

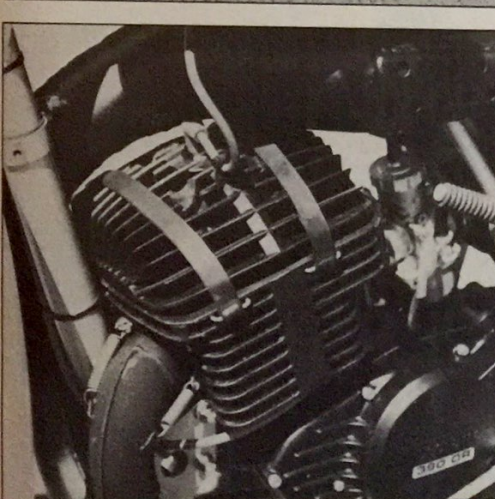
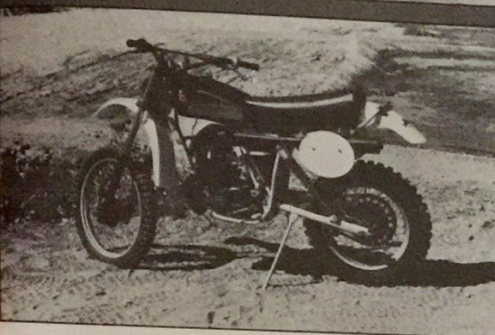
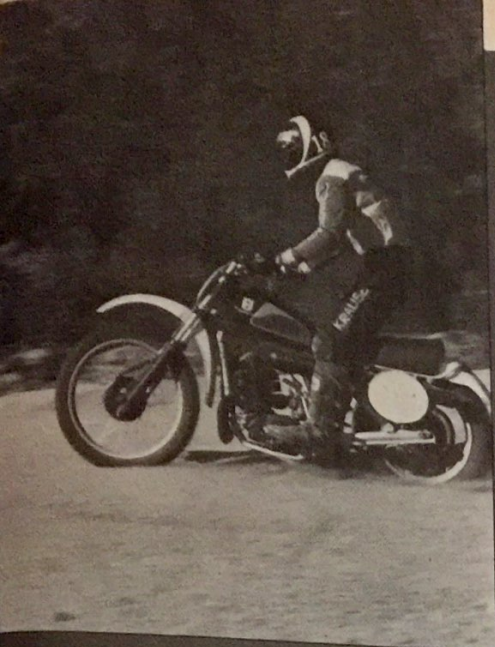


HUSQVARNA 390 OR

KING RAT

WARNING! Do not read this test if you live east of the Mississippi

By The Staff of Dirt Bike



Heart of the matter, a torquey engine that thrives on tall gearing. Rubber straps are used to quiet ringing noise from fins.

□ Chances are, if you're from New Jersey, you may never see one of these bikes right up close. If you live in Ohio, or Pennsylvania, you won't find a 390 Husky OR sitting on your local dealer's floor. Michigan? Forget it. The bike doesn't exist. The South? No way.

To get close enough to inspect and examine a real, live, honest-to-gawd 390 OR Husky, one will have to venture to the barren wastelands of the Southwest.

Desert, as it's called.

Here, the Husky 390 is Big Daddy. King Rat. The Ruler. This reign extends from the Mojave Desert to the tip of the Baja Peninsula.

If you're a serious desert/off-road racer, *this* is what you ride. Oh sure, there are other fast riders on fast bikes who will occasionally pull off a win or three. But no bike — repeat: NO BIKE — has the awesome winning record in the desert that the Husky big-inchers enjoy.

The latest machine — our test 390 OR — is such a successful weapon in the desert, that it's difficult to get one. On the average, they're back-ordered from five to six months.

Think about that. Here's a machine that retails in the \$2200 price range, has limited (but effective) applications, and there's a waiting list of almost half a year. There's got to be *something* right about a machine with credentials like that.

So, we acquired one from the Husqvarna folks, and set about the pleasant task of finding out.

Our first impressions were not all that pleasant. We unfortunately had the bike out of its element at a local motocross track, along with a

half-dozen MX machines. On the track, the Husky 390 felt imprecise and wallowed through the turns like a prehistoric monster.

The bike didn't get ridden much that day. We took our pre-filth photos and let it stand around a bit. Occasionally, someone would blast up and down a fireroad with the OR and come back with comments about the nice power. And that was it.

Four days later, one of the editors trucked on out to the Mojave desert with the OR, a few friends, and a truckload of bikes.

The other bikes shoulda stayed in bed.

Nothing, absolutely nothing, would even stay in sight of the 390 OR. It would dance off into the distance, with the rider popping arrogant wheelies.

Riders traded off. Whoever was on the Husky instantly became The Man. Riders' skill levels seemed to mean nothing. The fast guy was automatically the OR rider.

Is the bike *that* good in the desert? Or are we just stroking you?

Believe us. The machine is *that* good. Possibly even better. Remember, we spent a limited time with the bike. What would we ride like after a half-year of learning all about the traits, quirks and mannerisms that all machines have? How fast could we travel in the desert once we *knew* the OR?

We can only speculate.

The designation OR stands for Off-Road. Editor Owens had more faith in those letters than we did, and took the 390 OR off to the mountains of Frazier Park, California, for some

HUSQVARNA 390 OR

trail riding. The terrain is typical nasty/gnarly hard-packed hills, with narrow trails carved on the sides. Sheer drop-offs line these trails and clusters of rocks and boulders make for enduro-type obstacles. In actual fact, enduros have been run in this area.

We suspected that Owens had chosen unwisely. After all, the 390 was a dez bike, not a mountain goat. Thoughts of the unsure turning traits on the MX course came back to mind. We had visions of Owens tumbling off a steep cliff, with the black Husky pursuing him to the bottom like a demented Frisbee.

However, when he came back from a full day of playing mountain goat, he had nothing but rave reviews for the 390 OR. The smooth, strong power of the Husky made climbing easy, and even when ascending to the 8700-foot level, there was extra power left over. No clutch slipping was needed.

What surprised Owens the most was the way the 390 worked on the tight uphill turns. Steering at low speeds was good, and accurate front wheel placement (critical on the sides of mountains) didn't demand too much attention from the rider.

This compliance with cornering at low speeds lent a split personality to the Husky. Picture this: The bike was happy at low speeds in tight enduro-type turns. It was a wallowing porker at the medium speeds required at most motocross tracks. In fact, on a hard-baked course, we had to push against a berm or a lip to go through any turn with a semblance of speed. Thirdly, we found that at high speeds in the desert, the 390 would turn well as long as the bike was under heavy power.

That's right. As long as we kept the gas on and the rear wheel cocked out to one side a bit, spewing a roostertail, the OR ate the fireroads up like a flatracker.

Amazing!

STANDING BACK AND TAKING A LONG, HARD LOOK

Here's what you get for the money: one each handsome black and silver bike. Touching off the gleaming paint are gold-colored rims. Truly good-looking overall. The OR is tall. Too tall, in fact, for a normal-sized human being (we consider a normal rider about 5'8" tall and 220 pounds or so) to sling a leg over without visible discomfort.

It helps to have the Husky on the down side of a slope, or down in a hollow if you're on the short side. We watched Chuck Sun (the Husky factory

rider) get on a 390 the other day. His technique is unique. After firing the bike up, he puts it in gear, then stands on the left peg with his left foot, lets the clutch out and gets rolling. When the bike is moving comfortably, he then swings up and over the saddle, much like your basic movie star cowboy types.

Oh yes. Starting the bike. Uh-hmmmm. Koff-koff. Somebody at Husky ought to be shot. Or at least flayed alive. For years, the Husky machines have had kickstarters that have been high, awkwardly placed and too short on the throw. Each and every year, they seem to come out with a new kickstarter that promises to cure this problem. But each and every year, it seems to get harder and harder to start the bikes. With the '79, the kickstarter has reached new depths of uselessness.

Not only is it high and poorly placed, it also has to swing far out, placing the kicker's weight far from the centerline. Then, adding insult to potential instep injury, the kickstarter abruptly slams into the back of the footpeg after a short arc.

Good lord! Is there no one at the factory who can come up with a better system than this? Many desert races are started from a dead-engine. It would take a lot of practice to have confidence in a first-kick start with the current kickstarter.

We talked to Malcolm Smith about the Husky, and he told us that savvy desert riders always build up a small mound of dirt next to the bike, enabling them to get a clean swing at the kickstarter for a sure start. They also set the bike down in a low spot, or create one with a few burnouts.

What made the 390 OR such a delight in the desert was the suspension. Everyone who rode the bike raved about how plush the ride was. No wonder! Slightly less than a foot of travel is available at both ends.

At the rear, you'll find a set of Curnutt shocks, sprung very softly. In fact, at low riding speeds, just about anybody can bottom them out. However, as you go faster and faster, the Curnutts get firmer. A velocity-sensitive damping system is what does the job.

We hit some incredibly bad ruts at high speeds with the OR, and that rear end ignored them. The rider would brace for the impact, and the impact would never arrive.

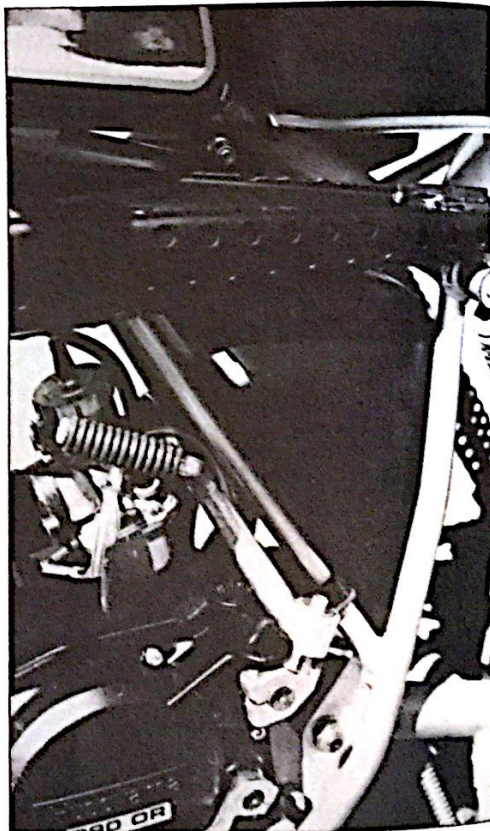
Backing up the almost sinfully plush rear end is a set of forks to match. These are Husky-made and have the same uncanny ability to eat bumps

without notice. Even though the fork tubes are only 35mm in diameter, they had minimal flex and showed no signs of bending. Malcolm stated that the steel used in the fork tubes was superior to anything else on the market.

We were pleasantly surprised to find that the fork seals didn't leak a bit. Not even a mist of oil seeped past. Normally, with seals this tight, one tends to expect excessive friction and an accompanying chattering on small, high-speed ripple-bumps. Not here. The forks worked at least as good as anything we've ever experienced.



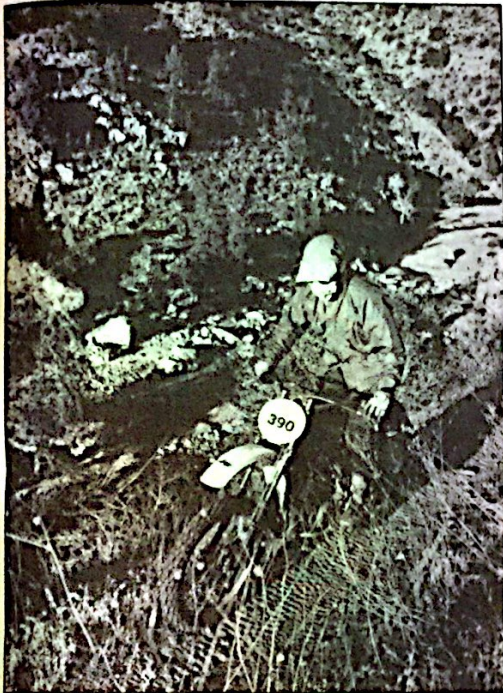
Rear-set bar clamps allow for up-and-down fork tube adjustments and easy access to air valves.



There's still one hot spot on the Husky pipe. More effective shielding could cure this.

HIGH SPEEDS AND BLURRY EYEBALLS

With a 14-tooth countershaft in place of the stock 13, Malcolm told us that a good, crisp 390 would pull 95-plus miles per hour. Do you have any idea just how fast that is? Most people talk about 100-mile-per-hour dirt bikes, but most of this talk is just that: talk. The Husky 390 OR is an exception. You can get going so fast on the bike that tears will come to your eyes, even through goggles. Yet, at this sort of speed, a certain freaky kind of confidence is given to the rider from the bike. It makes you want to go fast.



Kickstarter is a contorted piece of metal that's only marginally effective. Some rational thought is needed here.

A strange, euphoric feeling comes over you and the faster you go, the faster you want to go.

That, then, must be the magic of the Husky desert legend. On other bikes, the rider has to force to go fast. On the 390, you want to go fast. You don't feel right when wobbling around at trail speed. The bike feels loose, unjointed. Ah, but when you get wailing! Everything comes into place. The machine gets taut. Accurate. Picking a line between two pucker-bushes at 70 miles per hour takes little more than a thought. The bike weaves easily and comfortably past obstacles and the

rider seemingly does it all instinctively.

BITS AND PIECES

Things to watch out for on the Husky are few. Baja riders will have the rear wheel relaxed by Buchanan, with 8mm spokes on the drive side and 9mm items on the other side.

The stock gas cap leaks and has done so for years, which is a shame. Malcolm makes a new cap that doesn't leak. It goes for around \$6.95.

Most riders will pop for a bigger plastic gas tank, even though the stock steel and chrome unit is a really



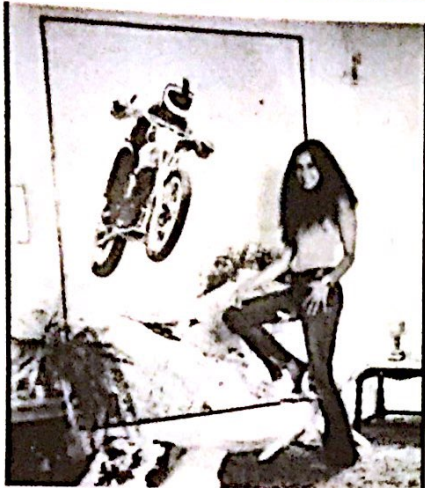
If the rider was in too low a gear for the conditions, unwanted wheelies were usually the result, as demonstrated by this fear-stricken Eastern wimp.

HUSQVARNA 390 OR

ENGINE TYPE . . . Single-cylinder, two-stroke, read valve
BORE AND STROKE . . . 83.0mm x 71.0mm
DISPLACEMENT . . . 384cc
CARBURETION . . . Mikuni 38mm
FACTORY RECOMMENDED JETTING:
 Main jet . . . 430
 Needle jet . . . R-O
 Jet needle . . . 6H3
 Pilot jet . . . 45
 Slide number . . . 2.0
RECOMMENDED GASOLINE . . . Premium
RECOMMENDED OIL (MFR.) . . . Pennzoil
FUEL TANK CAPACITY . . . 3.15 U.S. gallons
FUEL TANK MATERIAL . . . Steel
GAS/OIL RATIO . . . 32:1
LUBRICATION . . . Pre-mix
OIL CAPACITY . . . N/A
AIR FILTRATION . . . Foam filter in still air box
CLUTCH TYPE . . . Wet, six-plate, light alloy
TRANSMISSION . . . Six-speed, constant mesh
GEARBOX RATIOS:
 1 . . . 20:2
 2 . . . 14:6
 3 . . . 11:2
 4 . . . 9:0
 5 . . . 7:6
 6 . . . 6:7
GEARING, FRONT/REAR . . . 14/53
IGNITION . . . Motoplat CDI
PRIMARY KICK SYSTEM? . . . No
SILENCER/SPARK ARRESTOR/QUALITY
 . . . Skyway spark arrestor/silencer — good
EXHAUST SYSTEM . . . High-pipe, left side
FRAME, TYPE: Single-downtube, split cradle, chrome moly
WHEELBASE . . . 1485mm (58.5 inches)
GROUND CLEARANCE 315mm (12.4 inches)

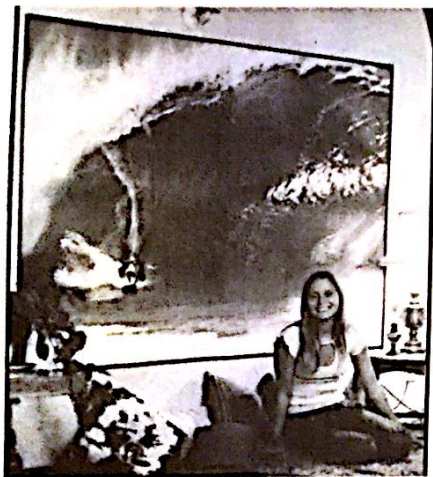
SEAT HEIGHT AT TANK: 940mm (37 inches)
STEERING HEAD ANGLE . . . 30.5 degrees
WEIGHT WITH ONE GALLON GAS . . . 238 pounds
RIM MATERIAL . . . Aluminum alloy
TIRE SIZES:
 Front . . . 3.50 x 21
 Rear . . . 5.50 x 17
SUSPENSION:
 Front, type and travel . . . Husky telescopic, forward axle, 11.8-inch
 Rear, type and travel . . . Swingarm with Cumutt shocks, 11.8-inch
INTENDED USE, MFR . . . Desert and off-road racing
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN . . . Sweden
PRICE, APPROX . . . \$2200
PARTS PRICES, HIGH-WEAR ITEMS
 Piston assembly, complete . . . \$54.51
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 Brake pedal . . . \$8.52
 Front sprocket . . . \$6.71
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 Suspension . . . 98
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 Attention to detail . . . 88
 Effectiveness, stone stock . . . 98

HUSQVARNA 390 OR



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handsome piece of hardware. In the desert, you need more range. Again, M. Smith offers a 3.9-gallon plastic bolt-on unit. This lets the rider have a 65 to 70-mile range at racing speeds.

The 390 OR comes with a Mikuni carb that's very sensitive to jetting, as far as range goes. A few small changes in jetting can yield 15 to 20 more miles per gallon. Or less, depending on where you ride.

Malcolm prefers to use Ohlins shocks on his personal Husky. While the ride is a bit firmer, he feels they give more steering accuracy on the medium-speed corners. He felt that Novice and Intermediate-level riders would be more happy with the Cornutts, though.

The flywheel must be tightened (or checked) frequently in the first few hours of riding. Same with the spokes.

If you leave the sidestand on, rubber band it into place, so it won't flop down while you're riding.

A 3.50x21 front tire comes standard, and it's a pretty good rock-eater. Most riders leave it on for desert use, some switching to a Metzeler up front for enduro work.

The number plates are just sort of

hung on the rear and look like they were placed on as an afterthought. Especially the left side plate, which is bolted to the muffler and gets a heat-warp set after a while. It eventually ends up looking like a large, white potato chip.

The all-new air box is cleverly designed and super-easy to get to. This should have been done years ago.

This year, the frame is all-new and much stronger than past frames.

WHY ARE WE SO PUMPED ABOUT THIS BIKE?

Simple. Because it does what it's intended for, like no other machine we've ridden to date. Maybe you don't have much desert in Indiana. But you owe it to yourself to Get Thee Unto a Desert at some time in your life and ride... no, not ride... experience a 390 at speed. It's an emotional experience.

We've ridden and tested a lot of bikes over the years. Some we've hated, some we've tolerated and some we've genuinely liked.

The Husky 390 is a bike you can learn to love, because, in the simplest terms possible, it makes you feel good when you ride it. And that's the truth. ■



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