

Reader's Ride

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HIDDEN TREASURES



A seam-sealed
Honda seat cover
gives this TM250
a unique look

Getting the good oil on the TM250EN from a true blue trailrider who shelled out his own money to buy one





Slicing through the bush is what this weapon does best

High-quality components as standard equipment make the TM stand out from the crowd

'OWNING OR RIDING AN EXOTIC BIKE IS A FUNNY THING. THEY'RE OFTEN SEEN AS CURIOSITIES, BUT SOMETIMES YOU COME ACROSS ONE THAT'S A HIDDEN TREASURE'



OWNING THE '07 TM250EN is a really different experience. People don't see these things as a mainstream motorcycle and just trailering the bike around brought some strange responses. The funniest response to the TM was from a bloke who wandered out of the pub and informed me that "these Chinese bikes are crap, mate. It'll fall apart on you". Of course, the TM is Italian. Everyone knows that.

QUALITY ALL THE WAY

Let me start by saying this thing is a freak show. It's the best-handling and braking stock bike I've ever ridden and I've ridden most of them. I have a 100km test loop where I usually average 46-47km/h over the loop; obviously, it takes over two hours. That's on my KTM 250EXC, so we're comparing apples with apples here. The brand new, stock-as-a-rock TM did it averaging over 52km/h in under two hours.

The chassis feels smallish and chuckable but certainly not cramped for me, at 1.82m tall. The thing corners like a rat on rails, so much so that when I was wondering how I'd torn a grip without hitting anything, one of the boys told me I'd dragged the bar through a turn. I've never done that before. It's stable at high speed and is the only two-stroke Euro I feel comfortable on at any speed with no steering damper.

The fuel is carried low in the steel perimeter frame and about two litres sit down behind the barrel. The subframe and extension frame are steel and this, plus the big muffler and steel sidestand, make the rear of the bike somewhat

heavier than the other Euros. This seems to be a factor in the excellent chassis balance, as the rear rarely steps out of line.

Ready to race is a phrase that's been used by lots of people, lots of times, and it mostly makes me laugh. But apart from a bottle of Loctite, the TM's the first bike I've seen that I'd happily race stock. The quality of the componentry is top notch: Ohlins suspension, double-label Excel rims (the top spec rim), Brembo brakes, billet triple clamps, billet hubs, Nissin master cylinders, Reikon bars, Domino grips, Vforce reeds, HGS pipe, forged bar clamps, quality Michelin tyres, super heavy-duty Pirelli tubes and 3mm Teflon rim bands.

THE PARTS BIN

Everyone who casts a glance over the TM asks the same question: how is it for parts? The local TM importer has a good supply of spares (I trashed a pipe and a new one came the next day) and very few parts are TM-only on the bike.

The front guard, front master cylinder, fork guards, throttle housing, mudflap, rear caliper and rear master cylinder are all current Honda CR spec. The radiators, footpegs, fuel cap, clutch basket, grips and front brake caliper are all current KTM spec. (The radiator grilles even have KTM stamped into them.)

About the only one-offs on the bike are the engine parts and the billet hubs. The rear sprocket is also TM-only with nine bolt holes, which seems weird until you realise all the nuts clear the spokes and any spanner can fit in. Clever.



The TM's engine produces typical 250cc two-stroke power that's exciting and fast



A set of red Cycra handguards matches the Honda seat cover for an even splash of red

WHAT I'D CHANGE

- ▶▶ Swap the 52-tooth rear sprocket for a 47 or 48. This expands the gear set without making first gear too tall and allows the bike to do transport sections at 75-80km/h comfortably
- ▶▶ Both the needle and pilot jet are way too rich. I went down two pilots from a 42 to a 38 and I took the stock NOZE/4 needle out and replaced it with NOZG/5. With the head clearance setup, even a NOZH/3 and 35 pilot would be OK. I dropped the needle clip one notch and we went from a 170 main to a 168.



ENGINE

Here's the fun part: this thing isn't like other 250s. I've ridden lots of 250s and never felt one which revs as hard, crisp and clean up top as this one.

Being a technical type, I whipped the pipe off and took a peek inside the cylinder. Inside was an old-school cat's-eyes-type exhaust port with no guillotine, just two eyebrow power valves. It's an old design that all the Japanese makes dropped long ago as it produces lots of top end at the expense of bottom end. Not that it's a problem — the bike certainly has enough bottom end. The motor's just a little different to ride but you end up with a motor that rewards an aggressive rider.

The bike even makes enough bottom end to carry a higher final-drive ratio. I went to a 47 rear sprocket from the stock 52 and it spaced the ratios out nicely and made the gearbox much more usable.

The operation of the gearbox is fine with solid shifts. The alloy shifter is held on with a spline, a screw and a snap ring for triple safety. The ratios are a bit different from the other Euro bikes, with a tall first and second and low fourth and fifth coupled to a MX third gear. This gear set is the main culprit in giving the motor its big hit reputation. The tall first needs a bit of clutch to get going and misleads the rider into thinking the motor has a weak bottom end. It hasn't; it's the gearbox ratios.

The short top gear and MX third and low fourth mean the bike is blindingly quick in the upper gears, as my pal Lumir the Czecho found out when I passed his KTM300 at warp speed, showering him with dirt.

The massive 270mm floating front disc gives the immediate impression that the bike has strong stoppers, and that's certainly the case. This bike has truly awesome brakes. The front is super powerful but very tame in its initial bite,

meaning at the end of a long day in the saddle you won't accidentally lock the front brake. The rear is balanced, progressive and as strong as it needs to be. The roller bearing, billet rear pedal with replaceable tip just adds to the bling.

THE END ZONE

You probably have the idea I'm pretty impressed with the TM250EN, and I am. Lovely ergos, and the motor's a happy, smooth, fast little unit. The componentry is superb. The electrics deserve special mention: both the head and taillights are super bright and safe and the speedo is tiny and trick (a KTM mxc part). The speedo wires are safe inside the front brake hose assembly and overall the bike offers a great ride.

On the downside, there are a few little things that just don't gel. The muffler entry is poorly angled and unpainted and it becomes a rusty eyesore after one wash. The sidestand is a weapon of leg destruction — be careful of it. The chain on the bike is of the only brand I've ever snapped (twice) but seems to be holding up OK.

The plastics are pretty much old school and the motor really does need a redesigned cylinder

head to cope with modern unleaded fuels. The days of 15.5:1 compression and 40 per cent squish bands are over. Then again, it would be perfect on methanol!

My biggest beef is that you need sponsorship from Snap-on to own this bike. It's almost as if they had a contest to use every fastener known to man. There are 3, 4, 5 and 6mm allen screws, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 19, 24, 26 and 32mm hex heads, flat-head screws, TORX screws, Phillips heads — you name it. You'd need two bum bags to ride this bike.

TMs have had a reputation as hard-nosed, hard-to-ride race bikes, mainly because their engines (both four-stroke and two-stroke) of old used to hit so hard. The '07 250EN is a lot tamer than bikes of earlier years and a smaller rear sprocket and some jetting will make this bike as tame as a 250 two-stroke needs to be.

But really, if you're a 250 two-stroke kind of rider, do you want the thing to be too tame? Isn't that what 300s are for? The reality is you could bolt a WFX motor into this bike and the awesome chassis, giant brakes and superb Ohlins suspension would be up to the task.



A trick speedo and classy triple clamps complement the front end



Fuel is carried low in this rocket