

WHAT I'D CHANGE

- ▶▶ Swap the 52-tooth rear sprocket for a 47 or 48. This expands the gear set without making first gear too tall and allows the bike to do transport sections at 75-80km/h comfortably
- ▶▶ Both the needle and pilot jet are way too rich. I went down two pilots from a 42 to a 38 and I took the stock NOZE/4 needle out and replaced it with NOZG/5. With the head clearance setup, even a NOZH/3 and 35 pilot would be OK. I dropped the needle clip one notch and we went from a 170 main to a 168.



ENGINE

Here's the fun part: this thing isn't like other 250s. I've ridden lots of 250s and never felt one which revs as hard, crisp and clean up top as this one.

Being a technical type, I whipped the pipe off and took a peek inside the cylinder. Inside was an old-school cat's-eyes-type exhaust port with no guillotine, just two eyebrow power valves. It's an old design that all the Japanese makes dropped long ago as it produces lots of top end at the expense of bottom end. Not that it's a problem — the bike certainly has enough bottom end. The motor's just a little different to ride but you end up with a motor that rewards an aggressive rider.

The bike even makes enough bottom end to carry a higher final-drive ratio. I went to a 47 rear sprocket from the stock 52 and it spaced the ratios out nicely and made the gearbox much more usable.

The operation of the gearbox is fine with solid shifts. The alloy shifter is held on with a spline, a screw and a snap ring for triple safety. The ratios are a bit different from the other Euro bikes, with a tall first and second and low fourth and fifth coupled to a MX third gear. This gear set is the main culprit in giving the motor its big hit reputation. The tall first needs a bit of clutch to get going and misleads the rider into thinking the motor has a weak bottom end. It hasn't; it's the gearbox ratios.

The short top gear and MX third and low fourth mean the bike is blindingly quick in the upper gears, as my pal Lumir the Czecho found out when I passed his KTM300 at warp speed, showering him with dirt.

The massive 270mm floating front disc gives the immediate impression that the bike has strong stoppers, and that's certainly the case. This bike has truly awesome brakes. The front is super powerful but very tame in its initial bite,

meaning at the end of a long day in the saddle you won't accidentally lock the front brake. The rear is balanced, progressive and as strong as it needs to be. The roller bearing, billet rear pedal with replaceable tip just adds to the bling.

THE END ZONE

You probably have the idea I'm pretty impressed with the TM250EN, and I am. Lovely ergos, and the motor's a happy, smooth, fast little unit. The componentry is superb. The electrics deserve special mention: both the head and taillights are super bright and safe and the speedo is tiny and trick (a KTM mxc part). The speedo wires are safe inside the front brake hose assembly and overall the bike offers a great ride.

On the downside, there are a few little things that just don't gel. The muffler entry is poorly angled and unpainted and it becomes a rusty eyesore after one wash. The sidestand is a weapon of leg destruction — be careful of it. The chain on the bike is of the only brand I've ever snapped (twice) but seems to be holding up OK.

The plastics are pretty much old school and the motor really does need a redesigned cylinder

head to cope with modern unleaded fuels. The days of 15.5:1 compression and 40 per cent squish bands are over. Then again, it would be perfect on methanol!

My biggest beef is that you need sponsorship from Snap-on to own this bike. It's almost as if they had a contest to use every fastener known to man. There are 3, 4, 5 and 6mm allen screws, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 19, 24, 26 and 32mm hex heads, flat-head screws, TORX screws, Phillips heads — you name it. You'd need two bum bags to ride this bike.

TMs have had a reputation as hard-nosed, hard-to-ride race bikes, mainly because their engines (both four-stroke and two-stroke) of old used to hit so hard. The '07 250EN is a lot tamer than bikes of earlier years and a smaller rear sprocket and some jetting will make this bike as tame as a 250 two-stroke needs to be.

But really, if you're a 250 two-stroke kind of rider, do you want the thing to be too tame? Isn't that what 300s are for? The reality is you could bolt a WFX motor into this bike and the awesome chassis, giant brakes and superb Ohlins suspension would be up to the task.



A trick speedo and classy triple clamps complement the front end



Fuel is carried low in this rocket