

First Test

2011

HUSQVARNA

WR 300

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When I was a kid I dreamt of racing a Husqvarna. In the 70's and 80's Husqvarna had all the best riders and seemed to win everything in sight. After all, back then Husqvarna ruled the roost with their highly innovative and top of the line two strokes motorcycles. The powerful and bomb proof motors coupled with top quality components and handling drew in the consumer and created a diehard following that exists today. Although I've never owned, or for that matter ridden a Husqvarna, the appeal of the brand is something that has stuck with me over the past 30 years. So when Trail Riders "El Hefe" called me up to see if I would be able to assist him with the 2011 Husqvarna WR300 test, I was all over it. There is no doubt that "Husky" still maintains a cult following. However over the past two decades Husky has had some ownership changes that have resulted in a stretch where quality was lacking in comparison to the golden years of the 70's and 80's. With BMW now the parent company of Husqvarna, the German owned, Italian based brand once again seems poised for a comeback of sorts. Needless to say, the Husky diehards are excited about the brands future - despite that the companies current focus has been on their amazingly innovative four stroke line. Anyone catch a glimpse of the new TXC450? Wow, we want one! Talk about a machine that was built for a singular purpose! In fact much of their 4 stroke line is an indication of the innovation that BMW has brought to the table.

A lot of this excitement however has yet to carry over to the two stroke line up. A quick pursue through Husky Cafe.com will reveal some frustration with the two stroke line as it has not received the innovation and attention that the 4 strokes have. Common complaints include a heavy motor in need of updating via power valve

adjustments, a dated chassis (it's only been around since 2009!) and an on the fly ignition mapping switch (OK that's our complaint). Some, but not all diehards want an E start, we agree with the "some". A lack of yearly innovative changes doesn't necessarily indicate deficiency when compared to the competition, perhaps it's just something we picky Americans expect? A perfect example of this is Yamaha's YZ250. This bike has barely changed over the last decade and still gets rave reviews, but that's an article for another time. Regardless, we were still stoked about wringing out the new WR 300. We chose the 300 because we thought the tractability of the 300 would handle the wet, greasy rocks and roots of New England better than a 250. Looking back, we stand by it!

Excited as we were about the Husky our first experience was like showing up excitedly to a blind date, getting to know her a bit and then wanting to low crawl out the door - it was a rough start, literally! However, that first impression didn't last long. It just takes a bit of patience and time to get this beauty broken in and embrace her little quirks. The plan was to do three days of break in and testing, then on the fourth day do a race test at the Rhodey Rover Enduro in Greenwich Rhode Island. I haven't raced east of the Mississippi in 20 years, so getting the big Husky dialed in would be imperative to me getting out of this race alive.

Truly, the only real downside to the WR300 is the break-in period. The bike comes jetted extremely lean to keep the government happy, and along with some serious compression and an oddly placed kick starter the bike can be a real



Keith Novello

A tractable bottom end and decent stock suspension made piloting the Husky through the snot a pleasurable experience.

bear to get going. Because the drive chain is on the right side of the bike, it necessitates the location of the kick starter gearing and lever to be a bit higher and forward, initially making it awkward and harder to kick over. The really short kick starter only magnifies the starting issue. The WR also has an occasional but fierce kick back on the kick starter that forces weakness to leave the body. I would highly recommend wearing your riding boots to start this beast, at least initially. If the kick back occurs while wearing your flip flops you will regret it. Additionally, our contact at Central Cycles in New Jersey confirmed that the bikes are difficult to start during the break in period and recommended a four stroke approach with getting the piston to top dead center. Given the shorter kick start lever and long stroke, a crate to stand on was a huge help at first. Time on the engine and installing the performance jetting kit that comes supplied with the bike make this bike much, much easier to start. We quickly realized that our initial frustrations were an indication of our impatience and lack of understanding as to how this bike comes out of the box. From this point on it was all smiles!

The 2011 WR300 is still mostly unchanged since its recreation back in 2009. For 2011 it got new graphics along with a new rear mudguard, a different front headlight layout and a new Ducati Energia digital ignition that is supposed to increase performance and improve power distribution. The exhaust system was also refined to help the 300 deliver smooth, tractable power. There is also a new thermostatic valve in the cooling system that was included to maintain appropriate engine temperatures. Some changes have also been made to the rear suspension and the filter box. Other stock components include a Mikuni carburetor, a V Force 3 reed-valve arrangement and a 48mm Kayaba fork and a Sachs shock. The forks are the Kayaba open cartridge system with compression and rebound adjustment that compliment 11.8 inches of travel. The KYB fork is a great addition to the bike as every aftermarket suspension company has great settings for this open bath style fork. The shock is a Sachs single shock with remote reservoir, adjustable spring preload, compression and rebound damping that

delivers 12.6 inches of travel.

This motor may have been around for a while but it does not lack power. Once effectively jetted and broken in, the first thing you notice is that the motor rips! What's most impressive is how meaty and usable the bottom is - the tractability of the bottom end really stands out. Lugging this bike around is no problem as is riding it a gear higher. With plenty of bottom end to chug and lug and long legs up top, the spread of power is wide and usable. Where you can get into a little trouble is when the mid-range kicks in. If the mid-range kicks in unexpectedly (in my case via a bit of "whisky throttle" action) this thing will just keep pulling and pulling until your eyes are sucked back into their sockets. If this were my bike I would be installing a G2 throttle cam to help reduce the initial hit with smaller throttle openings. Another engine notable was the clutch performance. Clutch action was continuously smooth and fade free. After 4 days of riding and racing the clutch never needed adjustment - though we do prefer the hydraulic clutch.

The suspension and handling of the WR were a pleasant surprise, or should it be? With a blood line derived from the World Enduro Championship I kind of expected the bike to perform well in the snotty New England conditions. The suspension was very plush with a nice range of adjustment. At nearly 200lbs I am probably at the edge of the weight limit for what this suspension is supposed to handle. Despite this, the suspension performed admirably even at race pace. As I expected the tried and true open bath KYB fork work well in the snotty conditions, the real surprise was the Sachs rear shock. I personally don't have a ton of experience with the Sachs shock, but I know its reputation is that of dumpster bait. After setting the preload and making a few clicker adjustments to compensate for my lack of skipping meals the shock performed really well. For riding and racing in the North East I don't think that a suspension revalve would be the first thing on my list of upgrades. If you live or ride in areas with faster trails or lots of whoops then get down to your favorite suspension shop sooner than later. In faster, deeper whoop sections the suspension will blow through the stroke with relative ease, and coupled with a



steeper head tube angle make the fast stuff a bit less desirable. For faster riding I would add a Scotts steering damper and BRP 22mm offset triple clamps. With a noticeably steeper steering angle this bike slices and dices through tight New England woods effortlessly. Its strong ability to handle the tight stuff, unfortunately is what hinders it at speed. Out of the box the fork legs came sitting high above the top clamp. Moving the forks down 7mm made the bike handle much better in a wider range of trail. Like most things in life, excellence in one area usually results in deficiency in another.

The frame is a chromoly steel single tube cradle (round tubes) with a light alloy sub frame. We not only had no issues with it, we prefer steel frames as they are more forgiving and offer better feel. The design of the frame allows for a very open area around the motor making maintenance very easy. By design, the motor also sits very low within the frame cradle creating a lower center of gravity. While some complain that the motor is a bit on the heavy side, having it sit low in the frame only helps in the handling department. Filter access is toolless and rider friendly. A quarter turn of a D ring at the rear of the seat releases the seat and reveals ample filter access. The brakes worked flawlessly and had great feel and never offered a hint of fading. The solid rear rotor was perfect in the mud, but may get a bit hot when things start to dry out. The DOT Michelin tires may work adequately for some, but in the conditions we were riding in they needed to be disposed of immediately.

Race Test

We fiddled a bit with the gearing and liked what an extra tooth in the rear did for additional tractability but went with the stock setting for the race as the Rhodey is generally fast and fun. We also mounted up some fresh tires as the stockers are dumpster bait for New England. For the rear we chose the Pirelli MT-16 as it performs brilliantly in the rocks and most everywhere else. In the front we mounted the Bridgestone M59 - same deal as the MT-16, brilliant in the rocks and excellent most everywhere else. We also went with Enduro Engineering bark busters and brush guards, their skid plate and a rear disk guard to keep our digits and components intact. We then swapped out the tubes for ultra heavy duty tubes. We then wrapped the UHD tubes in the stock tubes to insure

against flats. We ran 8 pounds of air in the rear as the extra tube lends the feel of an additional pound or two of air. We ran 10 in the front and had no issues with punctures or performance.

Once the cards flipped the club hit you over the head with a very technical section comprised of greasy roots and rock gardens, some serious mud and a portion of the course that took you up a river bed with about a foot and half fast flowing of water in it. I had no problem chugging through the technical sections as the bottom end really allows you to chug n lug your way through the slow going stuff. Everything was great as long as you avoided whiskey throttling the machine into the mid-range. If I had the option, I would swapped to a less aggressive ignition mapping switch for the first section, instead I just rode it a gear higher. This thing loves to chug!

From here the terrain changed up dramatically with several long sections of fast, sandy, flowing trails. The sand was also wet and made for excellent traction. This is where the Husky really shined! I could lay the bike into a corner, dump the clutch for fun and rocket on to the next corner once that mid-range kicked it. We also got a chance to open it up in a few long sand pits and the bike proved to be very stable, as long as the whoops weren't too big! So yeah, I was liking the chassis.

Throughout the day the terrain swapped from fast and fun to highly technical and everything in between. In the technical terrain the suspension worked well and I really appreciated the meaty bottom end of the power band...but I sure would like to change the power characteristics on the fly, via a mapping switch or power valve adjustment! After 5 hours of racing and enjoying Husky's open class enduro bike the only thing I would have liked to of added before the race would be a Revloc DinaRing. With a precari-

ous kick starter location, pop-stalling this bike in the wrong location certainly spiked my blood pressure. Adding an auto clutch/anti-stall device such as the Revloc DinaRing would eliminate this issue.

Return to Greatness?

Overall the Husky is a great package and at a much more affordable price than the other manufactures (MSRP of \$6399). Great pricing along with the best contingency program out there make for a package worth serious consideration. At nearly a thousand bucks cheaper than comparable 2 strokes, that's a lot of extra dough to get the Husky custom tailored to you. The Husky 300 didn't do anything wrong and did everything very well. We don't have complaints so much as recommendations. Although I may have been complaining when I was awkwardly placed on the side of a hill without an e-start.

So is the Husky line poised for a return to greatness? Well, yes we think so. It only takes a moment to realize a lot of effort has gone into the four stroke line and when the attention is put back on the two strokes, things in the two stroke division will get very interesting.

The advertisement features a black background with logos for Husqvarna, Kawasaki, KTM, and Husaberg at the top and bottom. In the center, there is a photograph of a blue and white dirt bike. Below the bike, the text reads "Parts • Sales • Service". At the bottom, the address "115 Route 23N, Hamburg NJ" and phone number "973.875.2111" are displayed.