



TM 450F



It's Italian, it's expensive but is it worth it?

BY RYAN DUDEK

NOWADAYS, DROPPING TEN GRAND ON A DIRTBIKE isn't so unusual. Average retail for a 450 enduro is sneaking up on \$7500, and by the time you add an aftermarket exhaust, a bit of suspension work, some cool billet parts and a set of custom graphics, you're flirting with that five-digit number. Most current production bikes may not really need all that aftermarket stuff, but it's readily available, and lots of people buy it.

That fact makes it easier to swallow the \$9795 price tag of the TM EN450F e.s., a four-stroke enduro bike that rolls out of the box already equipped with lots of nifty aftermarket components, including top-of-the-line Öhlins suspension at both ends. And just like a factory bike, every TM motorcycle is hand-built at the company's headquarters in Pesaro, Italy.

Some of the EN's more notable trick components are a Reikon tapered handlebar, CNC-machined triple-clamps, blue-anodized Excel rims laced to billet aluminum hubs, billet intake and airbox manifolds, a digital speedo/

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Call the TM expensive and exotic—it is a bike of beauty, priced at \$10K—but it works just like a dirtbike should. Drop it in the rocks a couple of times to get the “new” off, then roost at will. Of course, you can’t go wrong with the Öhlins suspension, even with scuffmarks.

enduro clock and a Giannelli exhaust. Although technically, the EN450F e.s. (for “electric start”) is not street-legal in the U.S., it’s fitted with everything required by some state DMVs, including turnsignals, to make the bike plateable.

TM Racing only builds a very limited number of bikes per year—around 2000 worldwide, and those are spread out over 15 available models. The philosophy is quality before quantity, and the bikes’ scarcity gives TM riders a sense of exclusivity. The strategy seems to work, as 2007 marks the company’s 30th year as a manufacturer.

A high quality of workmanship is evident throughout the entire bike, with numerous custom-made pieces complementing all those aftermarket parts. In essence, TM customers get the very same bikes and trick parts that the company’s factory racers use in Europe.

Powering the EN is a 449cc, dry-sump, liquid-cooled, dohc, four-valve Single driving through a five-speed transmission. The cylinder head is ported and polished—by hand, rather than by machine—then fitted with titanium valves.

Out on the trail, the EN450F engine is the most free-running, healthy-sounding motor of its kind. It’s not corked up like a typical dual-sport engine, but it’s also not as loud as a motocrosser. The powerband is wide and smooth, pulling hard from the bottom all the way up through the midrange and the top end. It’s not exceptionally snappy at lower rpm but is very torquy and difficult to stall. Shifting is easy and consistent; and although the clutch-lever pull is harder than on most current bikes with cable-operated clutches, the clutch always engaged smoothly during our test and never overheated.

If you think aluminum frames are mandatory on off-road bikes, the EN450F proves otherwise; its perimeter-style

frame is constructed of oval-section chrome-moly steel tubing. And it works exceptionally well. The bike is stable when flying low along fast trails, turns crisply on all kinds of surfaces and gives great feedback over rough terrain. It’s also roomy, with a riding position that’s comfortable even for extra-tall riders.

Suspension-wise, TM offers two options: the Öhlins units like those on our testbike, or a Marzocchi fork/Sachs shock combo that drops the EN’s retail price down to \$9295. We only tested the Öhlins setup, and it delivered top-notch suspension behavior under every kind of off-road terrain we sampled. In fact, the harder we rode the EN, the better the bike handled, yet it was plush when just cruising on tight trails. An especially handy feature of the Öhlins suspension is that it comes with its own owner’s manual that gives in-depth set-up tips and adjustment instructions.

There’s excellent braking on the 450, as well, thanks to Nissin discs at both ends. The front uses a full-floating 270mm rotor—larger than those on most other bikes in the 450 class—and the rear is halted via a standard-sized 245mm rotor. Both setups deliver strong stopping power but with progressive feel that makes them easy to modulate. We used the brakes almost continuously down a steep, 4-mile hill and never felt any fade whatsoever.

As nice and as “works” as the TM might be, though, it’s not perfect. We found, for instance, that practically every nut and bolt was over-tightened. We’re not sure if this was how the bike came from the factory or if an overzealous PR mechanic wrenched on it before we received it. What’s more, the right-rear turnsignal is in the worst possible location, directly behind the exhaust outlet, so it got burned complete- >

ly off after just one ride. No big deal, though, since the bike isn't street-legal and doesn't even need turnsignals.

But it does need to run when bounding over rough terrain, where we had a problem with the engine cutting out and stalling. We think this was caused by the fuel petcock; it threads into the gas tank at about a 45-degree angle and doesn't seem to pick up fuel very efficiently when the contents are sloshing around. If we just left the petcock on Reserve, that problem never occurred. Speaking of the fuel tank, its capacity is marginal at 2.1 gallons, with no larger tank available from TM—or anyone else as far as we know. And finally, there currently are just 24 U.S. dealers, so parts availability could be iffy. At least there is always UPS.

Despite all that, the EN450F e.s. is a very capable off-road motorcycle ideally suited to trail riding and all-out enduro competition. With a little tweaking, it could be even better. In our limited time with the bike, we weren't able to compare the EN to the Japanese and KTM 450 enduros, so we can't say for certain how the TM would stack up point for point. But one of our test riders, who wasn't at all unsure, told us this about the TM 450: "It's one of the best off-road bikes I've ever ridden."

Despite that high praise, the TM isn't for everyone. Ten Large is a huge chunk of money to throw down for a dirt-bike, even one equipped with a long list of some of the industry's nicest, most expensive components. But this is not a plug-and-play bike like most of the Japanese 450s; the TM will need some fiddling to get completely dialed-in and a little more maintenance to keep it that way. But if and when you succeed, you should end up with one seriously competent off-road motorcycle. □

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SPECIFICATIONS

GENERAL

List price \$9795
 Importer MotoXerotica, Inc.
 2598 Ballew Ct., Marietta, GA 30062
www.motoxerotica.com

Customer service phone 770/977-5171
 Warranty 30 Day (limited factory warranty)

ENGINE & DRIVETRAIN

Engine four-stroke Single
 Bore & Stroke 95.0 x 63.4mm
 Displacement 449cc
 Compression ratio 11.5:1
 Carburetion Mikuni TDMR 40mm

SUSPENSION

Front suspension:
 Claimed wheel travel 12.4 in.
 Adjustments compression and rebound damping
 Rear suspension:
 Claimed wheel travel 11.8 in.
 Adjustments high- and low-speed compression,
 rebound damping, spring preload

CHASSIS

Weight:
 Tank empty 262 lb.
 Tank full 275 lb.
 Fuel capacity 2.1 gal.
 Wheelbase 59.0 in.
 Rake/trail 25.5°/3.8 in.
 Seat height (unladen) 37.3 in.
 Footpeg height 16.0 in.
 Footpeg to seat top 21.3 in.
 Ground clearance 12.5 in.