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***HUSKY 390 AUTO**

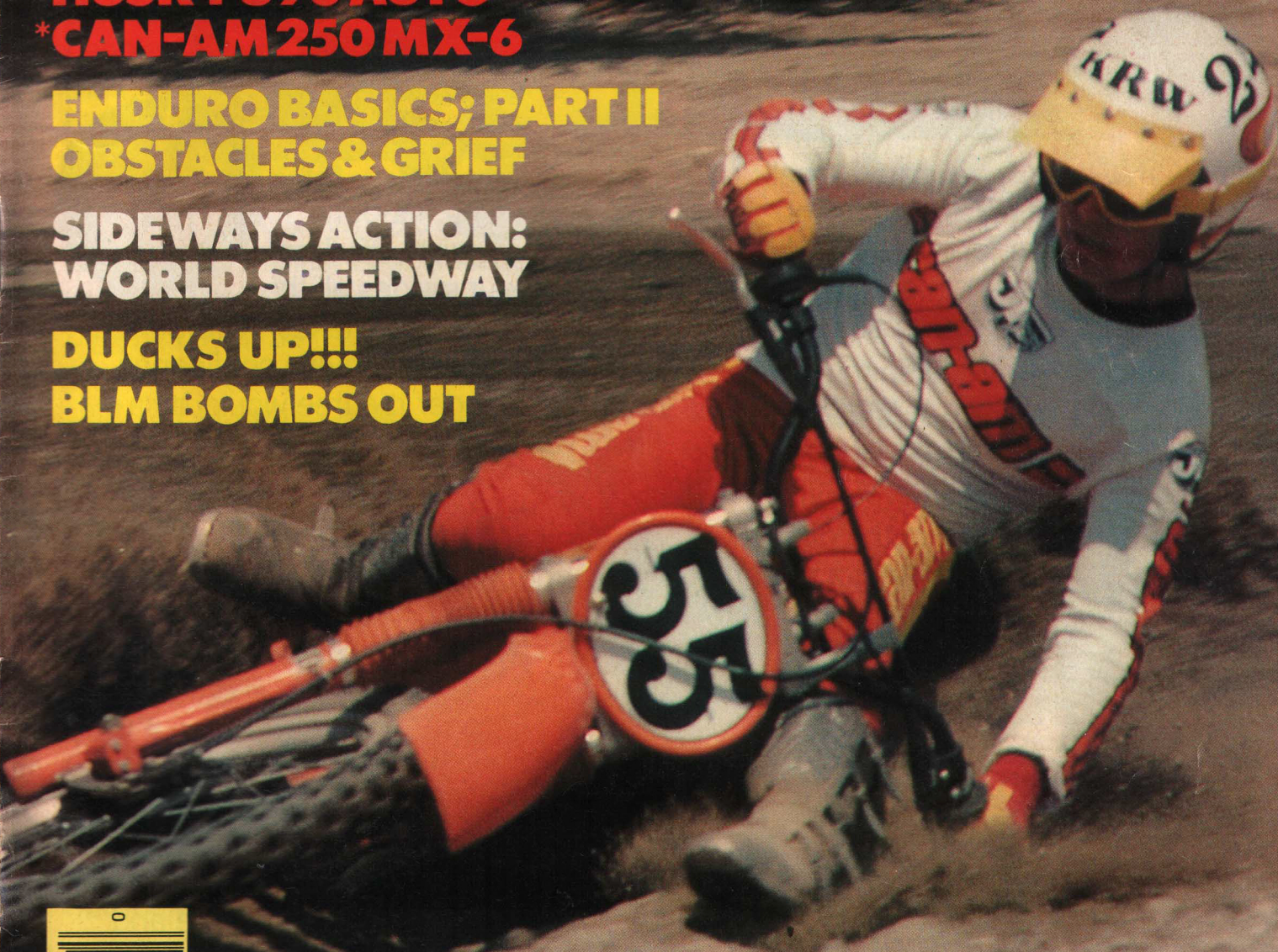
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HUSKY 390 AUTOMATIC

SHIFTLESS AND SNEAKY

No more of "dem ol' left-foot stompin' blues"

By The Staff of Dirt Bike

We have to admit: we did our share of babbling and drooling when we picked up the Husky Auto. After all, it's not every day that you get to test something you won't have to shift, and there's a certain amount of mystique involved when it's the highest-priced dirt bike on the market. Well, that's not actually true, it's not *the* most expensive bike, but one of a select group of them—all European open class bikes, by the way.

But, let's consider something: This is a 1980-model Husky Auto, and it sells for \$2395. Back in 1977, the Auto sold for just a tad under \$2000. After three years, 30cc, and \$400, the Auto hasn't really gone up that much, especially in a time when *any* open class dirt bike is going to cost at least two grand. The money saved on shift and clutch levers alone, if you crash a lot, may make up the difference.

Enough of this price war babbling; hell, it's only money, right?

Rotating masses

The top end of the Auto is pretty much standard issue: 384cc displacement, an 83mm piston pumping up and down in a 71mm steel barrel, nor-

mal induction from a 38mm Mikuni through a set of manifold reeds. Nothing crazy, elaborate or unreliable. But, get out your Allen wrench and pull off the left side cover, and the whole picture changes. Hanging on the end of the crank is a huge centrifugal clutch, and if it wasn't soaked in oil, it would immediately bring to mind an old Briggs and Stratton mini-bike motor—the lawnmower type.

For some of us, it isn't all that easy to seriously accept centrifugal clutches. But, they work.

And they work basically like this: Fire the sucker up and let it idle. With the handlebar lever locked down, the transmission is disengaged from the crank, and this is the *only* way to start it. Once the Auto has warmed up to the point of holding a steady *low* idle—with the choke off—the handlebar lever is released gently and the trans is engaged. It will sit and idle until a little more throttle is applied, and then the main clutch engages and we start to motate. After the revs climb a bit, second gear is engaged and the process continues until top gear is reached, which is the fourth one, and is usually

accompanied by a high rate of speed. A deceptively high rate.

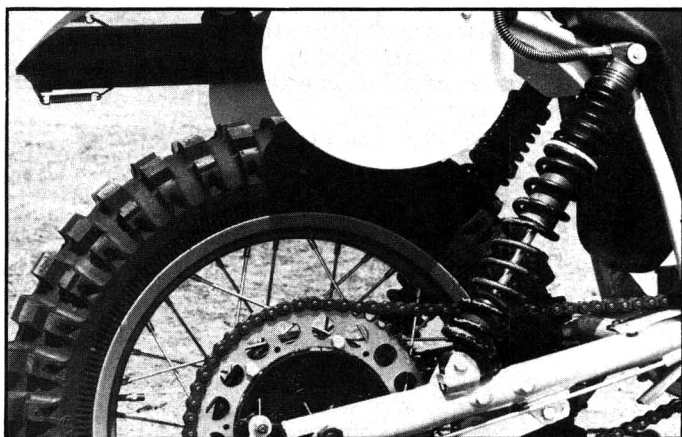
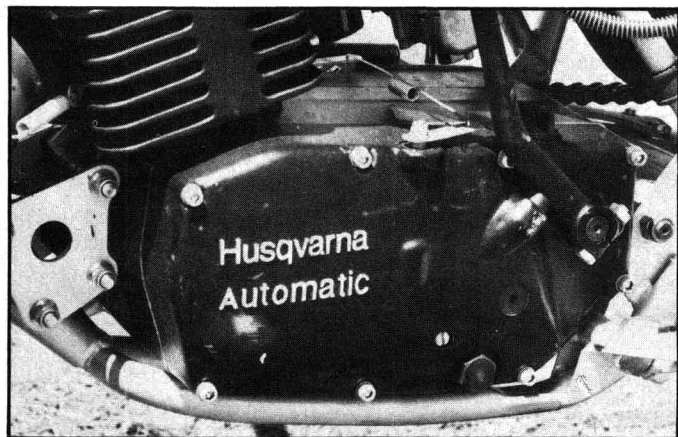
The only thing we can attempt to compare the Auto to is the now-defunct Rokon, an automatic dirt bike from a few years back which, at its best, was rather heavy; and at its worst was an evil-handling sucker that's no real comparison to the Husky.

However, it was an auto, and it did its thing through a variable torque converter, the same type of system that's used on the Honda Odyssey. With the torque converter, there is no feeling of shifting, as a belt is driven through a set of variable pulleys, and ground speed increases with engine speed in a steady pull right up to redline.

Each of the two systems has its own set of advantages and disadvantages. The Rokon had no release lever for the transmission drive, and it was very possible to start one up with a stuck throttle cable, often with surprising results. Applying a little bit of throttle on a downhill, with a Rokon, would produce a good amount of engine drag to help with the slowing process. This is not the case with the Husky, sadly enough. The freewheel effect of the

Shift lever is conspicuous by its absence. Removing the left side cover allows access to main clutch and entire transmission, simplifying maintenance.

Seventeen-inch Barum is a serious piece of rubber; shocks are a bit stiff for slow running.



SNEAKY

Auto's transmission becomes apparent every time the throttle is shut off—there is no engine braking whatsoever. At least, there's not enough to write home about.

All these clutches and gears are accessible through the left side engine case cover, and with a minimum of tools—all supplied with a new bike—the cover and the entire transmission can be removed for inspection and maintenance. And that's without splitting the cases or taking the motor out of the frame. Actually, no. There are still a few pieces left inside, but all the parts that're subject to normal wear will come right out in your hand.

The innards are bathed constantly in Husqvarna Automatic Transmission Fluid, and the owner's manual tells us that this is the only juice we should use, but the inside word from Husky is: If you're stuck without any oil, motor oil will do OK, but the bike won't shift as smoothly because of the difference in viscosity. Use the Husky ATF and you'll be happy as a clam.

One other thing: Once the transmission is engaged, the Husky lower end is indestructible. Everything is in constant mesh and there are no shifting dogs, or shafts, or things that go bump in the night to get out of whack. Unless something inside comes apart. In that case, the Husky comes with a 60-day guarantee. If it doesn't break in 60 days, you can be reasonably sure that you won't have any problems.

We wound up giving our lower end the ultimate test, when one of the springs on the main clutch broke and started to dance around the gears. We didn't realize it until the motor got really noisy, and a crack appeared in the side cover after we tried to kick it over. A close inspection afterwards revealed that the spring had been chewed into about a dozen pieces, which managed to grind off quite a bit of magnesium from the side cover. Even though the oil looked like it was full of glitter, when we flushed out the cases we could find no damage other than the case cover and the loss of the spring. We replaced the two parts (under warranty, of course), and it's been chugging along ever since. Truly a strong unit.

Everything else

When we tore ourselves away from the motor, the Auto looked more and more like a 390 OR. Which shouldn't be surprising—it *is*, essentially, an OR with a different motor. Or is it? We spent a lot of time babbling about the OR back in February, so let's just compare the figures and see what we come up with. First of all, the OR boasted of



HUSQVARNA 390 AUTOMATIC

NAME AND MODEL	Husqvarna 390 Automatic
ENGINE TYPE	Two-stroke, reed valve single
BORE AND STROKE	83mm x 71mm
DISPLACEMENT	384cc
HORSEPOWER (CLAIMED BY FACTORY)	N/A
CARBURETION	38mm Mikuni
FACTORY RECOMMENDED JETTING:	
MAIN JET	430
NEEDLE JET	R2
JET NEEDLE	N/A
PILOT JET	45
SLIDE NUMBER	2.5
RECOMMENDED GASOLINE	Premium
RECOMMENDED OIL (MFR.)	Castrol R
FUEL TANK CAPACITY	11.8 liters
FUEL TANK MATERIAL	Steel
LUBRICATION	Pre-mix
AIR FILTRATION	Oiled foam, side access
CLUTCH TYPE	Centrifugal
TRANSMISSION	Four-speed automatic
GEARBOX RATIOS (crankshaft: rear wheel)	
1	16.51:1
2	12.26:1
3	9.74:1
4	8.10:1
GEARING, FRONT/REAR	12/53
IGNITION	Motoplant CDI
PRIMARY KICK SYSTEM?	No
RECOMMENDED SPARK PLUG	Champion N2, Bosch W4G

SILENCER/SPARK ARRESTOR/QUALITY	Yes/moderately loud
FRAME, TYPE	Single downtube, chrome moly
WHEELBASE	1430mm (56.29 inches)
GROUND CLEARANCE	325mm (12.79 inches)
SEAT HEIGHT AT TANK	940mm (37 inches)
STEERING HEAD ANGLE	29 degrees
TRAIL	152mm
WEIGHT WITH ONE GALLON GAS	110 kg (242 pounds)
RIM MATERIAL	Sun aluminum alloy
TIRE SIZES:	
FRONT	3.50x21 Trelleborg
REAR	5.50x17 Barum
SUSPENSION:	
FRONT, TYPE AND TRAVEL	Leading axle forks, 240mm (9.44 inches)
REAR, TYPE AND TRAVEL	Ohlins gas shocks, 254mm (9.99 inches)
INTENDED USE, MFR.	Enduro, cross-country
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	Sweden
PRICE, APPROX	\$2395
PARTS PRICES, HIGH-WEAR ITEMS:	
PISTON ASSEMBLY, COMPLETE	\$54.91
RINGS ONLY	\$8.43
CYLINDER	\$216.69
SHIFT LEVER	N/A
BRAKE PEDAL	\$8.52
FRONT SPROCKET	\$6.51
DISTRIBUTOR:	
Husqvarna Motorcycles	
4925 Mercury St.	
San Diego, California 92111	

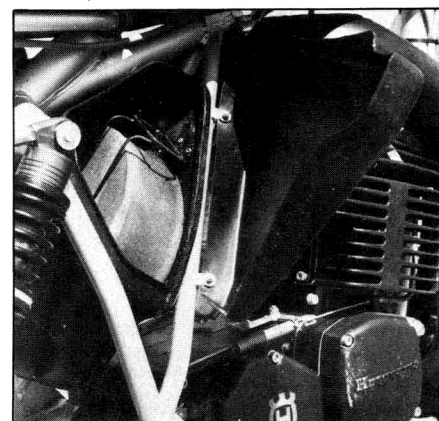
OVERALL RATING, FROM 0 TO 100, VARIOUS CATEGORIES, KEEPING INTENDED USE OF MACHINE IN MIND:	
HANDLING	85
SUSPENSION	90
POWER	92
COST	88
ATTENTION TO DETAIL	90
EFFECTIVENESS, STONE STOCK	95

11.8 inches of suspension travel, front and rear. Oho! The Auto has just under 10 inches, just the right amount for a woods bike.

This could explain why the Auto is more confidence-inspiring at moderate speeds than the OR. The ground clearance and seat height are listed the same, although the Auto seems lower to the ground. Hmmm. A quick check with the incredibly accurate DB tape measure reveals that the Auto has an inch lower seat height, obviously the result of the shorter suspension. Just goes to show: Don't believe everything you read on a spec sheet.

The forks are, once again, Husky units—9.44 inches of travel, 35mm fork tubes and one of the sweetest rides money can buy. This year, they come with air caps, but we found we liked them best with zero pressure. Up front, we have a very good brake hub strongly laced to a 21-inch WM-2 gold Sun rim, covered with a 3.50x21 Trelleborg. In the rocks, the 3.50 will save the rim from a lot of abuse, but if most of your riding is on the smooth side, you may be happier with the lighter weight of a 3.00x21.

The rear sports Ohlins shocks, remote reservoirs and all, and they are excellent units. Ours were set up pre-loaded to the fourth notch and were a bit stiff. We eased them down to the second and had a much nicer ride. The overall suspension on the Husky was a little harsh at slow speeds, but once the meaty part of third gear was found, most test riders became absolutely fearless, slamming into ruts like a crazed jackhammer.



Air filter is easy to service; air box will need more waterproofing for wet running.

The rear tire is a 5.50x17 Barum, with little Husqvarna "H"'s molded into it. Cute. The Barum is an excellent mud tire. Performance on the dry stuff is fair, but with the excellent traction the Auto serves up in huge doses, everything will work well.

Oh, we didn't mention that yet, did we?

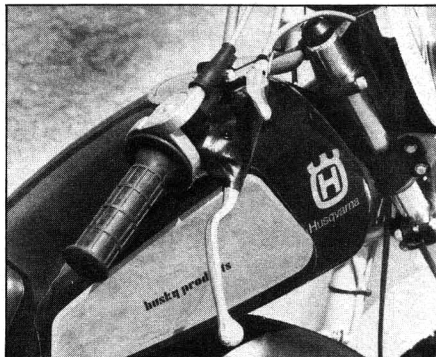
To climb a hill, the rider merely



Forks are fine with zero air pressure. 3.50x21 tire is a little big for the stock fender.

motors up to the base and climbs it. That's all. There's no frantic stabbing for gears, no fighting for traction. The Auto seems to signal when to back off on the gas, and when to pour it on, and stays hooked up through the whole thing. It's so easy, it's almost embarrassing.

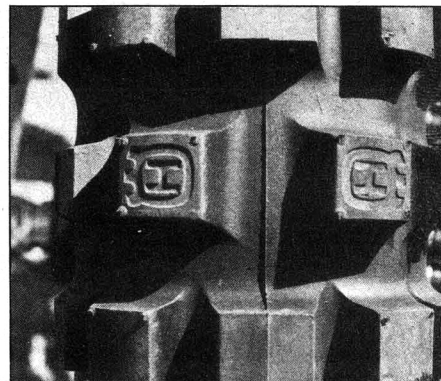
But easily the most potentially embarrassing part is the return trip back



Lever above front brake is used to disengage transmission for starting. Left side of the bars feel naked.

down. The first time, it can be enlightening. The Husky will freewheel all the way down, the same as if you were in neutral, and calls for some artistic braking. Thankfully, the brakes are up to the job. We hauled the bike up and down everything Texas Canyon had to offer, and soon found ourselves going much faster downhill than we had previously been used to. Go ahead, try it. It gets old real fast, dragging your brake all the time. Best way in the world to learn how to go faster.

The only time this could get into a serious situation would be when the brakes are wet. Being the same design as the OR, and past history being what

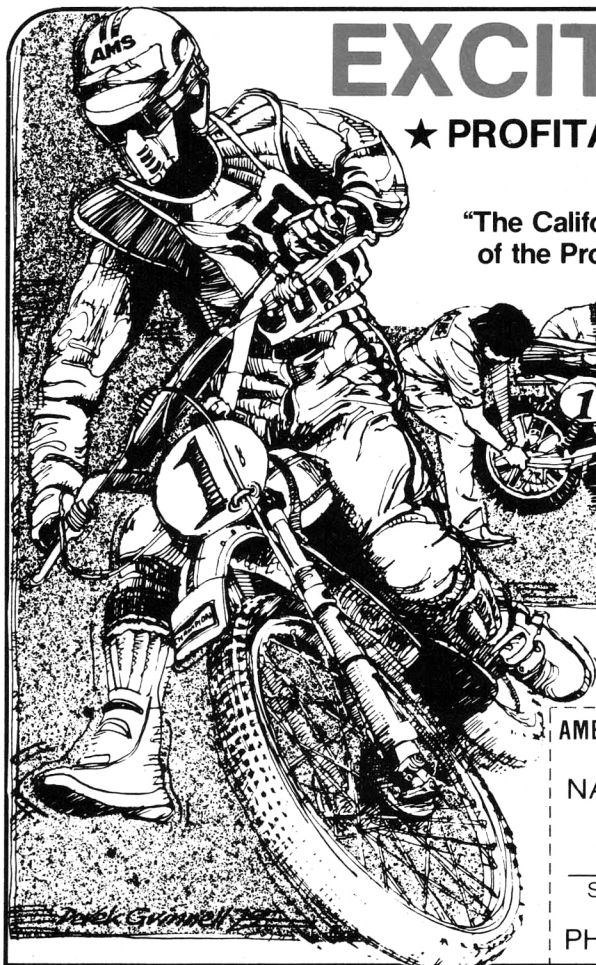


Until the rear tire wears down, you'll leave an unmistakable trail.

it is, the brakes are not going to function all that well when full of mud and water. Sometimes they might not work at all, and freewheeling down a hill will be the worst place to find out about it. We suggest that you maintain the brakes carefully, and use everything in your power to make sure they're waterproof. Check out your brakes in water, and learn what to expect. There should be better thought here from the factory, though.

On tight trails, the Auto performed with ease, much more securely than the OR, as we said earlier. The turning was just a little quicker, and the

(Continued on page 68)



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SNEAKY

(Continued from page 43)

shorter suspension made it easier to get back on the ground in a hurry.

Bits and pieces

The lack of a clutch lever (and shifter!) is still a little freaky, but there is a positive side: much less maintenance/fewer things to go wrong.

We sneived a lot about the kick-starter on the OR, and thankfully, the Auto suffers from none of the past problems. The different design is much simpler and easier on the foot.

Some sort of case protection should be offered for the Auto. The left side cover is held in place by Allen screws that stick way out in the breeze and beg to be torn off by a rock. And them are some expensive cases, boss.

The air box must be the quickest unit in the world to service. Flick it open, and releasing one spring lever allows the filter to practically fall out. Great for a fast wring-out after a stream crossing.

The levers and throttle are all Magura, and the speedo is a VDO; both fine units.

The front fender on our test bike contacted the tire in three different places, and didn't do a very good job of keeping mud off the rider. We think it's a little small.

Justifying the big one

And now everyone wants to know: Is it really worth the price? Let's forget that it's an Automatic for a moment, and then ask the same question. Are the good handling and bulletproof design of the OR worth its price tag of \$2200 or so? Is that too much for a state-of-the-art European motorcycle? Judging by Husky's sales figures and the number of satisfied customers out in the woods and deserts, no. It's not too high a price to pay. Damn little, in fact.

Now, all you have to do is add the \$200 more for the Automatic, and ask yourself the same question. □

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