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Macho Woods Mauler

Too much, or are we just snivelers?

WISECO/THUMPER RACING HONDA CRF480



Here was the goal of the Wiseco/Thumper Racing Honda CRF480: take the Honda CRF 450 and give it a new set of off-road duds that would soften the snarl, smooth out the rough edges and give it some palatable manners for the woods rider. These traits would come via a smoother, albeit larger powerband; suspension that would be massaged through the efforts of ESP; stability and terrain guidance enhanced with a Scotts Damper; and stopping assistance from the folks at Braking.

This test was the brainchild of Steve Johnson from Wiseco pistons and Thumper Racing's Gary Hazel. Wiseco offers the big bore piston arrangement and Thumper put together the project and all of the accouterments that make for a tasty experience in the non-MX world. We tested the machine at the McKool Ranch in Texas, a paradise that offers incredible variety in terrain and would pinpoint the hits and misses of any off-road machine.

THE JUG

Steve Johnson is the off-road products manager at Wiseco Pistons and he set out to build a mousetrap that would shoehorn the Honda's brutality into a more manageable off-road beast. The Wiseco CRF480 kit consists of the complete top end, including the 99mm piston. Thumper installed the kit, boring the standard cylinder and fitting the new piston, rings and gaskets. Jetting was also modified to work with the kit and everything else from the clutch, starting system and electronics remained stock.

Thumper retained the standard Ti headpipe and fit on a Big Gun stainless muffler which was designed to enhance the powerband, make it spark arrester legal and soften the roar of the standard exhaust system.

The Wiseco/Thumper CRF 480 looks like a well adorned MXer, but is in reality quite dialed in for the off-road world. ESP suspension, Scotts Damper, Dunlop D773 meats, a tall Guts seat foam kit are part of the puzzle. Big Gun's muffler flowed well and emitted a softer bark and E-Line Carbon-Kevlar adorn the machine and protect it from abuse.



Gearing was left in standard trim (13/50) though the standard chain and rear sprocket were shelved in favor of an RK O-ring chain and Moose Racing rear sprocket.

THE HANDLING HAT

Suspension work would be pivotal and this was handled by E.S.P. and George Capodiecici. George was the main suspen-

sion tech at Scotts for 25 years, and Thumper Racing has worked with him on suspension for the last decade. George resprung and revalved the CRF Showa units radically, altering the pitch so that the initial travel would be fluid, and the transition in the mid travel very smooth. Bottoming resistance would be set so that the big hits would be absorbed rather than clanked through.

Get the Wiseco/Thumper mauler out into the open and the real prowess of the machine rears its head. It gobbles up terrain with its stronger bottom and mid power and the only glitches we had were in the starting (which was hit and miss) and the increased vibration.



Additionally, a Scotts Steering damper and top clamp were bolted onto the CRF. The top clamp is very sano, offers improved ergonomics through various bar perch lengths and positions and integrates perfectly with the Scotts Steering damper. Too, a Scotts frame bracket was installed, and this allows the damper a fastening point to pivot from.

Moose Racing Flex bars were installed and they're a tapered crossbar-less big bar that offer good flex points and excellent strength. Enduro Engineering aluminum handguards finish off the off-road cockpit and they offer excellent digit space, feature beveled edges for comfort and have nice plastic deflectors.

Thumper installed Braking Wave rotors onto Excel wheels, opting for their increased stopping power, less weight and the strength. The Excel wheels too were chosen for their strength, durability and the fact that the CRF needed an 18-inch rear wheel. Testing has proved their grit, as these were the same wheels that we used on an earlier project bike and we simply plugged in new wheel carriers to adapt them to the Honda.

GUARDS, GUIDES & PLATES

E-Line came through with an excellent carbon/Kevlar fiber skid plate, chain guide and rear disc guard. All fit superbly and both the skid plate and chain guard proved hugely strong and well warranted. For serious off-road abuse we'd certainly fit an aluminum rear shark fin to protect the rotor, though the E-Line Carbon/Kevlar works just fine for moto. Guts Racing provided a taller seat kit (which most riders will prefer and taller ones demand!) and Thumper finished off the package with aluminum radiator guards which enhance the protection of the soft and very malleable cooling cans.

MORE JUICE & BOINGER NIRVANA

Let's start with the suspension and handling arena of the machine. George over at ESP has just gone up the food chain about 10,000 years. His valving and setup for the CRF were excellent, the bike's ability to track in snot, roots, rock and yuck superior, and the bottoming resistance was excellent. It worked well in MX, superb in the woods and did not transmit a whole bunch back to the pilot. We loved it. Kudos too to Scotts. We've learned that steering dampers are our friends and the Scotts system is the best on the planet. It's easily adjustable, is incredibly durable, and though quite pricey, is most definitely worth the admission. It allows you

to run the suspension very soft and cushy, yet gives the bike the confidence to attack nasties while instilling in it stability and, more importantly, resistance to front end whip. Confronted by deflection either from rocks, roots or ruts, the steering stays easy yet can take a side blow that would normally rip the bars out of your hands.

We've got to be honest here; the Wiseco/Thumper Racing Honda CRF 480 is a brute. It'll require a strong hand and experienced pilot to navigate the woods without mowing them over, as the power is hugely strong down low, the middle is gnarly and the top feels as if it mirrors the standard CRF, which is decently nasty. Vibration seemed a bit more noticeable and we suffered from some starting glitches that were irritating. According to Gary Hazel, these were simple jetting maladies that he hadn't had enough time to massage out. But get the sucker out of the really tight stuff and it rewarded you with superior short shift power, incredible acceleration and enough roost to knock down a barn. Grass tracks, faster hare scrambles circuits, hillclimbing and general off-road hoot-n-nanny were conquered with all the delicate finesse of a howitzer. This machine hauls timber, displaces volumes of terrain and is a riot to manhandle. It ain't for everyone, but as a manly man machine, it's pretty darned impressive. □



Twebb had kudos for the new ergos thanks to the Thumper/Guts taller seat mated to Scotts triple clamp with tall posts and the Moose CR-hi bulge bar. Too, the Big Gun muffler did an excellent job of smoothing out the power, containing the decibel level better than stock, and it was spark arrester legal.

PARTS USED

Thumper Racing/Wiseco 480 kit	..... \$450.00
Thumper Racing tall seat	..... 69.00
Thumper Racing seat cover	..... 65.00
Thumper Racing/E.S.P. fork mod	..... 225.00
Thumper Racing/E.S.P. shock mod	..... 235.00
Thumper Racing radiator brace	..... 70.00
Excel Pro wheel kits	..... 1150.00
Braking wave rotors front over sized	..... 284.00
Braking wave rotor rear	..... 214.00
Scotts top clamp/stabilizer kit	..... 529.00
Moose flex bars	..... 79.95
Enduro Eng. Hand guards	..... 59.95
RK o-ring chain	..... 120.00
Moose rear sprocket	..... 50.95
Big Guns exhaust	..... 349.95
E-Line skid plate	..... 129.95
E-Line rear disc guard	..... 59.95
E-Line chain guide	..... 59.95