

“WE SAID THIS BIKE HAS THE BEST SUSPENSION WE’VE EVER COME ACROSS AND WE’RE STICKING WITH THAT OPINION.”

If you read this mag much you’ll know that me and Dr Dan love TM two-strokes. It’s not a brainless infatuation or anything, we’re way too old for that. It’s more like an appreciation of the finer things in life, in this case explosive performance wrapped in a black and blue package with a lot of clever bits, like billet clamps and hubs, Ohlins suspension and damn near perfect ergonomics.

So yeah, we like TMs, and we don’t just admire the 250EN two-stroke, we reckon it’s the best two-stroke out there and one of the best dirt bikes we’ve ridden. That’s a big fat statement, but it’s not hard to believe once you’ve ridden this bike, particularly in the filthy conditions we had to ride. This test took place right after the two day storm that Newcastle copped in June this year. By now everyone knows, having watched the television news, what happened. Poor old Newcastle copped it all. Cars washed off bridges, a coal ship blown ashore on Nobby’s Beach, houses with roofs ripped off, shopping centres drowned, and eleven lives lost. This storm caused more damage and destruction than the earthquake of 1989. None of us had ever seen wind like it.

And the damage wasn’t confined to urban areas. When Dan and I headed into the bush on the Monday of the Queens birthday long weekend, it didn’t take us long to see that carnage had been partying in the bush. An enormous volume of water had thundered through the trails we normally ride. The native grass was flattened, trees blocked the trail at every second turn and the ruts were as big as canyons. We barely recognised the place.

Normally, knowing how bad the scene is after a big storm, we’d stay home and drink Dan’s beer all day, we wouldn’t go into bush, but

this time we had a deadline hanging over us. These were not the conditions for letting rip on a high, powered two-stroke that can light up too quickly, break traction on snotty hills and launch you at obstacles at insane speeds when it gains purchase. The last thing you want is a bike that’s hard to control when conditions are already out of control, so you can understand why we were, if not a little anxious, at least a little interested to see how one of our favourite bikes would handle conditions that dissuaded anyone else from venturing out. We didn’t see another bike all day.

SO WHAT WAS IT LIKE IN SNOTTSVILLE?

Not as bad as you’d imagine. We’ve tested this model several times now and even when we’re in a shitty mood we can’t find anything seriously wrong with it. The clutch is a little stiff, and the engine doesn’t like starting in gear. Other than that, the characteristics that make the TM good in near perfect conditions make it easy to get on with when you’re knee deep in poo.

For starters, it changes direction like a whippet on speed. That makes it easier for everyone to ride, and particularly those who aren’t experienced or haven’t had much saddle time in tough conditions. The 250EN feels like it’s made from pure helium. It floats over gnarly obstacles that other bikes have to crash and bash their way through. It steers accurately no matter what you’re riding over and deflect. It’s not twitchy, nervous or highly strung, and that’s unusual from a manufacturer who claims that everything he makes is a race bike.

In our experience two-strokes can be physical to ride in gnarly crap because they jump around under you. This bike doesn’t do that. Something that we really like is that despite the filthy conditions we rode in, it just did everything so easily. Riding down hills where you have to choose from the least intimidating of three humungous ruts, or criss-cross them to the bottom, can be a bit nerve racking test for novice riders, but because the TM has such manageable power and such a light feel to it, with a little practice they could actually hoik the front wheel out of a rut and get going again. As we said before, it’s very easy to get this bike to go where you want. You don’t have to fight it all the time.

What this tells us is that TM has learnt an important lesson. They used to give us bikes on which the suspension was so stiff you got arm pump on your driveway. After criticism from us, and no doubt magazines around the world, TM can now make a bike the average Wally can ride without breaking the bones in his forearms. In our opinion this is their greatest achievement.

We know that the guys who bring these bikes into the country have, in the interest of

Below: The powervalve (arrowed) costs about \$800 but makes a world of difference to this engine’s torque delivery. It makes a great bike better.

