

FROM BEAR TRAP TO BARBON!

SINCE DEBUTING AT THE TOUGH ONE WITH A DISAPPOINTING DNF WE'VE COME A LONG WAY WITH OUR RMX450Z LONG-TERM TEST BIKE AND SO FAR IT'S BEEN A PRETTY EMOTIONAL RIDE...

Words by Sully Photos by Ariann Morris

They say there's nothing hurts more than a DNF but after turning his world upside-down, right way up, upside-down, right way up and upside-down again during a practice session I guess The Bear would disagree. Our Art Editor doesn't get to ride dirt bikes all that often and so when he does you can guarantee that there are gonna be LOLs aplenty – like that time he rode into a patch of nettles, or the time he got cross-rutted and rode into a ditch or the time he took the still good-as-new RMX450Z and flipped it out of a corner.

Actually that last moment wasn't actually all that funny because by the time The Bear had finished getting all Larry Loopout on our RMX's ass he'd broken his toe and modified the Suzuki's back end considerably n'all. And so while he hobbled around looking all forlorn as he foraged for competition prizes to guzzle I was forced to head down to the DBR race shop and start a strip search of our Suzuki so I could figure out what we – that means me – needed to repair the 'X'.

Luckily the majority of damage was cosmetic and cosmetic is always easily fixed provided you've got the moolah to throw at it. Unfortunately – in these times of economic despair – this repair job wasn't going to be cheap because the RMX needed a new back mudguard, a LHS side panel, one airbox (who the feck ever breaks an airbox?) and a silencer.

The silencer damage was a bit of a gutter because it was one of those beautifully crafted LeoVince jobbies that looks, sounds and performs amazingly and is also a good bit lighter than the stocker too. At first I figured it'd be okay to keep on running it despite it looking like a banana but it transpires that the core is damaged which means it's sidelined while I search for a suitable replacement. For the time being the stocker's gonna have to do because believe it or not sweet silencers don't just grow on trees.

Because the RMX450Z is something of a rare beast it's not possible to just order up bargain-priced aftermarket plastics but when the stock rear fender has an RRP of £96.57 you know it's time to start looking for alternatives. I figured that since the RMX is a 450 and they look the same, RMZ450 plastics would fit so I ordered up a Polisport plastics box set from Apico and a set of custom graphics from Gareth at Pro-Decals to go on them. Unfortunately for me I found that the RMX450Z actually shares the same plastics shape as the RMZ250 which meant that aside from the rad scoops nothing fit as Suzuki intended – being a dumbass I found this out while trying to fit the graphiced-up plastics. D'oh!

Anyhoo, the good news is that if you're cool with not running the tail light, the RMZ250 rear fender bolts straight on as does the RHS side panel. But because the stock LHS side panel has a little door in it to allow access to the air filter the RMZ panel won't fit without modifying the door flap. Luckily for me The Bear had already 'modified' this area of the machine anyway so I didn't mind 'modifying' it further and I found a solution that worked brilliantly by cutting away some of the old plastic and then riveting an RMZ250 panel to the RMX air box door.

If you do that you basically end up with a huge flap that's hinged at the front of the airbox and bolts in place using the original side panel and seat mounting points. It's a solution that works well, looks better than stock and saves a fortune compared to replacing the stock parts.

The only downside is that you have to further 'open up' the airbox to give the starter solenoid and ECU a place to live but that too was a win-win situation in our case – it negated the damage to the air box and lessened bulk at the back end while increasing airflow to the filter.

Although it was all a bit of a ball-ache the end result was that by using a little smarts we'd turned a £450 plastics bill into an £89 one – plus the price of graphics which are an optional extra anyway. So after a bit of guesswork, some brutal 'modifying' and some bolting back together the RMX was good to go again except that I hadn't finished fixing it just yet...

You may have noticed that I have a bit of a flat track fixation of late and the lure of going racing was proving too difficult to resist. On the verge of buying a very old and very second-hand Honda CRF450 to convert into a flat track racer someone suggested giving the RMX a makeover instead. Hmmm. Could an enduroised 450 be competitive for a rookie flat track racer? There's only one way to find out...

The first items on my list for the conversion were wheels and tyres. Since just before The Tough One we've been running a pair of mousseed-up Hollis Wheels in the RMX and they've performed solidly. It amazes me that the guys at Hollis can retail wheels as good as these for the price they do. For £440 you get a pair of anodised billet 6061 T6 aluminium hubs, laced to super-strong rims with eight gauge spokes. Trust me, these wheels are as good if not better than anything else out there and so when it came to acquiring a 19 inch front wheel there was only one place to go.

The tyre thing was simple enough too as The Pozzani Grand National Championship runs with control tyres – in this case a Maxxis DTR-1s. There's only one company that stocks the tyres in the UK and that's AAA-Racing in the North West so like anyone else who wants to race flat track in Britain I had to buy mine from there. Although they seem quite expensive compared to motocross tyres the DTR-1s last for years and rarely need changing – or so I'm told.

To optimise the bike's handling for flat track use some suspension work was needed so for this I handed the forks and shock over to the comic geniuses at KAIS Performance. I've been a fan of the White's suspension work since forever and the quality of work the boys pop out from their spotlessly clean workshop in Atherton is second to none so it was a no-brainer really – especially when taking into account their experience in lowering motocross bikes for supermoto use and whatnot. I dropped the boingers in, laughed at Johnno and Nick's crazy antics then returned a few days later to pick up my lowered and sweet-handling sussies and laugh at Johnno and Nick's crazy antics some more – sweet!

After that the only additional work needed to turn the RMX into a flat tracker was to remove the front brake assembly, fit a motocross-style front number board and a lanyard operated killswitch. Apico supplied the switch I needed so I wired that in then made a bracket to attach the front plate that came in the Polisport plastics set to. Voila! Time to go racing...

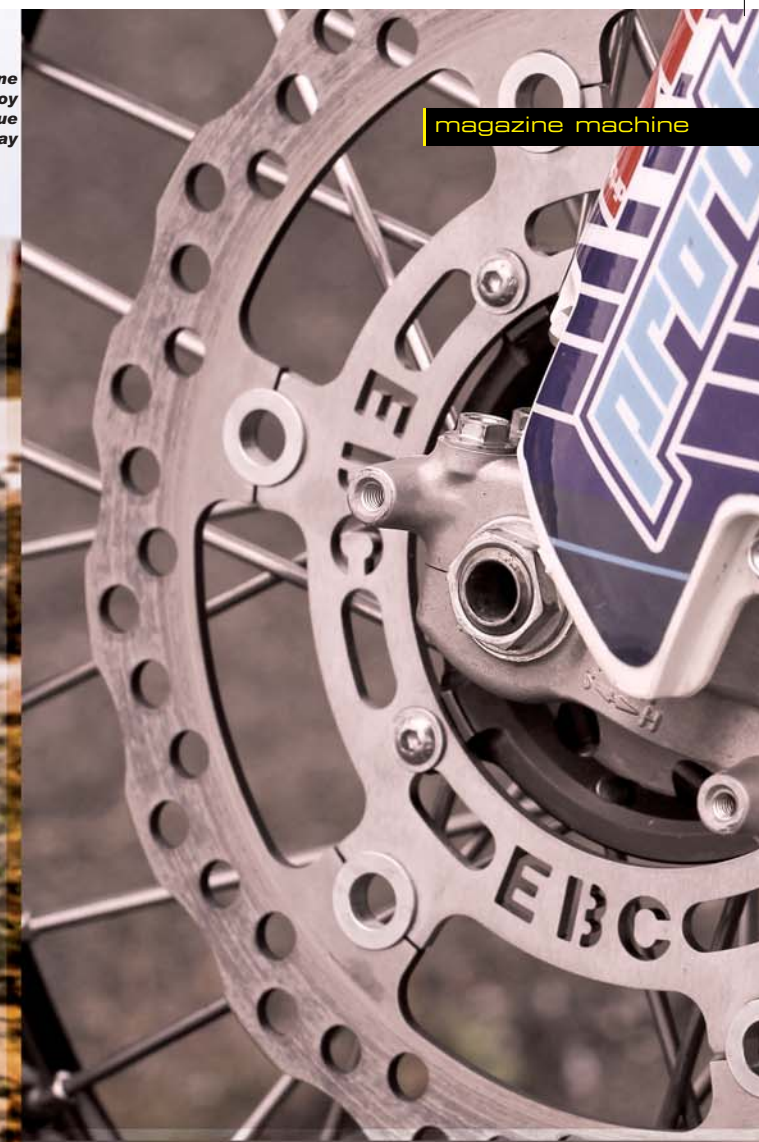
My first wildcard appearance in this year's GNC was all set for round five of the series which was being held at the all-new and very impressive Leicester Lions



The Dawg goes hill climbing at Barbon

© CHRIS HIGGSON

The Magazine Machine takes time out to enjoy Heysham's picturesque Half Moon Bay



magazine machine



Nick White – he's the handsome brother – gets stuck into the rear shock



If he'd been running knobbles Suttly would have railed the bale berm...

Anyone for fat, sorry, flat tracking?

© Chris Hudson

speedway stadium. Arriving with some trepidation my nerves were soon put at ease by the friendliness of the other competitors who despite being hard and unforgiving motherfudgers out on the track really couldn't be any more different in the pits. There's always plenty of good advice and friendly banter being chucked about at flat track races which is much of the appeal – that and all the cool bikes and the full-bore, bar-to-bar racing!

After going out for every practice session I could I felt as ready as I was gonna be for the first of my three heats which would decide whether I'd be making the semis or not. I was thinking that'd be a bridge too far for my first meeting so my goal was to ride as hard as I could in all three races and come away with a smile on my chops. Anyhoo, a first race fifth from the front row followed by a ninth from the rear put me in a position where a good last race might just help me squeeze through to the next round.

With some good advice from reigning British champ Ade Collins – who'd seen where I'd gone wrong in heat two – I started from the middle row in heat three, got an okay start then just kept plugging away on the inside to pull through to third at the finish. Awesome!

That qualified me for a back row start in the second semi. With eight of the UK's leading flat track racers in front of me and three right

alongside I figured a top five transfer spot was gonna be a tall order to fulfil and I was bang on the money. After 10 laps of 100 per cent effort I was rewarded with eighth and a trip to the LCQ where only the top two would go through to the main. Needless to say it was a desperate situation to be in. I had six laps to pull through to second from a second row start against riders who'd had an edge on me all afternoon. Did I settle for a non-transfer position or put it all on the line to try and make the Main Event in my rookie flat track appearance – what do you think?

It definitely didn't go to plan and a bent pair of Pro Tapers, a written off clutch lever and some scratched up plastics were the result of a second blast around the outside that hadn't worked the first time either. Still, a good old highside gave the crowd something to chuckle about and reminded me that crashing dirt bikes sucks. Luckily, I'd landed pretty much square on my ass and although I'd like to say I gave it the speedway lie-down to force a restart the truth is I was incapable of doing anything other than groaning loudly as I sucked some air back into my lungs. Allowed to start the rerun from 20 yards back, I gave chase for a while before realising that my attempts were fruitless.

Super-friendly shale shifter Ade Collins won the points-payer on his HM Plant Honda ahead of Pidcock's Tom Woolley and Italian stallion

Jacopo Monti making it a Honda 1-2-3 while Team Suzuki team-mates Pete Boast and Tim Neave rounded out the top five.

With a two-week break until the next bout of flat track action I had the opportunity to do something very different again the next weekend with the RMX – hill climbing. Now, before I go any further with this I'm not on about hillbilly hill climbing with 20-foot swingarms and paddle tyres but a half-mile sprint up a Tarmac climb with corners at Barbon Manor. It's very popular with the supermoto crowd so super ad salesman Marcus Davies and I thought we'd give it a shot – myself with the RMX still complete with flat track tyres and Marcus on the CR500 he commutes to work on when the weather is right.

Between racing shale on Sunday and sprinting up a strip of Tarmac one week later I had a bit of work to do. First of all I needed to reattach my front brake but rather than just run the stock RMX disc I got on the phone to Nat Brown and Jon the legend at EBC Brakes in Northampton to see if they had anything oversized that might fit the Suzuki and enhance performance – the short answer was yes and they posted out a disc and calliper carrier, some new pads and a clutch kit as well.

I think it's really awesome that British companies like EBC still engineer their race parts right here in the UK rather than outsource the work to China. The quality of

these British products is second to none and the designers are right on the ball too creating awesome brake and clutch bits and bobs. The oversize MX disc kit is a great example of EBC's work – well thought out and well engineered. The thing works well and is competitively priced.

The DRCF clutch kits are incredible too featuring carbon fibre-lined friction plates, pin planished steel plates for better distribution of oil and shot peened, heat treated springs. All in all an EBC DRCF kit adds up to a high performing, long lasting clutch that's all made right here in the UK. Brilliant.

With the EBC parts fitted I slipped in a fresh pair of Pro Tapers, some new grips and then turned my attention to the clutch lever. The stocker was bent out of shape and the perch was damaged too so I lined up a Zeta unit from Madison. While I get excited about EBC bits and bobs the Zeta stuff is off this planet and the clutch lever/perch set is a great example of their work. Multi-adjustable and pretty much unbreakable I expect that the Zeta and I are gonna be friends for life.

With the bike all good to go bar numbers (I made my own for this one-off event with some Fablon from B+Q) I got out the old leathers that must have shrunk over the years – laff! – and loaded up the van ready for Barbon, picking up Marcus along the way.

Like in the flat track world the diversity of bikes that the hill climb offered was immense and although there were a lot of MX-based supermoto machines to look at, the real sweet steel to set your eyes on was the ancient Velocettes, the home-made specials like the

'Eigenbau' which literally means self-built in German and the complete odd-ball machines like the trikes and the grass tracker that some dude from around the corner here in Morecambe slid up the hill on full gas until he came to the right-hand hairpin at the top.

But it's the supermoto bikes that rule the roost – not that there's any of that – with former youth motocross champs Matt Winstanley and Christian Iddon fighting over the hill record all day until the Wigan-based Silicone Engineering Honda rider finally lowers his time to a 25:28 in the Top 15 Shootout. But it's CR500-mounted Paul Jeffrey who takes the overall though as times from each round are scrapped and Winstanley screws up his final run allowing Jeffrey to sneak it for all the two-stroke lovers.

In the battle of the DBR staffers Marcus and his five-tonner four-stroke-eater handed me my ass on a plate beating me and the RMX up the hill by a second – or near as dammit. Fellow flat trackers David Haith and Derek Brindley both powered their CRF450s into the top five of the 'up to 500cc' class and also made the Top 15 shootout n'all – well in boys!

Next on the agenda is a little TT racing – an oddity for flat track racing as the circuit features right-hand corners and also a jump. The week after that comes full-bore flat tracking on a half-mile circuit near Rhyl where Short Track UK series promoter Pete Boast reckons we'll be hitting speeds over 100mph on dirt with no front brake – hopefully the wide-ratio gearbox of the RMX will work to my advantage here.

While travelling so fast off-road sounds scary it's still very exciting and I can't wait!



The airbox modification ain't so pretty on the inside but from the outside (see below) it looks reet...



Nick White - he's the handsome brother - gets stuck into the forks



The new Zeta clutch perch and lever



ROLL OF HONOUR!

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