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## All Show... No Go!

**W**ell that's the Dirt Bike Show over and done with for another year. According to the show organisers' PR people, nearly 21,000 visitors attended during the four days in November this year - though I suspect from what I saw with my own eyes, that that figure may be just slightly on the optimistic side. If so, it wouldn't be the first time that a show attendance figure had been 'rounded-up' by a few thousand people. Then again who can blame 'em? In an industry where everyone exaggerates their sales figures (yes, including magazines) to help make them look good, they're only guilty of playing by the same rules as everybody else.

And if the actual number of people through the door was nearer, oh I don't know... say, 15,000-16,000 paying punters, then that prompts the question: where were all the other off-road enthusiasts that day? Or perhaps more importantly, if you are an off-road enthusiast then why wouldn't you want to go to the only off-road show in town?

Certainly it can't have helped that it clashed with the last round of the British Enduro Championship. But then again, I suspect that the answer is slightly more obvious than that. A quick trawl of the TBM Forum reveals a certain amount of dissatisfaction with the costs involved in attending the show (both in terms of the cost of entry for a family, and the sky-high prices charged for food and drink at these venues). On the other hand, the cost of hiring a place like the NAC isn't cheap and in order for the show to succeed and prosper, then those costs have to be met somewhere along the line.

Certainly the cost of entry for the paying public was an important issue to TBM; to such an extent

that as a magazine we didn't agree to sign up for this year's show until we'd received (personal) confirmation from the top man himself that entry fees would be frozen at last year's prices. Wonder how many other magazine editors did that?

So does the industry really need a show all of its own? Yes I believe it does. Because without collective representation we are nothing more than a small number of individuals, each of us pulling in a different direction. And we already know what happens when our disparate voices get ignored. What the show does is to unite the industry (in as much as that's ever possible), and give it a communal face (and voice) and collectively greater political clout.

I realise that cost is important to you guys - though clearly not as important as it was to the bloke who stood at our stand and declared proudly that he never bought his own copy of TBM, he simply shared his mates' ones. Let's hope he doesn't do the same when it comes to buying underpants. But tight-asses aside, how much would you pay

to secure the future of dirt biking in the UK? Because those of you who failed to attend the show this year for reasons of parsimony should now ask yourselves whether you want to have a dirt bike industry in this country in the next ten years? Or whether you want a future for dirt biking at all? Indeed whether you want to be able to read about dirt bikes and dirt biking in a magazine like TBM, come to that. Because without the industry and the punters who support it, the whole thing's got the whiff of a pair of borrowed boxer shorts...

SI MELBER



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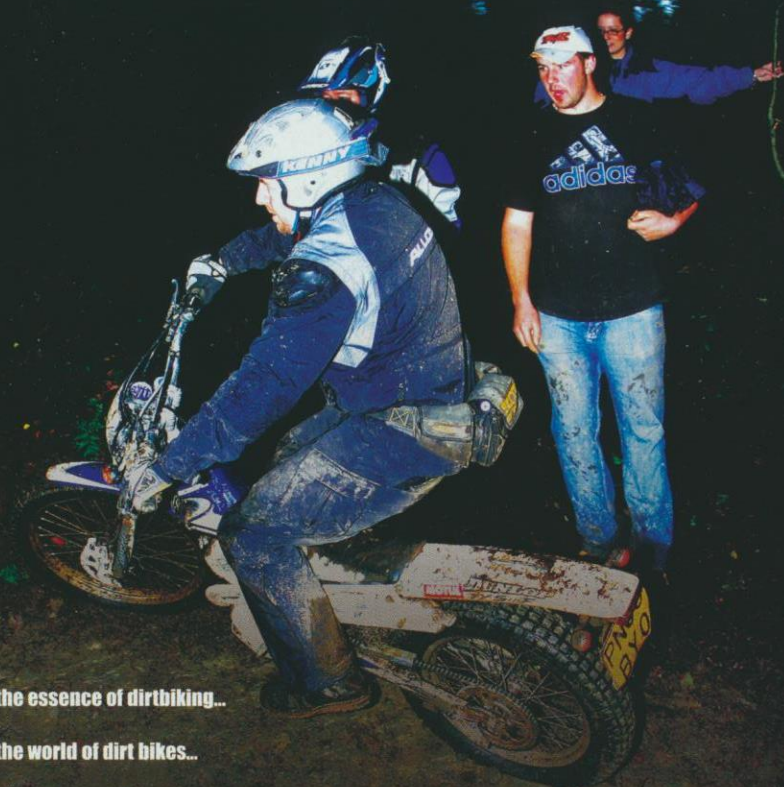
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# AXLES OF



# EVIL

WORDS: BARNI & SI; PICS: TBM & VARIOUS

The mighty Maico 490 Mega2...  
Die young and  
stay pretty!



**Never mind Blair and Dubya's missing WMDs, TBM unearths the *real* Weapons of Mass Destruction and presents its own *war on terror*...**

**W**ay back when, in a time before brakes and suspension that actually worked, you could hear 'them' out on the moors. Carried in the wind, swirling through the mists came that unmistakable howl. Starting as a faint cry, it changed into a blood-curdling scream as it moved ever nearer. Then you saw it: rising up on its haunches it barked at the moon, a rooster-tail of dirt flying high into the sky, before it darted off into the darkness - gone as quickly as it appeared.

This marauding beast left a trail of destruction in its wake: broken bones, torn ligaments, tattered wallets and ruptured bank accounts. For it was a particularly vicious animal, and its thirst for blood was legendary. It was... 'an evil enduro bike!'

Nowadays, we like to think that the enduro gene pool has evolved beyond the point where these dinosaurs roamed the Earth. And so the evil enduro bike has all but disappeared from the scene. Or has it?

There's still a few of them out there amongst us, and even more lurking in the backs of sheds just waiting to maim a new generation of enduro riders foolhardy enough to 'restore' them. Heck,

there's even a few manufacturers who still conspire to produce these malevolent machines. And so, we'd like to take you on a none-too-serious look at the kind of bikes that simply can't fail to move you... that little bit closer to your maker!

## EVIL OLDIES

### Maico 490

Yep, we thought we'd kick-off this look at mechanical gravediggers with one of the most revered, and feared, dirt bikes of all time - the 490 Maico. Back in 1981, legendary US dirtbike journo, Rick Sieman, described the Maico as having 'all the subtlety of a safe falling on a cricket' and 'all the finesse of a cannon being fired in a handball court'. It was light... and boy, was it fast. Which meant that unless your name was Geraint Jones, or Graham Noyce, you were pretty unlikely to ride it anywhere near its limits. Instead, you were far more liable to find yourself upside-down in a hedge wondering just what the hell had happened..?

Compared with modern machinery, the 490



Cagiva's WMX500DE: All you really needed in a big, fast, scary dirt bike: half a litre of two-stroke power, ineffectual brakes and four gallons of highly volatile fuel...!



Maico was tall and rangey, with a seat height of 960mm and a limo-like wheelbase of 1582mm. And there was well over a foot of suspension travel to keep you literally on your toes. It was a big bruiser of a machine, a real man's bike. And whilst the celebrated red and yellow machines with their gorgeous radial-finned motors, were actually bloody good 'open class' bikes, they earned their place in dirtbiking folklore simply because they were just so darn big and powerful... And they always broke down. Oh, and not forgetting the fact that the kickstart had the kind of kick-back that'd take your leg clean off, just below the knee of your Jofa race-pants. Life was sweeter back then, if a little shorter... **Verdict:** German bombs killed fewer people...



### Cagiva WMX500DE

Ah yes, now we're talking. We simply couldn't ignore the old mid-Eighties Cagiva without a mention. Not only because it's got to be one of the most bonkers production dirtbikes of all time, but also because we've got one rusting in peace in the TBM shed.

Talk about niche markets, the DE moniker stands for Desert Enduro and the bike was built

simply to go racing in the US desert. So the Italian firm took their 500cc, two-stroke WMX motocrosser, added a wide ratio five-speed gearbox, a basic set of lights and - since its thirst for fuel was almost as legendary as its thirst for blood - a whopping great 18L fuel tank. This thing was a beast to ride: not only was it a pain to get onto since it featured an eye-watering 990mm seat height, but it was also a bitch to steer as you

Yamaha's IT490 was the culmination of years of research into what really makes people scream!



Legend has it that the bike is so evil it somehow repairs itself, just like the Plymouth Fury in Stephen King's 'Christine'. But there's little truth in the tale, as the TBM project WMX was taken to bits a year ago, and it's still in pieces today...! **Verdict:** 'You toucha my throttle, I smasha your face, capice...'

### Yamaha IT490

Remember the end of the film Ghostbusters, where the sky turned funny colours, the clouds churned ominously and lightning blitzed across the sky? Well that's exactly what happened when the second TBM project bike in this

fought to overcome the effects of 18L of fuel slopping its way around at waist height.

Somehow a small number of bikes escaped their Stateside destiny and found their way to the UK where they set about demoralising our dirtbiking establishment with their legendary power, their unwieldy centre of gravity and their demonic kickback - if it didn't break your leg, it broke the kickstart shaft and smashed the cases!

line-up - issue 76's Yamaha IT490 - first rolled from the back of the TBM Transporter. It was the devil incarnate, badly disguised in faded blue plastics and drooling gearbox oil. And just as the sky turned purple, so ex-TBM test rider Clive Garnham's face turned a particularly putrid shade of green at the thought of piloting the early Eighties Yamaha at the Weston Beach Race that year.

Husqvarna's legendary 360. For the riders it was not so much *On Any Sunday*, as on every hospital ward...



With its cantilever rear-end and radial-finned motor, the big two-stroke Yamaha is considered by some at least, a classic machine. And Clive probably would've thought the same had he not found that the IT had no suspension, very little in the way of brakes, and a constantly detonating motor thanks to filling the tank with cheap unleaded. Oops. Never mind, you may think, a 490cc two-stroke must have flown down Weston's mile-long straight. And back in the bike's heyday it certainly would've done. One of these babies at full chat was easily good enough for a ton-up blast down the beach - even if it would take another mile or so to stop it!

Ours however, was a little different. Because what the pre-race check (a bumble along a residential street) had failed to highlight was that the bike was geared not for three-figure speeds, but for a top-end of about 55mph!

Clive was not alone in his dislike for the ol' 490. To once again quote the legendary Rick Sieman, 'the 490 handled like a safe falling down a flight of stairs'. And it was this haphazard handling which finally did for Clive's Weston attempt, and ultimately his dirt riding career.

Having spent a thoroughly unpleasant couple of hours trying to steer this unrideable old nail around a freezing West Country beach, Clive took the merest little dab mid-corner to save the wayward from-end from tucking, and immediately tore his Cruciate Ligament. Game over.

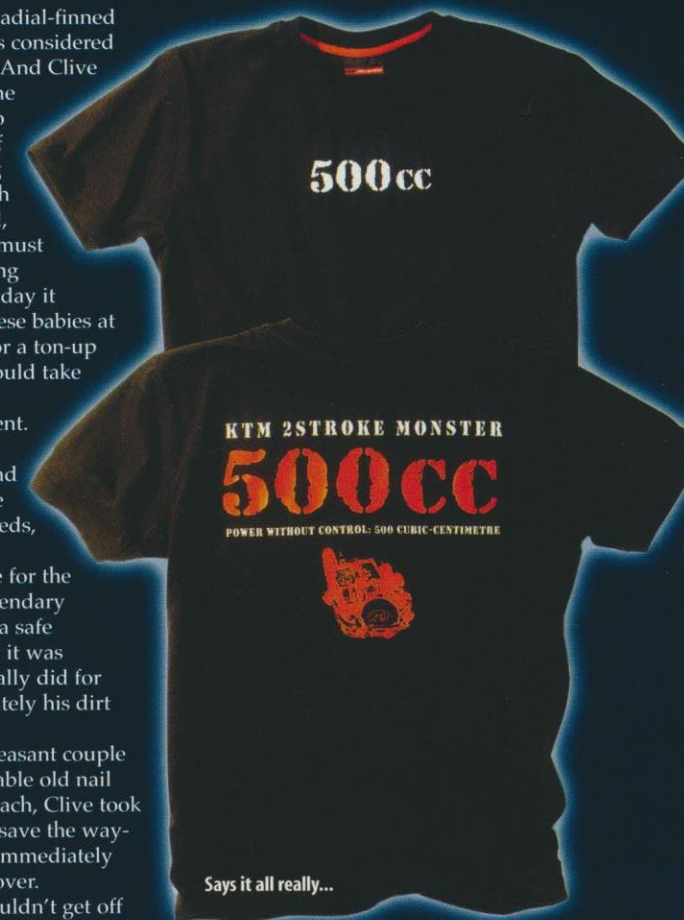
Just to really top things off he couldn't get off the bike 'cos his leg wouldn't support him and he couldn't stop the jackhammer of a motor because his gammy leg meant he'd never start it again. Not that he'd have got it going anyway, 'cos the kickstart mechanism had sheared at the start of the day!

Looking back, Clive really should've known better. After all, when he signed-on the previous day he'd landed a particularly pertinent race number - 666... **Verdict:** You had more chance of survival as a Kamikaze pilot...

### KTM '500' two-stroke

'Power Without Control' reads the slogan on the KTM T-shirt celebrating this most awesome of engines. And it's as a powerplant, rather than a specific bike, that the KTM makes this list.

Throughout the '80s and '90s the Austrian's employed big-bore low technology two-strokes in a wide range of off-roaders and in slightly varying displacements - all the way up to a life-threatening 550cc - though we particularly



Says it all really...

liked the sound of the 1990 540DXC desert racer: more low-down oomph than a Mack truck and with a top-end that'd drag your competitors clean off their bikes in your wake, this was one of those bikes you'd always remember... for all the wrong reasons.

They say that if you can remember the '60s then you weren't really there. And by the same token, if you're still in one piece today you probably never took a ride on an old 500cc 2T Katosh... **Verdict:** Austria's other evil export...

### Husqvarna 360

No collection of old timers would be complete without a mention of the God-daddy of all widowmakers, the legendary 'willy-shrinking' Husky 360. This was a bike so infamous even the great Malcolm Smith (of MSR and *On Any Sunday* fame) had trouble controlling it at times. God help the rest of us mere mortals.

The fact that it produced gobloads of power at



## MODERN MONSTERS

the merest touch of its throttle was not really the problem - rather that all this performance was harnessed in a spindly Scandinavian steel chassis with its origins back in the mid 1960s - and with brakes and suspension to match.

If you could ever get a 360 Husky to start you knew you were in for an epic ride. Fortunately most of them either failed to fire or broke-down soon afterwards, sparing a whole generation of riders the discomfort of numerous broken bones and disfigured bodies.

With its famous polished-and-painted alloy tank, it did however have the saving grace of being extremely pretty to look at. Something that must have been scant comfort as you gazed longingly at it from your hospital bed... **Verdict:** No wonder so many Swedes commit suicide...

### Husaberg FE650e

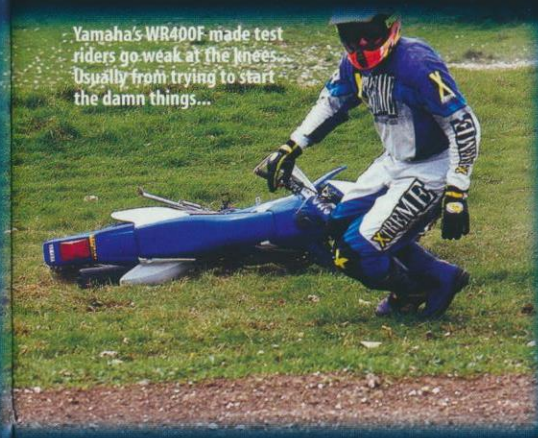
Though hugely popular in supermoto trim, there are few good reasons to want to buy the monstrous 650 Berg with dirt wheels installed. Perhaps you live in the desert Kingdom of Qatar and require the horizon-shrinking performance of a truly insane sand-blaster; maybe you're trying for an all-out assault on the off-road world record (currently 123mph), or possibly you're just sick of living!

There's no hi-tech wizardry involved with the big Berg, it makes big power because it's a big-bore motor in a ballsy state of tune. Essentially, it's the same basic engine that Swedish company Husaberg have been making since the late Eighties, only now it comes blessed with such mechanical luxuries as an oil pump! And as this

HM Honda CRE500. Riding instructions as per below right...



Yamaha's WR400F made test riders go weak at the knees... Usually from trying to start the damn things...



1) Start bike.  
2) Twist throttle...

3) Fall on ass...  
4) Sell bike.



### Yamaha WR400F

Now I know what you're thinking: 'A mere 400 isn't evil. What's that doing here?' Well, I beg to differ and I'm sure that those of you who owned one of those first WR400Fs will agree. Because the early 400 was an absolute pig to start. To be fair, getting it going from cold was rarely much of a problem, but woe betide you stall the bike when it was hot and clattered in mud, because then those early WR-Fs flatly refused to light up.

If you were riding enduros back in '98 you'll have no doubt noticed 400F 'owners' (the term 'riders' would imply you could actually get the thing going) - they were the ones stood at the trackside burger van swigging a cup of tea

powerhouse of a motor is bolted into an ultra-lightweight (and detractors might say slightly fragile) chassis, it's easy to see why the FE650 is such a beast.

But really, we should leave the final word on the FE to Husaberg themselves, because they seem all too aware - proud even - that they've created a monster. As they state in their advertising blurb: *'The FE650e, one of the most powerful enduro bikes ever made, will expand your senses: full force out of the bottom.'*

Quite... **Verdict:** Parp!

Vertemati E570: Silver Dream  
Racer or Death Race 2000.  
You decide...



having given up trying to get their mounts to fire.

In fact you could argue that far from 'kick-starting the four-stroke revolution', those early Yamahas actually did the opposite. And it's because of the WR400F that we all now enjoy electric-start thumpers, and that strokers are currently back in vogue.

If you did get the bike fired up it was quite a revelation. With its high-revving (13000rpm no less) five-valve engine it produced more than enough power to get you into deep water. Unfortunately that's precisely where you didn't want to be. Since Yamaha also designed this baby with a low-hanging crankcase breather hose. Stall this sucker in a stream and not only would it refuse to start, but it would also occasionally suck-up a lungful of cold water into the top of a hot motor - and might never start again!

As the old saying goes 'to finish first, first you've got to finish'. But in the case of the 1998 WR-F, to finish first, first you've got to start the bloody thing! **Verdict:** Where do we start...? We don't!

### HM CRE500

It's rumoured that when *the Devil went down to Georgia* he was riding an HM Honda 'five hunderd'! I mean, who but Old Nick himself could possibly want to pilot one of the most fearsome MXers ever built... in a forest enduro? Okay, so

the Italian Honda importers added a flywheel weight and a lighting kit but, quite frankly, they'd have been better off adding an ejector seat! It'd take more than a couple of lame tweaks to tame the hit of the mighty CR500 lump...!

Unlike more modern two-strokes, the CR500 has no powervalve to temper its fury at the bottom-end. In its place is a seamless wave of power, the likes of which could only ever come from a large displacement motor. And with so much grunt available you could probably ride most events using only third gear!

The one and only time TBM tested a CRE500 has long since gone down in office folklore as truly unforgettable. Like Beaker from the Muppet Show, it was once again Aussie Clive who was first (and last) to throw a leg over the beast, declaring with chest-thumping diffidence: 'Stand aside boys, I know how to wheelie these babies, I used to have a CR500'. At which point Clive clambered aboard the red-and-black monster and promptly gave its tail a cheeky tweak.

Suffice it to say, the wheels had barely turned a complete revolution before Clive was dumped unceremoniously on his ass and the bike cart-wheeled off in a profusion of scattered plastics and snapped sub-frame. Like a wild mustang being broken-in by a novice cowpoke, the Honda simply sat there taunting him with a ring-dinging 'laugh' from what was left of its muffler.



We hastily patched the bike back together again and returned it to its rightful owner (a dirtbiking novice) who, clearly delighted with his recent purchase, kept it for, oooh, about a week before selling it on. He'd ridden the bike just once...

**Verdict:** Once ridden, never forgotten!

### Vertemati E570

There's nothing like a good bit of over-powered exotica to get your heart racing. And the E570 would probably send your ticker right off the scale. Originally, the Italian Vertemati brothers built their simple (and beautiful), lightweight, gear-driven SOHC dirtbike to take them racing. But, like all successful racing prototypes, when they tried to make the jump from one-off special to production machine, that's when the troubles really began.

Just like Sharon Stone in *Basic Instinct*, how could something so beautiful ever prove so evil? After all it's not like the magnesium and billet-encrusted bike was particularly fragile, it's just that this piece of engineering art was never really designed to be productionised.

The vibes from this extraordinarily powerful motor were so strong they could be measured on the Richter Scale, and test bikes rarely went the distance.

The power it produced however was stomach-churningly brutal. When we tested a smaller 501cc SM version in our sister title *Supermoto Magazine*, it wiped the floor with an XR650 in a side-by-side drag race (spitting flames from the exhaust in the process). The 570 however, was much more of a handful!

On tarmac it was barely controllable, but get it on the dirt and the Vertemati was simply a liability. Everywhere it went it scarred the landscape leaving a 140-section trench in its wake! Fortunately as it turned out, very few people actually bought the E570, and it was listed by the Italians as 'special order' only. 'Special needs' only more like...

**Verdict:** One flew over the cuckoo's nest...



Honda XR650R: Sadly the 'R' didn't stand for *Retardation*, 'cos Honda forgot to fit it with a usable front brake...



Below: ATK's 700cc two-stroke INTIMIDATOR. Nuff said...



### Honda XR650R

The Big Red was unleashed on an unsuspecting world back in 2000 as a replacement for the venerable old air-cooled XR600R. And, despite a lack of electric start, it proved a popular machine though certainly more suited to US desert racing than gloopy green lanes or UK forest enduros.

A large number of sixfifties have found their way onto the road as supermotors, with 17in wheels and huge front discs, and that's a good thing because the big XR gets a mention here not merely for its stonking water-cooled motor (though it *is* stonking), but for its woefully inadequate front stopper. Yep, for some reason Honda decided to fit a 100+mph, 140kg dirtbike with a front disc off a moped. The puny 240mm rotor provides about the same level of retardation as trying to use your bum bag as a parachute.

Our own Dave 'Crasher' Cornish found out just how ineffectual that brake is when, having slightly misjudged a corner on a Cambrian Rally fire-road, he tried in vain to slow the XR down using the weedy anchors. Sadly for Dave, the XR was having none of it and threw itself lemming-like off the side of the mountain, Crasher still flailing from the handlebars.

Eventually Dave made a full recovery but not before he'd discovered for himself the true consequences of riding a motorcycle blessed with more go-than-whoah!

Locals say that on a clear night you can still see the ill-fated Honda as its ghostly form tears

across the sky above the Eppynt ranges...

**Verdict:** Don't stop me now...

### And Finally...

We couldn't end this feature without giving mention to two of the scariest, most pointless production dirtbikes on the planet. First off another Maico! When the remainder of the Dutch/German firm was sold off to yet another German industrialist he couldn't simply settle for selling spares. Oh no. He had to build his own bike - and one which was even more terrifying than the mighty Maico which heralded it. Enter the 685cc Koestler two-stroke. A bike so scary we don't know anyone who's had the guts to ride it.

But the final word must surely go to American dirtbike manufacturer ATK. Clearly the company

enjoys a laugh, why else would they buy the remaining stock of Cannondale motorcycles. So when they launched a bike called the *Intimidator 50* - a kiddy motocrosser with black plastics and blood-red calipers, we all thought: Ooh, scary..!

But that was before we 'met-the-parents'. Cos this little fifty is the unholy offspring of the mutha and father of all dirtbikes... the mind-numbingly stupid 620cc and 700cc two-stroke INTIMIDATORS!

What we really want to know is... who was it that tested the 620 version and thought, 'Hmmm, not bad. But what this thing *really* needs is just a little bit more power'?

Answers on a mortuary toe-tag please...

### Dishonourable Mentions

- All Triumph 650 Twins
- Any big open-class CZ or Jawa
- KTM's 620SX & 540 Tiainen Rep
- Moto Guzzi Quota
- Suzuki's TM400 Cyclone
- TM 700SM
- Praga 610

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