



If you can find a TM 250, you will find that it's pretty fast. Shock Therapy and Moto West know where to get them and how to make them more rideable.



SHOCK THERAPY TM

*Sometimes the
real world is
really weird*

By the staff of DIRT BIKE

You don't see TM 250 motocrossers on every street corner. Even if you looked on every street corner in the Twilight Zone, you'd probably never get a glimpse of one. But if you go to an Over-The-Hill-Gang race in Southern California, chances are you'll get beaten by one. Steve Piatoni is one of the club's top experts. And he's also the suspension guy at Shock Therapy. You would think that with all the bikes he sees coming in and out of his shop, he would have chosen something safe, proven and established for his race bike. Not so. "I like being different," Piatoni says. "It's more interesting to work on something unusual like the TM."

First, a definition: TM is a tiny Italian company with a few hard-working, very creative engineers. Cart racers know all about TM engines, which have been a big deal in those cir-

cles for years. Enduro riders might even know a little about them. Chris Smith has won two ISDE gold medals for the U.S. Trophy Team on TMs. And if you're a really devoted fan of European motocross, you probably know that a TM finished second in the 125 World Championship with Alessandro Puzar. But for the most part, TM 250 motocrossers are pretty rare in the American motocross scene. They are very European, meaning that most Americans have a hard time adapting to them.

"I didn't," says Piatoni. "I have no trouble with the overall handling. It was the motor I didn't like. It was typically Italian. Fast on top and nothing down low." So he and Steve Marolda at Moto West, the Brea, California, shop where Shock Therapy is based, made the TM a project. They tried several different pipes of their own design, a different silencer and played with reed-valve configurations. The TM also has a hydraulic clutch, but the pull is excessively hard. They discovered that Honda clutch springs

make that more reasonable, although clutch life suffers.

As for the suspension, the TM starts off with an unusual combination. The fork is an upside-down Paioli. That's an Italian manufacturer that has licensed many of KYB's designs. "The fork is just like a KYB except the cartridge diameter is bigger and the shaft is smaller," describes Piatoni. The shock is an Ohlins. He revalved the suspension using Race Tech Gold Valves. He also installed heavier springs for his own weight—a 220-pound expert requires fairly stiff suspension.

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When we rode the bike the first time, it had the stock pipe, a Moto West silencer and a dual-stage reed. "It's a work in progress," they admitted. As we expected, the bike isn't a get-on-and-go type of ride. Italian motocross bikes require a period of adjustment. Just like he said, the TM is fast—crazy fast. It revs like a turbojet. In a flat-out drag race, there aren't many 250s that can stay within sight. The adjustment period consists of learning to keep the bike under control. There isn't much low-end power—in fact it makes a new Honda 250 look like a torque king. Piatoni says his reed-valve modification is necessary just to smooth out the transition from no power to too-much power.

On tracks with good traction, the TM is fun to ride. In more difficult, low-traction conditions, it's a handful. The suspension was, understandably, too stiff for any of our riders, although Joe Papa and Shane Trittler could probably ride double and make it work perfectly. Steve had it working right for him, and we would have felt guilty making him switch it all around for us.

"The only thing I'm not happy with is the bottom-end," says Steve. "It handles great for me, but I'd like to feel more confident that there's going to be some torque down there when I open



the throttle coming out of a turn. I'll keep on working with it."

So why go through all that trouble finding an unusual bike then working all the bugs out by yourself? With a Honda or Kawasaki, you could just call the local shop and get a dozen cures for the same problem. With a TM you have to find them all yourself. Whether the

Do you have to be Italian to ride a TM 250? No, but eating 17 lb. of pasta a day might give you the strength.

bike works or doesn't work, you have no one to thank or blame but yourself.

If you ask someone like Piatoni, that's probably the best reason to ride a TM. □