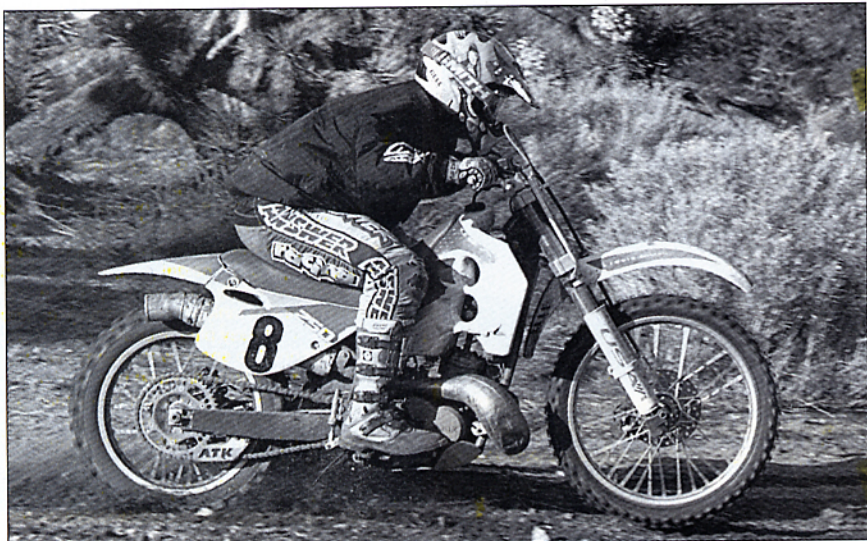






# NOT A T K 250 L Q ANOTHER AIRHEAD!



The ATK does bottom on big impacts but no more so than other machines set up for off-road conditions. At 230 pounds the bike feels very light. The nickel-plated pipe dents easily.

## REAL STEEL, TRICK BITS, ERGOS THAT FIT, HOT LOOKS, AND IT BOOKS!

We saw a T-shirt the other day that read, "If Harley-Davidson made an airplane, would you fly in it?" That shirt led us to muse about the new ATK 250 LQ, and we imagined a shirt that read, "If ATK made a 250cc off-road racer, would you race it?" Of course, ATK has been making a proven and reliable air-cooled 250cc off-roader, but competing in a head-to-head battle with



ATK's new 250 LQ is a strikingly attractive machine. The more closely you examine the details, the better it looks. The single-sided, no-link shock is a breeze to work on.

the potent KTM 250 or Suzuki RMX? Maybe after that transatlantic flight in a single-engine Harley plane.

ATK's all-new six-speed, liquid-cooled 250cc-class off-road machine is another case altogether. ATK could probably sell every 250 LQ they make on looks alone. ATKs have always been hand-built, but many of them just looked homemade. The LQ bristles with exotic materials and excellent finish work that rivals factory supercross bikes. This ATK is a finely detailed, well-crafted racer that finally delivers American ingenuity in a form we appreciate. The LQ is light, comfortable and fast with hot looks and modern performance.

## MOTORVATION

Much of the modern look and feel of the LQ can be traced to the Austrian Ro-

tax engine with '90s technology. The compact power plant features a six-speed wide-ratio transmission, a two-piece clutch cover, a Nikasil cylinder and a unique power valve system. There is no exhaust valve linkage to line up or maintain. A rubber diaphragm and exhaust pressure open the valve. It can be removed and cleaned with the engine together and in the frame by removing one wire bail and two small Allen-head bolts! The engine also has a rotating counterbalancer to smooth out the vibration.

Initial testing proved to ATK that the Rotax engine had all the power it needed to be competitive, and development work centered around getting the motor to produce usable power.

Once the decision was made to use the water-pumper, ATK needed a chassis. They could have cobbled it into the existing 250/406 chassis, but that chassis was essentially a first effort of the company after it moved to Utah. They knew that they needed a chassis that was physically smaller with less flex, better handling and improved suspension.

The chassis they arrived at has modern ergonomics that let a variety of body types get comfortable quickly. They improved the suspension and the handling by stiffening the frame. The subframe is not removable, and the swingarm pivot is boxed in like other modern frame designs. The single WP shock mounted on one side of the swingarm called for extra measures of strength there. The new swingarm is fabricated from chrome-moly steel plate into a very strong and rigid shape, which is

## WHAT'S NEW!

- Light, compact chrome-moly steel frame with boxed swingarm pivot—even the gusset plates and mounting tabs are chrome-moly
- Swingarm fabricated from chrome-moly plate and heat-treated for strength
- Powder-coated frame and swingarm
- Strong wheels with gold anodized machined-billet aluminum hubs, stainless steel spokes, D.I.D. rims, sealed bearings and captive wheel spacers
- Strong, quiet chain guide
- Billet aluminum triple clamps and steering stem
- Six-speed, wide-ratio, liquid-cooled 250cc motor with Nikasil cylinder lining and gas-operated power-valve
- Nissin brakes front and rear
- 3.1-gallon fuel tank
- Michelin tires standard



then heat-treated for additional strength.

The frame and swingarm have returned the shock to a location closer to the original ATK design, and the shock and fork are the latest offerings from WP. The fork has a rebound adjuster on each leg, but the compression adjuster on the brake side controls low-speed damping, and the adjuster on the bottom of the throttle-side fork leg affects only the final three inches of travel.

## PLASTIC WORLD

Plastic parts on the bike come from everywhere. The fenders and sidepanels are from Acerbis, the seat base from KTM and the tank and airbox from the USA. The beautiful Talon-hubbed wheels are super strong and are complemented by an Answer Radialite sprocket, Answer ProTaper handlebar, D.I.D O-ring chain, Twin-Air filter, FMF silencer, ATK's own nickel-plated pipe and the Mikuni TMS carburetor.

## SUM OF THE PARTS

As we mentioned earlier, this bike could sell on looks alone, but it won't have to because it works! Our first impressions were good ones. The small left-side kickstarter is fairly easy to use, the en-

gine starts easily, and the sound level is in the ballpark (unusual for two-stroke ATKs). We had to look for terrain that made first gear useful, but we found a couple of nasty rock waterfall canyons where the super-low tractor gear was



On trails that are just a little open, the ATK starts to shine. The suspension is very good in whoops, the standing ergos are superb, and the large tank is slim and comfortable while riding.

welcome. We started from a dead stop in second gear on the flats and found there was still heart-stopping top speed on tap in sixth. ATK gave us a 14-tooth countershaft sprocket, which we felt would tighten up the wide spread between second and third gears that had us either overrevving second or bogging in third on the trail.

The new sprocket went on, the chain was adjusted, and we were much happier. That change allowed us to do most trails in third and fourth gear. It isn't necessary to do a lot of shifting since the power pulls so long in each gear, but the ratios seemed very usable. The shifting was a

## WHAT'S HOT!

- Easy access to spark plug from both sides
- No-maintenance rear suspension. No linkage to service, and swingarm rides on sealed ball bearings with additional O-ring seals
- Well-thought-out ergonomics and low seat height
- Excellent, easily adjusted suspension
- Comfortable fuel tank with excellent range and easy plug access
- Blistering top speed with granny low
- Very light, flickable feel
- Standard Answer ProTaper handlebar
- Radiators protected by fuel tank
- Stable chassis geometry that still turns
- Good off-idle chugging power with massive high-rpm boost

sore point early in the test, but it improved with miles on the engine and an oil change to Motul. On the last day of riding we missed no shifts at all. Bending the Magura clutch lever closer to the bar ended the clutch complaints.

## GETTING A HANDLE

We had riders in the 160-200-pound range ride the bike, and they all found the suspension plush and easy to deal with. We set the sag at 95mm and rode. The standard fork compression adjustments are fairly coarse, so one click makes a definite difference. We did find some hardpack stutters that made the fork feel a bit harsh, and we found some rock steps that we thought a Yamaha WR250Z rear end handled a bit better, but otherwise we were thrilled with the ATK suspension. Several riders commented that the LQ went through whoops as well as any bike they had ridden. The relationship between the handlebar and pegs is excellent for a standing rider, and no doubt that helps the bike feel comfortable at speed. Also, the large tank is thin enough to grasp easily with your knees.

The whole feel of the chassis is super light and responsive. We didn't get the ATK to steer as tight a line as we wanted,



Top marks to ATK for using the Answer ProTaper handlebar, Talon hubs, Michelin tires and WP fork.

## WHAT'S NOT!

- Clutch action requires too much lever travel
  - Must back off throttle to shift
- Seat foam is soft and too low for taller riders
  - Front brake needs more power
- Pipe is vulnerable to damage on right side
- Front half of tank graphics are vulnerable
- Midhit is soft and lacks snap out of turns



but relaxing the low-speed compression adjuster on the lower part of the left fork to number two and installing a Dunlop K490 front tire helped. A firmer seat, which let the rider get a little more forward, also helped. The standard foam is too soft for our tastes, and we sunk into the pocket of the seat. Overall, the handling is a nice balance of good stability and decent cornering traits.

## TRAIL TIME

Once we got on the trail we found that the LQ worked very well in slow, tight going. The engine can be ridden like a trials bike at low rpm. It had good grunt and very little wheelspin. The LQ also excelled in lightly open trails where the long, smooth power and stable chassis shine. In terrain that required the midhit to help with the cut and thrust and where there were many direction changes, the ATK was at a small disadvantage. Serious boost is only available at higher rpm. The midrange could use more meat to let you ride a gear tall and use the clutch. As it is, we often found ourselves using the gearbox to keep the engine on song, rather than just touching the clutch.

## NO FEAR!

Despite the traits that required acclimation, the ATK is a serious and viable off-road machine. It has a lot of power, an excellent tank with excellent range, a versatile transmission and very good suspension. It feels as light as a 125 on the trail, and our bike held up very well. In addition to being a very good machine, the ATK allows the consumer to buy American at a very competitive \$5145 price and still win races. If you aren't competitive on this ATK 250, it isn't the bike! **DR**



The U.S.-made 3.1-gallon tank requires a petcock on each side, but it holds plenty of fuel, it's skinny where it needs to be, it protects the radiators, and the spark plug access is as good as any we've seen. Good job, ATK!