's a noticeable

surge at around seven grand (both 1000rpm up on where I remember them being on the launch bikes). Understandably, the V-twin feels slightly less powerful than the three-cylinder motor (it's a claimed 6bhp down), though it was the quicker bike through the twisties simply because it's that much more competent. Even out on the flowing curves of the main roads the KTM felt quicker by dint of having commendably taut suspension (and a slick gearbox!). By contrast, the shorter travel suspension on the Triumph starts to wallow as the speeds rise and some enthusiastic riding is required to hang onto the Adventure's twin tailpipes.

After watching the world's top supermoto racers strut their stuff on the track (you can read the report in Supermoto 17), we took in a bit more off-roading (only on the Adventure, mind) before packing up and heading for home. Before the off, the KTM's underseat toolkit was pressed into service to adjust the chain, and as bike toolkits go it's pretty impressive - comprehensive and of reasonable quality. Thankfully, the 955 didn't require any adjustment because among the cheap tools under its seat I couldn't find anything with which to undo the wheel nut! Doh!

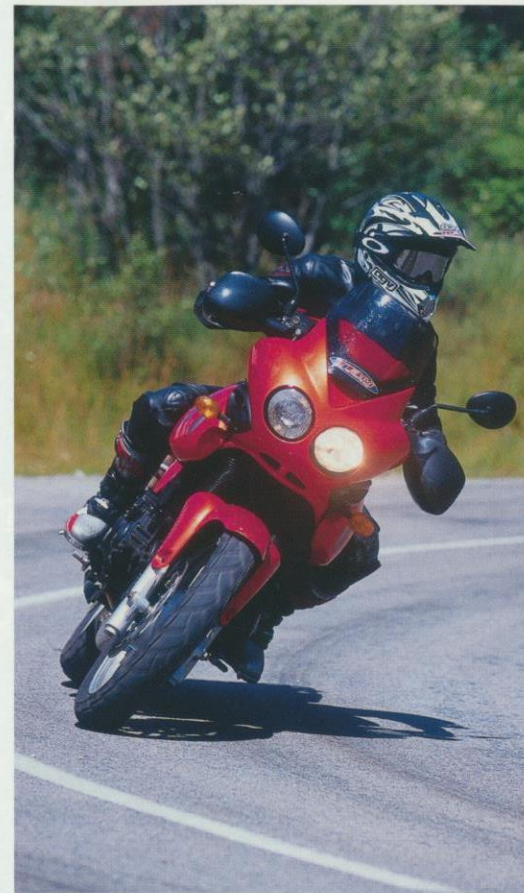
Cat and Moose

By mid-afternoon the Alps were just a distant memory, and we were making good time for our stop-over in the cathedral city of Reims. With little traffic around we decided to try a few top gear roll-ons. In sixth gear, at 60mph, we pinned both throttles. The KTM rumbled and grumbled like Blez at a Weight Watchers meeting, the tacho needle ambling leisurely round the clock.

Meanwhile, the Triumph streaked ahead and was nearly at the next fuel stop before the Katosh got into its stride. Whereas the Adventure had been chugging along at 3000rpm, at sixty the Tiger is spinning at 4000rpm, just 400 revs off its peak torque figure, so it's no surprise then that the Brit bike just cleared off.

Up the speed, or drop a gear and the KTM builds revs quickly and will stay level with the Tiger, even beating it at the top-end. But you do have to keep the motor singing. On the Triumph you simply twist the throttle and the motor winds up like a turbine and propels you effortlessly forward. It's an awesome engine for touring on, and for fast and flowing A-roads, with just the snatchy fuel injection at low speeds spoiling the party.

Hard on the gas, both bikes start to become a touch unstable. The peaks on our motocross lids (plus both bikes' standard handguards) clearly affect the aerodynamics and although it was comfortable cruising around the ton, at one-fifteen

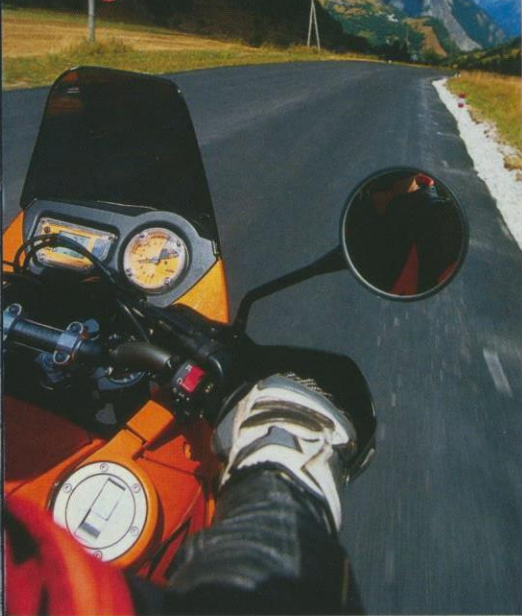


things started to get a little squirrely. However, a quick duck down beneath the screen alleviated the problem and it was easy to keep the bikes wound open until the traffic (or les gendarmes on one occasion) meant we had to roll off.

After a night in Reims, it was just a quick blast back to Calais. Pouring rain bounced off the road, visibility was down to a matter of yards and we made the sailing by a matter of minutes. I'd like to tell you which bike had the better weather protection, but I'm afraid the only way to protect from this kind of weather was to travel by car... or plane. But what I can say is that the 955's heated grips (standard for 2005) do a great job of baking your hands!

Back in Blighty, the tanks were fuelled for the final time. From Dover to Dover, the twin carbs of the KTM had sucked their way through 120 litres of 'sans plumbe' and the bike returned approximately 46mpg. The fuel injected Triumph, meanwhile, went two miles further for every gallon of fuel. Combining a reasonable cruising speed and

Big Game HUNTING



a modicum of hooning we were nevertheless pretty impressed with both figures.

Some You Win, Some Zulus

After more than 1500 miles of mixed riding it was pretty obvious which bike was the better all-rounder. The KTM will whisk you down an autoroute at Mach IV, haul you through the twisties at breakneck speed, and carry you along mountain trails without batting an eyelid. It's well detailed, well screwed together, and looks like it would transport you around the globe. Plus it's been styled by someone other than David Blunkett.

By contrast, the Tiger seems more at home carrying you around the M25 to Auntie Doreen's. It may be a grand cheaper than the Austrian bike, it may have a super smooth motor and (just) the edge in terms of performance, but once you turn off the straights it lets itself down. The chassis is nowhere near as good as that engine deserves.

In five days of riding we saw some awesome sights, had a couple of 'interesting' experiences, and I'm truly glad that we didn't take the easier (and no doubt cheaper) option of jumping on a

budget flight. So next time you're 30,000 feet in the air, breathing recycled air and having the back of your seat kicked by a small child, try not to think of all the fun you'd have had going by big trailie...

Thanks to: Trevor Barton at Triumph and Dave Plummer at KTM for sorting the bikes. And thanks to the guys at Triumph dealers Flitwick Motorcycles (01525 712197) for giving our Tiger a quick once-over...

TRIUMPH TIGER 955i

Price:	£6999 otr
Engine:	Liquid-cooled, DOHC, fuel injected, in-line 3-cylinder
Displacement:	955cc
Bore & stroke:	79 x 65mm
Comp ratio:	11.65:1
Transmission:	6-speed
Frame:	Tubular steel perimeter
Front susp:	43mm forks with triple rate springs
Rear susp:	Monoshock, remotely adjustable for preload and rebound
Front brake:	Twin 310mm discs, two-piston Nissin calipers
Rear brake:	Single 285mm disc, two-piston caliper
Seat height:	840-860mm
Wheelbase:	1515mm
Dry weight:	215kg (claimed)
Fuel capacity:	24L

KTM 950 ADVENTURE

Price:	£7995
Engine:	Liquid-cooled, four-valve, DOHC, 75-degree V-twin
Displacement:	942cc
Bore & stroke:	100 x 60mm
Comp ratio:	11.5:1
Transmission:	6-speed
Frame:	Chro-moly steel trellis, alloy sub-frame
Front susp:	WP 48mm USD forks, multi-adjustable
Rear susp:	WP PDS shock, remote pre-load adjuster
Front brake:	Twin 300mm discs, two-piston Brembo calipers
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Getting sore hands during a hard day's riding is never pleasant, but Italian grip specialists Ariete may have come up with something to help ease the pain. The MX Professional Grips are made from a soft compound rubber, and have been designed to help reduce tenderness and blistering.

There's also no excuse for fitting them the wrong way up as both grips come with a handy 'up' arrow imprinted on the ends. Each grip has about an inch-wide graduated grooved section running lengthways under the fingertips that should fit the average hand comfortably and hopefully enhance, er... grip. There's also two lock-wire recesses per grip.

The right and left inner flange guards are cleverly labelled to avoid confusion and are easy to get on and off the grips. Made from a different material from the grips, these 'Sil-Gel' flanges are fairly soft, although they probably won't be able to stop all chafing, especially on the throttle thumb.

Grey is the standard grip colour, but flanges are available in orange, red, blue, green and yellow for easy bike customisation. Retailing at £11.99 these grips are a bit on the pricey side, but if you're prone to tender mitts, they're well worth a go. To lay your paws on some, call Venhill on 01306 885111 or log onto venhill.co.uk.

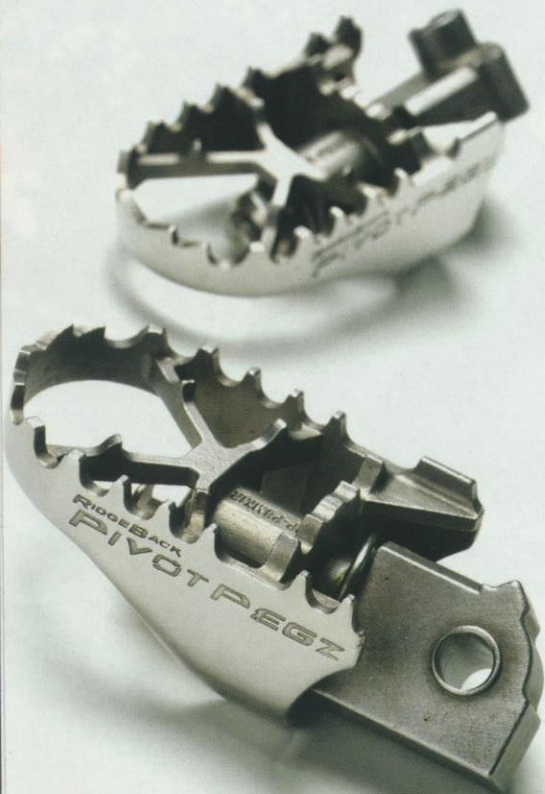
OFF THE PEG

Anything that helps improve your riding control has to be a winner, and these new Pivot Pegz from Baseline aim to do just that. What's different about these pegs is an innovative spring-loaded mechanism which allows the pegs a small degree of forward and backward rotation.

Since much of a bike's control comes through the pegs, their pivoting action should enable continuous contact and thus provide smoother, faster weight transfer. According to Baseline, these pegs should also give slicker gearshifts and easier rear brake access plus less body jarring, achieved through the peg's load-spreading capabilities.

CNC machined from stainless steel, the pegs are heated-treated twice for increased durability and strength, resulting in a well-finished, substantial piece of hardware. The central pivot shaft uses a replaceable Teflon bush and rubber O-rings prevent water ingress.

On the down-side the pegs are quite a bit heavier than standard offerings, and obviously more costly. But then technical gear always costs a little more. In this case it's £137.99. Similar pegs have had pretty good reviews in both American and Aussie dirt bike mags, so we'd definitely like to try out a pair for ourselves. On sale in the UK from October, for more info, contact Baseline Ltd on 01306 889911.



NUT CRACKER

Good vibrations are not always, well... good, especially where the nuts and bolts of your dirt bike are concerned. These free-spinning locking nuts from Moto Disc Lock are designed for use in high stress areas and claim to be vibration and shock proof.

To avoid a potential fastener failure, the nuts have an interlocking mechanism to prevent them working loose. Easy to fit and remove using a normal socket set, they can also be reused (unlike a nyloc nut for instance). Manufactured from carbon steel, they are slightly bigger than standard nuts, so may not work on every area of the bike. But if you've had problems with loose nuts before (!) then these are worth a go. For more info and pricing, call Moto Disc Lock on 01795 843779.

NORSE RIDER

It looks as if Thor are out to hammer the opposition with their all-new 2005 riding gear. Here at TBM we've been hugely impressed with Thor's 2004 Core range, having worn it for the last eight months and found it both comfy, and well-made.

Happily, the latest Thor Core kit looks to be of the same high standard. The jersey is well stitched together and nice touches include lightly padded elbows, a longer back section and a cushioned V-neck collar that sits unobtrusively on the neck. Under-arm ventilation panels and the Ride-Lite fabric keep things cool and the bold graphics promise to be colour-fast and fade resistant.

Pants-wise, these look to be just as hard wearing as the ones we've been using all year, with double and triple stitching as standard for extra durability. Stretchy lower leg panels make for a flexible fit and, as on the previous year's trousers, there are leather inner knee areas.

Staying on the knee, there are also three front flex panels that should give plenty of room for knee braces. In addition to the usual zip, a new ratchet-style waist fastener helps hold everything in.

The biggest change is on the gloves. The 2005 jobbies have more venting than the previous year's, and there's more silicon fingertip grip coverage, although this just wore off the 2004 mitts. We think the older gloves had more all-round protection, with pads on both the index and middle fingers and an extra Core logo at the base of the thumb. In comparison, the new ones just have one smaller ThorMX reinforced logo on the first finger and the wrist closure on the inside, so there's no extra front hand protection.

As well as the Core clobber, Thor has also launched the slightly cheaper Phase gear and their trail riding Ride range, comprising of waterproof nylon jacket and over-the-boot trousers. Based on our experience this year, we can't praise the gear highly enough.

Colours for all the Core kit are: black/red, black/gum, blue/navy, cream/maroon, red/maroon, avocado, paste, Reed navy or Pastrana. Jersey sizes are S - XXL and cost £37.99, pants come in 28 - 38 and are £119.99 each and gloves are available in S - XXL and are priced at £24.99 per pair.

All ranges are available from late September - phone Madison on 020 8385 3385 or visit ultimatepursuits.co.uk to find out more.





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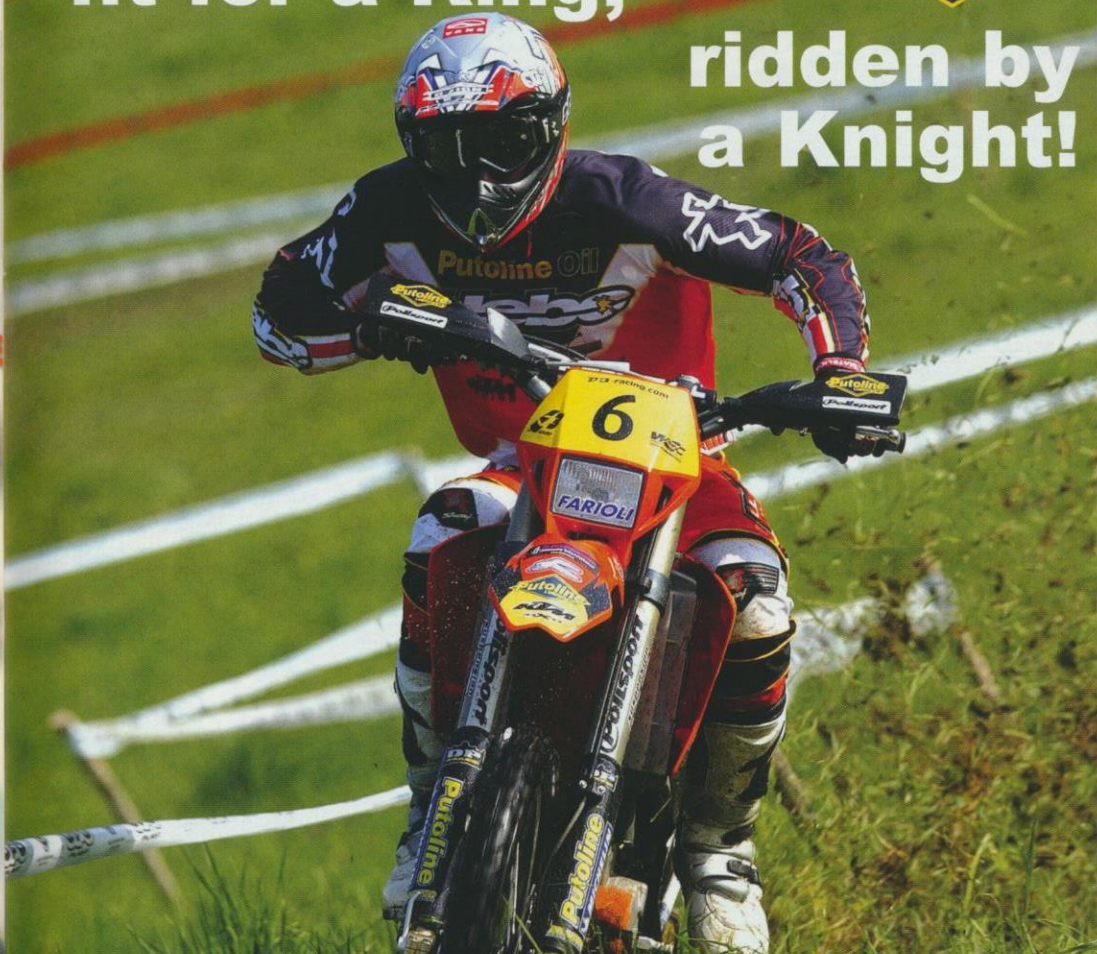


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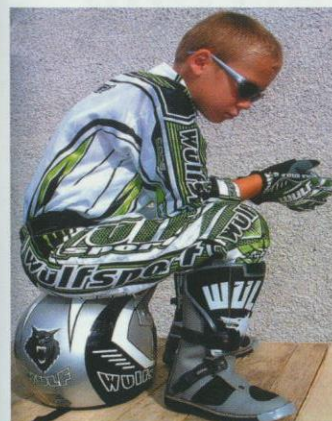


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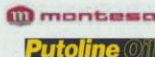


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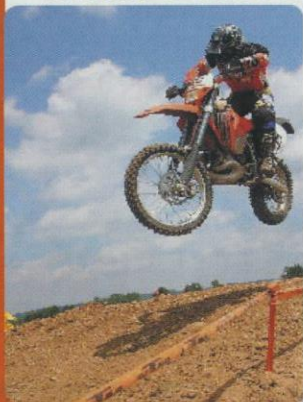
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Navigation is by roadbook, gps & compass.

- Entry prices - Competitors: Bike - 1400€, quad - 1600€, sidecar (2 riders) - 1950€, 4x4 (2 drivers) - 2650€
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BRITISH ENDURO CHAMPIONSHIP 2004

ROUND THREE, CRYCHAN ENDURO,
AUGUST 7-8

They say that 'a day can make all the difference', but when it comes to the British Enduro Championship it's the weather that really makes the difference. No matter what day, month or even year it is, it's the weather that makes or breaks an event. When it's bad, no amount of time, effort or money can guarantee the smooth running of a competition. Organisers are faced with problems that simply don't exist if skies remain clear.

Thankfully, after the abysmal weather at the previous round, the third round of the Motul British Enduro Championship was one of those rare dry events where everything ran smoothly. Despite the lack of mud and rain, the event was far from easy. With much of the course designed

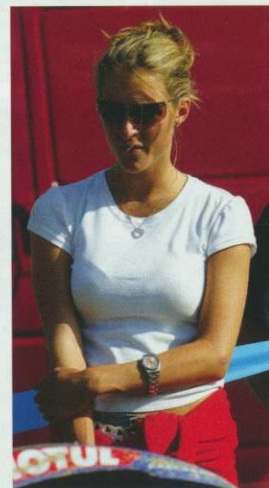
by Bob Perring, many of the tracks and trails featured were used in previous Beacon's enduros, with the addition of a considerable amount of technical 'new going'.

Last year's WTRA organised BEC event was, besides being incredibly hot, close to being the club's last. Having had some problems with their self financed/self operated special test timing equipment, a few wayward comments from riders and 'team managers' almost saw this year's event run without the

'hassle' of being a round of the British Enduro Championship. I think I speak for all riders, especially those at the top end of the enduro ladder, when I say that this year's BEC series certainly would have missed the Crychan Enduro. With no problems with the timing of either of the event's two special tests, the Crychan was everything a British Championship round should be - well organised, well thought out, challenging and enjoyable. Even the weather was good.

Day One

Day one saw David Knight and Paul Edmondson do exactly what was expected of them - battle it out for top honours in the Championship class. Having been night-and-day faster than all other riders at the Breckland and Hafren enduros, it came as little surprise that Britain's two top WEC competitors were once again setting the pace. But what made things a little more interesting was the fact that despite one round of the series still remaining after the Crychan - the Natterjack Enduro - the title of '04 British Enduro Champion was up for grabs. Provided Mr Knight continued his winning ways, he



Paddock Pointers

↑ Returning the start/finish and parc ferme to the Rugby Club in Llandovery was a move welcomed by all as it made for a much more sociable event. Based 'out on the ranges' last season, bringing the event into town meant that all competitors were able to get properly fed, watered and showered during the weekend.

↑ With the weather at round two of the BEC having made for an extremely challenging event for both competitors and event organisers alike, the weather at the Crychan was near perfect. With heavy rain forecast for Sunday, conditions remained dry during the event with rain only starting to fall as day two drew to a close.

↑ The one motocross and one X-country special test at the Crychan were both extremely well received. Technical, and very different in both layout and terrain, they provided close racing in all classes. There was also no problems with special test timing like there had been at the Hafren Enduro and last year's WTRA organised BEC event.

↓ As far as some are concerned the BEC is now over before the season's finished. Several riders were crowned British Champion at the Crychan and as a result can gain nothing from competing in the last round of the championship. With a rider's best six results from the available eight days of competition counting towards their end of year championship position, the

Juan Knight gets some air-time...



R Roper on the gas...



would be crowned champion.

Thus, Paul Edmondson's objective for the weekend was a simple one - he had to beat Knight to keep his title hopes alive. And when David hit the deck only metres after the start of the event's opening motocross test it seemed as if Paul might be able to do just that. Knight however had other ideas. Despite ending up with his bike pointing in the wrong direction he remounted and posted the quickest time of any rider! As if that wasn't enough, David went on to win the remaining two motocross tests and the two timed cross-country tests of the day to

finish unbeaten and one step closer to being crowned 2004 British Enduro Champion.

For Edmondson, despite trying his level best and finishing only a handful of seconds behind Knight on each of the motocross tests, he ended the day 16 seconds adrift of the top spot. Helped in no small part by a final cross-country test some seven seconds slower than Knight's, Edmondson was simply unable to beat DK.

Like at the Hafren Enduro the battle to finish as 'next best' behind Knight and Edmondson went to an Over 175cc two-stroke rider. Unlike at the Hafren Enduro however it was Gas Gas rider

pointed because a little more speed could well have seen him finish third.

In the 125cc class Honda Racing Fast Eddy rider Si Wakely proved that he was right to jump straight from the Clubman into the Championship class at the start of the season by claiming his first ever win in the big boy's class.

Having performed well at both the Hafren and Breckland, Si posted consistently quick special test times to finish

in a highly respectable fifth overall, just four seconds behind Edward and Juan.

Still only a teenager, if Si can continue to improve at the rate with which he has this year, then Britain may well have itself a future European or Junior World champion. Fast and smooth on both the event's motocross and cross-country tests, and riding much of the day with two blown fork seals, Si impressed a lot of people with his result - including HRFE team leader, and Si's teammate Paul Edmondson.

Making his return to BEC competition, having been forced to sit out the Hafren Enduro after breaking his thumb while contesting a round of the European Enduro Championship in Italy, Husqvarna rider Daryl Bolter placed a close second to Wakely. With less than a quarter of a second separating the two former schoolboy motocross riders, Daryl showed no ill effects of his injuries but was clearly not firing on all cylinders. While he was quicker than Wakely on the three runs through the motocross test, his decision to 'take things

Paddock Pointers

Natterjack may well lack a little end-of-season excitement. Wouldn't it be better if all days of the short, four round, series counted?

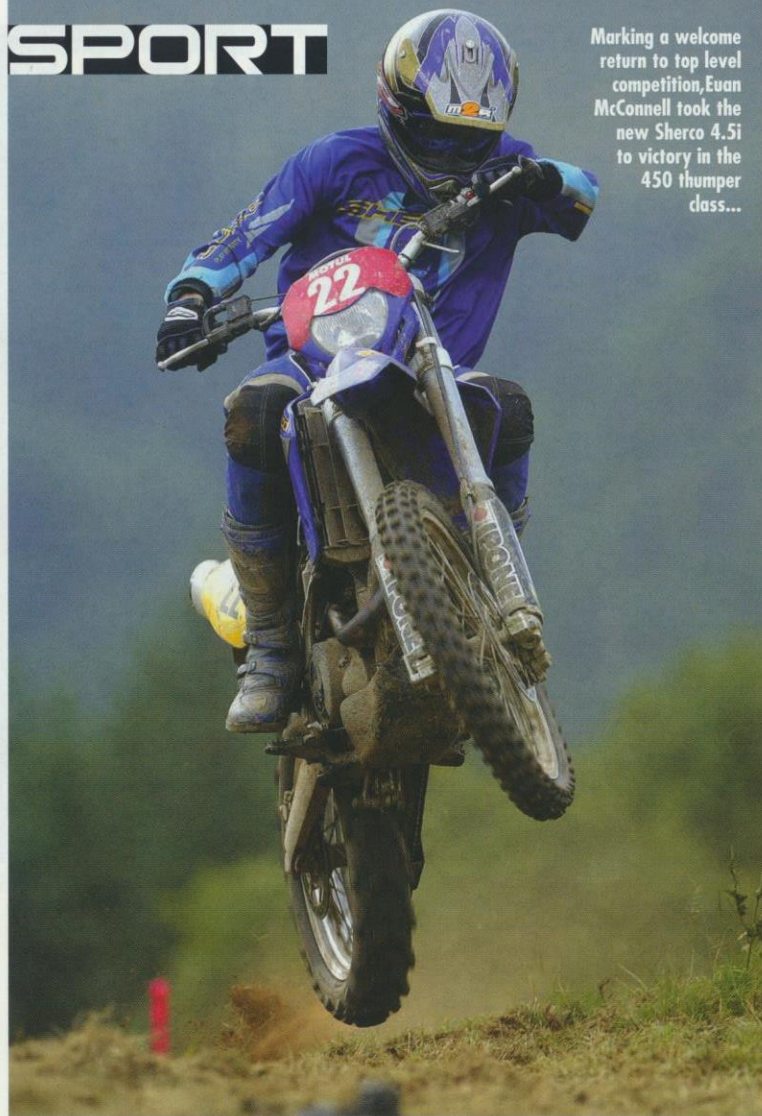
↓ The accuracy of the noise testing equipment was called into question by several riders competing in the Crychan after their bikes were deemed to be too noisy. Despite having been accepted into European Enduro Championship competitions this season with the exact same exhaust system fitted, they registered as being too loud when tested in Llandoverly. Others saw little point in checking for noisy machines when bikes over the legal limit were allowed to compete anyway.

RESULTS: OVERALL (DAY 1)

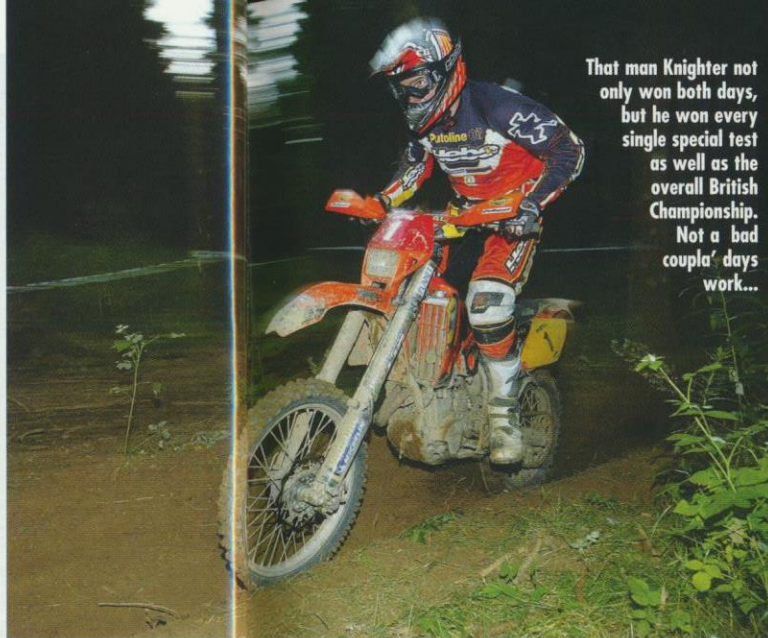
- 1 DAVID KNIGHT
- 2 PAUL EDMONDSON
- 3 JUAN KNIGHT
- 4 EDWARD JONES
- 5 SIMON WAKELY
- 6 DARYL BOLTER
- 7 WAYNE BRAYBROOK
- 8 ROBERT JONES
- 9 SASHA EKERT
- 10 DYLAN JONES

RESULTS: OVERALL (DAY 2)

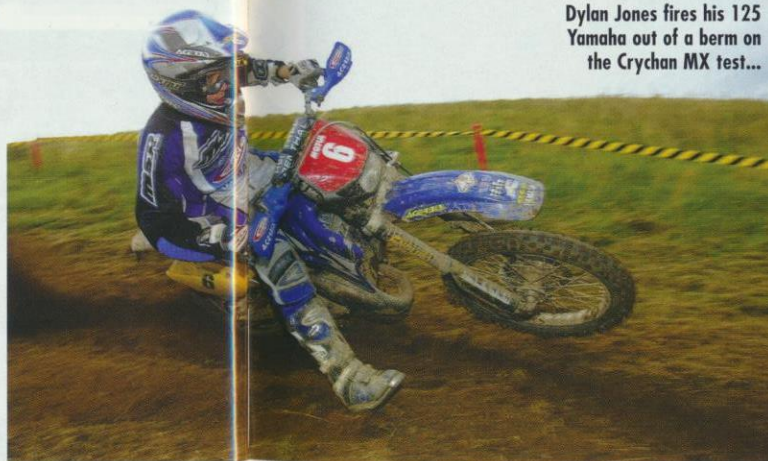
- 1 DAVID KNIGHT
- 2 PAUL EDMONDSON
- 3 JUAN KNIGHT
- 4 EDWARD JONES
- 5 WAYNE BRAYBROOK
- 6 DARYL BOLTER
- 7 TIM LEWIS
- 8 SIMON WAKELY
- 9 DYLAN JONES
- 10 ROBERT JONES



Marking a welcome return to top level competition, Euan McConnell took the new Sherco 4.5i to victory in the 450 thumper class...



That man Knighter not only won both days, but he won every single special test as well as the overall British Championship. Not a bad coupla' days work...



Dylan Jones fires his 125 Yamaha out of a berm on the Crychan MX test...

easy' on the cross-country test on his first ride back meant that he finished as runner-up.

Riding with maturity, Daryl decided to ride at nine tenths, finish the day, and then step things up a level for day two. A hard charging young motocross rider a few seasons ago, Daryl, like Si, has become an increasingly well rounded young enduro rider in a relatively short period of time. And a rider that will feature prominently at the head of the BEC for many years to come.

Far enough behind Si and Daryl to not really worry them, the Jones cousins Robert and Dylan placed as the next best 125cc class riders with Robert finishing the day eight seconds behind

Daryl for third in class while Dylan placed fourth and 10th overall.

The 250cc four-stroke class saw Wayne Braybrook finish top of the results on day one as he placed his quarter litre Honda in seventh overall. Not quite as quick on the motocross test as several of the riders that finished both in front of and behind him in the overall results, it was on the cross-country tests where Wayne produced the goods. Seventh quickest through the dry, fast and flowing test on his first run, on his second, Wayne matched Juan Knight's pace through the trees to record the fourth quickest time. In doing so the Sandiford Honda backed rider was expect-

ed to place comfortably ahead of the rest of the 'turbo-diesel' class.

But with riders only knowing their test times from the motocross special stage during the event, it later turned out that German rider Sasha Ekert, visiting the UK to spend some time with his girlfriend who studies in Wolverhampton, had ended the day as runner-up, less than two seconds behind Braybrook. After enjoying (but not really excelling) in the mud of the Hafren Enduro, and despite riding his practice bike in the Crychan, Sasha produced a well deserved result. Behind Sasha, Yamaha riders Jason Fraser and Rowan Jones were separated by virtually

nothing with Gareth Edmunds finishing fifth and Stephen Hunt sixth.

Finishing first of the mid-sized four-strokes was a rider that despite having been a spectator at both the first two rounds of this year's BEC series is no stranger to the Championship class - Euan McConnell.

Bored of sitting at home of a weekend, the lanky Scot was back riding in preparation for a full-time return to competition in '05. What was interesting was that Euan was riding the new Sherco 4.5i. With Sherco importers MRS wanting a top level rider to help iron out any possible teething problems they might have with their first production built enduro machine, and with Euan simply wanting to compete again, both parties appeared happy with the new arrangement at the Crychan. The fact that the bike proved reliable and Euan topped the 450cc four-stroke class made the pairing all the more fruitful.

Finishing 11th overall, Euan placed comfortably ahead of fellow Scot Richard Hay aboard his Yamaha. With Hay claiming the runner-up spot (in class) with 17th overall in the Championship class, Gas Gas importer John Shirt finished third, 28 seconds adrift of Richard. With Knighter having placed his half-litre thumper at the top of the overall results, it was left to Husaberg rider Chris Tett to place as runner-up in the Over 500cc four-stroke class.

Day Two

Day two of the Crychan saw little change in either the weather or the top of the Championship class results. David Knight topped the day, and in doing so became the 2004 British Enduro Champion, while Paul Edmondson again placed as runner-up with Juan Knight and Edward Jones finishing in third and fourth overall. However, despite David winning by the exact same margin as he had on day one - 16 seconds - Juan placed 30 seconds clear of Edward and much closer to Paul Edmondson.

The first real change in the results came with Wayne Braybrook placing in fifth overall, up two places on his day one performance. Less than two seconds behind Edward in the overall classification, and having moved in front of 125cc mounted youngsters Si Wakely and Daryl Bolter, Wayne comfortably topped the 250cc four-stroke class and claimed the British title with it. Despite again placing second to Braybrook, German rider Sasha Ekert was unable to improve on his day one result despite out-pacing the rest of the 250cc thumper class.

Finishing 23 seconds behind Wayne, 21s further behind than he had on day one, Sasha ended the event having thoroughly enjoyed racing at

SPORT

Juan Knight took his two-stroke Gasser to a comfortable third place



both the Hafren and Crychan enduros. Both of which he commented were more challenging and enjoyable than equivalent German Enduro Championship events. Claiming third was Army Yamaha rider Stephen Hunt. Finishing at the sharp end of the Yamaha trio that occupied the 15/16/17th overall positions, Hunt finished ahead of Jason Fraser and Rowan Jones.

With Edmondson, Juan Knight and Edward Jones claiming the top three spots in the Over 175cc two-stroke class, Husqvarna rider Chris Hockey finished in fourth, just as he had on day one. At the top of the 125cc class things changed on day two as Daryl Bolter upped his pace to finish as class winner. Happy that despite some discomfort from his injured thumb he wasn't going to cause any further damage to his fifth digit, Daryl posted the three fastest 125cc class times around the motocross test. On the cross-country test Wakely proved fastest on the first run through, while Tim Lewis recorded the fastest eighth-litre times - second and third time through.

Having done enough to top the class despite

not being quite as quick through the trees as he would have liked, Bolter was followed home by Lewis and then Wakely. With just two seconds separating Bolter from Lewis, only three seconds then separated the Cornishman from Wakely at the end of the day. With Dylan Jones placing fourth for ninth overall and getting the better of his cousin Robert who finished 10th overall, 125cc bikes again held the majority within the top ten of the Championship class. Proof that on some occasions, less is most definitely more. Euan McConnell again topped the 450cc four-stroke class on day two with Richard Hay and John Shirt second and third respectively.

So that was that. The 2004 British Enduro Championship decided before the end of the season. With Knighter winning the Overall and Over-500cc four-stroke titles, Paul Edmondson securing the Over-175cc two-stroke class and Wayne Braybrook crowned the 250cc four-stroke champion, all that remains to be decided now is the 450cc four-stroke and 125cc two-stroke classes. Looks like it's going to be all eyes on the youngsters at the Natterjack Enduro...

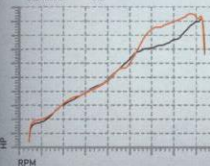
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UK CROSS COUNTRY CHAMPIONSHIP

2004

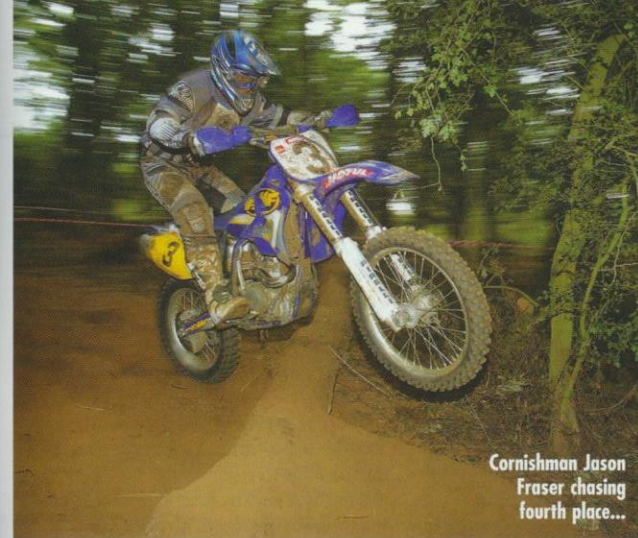
ROUND THREE, CULHAM,
OXFORDSHIRE, 25/7/04



The third round of the UK Cross-Country Championship took place at the end of July with Honda Racing Fast Eddy rider (and event organiser) Paul Edmondson finishing as the only competitor to notch up 18 laps around the relentless, eight-minute long Oxfordshire circuit. Joined as a Pro-class winner by Morris Oils/Yamaha rider Rowan Jones who topped the 125cc two-stroke/250cc four-stroke class, Honda rider Martin Lear won the Pro Open four-stroke category after a strong, race-long performance.

With the mixed 125cc two-stroke/250cc thumper riders starting first, Rowan Jones recorded his best result of the year after leading for the majority of the two-and-a-half hour race. Pushed by HRFE rider Simon Wakely and Sandiford Honda's Wayne Braybrook during the early stages of the final hour, Rowan remained at the front to claim the win by just under one-and-a-half minutes. With Wayne and

WORDS: RAND PICS: JONTY EDMUNDSON



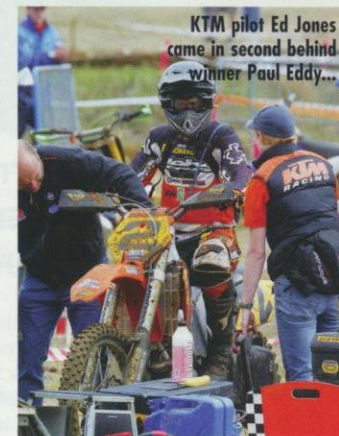
Cornishman Jason Fraser chasing fourth place...



Riders charge away from the start...



KTM pilot Ed Jones came in second behind winner Paul Eddy...



Simon claiming second and third, Cornishman Jason Fraser placed fourth with Dylan Jones fifth, both on Yamahas.

For much of the early part of the Pro Open four-stroke class race it looked as if Gas Gas importer John Shirt was going to make it a winning ride, until fatigue got the better of him. And with Scot Richard Hay then charging to the front, the Yamaha rider seemed to have not only the Pro Open four-stroke class win in the bag but also a possible event overall win until his chain broke with half an hour to go.

Having set a pace that only Paul Edmondson could match, Hay's cruel luck saw him fail to finish the event for the second year running. With Hay out and Shirty knackered, Honda rider Martin Lear topped the class with Husaberg rider Lewis King second and Shirty managing to claim third.

Taking his third overall UK XC win of the

season, Paul Edmondson comfortably topped the Pro Open two-stroke class after battling his way to the front after a poor start. With early class pace setter Mark Jackson crashing out of the event, Edmondson was followed home by D3-Racing KTM rider Edward Jones and Husqvarna rider Chris Hay.

The final round of the series takes place at Hawkstone Park on Sunday, 5 September.

RESULTS

PRO 125CC 2T & 250CC 4T

- | | | |
|--------------------|--------|---------|
| 1. ROWAN JONES | YAMAHA | 17 LAPS |
| 2. WAYNE BRAYBROOK | HONDA | 17 LAPS |
| 3. SIMON WAKELY | HONDA | 17 LAPS |

PRO OPEN 2T

- | | | |
|-------------------|-----------|---------|
| 1. PAUL EDMONDSON | HONDA | 18 LAPS |
| 2. EDWARD JONES | KTM | 17 LAPS |
| 3. CHRIS HOCKEY | HUSQVARNA | 17 LAPS |

PRO OPEN 4T

- | | | |
|----------------|----------|---------|
| 1. MARTIN LEAR | HONDA | 17 LAPS |
| 2. LEWIS KING | HUSABERG | 17 LAPS |
| 3. JOHN SHIRT | GAS GAS | 17 LAPS |



'BEING ABLE TO COMPETE CLOSE TO HOME, AND THEN GO DOWN THE PUB AND LAUGH ABOUT THE DAY WITH MY MATES AFTER THE RACING HAS FINISHED, IS WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT FOR ME...'

Trust me when I say that winning the 2004 British Enduro Championship title means a lot to me.

Firstly, it means a lot because I rode the opening round of the BEC with a hole the size of a tennis ball just above my butt after having an operation to remove an ingrowing hair. And having spent hardly any time riding my bike. That bike was 100 percent new to me and one that's not the easiest thing to ride in certain 'Welsh', conditions.

It also means a lot to me because in terms of my competition it has been the hardest year yet. Having Paul Edmondson compete in the full BEC series has meant that I have had to be on top of my game on every day.

And it also means a lot to me because the combination of switching to new machinery, having had next to no time to adjust to - and test it before the season and effectively starting the year injured and a long way from 100 percent bike-fit is something every riders dreads. Thankfully, everything else has come together and... well, like I said, being the '04 British Enduro Champion means a lot to me - more than you might think.

Going into the Crychan Enduro I was confident that I could win the event and claim the British championship title, the problem was no one seemed sure if this year's British championship allowed for throwaway scores or not. If it had been 'all rounds to count', which thankfully it wasn't, a win at the Crychan would have been followed by a trip to the Natterjack in October.

Thankfully, my two day wins added to my winning rides at the Breckland and the Hafren meant that I can't be beaten, and as a result don't have to race at the Natterjack.

BRITAIN'S TOP ENDURO RIDER WRITES EXCLUSIVELY FOR TBM...

W

hen I look back at where I was seven months ago - pacing around my garage at home, week after week like a cat on hot bricks, unable to ride a bike due to having just had an operation on my lower back - I've got to admit things have turned out much better than even I hoped they would so far this season. Confident that I could retain my BEC title and improve on my world ranking, until the season started I didn't really know what the outcome was going to be. But winning the '04 British Enduro Championship at the Crychan Enduro early last month was the result of a lot of hard work and is a title that means a hell of a lot to me.

As any rider fortunate enough to have reached the top of his chosen discipline will tell you the first title, whether it's a British or a world title, is always special. After that, certain seasons are easier/harder than others and as a result, winning can sometimes mean a lot - while at other times it doesn't give you any great reward.



The main reason I was so keen to make sure I wrapped up the championship before the final round was because the Natterjack Enduro is sandwiched between two WEC events - Greece and Germany. While I love riding in sand, riding a 525 KTM fitted with a trials tyre isn't something that I'm overly keen on doing, especially with a highly important world championship race just five days later.

Everything went well at the Crychan, including the weather, despite crashing just off the start of the first test. I wasn't expecting things to be as slippery as they were and as I parted company with my bike and went sliding down the hill on my arse all I could hear was my brother Juan and the other Championship class riders laughing at me. I showed them though as I still managed to win the test.

Everything else went pretty well and the event was spot on with a cross-country test that was right up my street. Fast and flowing, just a little bit shorter than I would have liked, the test was world class - and we got results pretty soon after the event too!

After winning the first day I relaxed a bit more on day two, rode within myself and simply tried to look after my bike. With the course being very rough, and knowing that I had to use the bike in certain other events this year, I didn't want to damage anything and risk a DNF. Again everything went well on the second day and despite it being difficult on both tests to open up any real advantage I was happy with the way I was riding and really enjoyed the day due to the pressure being off.

Prior to the Crychan I decided to compete in a couple of very different motocross events - a round of the British Motocross Championship, at Desert Martin in Northern Ireland, and a local event here on the Island. Having ridden at Desert Martin last year and really enjoyed it I was keen to go back again this year and see how I'd get on.

Unfortunately, the meeting didn't go quite as planned as I was forced to pull out of the first race due to my engine starting to tighten up. Having raced my 540SX at a KWS event at Hawkstone earlier in the year and had the thing all but pull my arms off I decided to try a 450cc motor and see if it would be any better. Problem was I didn't really have time to run the new motor in before quali-

fying and about 15 minutes into the first race it started to tighten up so I decided to pull in.

Not having a mechanic with me meant that I spent the hour or so before my second race switching engines and fitting my 540cc lump. Getting everything finished with about 10 minutes to spare, not having loads of time to worry about the race must have been a good thing because I felt right at home on the bike, didn't get tired, and wished I'd used it in race one. Running in 11th for most of the race I made a pass on the last corner, which gave me a top 10 finish. Ahead of me were the 'full time' motocross boys so I was pretty happy with that.

The good thing about the race at Desert Martin was that it was on a Saturday, which meant that I could get the overnight boat home and ride a motocross on the Island on Sunday. Racing at the highest level of British motocross and then at club level on the same weekend was something I guess not too many people get to do in a weekend and to be perfectly honest I had more fun racing back home on the Island. Racing in Ireland was good, don't get me wrong, as I wanted to race against faster riders to improve my riding. It's just wasn't as enjoyable as racing with my mates, as people don't seem to have as much time for one another the higher up the MX ladder you get. Being able to compete close to home, and then go down the pub and laugh about the day with my mates after the racing had finished, is what it's all about for me. Just like it is at BEC events.

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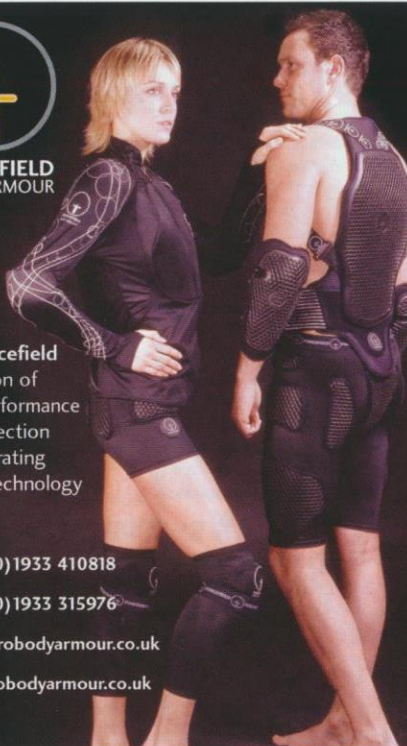
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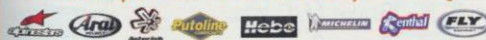
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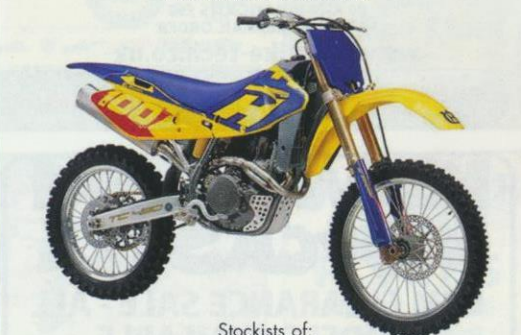
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MARK WILLIAMS
YAMAHA TT-R250RM
BABY BLUE

STORY AND PICS: MARK WILLIAMS



WAS

Regular readers will no doubt be familiar with my long (and somewhat drawn-out?) hunt for a new dirtbike. After the sale of my trusty old XT350 and the return to Kawasaki of my last staff bike, a KDX220R, I was keen to purchase myself a new set of wheels. Having exhausted the avenues of both personally importing a bike from Italy (not worth the hassle) or sourcing one via the wonders of technology on internet auction site eBay (where being 'on-line' at that crucial moment is paramount), I was beginning to wonder whether I'd ever find the machine I wanted.

Fortunately, during this extended period I didn't go without a ride. Having twisted the collective arms of Yamaha's marketing department I'd been loaned a long term 2004 TT-R250 to continue my 'dirty ways'. And you'll no doubt have seen (and read about) the bike in 'Doing the Rounds'. Unfortunately, with the 2005 models arriving mid-way through '04, all too soon Yamaha were keen to have their bike back, in order for them to 'move it on'. Unless, of course, I fancied buying it myself? Oh, go on then...

New Blue?

The TT-R250 was added to Yamaha's UK range late last year, around the same time as the 'stop-gap' 600 model. Versions of this leccy-start, DOHC four-stroke trailie have been around since 1992 - albeit primarily as grey imports - though the bike was officially imported back in 1995. However, instead of curtailing the rise of parallel imports, Yamaha priced themselves out of the market (with a sticker price over 500 quid higher than the imports) and the bike was dropped for the following year.

It might be argued that Yamaha have bowed to the inevitable market pressure - albeit rather late in the day - when they re-introduced the TT-R250 to their official range. But their previous reluctance to bring it in was as much to do with homologation problems as any pessimism about the size of its market. In the event, they've brought in the dual kick/electric start 'RM' Australian model which was easier (read cheaper) to modify for UK regs than the slightly lighter French version. In fact with its plastic tank, improved suspension and quicker steering compared to the older, steel-tanked TT-Rs, it's quite a big improvement on what went before.

On first sight, the TT-R looks like a prime example of the generation of trailies which immediately preceded the latest, enduro-styled water-cooled variety. Relatively light at a claimed 120kg dry, it's also got plenty of ground clearance (300mm), a compact engine neatly wrapped in a single downtube, square section chassis, a tank sculpted to initially suggest it shrouds a radiator, and a substantial alloy swing arm. It's also a fairly tall bike, the 910mm seat height perhaps deterring the short-legged, but conversely it comes with a comfortable seat, full road lighting, dual mirrors and even a brace of pillion footrests.

Interestingly, the engine's internal dimensions - 10.2:1 compression ratio and 73 x 59.6mm bore and stroke - are the exact same as the XR250R's, (which of course has one less cam). Pull out the carb-mounted choke, hit the button and the engine instantly ignites, settling down to a steady thrum just a minute or two after you've dispensed with the choke. And what you immediately notice is how uncannily quiet it is, due of course, to the considerable restrictions placed on breathing by the massive silencer and complex induction arrangements. The motor is

STREET BIKES

TT-R is sure-footed in most conditions...



Engine is pleasantly grunty low down



Aftermarket Twin-Air filter fitted for easier breathing...

nonetheless a willing revver, and aided by a light clutch and slick six-speed gearbox, eager forward motion is never a problem, until... well, until you hit a serious hill.

Though the twin-cam motor isn't tuned for top-end power, it isn't particularly torquey either. Instead it's endowed with the kind of bottom-end punch you'd expect from an old twofifty

thumper lump, that's to say a reasonable amount of torque but not bucket-loads. And whilst you can easily snick up and down the gearbox to compensate for this relative lack of grunt, there are times when concentrating on picking and maintaining the right line mitigates against this. This wouldn't be such a problem if the bike's standard gearing wasn't more inclined to the road rather than the rough. Out-of-the-box it comes with a 14T gearbox sprocket and a 44T rear, a compromise that provides an indicated 60-65mph top speed, but robs it of low-end tractability.

Substituting a 13T gearbox sprocket is the quickest and cheapest way to rectify this (see box-out), but rather more expense is required to overcome its other stock-spec drawback - the tyres. Shod as standard with Dunlop D605 dualies, the TT-R easily loses traction in serious mud and slithers aimlessly on wet grass or loose gravel.

Other than junking the overly large indicators, mirrors and rubber footrest plugs, the bike you see here is bog-standard, and as such it looks and feels like a solid, purposeful package which reflects its robust build quality. With its 1410mm wheelbase, the TT-R tracks steadily across rough and rapidly undulating terrain at anything up to 30-35mph. But if you hit a few serious whoops, it can lose its directional composure - although it rarely seems to bottom-out. Dialling in the right pre-load and damping for your weight and riding conditions on the chunky rear shock can take lots of trial'n'error and the same goes for the chunky 43mm front forks.

Set up as best it can be to suit its rider, the chassis is entirely competent for fast or slow trail riding. The bike is a nimble performer in low-speed nadergy conditions and steers as precisely as its suspension and power delivery will allow, although not without deliberate rider input: we're not quite in KTM country here! But on those occasions when lack of low-end traction or the imperatives of, say, ascending a steep, rock-strewn incline mean it's a hang-on-tight-and-hope-for-the-best scenario.

Actually, and as I've reported during recent Doing The Rounds, hoping for the best is usually rewarded by a successful outcome. And this is because within its trail riding remit, overall the TT-R's chassis is a cracker. But if the engine had more usable torque and/or lower gearing,

STREET BIKES

the rider's ability to dip the clutch and lighten the front-end now and again would make it easier to (literally) overcome some of the obstacles he (or she) instead has to simply rely on the TT-R to plough through.

By the same token, hauling the bike out of corners invariably means downshifting or entering

them in a lower gear than seems necessary (typically bottom gear in the tighter turns). This makes it more tiring to ride over long periods, a fact not helped by handlebars that command an awkward, muscle-straining stoop for anybody over 5'10" when standing on the pegs.

Blue Tooth

With its origins in the venerable XT350, the engine feels pretty unburstable and received

wisdom suggests that it'll last upwards of 20,000+ miles before needing serious attention. The only question mark lies over its electric-start mechanism which utilises a sprag clutch and which can, in extremis, wear one or two idler gears running off a gearbox pinion, causing tooth breakages and the inevitable, expensive damage. Occasional inspection and, if necessary, replacement of these idler gears is the solution, although stalling the engine in gear rather than with the kill switch

saves wear on the entire mechanism.

Ergonomically the TT-R is very similar to the XR250R, which is to say it's a fine, easily managed ride for those not too short in the leg nor overly tall. For riders over six foot the stand-up riding position can, as mentioned earlier, be irksomely tiring, though for anyone substantially shorter, a lowering kit - available from Kouba - may be the answer. What's not in doubt is that what the wide seat lacks in ease of body move-

BLUE BLOOD

Independently dyno'd by Phil's M/Cs in Worcester, stock TT-R250s put out around 23.5 - 24.2bhp at 8300rpm - rather less than the 27 Japanese stallions claimed by the factory at 8500rpm. However, a few simple mods and upgrades can add another 3-5bhp and substantially boost the engine's low-end torque from its alleged 20.7ft/lb.

The simplest and cheapest modifications - well buckshee actually - are to remove the snorkel from the top of the airbox or, if you want the peace of mind engendered by an extra inch of induction height, then reducing the length of the snorkel inside the airbox with a Stanley knife helps. Next, remove the header pipe and hacksaw 5mm off the pipe just before it meets the silencer, thus liberating a washer and internal back-pipe which crudely restrict exhaust flow. No re-jetting is needed to compensate for these mods, but the performance improvement is instantly obvious and there's little extra noise.

Adding an aftermarket muffler and an easier breathing air-filter - in my case a Twin-Air item (from Off-Road Only) - are the next steps in peppering up the motor. But according to Brian Sussex's TT-R Owners website -



a mine of helpful info - it's possible to cut'n'shut the standard exhaust to obviate some of its more restrictive tendencies. This is a job strictly for expert welders, and does little to reduce the weight compared to an Oshiro, CRD or FMF end-can. I've fitted a secondhand CRD jobbie (bought from a fellow member of Yahoo's TT-R Owners Group forum) which weighs 3.5lb less than the stocker, adds low-end torque and power across the range and yet maintains an acceptably quiet decibel level.

Strangled as it is by emission requirements, the

standard motor's weak carburettion caused misfiring when maxed out in top gear on anything but a flat surface. However, downgearing seemed to solve this. Rental offer a variety of front and rear sprockets for the TT-R, but I opted for a steel 13T front from CMS M/cycles (01392 467700), and when it's time to replace the chain I might downgear it further with a 48T rear. But for the moment the 13T sprocket improves the TT-R's off-road heft, whilst still enabling it to reach the same top speed as the 14T item, and without any tendency to splutter. It now 'pulls like a train' in every gear, confidently despatches muddy, rocky hills in second or even third, easily pulls 70mph in top and allows you to lift the front-end almost at will. Almost. Throttle response is also comprehensively improved, although upping the Teikei carb's Keihin-pattern main jet from 147 to 150, or even 152, is an option for even greater mid-range, though one I've yet to explore. I have however opened the air/fuel enrichment screw a couple of turns to good effect.

If you've got an over-stuffed wallet, a Mikuni TM33 flat-slide carb will instantly add a further pony or two, and Phil's M/Cs will supply and set it up for you (and, indeed, perform all of the above upgrades).

As a lanky lad, I've junked the horrible low-rise steel bars (as any sensible owner would) in favour of Rental Desert/Vintage bend (aka Dakar High) which greatly improve stand-up posture and consequent control, and bestows a small weight-saving. I've also replaced the rather flimsy stock handguards with Polisport Sharp brushguards purchased from Off-Road Only. And at the time of writing a CRD bashplate and frameguards are on their way (my nearest stockist being Steve Plain M/Cs).

As previously mentioned, the standard Dunlops aren't really up to much for proper off-road use, so I've swapped these for a Mitus EF-02 on the rear and a Michelin S12 upfront. These are great for trail riding, though the soft compound Mitus wears quite quickly and the grippy S12 is really an MX tyre.

Removing the mirrors, pillion pegs, indicators and other non-essentials have shaved 2.2kg from the bike, but other than that there's not much weight saving that Yamaha themselves haven't already addressed.

None of the modifications I've performed required major work, yet to varying degrees all of 'em make the TT-R a better tool for the job, and even a decent prospect for the occasional rally, enduro or hare 'n' hounds. I might add a factory oil cooler to augment the rather limited, 1.2L capacity of the Yam's sump, and that does require minor surgery beneath the clutch housing. For the moment I've fitted a magnetic drainplug from Brian Eland who specialises in TT-R stuff (including big-bore kits), and I change the oil and filter after every fourth day's trail riding.

Of course there are those who'll exhort me to cease with the spannering and simply buy a box-stock KTM, WR-F or even a new CRF which, even if they offer more performance than I'm capable of wresting from them, will by virtue of their higher degrees of competence, prove an easier ride. Financial resources aside, it's a difficult argument to refute, but the TT-R250 is at heart a good, solid trailie with levels of civility and durability those other bikes don't enjoy, and frankly the business of improving and customising its functionality to my own taste is all part of the fun.

TT-R BIKES

ment, it more than makes up for in comfort - this is, after all, a trail not a race-bike. The gear and rear brake levers are well tucked in but entirely accessible, although they remain a little vulnerable and the standard protective bars below the engine aren't as convincing as a bashplate. The levers have

eyelets for security wiring, but unfortunately lack the wiring itself. With its healthy powerband, accommodating transmission and compliant suspension, allied to a decent seat, the TT-R is commendably comfy to ride long-ish distances on tarmac, even two-up. Which means it's also an effective commuter machine. And with a range of approximately 80-85 miles of on-and-off-road riding before you reach the two-litre reserve, it's decently economical too.

Although the TT-R has yet to let me down, I've come across a couple of areas which were badly thought-out. The air-filter sits behind a plastic cover quickly accessed by three fasteners, though access to these requires a screwdriver to unfasten the nearside panel. And this inconsistent detailing extends to the seat which, if you need to get at certain electrics or remove the tank, requires grubbing around in the accumulated muck above the rear wheel to unscrew two retaining bolts. Poor design and cheap execution is not what one expects of Yamaha, but I can't fault the switchgear, the smooth - if lengthy - throttle action and the solid, though undeniably old-school instrumentation - a speedo and odometer that'll be familiar to Yam fans from the mid-Eighties, plus a trio of warning lights.

And that, dear reader, is essentially my take on the stock TT-R. Only this particular little Yam didn't remain stock for too long...



Useful Contacts:

Yamaha UK: 01932 358000
 Off-Road Only: 01597 822666
 Brian Eland: 01207 272228
 Kouba: KoubaLink.com
 Phil's Motorcycles: 01905 21616
 Steve Plain Motorcycles: 01597 825817
 On the Web:
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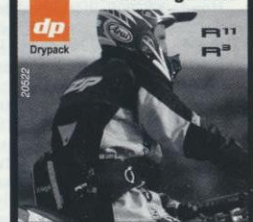
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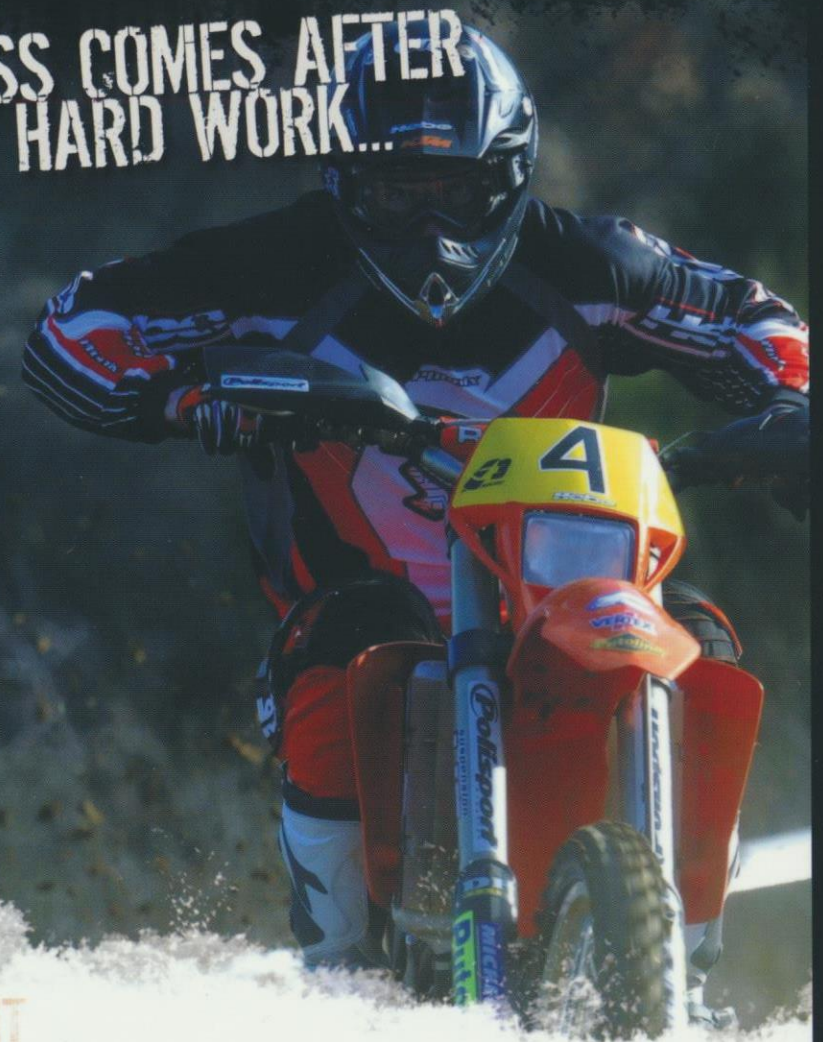
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