



RUST

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Issue #3



FULL GAS

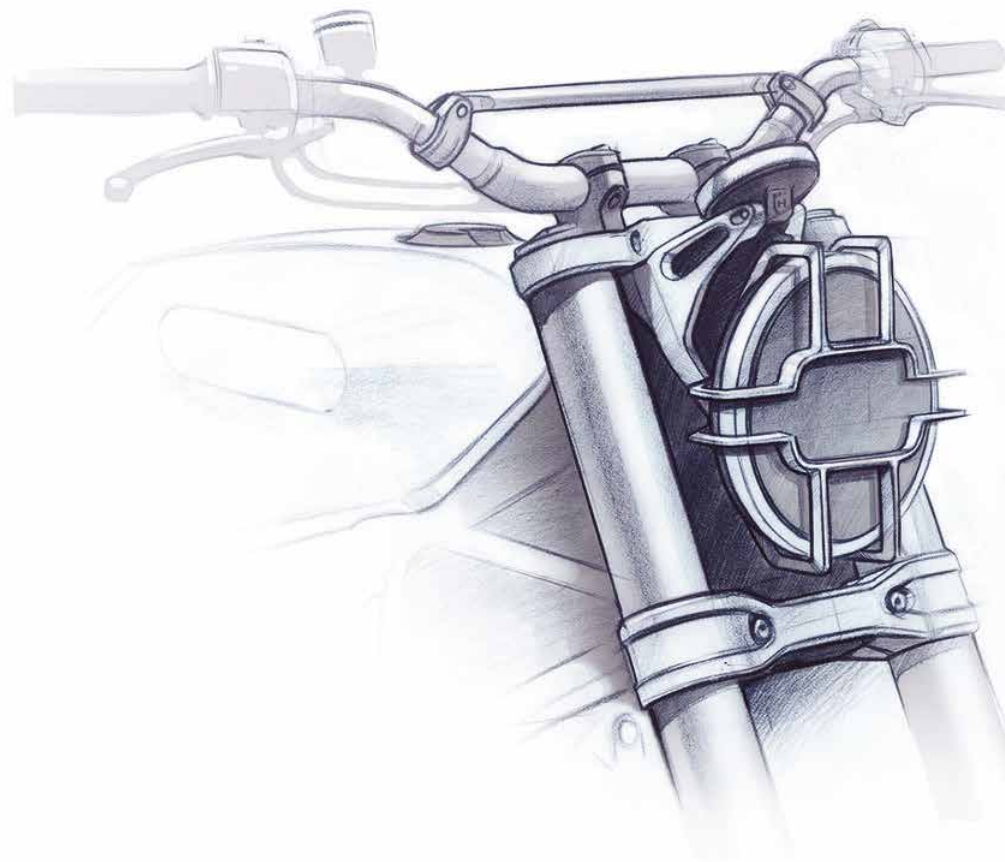
BY SI MELBER,
PHOTO: JOSH SNOWDEN
ILLUSTRATION: HUSQVARNA

HI THERE

MERRY CHRISTMAS EVERYONE. Here at RUST it's been an exciting and exhausting few months as we've compiled, collated, curated and created what we reckon is the best digital dirt bike magazine available anywhere.

In barely two months we've brought you launch tests of the 2016 Betas, 2016 KTMs, 2016 Huskys, the new Yam WR450, new Husky 701 Enduro and Supermoto, the new Suzuki V-Strom 650XT, the WK400 Trail adventure, secured the exclusive first test of the new Honda Africa Twin (before it was even officially launched), given you a taste of the 2017 KTMs and organised a shootout between the Yam WR-F250 and KTM 250EXC-F.

Add to that the contributions from our learned industry columnists, video content to accompany all of our tests, and the fact that it hasn't cost you a single dime, and I hope you're feeling loved.



And it doesn't stop there. We've already got a number of exciting tests lined up for 2016 and we're busy framing new ideas to take RUST forward and bring our anti-brand of dirt bikery to as many new people as possible.

As I outlined in issue #1, what you see of RUST right now is really only the beginning of what we have planned. 2016 will see RUST expand its reach, its content delivery and its sphere of influence around the globe, but what I can tell you now is that RUST Magazine will continue to be written by enthusiasts and remain FREE to all fellow dirt bikers who want to share the love.

Have a peaceful and happy Christmas and don't forget to keep checking out RUSTsport on social media (*Facebook, Instagram & Twitter*), where you will find the latest updates on what we are up to. All the best.... **SI MELBER**

We want to hear from you. Contact editorial@rustsports.com with your feedback.





RALLYING CRY, BABY

BY CHRIS EVANS,
PHOTOS: FRIENDS

FOR THE FIRST time in 19 years it looks like I'll be spending the festive season in Europe and not on the Dakar in Africa or South America. Obviously I'm disappointed not to be going. But at the same time, I can't deny there's a few aspects of the world's most famous off-road event that I definitely won't miss. No, that's a lie. There's a *lot* of aspects I won't miss. And almost all of them centre round my much cherished creature comforts.

For a start, I won't miss the sleep deprivation. If you read biographies of famous people who've run the world (*currently I'm in the middle of a brick of a book about Napoleon*) you'll know they all got by on just four hours kip. They'd simply love the Dakar. They might start to get a bit grumpy towards the end though, 'cos the most I've ever managed was three, but basically they'd be right in their element. Myself, I'm not running the world, not even a medium sized multi-national, so I require a lot more shut eye. To be fully functioning I need at least seven and a half hours and if you want me to be operational *and* in a good mood, the minimum requirement goes up to eight and a half. You also need to bear in mind that the three hours sleep you do get are extremely poor quality. Like virtually all Dakar old hands, I had to resort to sleeping pills, as without them the sound of a thousand generators roaring away all night makes dropping off difficult, if not impossible. The trouble is that you wake up feeling like hell...



The generators aren't the only impediment to a good night's kip. The fact that you are lying on a very thin camping mattress is also a major handicap. Admittedly, the last two decades have seen quantum leaps in camping technology. 20 years ago, camping mattresses were *really* rubbish. Now they are just rubbish. Tents have also improved. The one that you can buy from Decathlon really does go up in 20 seconds. The only hic is that it takes a lot longer to work out how to put it away the next morning, especially as its bag has invariably shrunk in size overnight. It is something that only the incredibly dextrous Chinese lady who put the tent in there in the first place can really get right; and I can guarantee that she didn't take enough sleeping pills to knock out a small horse before trying.

Fatigue, climatic extremes and poor hygiene inevitably play havoc with your constitution and so another thing I won't miss is my annual visit to the Dakar field hospital. Don't get me wrong, the doctors do an amazing job, in less than ideal circumstances. Believe it or not the job is so coveted there's actually a waiting list of talented emergency medics itching to act out their MASH fantasies. Unfortunately for me, the other reason they want to go is to avoid hypochondriac malingers like me that clutter up their waiting room back in the hospital they normally work at.

Saving the life of some talented off-road demi-god rocks their world; sorting out my assorted psychosomatic ailments less so. Normally I present myself with a bog standard case of food poisoning but every so often I try and giving them something more exotic to get their teeth into. They couldn't do much for a

“ I was screaming before the impact and screaming a lot more afterwards when we got out to inspect the damage...”

particularly nasty abscess, except threaten to send me home, but a difficult-to-shift urinary infection did inspire them to get me to bend over and for them to snap on the rubber gloves. It certainly did the trick as far as they were concerned, as they didn't see me again for the rest of the rally...

But the thing I really, *really* won't miss is entrusting my life to an unknown co-driver for the 8000km or so of '*emerging economy*' driving conditions. For some bizarre reason, everybody involved in motorsport seems to think they have to drive at the same speed as their heroes. Except they don't have the talent and they didn't get to sleep in a motorhome the previous evening. Last year's co-driver was particularly awful and at the end of our 14 days together, so much did I resent him putting my life in constant danger that I was actually incapable of talking to him. If anything the one before that was even worse.

Every time the Dakar crosses the Andes, the organisers block the bivouac to stop assistance vehicles cluttering up the road they share with the competitors, which in turn means we all arrive very late over the other side of the mountains. My 2014 co-driver's solution to the problem was simply not to

bother with the gate at all, but instead to drive full pelt at the perimeter fence in the hope of knocking it over - Dukes of Hazzard style. I was screaming before the impact and screaming a lot more afterwards when we got out to inspect the damage. I won't bore you with the list of body panels that were ripped off in our Great Escape attempt. Suffice to say the camping car rental company wasn't best pleased and neither was the team boss when presented with the repair bill.

After this long list of things I won't miss about this year's Dakar you're probably wondering why I ever signed up for one, let alone 19 consecutive editions. The explanation is shorter but much more difficult to articulate. In part I suppose it is simply because it is the biggest event in the off-road calendar. Also, there's the inescapable fact that in between the moments of fear and loathing, you get to see some incredible scenery and work with some amazing people.

But most of all what kept me going back was my utter admiration for privateer competitors. They suffer exactly the same level of discomfort as I, *and* they had to get up every day and race their motorcycles across some of the most inhospitable terrain known to man.

The highlight of my Dakar day when all my work was finished, was to slope off for a few minutes and visit the privateers and see how they were getting on. They always put a brave face on it, talking down their achievements, but both they and I knew they were tackling the motorcycling equivalent of ascending Everest, with not a lot of oxygen. Which is why I would like to sign off by wishing my compatriots Chris Cork, Jamie Smith and, if he makes it, Sam Sunderland, the very best of luck for the 2016 edition.



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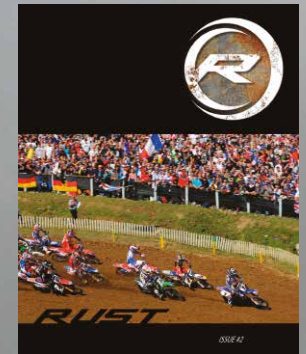
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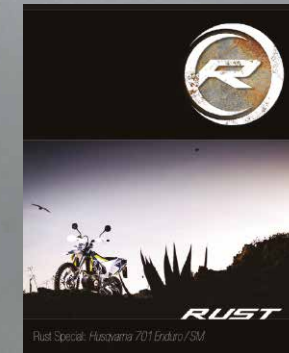
ISSUE #1



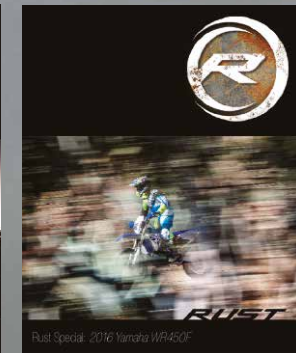
AFRICA TWIN SPECIAL



ISSUE #2



HUSQVARNA 701 SPECIAL



YAMAHA WR450F SPECIAL



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Come the summer of next year, KTM will launch an all-new range of enduro bikes. And they could be the last comprehensive revision we'll see before super-stringent EU legislation changes our machinery forever. So what will we get in 2016? RUST investigates...



FUTURAMA

Words: Jon Bentman & Si Melber
Images: Jon Bentman, Si Melber (& various)





KTM ISN'T A manufacturer that likes to stand still. They make detail changes to their off-road ranges most years, then quite regularly they'll do complete overhauls: new frames, new engines, new bikes. For the opposition it takes some keeping up with. That said when it comes to the enduro (EXC) range, KTM have been a bit quiet for the last couple of years. But as you'd expect that's just the lull before the storm, because following the ground-up redesign of the motocross range this season, for the 2017 model year (*launching in mid-2016*) there's going to be all-new EXCs too.

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Enduro

It's worth backgrounding this story by indicating just how busy KTM have been. By Spring of this year (2015) KTM were reporting revenues up by 25% (year-on-year) with sales of €515 million. And while many firms have highlighted the importance of emerging markets, KTM's figures reveal that European sales have grown by 10%, whereas - despite all manner of strategies - the US market grew only 5.7% over the same period.

What does all that mean? Well for one thing it means KTM's growth spurt hasn't finished yet. They still have a way to go to reach market maturity, and thus far it's been a success story driven by a commitment to continuous development of the product and frequent upgrades. Expect that to continue for the next few years as the push towards more road-biased and crossover models continues. And expect the new range of European-biased enduro bikes to be their best yet.

Okay enough of the Bentmanomics, let's talk specifics about dirt bikes. For 2016 the motocrossers were as good as all-new. How new? Well KTM revealed that from the 378 parts that make up a single four-stroke motocrosser, 365 had been completely redesigned for the new model, so that's just 13 parts carried over and that includes things like tyres and handlebars.

Sticking with the motocrossers, the 250/350 four-strokes are still a '*common platform*' design in a sense: sharing the basic architecture and many parts in the motors. The new DOHC motors are

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physically smaller and around a kilo lighter than the old unit. Well we say 'old'... the last motor having been substantially upgraded as recently as the 2013 model year. They're more powerful as well. The 2015 250SX-F was claimed to be good for 42.9hp, while the 2016 makes a claimed 46hp!

KTM are also claiming that their new 350SX-F makes 58hp - allegedly more powerful than some competitors' 450s. That's serious power.

We should take a broader look at the progress here. Back in 2011 KTM were claiming around 36hp for the 250SX-F, only slightly up for figures on the older motor that dates back another half-decade, of around 34hp. But the 2016 250SX-F is claimed to put out a whopping 46hp. That's a near 30% boost in power inside of a decade - huge for a humble 250. Likewise for the 350SX-F: at its launch for the 2011 model year it was a 46hp motor, today the same model supposedly makes 58hp. If those figures are accurate, then that's remarkable progress.

KTM have arguably made even more significant progress with the 450SX. Back in 2011 this was



a 54hp unit, but the new motor - now a whopping 1.8kg lighter - makes a staggering 62hp it's claimed. KTM have retained the SOHC top end but it's noticeable that peak power has shifted from 8200rpm (*back in 2011*) up to a giddy (for a 450) 11,500rpm today.

Even the 125cc two-stroke got an all-new motor. Only the 250/300 two-strokes haven't been upgraded. But that's only because imminent European emissions regulations will eventually force KTM to redevelop all their two-strokes as direct-injection units - without a total-loss lubrication system - and strategically and economically it makes more sense to wait until then rather than funding two lots of development.

Physically smaller motors have meant KTM have been able to develop lighter chassis to accommodate their new range of engines. For example the 2016 250SX-F has a claimed dry weight of 98.5kg. Compare that with the 102.8kg for the 2015 model and you find a staggering 4.3kg weight loss. So across the board, the new KTM motocrossers have met with rave reviews.

We'll have to wait and see how this parlay into the 2017 enduros, but with a nod towards the development of the motocrossers, this would suggest the new 2017 250EXC-F should roll in around 101kg and with 39.5hp. For that model in particular, that's an important improvement, because without a doubt the all new Yamaha WR250F has the existing KTM 250 firmly against the ropes this season.



Whilst we expect the new 250/350 and 450 style motors to make the transition into enduro, gaining six-speed gearboxes and subtle adjustments to tune on the way, we're not yet certain about whether the new chassis technology will be carried across as well. The 2016 'crossers are using hydro-formed frames and air forks. And of course the SXs all have linkage suspension whereas the EXCs traditionally retain PDS.

Air forks have yet to appear on enduro models so we have no marker as to whether they'll work in this environment. More likely for the EXCs would be a switch to the WP 4CS shock, which is currently reserved for the Six Days models (*and Husqvarnas*), and retention of the PDS - albeit probably with the new frame design as well.

And as we've already stated we are inching ever closer to tightening emissions regulations that could potentially change our bikes forever. The next significant date in EU legislation is 1 Jan 2017 - actually not for emissions, but for the mandatory application of ABS on all motorcycles registerable for road use. That shouldn't necessarily be an issue - some might recall how the former (*Italian-German*) Husqvarna showcased ABS on their TE models and how well that worked with minimal impact on weight or performance; whilst under their new owners, Husky have already released the 701 trailie which features a fully-switchable ABS system. Many riders - myself included - felt it to be a step forward in terms of safety. So no major issues there.



However, following that in 2020, comes Euro 5 emissions regs which will demand a near halving of carbon monoxide and nitrogen-oxide emissions. That will potentially make a huge impact on enduro engines, and following the VW diesel scandal, chances are that the legislators are going to be super-tight on enforcing this so we can't automatically expect competition machines to get an exemption. Don't get your hopes up. The upshot is that these latest KTM motors will probably be the last of their kind, designed to take us through these last five years to the ecological clamp-down in 2020. Unless fossil fuel combustion engine technology makes a

quantum leap in the next five years, from there on we can expect either more complex machinery (*heavier, slower and encumbered with all manner of gas-cleaning systems*), or even a switch towards hybrid petrol/electric powerplants (*complex, though potentially more powerful*).

But for now, what's coming from KTM should constitute the peak for petrol-powered enduro motorcycle technology as we know it. So enjoy it while you still can!

Tomorrow's Technology Today

So what will a 2017 EXC be like? Well to help us find out, we got hold of a lightly enduro-ised 2016 KTM 250XC-F - which features the new engine and frame technologies - to see what kind of differences we could expect to see come late Spring 2016.

I should make it clear from the outset that experience has taught us that XC models rarely feel anything like as good for our needs as the factory EXC versions. Whether it's the power delivery or the heavily sprung suspension, there's something about the nature of XCs which doesn't quite work as well on our typical enduro going. But this does seem to vary from model to model.

And so to this particular bike which according to the spec features the MX engine but with a different ignition curve, along with a wider ratio six-speed trans. Suspension-wise, as far as we can tell, it's essentially a mix of MX and EXC components, and this one had been dialed-in



‘ The new 2017 250EXC-F should roll in at around 101kg and 39.5hp. That’s an important benchmark because the Yamaha WR250F has the current KTM 250 firmly against the ropes... ’

a little by the owner. Certainly it didn’t feel as firmly suspended as a fresh outta’ the crate SX model. The bike has been put together by the guys at TriCounty Motorcycles in Berkshire, who have been responsible for some of the craziest KTMs we’ve ever ridden. The idea behind it was simply to allow one of their customers to have a unique and futuristic ‘EXC’ (*well at least for this year*), on which to go trail riding. So head and tail lights have been added to the base XC-F model (*which already features an 18in rear wheel*), and then the bike has been road-registered to allow it to hit the trails.

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Castles in the Air - Si Melber

Appearances can be deceptive. From a distance you could be forgiven for believing that the ruined castle tower in the picture (left) dates all the way back to Norman times. Certainly that's what the Victorian engineers wanted you to believe when they constructed this '*folly*' 150 years ago on the site of a genuine (*but derelict*) 11th century castle. And the same could also be said of this bike which appears - at first glance - to be a 2017 EXC250F, but is in fact a 2016 XC-F with lights.

What you can't really tell from the photos is just how fantastic this bike looks in the metal. I mean you'd have to be as blind as a welder's dog not to see the sheer beauty in this machine... But apparently even this is a matter of opinion.

My own take on it is that it is unquestionably the best looking dirtbike I've ever set eyes upon. But that is countered somewhat by RUST's JB, who called it '*just another orange dirtbike!*' You gotta' be kidding me...

I'm not letting this one go just yet however, because I want to stress just how pleasing to the eye it appears: the straightness of line, the simplicity of its form and function, the perfect proportions... it's enough to make you believe it *really is* a Norman castle tower in the photos. In all seriousness though, there's not another enduro bike out there that can match the KTM's innate style. This is not just me sounding off - no other bike has anything like the simplicity of line, and pureness of form. It's small and minimalist in design, but



perfectly proportioned. That might not be important to you, but to me it is. Form follows function, and this bike *looks* right.

Performance-wise we don't want to speculate as to how next year's EXCs will feel, based purely on an entirely different model, but I can tell you that whilst the 250XC-F felt pretty hysterical for a 250 thumper, there's no way on *Earth* that this thing is pumping 46 horses. I'd be surprised if it made even ten less than that.

No question it's incredibly peppy for a 250 thumper with a top end hit and accompanying scream that comes straight out of a Meatloaf track. But a side-by-side drag up a long, stubbly hill against a 200EXC was quite revealing. Sure the 250 thumper pretty much had the measure of the smaller capacity machine each time we raced, but not by much. And what's more this wasn't a brand new 200EXC, it was a 12-year-old bike

purchased “voetstoets” (*sight unseen*) out of the classifieds for £1300. So the pace of progress is perhaps not quite as rapid as the hyperbole surrounding the new motocrossers would have us believe. What isn't in dispute is how small and light is the new engine and frame design and how this in itself could be a game-changer for enduro, irrespective of any power increases.

Perhaps less contentiously I can report that the new brakes are absolutely outstanding. Be warned they are incredibly powerful next to the existing Brembos KTM use... I nearly went straight up and over the bars when I hauled them on at about 40mph whilst the rear end shot up in the air like a Coke bottle with Mentos dropped in it. Now this is progress. I never thought I'd be saying this about KTM brakes but they are truly phenomenal. I like the linkage suspension too, and the way the engine revs and revs, and the looks... did I mention the looks? **Si Melber**

Forward Looking? - Jon Bentman

I'm surprised just how excited Si is about the looks of this bike. I think it's very pretty and all, but actually... well, maybe I'm just hard to please. Or maybe I just have an aversion to black rims. I'm not sure. Perhaps it's my age, heck this thing is brand new from the ground up, and yes it does look sweet. So what gives?





To be fair, I also don't want to place too much stock on this taster-ride, it would be unfair to KTM. This is an unofficial import with a few mods; KTM UK have had no part in it and can't be held accountable for its performance. And on a point of detail it's not got the MX air forks, which is a shame, but instead the 4CS tackle we typically see on Six Days models (*and Husqvarnas*). And as a further caveat, I'd like to ride it a lot more comprehensively over a proper enduro course before casting a solid opinion.

First impressions though, yeah, it's lovely and light, runs real sweet and has that sense of engine and chassis optimisation that we're looking for in a new bike. However, I'm not detecting a blow-your-socks-off wow-factor here.

The 2017 model year 250EXC-F will need to be at the top of its game when it arrives next summer, as the latest Yamaha WR250F is such a weapon. We need the new KTM to have the Yam's screaming-blue-murder top end rush, and some of the low-end gutsiness of the existing 250EXC-F. That's probably quite an ask. With the test bike in question (*here*) I'm not sure that's all present. But then this is an XC-F, one of those hybrid cross-country machines: half motocrosser, half enduro, and in my experience not quite as good as either in their respective environments. These bikes have been hit and miss ever since we first tried them.

But I like the conflicting opinions. Si's super-keen, I'm reserving judgement. Si thinks it looks

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amazing, I see another orange bike. He thinks it has an awesome top end honk, I'm thinking the Yam is stronger... Yeah, there's going to be lots to consider come next May/June and actually here at RUST we welcome that. One thing's for sure, it's going to be a helluva' shootout between these two...

Thanks to: Clive Hoy at Tricounty Motorcycles in Wokingham for building, preparing and loaning us this machine, and its owner who entrusted it to us. Clive and Keith do an excellent job of creating and maintaining customers' machinery and you could do worse than speak to them about your next bike. Also ask Keith how this particular bike cost him a thumbnail. **Tricounty: 01344 424282.**

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2016 SX highlights

250SX-F now 46hp & 98.5kg

350SX now 58hp & 99.9kg

450SX now 62hp & 100.4kg

125SX power N/A & 87.8kg

New engine management and throttle bodies

New adjustable ignition and fueling mapping

250/350 engines are 1.1kg lighter

125 engine is 2kg lighter

Frames 3.8kg lighter, featuring hydro-formed sections. Frames 20% stiffer in torsion, 30% more flexible in length, 20% lighter subframes

New single-casting swingarms

WP 48mm air forks save 1.4kg

New lithium battery by Samsung saves 1kg

New brakes with Brembo calipers / Galfer discs

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Suzuki's V-Strom 650 has been a best seller in the UK for over a decade. But it's only now - 11 years after its arrival - that the 'sport enduro tourer' has at last been specified with wire-wheels and bash plate. It's like a proper adventure bike... or is it?

Words: Jon Bentman Pics: James Wright (Double Red)



Strom
Deliverer

OH THE GLAMOUR of testing. There's nothing like the sting of hailstones on your neck, snow freezing on your goggles and wheels skidding gently on slush-covered roads to remind you that this is the reality of motorcycle testing in the Northern Hemisphere winter. And fair play to Suzuki GB on their bravery. With a choice between Sardinia and western Ireland to decide between... they chose Ireland. It was certainly a bold decision. Cynicism and discomfort aside, it was actually a good choice - at least from the point

of view of testing the Strom's weatherproofing.

So take a look, here's Suzuki's V-Strom 650XT. You may know the Strom from public service films such as: *'Hey, is that a middleweight sport enduro tourer you got there?'* and the sequel: *'I gotta get me a comfortable mid-market adventure*

tourer - with ABS'. The V-Strom has been with us since 2004 and until the 2012 revamp that was an eight-year model run with precisely zero changes year-on-year, except for colour. You'd think that in that time it would lose popularity, but Suzuki confirms that the V-Strom 650 has consistently been one of their best selling models world-wide. Go figure. Seems the mix of lightish-weight, decent steady-away performance and go-anywhere/anytime versatility has hit the right note. Sensible pricing helps...





Strom
Deliverer



KTM might be shouting out the superiority of their 150hp rocketship 1290 Adventure, and BMW's mighty R1200GS Adventure remains the continent-conquering über-state-ment, but in reality, does anyone need that much performance in a big trailie? I'd wager not. In fact it would seem that a humble 65hp vee-twin workhorse is just fine by a significant number of riders. And I'd go along with that. Honda's Transalp has been making do with that kind of punch (if not slightly less) for years.

Of course we've not seen the V-Strom 650 cluttering up too many green lanes here in the UK, nor making dramatic high-speed swoops over Erg Chebbi, but until now it didn't quite have the full adventure spec kitbag. Cast wheels remain a worry anytime you're chasing rocky off-road trails. But now on the XT model, we find cool wire-spoke wheels, alloy bash plate and crash bars all as standard. Welcome to the dark side, *'Wee-Strom'*!

A History In 100 Words

Let's go back to the beginning. We need to do that. The start date then is 1999, with the SV650 naked-roadster thing and its sibling with the clip-ons and half-fairing. The V-Strom 650 appeared five years later, taking ostensibly the same motor (by then well-proven both in terms of performance and bulletproof reliability), placing it in a surprisingly up-spec alloy beam frame, then adding slightly lengthened (but not so up-spec) suspension, a 19/17in wheel combo, a sizable 22-litre tank, high bars and a fairing. It wasn't the prettiest looking thing you ever did see, but as Suzuki suggested in their scattergun marketing campaign, it was kind





of a sport-enduro-tourer do-it-all machine. Oh, ok then...

The enduro bit has been viewed with the kind of suspicion usually reserved for people returning from a *'holiday in Syria'*. But then we ride in thigh-deep mud for ten months of the year. But elsewhere on this planet - where the soil dries out occasionally and the word *'enduro'* simply means *'trail'* and they have mile upon mile of unmade road - you could find V-Strom 650s sporting town-and-country tyres kicking up the dust and even sliding the corners as they powered over the world's gravel-roads. Truth is that for many a year it has been a de facto adventure bike.

So over the years Suzuki have had a surprising best-seller on their hands and - as you do when that happens - you don't mess with it. After all it was fuel-injected from the very start, so no immediate emissions issues there, and at 194kg (*dry*), while heavyish, it's on the money for this kind of round-the-world kit. Quite acceptable given the use and job it will perform.

When the revamp did come in 2012, it was more of a subtle restyle than anything more tangible. The performance didn't change, neither did the weight; and if you read the spec sheet nothing looks different. But in fact the motor

THE COMPETITION					
BIKE	POWER	WEIGHT	FUEL	SEAT/GROUND CLEAR	PRICE
Suzuki V-Strom 650XT	68hp	215kg	20L	835/175mm	£7499
Yamaha XT660Z Ténéré	47hp	206kg	23L	895/260mm	£6999
BMW 650GS Sertão	48hp	193kg	14L	860/NA	£6695
KTM 690 Enduro R	66hp	155kg	12L	910/280mm	£7799
BMW F800GS	85hp	214kg	16L	880/NA	£8800



was significantly revised. This was now the same spec as the new Gladius model and so featured new cam profiles for more mid-to-low punch. The valve springs were now single springs, not double, apparently reducing mechanical noise. A redesigned crankshaft and primary

drive again reduced noise and enhanced smooth running. There was a thicker clutch cover reducing mechanical noise still further (*you can see those pesky noise emissions regulations being dealt with*), then Suzuki added a liquid-cooled oil cooler while the clutch actuating mechanism changed to cam type. Still awake?



More significantly perhaps for this kind of machine, the motor was much more economical and this allowed for a reduction in the tank size down to 20-litres. And whilst some owners bemoaned that change, it did allow for a narrower width through the mid-section of the bike, which we dirt bikers know is very useful when it comes to riding off-road. The new bodywork was far swoopier than of old, almost

making the V-Strom look sexy (*yeah, almost*). But dynamically it was an upgrade to the suspension - now much firmer - that together with the more sprightly motor helped breathe new life into the old girl. All this topped off with a new instrument cluster that was suitably up to date, with extra functions including two trips, fuel consumption, ambient temperature and

clock. Ooh, nearly forgot... the 2012 model also heralded the fitting of ABS to the V-Strom's braking system.

The 2012 revamp is important to us then, as it sets the V-Strom up for this, its latest development into a proper adventure bike. Hold the front page.

Hello Moto

So here we are in 2015 and - shockingly - 11 years after its introduction, the V-Strom 650 finally gets a proper adventure up-spec. Actually, given the 'Adventure' accessory pack



V-Strom Deliverer



Suzuki have marketed with the existing model, we've already been very close to the full Bear Grylls before now. But with the XT version we're now getting the bare-chested essentials in the base model.

Suzuki list the differences as the wire-spoked wheels, alloy sump guard, crash bars (*or rather, less bleakly named 'accessory bars'*), injection-moulded handguards and don't forget the, er... 'beak' that projects under the headlights.

Suzuki really don't want you to forget that it was *them* (and not BMW) that invented the beak on big trailies, when it first appeared on their Eighties model DR Big. And that here they are simply revisiting their own idea. Not that it serves any particular purpose - as a vestigial mudguard it's more of a styling cue to the bike's historic origins than an essential piece of hardware, but it does seem to endow the bike with the right look. Anyway back to the story. So it's not the longest list of modifications ever, and if we're honest the

ACCESSORISE THIS!

The Suzuki V-Strom 650XT comes with a decent list of add-ons:

Centre stand	£185.00
Heated grips	£225.00
Aluminium 3-case set	£1250.00
Alloy chain guard	£60.00
LED Fog lamps	£495.00
Vario touring screen	£125.00
Tall / low seat	£149.00
Sat Nav bracket	£49.00
Tank bag	£95.00
12V socket	£55.00



only real new - and significant - change is to the wheels.

The wheels give the bike credibility however, being essential when it comes to real adventure bike spec. Cast wheels are just fine for most applications, but when it comes to slamming into rocks, deflecting off tree roots, and absorbing the repetitive percussion of corrugated gravel roads you can't argue with the strength and practicality of a traditional wire-spoked wheel. In this case made by DID, the spokes lace into the rims via two central raised flanges, so allowing the fitment of tubeless tyres (*Bridgestone Trail Wings on our test machines*). Smartly finished they are too, the anodised black rims offset by the 32 gleaming polished steel spokes with fancy paired lacing - certainly fit for purpose.

The other mods? Well the alloy sumpguard is also an adventure-must, and is vital on a bike like this with its lack of lower frame rails and the exhaust and oil filter projecting proudly out front. The guard is a three-piece unit but looks substantial enough. The 'accessory' bars we've seen before (*within Suzuki's accessory packs*), and given the almost inevitable topple-overs that occur in off-roading, they are essential pieces of kit, too. The handguards will deflect rain, the cold breeze and extremely small leaves gently blown up by the wind, but have limited scope as real crash protection.

And as for the beak (*and this one is truly bird-like*), well as we've said... that's a tip-of-the-hat to Suzuki's brief dalliance with the Dakar Rally back in 1987 when triple world motocross champion Gaston Rahier piloted a modified Marlboro-backed DR750 - complete with beak. He was awesome was Gaston: a tough and wiry little Belgian who stood no taller than a Bonsai, and who'd



famously piloted the gigantic factory BMW to thrilling back-to-back Dakar victories in 1984 and 85. Sadly he couldn't win on the DR... No-one could. Beak, or no beak.

On The Road

You can tell why the V-Strom 650 has been so popular with owners almost the moment you start riding. It's a very easy bike to operate, and with a real duality in both low and high-speed capability, it's a strong performer all

the way. The vee-twin motor has become a modern-day classic. It's torquey when compared to equal-capacity three and four-cylinder alternatives, but it also has a free-revving top end that makes it feel more powerful than it really is. Anywhere between 0 and 115mph it performs sweetly, whether you want fast or slow. The motor creates minimal vibrations and - typical of a Suzuki - the gearbox is super-slick to use. You can chunter the motor down to 1500rpm in fifth gear (*of six*), probably about 20-25mph, and it will pick up from there

with not so much as a minor cough (*try that with your 650-single*). Equally, battling along at 9-10,000rpm through the gears it's easy to get a serious bit of speed going. Incidentally, the motorway cruising speed of 70mph equates to 5200rpm in sixth gear and whilst that may sound rather busy, the vee-twin motor flatters to deceive. It actually feels amazingly relaxed at that rpm.

Our test route was a loop known as the Ring of Kerry, about 110 miles of roads and lanes that wend their way around the edge of a rocky outcrop of





south western Ireland that reaches bravely into the North Atlantic. Actually we took a diversion off that route for a bit, along the Gap of Dunloe, to find even more dramatic and challenging roads. These being the narrowest lanes through the harshest of valleys - with plenty of grass and shingle under tyre to catch out the unwary. A wintery gale then added hailstones (initially) and eventually snow into the mix, only adding to the sense of adventure.

And whilst the riding wasn't super-challenging, this was certainly adventure terrain of sorts - especially given the gale-force winds and the precipitation and it was a wild environment to venture through. Most bikes would be okay through this of course, but the XT still shone, for it asks so

V-STROM 650XT NOTES

Fuel consumption

You can't test everything on a launch test and fuel consumption typically goes untested. Suzuki are though, quite rightly proud of the V-Strom's fuel figures. Under EU-lab conditions they say it can attain a decent 71mpg. Other journo long-term testing the latest V-Stroms have reported 55-60mpg as repeatable everyday consumption figures. With a 20-litre tank that makes for a fuel range in the order of 260 miles.

Headlights!

It wasn't dark for this test, of course. But The V-Strom's headlights have previously come in for praise. With twin H4 halogen headlights the beam is said to be strong, making for safe night riding - probably the best in this class.

Panniers

One test bike was fitted with Suzuki's accessory alloy panniers. These are of that rugged boxy type that shouts 'adventure'. They are of course also wide enough as to warrant special consideration when riding in traffic (as most such panniers require) but the construction was commendably robust, particularly the mounting lugs and pannier locks which seem suitably strong. The mounting rack is also well designed to be handily QD for times when you want to ride without them.

Seat

Suzuki offer an alternative (higher) seat for the V-Strom which we tried during this test. Taller people will certainly welcome this as it offers more legroom and something of a sit-on riding position more appropriate for off-road riding.

ABS

The ABS worked well on the road but wasn't seriously tested off-road in this test. Note that it isn't switchable, but you can disable it for off-road use by removing the fuse.



Strom
Deliverer



little of the rider. The riding position is suitably upright and relaxed, the fairing does a fair job of deflecting the worst of the elements away from the body and with a steady 65hp on tap the power isn't menacing. You can relax and simply take in the wonder of the location.

The feel of the bike is more *'taut'* than expected. This is an improvement over the earlier model, and it's noticeable that the XT doesn't pitch about on under-damped, under-sprung long travel suspension. It stays firm, allowing as much *'attack'* as you want to apply without getting wayward. The suspension is mid-spec in adventure terms. It's made by Kayaba which is a positive in the first instance. The forks are 43mm conventional units, the rear is a monoshock design.

Travel at 150/159mm respectively is in the middle ground between road and trail; for example a Yamaha XT660Z Ténéré offers 210/200mm while a BMW F800GS has 230/215mm, whereas the new breed of 'urban adventurers' like Yamaha's Tracer MT-09 sits on 137/130mm. So the suspension is mid-length and commendably firm and yet fairly plush in road use. However it is adjustable for preload only, with screw-in adjusters on the fork top and what looks suspiciously like a knob stolen from a GS BMW for easy adjustment (*by hand*) on the shock.

The fairing is pretty decent. It's missing the instant adjustability of screen height/angle found on the V-Strom 1000, but given five minutes with a hex tool you've got a range of 42mm of adjustment. I left it as standard (*too cold to bother with adjustment*) and for the speeds we were doing it was just fine. The seat is pretty decent too.





It's apparently much improved on the old seat, and it certainly feels nice and firm - especially appreciated off-road - but I have to admit I did get a little uncomfortable after about the 100 mile mark (*despite stops*). That said I get uncomfortable on most bikes at that distance, maybe I'm just getting a bit soft in my old age.

And Off-Road

Now this test didn't afford much in the way of pure off-road testing. But there was some at least (*in fact still more than a lot of adventure launches allow*). So at one point we took off down a lane and ended up on a beach. The first section was all rocks, boulders and pebbles (*wet of course*) and despite first reservations, the XT rode them sweetly enough, all feet-up, very much like any trail bike.

Then we hit firm sand and we could play at skids. Again it was pleasing stuff, you could get your weight plenty forward enough and the bars were high and sufficiently wide for a regular off-road standing position to be adopted so you could steer from the front in a traditional way, then apply power to steer with the rear. The gearing was road-high though, and I noticed I was doing most of my playing in first gear. Second gear called for more commitment in terms of speed and technique and you could tell that greater damage would result if you made a mistake.

We crossed a very shallow stream at one point, no real issue there, but if you're used to wheelying off banks and popping the front up for the far bank (*enduro style*) well that's not so easy to do with a bike like the XT. Like most bigger adventure bikes there's just too much weight (*on the*

front and overall) and not enough instant snap to achieve it, so you need to adopt a more pedestrian crossing technique. The suspension wasn't at all troubled by this, but in reality we weren't doing much to trouble it. At the very least the XT was riding as well as any middle-to-big adventure bike in the conditions, and it was proving very easy to get on with and quite confidence inspiring too.

The footpegs are well placed - not too far forward as you can find with road bikes - but, alas, of a road type. A set of serrated type (*with inset rubbers*) would have been the better call. Likewise the gear change lever is a non-folding type and just a little too exposed for practicality (*when ridden off-road*). Easy to change of course. The handlebars are unbraced and of a shape that looks susceptible to bending given a fair drop so will probably want changing if you're thinking of heading off into the beyond. The tyres are essentially cut-slicks but they didn't do so bad on the rocks and sand - all things considered. So all in all, for serious work you'd want to implement a few changes.

Regarding the wheel sizing, we think Suzuki have taken the right approach in choosing the 19in front. You may recall that other middleweight adventure twin, the Honda Transalp, started out with a 21in front before downsizing to the 19-incher at its last revamp. There's something to be said for this size wheel, it works far better on the tarmac, allows for the safety of the tubeless tyre but has enough bite and capability to go decently off-road... not exactly to Dakar-winning speeds, but plenty good enough. For 98% of owners this is probably the best spec.

Ultimately the V-Strom XT's off-roading will be limited by



its ground clearance. At 175mm this is not very much at all. A lot less than (say) the Yamaha XT660Z Ténéré's 260mm. The difference lies in the amount of suspension travel - the Ténéré offering 9-inches (*in old money*) to the V-Strom XT's 6-inches. So yes, for green lane riding you could find easier bikes to ride. Given the serious ruts many green lanes offer up, the V-Strom XT is going to struggle at times, even with wire wheels, knobbies and a bash plate. But on less-trav-



elled, firmer-surfaced green lanes it'll be as much fun as any big adventure bike and should cope well. It's actually quite cool that it doesn't look as aggressive or imposing as some bikes do and it's suitably quiet, so it shouldn't cause any offence.

Define Adventure Bike

Of course, how highly you'll rate the V-Strom XT depends on how you view adventure bikes. They can of course be anything you want them to be from a Honda step-thru to a top-spec 1200GS complete with oodles of crash protection and knobblies.

So the V-Strom XT pitches somewhere in the middle. It's a seriously accomplished all-round performer and ultimately does exactly what an adventure bike should - offer you a low-stress platform from which to observe the world. It's more of a '*soft-roader*' than a true dirt bike, but then you knew that already.

There are bigger, faster adventure bikes, but if we're honest with ourselves we'll concede most of the additional benefits they boast are non-essential. It's more about bragging rights than real-world practicalities. There are also lighter, more agile adventure bikes, but as we all know... much of what we now call '*adventure riding*' isn't about racing around like a Dakar hero - we're simply travelling lesser-used and un-made roads. It's not about whether these bikes can cross a desert, as much as would you chose one of these bikes as a riding companion on a long trip? How much of their mile-high seat heights and enduro-spec do we really need? The XT does then, tread the

middle ground, and that's quite a brave thing to do, for it doesn't write headlines.

What is even more remarkable is that the bike-buying public have been responding - which surely must poke a finger up at the marketing types who extoll 'more' and 'bigger' as better. Plenty of people are clearly quite prepared to say '68hp is enough for my purposes thanks'. And all power to them. If you seriously analyse what you need in an overlanding, round-the-world adventure bike, the V-Strom XT pretty much fits the bill. Comfort, capability, wieldiness, reliability, and a means of tackling unmade roads - it's all there. And while it might not be the virtuoso performer of some other machines, here at **RUST** we certainly feel the need to applaud Suzuki for building it...



Strom
Deliverer



2015 SUZUKI V-STROM 650XT

Engine: 645cc, 90° V-twin, liquid-cooled, DOHC
Power: 68bhp @ 8,800rpm
Torque: 60Nm @ 6,400rpm
Transmission: Six-speed, chain final drive
Fueling: Fuel injection
Chassis: Aluminium twin spar frame
Suspension: Kayaba 43mm telescopic forks, 150mm travel, Kayaba monoshock, 159mm travel.
Brakes: Front, twin 310mm discs, Tokico calipers, ABS. Rear, Single 260mm disc, Tokico caliper, ABS
Tyres: Front, Bridgestone Battle Wing 110/80R19M/C (59H), tubeless. Rear, Bridgestone Battle Wing 150/70R17M/C (69H), tubeless.
Wheelbase: 1560mm
Width: 835mm
Height: 1405mm
Seat height: 835mm
Ground clearance: 175mm
Weight (wet): 215kg
Fuel capacity: 20 litres
Colours: Metallic Triton Blue, Candy Daring Red, Metallic Mat Fibroin Grey, Pearl Bracing White
Price: £7499



2016 Husqvarna Launch

Story by Rust, photos by Josh Snowden & Husqvarna



Yellow
velvet





Right off the bat the first thing that strikes you about the 2016 Husvarna enduro bikes is the new colour scheme. With fewer mechanical changes in store for customers, Husky have made sure you notice that these are 2016 machines by switching to a fluorescent yellow in their white/blue/yellow colour schemes.

Sounds awful doesn't it? I agree, but the end result is considerably more subtle than it sounds, and as ever with the new Huskys the whole look is very appealing. More than that (*as I can personally attest to*), the plastics are of the highest quality I've ever seen on a dirt bike. Not only are they beautifully styled, supremely well finished and feature the blocks of colour all moulded in, but they are unbelievably strong too.

I should know... I stuck one of these babies face first into a large tree and the front fender bent back so far that it hit me in the chest. Yet not a single crack nor mark appeared in the plastics. I take my





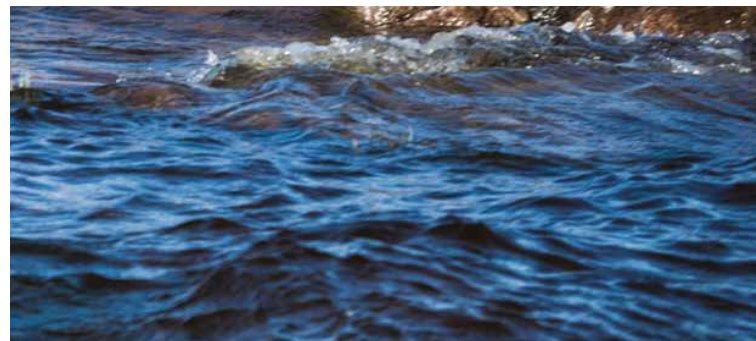
“ Husky have switched to a new fluorescent yellow... Sounds awful, but it's lot more subtle than it sounds...”

hat off to you Husqvarna.

So like the MY16 KTMs the story we have for the 2016 Huskies are a few modest upgrades and another great year of well-sorted bikes. Changes that there are, include a switch to a smaller (*more flexible*) 22mm front axle, some much needed improvements to the set-up of the 4CS forks, the fitment of the two-way power-selector switch up on the bars (*previously this was an optional extra*), and some subtle gearbox mods, new discs, and a steel/alloy sprocket.

As ever the terrain can have quite an influence on proceedings; but this launch couldn't have been better from

Yellow
Wellied





a UK testing point of view as it took part in glorious South Devon (*where the rich red soils are littered with small rocks*), and involved a mix of a terrific special test and an afternoon spent on the trails. Which is pretty much exactly what owners of these bikes will have in mind when they invest.

Here in the fertile valleys of the South Hams of Devon there's hills and steep climbs, stony descents, a mixture of mud and rock and our test included some fast sections of grass-track. All the bikes were shod with excellent Michelin Comp IV tyres, and here's what RUST found...

A wonderful couple of hours spent trail riding the 450 revealed just how nice and easy this bike is to ride



Yellow
Wellied





Yellow
Wellieo





Si Melber

My pick of the bunch this year came from the 250 two-stroke and the 350 four-stroke machines. That's not to say I didn't like the others almost as much. It's more a reflection that these two bikes are to my way of thinking, the most effective models in the range. By that I mean you can race them or simply ride for fun and they will perform equally well in either arena.

The TE250 two-stroke is pure class. It's the pinnacle of how a modern, light-weight enduro bike should feel - agile, powerful, and unintimidating. And you won't be surprised to learn that the 350 is its four-stroke equivalent, matching it on power and performance every step of the way. Ultimately the 250 stroker just gets the nod from me as it suffers less from crank inertia and has a healthier bottom-end. But both bikes were brilliant around the special test - maximising the speed you could extract from them across the mixed terrain.

The 300 two-stroke isn't far behind of course, though I urge you to consider the

Yellow
Wellied





250 first... it's that bit more manageable in virtually every situation (and lots more manageable in some). I should add that I've been thoroughly enjoying the 450 and 501 models a lot more than I did in the past, which I put down to the Austrian factory re-purposing them (*in 2015 guise*) as fun machines rather than arm-wrenching monsters. Confirmation of that came when I managed to hit the rev-limiter on one section of the course (which is certainly not my normal style on a 'five hunderd'). A wonderful couple of hours spent trail riding on the pleasant 450 revealed just how easy this bike is to ride

“ A wonderful couple of hours spent trailriding the 450 in Devon revealed just how easy this bike is to ride... ”



Yellow
Wellied





when you have time on your hands. And if anything the 500 is even easier, though it was the bike I bumped into the tree with. Coincidence? Perhaps!

But this is riding them at a healthy trail pace rather than pushing them at race pace for example. Of course I did push harder in the morning on the special test and actually both felt brilliant around the track. But that was simply a matter of stringing a few short laps together. There's no escaping the feeling of weight they convey; and I think that during the course of a long day you'd begin to feel that weight sooner rather than later.

For me both the FE250 and TE125 two-stroke felt like they couldn't quite match the opposition here. Both were great fun to play with and I enjoyed rinsing the motors for all they were worth, but on this test they were out-gunned by faster machinery, especially in the dry conditions of late summer. And if I had to single out one overall winner it would have to be the amazing

Yellow
Wellied





TE250 two-stroke. There may be a better enduro bike out there.... but I certainly can't think of one. **Si**

Second Opinion - Jon Bentman

I feel a tennis analogy coming on. Husqvarna's 2016 range is like '*new balls please*'. Sure there are updates to the forks, the triple clamps, even to the gearboxes - and of course to the graphics - but ultimately the result is still yellow and a little fuzzy. Without having a 2015 to ride alongside can we detect any differences over the old models? We cannot.

Call me stubborn...
but I'm still not ready to
submit to the allure of the
350. Everybody loves it,
except me it would seem.



Yellow
Wellied



Yellow
Wellied





Talking of new balls I definitely needed some new ones down at the UK launch at Wheeldon Farm. For the morning I didn't have any at all and when I saw one of the other bike testers pulling himself out of a barbed-wire fence - in fairness he's a motocrosser and hasn't yet learned to ride around obstacles, rather than into them - I feared I wouldn't find my rhythm at all that day. Slippery off-cambers and pronounced root steps didn't help. Then, when on a trail ride I baulked at a mere puddle and got what I deserved - a proper soaking - as Warren (*one of the other RUST testers*) pulled a classic *On Any Sunday* move on me with an overtake-and-bath-all-in-one.

A switch onto the FE450 mid-afternoon worked the trick. I gelled with it immediately, forgot my inhibitions, and simply romped around the trails. And with Warren riding in P3 immediately behind me he received full retribution; the old four-fiddy sure loves to spit rocks out. Actually the FE450 deserved top marks, it feels much less snappy than the 450s I recall of late,





but it's no less authoritative. It's a lovely full-fat experience. Si argued that as much fun as it was, you wouldn't want one for a whole day. But I disagree, you can use as little or as much of it as you want and I'd far sooner race one of these than a 125. Having previously called out the 450s as expert-only, this one bike felt the opposite, it was bike of the day for me.

The TE250 also seemed to perfectly match the terrain. Like it's half-brother the 250EXC-F, we could argue that in 2015 this bike is playing second fiddle to the new and exciting Yamaha WR250F, but there is fight left in the old dog still. And the way the suspension on this example reacted so naturally to the trails it was a joy to ride. And it's still a natural born mountain goat; it loves long lusty climbs as much as the 450, or indeed the 501 for that matter.

Call me stubborn but I'm still not ready to submit to the 350, in this instance an FE. Everybody loves it, but not me. And



Yellow
Wellied



I'm pretty sure the reason is the gearing. It feels wrong. I've gone so far as to check the spec sheet and my feelings are borne out by the stats. Compared to the rest of the four-strokes this model has a unique set of internal ratios that are about 10% higher in each gear. I've got a feeling that a simple swap to a 13T countershaft sprocket would help do the job. It should at least close-up the gaps in the lower gears, so you don't have to wring the 350's neck before going for the next ratio (*or risk falling out of the powerband*). Once that's done I'm sure there'd be a love everlasting. But not until then.

The two-strokes I found little love for all day. Nothing wrong with them I know, but in Devon the four-strokes felt to be the pick for the terrain. The 125 - well, Si is welcome to it, this one didn't feel to be jetted correctly, the bike was overly peaky, going all or nothing, making the hill climbs harder work than they needed to be. The 250, nothing wrong there, it was good actually and I had a little off-piste fun with it, climbing a root-infested bank where no

Yellow
Wellied





other bike can go (*at least not so easily*). The 300 - no, not today. I suspect it would have benefitted from some suspension tuning as it was unnaturally nervous on the loose stuff, where it should have really, well, cake-walked-it.

And that leaves us with the FE501. Now the old TE570 is long dead-and-buried (*before its time*), so this is the daddy. And it is a cool ride. It doesn't just romp up big hills, it mashes them on the rear wheel - changing up as you go. It's the slightly taller, slightly heavier (*feeling*), laid-back big bro to the 450. And again, given the choice of riding an enduro on this or the TE125, I would have to pick this bike every time. A great trail bike too, I'd wager.

So, did I learn anything in Devon? No. Some days you're just happy to drive home uninjured and with a smile on your face. Obviously it's not so bad to start the day riding rubbish as long as you finish strong, which is what happened. That



Model Prices

TE125	£6,349
TE250	£7,049
TE300	£7,249
FE250	£7,499
FE350	£7,699
FE450	£7,799
FE501	£7,899

Yellow
Wellied



Yellow
Wellieo



“ The FE450 was a bundle of laughs. I’ll have one of those please. Oh and don’t bother wrapping it, I’ll take it as it is...”

said, if you were to ask me would I buy a Husky over a KTM, then the answer is ‘yes’. That FE450 was a bundle of laughs. I’ll take one of those please. **Jon**

Second Opinion - Warren Malschinger

The most immediately impressive element of the 2016 Husqvarna range for me was the combination of the front brakes in tandem with the Michelin tyres. Parts of the two mile loop set out for this test involved a few treacherously steep grassy (wet) open sections and despite how much of a handful of front brake I grabbed, the front stayed true and felt really planted and produced an involun-

Yellow
Wellied





tary smile under my helmet. By contrast, the stock suspension settings especially on the front felt unwieldy. I know the 4CS forks are meant to be an upgrade from a standard open cartridge fork but to me they didn't feel like it at first. Once I dialled them in to my liking though they worked well, and I suspect that it's just a matter of spending time on the set-up to get comfortable with them. Overall the Huskies felt top quality and well made; the plastics were trick and solid and the graphics get a thumbs-up from me.

The ergonomics felt good on all the models especially on the FE350 which I felt was the best all-rounder for all skill levels, the most forgiving and exciting at the same time. If you prefer four-strokes then this would be the pick of the bunch.

But as far as my best bike's concerned, it's not a four-stroke that tops this test, but in fact the two-stroke 250 which was my clear winner (*followed by the 300*). The 250 was a real eye opener. As a long-standing campaigner of the 300 I fully expected to prefer the bigger capacity, however based on my experience on this test I would buy the 250 over the 300. It just felt good in all conditions and inspired confidence.

It feels like a crosser when you need it, but the gearing and power availability is what impressed me most. The bike pulls strongly in every gear, even low down where the 300 normally comes up trumps and the 250 lags or has to be geared down, but not this time. It had tons of low-end grunt and at no point in the day did I run out of top end either. The power delivery and ergos made this bike feel significantly lighter than it is,



and my closing thoughts for the day were that I could ride longer and faster on this machine before fatigue set in than any other bike in the range... **Warren**

Conclusion

So we all know that Husqvarnas and KTM's roll out of the same factory but the differences between them (*most notably in the suspension*), are such that you don't feel like they're the same bike.

The Huskys have bigger tanks, linkage rear suspension, closed-cartridge forks, cooling fans (*4Ts only*), different rear subframes and in previous years have always carried a £300 premium. This year that premium has shrunk by a third to £200 which now makes them even better value.

The 2016s might not be significantly different from last year's bikes but they're still great machines and this year they're even better sorted. Spend some time dialling in your suspension and we reckon you'll own one of the best enduro bikes money can buy. **RUST**

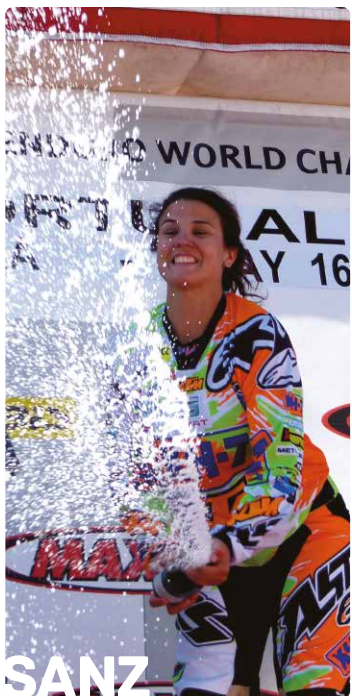




STORY: GEORGIA WELLS
PHOTOGRAPHS: RICK WELLS

THE FORCES AWAKEN

SO THE EWC 2015 SEASON IS DONE AND DUSTED, BUT HERE AT RUST WE'RE NOT QUITE READY TO DRAW A LINE UNDER IT YET...



SANZ



BELLINO



MCCANNEY



MEO

REPORT BY GEORGIA WELLS; PICTURES RICK WELLS

OVER THE YEAR I've been lucky enough to witness first-hand the struggles and sacrifices the six winning champions have made. I've seen them at their worst, and at their best. So, as is 'traditional' in my Christmas column, I'm gonna' remind you of the events that proved they had the will, the courage, and the skill to conquer all.

Small is Beautiful: E1

The 'smallest' of the main classes was the biggest this year in terms of surprise, suspense, and popularity. A season-long battle for the top spot was matched by plenty of scraps further down the standings. Whilst E2 contained all the 'big names,' E1 was bursting with overlooked talent.

Hands-down favourite coming into the season was the oft-flawless Christophe Nambotin. The Frenchman's perfectionism had seen him through to three consecutive titles in the preceding three seasons. The KTM star was going to be hard to topple, so when cracks started to appear in his armour early in the season it was with a kind of morbid fascination that we watched in shock as he made very public errors in several Supertests, and his usual precise riding style began to falter.

Christophe revealed before the mid-season mark that he was suffering with a long-term knee injury. But the truth is few people knew just how much pain he was in. He remained stoical as his wins began to turn into second places. The incredible thing about Nambo is that even when he was in severe pain and barely able to walk he was still on the podium.

Ready to take full advantage of Nambotin's problems was TM's Eero Remes; in fact the Finn was even able to beat his rival as early as Day 2 of the opening round in Chile. Every time Nambo slipped, Remes was right on his tail. Eero took a string of wins in the mid-season and the fans finally began to realise that this might not be Christophe's year.

Like his rival, Eero is focused and reserved, but despite being in the EWC since 2007 he has kept a remarkably



low profile. He has finished in the top four several times since moving from MX to Enduro but perhaps his quiet, typically Finnish personality is what has led him to be overlooked. His diminutive stature belies his strength; he is able to muscle his TM up the slipperiest of hills, without even attempting to dab a leg. His riding style seems to contain a lot of trials influence, perhaps even more than the MX elements of his past.

Eero may struggle to overcome his natural shyness when being interviewed, but get a few beers down him and he fast becomes the life and soul of every enduro party. He's a real dark horse.

Middle Class War: E2:

The middle class has had me completely hooked over the past couple of years; it's always been the source of the greatest battles and the most spectacular riding. But all good things come to an end. Last year the fight between the three front runners became so fierce that they injured themselves. The most shocking crash of all was Meo's in Finland, where he hit a tree at full gas and was airlifted to hospital - it was eight months before he could ride again.

Despite Antoine's long recovery, his off-season pace was blisteringly quick and heading into 2015 it seemed clear that we'd have the usual Antoine Meo/ Pela Renet /Alex Salvini fight for the lead. But it wasn't clear who the favourite would be. Meo won the first four days of racing but Renet and Salvini were just biding their time. Salvini overthrew Meo in Portugal, but just for one day, and then it was back to the status quo. After that Renet took over the mantle and beat Meo for three consecutive races in the middle of the season.

Whispers started in the paddock; was Renet going to be able to prise the title from Meo's grasp? The ever-smooth Pela had that determined look in his eye. But just as the calm and collected Frenchman began to believe he could



E1 favourite Christophe Nambotin had problems right from the off and eventual winner Eero Remes took full advantage of any slips to finally take the E1 title...

win, it was over. He broke his shoulder and was out.

The task of trying to halt Meo was handed to the ever-charismatic Salvini, but Antoine was simply unstoppable. Salvini would beat him twice at the final round but it wasn't enough to prevent Meo from claiming the 'High Five' - his fifth title for KTM.

Antoine is a consummate performer with incredible style, fast on any bike and in any situation. In many ways he has been the ultimate package for spectators all over the world. In past years he was endlessly entertaining in the paddock, hosting parties and always ready for fun. But more recently Antoine has mellowed out a lot, preferring to keep himself to himself and rarely mixing with anyone other than close friends. This new found sensible side should stand him in good stead for his new challenge in the Dakar.

Frustratingly for his rivals, Meo seems to be able to just show up and go extremely quickly - where others are seen meticulously planning the race ahead and test walking multiple times, Antoine can afford a slightly more casual approach: take to the start line and keep the throttle pinned. Five titles later you can't argue with his results, and in 2015 he proved once again that he is unbeatable. For KTM, Antoine's fifth title rounded off the partnership in the best possible way, and you simply have to respect that level of formidable, unrelenting success.

Battling Big Guns: E3

After last year's incredible duel between young upstart Matt Phillips and old favourite Ivan Cervantes it was hard to imagine that 2015 could offer up a rivalry so enthralling. With Cervantes struggling from the start with a multitude of niggling injuries it was clear that it was not going to be the Spaniard's year.

The man who made his intentions crystal clear from the very beginning was France's Mathias Bellino, winning the opening round in Chile against a struggling Phillips. But three rounds in, Barragan, Leok, Monni, and Seistola had all placed on the podium behind Bellino and Phillips, and

it seemed like E3 was fast turning into the most open class we'd witnessed for years. Despite most eyes being on the Franco-Aussie fight, it was actually Matti Seistola who led coming into the season's midpoint.

Many people would have been thrilled to see the extremely popular Seistola take his first ever EWC title. But injuries and setbacks saw Matti suffer a bad couple of rounds, switching the focus back on to Bellino and Phillips. As we reached the frantic Italian GP the ball was firmly back in Matt Phillips' court. He took a double win in front of an adoring crowd, but at the following round in Belgium, Mathias Bellino was back atop the podium. A frustrated Phillips was left to rue his slow start to the season as we headed to the final round in France. Their rivalry was an intriguing one, closely matched in age, and actually not as dissimilar in personality than they'd like to think. Both are highly intelligent and considerate, but both possess a wild side when the fans or the parties appear.

Those who know Bellino well had little doubt that Mathias was capable of taking his second EWC title in 2015. The young Frenchman was crowned Junior champ back in 2012, but in the intervening time he has been to hell and back. Plagued by debilitating injuries and having to build himself back up from some very low points, Mathias' approach to his fightback was inspiring. His level of determination never slipped, and he worked tirelessly to regain his fitness and mental strength in time for his third season in E3.

Off the bike Mathias is well-mannered, smiley, friendly and professional. On the bike his riding style is fearlessly aggressive, a powerhouse of a rider who's not shy of adding in a bit of MX-style flair. Not so long ago he was the hyperactive loudmouth of the paddock, but he has matured into a fully-fledged champion in every sense of the word.



With Seistola hampered by injuries and setbacks, the battle to watch in E3 was between Phillips and Bellino with Bellino winning through to take the title at the GP of France...

Junior Jack Rabbits: EJ

The Junior class is insane. It's usually bursting at the seams with fearless talent who have yet to suffer any nasty injuries; and this year there were a lot of really gifted riders who didn't even get a sniff of the podium. It's hard to make your mark as an Under 23 here in EWC.

The favourite ahead of the season was Italy's Giacomo Redondi - the Beta rider having placed runner-up for the last three years in EJ. He was odds-on for the number one spot, but he'd reckoned without Jamie McCanney. The Manxman is one of the most promising riders to have emerged in the last few years and was gunning for another title since winning the Youth Cup in 2013.

But little did Redondi and McCanney know that there was another rider eager to get right into the mix. Steve Holcombe seemingly came out of nowhere. Signed to Beta Boano, Steve took off like a rocket, taking podiums and wins at an alarming rate of knots. If he'd gone to the first round of the season in Chile he would have pushed the two favourites for the title. As it was, Jamie didn't have much trouble fighting off Giacomo, who seems destined for the 'bridesmaid' spot. On the podium at every race except the season finale where he just needed a handful of points, Jamie put in a superb display all year long. His riding style is fascinatingly smooth and precise, and he's not a rider who looks fast until you see the results sheet! Around the paddock Jamie keeps himself to himself but he's grown in confidence and certainly come a long way since the days when he'd stand atop the podium staring at his shoes.

Young Guns Go For It: EY

The Under 20 class, where youngsters are restricted to using 125 2-strokes, is my favourite class. It's heart-on-the-sleeve, all out, emotionally-charged madness. These kids are so thrilled to be in the EWC that they never miss an opportunity to show what they can do. EY is the breeding ground for future talent and it's where some of Enduro's brightest stars have been discovered.

Spain's Josep Garcia was the only rider from EY who made the trip to Chile, where he wiped the floor with the local competition. Coming into the first European round in Jerez the field looked shockingly small, with most of last year's riders either too old to be allowed in the class, moving up to other classes, or out of the championship due to funding/sponsorship issues. We were faced with a tiny bunch of EY competitors, most of whom lacked the experience needed to string together a campaign. All except one.

Sweden's Mikael Persson has attempted to win the EY title for three years, but injury ruled him out of 2014. And he was more than ready to ruin Garcia's party. Despite the Spanish Husqvarna rider taking five wins at the start of the year, Persson was hot on his heels.

And in Greece, with Garcia sidelined, it was suddenly evident just how quick Persson was. The Swede took two emphatic wins in his rival's absence and repeated the feat at the next round in Italy - where the crowd adored the screaming little 2-strokes. Then, devastatingly for Garcia, his lead was slashed further when he suffered a fall in Belgium and injured himself once again. Coming into the final round there was little to separate the pair - the EY class are allowed to drop their four worst results. A nail-biting final race weekend saw the youngsters both giving their absolute all, but in the end there was nothing Garcia could do to hold off Persson who has to be commended for the way he battled on, with the odds stacked against him after missing the opening round.

Staying Power: EW

Well, I've had the privilege to write about the same woman at the end of every season for the past three years. Laia Sanz won every single day of EWC racing she took part in this year. And I still can't really put into words just what an incredible rider she is, but pre-season



At a nail-biting final race weekend both riders gave their all, but in the end Garcia could do nothing to hold off Persson who has to be commended for his battling spirit...

I had the audacity to let doubt creep into my mind. Off the back of a 12th place finish overall in the Dakar Rally - an achievement which is hard to comprehend - I began to wonder if Laia would have the energy to commit to EWC.

Although she loves the EWC, anyone would have forgiven her for having other things to think about. But the distractions of the Dakar seemed to do little to dampen her enduro enthusiasm. Despite an extremely determined season for the ever-improving Jane Daniels, no-one had an answer for Laia's sheer dominance. There are many things I like and respect about this multi-discipline champion, but perhaps the trait I find most endearing is her humble and modest nature. At the Belgian GP she stated genuinely: *"I'm surprised to have won, because I'm really not good on this type of terrain!"* But the fact of the matter is that she is superb on all types of terrain, and on pretty much any size bike.

2015 was the most gruelling season I've ever had the pleasure of being part of. So many demanding rounds packed in to such a short space of time had everyone on edge and left no margin for error. One slip up was all it took this season; one mistake to cost you the dream of a lifetime.

But for all those who fell by the wayside, there were six incredible champions who managed to beat the odds and piece together that magic combination of skill, consistency, and courage to overhaul a pack of keen rivals. They stayed strong, safe, and fast all year long. Their sportsmanship, strength of character, professionalism and showmanship has been inspiring. Watching them take-on such a variety of situations and tackle them with skill and finesse has been a treat.

So really, I simply have to end by thanking them all for providing such an awesome display for everyone who was lucky enough to see them perform - either on TV, on-line, or out in the woods with all the other enduro nutters. It's scarcely been two months since the champions were crowned and I already can't wait to see what will happen next year! **Georgia Wells**



DROWNING IN GLORY

WORDS AND PHOTO BY GARY FREEMAN

*Stefan Everts is currently in the news for buying up Sylvain Geboers' Suzuki MXGP race team (lock-stock-and-barrel) and for recruiting the formerly-retired Ben Townley as his hired gun. But back in mid-2004 he was **The Man** of motocross, steamrolling his way through the MX1 world championship and destined to dominate the Motocross of Nations at the end of the year, too. So we decided to chuck him in a lake...*

AT THE TIME RUST's JB was editor of MotoX magazine in the UK, and he was keen to create some highly conceptualised features, the point of which neither of us can subsequently recall. Anyway, we had a joint-inspiration for this shoot, JB had in mind some epic Arthurian imagery - Excalibur rising from the lake - whilst I matched that to a distant memory of a famous snap of REM's Michael Stipe partly submerged in water. So we came to the conclusion it might be cool to chuck Everts in the lake and coat him in a photogenic 'liquid glazing'.

Stefan, being the affable fellow that he is, was up for it and so we found ourselves an appropriate lake and persuaded the then seven-times MX champ to take to the water fully clothed. For this we needed relatively shallow water so he could crouch down submerged; then propel himself upwards. One or two attempts would surely do it. *'And voilà! My work would be done. Campari for everyone! And warm towels for the champion! Well done everybody. Really, well done'.*

It didn't really turn out that way. I think the 'mistake' we made was to insist that Stefan opened his eyes underwater and kept 'em open as he emerged.

We hadn't realised how painful this must have been and though Everts mentioned that it was almost impossible to do, we clearly didn't hear that bit.

I was too busy wrestling with a Mamiya RB67 film camera to pay any attention to our star's needs.

Anyway after endless attempts at getting a snap with Stefan's eyes open, we changed things around a little so he only opened his eyes once above the water's surface. That didn't work either; and because I was shooting on film, I couldn't see what I'd shot anyway.

So after about 30 minutes messing around in the water a freezing cold Everts finally emerged from the lake, shivering. It wasn't just the air that was turning blue...

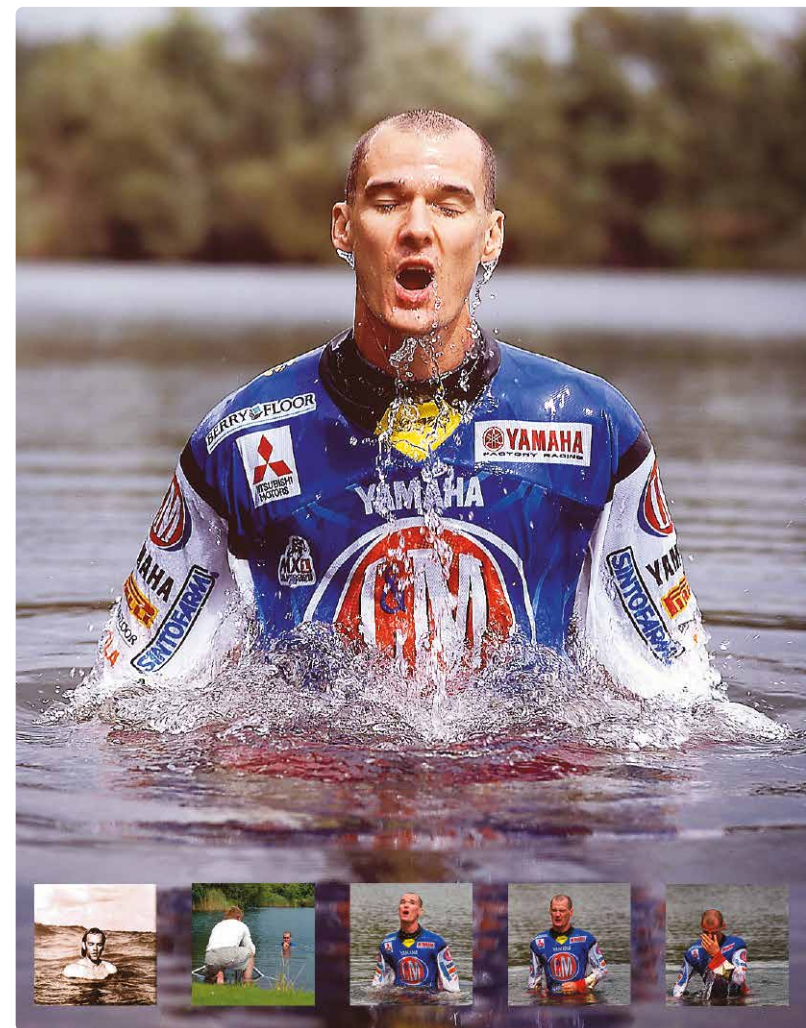
In truth there was no Campari or warm towels; just a grassy bank decorated with waterfowl droppings. Yep, he was living the dream alright.

Anyway after the film was processed, I was gutted that none of the ones with his eyes open had worked, though JB maintains to this day that 'eyes closed' looks better. I was disappointed not to have produced what I'd pre-visualised, but the final shot still has something about it. You can judge for yourself.

As a postscript to this... After the shoot I did take a swim in the lake in my boxers [*Hi girls*], just to prove to Everts that it wasn't that cold and he just needed to man-up. It was cold actually. Bloody freezing in fact.

Everts went on to win 10 world titles and never spoke to me again. Just kidding! We're good friends and we still laugh at *'that shoot'*.

Now seriously, I really need a Campari! **GAZZA**



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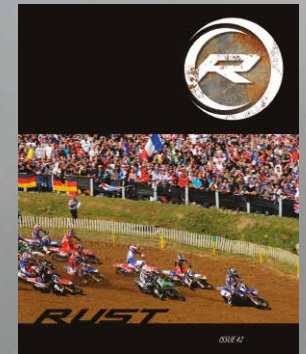
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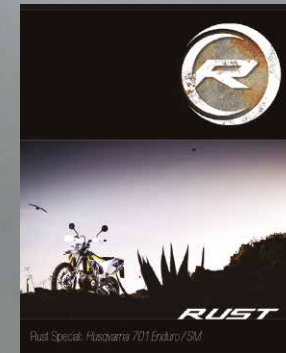
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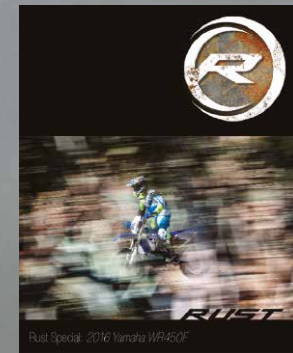
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