



ISSUE #2



STUBBLE TROUBLE

BY SI MELBER, PHOTO: SELFIE

"Making hay whilst the sun shines..."

IT WAS ONE of those days when the sun seemed determined to hang around and see what was occurring, like an over-excited child on Christmas eve. Four friends from four different parts of the country armed with four distinctive dirt bikes (from four different decades), came together to celebrate the annual end-of-summer stubble-thrash. It began - as all stubble thrashes do - with tea 'n' biscuits and excited conversation around a big kitchen table. And it ended with the traditional curry, lager and mother of all hangovers. In between there was plenty of laughter, thrashing of motorcycles, crunching of gears, taking of photos, taking of mickey, the odd crash and burn, and a bit of sunburn thrown in for good measure. This was a classic year.

Much like the riders involved, the bikes they rode were for the most part a motley collection of untried and un-tested, mis-shapen has-beens, rescued from the knackers' yard for one brief moment in the sun. Dusty, Rusty, Crusty and Musty... and the bikes weren't much better either. Three ancient two-strokes were joined on this occasion by one scorching new state-of-the-art thumper.



RUST

The stench of oil sullied the air like the aftermath of a sunken battleship as we departed the farmyard line-astern in a choking fog of lightly sautéed hydrocarbons. To the casual observer it might've seemed like a gaggle of Volkswagen diesels had all got stuck together in the same traffic jam.

The Suzuki PE250 of around about 1980 vintage had been purchased on a whim the night before out of the classifieds... In the dark. This was its maiden voyage with a careless new owner. The cable operated drum brakes seemed to have more play in them than the entire England Rugby team. What could possibly go wrong? The Honda CRM250 dating from the 1990s also lacked a bit in the braking department, but it made up for it with a clutch that was completely uncompromising. Either out or in - no half measures there.

It did at least have a functioning shock absorber and a full compliment of pumped up tyres... unlike the 2003 KTM 250EXC. Another classified classic that had sat unloved since first being purchased nearly a year ago. Not since WW1 when Tommy went over the top to face the German machine guns armed only with a stout wooden stick and a service whistle has a bunch of people set-off so badly equipped for the job in hand. At least the 2016 KTM 250XC-F promised some reliable fun.

The stubble crunched and crackled under our wheels like freshly raked gravel. The sun burnt our noses and lips, and streaked into our eyes. The prospect of fun, hung heavy in the dust-speckled light. A hasty hay bale course was laid out and the shenanigans began. The PE250 lacking the long legs of modern suspension felt good in the turns, even if dragging your toes in the dirt seemed unavoidable through the corners and more effective than using the actual brakes. Its cow-horn bars, plush saddle and skinny footpegs felt alien by modern standards. As did the lack of power-valve. I'd expected the PE to be all bottom-end, but in fact what it lacked in bottom-end it also lacked in mid-range. And top-end too, come to think of it. It did however look heart-stoppingly beautiful whilst doing it.

By contrast the 2003 KTM 200EXC looked pretty ordinary in comparison (neither dated, nor modern, strangely), but its engine was a scorcher. It's easy to forget just how significant the addition of a power-valve was to two-stroke technology back in the mid-Eighties, until you are reminded of it in the starkest way possible. Not only did the little 200 run rings around the older 250 in terms of power, it also matched the modern 250 thumper pretty much yard for yard. It was an eye-opener. Oddly enough despite being more powerful than the PE, their times were barely any different around our makeshift course. That was all down to the PE's low centre of gravity and its ability to carry a high corner speed throughout the turns. Well that and the fact that the brakes were as ineffectual as the engine, so it was one-speed everywhere.

The 2003EXC had some brakes but when I hopped off than and onto the 2016 EXC-F, I damn near went over the bars at about 40mph when a stray cabbage-white butterfly accidentally brushed a wingtip against the front brake lever. 'Wheweee' better watch out for those brakes, guys.

The EXC-F felt like a scalpel compared with two butter knives and a baby's feeding spoon, but this was hay-bale racing not enduro, and its high and mighty set-up on its lengthy suspension was a disadvantage. By the time you got it braked then cranked all the way over in the turn and back upright again you never had any straight left where you could apply the power. Consequently it was barely any faster than the PE250 Anvil. That made us giggle.

Come sunset we couldn't really decide on a winner. Not that this was in any way a serious test of the other machinery, but hell we all wondered why you'd spend £7k on the latest new bike when you could get an old ratter for a grand that could do the job a motorcycle is designed to do... and scare the living bejesus out of you. If not on the straight, then certainly at the end of it.

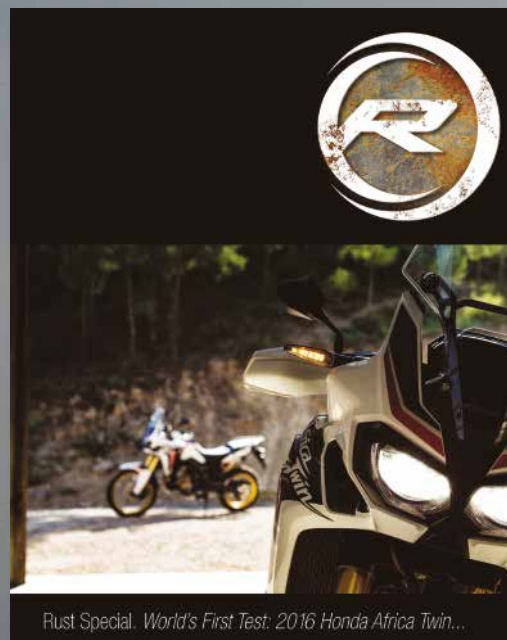
Soon enough it was time to call it a day. The light had gone off to play in someone else's backyard, the bikes were put away (for another year) and the PE had more or less stopped working altogether. We gathered up the bits that had fallen off it and made our way back to the farmyard, the new KTM purring seamlessly alongside the wheezing old staggers.

The cry went up... "Same time next year lads?" We all nodded approvingly then set off for the pub. You gotta love dirt bikes...

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WORLD BETA

Beta's 2016 models revealed & rated...

Story by Rust's Si Melber, Photos by Beta





WHEN YOU'RE IN ITALY and someone wearing dark glasses informs you that *'This is a family-run business'* you tend to sit up and listen to what they have to say. I half expected him to add the word *'Capice?'* at the end...

Fortunately it's not quite as sinister as it sounds. Beta have been owned by the same family since they started out in business 111 years ago. That's some heritage right there; in terms of dirt bikes, only Husqvarna has more in the way of provenance. This however is not a history lesson, so let's get straight on and tell you about the 2016 enduro and trail models and what you will find.

The big news for the 2016 model year is the introduction of an automatic oil injection system (that's *'autolube'* to you and me, squire) on all of the two-stroke models except the Racing version (due out in late September). Squierled away under the seat is a small plastic oil tank at the bottom of which sits a tiny oil pump. This pump (controlled by the CDI which in turn is linked to a throttle position





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sensor) varies the amount of oil fed into the carburettor. So say goodbye to premixing fuel, or having to carry bottles of oil in a backpack when you're out and about on a long day's trail ride.

The benefits - Beta claims - are numerous, not the least of which is helping the bike pass emissions regs. But who cares about that? That's the factory's concern, not the customer's. What the customer wants to know before parting with dollar, is what advantages will it confer on them - or their riding?

The answer to that my friend is the convenience factor. Quicker, simpler refills; less worrying about calculating the correct ratio of oil; and no need to carry spare oil with you. One tankful of oil is sufficient to last for 3.5 full tanks of fuel. And Beta claim that because of the system's ability to measure demand, and then accurately supply the precise amount needed (it varies between 0.7-1.2%), there's far less oil used overall and less smoke emitted generally. I can't say we particularly noticed the lack of smoke at the launch. But what we did notice was the Beta technicians pouring neat fuel into both the two-strokes and four-stroke machines, which obviously makes things a whole lot easier come refuelling time.

Before we leave this oily subject, there are a couple of other things worth noting. First of all the system has two warning lights associated with it set into the new dashboard. The first is a low oil lamp. When this appears you have sufficient oil left for approximately one more tank of fuel. The other warning lamp informs you of a system malfunction. So for instance, should the oil pump fail, the





warning lamp indicates that you need to switch to pre-mixing your fuel. In an emergency it would be possible to remove the oil tank and pour some of its contents into the main fuel tank to get you home.

And secondly, anyone wishing to bypass the autolube system and switch to using premix can do so quickly and relatively easily - just by disabling a couple of parts. The whole assembly adds approximately 300-400g to the weight of the bike (plus a bit of extra oil). It's pretty insignificant overall.

Far more significant is that Beta have struck out in this direction unilaterally. alright the idea is not a new one by any means. In the past both Yamaha and KTM have built two-stroke enduro bikes featuring auto-lubrication (whilst pretty much every manufacturer has made two-stroke trailbikes with this kind of set-up). But Beta are the only manufacturer to currently build a competition dirt bike with it fitted (and what's more they've designed a system which offers much more accurate measuring of the oil





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supply), which marks them out as having their own unique selling point in terms of customer appeal.

That’s probably a good thing. At the press conference, the marketing manager explained that rather than trying to compete head-on with the mighty KTM Corp, Beta’s intention is rather to try to push hard to improve their market share amongst those customers that don’t currently buy orange. That’s not a bad plan.

In their home market of Italy for instance, Beta already enjoys a solid 34% of the total enduro bike sales. That’s a significant amount of bikes, and for 2016 they plan on improving sales globally by 15%, with the aim of selling north of 15000 bikes worldwide... that’s comparable with the numbers Husqvarna are selling. *‘And we still won’t be able to build enough to meet demand’* admits Beta’s German Marketing Manager. *‘The company is booming... demand will outstrip supply once again.’*

In a sense that doesn’t seem all that surprising. Gas Gas has gone and anyone who’s ridden a Beta has usually come away from the experience pleasantly surprised, and will tell you how great they are to ride. That’s great as in... tractable



engines and a chassis that's easy to get to grips with: traditional enduro bike virtues, then. Last year however the suspension was criticized for being too harsh and poorly damped (especially at the rear); but Beta appears to have spent a good deal of time working with their suspension engineers to address these issues.

And whilst the Sachs-shod machines (gold anodized units for 2016) retain a generally softer feel to the ride than something like a KTM EXC for instance, they're extremely compliant, fully adjustable and well balanced front to rear, and that's ideal for a bike that - let's face it - will spend the majority of its time getting ridden in the slippery winter months where softer suspension aids grip.

But is it another way of saying the suspension's soggy? No... but it is a way of saying that not everyone takes the same approach to suspension as the Austrians. For starters there's a nice progressive linkage at the rear and the Beta's set-up tends to allow the bikes to hug the ground more readily where they can put down even more of their tractable power. That makes them remarkably quick point-to-point. They're also very easy to ride and there's little in the way of kickback or deflection gets through to the rider, unless - that is - you blow all the way through the suspension's stroke, as I did on one occasion.

In fairness it was at full noise in fourth gear on a long downhill straight, and the bike drove hard into a compression hollow that bottomed both ends and sent it into a major slapper. Those who witnessed it commented on the effect, and if I'd been racing



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at the time I would have definitely backed off a little on the following lap. Would it have happened on another brand of bike? Perhaps, who's to say, but it's clear that the suspension issues which dogged Beta at the launch last year haven't completely gone away. It's also clear that the Beta is set-up in a more compliant manner - which has its plusses and minuses at times.

If we'd been able to spend more time adjusting the clickers, I'd like to have tried dialling-in a bit more high-speed compression damping. But as it was, there wasn't really the opportunity to mess with the suspension all that much - given that we were jumping off one bike and onto another. Besides it was a one-off occurrence and we had a lot of bikes to get tested that day.

For the most part then, feedback from both ends felt pretty good to me with a smooth progression



throughout the entire stroke - despite riding in summertime on hard (though fairly smooth) tracks. Personally I'd probably need slightly firmer springs for my bodyweight, but if you don't push really hard through chocolate based snacks as I do, you'll probably find the stock settings more or less to your liking. I'm happy to reserve judgement for now on the 2016 suspension as aside from this one incident I felt pretty confident with it. What I will say is that as good as the Sachs kit is (and it reminded me of a supple Marzocchi set-up), I don't think it's quite a match for a decent set of WPs if I'm honest. Harsh but truthful.

Overall the chassis dynamics work well - Beta has strengthened the rear top shock mount for this year and the additional stiffness it provides is said to help improve the chassis 'feel'. I can't comment on that but I can say that dynamically the 2016 Beta's felt extremely neutral to me - neither overly sharp (read unstable), nor predictable to the point of being dull, but somewhere in between.

Those of you used to the fingertip responses of an EXC might find the Beta's rather more conservative geometry somewhat strange at first, but in truth it's more of a reassurance than a hindrance to speed.

Thanks to the suspension balance the bikes all turn-in quickly on the brakes, and then extend their wheelbase as you exit the turn, which is exactly what you want on the dirt. Let's be clear here, this is not old-fashioned geometry - far from it - it's just a minor difference to the benchmark EXC. It's easy to get too carried away with trying to make a bike turn ever-quicker (to shave milliseconds off a

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“What I will say is that as good as the Sachs kit is, I don’t think it’s quite a match for a decent set of WPs if I’m totally honest. Harsh but fair...”

special test time) when all you really achieve is to dump the rider on the ground when they’re least expecting it. Personally I liked the way the 2016 Betas handled, I’d happily race one, provided I’d got the suspension properly dialed in.

Once you begin to familiarize yourself with the Beta, you will find much to admire about it - not least the attention to detail in terms of the build quality. It is a solidly constructed enduro bike, the cockpit arrangement is first class, and the seating position feels spot on for a normal height rider. Beta has made minor changes here and there this year including improving the quality of the seat cover and switching to a translucent tank.

It’s noticeable that whilst the tank appears to be wider than a KTM one, it sits slightly lower down where it doesn’t interfere with your knees. Ultimately the fuel has to go somewhere though and thanks to the Beta’s semi-perimeter frame design, only part of the fuel load can be positioned within the twin frame spars. You certainly don’t notice the width as a problem when you ride.

But if I have one complaint about the Beta’s build quality it’s with the plastics, which look and feel...



dare I say it... slightly cheap. Whilst everything about the rest of the bike appears to be well designed and executed, the plastics have that slightly translucent quality about them, which just makes them look a bit cut-price.

And because the plastics are the first thing you see on a bike, it really sends out the wrong impression of an otherwise well finished machine. It may or may not be an issue for you, but it's noticeable that KTM/Husqvarna/Yamaha/Honda have all gone the other way - improving the quality of their plastics year on year. Thereby pushing up both the quality, and the *perceived* value of their brands. It's an important lesson Beta should learn.

And one other thing before we leave this subject, given that Betas are an Italian brand, I'd love to see the designers given a bit more free reign with the styling to inject an element of 'brio' into the look.

Don't get me wrong there's nothing intrinsically wrong with the overall styling - the Betas are pretty good looking bikes - but they're more conservatively styled than you'd expect from Italians. I don't want to sound too critical but when you park something Italian in your garage you expect it to turn heads and please you from every angle. That's my take on it anyway.

Betas - it should be pointed out - cost less than an equivalent KTM/HVA. Here in the UK the difference equates to between £500 and £1000 depending on model, so perhaps we should cut them a little more slack. Nevertheless I think they're missing a golden opportunity to really stand out and make their mark on the enduro scene... just as KTM have done.

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Line-Up

For people that don't already know, the Beta line-up can be more-or-less summarized like this:

RR250/300 2Ts – Competition enduro machines or potential super-sport trail bikes. Brilliant all-rounders

RR350 4T – the racer's thumper - relatively hard edged and sporty, but not all that powerful

RR390 4T – a lovely mellow trailie, or easy-going enduro bike

RR430 4T – same as above but with a good dose of extra wallop. Very torquey

RR480 4T – a racer's bike, more brutal and hard edged

X-Trainer – Beta's Freeride, bigger and slightly more powerful than a Freeride

When it comes to the thumpers it's the same story of a few small but significant developments this year - principal among which is the adoption of EFI across the board. Last year only the 350RR had EFI, but for 2016 all four models of four-stroke get the same Synerject system with a 42mm throttle body - complete with its stepper-motor which ensures a guaranteed minimum engine speed, that in turn reduces the wheel-locking effect of engine braking.

Other changes include new optimized intake ports on the 430 and 480cc models; a modified cam on the 480; a new rev ceiling of 13,000rpm on the 350RR (up from 12,500rpm); improvements to the generators to provide 200W of power; alu-



minium engine bolts in place of steel ones in low-stress areas; a polyamide plastic skidplate; improvements to the air-filter box; minor chassis and suspension mods; and the adoption of the clear tank.

I take my hat off to Beta for swimming against the tide of conformity by picking their own capacity classes. This clearly makes much more sense from a consumer point of view than simply adhering to some arbitrary capacity limit set more than a decade earlier.

What it also means is that Beta can fine-tune their machinery to build the sort of bike customers actually want... and that's exactly what they've done. Rather than consider them in capacity order, instead I'm going to sort them into 'Racing' and 'All Round' categories. That's not to say you can't

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“ The RR430 has that jump-out-of-the-corner stomp that most 450 riders crave, but without making you feel over-biked...”

race the all-rounders, nor trail ride the racers, but whilst they are essentially one and the same bike underneath, the way they make their power is so completely different that you would be best to decide what you want to do with them first, and then purchase accordingly.

So beginning with the All-Rounders (which were my favourites I have to say), you have the 390 and the 430, both of which produced fabulous creamy power in a way that was so usable and so unthreatening, I'm surprised I haven't seen more Betas out there on the trail.

The 390 is a fabulous trailbike... it has charm and versatility and such an easy-going manner, it's a real winner in my book. It makes everything so easy, and yet it can turn on the performance when you want it to. It feels smaller and more nimble than the old 400cc KTM and in many ways it's far nicer to ride. Frankly it's just a great little bike.

Now imagine that same bike but with bigger cojones and you have the RR430. This is a stump-pulling torque-monster of a bike but without the killer hit of a full-fat 450. In that sense it's just perfect. It has the jump-out-of-the-corner stomp



that most 450 riders crave, but without making you feel like you're over-biked.

Again it feels slightly smaller than a full-on 450 (weight-wise), and that's a good thing, yet like the 390 it's so incredibly mellow and forgiving, that you can actually ride it damn fast but without having to work too hard. This is clever stuff from Beta.

As much as I loved the 390 and 430, I actually didn't care all that much for the 350 and 480. The problem is (as I see it) that the 350 tries a bit too hard, whereas the 480, *is* a bit too hard.

So the 350RR is good, but it feels sharper, more focussed and in one-sense less user-friendly than the more-rounded 390. It also doesn't feel as powerful (no surprise there), though it tries to make up for that slight lack of punch by being much revvier. It certainly feels quick enough - though not as powerful as the 350 KTM. It sort of reminds me of the revviness of the old TE310 Husky, which always felt like a bike searching for a marketplace.

I can see that the 350RR would appeal to some riders - I guess those that feel they want a bit more than a 250F, but not as much as a 450F but personally I felt like I was faster on the 390, simply because I didn't have to try as hard.

So there we have the 2016 Betas. I haven't talked about the X-Trainer because I feel it deserves a test all to itself (which will come in due course). I like the way Beta is headed, the bikes are improving, the quality is good and the way they ride is just so damn easy.

My pick of machinery then would have to be the 250RR two-stroke, which is just a brilliant bike with

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“ I had my eyes opened by the Betas this year and I think you will too. They want to appeal to riders who aren’t looking for a KTM...”

the most amazingly tractable power and forgiving chassis. Compared with a 250EXC it’s slightly easier to ride, slightly more mellow and a touch easier to master. It’s plenty fast enough however with great zing available and a lovely smooth engine that puts all its power to the ground.

On the four-strokes it’s a toss-up between the easy-riding 390 and super-trooper 430... with the bigger bike just getting the nod thanks to an amazing bottom-end. I had my eyes opened by the Betas this year and I think you will do too. As Beta themselves suggest, they want to appeal to riders who aren’t looking for a KTM, but in fact something different. That’s different as in alternative, competitive, and innovative. Capice...?

Beta RRP 2016

Beta RR250 2T	£6145
Beta RR300 2T	£6295
Beta RR350/480 4T	£6645
Beta RR390/430 4T	£6645
Beta X-Trainer 300	£5395





FOUR WHEELS BAD...

BY RICK KEMP.

*This is the story of how triple World SuperBike Champion Troy Bayliss
NEARLY got beaten mano-a-mano by a Silverback from RUST...*

QUADS HAVE BEEN in the news lately, sadly for all the wrong reasons. Living and trail riding in rural Kent in South East England, I see a lot of them on the byways and highways and tear-arsing around field headlands. You know those bits round the edge of fields, which - if a certain width - farmers can claim a wildlife subsidy for. I've never quite been comfortable with the concept. Of either as a matter of fact... Quads, or the subsidy.

This is partly as a result of personal experience and partly due to the type of riders they attract. Ironically quad riders may well qualify as wildlife - and possibly endangered at that. They're certainly off the evolutionary scale when it comes to sporting activities. In terms of the sheer skill required, most people would probably agree that trials riders would be atop the evolutionary dirt biking tree followed by enduro and motocross riders and then grasstrackers then come the sidecar versions (*in the same order*) with quads bringing up the rear.

In common with three-wheelers, the biggest thing quads have going for them is that they don't fall over when you stop. However it's just as easy to crash a quad off-road as it is a motorcycle - only it hurts a whole lot more when they land on top of you. Just ask Ozzy Osbourne.

Back in the 1980s, myself and a fellow magazine hack by the name of Roger Willis, were both members of the Which Bike 'On The Rough' team. Which was an excuse for crashing other people's motorcycles and getting paid for it. This particular day in question we were both riding a batch of early Sports Quads at Golding Barn Raceway.

Having a vehicle with long-travel suspension at each corner and a lively, two-stroke 250cc motor was always going to prove interesting and so it turned out for Willis. We were informed by local experts, and I believe this still holds good with modern tackle, that changing direction has got very little to do with steering input and everything to do with shifting your weight and giving it loads in the throttle department to unstick the rear end. And because having four wheels means you've got a roll axis in every direction, this technique has to be employed just to keep the thing in a straight line. I told you it was a flawed concept. In fact throttling off for anything isn't really recommended. It's a shame no one bothered telling Willis that.

A few minutes into our session he managed to transform a berm and advertising hoarding into a launch ramp worthy of Evel Knievel. Oh, and a word of advice, if you really have to bail out, don't forget to let go of the bars. Fortunately the ambulance arrived quickly.

Waiting for Willis to return from Accident & Emergency, I sensibly availed myself of the hospitality at the local watering hole. By the time he turned up we were both plastered; Willis from palm to elbow on both arms with two broken wrists. Ironically it was him that really needed a drink. With both wrists in plaster certain personal hygiene tasks become impossible. Let's just say that you learn who your friends are...

The forerunner of the modern quad was the three-wheel ATV, now they really were bonkers. My first taste of one of these little gems was thanks to Kawasaki who took a handful of journalists to its agricultural distributor in darkest Gloucestershire. With no differential and a very short wheelbase, the front wheel had very little grip and of course every time you instinctively had a dab you ran over your foot. You could understand why other manufacturers were reluctant to introduce mainstream motorcycle journals to their ATV products.

It's possible that Honda got the message after it had invited the European motorcycle press to Ibiza for an off-road launch. At the initial product presentation Honda showed us pretty videos of Honda motocross bikes winning races, trail and enduro models taking their riders to breathtaking vistas of the Rocky Mountains and its three-wheeler ATVs on California beaches being swarmed over by girls who were all tan, tits and teeth.

When it came to riding the bikes the following day one of the UK press contingent selected an ATV and took to the beach but instead of riding along it, he headed straight out to sea and promptly drowned the thing (probably the best thing for it). This behaviour perplexed Honda personnel no end, but the journalist just wanted to see if it would float with its balloon tyres. It didn't.

The big road-legal quad sales boom never happened in this country because our roads are congested and what's the point of being exposed to the elements and not being able to filter through the traffic - it's the worst of both worlds. Likewise, the kiddy-quad market has grown and then shrunk again (*a quad is for Christmas, not for life*). Even though I've ridden with quads in countless events: enduros, beach races and Hare

I know I could've had him if only he hadn't got away from me. The walk back to the hotel room was cold and uncomfortable and by the time I arrived back I vowed never to ride a quad again...

and Hounds, they've never appealed, they don't fit well with solos.

The market seems to be polarizing now (*no pun intended, Polaris being the largest manufacturer*) with side-by-side utility vehicles at one end, and fun buggies at the other. A side-by-side utility vehicle is pretty much a golf cart with more power and I have got some experience of golf cart racing with WSB racer, Troy Bayliss no less. It was on an Italian boot manufacturer's launch at a golf club complex in Northern Italy (*I get all the glamorous jobs*). We'd had the presentation, the dinner, the disco and the compulsory litre of Limoncello when a massive thunderstorm broke out. The hotel we were staying at was part of a golf complex but set-apart from the

presentation so there was a group of us waiting for the rain to stop. I looked at Bayliss he nodded towards the golf carts and suddenly there was a LeMans start.

Golf carts have crap lights and it was dark and raining, so it was nip-and-tuck as we headed off into the gloom, neither one of us able to make the break. But then I spotted my opportunity: '*Troy Bayliss may be fast on two wheels*' I thought to myself as I lined up an outrageous overtake on the outside of an off-camber grassy bend, '*but this is four-wheel racing*' - albeit at 8mph.

I really don't know how I didn't see the raised flowerbed, but all of a sudden there were flowers flying everywhere. Everything seemed to happen in slow-motion - which of course it did - and the next thing I knew I was beached and all I could see was the faint glow of Bayliss' tail-lights disappearing into the gloom and hear the sound of maniacal laughter drifting on the wind.

I know I could've had him if only he hadn't got away from me!

The walk back to my hotel room was cold and uncomfortable and by the time I arrived back I vowed never to ride a quad again...



Enduro

Rust rides the 2016 KTMs...

Oranges, no Lemons...

I SHOULD IMAGINE if you work for Honda's off-road marketing department you must lay awake at night dreading the arrival of June when KTM reveal their reworked models for the forthcoming year. Well this year the Honda men can rest easy in their beds for KTM have spent every last dime of their development budget on new MXers.

All they had to spare was a few fork yokes and orange sprockets from the old 6-Days bikes, some smaller axles and some bold new graphics. Still... there was nothing much wrong with the bikes to begin with and the new look has freshened them up nicely. That said there's not a whole lot new to report about - which you don't know already from the 2015s. But it was good to take a ride on the whole range and look at them with a fresh set of eyes. So here's what the Rust testers found....



Story by RUST, Pics by Nuno



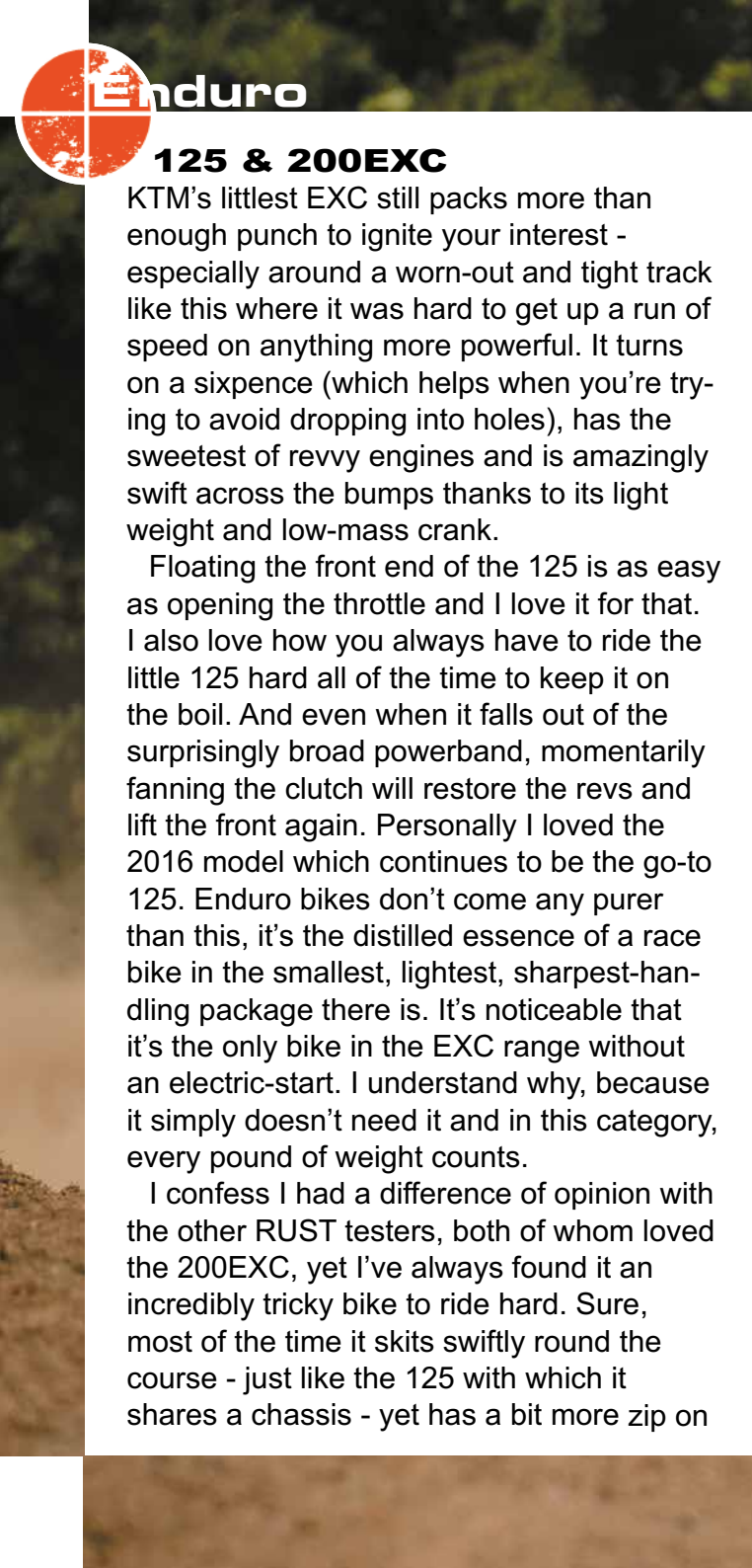
Oranges,
no Lemons...



Si Melber

I'm always amazed at how much of a bearing the type of track has on the feel of particular bike. Generally international launches are fly-in/fly-out affairs at exotic locations like Hells Gate in Italy, the edge of the Arctic Circle in Sweden, or part of an EWC course in Spain. This time KTM chose Northampton. Not that there's anything wrong with the UK's self-proclaimed shoe capital of course, and it did mean that the track was probably much more typical of the type of terrain most readers will encounter. So in place of Spanish rocks, Swedish sand and Italian hills there were British brogues... sorry, braking bumps, whoops, more whoops, holes, roots a smattering of ruts, and did I mention the whoops? Basically the track was knackered, but fairly typical in that respect. Worse still it had obviously been cut-up during the wet season then left to bake hard in the sun. Still typical then...

In some ways of course, the rougher the track the better the test of the machinery as it exposes any weaknesses in handling, suspension and power delivery, but on the flip side it does make it harder to string a flowing lap together and it is a lot more punishing on the rider. Not that you care about that of course! Suspension-wise we messed with a few of the settings and found that it transformed some of the bikes on what was a very choppy bit of ground, so the moral there is get the set-up right.



Oranges,
no Lemons...

125 & 200EXC

KTM's littlest EXC still packs more than enough punch to ignite your interest - especially around a worn-out and tight track like this where it was hard to get up a run of speed on anything more powerful. It turns on a sixpence (which helps when you're trying to avoid dropping into holes), has the sweetest of revvy engines and is amazingly swift across the bumps thanks to its light weight and low-mass crank.

Floating the front end of the 125 is as easy as opening the throttle and I love it for that. I also love how you always have to ride the little 125 hard all of the time to keep it on the boil. And even when it falls out of the surprisingly broad powerband, momentarily fanning the clutch will restore the revs and lift the front again. Personally I loved the 2016 model which continues to be the go-to 125. Enduro bikes don't come any purer than this, it's the distilled essence of a race bike in the smallest, lightest, sharpest-handling package there is. It's noticeable that it's the only bike in the EXC range without an electric-start. I understand why, because it simply doesn't need it and in this category, every pound of weight counts.

I confess I had a difference of opinion with the other RUST testers, both of whom loved the 200EXC, yet I've always found it an incredibly tricky bike to ride hard. Sure, most of the time it skits swiftly round the course - just like the 125 with which it shares a chassis - yet has a bit more zip on

Oranges,
no Lemons...



hand ready for when you want it. But I just can't get the measure of the thing. Because if you ride it like a 125 with the throttle open and the engine screaming the entire time, there will come a point where the power overwhelms the chassis' ability to hold a straight line - flicking the bike sideways into a violent powerslide as the suspension unloads. This was exacerbated by dry and slippery conditions such as we had with powdery dust and a set of Maxis tyres that struggled for grip. And it happened to me three times a lap, every lap, yet it didn't happen on any of the other bikes. Go figure.

My reasoning is that the 125's chassis is just too nimble for the 200's engine, and there's something about the 200's delivery which works against you - but the others loved it. In my opinion you're either a KTM200 rider or you're not. If it was my money I'd pick the 125 every single time over the more violent 200, simply because you can ride it harder. It may not have the torque of the 200, but really... who rides a small stroker on the torque? These things have to be fed a diet of revs the whole time, and you need to be riding them on the gas to be getting anywhere. On the 125 that's a blast, on the 200 it's a touch more sketchy.

250 & 300EXC

Frankly enduro bikes don't come any better nor slicker than the current 250EXC which feels as powerful as a 300 from a few years ago, but as docile to ride as a 250



four-stroke most of the time. I freakin' love it. The thing about the 250 is that it offers all the power and torque anyone needs off-road and in a package that's not compromised in *any* way. It ticks all the boxes: light weight, torque, power, great handling, yet it's just that bit more manageable than the 300 when it comes to finessing the power on a really slippery uphill for instance. We didn't have those kind of conditions in Northampton, but I defy anyone to tell me that the 250 doesn't have enough power for them. Unless you're one of the megastar Extreme riders, do yourself a big favour and opt for the 250 over the 300. You'll thank me for it one day...

Paradoxically, KTM UK's own figures show that for every two 250 two-strokes they sell, you guys purchase three 300s. Apparently you lot are a power-crazy bunch of nutters who claim to enjoy the torque of the 300 more. I do get that way of thinking... It does have an amazing engine, it's just not all that different from the 250, except in one respect... it feels slightly heavier. It's not any heavier of course, that's an impression created by the slightly weightier crank, but you wouldn't know it, from riding them back to back. Make no mistake the 300 is one helluva motorcycle - especially once you've got the suspension dialled-in correctly for your weight and track conditions. I do enjoy riding 300s much more than I used to, but that's because the factory is forever finding ways of making them easier to ride.

Oranges, no Lemons...



“ Pretty much any rider with a few years experience could handle a 250EXC and probably never go back to a four-stroke... ”

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This one was super-easy to get on with, the power comes in very consistently and (unlike 300s from 10 or 12 years ago), it's not the same brutal impact as it once was. Around this track the 300 performed brilliantly, driving hard out of corners and using its torque on the choppy sections to keep the front light... But, was it any better than the 250? I don't think so. It's no more relaxing to ride and when the power comes in it hits even harder. I never got it anywhere near full throttle, and even down the main straight, where I briefly held the throttle open for a few seconds, there's just so much acceleration that you have to quickly back off again before the corner comes racing up on you. Personally I think that the 250 allows you to get on the gas a fraction earlier at every turn but you guys keep on buying 300s, so what do I know?

250 & 350EXC 4T

Normally there's no real comparison between these bikes, because despite sharing an engine and chassis package, the 250 is all about its rev-and-rideability whereas the 350 is the consummate all-rounder (but master of none), and I much prefer a rideable bike to one that can do everything fairly well. But this time... on this course... and in these conditions... (hot and dusty), I preferred the torque of the 350 to the weildiness of the quarter-litre as it let you stay on top of the bumps a little better than the revvy 250.

That's not normally my experience. Having ridden and raced both machines I'm genuinely much fonder of the 250F, where (like the 125 compared with the 200), I feel it's better to be exploiting the revs rather than the torque. Again the 350 feels a few kilos heavier and slightly slower to turn, but really this was no issue on this course because the 250 just felt slightly flat compared with the more powerful 350.

So far so obvious, but ordinarily I find the 250F's power delivery exactly to my liking and whilst I didn't have any complaints about this one, I just felt that the 350 worked a little better in the conditions. Of course a dirt bike gets used in all seasons and had the course been wet and slippery, my opinion would have no doubt been the opposite. Think carefully about what sort of riding you do most and then decide. But undoubtedly as good as both bikes were, I wouldn't pick either of them in my final shortlist.

450 & 500EXC

This year KTM's biggest beast is a real doozy to ride (as it was last year, of course). I remember from last year's press conference that KTM worked on making the 450/500 much more rideable and frankly they did a remarkable job. It doesn't hit hard at all even when it's accelerating fast it seems to just shove you forwards rather than tear your arms out of their sockets. Around this course the 500 was one of my favourite bikes. It's actually really easy to

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“Around this course the 500 was one of my favourite bikes. It’s actually really easy to ride because it’s so tractable everywhere...”

ride because not only is it so tractable everywhere, but the power delivery has been fine-tuned to provide monster grip instead of monster power. So provided you use plenty of input to steer the thing into a turn it’ll carry you out the other side with a remarkably smooth ride. I was actually amazed at how well the 450 and 500 soaked up the bumps on this particular circuit. These bikes flatten everything in their path and KTM have done their homework on the suspension settings. Overall then they performed far better than I expected them to. For me there wasn’t much to choose between them but if I had to pick I’d opt for the 500, just because it allows you to be so lazy with the throttle and gear selection. Yep, I know it’s the opposite to what I said about the 250/300 two-strokes but those are race bikes whereas these things are cruisers. You could try racing one, but make sure you’ve had a good night’s sleep beforehand... Just a couple of laps was all it took before I began to notice the extra poundage of the big-bangers. You have been warned. Nice bikes. Join a gym.

Summery Summary

So having thrashed KTM’s bikes around a test track all day now I get to pick my top three. And this selection is based purely on my findings on the day rather than what I know about the bikes. In first place it’s the 250 two-stroke. Come on, did you really expect me to choose anything else? There

is no situation that this bike can't handle. Rain or shine it's a winner out of the crate. We happened to have dry, dusty conditions... no problem for the 250EXC, which zipped around all day staying on top of the bumps and delighting its rider. It has pace and grace in equal measure and as a bonus I reckon it's the easiest bike to brake on, thanks to slightly more stable geometry compared with the 125/200. Pretty much any rider with a few years experience could handle a 250EXC and if they did I think they'd never go back to riding a four-stroke.

In second place it's the 125EXC for me. The beauty of this bike is that it allows you to pick completely different lines to all the others, and that can often give you an advantage over the other bikes. There was one section of the course where a downhill sharply off-cambered left turn could be negated by tucking the bike right up onto the inside tapes and using what was left of the grass to make the turn. I tried it on all the other bikes and the 125 was the only one I could make stick, lap after lap. All the others would drift down the off-camber and into the bumps in the centre of the turn. Aside from that it's lighter than everything else, more fun than everything else (yes, really), and less tiring than everything else. At my age.... that's a bonus.

And (surprisingly) in a solid third place it's the 500EXC. This is a bike for people who don't really enjoy shifting gears. It's not anything like as much of a handful as you might

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“ The overwhelming piece of advice to any rider is to spend your time setting up your suspension, as a priority over bling... ”





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imagine, and its tractability, reserves of power and unstoppable nature will probably suit the sort of rider that likes to clock up decent mileages on a Sunday. I probably wouldn't have enjoyed it quite so much had the course been considerably more technical, but actually on those slightly trickier parts of the course we were riding, it breezed through because the torque it provides allows you to be incredibly delicate with the throttle and still maintain momentum. Congratulations to KTM for realising that a 500 doesn't need to be intimidating, it needs to be unstoppable, and this bike is as near to that as it's possible to get. One final thought, the 500 felt the smoothest of all these bikes both in terms of power delivery and engine smoothness overall. Once again that might be consideration if you're taking one long distance...

Warren Malschinger

My overwhelming thought on attending the 2016 KTM launch is the responsibility to translate the privilege of being able to ride so many different models back to back. While all the bikes began on stock settings the guys at KTM had a team on hand to make minor adjustments to suspension, controls, bars etc, to suit each rider's preferences. I rode each bike stock to give me a benchmark, first on the machines themselves and then against each other. I rode all the bikes in the following order: 350F, 450F, 300, 500F, 250, 200, 125, 250F.





Enduro

EXCs

My standout bike in stock trim was the 350F. The track was a two mile loop with a good part being tight turns with loads of roots, braking bumps and ruts combined with faster sections littered with rollers. The 350F provided just the right amount of torque for these type of riding conditions and was nimble and easy to ride. I felt I was quickest around the track on the bike and had no feeling of exertion when back in the pits.

The 450F was equally good but would fare better on a faster, more flowing track. I just couldn't put the power to good enough use on this track on the 450. The 500 had the best seat by far, so comfortable, and felt the right height for me. Again, like the 450 it would be better suited to a more expansive track. Having just ridden a six-day tour in Portugal on the 450 it left me wondering if I would have preferred the 500... which was surprising.

The two-strokes were all a bit of a handful for my weight and height on their stock settings. The stock rebound is way too fast on both the shock and the forks, which made the bikes extremely skittish to ride. The four-strokes on stock settings were far more manageable and as such my initial impressions were that the 350F came out on top with the 250F a close second.

I am around 95kg in full kit and just shy of 6'1in. I adjusted the suspension settings to my liking which is 17 out on the compression and rebound on the forks, and 17 on

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the compression and 14 on the rebound on the shock. On stock springs I usually prefer the high speed damping to be turned out 1 and a half turns but this was too much of an ask as the bikes were in high demand all day and returning them to stock for other riders would have been a pain so I left the high speed adjustment stock.

Wow, what difference it made... and before I comment on the impact on the bikes individually, I have to say that the overwhelming piece of advice to any rider considering any of these machines is to spend your time setting up the suspension as a priority (sparing your wallet on the bling). In my opinion this is the biggest secret to going quicker on any of them. The improvement on each of the bikes individually was remarkable.

My least favourite bike stock was better with the adjustments than my best stock bike. The two-strokes came into their own and went from the back of the queue to the front with the 200 and 300 stealing the show in my opinion. They floated over the rough stuff and in corners where I had been coasting or braking before on all the bikes, I was able to keep the throttle on through the technical stuff which put a smile on my face. The other bikes also felt more planted and sure-footed and in comparison to stock conserved my energy no end. This on a longer ride makes a huge difference if you are not having to fight the bike on every bit of rough-stuff.

In the end I kinda' hogged the 200 and the 300 for a bit. If I had a choice I would have both of them in my garage. The 200 for the typically tight technical races, and the 300 for the extreme, more flowing stuff. The torque of the 300 made it a doddle to ride on this track, but I preferred the 200's power delivery in the tight turns and rarely ran out of top-end on this course. Of the four-strokes the 250F responded to the adjustments with the most noticeable difference and like the 200 seemed the most at ease on this particular circuit.

My top three buys then would be: 200, 300, 250F in that order for this type of track. Sitting in the pub sharing a few well-earned jars after the ride, Si asked me which bike I would have in my garage as the best all-rounder? And without hesitation the 300EXC rolled off my lips as easy as it rolls on the power in third gear.

Jon Bentman

This may be the calm before the storm. A last chance for KTM's rivals to get in some sneaky sales before the all-new 2017 EXCs arrive, as they will, with derivative engines and frames drawn from the all-new 2016 motocross range. That's all to come. For now the 2016 EXC is about the true perennials that are Bold New Graphics and new suspension settings. Okay, there are new milled yokes and a smaller front axle, too. And an orange sprocket. But hey, c'mon



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“ If you’re thinking of holding off buying orange for a year, you might want to think again, if you like your enduro ‘full fat’ this might be the last chance...”



Oranges,
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let's ride before we all lose interest.

First up, was this a day of riding joy? It could have been but boy was the track concrete-hard, bone dry and dusty - KTM could have brought us factory-spec WP kit and it would have still hurt. No, this was for the most part torture, and trying to filter the improvements that the clamps and axle (and settings) made through the constant bombardment of hit after hit after hit, was not going to happen: mission impossible.

The 200EXC was a bundle of fun though. On this track, for publisher Warren and myself, it was a good fit for pace and agility. The slightly smaller chassis was ideal on this track as was the slightly smaller power. You could boss it - and that was a nice, almost unique feeling on this day. Honestly, I'd like one of these.

The 450EXC was welcome relief after the small-bore stroker, a proper bit of violence, and all the better for it. It was actually less of a handful than I first thought it might be, I found I could unleash the anger in well-measured servings and so it made the course easier not harder. Well, for a lap at least... I could imagine it could get messy if you were tired. But, you know, I'd sooner go out in a rolling ball of metal, flesh and fracturing plastic (and thence into the ambulance) than flounce around being a friend to the bunnies on something insipid like a Freeride E!

The 250/300EXCs were on-it too, but needed their suspension sorted to match

the conditions. It was all a bit too hard for the stock settings. With the 250EXC-F Warren had got the KTM mechanics to replicate the settings he'd had on a 2015 KTM while on a recent five-day ride in Portugal - and that made a positive difference; finally I was riding something that absorbed the hits.

From there onto the 350EXC and yes what a nice do-all it is ('yawns'). Somehow I still think the gap between first and second gear is too big, or is it between second and third? I can't quite put my finger on it, but me and the 350's gearbox, we don't quite match.

Last bike, the 500EXC. Lovely beast. Less of an axe murderer than the 450EXC, more big, friendly giant. It's a top trail bike, I'm sure - and fun if you want something a bit different for club enduro. And it's big. In a world where we're constantly being told less is more, here..... more is more. In fact, as I've said before, too much is never enough. I hope there's a big bore kit in the hardparts catalogue!

Oh, and a last word. If you're thinking you'll hold off buying orange for a year, until the 2017s arrive, you might want to think again. Contrary to what I said at the start of this piece, chances are the 2017s will have to fulfill all manner of new, tighter EU emission regulations, so they may well be more complex, heavier, maybe even slower. If you like your enduro 'full fat' this might be the last opportunity to buy...

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FRENCH FANFARE

RUST'S PITGIRL GEORGIA WELLS ROUNDS OUT THE 2015 ENDURO WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP SEASON...

REPORT BY GEORGIA WELLS;
PICTURES RICK WELLS



THE 2015 SEASON has gone in a flash! Exactly where have the past five months of my life gone? From the season's beginnings in bustling Jerez to the grand finale in sleepy Requista in France, it all seems to have happened almost too quickly to take in. There have been many ups and downs this year, but the season certainly ended with a bang at the beginning of October as we saw new champions crowned, old champions retiring, and the wildest crowd witnessed for many a year!

I'm here as usual, my friends, to let you in on just how it felt to be trackside at the final race of the year. Are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin...

Arriving in Requista, it was hard to imagine how this tiny town of just 2000 people was going to produce a race worthy of ending the 2015 season. After all, this was where six champions were to be crowned; there needed to be a superb send off for a season that has seen some of the biggest crowds of recent years.

The area was typically French; old men shuffling around with a baguette over their shoulders and beret perched atop their heads, giant cows with dangerous looking horns, dubious looking bits of former animal life available with every meal, and plenty of vin rouge.

The weather started off glorious; especially for early October, and test walking was enjoyed under beautiful sunshine. But as the weekend drew on it turned windy, wet and decidedly cold. Yet none of this could deter the massive influx of fans. People appeared from all corners of France, Europe and even as far afield as Australia.

Friday night's Supertest proved we had nothing to worry about; 5000 people showed up to cheer on the 106 strong entry. The atmosphere was fantastic and the crowd went wild as Antoine Meo went head to head with Alex Salvini in one of the closest duels of the evening. The partying went on late into the night for the spectators as beer and sausages disappeared at an alarming rate. But for the riders it was all about being tucked up in bed for an early start; they knew the challenges of the week-



end ahead would require all their energy...

On Saturday morning the riders arrived in the cold paddock, including a large contingent who had travelled to the ISDE a few weeks earlier still coughing and spluttering following a bout of what we'd dubbed 'Slovakian Flu'. The vibe was a fairly chilled one anyway, especially considering that title rivalries were coming to a head, with many riders swapping banter and enjoying themselves. Paddock favourite Aigar Leok, who is now retiring from EWC, was showing off to his mates Rannar Uusna and Matti Seistola. "I only have my race shirt on, nothing underneath, you two aren't tough like me!"

"Haha, no, we're the clever ones," quipped Seistola, "we have thermal layers and rain layers, we will be laughing when you are too cold to ride the bike!"

One of the tightest classes in the title fights was EY, yet contenders Mikael Persson and Josep Garcia were still happy to stand around chatting to each other and to fellow rider Jack Edmondson, despite fierce rivalry in the standings. Saturday morning's friendliness reminded me once again of just how lucky we are to have a racing series where generally the riders respect each other and no-one is 'too good' to speak to anyone else. Across the classes champions and privateers become friends.

In addition to the 'regular' British riders, EWC Requista also saw 'wildcard' appearances from Josh Gotts and Tom Sagar. In previous French events there have been a bigger contingent of Brit riders making the trip across the channel, but post-ISDE work commitments and injuries put paid to the hopes of some promising young names.

However, Tom Sagar attacked the event with his usual happy-go-lucky attitude, ending up with an 8th and a 9th place in the E2 class. Josh Gotts is always a joy to have in the paddock, dedicated and determined and with a great support network around him, he has a bright future



The area was typically French, giant cows with dangerous looking horns, dubious looking bits of former animal life available with every meal, and plenty of vin rouge...

in Enduro. Although Josh has support from TM UK and some decent sponsors, he is still essentially a privateer. But you wouldn't know that to look at him - his bike and gear are always immaculate and his professionalism matches his style. And Josh's Dad John even gave me some TM 'earrings' he'd made to wear for the weekend. The youngster from Cornwall adores the EWC and he is building on his experience with the hope of competing full time as soon as possible.

Requista's tests were much better than I expected, with the Cross Test one of the most spectacular I have seen in recent years; built over the side of some steep hills with brilliant viewing and some decent jumps and drop-offs. The Enduro test featured some off-camber going in the woods which would've become somewhat slippery during the daily rainfall, and the Xtreme Test - whilst not particularly extreme - incorporated Friday night's Supertest course to add in some rocks and logs to the climbs. All the tests were close to the paddock and easily accessible, making it possible to see plenty of action throughout the day - which came in handy when we suffered a puncture in the hire car on the way out to the Cross Test on Saturday morning!

All this easy access, plenty of parking, and help from the local authorities meant that the public could flood into all the tests, bringing their entire families from grannies to toddlers as well as flags, airhorns, picnics, and an abundance of enthusiasm. Italy's fans are always wild and animated, but the French fans seem to somehow combine this enduro-induced fever with an impressive knowledge of the sport. And while they are always fervently patriotic, they will occasionally cheer for a 'foreigner' if they do something particularly spectacular. This encouraged all the riders to put on a good show and give their absolute best to aim for a roar from the assembled masses.

Despite heavy drizzle and strong winds, the tests were some of the most enjoyable of the year. They weren't



particularly challenging but this gave a kind of flowing feel to them, allowing the riders to carry plenty of speed.

Class-leading riders aiming to just get through Day one were Husqvarna team-mates Jamie McCanney and Mathias Bellino, and KTM's Antoine Meo and Laia Sanz. They knew that if they could just stay out of trouble and put in some decent results they could walk away with 2015 titles. For Laia and Antoine the titles came with more relief than revelry with both needing to head off to the Rally Morocco on Sunday, meaning they had to wrap the titles up on Saturday. Meo's first E2 title marked his fifth for KTM. Ending his World Enduro career with a 'High Five' seemed like the perfect way to bow out for enduro's oldest showman. For Laia it was a fourth consecutive enduro title and the impressive Spaniard celebrated by soaking Team Manager Fabio Farioli with champagne.

Over at Husqvarna the tensions were a little higher as Jamie McCanney and Mathias Bellino looked set to grab their second career World titles. Bellino was first in and the emotions were evident from the beginning with most of the team and his entire family welling up and grinning from ear-to-ear. The young Frenchman has been through a lot to win his first premier class title in E3 after winning the Junior class in 2012. Thanking everyone individually and handing out t-shirts and crowns made from airfilters to the assembled supporters was a nice touch. Jamie was next into the pit and the Manxman was thrilled to be able to follow in the footsteps of his older brother, Danny, who also won the Junior title 12 months earlier. Jamie is often quiet and reserved but his joy was evident as he toasted his team and proudly took to the podium to collect his winner's plaque.

On Day 2, with four titles already decided, the mood was a jovial one. But for those watching the E1 and EY



“The fans took to the Cross test to witness some heel-clickers and full-gas berms whilst over at the rain-affected big hill the riders needed the help of marshals armed with ropes...”

classes intently it was also a day of nerves and much nail-biting. Eero Remes and Christophe Nambotin were separated by just a handful of points in E1 and Mikael Persson and Josep Garcia had a mathematical nightmare on their hands as the Youth Cup are allowed to drop their four worst results, splitting the determined pair by just three points.

Nambotin - the old-stager with three consecutive titles to his name - versus Remes the nearly-man with several top four championship finishes on his CV. And Persson, the EY trier who has aimed to be champion for the past three seasons versus the trailblazing newcomer Garcia. It was tough to call just who was going to do what, and the day took on an air of excitement right from the start.

For the crowd there was disappointment as Saturday's champions Meo and Sanz opted not to ride and flew to Morocco for the forthcoming rally. And Jamie McCanney also sat out Day 2 due to sinus issues. French favourite Johnny Aubert was also unable to ride the second day. But the remaining riders did a great job to entertain the fans with Alex Salvini taking another stylish win, and Mathias Bellino riding with more panache than ever.

As the fans took to the Cross Test to witness heel-clickers and some full gas berms there were struggles on the liaison sections. Two steep uphill had been rain-affected overnight and marshals were deployed to help the riders with ropes. The crowds quickly cottoned on to these 'spectacular' spots and the hill was soon lined either side with hundreds of screaming fans. The riders loved the support, commenting on their return that the cheers helped them struggle up the hill for the umpteenth time. EW's Jemma Wilson recounted how she'd lost two minutes on that section on Day 1:

“Just before I started the climb I clocked a deep rut on the left hand side and made a mental note to avoid it” explained the happy-go-lucky Aussie. “I leaned back and kept it pinned but half way up the bike just started sliding, I paddled but I’ve only got short legs! Then BAM! I felt the

wheel slip into that damn rut! I lost it and started crying immediately 'cos I knew I could lose the chance of 2nd in the championship. I began to wrestle my Yamaha out of the rut and then the marshal threw me a pulley rope. I chucked it around my bike and before I knew it he'd pulled the bike out with me clinging on the back! I didn't even have to run up the hill! Result!"

Some may say that the riders shouldn't get assistance, but in situations where the weather has affected the course, and where you have to cater to riders of all abilities including 16 year olds in the Youth Cup I think it's perfectly acceptable - and it really gave the crowd something to get stuck into! Many fans came back to the paddock with mud up to their knees and grins on their faces; my bet is they'd been on that climb all day!

By the time everyone had rolled back into the paddock at the end of the weekend the atmosphere was electric. Eero Remes had overcome the odds to deny Nambotin another title but everyone was so happy for Remes and his tiny TM team that the applause was genuine and full of respect. Eero is a typical Finn and rather quiet and reserved but he and the team couldn't contain their joy as the 30 year old came into his garage.

Eero picked up a bottle of champagne and drenched his team, but little did he know that team manager Luca Cherubini had prepared a bucket of ice cold water in the pit. He threw it over Eero's head to cheers from the assembled journos and fans.

Meanwhile in EY it was Mikael Persson who had won out over a devastated Josep Garcia. The Swede persevered to win by a small margin and I think you'd have been hard pushed to find anyone in the paddock who was as happy as Mikael's team manager, Joakim Johansson. He looked as though he would burst with pride as he and the team surrounded their champion



I can scarcely believe that this wonderful series is over for another year. At the final podium presentation the crowd cheered and clapped and I smiled until my face ached...

with a group hug before picking him up and repeatedly throwing him into the air.

After a distressing ISDE this year which saw riders arguing, indecision from the FIM, and a general fragmentation of the spirit of enduro, it was brilliant to see that this final round of the EWC saw everyone reunite on great terms. Riders hanging out together, supporting one another, and generally having a lot of fun. Paddock good guy Matti Seistola ended Day 2 with a huge smile on his face: *"I'm so happy! Not just because I got third in the E3 championship, but because Eero is the champion in E1 and that is amazing for him and for Finland! That's what is making me so happy!"* All the riders congratulated each other, rivals or not, and the level of professionalism and support was truly inspiring to see.

The weekend finished off with a glamorous 'do' - dinner and prize-giving for the top three in each class. Championship promoters ABC Communications had put in a lot of effort to bring some pizzazz to this little village in the tail end of nowhere, and they have to be commended for their work during this season to try and ensure that World Enduro is on the up.

The final podium was probably my favourite moment of the weekend and an emotional one for people such as myself, who can scarcely believe that this wonderful series is over for another year. Mathias Bellino, Anthony Boissiere and local man Jeremy Tarroux enjoyed the most incredible reception from the fans as they took to their spots on the podium. The crowd sang, cheered, chanted, clapped, and shared Champagne showers with their heroes. In the middle of the melee I grinned until my face ached - some may say that the EWC is going downhill with some of the biggest names leaving to start new careers in Dakar or returning to MX, but I know for a fact that there's no place I'd rather be.

*Stay tuned for my next column - where I'll be giving you an insight into the mindsets, riding styles, rivals and quirks of this year's six champions. **PITGIRL***





RAINBOW NATIONS





I'M 48 YEARS OLD. Last month at the Motocross of Nations, in Ernee, France, a childhood dream was realised. As a 12-year-old boy growing up in South Africa I had dreamed of one day being at the 'des Nations'. Here I was...

Seeing photos of my childhood heroes back then (*no live television coverage in those days*) spurred in me the passion to ride and race. That passion remains as strong today as it did back in 1979. Watching the riders brought back all those feelings.

I can highly recommend making the pilgrimage. I have booked my flight to Maggiore in Italy next year already. It may have taken me 36 years to make my first Nations, but I know now what I missed and I won't be making that mistake again.





Journeyman

I invited my friend, Stefan - a photographer specialising in motorsports - to come along for the adventure. His photography leaves no doubt that his passion lies with a camera. Oh and he's also a bit crazy and a former guitarist from an 80's cover group called Big Machine. Anyway, anyway, anyway...

We arrived at a tiny airfield in Dinard, France in an equally tiny four-seater, single-engined plane from Guernsey on a sunny and windless Friday afternoon. From there we made our way to St James, about 40km from Ernee. This is a beautiful region of France inhabited by friendly folk. Starving, Stefan and I began the search for dinner. As it was late our options were few but in France you never go hungry.

A pizza made in an authentic wood-burning oven in the rear of a food truck parked in the car park of the Carrefour miraculously appeared before our eyes. We ate out of the box and washed it down with a cold beer bought from the store. A group of locals joined the car park party and we all sat in the car park eating pizza. Delicious!

Track & Field

We were up early on Saturday morning - arriving at the track at around 8:30am. There must have been more than 500 motorhomes scattered over the surrounding fields as we approached the circuit. The setting and the track were spectacular. Set in a natural



amphitheatre, the track lay in the foot of a valley from where it climbed sharply up and back down the north bank of the valley. The ascents and descents were imposing with blind rises and drop-offs for the riders to contend with. Immaculate at the start of the day, the track was fast and treacherous and would become gnarly and littered with deep ruts and some scary braking bumps as the riders jumped some 60-80 feet downhill over a blind crest before braking hard to navigate a 180 degree turn up the steep hill again.

This has to be one of the best spectator tracks that I've ever been to. It's not often that tracks provide a panoramic view over the entire circuit. The south bank of the valley looked directly over the entire track and the 40,000-plus spectators made good use of the banks to view the racing up close.

The Paddock area was a real eye opener and a highlight for sure. I was able to get up close and scrutinise the factory bikes, mechanics and pit set up, and even catch some of the riders in the pit area. Kid in a candy store comes to mind.

What jumped out at me was just how popular Team USA was. Notwithstanding the very partisan French crowd, the biggest interest in the pits was Team America. Their pit layout and professionalism stood out by a country mile from the European teams.



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As a huge fan of both the AMA Supercross series and the Lucas Oil pro motocross outdoor series in the States, it was a treat to see the team setup, the bikes and the riders up close.

The teams

Saturday's qualifying saw the French Riders, Gautier Paulin (Open), Roman Febvre (MXGP) and Marvin Musquin (MX2) take a clean sweep of wins - laying down a marker to the other teams coming into the main event on Sunday and placing them as firm favourites for the win.

In the Open Class, Cooper Webb from the USA, a rookie on a 450 came in second followed by Jeremy van Horebeek of team Belgium in third. Ben Townley from New Zealand qualified second in the MXGP class and was the standout rider of the day. Coming out of semi-retirement there was no doubt he was fast and, if not for a lack of fitness, I think he could have taken the win. Everyone will remember Ben taking it to Ricky Carmichael back in 2005 at this track, the last time the MXoN was held here in a thrilling race that had him keeping Ricky honest right down to the chequered flag. Justin Barcia from Team USA came in third putting in a solid ride but obviously still getting to know the track.

In the MX2 class it was the Marvin Musquin show from the start. He was in devastating form; a clear 1.5 seconds faster

than the rest of the field. His main rival, Jeremy Martin qualified in second but just didn't seem to have the pace to match Marvin on French soil. Jeremy Seewer from Switzerland came in third.

Max Anstie was showing good pace for team GB in practice as was Dean Wilson and Shaun Simpson and were all well placed along with Team Belgium to give the French and American teams a run for the title on Sunday. Sunday morning saw Tim Gajser taking the B-final win after a poor Saturday qualifying and advancing to the main events.

The scoring for the MXoN works on a position system, ie first place is awarded one point, second place two, etc. Each class (currently MXGP, MX2 and Open) races twice, each time against one of the other two classes, for a total of three races. The worst score of three races is dropped, and the lowest combined score wins.

Race One - MXGP & MX2:

An epic battle in race one saw Team USA's Justin Barcia take the holeshot and then get hunted down by Team France's Marvin Musquin in the first part of the race. Marvin on the 250 was super quick and spurred on by the deafening crowd was catching Barcia on the 450 before throwing it away right in front of the crowd on the jump over on the far





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side of the track.

Marvin commented later that he'd just got too excited hearing the crowd and was making too many mistakes before he went down. A mad scramble back to the bike saw him rejoin in fourth after losing places to Evgeny Bobryshev of Team Russia and Team Germany's Max Nagl.

Jeremy Martin fought himself up to fourth place to challenge Marvin briefly, but after two blistering fastest laps by Marvin, Martin had no answer and the Team France rider came home in fourth. Bobryshev and Nagl holding onto second and third.

New Zealand's Ben Townley showed that his Saturday qualifying pace was no fluke and came home sixth behind Martin but ahead of the defending champion Gautier Paulin who went down and got collected by Max Nagl, leaving him with bent bars and out of contention for the top spots.

Shaun Simpson of Team GB came home in eighth place putting in a solid performance in race one - though after the loss of Max Anstie in a horrific crash team GB were left without any hope of competing for an overall position. Get well soon Max. After race one the USA held a slim lead over the French team with a 1&5 for Barcia and Martin.

Race One Results:

1. Justin Barcia (USA, Yamaha), 35:41.061;
2. Evgeny Bobryshev (RUS, Honda), +0:13.103; 3. Maximilian Nagl (GER, Husq-

varna), +0:16.316; **4.** Marvin Musquin (FRA, KTM), +0:19.053; **5.** Jeremy Martin (USA, Yamaha), +0:25.080; **6.** Ben Townley (NZL, Honda), +0:36.939; **7.** Gautier Paulin (FRA, Honda), +0:39.665; **8.** Shaun Simpson (GBR, KTM), +1:00.544; **9.** Valentin Guillod (SUI, Yamaha), +1:03.697; **10.** Jeremy Seewer (SUI, Suzuki), +1:15.508.

RACE 2 - MX2 & Open

Team USA's open rider Cooper Webb has a reputation as a no-holes-barred rider and he lined up behind the gate to battle Romain Febvre - his nemesis from the final MXGP race at Glen Helen the previous week in California. This set the stage for an epic duel and some tough racing with Webb determined to hold on to the Team USA lead after race one.

When the gate dropped it was Webb out front to claim the Fox holeshot from Team GB's Dean Wilson and Team France's Romain Febvre. Febvre promptly fired up the afterburner and made quick work of Wilson as he set out after Webb who had gapped a good lead. The French crowd erupted when Febvre took an inside line to take the lead from Webb. The pair were evenly matched as Webb held the pace of the new MXGP world champion before going down in a deep rut trying to avoid a back marker at the top of





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the circuit. Febvre was able to maintain the gap after Cooper Webb's off, which saw him re-mount in second place and hold position to the finish.

The third place battle was hotly contested with the 250s of Musquin and Martin making a run at Van Horebeek on the 450. Horebeek had no answer to the super quick Musquin who was outstanding in front of his home crowd. Marvin feigned a switch of line and made a sweet pass on the outside of van Horebeek and kept charging to come home third - a good five seconds ahead of the Team Belgium rider. Martin also put on a charge late in the race to catch van Horebeek, but ran out of time as they finished in fourth and fifth respectively.

Dean Wilson of Team GB put in an impressive performance coming home in sixth place and combined with Simpson's solid 8th place in race one would have set up team GB for a possible top five finish if they'd had Max Anstie fit to ride.

Race 2 Results:

1. Romain Febvre (FRA, Yamaha), 35:38.570; 2. Cooper Webb (USA, Yamaha), +0:03.133; 3. Marvin Musquin (FRA, KTM), +0:10.889; 4. Jeremy Van Horebeek (BEL, Yamaha), +0:15.384; 5. Jeremy Martin (USA, Yamaha), +0:19.463; 6. Dean Wilson (GBR, KTM), +0:40.540; 7. Glenn Coldenhoff (NED, Suzuki), +1:05.159; 8. Tanel Leok (EST, Kawasaki), +1:14.771; 9. Pascal Rauche-

necker (AUT, KTM), +1:23.712; **10.** Jeremy Seewer (SUI, Suzuki), +1:25.074.

RACE 3 - MXGP & OPEN

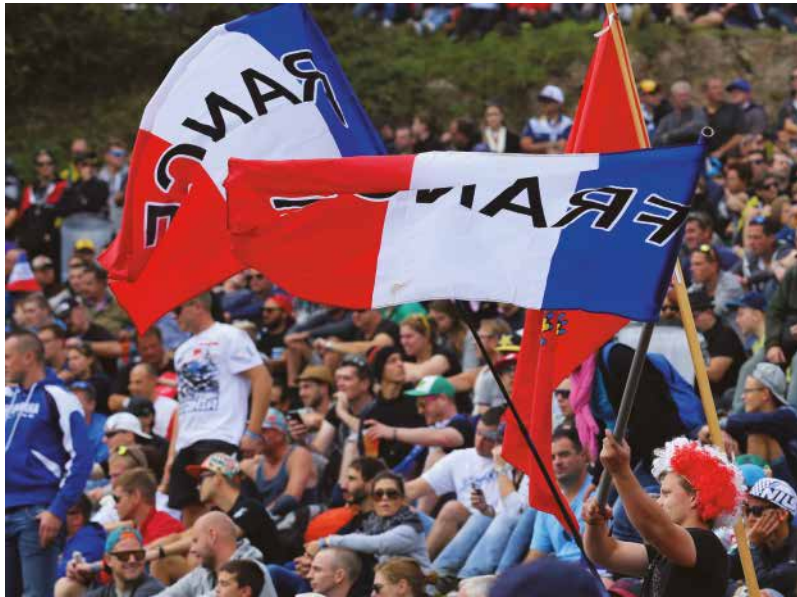
With Team France now in the overall lead following a 1&3 in race two it was all down to the French defence to hold off a charging and determined Team USA.

The gate dropped and a mad dash to the line saw Team New Zealand's Ben Townley and Team Sweden's Filip Bengtsson battling for the lead around turn one, followed by Febvre, Bobryshev and de Dycker.

Team USA's Barcia and Webb were buried in the pack leaving Febvre determined to take advantage as he charged to the front to battle with Townley in a phenomenal bar to bar tussle. Townley fought gallantly with Febvre who wasn't able to shake the veteran New Zealander - the Kiwi coming home in second with an unbelievable display of grit and speed. Ben had been on rails the whole weekend and it would be good to see him in more events - semi-retired or not.

As the race progressed both Team USA riders, Webb and Barcia were making up ground until a mistake by Barcia seemed to take the wind out of his sails and allowed Cooper Webb to close in. Barcia let Webb by as he was clearly quicker but while on the charge, three corners later he stalled the





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bike leaving it to Barcia to try and salvage the situation. Barcia kicked into overdrive and put on one of the best displays of speed and determination of the weekend, passing Paulin and Bobryshev to finish third. Bobryshev who was impressive for Team Russia came home in fourth, ahead of Paulin and a late charging Webb in sixth. Dean Wilson from Team GB finished 8th behind Jeremy van HoreBeek for a solid weekend's racing.

It was mayhem as Febvre approached the line and the chequered flag waved for a perfect weekend of wins in the open class for the reigning MXGP world champion. Marvin Musquin's victory in MX2 combined with Gautier Paulin fourth overall in the MXGP class saw Team France defend the Chamberlain Cup on home soil for the first time since the event started in 1947.

Team USA's dreams of winning were left unfulfilled as they came so close, but just weren't quite able to break the three year drought. It was always going to be a tough ask on French soil against a resplendent French team riding possessed to defend their title. Justin Barcia won the MXGP class with his teammates Jeremy Martin and Cooper Webb both finishing second in their classes to be beaten by a meagre two points, whilst Team Belgium rounded off the podium in third.

'The fans are unbelievable', commented Barcia afterwards. 'When I was behind Marvin I could hear all the cheering and then





when I came around in front of him I couldn't hear anything. They kill it. It will be nice to have one of these races in the US. The fans will be pumped up.'

'We don't have anything like that' said Webb of the crowd and atmosphere. 'I thought in Glen Helen the fans were good, but this was a whole new level. I knew when Romain was on me, for sure! It was extreme and you had to stay calm and push it aside, but it was hard when everybody was so loud and behind their team.'

Race 3 Results:

1. Romain Febvre (FRA, Yamaha), 35:29.211; 2. Ben Townley (NZL, Honda), +0:03.179; 3. Justin Barcia (USA, Yamaha), +0:04.708; 4. Evgeny Bobryshev (RUS, Honda), +0:13.119; 5. Gautier Paulin (FRA, Honda), +0:14.435; 6. Cooper Webb (USA, Yamaha), +0:15.539; 7. Jeremy Van Horebeek (BEL, Yamaha), +0:39.713; 8. Dean Wilson (GBR, KTM), +0:45.383; 9. Ken de Dycker (BEL, KTM), +0:54.619; 10. Glenn Coldenhoff (NED, Suzuki), +0:57.639.

Motocross of Nations Top Ten Teams:

1. France. 2. USA. 3. Belgium. 4. Estonia. 5. Switzerland. 6. The Netherlands. 7. Australia. 8. New Zealand. 9. Germany. 10. Austria.



This event is not all about the racing; it's about the access to the riders, the bikes, the teams and feeling like you're a part of a crazy band of worldwide brothers - every one of them living vicariously through their chosen hero on the track. Just being there fulfilled my childhood dream. To all the teams and riders from all the countries, thanks for the great racing, and see you next year...





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