

SPECIAL EDITION: THE BIKES OF 2015

CCC
02977

DIRT BIKE

SEPTEMBER 2014

NEW MODELS

FROM BETA, HUSQVARNA
HONDA, KAWASAKI



**HUSQVARNA
300 2-STROKE**

**THE LEGEND
GETS BETTER**

YAMAHA YZ450F

A SURPRISING OFF-ROAD CONVERSION

1200

ADVENTURE SHOOTOUT

BMW • KTM • SUZUKI • YAMAHA



Husqvarna's biggest-selling model in 2014 was the 300 two-stroke. It might be the perfect off-road bike.

RIDING THE

NEW

HUSKYS

The Swedish connection is still alive

The most recent episode in the ongoing corporate drama starring KTM and Husqvarna was played out in the far northern reaches of Sweden last month, less than 100 miles from the Arctic Circle. The new management at Husky sees the need to reemphasize the Swedish roots of the company, even though the motorcycles haven't been manufactured there for 25 years. We went to Lulea, Sweden, to be among the first to ride the new bikes.

To catch up on your Husky episodes, in early 2013, Husqvarna became property of the same entity that owns KTM. The old product line was completely abandoned and replaced with models that were accused of being white KTMs. The long-term plan is to separate the two lines, but for now, there are only a few variations in features. The company sees Husky as a premium line, much like it did with Husaberg. That model line, as a side note, was acquired back in the late '90s and is now gone. But, there's virtually no chance that Husqvarna will suffer the same fate. The parent company has invested heavily in its infrastructure to support the Husky line, much more than was ever the case with Husaberg. KTM executives understand the value of the Husky name and the Husky legacy. That's why the Swedish connection is being reemphasized with the world launch for 2015.

As we reported in this issue, the U.S. lineup has grown. There are four new models: two dual-sport bikes, a 350 four-stroke motocross bike and a 125cc two-stroke off-road bike. Those join the existing 10 models, securing Husqvarna in the role as the second-largest dirt bike line in the U.S. The U.S.-spec dual-sport bikes still aren't finished, but we got a chance to ride the rest of the new bikes.

NEW HUSKYS



Husky's version of the 350 motocross bike is only slightly different from the KTM model.



The Husky FE501 will have a dual-sport cousin later in the year.

HUSQVARNA TE125

If you want a 125cc two-stroke off-road bike, this is it. Husky is the only manufacturer to import one to the U.S. The demand has never been that big in this segment, but the little Husky is an absolute gas to ride. In the tight, rocky trails of northern Sweden, it was as effective as anything. The trails through Scandinavia are something like the American Northeast—rocky, slippery and heavily wooded. In that type of terrain, weight is a big disadvantage, and even horsepower is no friend. The TE is fast, as 125s go, but in situations where sudden acceleration should be avoided, the little Husky can operate below the powerband and keep moving at a good clip. It maintains forward motion cleanly without bogging, but not much more than that. When you have a sudden hill or some other need for more power, you'll have to downshift. Maybe twice. That's the nature of the breed. The upside is that the bike weighs almost nothing. You begin to feel like there's nothing you can't handle. You know that you can stop in about half a bike length, and that gives you confidence to go faster.

HUSQVARNA FC350

The other new-to-Husqvarna model is the 350cc motocross bike. This is similar to the 2015 KTM 350SXF that we test in this issue. Each of Husqvarna's motocross bikes is, in fact, almost identical to some counterpart in the KTM line, whereas the off-road bikes have more separation. For the 350, the main difference is the polyamide subframe. The airbox and subframe are combined in one big part.

During our ride in Sweden, the Husky 350 was just plain incredible. We were preconditioned to like it because we had a 2015 KTM 350 sitting in the *Dirt Bike* shop, halfway around the world. It was vastly improved over the 2014 version, mostly due to the fact that it got a new 4CS fork and reworked rear suspension. The front axle is 4mm smaller than that of previous KTM and Husky motocross bikes, and it sits about 2mm back. That has the result of lengthening the trail. The bottom line is that the new Husky 350 handles much better than the KTM 350 of 2014. It

turns better, the front suspension is more compliant and the chassis is less harsh.

We're big fans of the 350 format, anyway. It's just a tick off a 450 in sheer acceleration and doesn't punish the rider for trying harder. The motocross track near Lulea is built on deep sugar sand, similar to Florida. It's exhausting to ride, even for a few laps. The 350 lets you ride harder, longer. Is it different from the KTM? Yes, slightly. The power has a smoother feel, probably due to the airbox. Last year, some Husky riders vented the airbox for more airflow.

FAVORITES

We came away from the Sweden ride with two clear favorites. One was the TE300. No surprise there; the 300 is a great motorcycle. It got only small detail changes for 2015, but frankly, we don't know what to improve. It's still an electric-start two-stroke with incredibly sweet, smooth low-end power. It's hard to stall no matter how badly you mess up. On top, it has excellent horsepower. It doesn't rev especially high, especially if you are used to modern four-strokes. But in the harsh Viking terrain, you didn't need revs. The gentle output of the 300 is perfect.

Along the same lines, the FE250 four-stroke is excellent, but in a very different way. The 250's power is so smooth, it actually makes the bike handle better. Two-stroke ideologues might dig in their heels and object, but the Husky makes it clear that there's something about the power and mass of a four-stroke that helps suspension work better. The FE250 has the right combination of everything to make it nearly perfect in tough terrain. The small displacement means it doesn't stall as often as most four-strokes, and the mellow-power delivery at low rpm makes it easy to control. On top, it revs forever, so if you need power it's there—just way high up. All those elements combined make the little 250 our favorite four-stroke—over there.

We'll get a chance to test all these machines and the new dual-sport bikes on U.S. soil soon, so stay tuned. Husky has plans to dramatically increase Husqvarna's U.S. import numbers in 2015. So now, more than ever, Husqvarna is a realistic alternative. □