



Husqvarna test day. Attended by the Caerphilly Club.

August 14th 2014, Freestyle Motorcycles Husqvarna Enduro test day – Llanbister, Newtown, Powys.

The opening of a new shop in a new location, some 300 miles from your established customer base is a daunting prospect, throw in some further unknowns like the future of one of your premier brands and the mix starts to become stressful. Well, from what we've seen, Freestyle are well positioned to become a key player in this neck of the woods that has so much history of off roading.

If you're gonna pick someone to run your new shop in Newtown, an off road Mecca, you need someone who has been there, done that, got the T-Shirt! Step forward Welsh Enduro legend Wyn Hughes, 9 times British Enduro Champion, Enduro team manager and ACU Enduro coach. In the World of Enduro, Wyn has one of the fullest CV's you will find. He's competed against, managed and trained some of the best enduro riders in the World so he knows a thing or two about how to prep for off road riding.

Husky test day

6 Guys from the Caerphilly Club piled into the van for the 2 hour journey north to Newtown for an eagerly anticipated whizz on some enduro exotica comprising several offerings from the 2015 model year Husqvarna range including a TE125, TE250, TE300, FE250, FE350 and the FE501.

Upon arrival at the farm overlooking the test track we were met with the sound of two stroke and four stroke engines singing in the background. For just five of your english pounds we signed on and were pencilled in for the bike (or bikes) of choice. The lads couldn't get changed quick enough and within 10 minutes of arriving were out on the track. TE300 was first up for me and, having previously owned a 300 2 stroke, I was looking forward to riding a newer model after 4 years with a thumper.

Despite the Freestyle team explaining the difficulties they're having getting hold of bikes, they were able to provide a sample of the whole range apart from the FE450 which was parked next to the van looking pristine because someone had put a deposit on it. The slick turnaround meant bikes became available quickly and most of the guys were pencilled in for at least two bikes each but on the night everyone rode at least 3 if not 4 bikes.

The following is my own review of the bikes, and plenty of debate was had on the way home in the van and it was clear that opinions vary but all agreed that the Huskys are great bikes.

TE300 2T: The Leccy start on the 2 stroke was novel and the bike fired up with just a whiff of throttle. The test track was 20 feet from the pits and straight into a sharp left hand uphill which was beginning to rutt. Some whoops turned the track right and into a flat area with soft surface mud and then tight under the trees. The first Impression of the TE300 was how light it felt but wow, what gear do i need, forget first, that was only useful to pull off. Second was just screaming and third seemed to be too high. Some tight turns in the track were a perfect enduro test and allowed the bikes to impress before a left into an uphill whoops section that saw the TE bounce the back wheel and struggle to put the power down. The short climb came to an abrupt end and a turn downhill into a 180 right, the lack of engine braking from the two stroke motor was very evident and an engine stall, when not quick enough on the clutch, stopped play. No problem, leccy start and we were off again, but only to the next corner where too much rear brake, trying to slide the back wheel, and she stalled again. A bit more clutch needed obviously! The track moved into an off camber downhill into a series of whoops that could dump you over the bars if not careful. This being the first lap on an unknown bike, I had to proceed carefully, flowing through the whoops and into the next turn downhill. The TE rides light, moves easily side to side and steers very precisely. A short but rough straight with off camber allowed a pull on the throttle and the TE clearly has power to burn however the early tightness of the course seemed to stifle the throttling and the engine died before dropping into a woods section with a tight rutted turn between trees and a stoney turn. The 300 pulled perfectly through the turn with a little clutch putting the power down. By now in the bottom field the track became faster and picked up on a motorcross track with some tight wooded tracks just to mix things up. The 300 was still difficult to get going, second gear was powerful but flighty, yet third wouldn't pull cleanly unless the engine was revving. As a result third gear bogged down and where the track had short straights the throttle was being closed just as the pipe kicked in. Nevertheless, progress is swift on this machine, no less than five small jumps plus a ride through a drainage pipe finished the back end of the track and this was easily the most exciting part of the course with sweeping corners, jumps and fast downhills, a thrill a minute. Still struggling with the gearing on the 300 I went into lap 2 thinking I'd try to ride the whole course in third but I soon discovered this to be just too high a gear, maybe if you are a faster rider you could manhandle the power but for me, third was just too much, torque yes but flat in the slow turns and by the time it hit the pipe and kicked in, and boy does it kick, I was shutting off for the next corner. Third lap; I thought I'd try second gear. No sign of any flatness here, absolutely wired! Second gear is scary, you need to hang on tight, in the woods it's awesome but you pull the throttle and it goes crazy fast demanding a change up to third which is just too flat. After 3 laps on the 300 I have to say, thanks but no thanks. Great balance, sweet handling and a fine engine and maybe modified gearing would improve things, but I needed to get back on a fourstroke .

Next up? Well, not really sure, originally I was only booked on the TE300. Not to worry, Wyn and team were here to please. I really wanted to sample the 250F and the 350F if possible. So having 'done' the 300 I expected a long wait hoping to pick up the scraps. Someone pointed out that the TE 501F was available to ride but would that be a bit scary! Ah well, why not! I noticed that the 501 had a broken clutch lever, which was ominous, but she fired up in a confident burble and I headed out. On the track I immediately felt at home, this bike is bloody lovely. Mellow, heavy in a good way, you can roll the bike into the turns and power out on the throttle, perfect engine braking allows you to roll down steep descents at speed without touching the brakes and off camber grass tracks are easily negotiated due to the sure footing of the 501 chassis. Engine torque is the key to this beast, it's so

smooth and forgiving yet handles just as good as the lightweight two stroke. On the motorcross track it starts to shine but whoa, careful with the throttle, this thing is a rocket ship. It turns sharp and is beautifully suspended and out of corners the power is sublime, only when you have the space to get some legs does the power start to feel excessive but make no mistake, this baby will throw you through the hedge if you're not careful! Two laps was enough to fall in love with the 501 but also to start thinking about the need for a body building programme!

A short wait around and the Freestyle Team lined up the TE250F, this I really wanted to ride, wondering if the smaller capacity would be a useful trail weapon. The 250 fits the bill for me, free running, fast flowing, high revving, this bike rides light like a two stroke but has the characteristics of a four stroke including engine braking into corners and then power down torque out if the corners. Lightweight means high manoeuvrability, easily flowing into fast corners yet torquey enough in amongst the trees. On the motorcross track the bike tracked wonderfully and had plenty of power and go forward, never feeling slow and taking the jumps with ease. Two laps on the 250 was enough to convince me that this was an awesome bike. All I need now is to compare the TE350F.

Again a short wait and the Freestyle Team offered me the 350. This bike was in demand but I managed to get one lap. Straight away it feels the same as all other bikes I'd already ridden and very similar to the 250, however the extra power is noticeable. It feels light like the 250 but has more grunt, more torque putting the power down. From my point of view it was enough to feel like my KTM450EXC, the power needs to be respected, it can catch you out. On the other hand it provides an awesome all round package, light and tractable, powerful and torquey and ultimately, fast. Very good!

After almost two hours, I'd ridden 4 bikes for a total of 8 laps. All bikes were very good. The Husqvarna brand is well placed, these bikes are up there with the best in the business and world domination could be on the cards. But for the fact that the brand is now owned by a certain Austrian (Orange) market leader, I think we'd see a lot more Huskys in the paddock in the future. For me, the 350F would be my weapon of choice, closely followed by the 501F which would be an awesome trailbike. The 250F would be a close third. The two strokes might be the choice of the serious racer but the TE300 would need some gearing mods but I reckon, in the right hands, it'd be an awesome extreme enduro machine.

Ultimately all of the bikes on test were extremely good enduro bikes, all will sell well and will prove to be a quality alternative to the orange equivalent.

Many thanks and best wishes to the Freestyle Team in Newtown. Thanks to Wyn Hughes for the hospitality and good luck with the new venture.

Overall a fantastic test event, very professionally organised and a great track. Well done Freestyle, thanks from the boys at the Caerphilly Club!

For more info on Freestyle and the Husqvarna range contact Wyn Hughes:

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