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INTERVIEW

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The near-perfect
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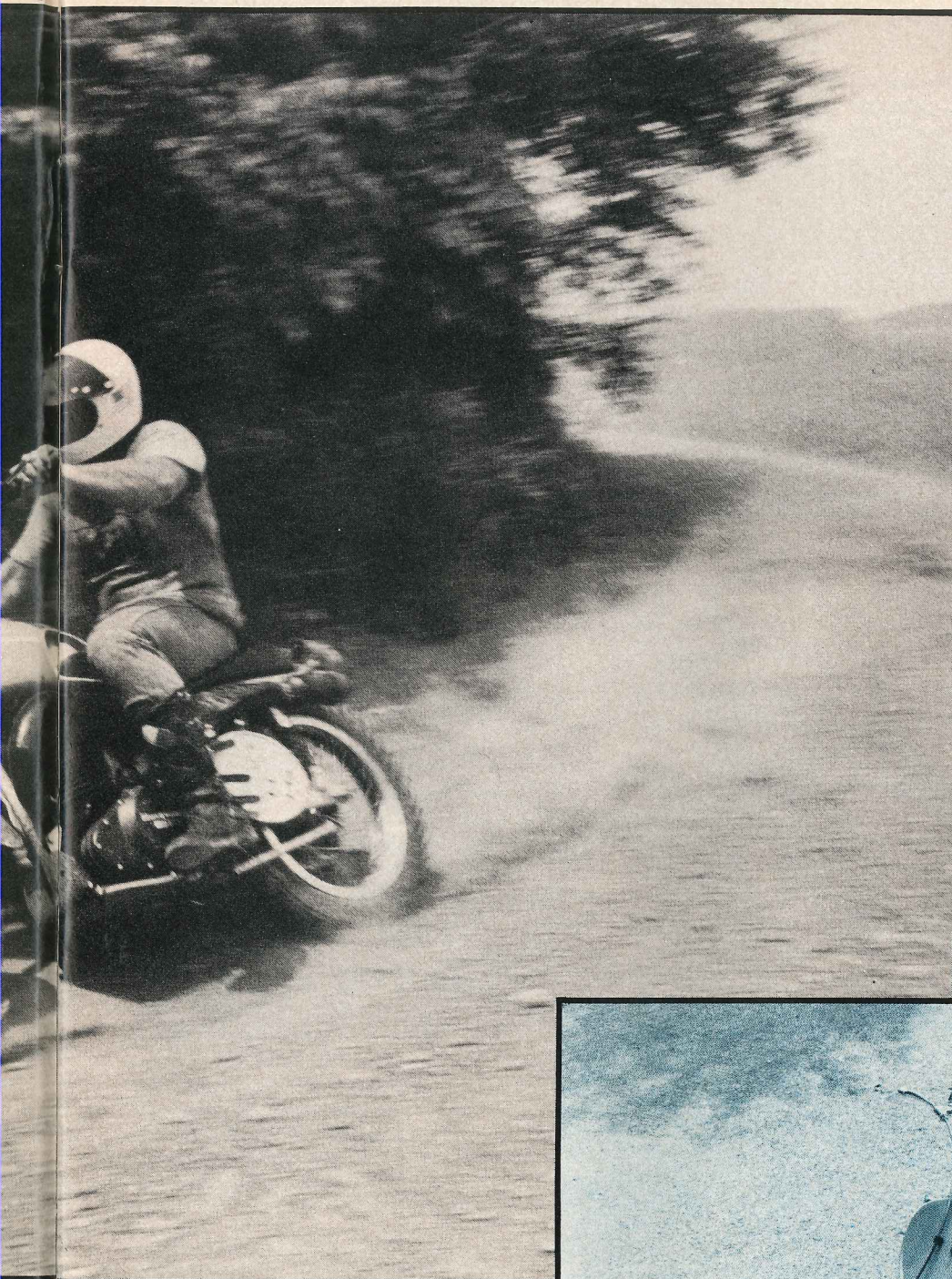
By Ross Watson
and Douglas Mellor



HUSQVARNA 450 WR DESERTMASTER

■ "\$1,570! And that's not including about 40 or 50 more for freight and dealer set-up. For that kind of money, I could buy a DT 3MX and take my change in Mini Enduros!"

Ah, but let's see what you get for your \$1600-plus. The Husqvarna 450 WR (wide ratio) is one of the very few full race bikes available that is capable of winning a 100-mile desert hare and hounds on one Sunday, and charge through an East Coast woods and rocks



with the new offset Magura clutch and brake levers and a quick-release throttle drum. All cables are equipped with lube nipples, another thoughtful touch.

Between the seat and tank is the infamous Husky goody smasher: the tank hold-down bolt. Although the front edge of the seat has been extended to cover this bolt to some degree, Husqvarna still sells a pad which could spare the rider a few anxious moments while proceeding fast down a rocky hill. The footpegs are not the serrated desert models now in fashion; they are flat with built-up tips that do a good job of keeping boots where they are supposed to be even when the going is wet or muddy.

The fenders of the first 450 WR's were alloy and tended to become permanently disfigured after the first good crash, so the Husky folks have put plastic fenders on the mid-1973 models. The forks are Husky's own and are double damped with six inches of travel. The latest models have been turned down and weigh 30 per cent less. They can be identified by their black paint. No one complains about the ride, but there is constant leakage, even after a moderate ride. Insiders know that Hon-

The 450 WR maintains Husqvarna's tradition for light weight and tight dimensions despite its whopping cylinder displacement.

enduro to win a trophy the following weekend. In a word, versatile.

This is a visually appealing motorcycle with a well-designed tank that blends into the exceptionally comfortable seat. The Husky is a bike you sit *in*, not on, and this makes for a more confident rider at speed. The frame, made of chrome moly steel and painted silver, has been welded with great care; there is no sign of haste in its fabrication. The basic design is consistent for Huskies from the 125 to the 450 and has always been known for its lack of flex at both the swing arm point and the steering head.

The bars are wide and at an ideal height for a six-footer. They're fitted



The Desertmaster can power through the toughest section or up the steepest grade, yet possesses the lightness and flexibility to sail over obstacles with ease.

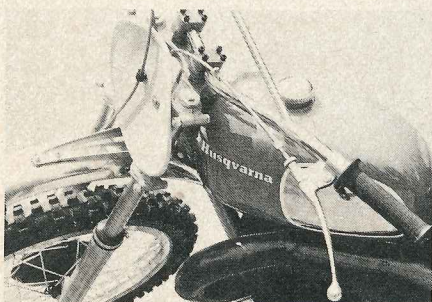
HUSQVARNA

da seals fit perfectly and last for a whole season.

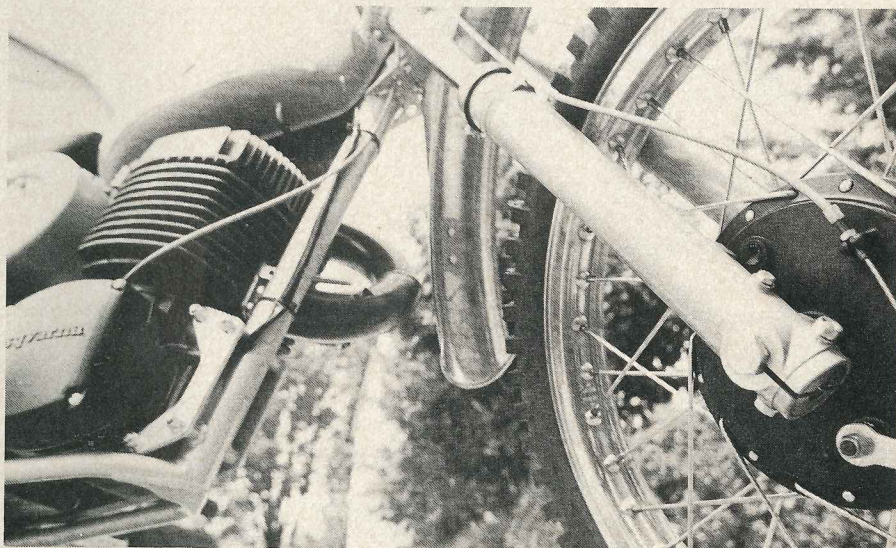
The 450 engine is part of the new generation of Husqvarna motors equipped with five-speed transmissions and redesigned outer cases. The shifter can be placed on either side but is on the left when the bike is bought, perhaps to conform with new Federal regulations. The kick-starter, with its rather short throw, is also on the left, virtually demanding that the bike be started with the right foot while standing next to the machine.

Firing up the bike when cold requires opening the gas tap and tickling the 36mm Bing carburetor until fuel mix runs out. Despite the large-displacement engine, the lack of a built-in compression release and a kick-starter that engages a third of the way through its stroke, the Husky is an easy-starting bike, primarily due to the relatively low compression and the excellent Motoplat pointless ignition. If you rise gracefully off the ground while sharply straightening your right leg and opening the throttle about one quarter, the bike will crackle to life, making you and everyone within a mile of ground zero painfully aware of the inadequacy of the stock muffler. Most people, factory riders included, use the Skyway silencer cum spark arrestor, especially for enduro work.

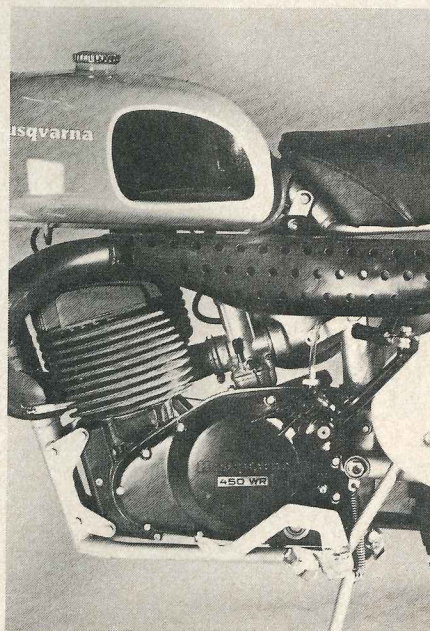
Extensive finning of the head and barrel make the Husky a bike that must be warmed up before it can be ridden away. The fins add to the overall loudness of the stock Husky, and most riders place nylon spacers between the fins to cut down on the noise. Once warm, the



Top fork yoke clamps like the lower yoke. Bars are flat and very wide. Alloy fenders are too breakable.



The forks are one of the Desertmaster's best points. They can really level the terrain and keep the front wheel in contact with almost any surface for good control at all times.



New engine castings are absolutely beautiful. New transmission has one extra speed and is completely redesigned. Kick-start is very awkward, but knowing the "combination" makes starting a breeze.

gearshift lever is moved down into first gear and the clutch is gently engaged. The machine will motor away with only a slight amount of throttle and will show no sign of loading up or stumbling.

Even with the wide-ratio gears, the bike needs to be shifted into second fairly soon (making us wonder what kind of ride is afforded by the close-ratio box). Once in third gear, you can hold on with arms and knees, then crack the gas on hard. The experience has to be felt to be believed. The bike squats down on its girdlings, the front wheel pops up a few inches and the thing takes off down the trail. Fourth and fifth are more of the same, and with the relatively short wheelbase care must

be taken to keep the front wheel down. The engine is not peaky; it develops horsepower from about 2500 rpm and just builds from there, never surprising, just getting stronger and stronger.

Trails do have turns, and the Husky handles them beautifully — once you learn to do things its way. The new frame design has moved the engine forward, allowing the bike to slide past corners better than its predecessors, but it is far happier when driven through a turn using a berm, if available. At slower speeds, it can be dirt-tracked more readily than smaller Huskies because of its

greater torque and its ability to break the back wheel loose at will. Over ruts and bumps the bike is a delight. The back wheel tends to hop from side to side over a series of fast “whoop-de-dooos,” but the recommended technique is to turn it on some more and grit your teeth. As the old sage used to say, “The faster you go, the safer you are . . . until you crash.”

Brakes are the same size front and rear, and both do a fine job of hauling the bike down from speed. The floating rear hub is a great help in preventing lock-up, a phenomenon often result-

ing in a fall or a stalled engine.

All these features make the 450 WR worthy of its name, the Desertmaster. It is an ideal bike for fast, open trails, having superb handling, excellent rider position, comfort and a wide power band.

These attributes also make it a relatively good enduro bike, but if used in enduros a number of changes have to be made. The air cleaner, which works so well in the desert (after you change to a foam type), is useless on a wet trail ride; water splashes off your left calf right into the back of the housing, and the result is instant drown-out. The factory

(Continued on page 53)

HUSQVARNA 450

Price	\$1570.00 (East Coast)
Warranty	none
Distributor	Husqvarna East, Loraine, Ohio
Resale value after one year	NA



Brakes	
front	160mm single leading shoe
rear	160 mm single leading shoe
Electrics	Motoplatt electronic ignition

GROSS MEASUREMENTS

Weight	241 lbs.
Wheelbase	54 inches
Seat height	31.5 inches
Ground clearance	8.75 inches
Handlebar width	34.5 inches
Fuel capacity	2 gallons

COMFORT RATING

1. Vibration . . . . .	.6
2. Suspension . . . . .	.10
3. Noise level . . . . .	.6
4. Seat . . . . .	.10
5. Handlebars . . . . .	.9
6. Start mech. . . . .	.5
7. Controls . . . . .	.10
8. Stand . . . . .	.8
9. Shift mech. . . . .	.8
10. Switches and instr.	NA
Adjusted Overall rating . . . . .	.71

PERFORMANCE

¼ mile	NA
0 to 60 mph	NA
braking dist. from 60 mph	NA

SUMMARY

Versatile. Can be adapted to almost any form of competition and give good results. 450cc powerplant is extremely tractable. Wide-ratio 5-speed gearbox provides a gear for every situation. A real winner.

ENGINE

Type	2 stroke single
Displacement	454cc
Bore & Stroke . . . . .	.84x82mm
BHP @ rpm	NA
Advertised c.r.	8.8:1
Carburetion	(1) 36mm Bing

Overall gear ratios

First	25.28
Second	17.28
Third	12.19
Fourth	9.44
Fifth	7.25

RUNNING GEAR

Frame	single loop, tube steel
Rake & trail	NA
Suspension	telescopic fork, swing arm
Tires	
front	3.00x22 knobby
rear	4.50x18 knobby

GLOSSARY

c.r.-compression ratio
D.N.E.-does not exist
N.O.-not obtained
N.A.-not available
Overall gear ratio-engine vs. rear-wheel speed
s.l.s.-single leading shoe
d.l.s.-double leading shoe

Comfort rating-maximum of 100
in.-intake
ex.-exhaust
trans.-transfer
Con rod/stroke-the connecting rod length divided by the length of the stroke.

(Continued from page 21)

solution is a vinyl shroud covering the air cleaner and carburetor, and this works quite well. The engine cases, particularly the squared-off right side magneto cover, are vulnerable to rocks and should be fitted with a good skid plate. A Penton headlight, tail light and leather tool bag are also recommended. A VDO speedometer and Husky-supplied rear wheel speedo drive complete the changes necessary for enduros, except for personal preferences such as (oh, heresy!) a compression release, which is also handy as a kill button and to pump out water.

Installing all these accessories should cost about \$80-\$90. You may also find that the stock steel two-gallon tank is not sufficient for longer events; in woods, for example, the bike averages about 20 miles per gallon. Besides, an alloy three-gallon tank weighs less and is very pretty.

In the woods, the 450 is a handful. The power is always there and is very controllable, but the machine really lives for those third and fourth gear trails that you can fly into, brake hard and power out of, heading for the next turn. The bike has a heavy feel, when twisting through slow going, yet you never need a gear lower than second except for the steepest stream bank or exceptionally rocky terrain. The brakes dry out quickly after a water crossing, and thus a straightaway and sudden slow turn never combine to give you that certain feeling.

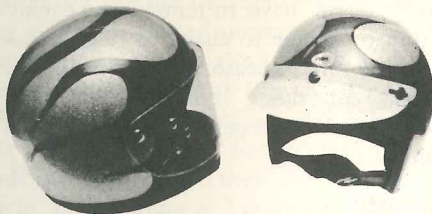
The lack of primary starting can be a handicap in trail riding since it is necessary to find the often-elusive neutral before restarting.

The Husqvarna is delivered with several useful tools included: a magneto holder and puller, a device to time the Motoplat, and a sprocket puller with two additional sprockets. Our 450 was delivered with the 12-tooth sprocket installed. We rode it this way and then switched to the 14-tooth. This made the bike far more tractable in slow going and also increased chain life. Even on the East Coast with its short, steep hills there was no need for a lower final gearing. In most cases, while smaller-displacement bikes were bogging down on slippery inclines, we were able to shift up a gear and chug up hills as if riding the big four-stroke singles of old.

The Desertmaster is more than its name implies. It is suitable, after slight changes, for any competition event,

(Continued on page 54)

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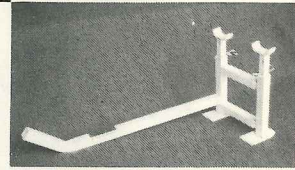


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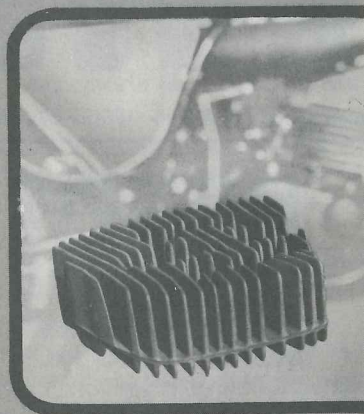
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HUSQVARNA

(Continued from page 53)

from the ultra-fast Baja to motocross to enduro work, and performs its tasks in a most satisfactory manner. Maintenance is simple, although parts aren't cheap and you do have to remove the engine from the frame to change a ring. Nonetheless, for the seasoned rider willing to change his riding style somewhat, the 450 WR is a near perfect motorcycle for all seasons.

GERMAN GRAND PRIX

(Continued from page 41)

was exactly in the right spot behind the starting barrier, the second hand on the big clock ticked off the last ten seconds and three dozen 40 horsepower Grand Prix bikes churned through the mud and plunged into the first turn like a wave breaking on the beach.

When the leaders came back into sight the abstract race for world championship points on paper became reality as Roger DeCoster led Willy Bauer by a scant 20 yards, which exactly represented the four-point lead he held in the standings.

Roger and Willy quickly left the rest of the pack far behind but Willy was close enough to Roger to get a face full of mud every time the Suzuki powered out of a turn.

No one could wear his goggles after the first lap and helmets, faces, jerseys and number plates were all coated with layers of gritty mud.

For a long time Roger stayed the cleanest because he was out in front, but poor Willy was less than a second behind and he had to ride through a constant shower of mud and rocks. Roger and Willy were locked together as they streaked around the boggy track, neither one willing to give an inch.

Adolf Weil briefly held third place but he dropped out of the race after a few laps. Another Maico rider, Gerrit Wolsink, didn't even make the race when his bike died on the starting line with ignition trouble.

Behind the battle raging for first place, Jiri Stodulka of the CZ team settled into third place ahead of Sweden's past world champ Bengt Aberg and Yamaha teammates Ake Jonsson and Christer Hammargren. Stodulka has had an incredible string of luck. Three times this season, in Poland, in the United States and in Bielstein, the CZ van has been broken into and all of Jiri's riding gear stolen. This time the thieves also

got a factory CZ engine. Sunday morning Jiri was left with his bike and the clothes on his back and nothing else. By now he must be used to racing in borrowed boots and pants, but I wonder what makes the CZ van look like such an easy mark.

Aberg was going well but he was passed by Jonsson and Hammargren in the later stages of the race. Czech CZ rider Oldrich Hammersmid held on to sixth ahead of Serge Bacou of France, Otakar Toman of Czechoslovakia, Husky's youngest star Yvan Vanden Broeck from Belgium and Jaak Van Velthoven, who seemed to be having his fair share of trouble with the mud.

When the ground was smooth and dry the rising, diving sections of the fast Bielstein course must have given the racers the sensation of riding a roller coaster. But now the ground was soaked with rain and the soft, slick soil made every hill a challenge, every turn a risk.

Just past the midway point, things started getting tricky for DeCoster. He had to lap the back markers now.

Bielstein is a narrow track and especially when it is muddy there is often only one wheel track through the turns.

Drawing near to lap a rider, Roger ducked his head as a stream of mud and gravel splattered his helmet visor. By this time the tree limbs closest to the track were weighted down with mud and Roger looked up just in time to catch a low hanging branch right in the face.

Now DeCoster and Bauer both had to feel their way around the track and just when they approached a steep climb they caught a slow rider who was using the best line. Roger kicked the Suzuki down to bottom gear and clawed up the slope with the rear tire spinning.

On the next lap the crowd's roar preceded Willy Bauer who had passed DeCoster on the opposite side of the track and took the lead six laps from the finish.

Now Roger had to follow Willy's rooster tail and that's how they finished. Jiri Stodulka was forced out in the last couple of laps and Ake Jonsson took third ahead of fellow Swedes Hammargren and Aberg.

In the pits, DeCoster used a towel and a mirror to clean the muck out of his eyes. But Bauer had probably taken the worst of it. Willy had pressured DeCoster for the first half of the race, facing a brutal storm of mud and debris. After Bauer and his pit help cleaned under his eyelids as well as possible, Willy sat in the Maico tent holding his head until time to come out for the second round. Willy's eyes hurt.

But when the time came, Willy and