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WHAT A CONCEPT! IS HUSKY THE NEW MINI?

WORDS: Brian Catterson PHOTOS: Andrea Wilson & Husqvarna

Pop quiz: What's the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the name "Husqvarna?" If you're like most red-blooded American motorcyclists, you'll likely think *On Any Sunday*, Malcolm Smith or Steve McQueen. But virtually no one would equate Husqvarna with streetbikes—never mind that the 108-year-old marque once built roadracers that competed in the world championship.

Husqvarna's new owners at BMW don't see it that way. To them, Husky is as much a street brand as a dirt brand. More to the point, they envision Husky as an iconic marque with retro appeal that could entice hip, young buyers, thus serving as a stepping stone to BMW motorcycles.

BMW applied much this same logic when it re-launched the Mini car brand in 2001. Although the second-generation Mini was all-new, its retro styling paid homage to the original—much as Volkswagen had done with the New Beetle in 1998. Affordably priced, the new Mini likewise went on to become a huge sales success.

Now it appears that BMW is looking to do the same with Husqvarna. The Germans purchased the formerly Swedish

marque from Italy's MV Agusta (nee Cagiva) in 2008. The downturned economy delayed development, but there has been some movement lately with the launch of two new street models powered by BMW engines. Unfortunately, the Nuda 900 twin and Strada 650 single are so out of line with Americans' perceptions of the brand that Husqvarna North America isn't even planning to import them.

Closer to the American ideal is the Concept Moab unveiled at last November's Milan Show. Based on the same underpinnings as the Strada, this pays lip service to the classic Husky desert racers of the '60s and '70s, with a silver frame, yellow side numberplates and a slightly overwrought muffler heat shield. Street-legal courtesy of an LED headlight, it rolls on semi-knobby 17-inch Pirelli MT60s.

The Moab didn't sit well with the Husqvarna N.A. staff, not least because it was named after a town better known for mountain biking than dirtbiking. Thus it was re-configured and re-launched at the New York International Motorcycle Show in January. Now called the Baja, it gained a high-mounted front fender, period-looking skidplate and adventure bike-sized 19-inch front/17-inch rear wheels shod with proper off-road Metzeler Karooos. Looking like a modern rendition of a classic



The Concept Moab is virtually identical to the Baja, save for its low-slung front fender shrouding a 17-inch tire.



Husqvarna's Concept Baja in its natural habitat: off-road in the American Southwest. Though it evokes a classic desert sled, it's actually envisioned as a street scrambler. Low seat height is key.



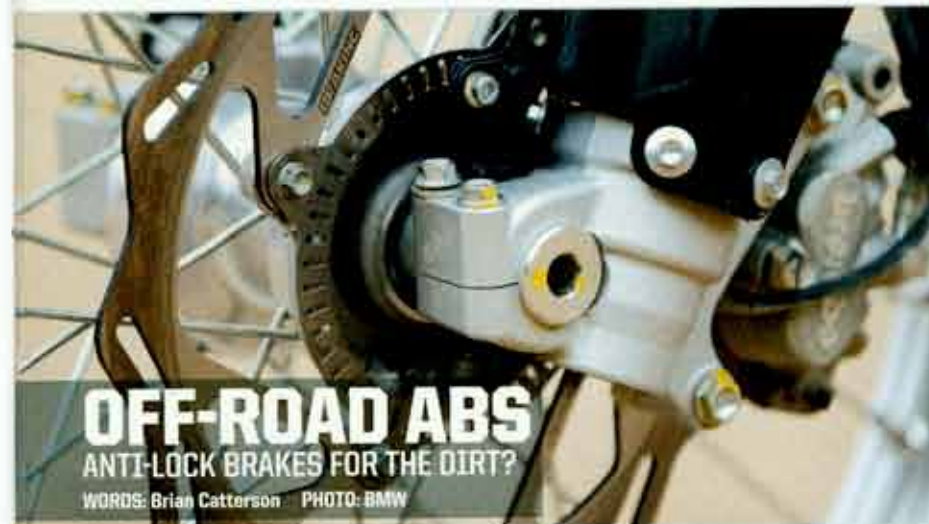
Production-intent Strada is more supermoto than street scrambler, in the same vein as the ill-received BMW G650 Xmoto.

desert sled, it's nonetheless more street scrambler than supermoto.

"If our TE dual-sports are 90 percent dirt and 10 percent street, then the Baja is more like 50/50," says Kris Odwarka, President of Husqvarna N.A. "An owner *might* take it off-road, but he's just as likely not to: Still, he wants his bike to look like it could."

Range Rover Syndrome, it's called. And hmmm, wasn't Rover the very company that BMW bought to acquire the Mini brand?

The Concept Baja prototype has been making the rounds at various motorcycle gathering places recently, and the Husqvarna N.A. staff has been taking dutiful notes. Will it make it to production? Stay tuned...



OFF-ROAD ABS ANTI-LOCK BRAKES FOR THE DIRT?

WORDS: Brian Catterson PHOTO: BMW

Just a few short years ago, sport riders were fairly certain that anti-lock brakes would never be used on the roadrace track. The Race ABS that debuted on BMW's \$1000RR superbike changed everyone's minds about that. And now BMW, through its Husqvarna subsidiary, is poised to change dirt riders' minds about ABS.

At last November's Milan Show, BMW announced that it has been developing Off-Road ABS at its Enduro Park in Hechlingen, Germany. Employing the same basic hardware as the \$1000RR, this works much as the superbike's system does in Slick mode, preventing skids only at the front wheel; the rear tire can be locked-up at will to allow brake-slides. Dual channels could let dual-sport riders select between Dirt and Street modes.

Off-Road ABS is currently available only on the flagship TE449, but not yet in America.

THE BIKE THAT CHANGED MY LIFE 1980 KTM 125



RIDER: Troy Lee
THEN: Aspiring Pro motocrosser
NOW: Owner, Troy Lee Designs

The bike that changed my life was probably my KTM 125, back in like 1980 ... or '79? The white-tank model. I was usually the only one on the starting line with one. I went and raced the AMA Nationals with it, went to Washougal, Washington, had some of my best finishes on it.



"No one else was really helping me. There was a KTM shop on Katella Avenue in Anaheim called Pro Gas or something like that. One of the guys there used to sell things to charge your shocks. Kind of a wacky bunch, but super-cool.

"I went from there to racing for Mitch Payton on the Pro Circuit Husqvarna team. That was a lot more serious effort. I became really good friends with Mitch, started welding pipes for his Huskys in his parents' backyard. That was around the time I started painting, going to the races and giving helmets to Jeff Ward, Danny 'Magoo' Chandler and David Bailey. Kinda started carving a little path for me...

"I had to put clutches in that KTM all the time, but I used to get great starts on it. The thing was just rocket-fast! The suspension was the part that was lacking—it was an old twin-shocker. I should have spent more time working on the suspension, but I was trying to start my helmet-painting business. It was definitely a great part of my life!"



JOE VERSUS THE HUSQVARNA

This one almost pushed Mrs. Gresh over the edge—although she's taking it better than Joe's old 1983 Honda Magna 1100. Maybe because this one runs? Anyway, resistance is futile: Sometimes you get the bike, other times the bike rips out your still-beating heart. A 2008 Husqvarna SMR510 with 860 original miles is not to be denied. That deafening Arrow slip-on? Ample warning for the tiny, endangered Key Deer who frequent the roadways of the Florida Keys. Those mini-bike-looking 17-inch wheels? All the better for Joe's short legs to claw for the ground.

PHOTO: Joe Gresh

TEAM HANSEN—STILL WINNING!

Bob Hansen is still alive and well at age 92, and his 1967 Honda CR450 (pictured on page 88)—or at least a replica of that bike—is still winning races! Here, Hansen poses with Sportsman 350 and 500cc GP trophies from the 2011 AHRMA National Historic Cup event at SoCal's Willow Springs International Raceway, both won by Team Hansen bikes. Nowadays, Hansen is mostly a cheerleader. Team owner Terry Naughtin and Mike Mathews rides the distinctive orange-and-white Honda twins. Together they won one world, two national and six regional vintage racing championships in 2011. Hey Henning, let's see you do that!



PHOTO: Terry Naughtin

BOOK SMART

Back in the early 2000s, when he was still a starving, Honda CB500-riding grad student at Chicago's DePaul University, *Motorcyclist* Editor-at-Large Aaron Frank wrote a book called *Honda Motorcycles* as his Master's Thesis. The 200-page hardcover, published by Motorbooks International, went out of print years ago—though you can still find new copies on Amazon for \$95! Fortunately, he saved all his research—including 40-plus hours of tape-recorded interviews with Bob Hansen, Bob Jameson, Dick Mann and many more Honda heroes—which formed the basis of his story "Mann & Machine" beginning on page 82.



PHOTO: Emily Carman



PHOTO: RoadracingWorld.com

FAIR TRADE

After admiring Ben Spies since early in his AMA Superbike days, *Motorcyclist* contributor Peter Starr had an opportunity to trade books with the MotoGP phenom during one of his International Motorcycle Show Press Day appearances. Spies' book is available from David Bull Publishing (www.bullpublishing.com) and Starr's book (with DVD) from www.motodvd.com. Turns out Spies' fellow MotoGP competitor Cal Crutchlow (signing autographs at Spies' right) was born in Coventry, England, the same town as Starr.