



KTM, MAICO

# EUROPEAN 500

Pitting the best from Western



AND HUSKY

# cc SHOWDOWN

Europe against each other.

# KTM, MAICO AND HUSKY



Horsepower freaks and holeshot artists rejoice. The Austrian company has produced a big, fast and tire-shredding open class rocketship.



Tons of low end and a strong middle make the Maico the most tractable powerband in the world. Even a beginner can ride a 490.

□ European motorcycle manufacturers make the best open class racers because they believe that 500cc equipment is where it's at! On the Continent, the 500 class is *everything*, and any rider worth his salt rides big bikes. Thus 80 percent of all development and testing goes into big-bores. Japanese manufacturers believe that money is where it's at, and thus they build more minis and 125s than any other classification. The 500cc technology is low on the Oriental totem pole because the sales figures in America for 500cc equipment are considerably less. Europeans believe in 500s.

## BIKES WITH CHARACTER

Husqvarna's new 430CR has built a good reputation for itself. Excellent dual-shock rear suspension and improved 40mm front forks give the Hoosk the components it needs to *fine line* its handling.

Maico built its awesome reputation on superb, razor-sharp handling and superb mid-range and low-end power.

KTM is the white knight of motocross. Capitalizing on its prowess at engine building, the Austrian firm unleashed the new, 495cc short-stroke motor on an unsuspecting public. Cubic centimeters mean tire-shredding horsepower.

Sweden, Germany and Austria are craftsmanship countries. Products built, manufactured and designed in these Western European nations have prestige, quality and big price tags attached to them. If you want the best in power, handling, personality, design and motocross confidence, then you buy one of these three open class bikes. If price, convenience, big shops with flashing signs, and lower-class citizenship in the world of motocross are okay with you, then a big bike from the Big Four is your cup of tea.

## WHICH ONE IS FASTEST?

None of the three European open class bikes makes the same kind of power or admires the others' methods.

KTM uses a short-stroke, big-bore approach to producing tire-shredding horsepower. The KTM 495 is the fastest open class motocross bike made, by leaps and bounds. Third-gear starts are almost required, to guarantee that the 5.10 Metzeler will even make contact with the ground. As you accelerate through the gears, the earth rushes past like the background in a *Road Runner* cartoon. Riding a KTM is life in the fast lane. It is brutal, scary, awesome, unbelievable and unbeatable in a straight line by anyone or anything (except Big Daddy Don Garlits). Most KTM riders drop on a bigger countershaft sprocket to raise the gearing enough so that the power is mellowed out a touch. KTM is in another league—the big league (the other powerbands are bush league).

Maico held the title of Power Monger of the Year for the past few seasons, and although the KTM smokes everything to the first turn, the new, slightly torquier Maico

Maico team, replace the front rim and replace the wheels with stronger spokes.

If the Maico has a major disadvantage it is weight. It tips the scales at close to 250 pounds. Lots of lightweight parts are available to make it lighter, but Maico's concern for strength overrode its interest in weight.

#### **KTM BITS AND PIECES**

White is a bold experiment for America, and KTM has pulled it off. The plastic holds up well, and the numberplate rear fender helps keep things looking sleek.

Although the plastic is sleek, the pipe isn't. It bulges out beyond the shape of the tank and fries the rider's left leg.

The complete rear end of the KTM unbolts to provide easy access to the shock and swingarm. The linkage system connected to the shock is very complex. It has more moving parts than any other system. These pieces must be greased at regular intervals to keep things working smoothly.

#### **HUSQVARNA BITS AND PIECES**

Husky's new primary kickstart motor steps into the eighties, and along with the new cases comes a beefed-up clutch basket and reinforced cases. The reed-valved motor (KTM is also reed-valved) uses a Mikuni carb, which adds points to the Husky side. Maico and KTM use Bings, which aren't as easily jetted, modified or R&Ded in Mikuni-crazy America.

Husky uses an aluminum gas tank, which gives the bike real European flavor.

We have learned to watch the shock bolts on the Husqvarna out-board swingarm mounts. They have a definite tendency to jump off, sending a shock adrift.

#### **THE VERDICT, MR. FOREMAN**

Husqvarna is the best 500cc European motocross bike. It has the best out-of-the-crate suspension, handles well on most tracks and excellently on rough and tough terrain, makes smooth power (although not the most) and brings together all the little details very well.

Maico is a close second, thanks to its great motor. The Maico's easy-to-use power and quick handling make it a better bike for lots of riders at many tracks. On a power-versus-power showdown, the Maico has more power and uses it better, but Husky cleans up in suspension, ties in handling, and generally does the job better.

KTM made the most horsepower, but it was so awesome that few riders could handle it. Handling on the white bike was good but hampered by mediocre suspension and a few niggling problems.

#### **CONCLUSION**

European 500s have character, and the best bike for you isn't necessarily the fastest, best handling or best suspended. It depends on personal tastes, individual needs and track demands. A good local dealer can make the slowest bike the best buy, while a particular riding style could negate the benefits of the fastest bike. Euro 500s are at the top of the field. □

