

DIRTY RIDER



2013 ISDE SPECIAL!

BEHIND
THE SCENES:
**ON ANY
SUNDAY**
WITH

MALCOLM SMITH

GUEST EDITOR

2014 HUSQVARNA
LAUNCH
A BRAND REBORN

2014 SUZUKI MXERS
RM-Z250 & 450
FIRST TESTS

HOLIDAY
GIFT GUIDE
MALCOLM WRITES
YOUR WISH LIST



\$4.99 JANUARY 2014

01

74470134803

A BRAND

Story By Chris Decker - Photos Courtesy Of Husqvarna

REBORN

FIRST TEST: 2014 HUSQVARNA LINEUP

I want you to forget everything you thought you knew about the new Husqvarnas. The 2014s are a totally different breed than the Italian-made Huskys of the past few years, and yet at the same time the latest model lineup is not exactly new technology. After months of working behind the scenes to find a new direction for the recently acquired, 110-year-old brand, the new Husqvarna owners decided to go with an obvious collaboration with KTM and Husaberg, and the new edition of the rejuvenated Husqvarnas cover a full range of two-stroke and four-stroke models in both the motocross and off-road categories. In short, the brand has undergone a full rebirth in a very short period of time, showing plenty of promise for the future and giving Husqvarna fans plenty to talk about in the process.

Dirt Rider recently attended the Husqvarna world press launch near Gothenburg, Sweden, and after a full day of riding these bikes it became clear exactly how the model line has been broken down. The 2014 machines feature ostensibly arbitrary designations, but it's really quite simple once you get used to them. There are 10 models in Husqvarna's 2014 line, with five two-strokes and five four-strokes known by their respective "T" and "F" designations. Of the 10 bikes, five are designed for motocross (as noted in the "C" part of the name for "Cross") with the other half reserved for off-road use (and referred to using an "E" for "Enduro"). Therefore, a "TE" refers to a two-stroke enduro machine, while an "FC" refers to a four-stroke motocrosser. Simple enough, right?

The new model range starts with an 85cc mini and extends all the way up

to the big 501cc thumper. The TC 85 has a few differences from the larger models, and many of the sweeping similarities of the '14 Husky line do not apply to it. But as far as big bikes go, the other nine Husqvarnas all sport WP suspension on both ends, linkage suspension, single component cast swingarms, black D.I.D. rims, CNC triple clamps with four handlebar mount positions, and hand guards. Additionally, each of these machines sports the polyamide rear subframe made famous by Husaberg. This three-piece, fiberglass-reinforced design offers what Husqvarna feels is the best balance of rigidity and flex, and its inclusion on the TC line marks the first time that a composite subframe has ever been offered on a production motocross bike. While the press launch's single day of riding was relatively short considering the number of Husqvarnas available to test, we were able to put the newly released machines to the test in the soggy Swedish dirt.





FOUR-STROKE ENDURO: FE 250/350/501

Husky's newest four-stroke enduro models—the FE 250, FE 350, and FE 501—take their cues from the now-obsolete Husaberg lineup. Kihin electronic fuel injection, DDS/Brembo clutches, built-in radiator fans, and WP's 4CS fork mark just some of the familiar features on these California green-sticker-legal models. Remember, all three motorcycles have linkage and polyamide subframes, as well as high-pressure die casting for thinner, lighter weight engine case walls. The FE 250 and FE 350 have the most in common, mainly due to their DOHC, titanium-valve-equipped engines with DLC-coated finger followers. The 501 simply has an SOHC setup. Interestingly, the FE 250 and FE 501 engines beat with Konig bridged box-type pistons, while the FE 350 is built around a Vertex forged piston and is claimed to put out an impressive 45 hp.

Out on the trails, these three machines perform similarly due to their closely related platforms, but they each have some unique traits as well. Across the board, the WP 4CS fork is somewhat undersprung for general off-road use, but there are places (such as low-speed, technical rock sections) where it works well and stays up in the stroke. However, faster terrain causes the fork to blow through the first portion of the stroke and pack hard in the mid, which creates a strange front-end wiggle when pushed hard at high speeds due to the fork over-settling down into the bottom of the stroke. Then, the fork springs back—hard. Fortunately, just one click on the clickers makes a very noticeable difference. The adjusters themselves are located on the top of the fork caps, with the “three Rs” rule reminding riders that the right side is red and controls the rebound. While the fork legs are adjusted on the right for rebound and on the left for compression, this design is not the same as a separate function fork. The hardware is the same in both sides of the fork except for the adjustment available, so the adjusters perform a different function in each leg to allow for overall tuning of the bike.

In general, the FE 250 likes to be revved out. My mantra aboard this bike was to “ride a gear low” everywhere. Heavier riders will feel as though the engine is lacking in power, but I thought it was a great off-road solution so long as I could keep it high in the rpm range and maintain momentum. The FE 250 is also extremely light feeling, and the bike changes direction with minimal input—an awesome trait in snaking single-track and tight terrain. Moving one step up, the FE 350 boasts a much more versatile engine package, with a smooth, even torque helping to make the bike really rideable in sloppy and smolty conditions. I noticed quite a bit more engine braking aboard the FE 350 than I did on the smaller four-stroke, with a stronger bottom-end and traction-grabbing midrange leading the 350cc powerplant

into a solid, rider-friendly top-end. Finally, the Husqvarna FE 501 rounds out the US four-stroke off-road models. Although a big beast both in terms of weight feel (the 501 is harder to lean than the others) and overall power output, the largest bike in the line-up gets power to the ground and doesn't break loose as much as you would expect. Torque is impressive, especially if traction is readily available. Heavier riders will find themselves drawn to the potent 501, which offers a righteous amount of power that can be put to effective use with a moderately thoughtful rider at the helm.

TWO-STROKE ENDURO: TE 250/300

Husaberg was kind enough to loan Husqvarna some of its off-road two-stroke technology in the way of the TE 250 and TE 300, both of which come equipped with the WP 4CS closed-cartridge fork and Berg-inspired valving settings. A DDS (damped diaphragm steel)/Brembo hydraulic clutch also graces each machine, along with electric starting with a kickstart backup. Each transmission is a six-speed design, and both machines are tunable via adjustable power valves as well as

through two different preset ignition curves that can be changed by simply switching a plug connection.

As we've seen before when these machines were dressed as Husabergs, both are incredibly capable off-road motorcycles. I'm more of a 250cc two-stroke guy, but on our test day in rainy, rocky trail conditions, I preferred the TE 300's power curve. With great torque that allows for easy lugging, the 300 required less effort to carry speed compared to the freer-revving 250. With an incredibly light and nimble feel, both off-road two-strokes grab incredible traction with minimal effort, and both can be revved surprisingly high if you choose to wind them out. The 4CS fork works better here than on the four-stroke (likely due to the lower weight), but coming into G-outs and hard hits caused the front-to-back balance to feel momentarily messed up by the too-soft-feeling fork. The front brakes are sharp, the clutches and transmissions feel great, and the ergonomics are extremely comfortable and easy to adapt to once you start riding. On the styling front, I was stoked to see the giant Husqvarna logos on the radiator shrouds each time I approached one of these bikes to take it for a spin. I personally feel that all of the new machines look great, and it's cool to see the new Husqvarna designers paying homage to the brand's Swedish roots.





FOUR-STROKE MX: FC 250/450

You've seen these machines before, but they looked like KTMs and had aluminum subframes. Designed for motocross use, the electric-start-only FC 250 and 450 are suspended by a closed-cartridge 48mm WP fork and utilize a 44mm throttle body, with the single-overhead-cam 450 producing a claimed 60 hp at peak performance. Neither bike has kickstart casting—it's button-start only—with Dunlop, Renthal, and Brembo sitting at the top of the Husqvarna's component list. The motocross track that we tested the FCs on was jumpy, hardpacked, and wet, creating an interesting mix of great traction in some places and absolutely no grip in others.

Not surprisingly, both machines' on-track performance reflects that of their orange counterparts. The FC 250 has a broad powerband that hooked up well on the slippery circuit. I felt at home aboard the machine right away, and I didn't notice any hiccups in tuning or when shifting. The bike could stand to have a stronger bottom-end, though the rev-to-the-moon personality of the top-end provides enough excitement for the average pilot. The FC 250 seemed to award aggressive riding, something that would mask the slightly harsh character of the suspension, which was apparent when the bike was ridden slowly or through repeated hits and rough ruts. Tracking was decent in corners, and I found I could cut inside of lines if I set up properly and kept faith in the front line's shoulder knobs to hook up. The FC 450 took more effort and energy to corner, due to a higher resistance to leaning. As expected, the larger four-stroke revved out quite hard and could clear bigger jumps from the inside line with amazing ease. Hard hits pushed the fork to the limit, and more tuning than we had time for would be required to really dial in the setting for the track we were riding. Still, this is the best "Husqvarna" 450cc four-stroke I have ever ridden, and the heavily KTM-influenced Austrian machine is leaps and bounds better than the old Husqvarna 449.

TWO-STROKE MX: TC 125/250

Based off of KTM's 125 and 250 SX models, the new Husky TC 125 and TC 250 both provide two-stroke lovers with a unique MX-oriented solution. The 125 powerplant features a Vertex piston with a Magura clutch and comes stock with Boyesen reed valves, Dunlop MX51 tires, a Renthal Fatbar, and WP's closed-cartridge fork. The 250 shares several of these components, but instead of the 125's six-speed, the 250 is offered with a five-speed transmission and a DDS/Brembo hydraulic clutch setup. For those who want a bit more boost, a 300cc kit is available through Husky Power. Both machines feature easy tuning by way of the same power valve and ignition curve options found on the TE 250 and 300.

I felt that these motorcycles were fun, but I'll admit the slick track conditions in Sweden were better suited to the traction-grabbing thumpers. The 125cc was a blast to ride and rev out; the small-bore engine produced a healthy snap and sounded crisp and clean. Given the additional weight of the accumulated mud added to the underside of the fenders, the TC 125's suspension felt soft on hard landings, in whoops, and even when coming into corners. A light steering feel makes the bike feel flickable but also unstable. On the bigger end, the TC 250 has such a sharp hit down low that it broke loose just about every time the throttle was cracked open—I actually added some slack to the throttle cable just to help mellow out the initial response feel. The 250cc engine has a fat midrange and revs out quickly while still allowing itself to be ridden up on the pipe. I felt as though the TC 250 absorbed harder hits better than the 125, but a semi-sharp bite of the suspension on square-edged bumps kept me on my toes—both literally and figuratively—when negotiating choppy terrain.

FIRST TEST: 2014 HUSQVARNA LINEUP



The biggest Husky of them all, the FE 501, cranks out an impressive amount of torque while maintaining traction in nasty terrain.

TWO-STROKE MINI: TC 85

There has not been a ton of innovation in the two-stroke minibike segment lately, a fact that makes the release of an all-new Husqvarna 85cc that much cooler. Essentially a copy of the KTM 85 SX, this little ripper has a hydraulic clutch, WP suspension, and a six-speed transmission, and while it's the only new Husky to come with an aluminum subframe, the small package is still potent and extremely neat. Husqvarna did not have a TC 85 available for our test day, so we will definitely work to get our hands on this great-looking motorcycle in the very near future.

CONCLUSION

If you haven't noticed already, the new Husqvarnas are essentially a collection of repurposed KTMs (on the moto side) and Husabergs (on the off-road side), with polyamide subframes and different bodywork/graphics thrown in for good measure. There are some other alterations between the US and European KTM models that change things a bit, but for American consumers the lines between the three brands are fairly narrow. KTM had just seven months to release the new line of Husqvarnas following the acquisition of the Italian brand, and the Austrians wasted no time in getting the project off the ground. Many Internet pundits are already pointing fingers at Husqvarna for relying so heavily on its sister brands, but it's important to realize all of the work that went into making sure that Husqvarna could stand on its own so early in its rebranding. Simply getting the new bikes up and running on the Mattighofen assembly line was a chore in itself, not to mention the additional pressure of building marketing and budget plans, dialing in rider support, developing a brand strategy, and designing the bodywork and subframe details of the new bikes



A hard-running, money package, the FC 450 is eager to beat some big and tricky jump combinations.

themselves. If you think that KTM took the lazy way out, you're dead wrong. These guys have been working like animals to get to this point.

Oddly enough, the timing of the acquisition has created a virtual leap year for the three brands; there are still some "old-style" Italian 2014 Husqvarnas available, and while the Husaberg production line is stopped for good, it is still possible to find these 2014 machines on dealer floors. We'll certainly miss the days of low-price, street-legal Husqvarnas. Hopefully another brand can step in and fill the budget-minded corner of the market while the "new Husky" moves on to become the premium package that it is setting out to be. At any rate, we think that Husqvarna made the right choice in assembling a proven and full collection of motorcycles, and we're excited to see what the future of the brand holds—even if it does borrow a few cues from its orange sibling for now. **DR**



MALCOLM'S TAKE

"I think people are very excited about the new Husqvarnas coming out. I'm sure that these new ones will be good because they are basically KTMs and Husabergs, but I think people will be disappointed

to see these aren't something new and different. I think if they could build a street-legal, fuel-injected two-stroke, that should be the new Husky. The brand needs something new to set it apart. Of course, it would have been tough to do anything new in such a short period of time between when Husqvarna was purchased and now. You just can't develop a full bike in that narrow of a window and have it be good. I'm definitely fond of Husky and am happy to see them coming back out onto the market so strongly. The bikes look good, and even the previous Italian-designed ones are still good motorcycles."

SECOND OPINION

— Ryan Dudek —

He: 5'11" / We: 170 lbs. / Ability: Pro

Overall, I think the Husqvarna brand is a lot better off now. The guys at the company are obviously excited, and to have some better product has got to be a great thing for them. The older Husqvarnas were always a little bit questionable in terms of performance and reliability, and the new machines are already proven to be solid, which is a great starting point. The new motocross bikes are competitive—the older Husqvarna TC 250 needed some help—but the new one has great power and is fun to ride. On the off-road side, I like both the TE 250 and the 300, which are really controllable. I don't ride two-strokes much, but the TE 300 was really easy to adapt to, and it's hugely better than the old Husky WR 300. I am slightly disappointed that the four-stroke off-road models aren't street legal. Husqvarna kind of set the standard for street-legal dirtbikes a few years ago, and the way things are going everyone wants a license plate nowadays. Being street legal would really set these off-road bikes apart for a trail rider.

WHAT MORE?

WE'VE GOT YOU COVERED! Find out more about Husqvarna's new line of motorcycles at www.husqvarna.com. For more information, contact us at info@husqvarna.com or call 1-800-776-8600. Husqvarna is a leader in off-road motorcycle technology.

FIRST TEST: 2014 HUSQVARNA LINEUP

