



HUSQVARNA 390 WR

A Husqvarna is a purebred. That means it is built for one purpose — to ride, and ride fast. Anything else is trivia, and the factory treats it as such.

Husqvarna is a strange marque. Anyone who has ever owned one, or who at presents own one, will swear by it. To them, there is no other bike in the world. At meetings, Husqvarna owners will gather together and talk for hours about different little things about their bikes; long-time Husky riders will wander over to new owners and help them get it set up properly; they are very cliquy, and are forever putting it on other riders.

Something must cause this.

If you are new to a Husqvarna, the reason for its following is very difficult to understand. After all, the bike is expensive for the number of things you can point out as defects with it: the side numberplates, for example, look as though they were tacked on as an afterthought; the kickstart lever is still unusual to operate; footpegs haven't changed since day one; the airbox needs a high degree of waterproofing; the steering is, despite a few geometry/suspension changes, still vague; the brakes still go away after a creek crossing; lights aren't as good as a Japanese bike; the sidestand is as weak as putty, and is difficult to get at; the lower chain guide keeps moving and the roller ultimately breaks; the Ohlin reservoirs appear to have been mounted in a hurry; the rear brake backing plate still needs a better bearing surface to eliminate wear; and a few other miscellaneous things.

So you must look deeper to find why they cause the loyalty they do. And if you manage to look hard enough, you discover that the Husqvarna is one of the few thoroughbreds in dirt bikes. Built by a smallish factory in Sweden, they are pretty much still hand crafted. Design changes trickle constantly into the production line, without waiting for a whole new model. The people who build them are riders just like you and us: they have a track near the factory to test ideas, they

race regularly, they support any Husqvarna riders at the ISDT, and in general they care about their product.

It's what that product is that baffles some people. All they see are the obvious faults mentioned above; some riders who buy a Husqvarna never fully realise what they are all about, and they never develop that distinctive Husqvarna loyalty. But the others do.

See, when something is a purebred, it doesn't mean it is absolutely perfect. It means it is perfect for one thing: the use for which it was designed. In the case of the 390WR, it is perfect, or as close to perfect as possible, for cross-country trials. Anything else is trivia.

To the factory, the positioning of the side numberplates is a mere detail — you have to have them in some races, so they make a token effort and weld a few tabs to the frame and bolt some oval plates to them. They work, even if they aren't a model of design principles. The same goes for the positioning of the Ohlin reservoirs — Husqvarna was basically happy with the frame geometry, and they decided that the absolute best shock absorber they could bolt onto that frame was an Ohlin set. So what if Ohlins came with reservoirs which had to be mounted somewhere? It didn't matter where they went, because the basic thing was right — the Ohlins were, and are, the best.

As far as the kickstarter is concerned, we haven't yet heard an owner seriously complain about it. Footpegs? They don't look trick, but they work. Lights? Everyone knows enduro riders never use their bikes at night (except if they break down and take some time to rectify the problem, and all Husky owners know Huskies never break down...). Sidestand? Yeah, well, about that sidestand... you never use a sidestand unless you have time to use it, so that's OK, and Huskies are light and their owners are smart, so they never seem to get broken.

The point is, owners never worry about this trivia either, because, just like the factory, they know it doesn't matter as long as the overall machine is good at its job.

And the Husqvarna is. Simple as that.

POWER AND ENGINE

There's little more you can say about this engine than that it is brilliant. Easy to work on, so reliable that you can go for a whole season on the original piston (and ring, if you are lazy), easy to start with the Motoplatt's strong spark and Mikuni carburetion, and magic to ride.

It isn't the fastest big-bore around, by any means, the 420 KTM has that distinction. But the power is easy to live with if you get tired, and easy to win with if you are aggressive. Which is the real key to this bike. Everything about it is made for an aggressive rider. Ridden loosely or lazily, it doesn't even begin to hint at its potential.

As soon as you use the engine as if you are angry and desperately want to catch the rider in front, or clean an impossibly tight section, then the bike comes alive.

There is enough power to please everyone except the ultimate power freak. If you unexpectedly come across a rut or rock or hole, a slight twist of the throttle is all you need to loft the front wheel across it; logs are the same. The powerplant is so torquey that on hills, you leave it in a higher gear and let it pull; as Chris Cater once quipped of his 390, "it pulls like a fourteen year old." Don't know what he meant, but it fits the picture.

Inside the crankcases are a set of wide ratio gears; no prize for guessing where the WR designation for this model is derived. The first four speeds are the same as the CR, which gives you four closely matched speeds to select from to suit any sort of slower going. Fifth and sixth are meant for the open forest roads found in most events, or any trailride. There isn't one type of riding for which a gear can't be found.



HUSQVARNA 390WR



Apart from that, the engine is the same as the CR390. The 390 is a whole new engine to the 360 — stronger, faster, using better materials. There is no bridge in the exhaust port, which increases the life of the bore because that part of the cylinder always gets hottest and wears most; there are four oversizes available anyway. The piston is a forged unit, which is stronger than the cast type used by the Japanese; there is only a single ring. Bearings used in the conrod have the silver cage which is the best you can get; in the past, Husqvarna made the mistake of using bronze-coloured roller cages in their bigends, for one model year, resulting in untold trouble with bigend seizures. This doesn't happen any more. Gearshifting is very slick when the bike is new, gradually deteriorating with age until you need to apply more concentration with your left boot; the gearlever feels sloppy in the sidecase from new, as a result of using a short replaceable linkage between the outside chamber and the gear-box proper. Husqvarna's reed valve is similar to a YZ's: very good.

The exhaust system is well tucked in except for when you stop at a checkpoint and put your left leg down. After a minute, you'll notice the stench of burning leather. The 390 doesn't have a sidecover on the left like the 250WR. Pity — it needs one. Silencing we could only say is marginal, despite Husqvarna using a double-walled

HUSQVARNA 390WR

Test Bike:

John Burrows, Malvern, Vic.

Phone: (03) 509 9246

Retail Price:

\$2,645 (Vic.) plus rego.

SPECIFICATIONS

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Engine | Single cylinder, air-cooled reed-valve two-stroke |
| Bore x stroke | 83.0 x 71.0 mm |
| Capacity | 384cc |
| Compression ratio | 11.5:1 |
| Lubrication system | Premix |
| Electrical system | Motoplat CDI |
| Starting system | Neutral only, LHS |

TRANSMISSION

| | |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Clutch | Wet, multi-plate |
| Primary drive | Straight cut gear 30/68 (2.27) |
| Secondary drive | 520 chain 13/53 sprockets front/rear |
| Gear ratios (overall): | |
| 1st | 21.8 |
| 2nd | 15.8 |
| 3rd | 12.0 |
| 4th | 9.6 |
| 5th | 7.8 |
| 6th | 6.3 |
| Transmission shifting | LHS, 1-N-2-3-4-5-6 |

DIMENSIONS

| | |
|------------------|------------------|
| Wheelbase | 1425mm (56.1 in) |
| Seat height | 915mm (36.0 in) |
| Ground clearance | 325mm (12.8 in) |

| | |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| Handlebar width | 880mm (34.5 in) |
| Fuel capacity | 11.8 litres (4 more than the CR) |

FRAME AND SUSPENSION

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Frame | Single front downtube, split cradle, chrome moly steel |
| Suspension: | |
| Front | Telescopic, hydraulic forks, 240mm (9.5 in) travel |
| Rear | Swinging arm, laid-down Ohlin shocks, 240mm (9.5 in) travel |
| Wheels and tyres: | |
| Front | 3.00 x 21 Barum knobby, alloy lipless Husqvarna rim |
| Rear | 5.50 x 17 Barum knobby, alloy lipless Husqvarna rim |
| Brakes | Single leading shoes |
| Footpegs | Steel, cleated folding |
| Silencing | Not quite quiet enough |
| Lighting | Headlight, taillight, rear brake light |
| Kill button | LHS, button type |
| Numberplates | Yes, three oval types, OK for enduros |
| Air filtration | Oiled foam element in still airbox |
| Mudguards | Effective for shielding mud, not unbreakable |
| Seating | Very comfortable |
| Throttle | Gunnar's Gasser |

HUSQVARNA 390WR

pipe: the fault doesn't lie in the pipe or the cylinder, because both are fitted with noise deadening features, but it is in the silencer unit itself. Quite simply, Husqvarna owners always have the most trouble at noise tests.

Kickstarting the bike takes a certain knack. When cold, turn on the fuel, then the choke, kick the lever through slowly three times, then give it a real serve: works every time. From hot, one good kick will do. It is best to dismount and use the right leg.

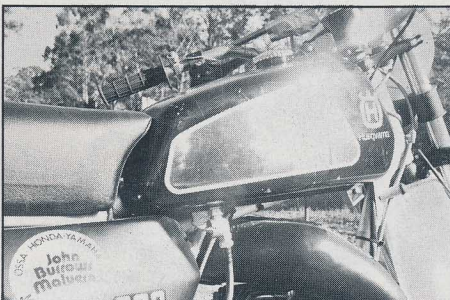
But everything inside those beautiful black cases works in harmony to give you a powerband second to none. If you aren't riding fast, you can't blame the engine.

FRAME AND SUSPENSION

This area is the only one in which we have a complaint. All the other snivels mentioned earlier are, as the factory believes, trivia. But the steering isn't. We found the steering to have a couple of disturbing characteristics.

But first, let's look at the frame/suspension components. The frame has a 30.5° steering angle: this is a full degree more than the 425 IT Yamaha. Theoretically, it should turn. The frame is also strong, flex-free, lightweight and it distributes the weight well: the front is neither light (as were the old 360 Husqvarnas) or heavy (as are PE Suzukis). Suspension stroke is pretty well middle of the road at 9.5 inches.

But when you jump on the brakes as you dive into a corner, the front suspension takes a dive downwards and the



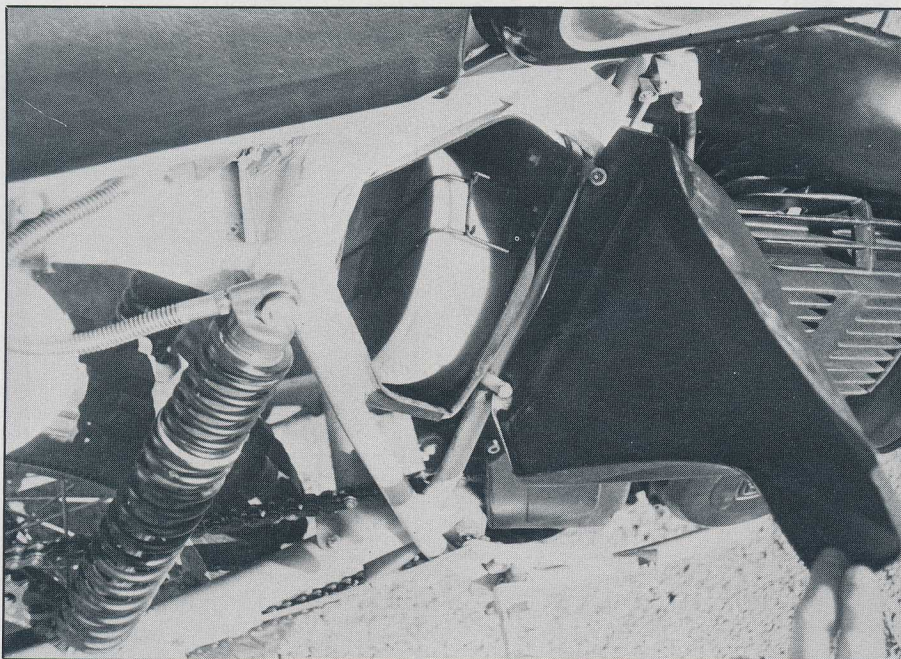
ABOVE

Fuel tank is a suave black painted alloy thing with two sidepanels where your knees normally rub the paint off. Capacity is four litres more than the CR Husqvarna at 11.8 litres. Seat/tank junction is good, seat comfy for extended periods, as it needs to be. Pipe is up out of the way.



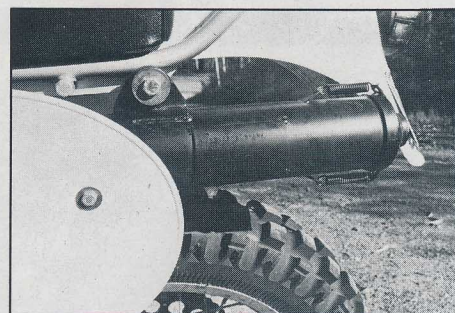
ABOVE

John Burrows (left, bald head) is very fond of his legendary trailrides. These rides are generally more like epics, and they deserve their reputation. If you can't handle the pace, John can't handle you. A simple philosophy, but one which has developed a lot of Victoria's finest riders. Other two ruffians are Howard Pepperell and Norm Watts.



ABOVE

The airbox is one weak point on the Husqvarna. Although it is the easiest filter to service — just fold out the lid, which pivots on two plastic hinges, then pull the rubber strap off — you need to apply a lot of duct tape to keep water out. Once you do, no problems.

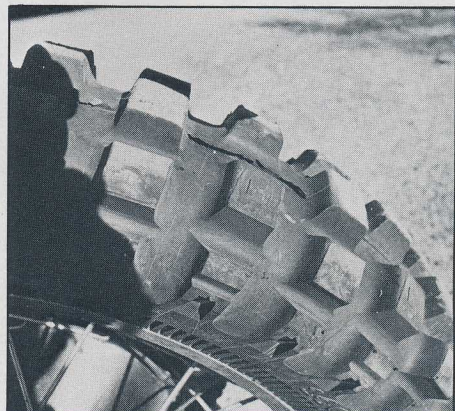


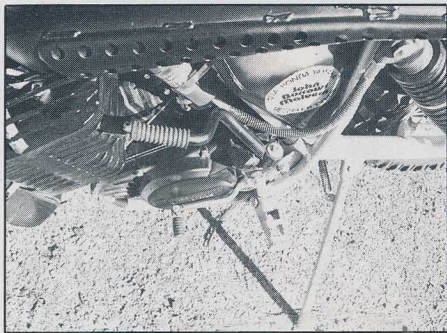
ABOVE

Silencing is very average, and Husky riders always have the most problems at noise tests.

RIGHT

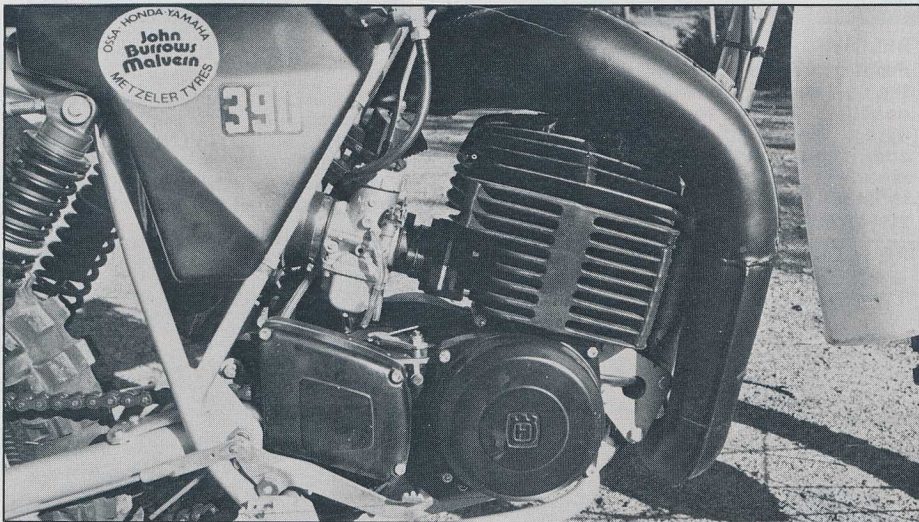
Standard rear tyre is a Barum, with the ultra level of trickery: the Husqvarna logo is moulded into the side knobs! It isn't as good as a Metzeler.





LEFT
Sidestand is very soft and hard to get at, but so what. Riding is what counts with this bike.

BELOW
The heart of the beast is the black magic engine. Power in abundance, but there are no hidden tricks. Easy to get along with, reliable and simply designed. A beautiful engine.



bike acts as if it wants to spit you off by tucking the front wheel under. Not even in 240 kilometres did the feeling disappear. In the end you adapt to it, for sure, but you are never as free to concentrate on racing as a rider with, say, a Maico. Or, if Japanese bikes are all you know, a PE175 or an XL185 Honda.

As well, the steering is decidedly vague in comparison to some other brands (examples of which are, again, the PE175, the XL185, the SWM, the Can-Am, KTM and Maico). You'd have to rank the Husqvarna's steering on a par with the IT425G Yamaha: an improvement over past models, but not as good as others.

As a result of all this you need to learn a basic riding technique to make it all work. That technique is to be aggressive. You need to use one of several aggressive styles when attacking a corner. You either get on the brakes and slide into the corner, square off and blast out; or you look for something to bounce off — any small lip will do; or you dive in, stop-pivot-blast out, squaring it all off. A good Husqvarna rider has learnt these tricks until they have become second nature. And, using them, he is as fast in corners as anyone. If he doesn't use them, he will never find the true potential of the bike.

But everything else about the Husqvarna is a pleasure to use.

The suspension is super plush, as you'd well expect of Ohlins and Husqvarna's own forks. And here is another difference to the CR model: suspension stroke.

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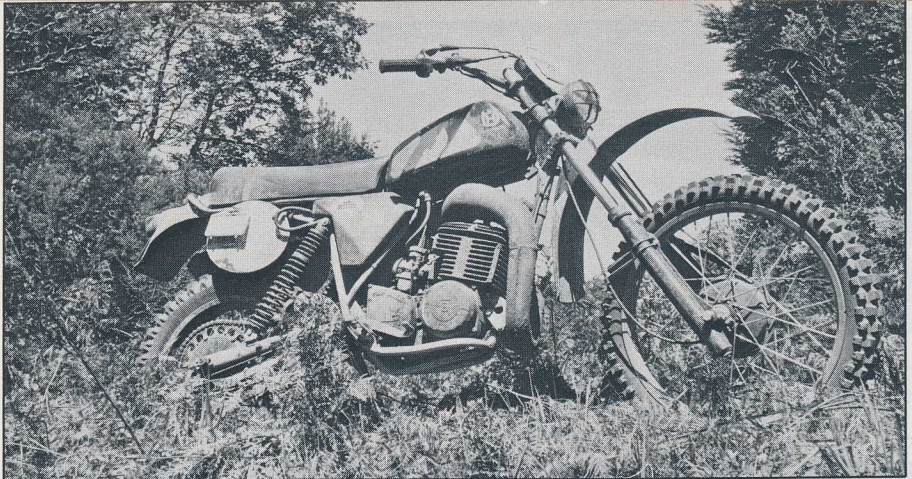
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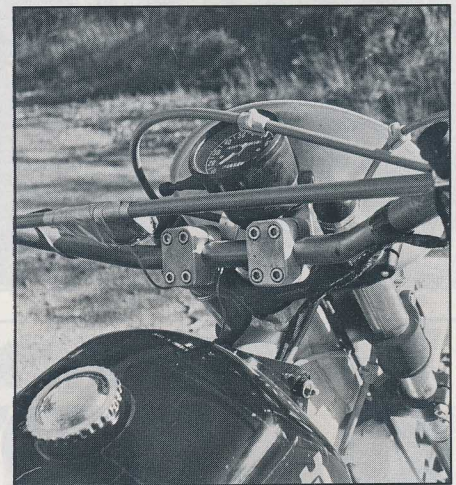
BELOW

Front forks are absolutely superb in their action and their bump absorbing qualities. Perfect for cross-country riding. We found that you had to adapt your riding style to suit the steering geometry and characteristics. Front brake works well until you drown it.



BELOW

Bars are rubber mounted to absorb vibration. Speedo is in mph, but it doesn't say so on the dial. Forks have a good range of movement in the clamping position. Fuel cap weeps a little when the tank is full.



CONCLUSION

The sole purpose of this bike is to get you from point A to point B as fast as possible, with as few dramas as possible, and using the simplest design possible. All else is trivia, and better left to the Japanese to worry about, because they like thinking about details.

In appearance, the bike is lean, stark. Purebred. Even when you sit on it, it feels ready to race. It is taut. And the thing will still feel that way after the most gruelling two-day ride you can give it: that is a funny thing about Huskies. They never seem to get sloppy. Owners are forever saying how everything is all original, or that they've had the same ring in for 18 months, stuff like that.

It's true. With a little care taken to waterproof the airbox, the engine will keep delivering that superb power for a long time. Parts prices are very moderately priced these days, even in comparison with Japanese stuff. And once you change the front tyre for a Metzeler, you will be in seventh heaven.

Right up there next to the few other god bikes.



DON'T STAND STILL

When it comes to boots for dirt riding, there should really be only one question: what offers the best protection at the most reasonable price? We have found that the 20th Century has a lot more to offer the buyer than a remake of an old material.

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