

HOUNDS OF THUNDER

By the staff of Dirt Bike



Now there are three

So you think you have it all figured out? You think that big, fast and light are the secrets? You think that new technology is the answer?

So did we. Before we lined up these three bikes in shootout mode, we thought it would be an easy trouncing; a showcase for the newest, lightest technology. We thought we knew the answers before we even started. Heck, we didn't even know the questions. We'll tell you right up front;

when you compare the Honda CRF450R, the KTM 520SX and the Yamaha YZ426F, you'll discover no clear, easy truth. When you look at a stop watch, you'll discover that most riders can average the exact same lap times on any of the three machines. When you ride the three bikes you'll discover that in between the black and the white of race results, there is a whole world of gray half tones that most riders actually deal with.

Clearly, staging them on a start line and seeing which got to the finish first would give us no answers. So we tested them in different ways. We raced them in MXs and in GPs. We rode them on tracks and off tracks. We took them apart and put them together. Finally, a clear picture began to emerge. These aren't just race bikes. They are expected to be much more than that. Accordingly, this had to be more than just another motocross shootout.



HOUNDS OF THUNDER



HONDA CRF450R

Pure MX blood

● Remember when Honda came out with the XR650R two years ago? At the time, everyone was expecting the new Honda four-stroke to be a motocrosser. Honda spokesmen made it clear: first things first. They had to introduce a new four-stroke trail bike before releasing the new MXer. Otherwise, they figured, riders would take the MXer off-road where it was never meant to go.

So now Honda dealers can steer the trail riders away from the CRF; the bike is a purebred in the eyes of those who build it. But we have a problem listening to authority figures. We tested it in supercross, motocross and every environment we could think of to see for ourselves.

SUPERCROSS

The Honda frame and suspension are naturals for supercross style tracks. The

The CRF is super light, incredibly nimble and is blessed with a strong spread of power. Gerrit Ordelman downsides a Glen Helen tabletop during the testing.

CRF has the stiffest suspension of the lot and is a clear winner when it comes to big jumps and stadium rockers. The fork doesn't bottom noticeably anywhere even when the compression clickers are set around 10 clicks (remember, they're on the top on Showa forks). The rear end might be a little softer and require a few clicks in on the low speed and maybe a quarter turn on the high-speed for jumps. But overall, the CRF suspension is a great starting point for amateur-level supercross.

Even better; the weight (or lack of it) is a huge factor on the Honda's side. In the air, it truly feels like a two-stroke. Jumping the CRF is never scary. We're

guessing that half of the credit goes to the lack of engine braking. Very few riders leave the earth with the throttle wide open (unless it's a really, really big jump). Usually the throttle is neutral or closed at the second of lift-off. On a normal four-stroke that means you can have an unpredictable shift in attitude as the engine goes from acceleration to braking. Anything can happen. On the Honda, that's no factor. Plus, the Honda feels super light in the air. That's because it *is* super light. It feels like a fighter where the other two are big, bulky air tankers.

On the down side, the Honda's engine is a little sleepy off the bottom. It makes plenty of torque, but throttle response is just a little slower than that of a two-stroke (or a YZ426). That means that the bike still likes wide-open spaces with a lot of room between the turns and the jumps. Jetting was never an issue on our test bike. Still, you must pay attention to the fuel screw (best around 1.5 turns) or risk stalling the bike at awkward moments.

OUTDOOR MX

Once you get the CRF on bigger, more traditional motocross tracks, the engine becomes its greatest asset. It has the ultimate combination: a ton of power with a controllable delivery. It goes exactly as fast as you want it to go; no harsh hits unless that's what you order. And on top, the CRF just keeps on winding out, going faster and faster. That makes it a great motor for courses that have plenty of traction and can take all the power that you can lay down, and even better for courses where traction is hard to find. The CRF always hooks up as long as you pay attention to what your right wrist is up to.

The CRF's biggest handicap on fast courses is a light-feeling front end. This is a bike that makes plenty of power, so you had better be sitting up on the gas cap when you roll the power on. If you sit too far rearward, the front wheel never feels that solidly planted. Making that more difficult is a really flat transition between seat and tank. Yes, usually this is a good thing, but it does make the bike feel more cramped as you move forward. A taller seat is a must for big riders.

In tighter turns, the CRF front end sticks much better because of the more radical weight transfer that comes with hard braking. That's why the bike works so well on supercross tracks. But in fast, sweeping turns, some riders will notice a vague feeling. You're not quite sure how much of a bite the front wheel has, although it never washes out without justification.

The CRF has lots of amazing parts. The front end isn't one of them.

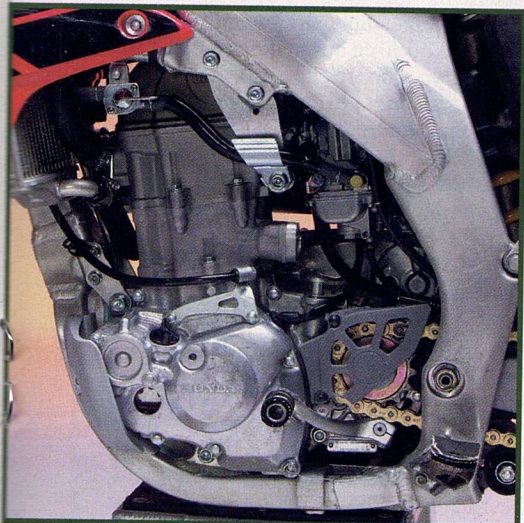
GRAND PRIX

Out west, we have a very old form of racing called the GP. You've heard of Viewfinders, Adelanto, Virginia City and Elsinore. Consider it a long, fast motocross over about eight miles of odd-ball terrain, or maybe a hare-scrambles with more speed. The Honda is a natural for this type of racing. The motor has such a broad, smooth power delivery, it can adapt to anything. In a GP you could be on pavement one minute and in a mud bog the next. The CRF engine is ideal everywhere. The five speed gearbox has a broad spread between gears to match the broad powerband. Stock, it will almost touch 90 mph on top. With a 45-tooth rear sprocket, the bike will break 100 mph, although first gear becomes too tall for tight stuff.

Oddly enough, the CRF is a very stable bike—it just doesn't feel that way. There's a certain feeling that most bikes get just before they break into violent headshake. The CRF always feels like that, but the headshake never comes. Once you start to trust the bike, you don't give it a second thought. The same goes for those aforementioned traits in high-speed turns; you get used to it.



The new standard: At 233 pounds without fuel, the Honda weighs less than a Kawasaki KX250 of just a few years ago.



The single overhead cam is kind of odd for a state-of-the-art four-stroke. But with a redline of 11,500, apparently it's no issue.

OFF THE TRACK

We only know a handful of riders who won't ride unless they are entered in a race. Most of them work for *Motocross Action*. The rest of us ride in the hills and can be caught goofing off on trails. The CRF is a typical MX bike. It's a little stiff, a little loud and a little out of place. First gear is a little bit tall for super slow trails and you can stall the engine if you're not careful. Its biggest asset is that it usually starts when you kick it. There's no drill, no looking for top-dead-center. You just have to learn the right touch. The hot-start trigger is usually a must. There's no manual compression release.

Fuel economy is fairly terrible. We never got very scientific in measuring it, but trust us, every time you think it needs a little fuel, it needs a lot of fuel. The two-gallon tank might squeak out

- HONDA CRF450R**
- Separate engine and gearbox oil
 - Aluminum frame
 - 233 pounds without fuel
 - \$6299 msrp

50 miles of fast trail riding, but don't push your luck. IMS has a bigger tank in the works. Long rides will push your endurance anyway. The CRF is a little bit buzzy and has a tight seating position.

Frankly, Honda was right. The farther you get from a pure, modern motocross track, the less impressive the CRF is. Once you get out on desert roads, the XR650R is a better machine. But for a bike that was built with nothing but racing in mind, it ain't bad. It can do it all. And that's something that few bikes can claim.

HOUNDS OF THUNDER



KTM 520 SX

The return of the Open class

● The KTM 520 has no right to be as good as it is. It's an Open-class motocrosser, at least by definition. And there's a reason why the Open class is dying. There just aren't that many riders who want to, or even can, muscle a 50-horsepower brute around a motocross course. On top of that, the 520 will be cast out of the 250 class in 2003 according to proposed AMA rules.

Yet the 520 is a sweetheart. It's a brute, all right, but a loveable one with a gentle side. That means that rule changes or no rule changes, riders will continue to flock to the 520, making it one of KTM's most popular bikes. Is it enough to singlehandedly bring back the Open class? If any bike can do it, this is the one.

Here's the secret to going fast on the KTM: Hold on.

SUPERCROSS

If you look in the record book, you'll find there actually was once a 500cc supercross championship in the U.S. Chalk it up to early-'70s substance abuse or just industrial insanity, but it was gone by 1975. Big jumps and little tracks don't mix that well with big horsepower. Still, the 2002 520 isn't half bad on an amateur supercross track. It's a fairly light bike, and that goes a long way. You can tuck it into tight turns and whip it around almost like it's a 250.

Just remember the 520's motor is much, much more powerful than the Honda's or Yamaha's. It certainly should be; it has more cubic inches. The

secret to having all that power and getting away with it is a smooth, predictable power delivery. The KTM doesn't drop all those horses on your head as soon as you open the throttle. It gives you a little time to grab a hold of something before it goes nuts. That's good and bad; good because that's the only way that so much power can possibly be manageable, bad because you don't have the instant snap that supercross tracks require. When you come out of a tight turn, you don't have the sudden burst to deal with an immediate jump. If the jump is just a few feet farther from the exit of the turn, then you have a very different problem; you might jump straight into the next county. You can't use the wide-open-in-second-gear rule that usually works on a good 250. That will put you into orbit on the 520.

You also find that the 520's suspension is soft for big jump landings. It can fall right through the stroke at both ends. Don't be timid with the compression adjusters on the WP fork and shock. You can go in 10 clicks at a time to deal with a specific track.

Having said all that, you might think the KTM is just too much motorcycle for any tight track. Maybe, but we will say this; there's no other Open class bike that is better for supercross. Don't even think about trying to put a 500 two-stroke or some other large thumper on that type of track. The 520 is amazing for what it *can* do.

OUTDOOR MX

This is what the 520 lives for. When you have a little space to use that fantastic motor, you can't wipe that stupid grin off your face. You look forward to steep hills and deep, soft dirt. All the things that usually drag a motocrosser down do nothing but make the 520 a little angry. The trick is to have your weight far enough forward to keep the front end down. Then you can achieve the KTM nirvana known as Full Throttle, and it's a wondrous thing.

Even Half Throttle is a great place to be. Like we said earlier, the power delivery is surprisingly smooth. The crazy acceleration doesn't kick in until you have the carb all the way open. You can dial in as much power as it takes to get the job done. Carburetion is usually smooth, aside from occasional popping on deceleration.

For most motocross tracks, the 520's suspension is decent. It's actually the best bike in KTM's line for average-size whoops, holes and bumps. At the extremes it's less effective; it feels soft on really big jumps and a little harsh on small chop. The fork, especially, doesn't

What's the KTM's big secret? Lots of power and not much weight. That's not much of a secret, is it?

like chop on high-speed straights. The front end dances and shakes. We know a few riders who simply installed a steering damper and put an end to that nonsense. The bike handles so well in every other way, the headshake is oddly out of place. It holds its line in fast turns and goes where it's pointed.

GRAND PRIX

The first thing you think of on a Grand Prix course is speed. Does the KTM's four-speed transmission have enough gearing? You would be surprised at how fast the 520 will go. Without changing sprockets, it will break 80 mph. You've gotta ask yourself, do you really want to go faster than that?

So we could live with the stock four-speed, but frankly, we would rather have a five-speed. We've never seen the logic in a four-speed gearbox in any motorcycle, dating back to the original 1981 Honda CR450 (not that we were alive back then). What's the advantage? Eight ounces of gear weight? Come on. In every other way, the KTM engine is perfect for GP racing. It's fast and smooth. That headshake thing might raise its head once in a while, but nine out of ten GP riders have steering dampers anyway. Consider it a cost of doing business. Plus the bumps and jumps that you have to deal with on the average GP track are right in the zone where the KTM suspension works best.

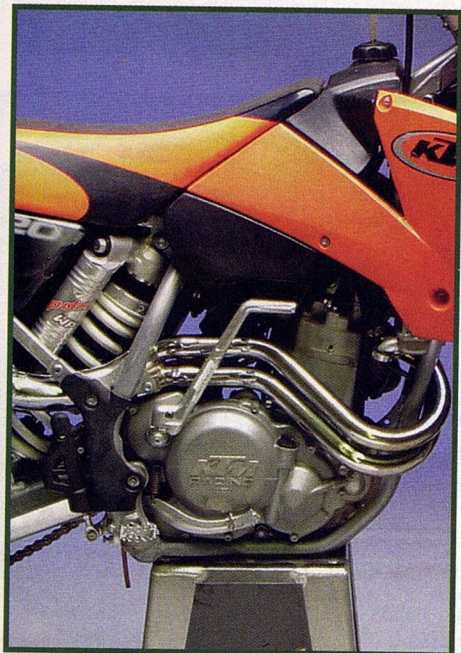


KTM's suspension gets a tiny bit better every year. Life would be sweet if it got a lot better each year.

OFF THE TRACK

If you measure a bike by its fun factor, then the KTM is a big winner. When you aren't trying to set your fastest lap time, there's no motorcycle on earth that's such a kick to ride. You have all the power of a monster four-stroke with none of the weight and bad manners. Ever spend a day just climbing hills? (Kansas riders, never mind.) You never get tired of going up stupid things on the 520.

Like the Honda, the KTM is easy to start. The drill is as follows: kick. The most difficult part is trying to find the choke knob under the tank. Usually you don't need it. The KTM is a comfortable bike, too. The seating position is the most spread out and even though the seat is hard, it's shaped well and allows you to move around easily. Vibration isn't much of an issue. The 520 shakes, but it doesn't buzz. And the fuel range is slightly greater than that of the Honda; the tank holds about the same amount,



No one has ever made this much power so easy to use. No one.

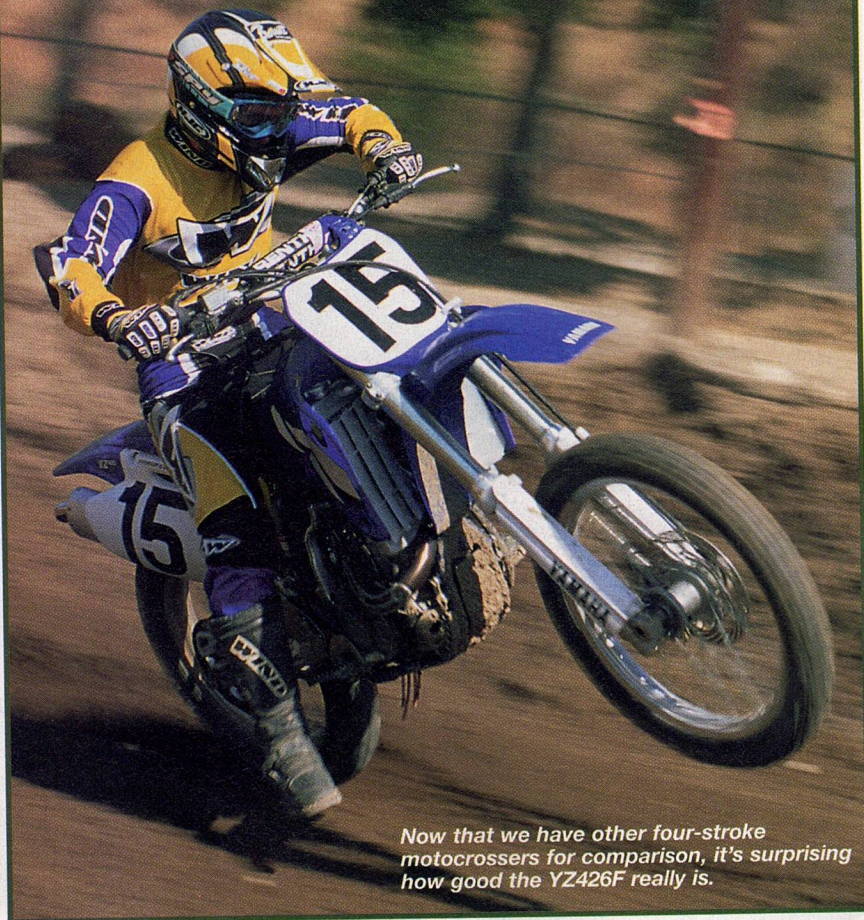
KTM 520 SX

- New 48mm WP fork
- Revised PDS rear suspension
- 240 pounds without fuel
- \$6748 msrp

but each gallon seems to go farther. Oddly enough, the SX fuel tank is in big demand. A huge number of riders go for the MXC version because of its six-speed gearbox and electric start. But few riders care for the enormous MXC gas tank.

Where does that leave the SX? It's a true general purpose motorcycle; a national caliber motocrosser that does virtually everything well. The four-speed gearbox is only a tiny flaw in the overall package, and if that's a big deal to you there are two other 520s in KTM's line that are bound to make you happy, both with more range, more gears and electric starting.

HOUNDS OF THUNDER



Now that we have other four-stroke motocrossers for comparison, it's surprising how good the YZ426F really is.

YAMAHA YZ426F

Still crazy after all these years

● The 2002 Yamaha YZ426F is the biggest surprise of the year. It should be slipping off the top by now. It should be shamed by the newer, lighter, more powerful bikes that have come out in the last few years. It should be, but it's not. Back when the Yamaha first came out, we had nothing for comparison. Now that the KTM and Honda are here, we're truly amazed to see how good the Yamaha really is.

SUPERCROSS

Believe it or not, the Yamaha's motor is a natural for tight supercross tracks. Even though it makes less power than the other two, it makes power more quickly. Don't look for this on a dyno chart. The Yamaha has instant snap when you par-

tially open the throttle. The Honda and KTM require a big twist before they really get going, which is why they have such controllable power deliveries. The Yamaha might not be as smooth, but it will get you up the face of a jump and into the air sooner than any other four-stroke.

The YZ also has the best balanced suspension package. The front and rear work together over most obstacles. Most riders will find it a little soft for pure supercross, but it's a simple case of spring rates. The suspension action is excellent and when it does bottom out, it never hits with a harsh clunk.

As expected, though, the Yamaha's biggest flaw is its weight. You just can't give away 15 pounds or so in a field this tight. The motor might get you into the air quickly, but once you're up there you feel like you're just along for the ride. The bike comes down where it wants and how it wants. It also has old-world four-stroke engine braking. That's a good thing in some places, but not on jumps.

OUTDOOR MX

Once you find enough room to get the Yamaha moving fast, you get a pleasant surprise. The YZ is the most stable bike of the bunch. Where the KTM has a little bit of head shake and the Honda has an uncertain feel, the Yamaha is as planted as a locomotive. It doesn't wander around the track at all and you always know exactly what it's going to do. In broad, sweeping turns, the front



Yamaha has shaved off three pounds in the years since the introduction of the YZ400F. Next year, expect the bike to lose another 15.

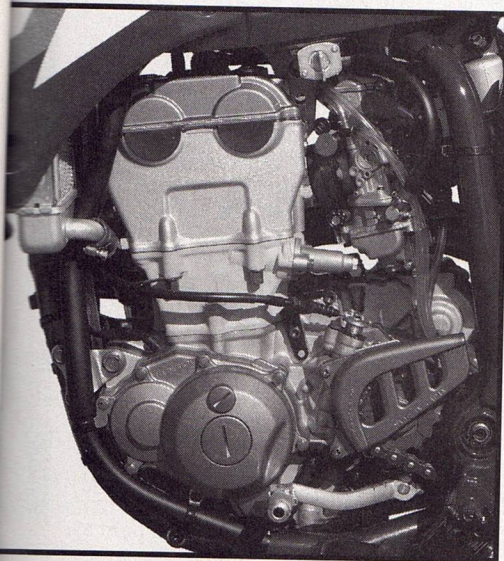
wheel just plants itself and tracks right on its line. You don't have to move your weight around nearly as much as you do on the others. The YZ is a great lazy man's motorcycle. Perhaps this is one area where the engine braking really helps; you get a gentle weight shift as you cut the throttle and that helps make the front end stick.

In super tight turns, you don't notice engine braking as much. Most riders have the clutch in when they have to lose speed in a big hurry. The Yamaha isn't particularly easy to stall, but it does require a little care in this department because of the consequences. It might restart on the first kick, it might not; and you'll lose a place or two no matter what.

The Yamaha's biggest asset is its suspension. It's probably the best suspended motorcycle of the year. Odd; it's even better than the YZ250 two-stroke. Test riders come in and out of the pits on the Honda and KTM wanting to try some different setting, but the Yamaha just stays on the track doing lap after lap. As long as you have the rear sag set to around 100mm and you aren't too far outside of a normal rider's weight profile, you'll probably ride with the stock settings and love them.

YAMAHA YZ425F

- Lighter, stronger swingarm for 2002
- Wider front hub
- Longer shock
- 247 pounds without fuel
- \$5999



Do you feel lucky? Good; it's your turn to start the YZ.



GRAND PRIX

At speed, you need stability. The Yamaha has it, with no real need for steering dampers or even weird suspension settings. Sure, a good damper is always an advantage in fast sections, but the YZ handles as well as any bike at speed. The suspension probably gets most of the credit here, too. Where the Honda and KTM are acceptable for dealing with the sharp impacts of Grand Prix racing, the Yamaha is excellent.

But even on wide-open tracks, you still feel the Yamaha's extra weight. In situations where you have to time your braking points like a road-racer, the YZ requires just a little more room. And the Yamaha's other disadvantage is displacement. We never thought we would say it, but the Yamaha just doesn't have enough sheer horsepower to hang with the Honda and especially not with the KTM. Top speed at least isn't an issue. The YZ's five-speed allows it to keep up with the other two, it just takes a little longer to get there. We've learned not to mess with the Yamaha motor. Be happy with the output or you'll be flirting with occasional DNFs.

OFF THE TRACK

The Yamaha has proven that it works well off road. Paul Clipper at *Trailrider* magazine reports that the 426 is popular

The Yamaha's front end is so well planted it might start growing roots.

even in the tight woods and rocks of New England. Who would have guessed? The mark of great suspension is in its capability to deal with virtually anything. And you can wiggle a 426 through tight trees as long as you are careful not to lug the motor so low that you're in stall danger.

Starting is still a big problem. The YZ doesn't use an automatic decompressor like the other two. You have to use a manual decompressor to find top dead center, then kick it though at just the right foot speed. If you aren't in a hurry, it will fire up in two or three kicks. If you panic, forget it. Once a 426 gets in a bad mood, you'll just have to wait around for another leg.

The 426 has the best fuel range of the three bikes. The bike is available in an off-road version, but frankly, the YZ is a better bike. The WR's bigger fuel tank is poorly shaped, so most riders replace it with an IMS tank anyway. That leaves the kickstand, a heavier flywheel, the lighting coil and the 18-inch rear wheel as the only good reasons to buy the WR. But you'll have to put up with more weight and less performance. The YZ426F remains the most versatile bike in Yamaha's line.

RATINGS

How they stack up and where to stack them

SHEER POWER

1. KTM 520 SX
2. Honda CRF450R
3. Yamaha YZ426F

There's no arguing with cubic inches. The KTM has a great big piston that does good work. As soon as the rules are sorted out, it might well end up in a class of its own. Literally.

POWER DELIVERY, SX

1. Yamaha YZ426F
2. Honda CRF450R
3. KTM 520 SX

The Yamaha moves out from the first crack of the throttle, which is an advantage on tight tracks. The Honda and KTM have less hit and a mellower delivery.

POWER DELIVERY, MX

1. KTM 520 SX
2. Honda CRF450R
3. Yamaha YZ426F

The KTM has a ton of power, but it's easy to use. You just roll it on and enjoy it. The Honda power is similar, it just revs quicker and doesn't have quite the guts. The Yamaha is a little shortwinded by comparison.

SUSPENSION, OVERALL

1. Yamaha YZ426F
2. Honda CRF450R
3. KTM 520 SX

The Yamaha has great suspension no matter where you ride it. The Honda is stiffer, so the only time that it has an advantage is where huge jumps are concerned. Otherwise it's a little unbalanced; stiffer in front. The KTM is too soft for supercross, but decent for most motocross tracks.

STABILITY

1. Yamaha YZ426F
2. Honda CRF450R
3. KTM 520 SX

Was the Yamaha always this good? It tracks like it's on rails. The CRF is a little nervous in the front and the KTM goes through periodic convulsions of head shake.

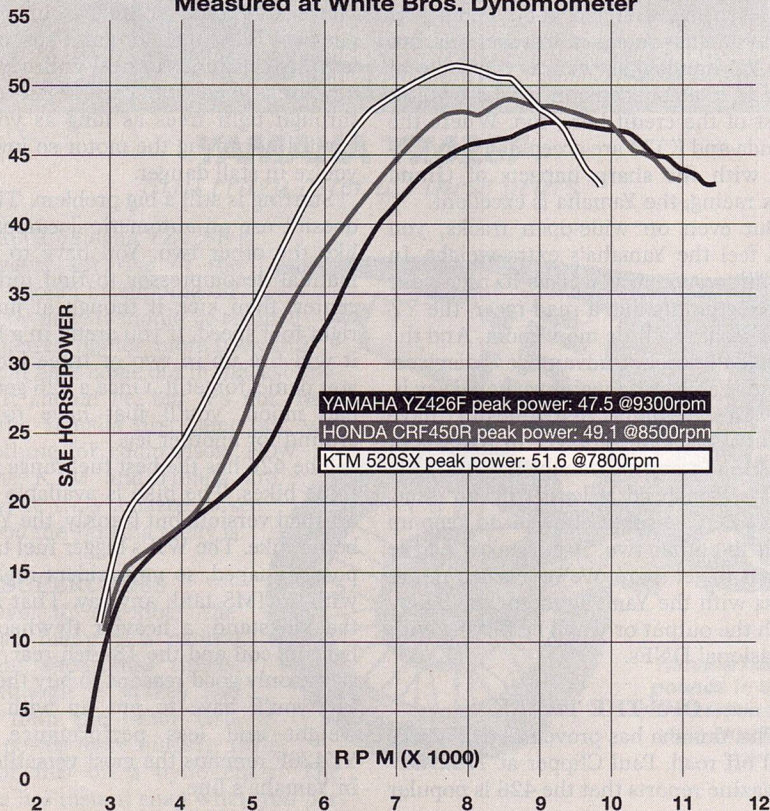
STARTING

1. (tie) Honda CRF450R & KTM 520 SX
3. Yamaha YZ426F

We're not saying it can't happen, we're just saying it *didn't* happen. The Honda and the KTM never had starting problems. The Yamaha usually will start, but you have to do the drill just perfectly.

HORSEPOWER

Measured at White Bros. Dynamometer



YAMAHA YZ426F peak power: 47.5 @9300rpm

HONDA CRF450R peak power: 49.1 @8500rpm

KTM 520SX peak power: 51.6 @7800rpm

HOUNDS OF THUNDER



If you want to build the ultimate supercross bike, stick a Yamaha engine in the Honda frame. The KTM is just too much bike for little tracks.

CONCLUSION

Where to go and what to bring

● Sometimes the more you test, the less you know. We raced and rode these bikes in so many different settings that we learned only one absolute, real truth; we like them all. But that doesn't mean they are all alike. Just the opposite. In this age, it's hard to find a more diverse group.

On the supercross-style tracks that are more and more common across the country, the decision is most clear. The Honda is best suited for jump-intensive tracks in suspension, handling, and weight. The Yamaha's instant-on throttle response allows it to stay in the running, but you'll have to work harder in the long run. The KTM, on the other hand, is just too much motorcycle.

The picture gets fuzzier on outdoor tracks and GPs. You can make a case for all three bikes. But the rougher the track, the more the Yamaha shines. The Honda and KTM have advantages in power and weight, but the YZ is so stable and so easy to ride that it might well have an overall advantage. But it would be small indeed. And in general riding, the KTM is the winner just because you can't stop smiling when you twist the throttle.

So where do we go from there? To three different dealerships, and then to the poor house, that's where. This is as tough as shootouts get. But if you hold a gun to our heads and demand a winner, we'll confess. The Honda is the one bike we'd most like to own.

WHAT ABOUT THE 250 CLASS?

Do two-strokes still rule?



How does the best of the two-stroke MXers compare to this group of thumpers? It doesn't. The bikes are so different they are hard to even ride on the same day.

● Our EPA is set to drastically reduce dirt bike emissions in 2006, and many say this will be the death of the two-stroke. We remind those nay-sayers of Honda's clean-burn EXP2 project and the CRM250. We also believe that four-strokes may have trouble meeting the impending standards without catalytic converters, but let's save that for another time. The point is that the two-stroke isn't dead just yet—far from it. The 2002 CR250R is the lightest production 250 of the long-travel era, as it's within a pound of the AMA's MX weight limit. And the suspension, power and handling are so good, we'd like to shoot it out against Johnny O's championship-winning '84 RC250. We think the '02 would smoke it! Anyway, if we pitted the CR250 against the CRF, YZF and 520, how would it do?

SUSTAINABLE SUPERCROSS

Boo all you want, but Ricky is on the bike he feels will carry him to another 250cc supercross championship. Given a choice between two-stroke and four-strokes, most top-level supercrossers will pick the lighter, quicker-handling two-strokes. The CR weighs 30 pounds less than the 426, 23 less than the KTM and 15 less than the CRF, so it's the least tiring to wrestle over and around SX obstacles. It turns tighter than any of the thumpers and is as stable as the YZF. It's not as prone to stalling in clutch-and-thrust supercross corners, and it's easier to restart if you do blow it. If you're trying as hard as Ricky does, the 250 is the

least tiring; however, most of us ride for fun, not to demoralize Jeremy. And few ride on well-groomed E.A. Sports Supercross tracks. On the hardpacked, slick surfaces of Southern California, the 250 wears you out faster than any of the four-strokes, because they're more tractable. The CR still wins, but it takes more focus from the rider.

MANAGEABLE MOTOCROSS

In supercross, perfect timing can overcome weight and soft suspension both, but motocross is another beast altogether. Natural whoops, braking bumps, even berms grow, migrate and mutate. Excellent suspension and chassis geometry are a must, but weight is a huge factor. Of the thumpers, we like the YZ426 best for its planted feel and stable chassis (despite its heft), but the CR250 is also ultra-stable and well-suspended. Because of its lightness and agility, the CR250 is easier to float over obstacles and snake through tight turns. It's also less tiring on tracks with lots of elevation changes and G-outs. The thing is, the two-stroke rider will likely eat lots of thumper roost on tracks with long start straights. Just ask anybody who had to pass John Dowd. The advantage is still with the CR250, but not by much.

GRANDIOSE GRAND PRIX

Western GP races have a lot of choppy, cross-grain terrain, exactly the kind of trail junk that makes a light bike better than a heavy one. We found that the

CR250 worked us much less than the thumpers in 45-minute races, overall, but the two-stroke buzzing sure worked our hands. The CRF450 did the same thing, so it has something to do with the aluminum frame and non-rubber-mounted bars. The suspension is a bit stiff, too, so back off of the fork's clickers. This one's a tie—the 250 is better on undulating terrain, but the YZF is better on more high-speed stuff.

THE YEE-HAW FACTOR

If you go cliff-climbing with Bob Hannah or house-hopping with Seth Enslow, the CR250 is you. It's also a great hillclimber if there's traction. On snotty, back-East elevators, you'll need to add flywheel weight for hook-up, and it still won't be as tractable as any of the four-strokes. For a day of play, we'll take the 520SX over the CR250 every time. It's simply more fun to ride.

So, there you have it. As long as there are races, there'll be serious racers lining up to buy two-strokes, and the Honda is the two-stroke of the year. Cost is a huge factor with many of us, and the CR250 wins here, too. Its MSRP is \$5899, cheap compared to the 520SX (\$6748) and the lusted-after CRF450 (\$6299). The YZ426 is \$5999. By the pound, the CR250 is the clear winner. If you wanted a CRF but didn't get your deposit down in time, maybe you should put off your four-stroke conversion another year and go with the CR250R. If price is no object and fun is the goal, go orange.

AMERICA'S BEST

"Only Cycra Probends give me the freedom and protection to go fast over motocross and off-road type obstacles".
- Rodney Smith



All New Cycra 2002 Billet Probends and Enduro Shields



Probends From \$89.95 - \$119.95
Enduro Shields \$21.95



NEW and Improved Links are 6061 T6 Alloy - 30% stronger!



New Clamps fit: Magura, Tag, Protaper



Alloy Bar Ends



Front and Side Triple Clamp Mount

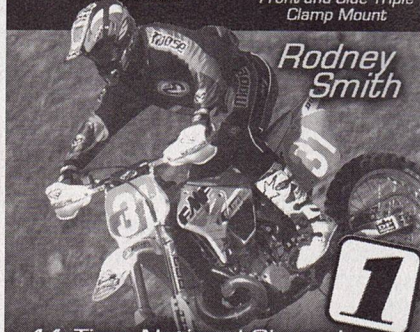
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HOUNDS OF THUNDER

THE OTHERS

What of Cannondale, Husky, Husaberg and the Professor and Mary Ann?



Don't look now, but the four-stroke class isn't just one class any more. With bikes like the Vertemati appearing, there are more exciting new bikes coming now than ever before.

The four-stroke class isn't one class anymore. It's a huge group of motorcycles meant for a wide variety of uses. We would have loved to gather them all together, but didn't have a box van big enough. Here's the status on some Significant Others awaiting test time on the DB calendar.

CANNONDALE: After going back to the drawing board for several months, the 440MX will be for sale soon. The bike will have a real airbox replacing the ridiculous filter behind the number plate. It will have the latest generation fuel-injection and a little more power. We don't expect it to be much lighter, though, so it would probably be the heaviest bike in the class.

VERTEMATI 450: There's no doubt about it; the Vertemati is the sexiest bike on the block. It will have a hand-built motor, a perimeter steel frame and a backward kickstarter. We have ridden the 501 version and know it has some potential, but it's very unconventional in handling and in virtually every other way. The 450 version is said to be much less weird and more race-ready. Contact MX imports at (415) 457-2139.

VOR 503: Even we can't keep track of what's happening with VOR these days. The company is no longer associated with Vertemati and has gone through several U.S. importers. We know that the basic motor makes great power. And the

new perimeter steel frame might cure the handling problems of the old bolt-together chassis. Contact VOR USA at (858) 218-2123.

HUSQVARNA 450TC: For the first time since 1986, Husqvarna finally has a new motor design. Do you think they got enough mileage out of the old one? The new 450 has a right side kickstarter as well as electric start. We can't wait to get ahold of one. Contact Cagiva USA, (215) 830-3300.

HUSABERG 470FC: Earlier in the year we got to try some of the new Husabergs. As always, they are light and fast, but expensive and hard to find. The top MX version is the 470, although it will probably soon shrink in size to meet the new 450cc limit on the 250 class. Contact KTM Sportmotorcycles, USA.

TM 400: Currently the TM is only available in an enduro version. We've ridden this bike too, and know that it has potential to be a decent motocross bike. Quantities are very limited for now (and probably forever). Contact TWS at (909) 608-0082.

GAS GAS 400: This is the biggest mystery bike of all to us. We've seen enduro versions with carburetors, but rumor has it that there is a fuel-injected MX bike in the not-to-distant future. Our advice: don't hold your breath. Contact Gas Gas at (662) 843-3251. □