



2015 HUSQVARNA MODELS

We did not crack the nod to attend the world launch of the new bikes - but we did have a mate who happened to be there. He shares his insights on the latest from Husqvarna.

Words: Alex Horvath | Photos: Husqvarna Motorcycles

It's around about 11:45pm, the perpetual midnight sun looms low over the horizon, and it's casting a surreal orange glow over the lakeside retreat of Ebbenjarka, Northern Sweden. Over by the lakeshore, Husqvarna's Product Manager, Federico Valentini, sits back in a hot Swedish outdoor bath with PR Manager, Paolo Carrubba and Managing Director, Oliver Göhring. A few of the mechanics, who spent the day tirelessly tooling over the range of 2015 Husqvarna motocross and enduro bikes, are entering the nearby sauna. Meanwhile our local host, Anders, is busily loading steel shotgun shells into

a Winchester 12-gauge for a group of tired but suitably liquored dirt bike journalists who are all attempting to blast apart every clay pigeon Anders has stacked in his shed. As I sit there nursing my beer and reflecting on the serenity of the situation, I can't help but conclude that if anything, Husqvarna sure doesn't lie about their proud Swedish heritage. After 112 years of operation, you can sense the satisfaction of the marque's return to their homeland.

So, after spending the day riding the refined 2015 fleet of Husqvarna motocross and enduro bikes, what did we think? Read on for an insight into just what the new models deliver...

MORE THAN A FACELIFT?

After launching a revamped fleet of Husqvarna motorcycles to the world only 12 months ago, there is no denying that the pressure was



mounting on Husqvarna to deliver a line-up of 13 bikes that would improve upon an already strong platform. Now that the information has been released, and we have had the chance to test the bikes, we can report that while most of the bikes may not have been revolutionised, they have certainly been refined. Husqvarna has once again delivered a fleet of off-road bikes that offer class-leading performance across the entire range.

THE RIDING

The riding complex where the launch was held is located just outside of Lulea. Up here in Northern Sweden, space is ample and population is sparse. So naturally, there is a strong and proud dirt bike culture. The motocross track offers deep dry sand, which is both exhausting and power-sapping at the same time, but it was perfectly prepped and watered the morning of our arrival. Right next to the track, there is a huge expanse of enduro trails that offer tight and technical riding amongst the stunningly beautiful Swedish

birch forest right next to the motocross track. Husqvarna could not have chosen a more perfect location. The club facilities even included a traditional Swedish sauna and shower facilities ... and the reindeer meat they served at lunch ain't bad either.

MOTOCROSS: FC & TC

The biggest change to the TC and FC fleet of motocross bikes has been made with the introduction of a WP 4CS fork, with all-new motocross specific internals. The upgrades to the new four-chamber closed-cartridge fork offer improved damping characteristics as well as a weight saving of 175g over the closed-cartridge fork used for the 2014 models.

During testing, I found it offered excellent rider feedback, and great small bump

damping on the rough sandy track. The improved fork feels particularly good through the mid-stroke, providing excellent feedback under braking and through corners. Early in the day, I came up a little short on a few jumps, giving me the chance to really test the bottoming resistance and deflection of the fork and it performed brilliantly, offering a confidence-inspiring ride. The small clicker tweaks I made were noticeable, meaning that the fork can be easily tuned on the fly to suit changing track conditions or according to individual riding style. Alongside the updates to the internals, the new 4CS fork also gets a 4mm reduction in axle size to 22mm and a shorter shoe offset, providing better front-end feel and improved overall stability. New open-back fork protectors have also been fitted to the new fork, allowing better access for maintenance and cleaning than the previous models' wrap-around style.

WP has also implemented changes to the bikes' rear-end by modifying the linkage geometry, to give a less progressive curve via increases to the rising rate of the

shock. Stroke length was increased by 4mm over last year's bikes and the shock has been revalved to accommodate the changes to the geometry of the suspension set-up. Overall, stability and chassis balance was the most noticeable improvement to the new models. The new suspension set-up gives the chassis an extremely balanced and compliant feel on the rough track and the bikes remained settled over the large braking bumps that formed throughout the day.

The list of upgrades for MY15 goes on to include changes to the rear polyamide subframe. One screw has been added on the airbox side, improving the fitment between the left subframe arm and the airbox. This change is a small one, but Husqvarna's research and development team explained that it offers improved crash resistance and performance.

Ergos of the motocross models remain much the same – a new Neken handlebar is now fitted, but it maintains the same bend as last year. No changes were made to the bodywork, so the Husqvarnas retain the same overall ergonomic feel. Interestingly, the seat retains the dipped 'enduro' style shape as last year, but the seat cover material has been modified giving it a much grippier feel that keeps you way more planted. While the standard motocross seat isn't differentiated from the enduro models, Husqvarna's Product Manager, Federico Valentini, did point out that a stepped seat is available from Husky Power Parts for those who prefer a flatter 'motocross' style seat.

The powerplants in the motocross bikes haven't undergone too much change for 2015. The two-strokes have a revised power-valve setting, engaging at +200rpm over last year's bike. This has created a very tractable power curve that offers plenty of torque low in the revs, then opens up to deliver plenty of power through the mid and top-end. All the TC and FC – except the TC85 and TC125 – bikes come standard with a handlebar-mounted map switch. Switching between the two curves in the deep Lulea sand provided an interesting contrast – the soft curve really took the edge off the power curve and bike got noticeably more bogged on the 'soft' maps in loose sandy sections. The CSS (coil spring steel) clutch found on the FC250 and FC350 has been redesigned for 2015. It receives a lighter clutch basket with less material and updated clutch springs offering more consistent behaviour and a smoother action.



ENDURO: FE & TE

Much like the motocrossers, the upgrades that have been made to the enduro range are more focused on refining an already strong and competitive offering. Husqvarna hopes that by improving a product that is already so strong, they can continue to expand their sizeable and growing market share. Once again, the line-up features two- and four-stroke off-road models from the light and nimble TE125 all the way to the fire-breathing FE501.

First up on the enduro bikes is a new front fender that is the same as the one found on the motocross models. Alongside this change, the CNC machined triple clamps have been modified to suit. The improved design also offers better rider feel and stability under braking. Surprisingly,

this seems to be counter-intuitive to the product differentiation that we heard so much about at last year's launch, but nonetheless, the new fender offers an improved look and easier mounting. The WP 4CS fork remains the same as that found on the 2014 models and hasn't been modified. Graphics have received a touch-up, drawing inspiration from the vintage FE range and they are slightly different to those found on the motocross bikes. The hand guards have also been updated to the new chemically bonded material found on the KTMs, providing better crash resistance and a small weight saving.

The speedometer has received an update, giving it a cleaner and simpler look by moving the warning lights onto the main unit creating a simpler user interface. The rear subframe also gets the



reinforcement on the airbox side, giving better durability and an improved seal. The seat cover is also updated, to the same grippier compound found on the motocross bikes.

Like the motocrossers, changes to the enduro bikes' engines have been minor. The FE250 now gets a taller sixth gear along, with close ratios on fourth and fifth – which is noticeable when the bike is ridden on the road. The small-capacity donk no longer screams its head off at 100-110km/h. The FE250 and FE350 also see upgrades to the DDS (damped diaphragm steel) clutch. The clutch

basket has been redesigned, with excess material stripped out giving it less weight and an improved feel. This was a feature that I really appreciated as the day wore on, and my arms became more and more tired.

TIMING & PRICING

Husqvarna is yet to announce any kind of pricing strategy for the South African market, and hopefully we should have more information over the coming weeks. The 2015 bikes are due to hit our shores soon. As soon as we get our mitts on them, we'll do some lekker features.

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