

1999 ATK 490 ENDURO

Not your father's 490

By the Staff of DIRT BIKE

Times, they are a'changin', and ATK is banging the gearbox to produce new, exciting motorcycles for 1999. ATK has to, if it is to remain the Harley-Davidson of off-road. Just as there are boom times now, ATK's route may well become a rough one in the near future.



Even the smallest jump bottoms the Paioli fork, as it falls through the travel quickly with stock settings. The PDS shock isn't as soft as the fork. For moto, crank in the compression clickers at both ends.

Like riders racing the trail to beat a summer thundershower, ATK is racing to get new bikes to the consumer, new models like the 490 Cross Country and Enduro, the 50MX and Cross Country, and a 500 Dirt Track to go with the successful 600.

This race is due to Harley-Davidson, its many clones and the government that oversees the nation's transportation system. The proliferation of Harley

clones, of custom-built look-alikes, has awoke a sleeping dragon—the Department of Transportation. The DOT called ATK this summer and laid down the law—no more quasi-legal street bikes! If the DOT lets ATK continue to produce minimalist dual-sports, then it can't lower the boom on the Replica-glides.

So, ATK simply removed the turn signals and mirrors from its enduro line. The wiring harness, speedo, and DOT-approved lighting are still there, and ATK has no control over a customer adding signals and mirrors and a license plate, but ATK can't condone such practices. To produce a legal D-S now, ATK has to meet all EPA standards, and it has to meet CARB emissions to be legal in California. This will cost big, big bucks.

Doing so would be risky, indeed, because Harley-Davidson is currently negotiating to buy KTM. The Austrian firm nearly folded in '91 but produced some 27,000 motorcycles in '98. It's planning to build another factory and build 40,000 bikes by 2000, and Harley is excited about KTM's new models like the revamped RXCs and YZF-like 400. This could spell rough trail ahead for "America's other motorcycle company."

ENTER THE NEW ATK

Stick a 8mm smaller piston into the existing 605, and what do you have? Rondo predicts a lot of blow-by! Seriously, sleeving down the 605 has produced three new ATKs for 1999, the stripped-down Cross Country, the lit Enduro, and a smaller version of the 600 dirt-tracker. All have a 89mm piston and sleeve instead of the 600/605's 97mm combo. Stroke remains at 79.4mm, so the 500-classes are still oversquare. ATK went to a 38mm Dell'Orto for all of the 500s, while the bigger Rotax mills get a 40. Compression is slightly lower, too, at 9.2:1 vs. 9.5:1.

Gear ratios, cam timing and such are the same for the 605/600DT and 490/500DT. ATK did massage the clutch some, for a lighter pull and smoother action at the lever on all models.

Next to the new engine class, suspension is the biggest ATK news for 1999. KTM went to a WP Progressive Damping System on its two-strokes, so ATK picked up the Ohlins PDS for its '99 four-strokes. PDS provides progressively stiffer damping, in case you forgot, by using two pistons and a tapered needle to increasingly stiffen resistance as the shock is compressed. A Paioli 46mm conventional fork is mated to the PDS Ohlins shock.

Aside from Bold New Graphics, the '99 ATKs also get Bold New Pricing and Bold New Financing. A strong dollar means ATK gets its components at a better price, so price tags have dropped some \$500, and factory financing can put you on an ATK for as little as ten percent down and \$99/month.

DIFFERENT KIND OF POWER

Compared to the 605, the new 490 engine trades some of the stump-pulling torque for quicker revs. The 490 climbs onto the cam easily and has good throttle response in technical sections. It doesn't quite have the midrange thrust of the bigger piston, or the log-leaping low end. It's not as tame as the 350 Rotax mill, though. The 490 has enough bark to lift the front end over obstacles without having that big, booming feel of the 605.

On top, the 605 makes more power than the 490, sure, but the 490 is more pleasant at revs. It doesn't vibrate as heavily as the 605 or guzzle fuel as quickly. The 38mm Dell'Orto seems to provide crisper throttle response, too. Oddly enough, the 490 shifts a bit easier than the 605, too. It must be a power thing; less of it places the tranny under a lighter load, so it'll take the next gear easier than the 605.

PUTTING IT TO THE GROUND

Gear ratios in the tranny and overall gearing are excellent, as there are no big gaps to overcome, and the final gearing allows the 490 to plonk at a walking speed in first and make your eyelids flap in fifth. We've experienced other downsized models where the smaller piston couldn't overcome gaps in the gearbox, creating a bog. Not so with the 490.

Past Rotaxes have had a relatively weak clutch, and the 490 has the same ancient design. Although the clutch pull is lighter than past models, it still has a lot of throw, and the bike lurches when you put it in gear. Do not put it into gear until the 30-second board turns sideways, or it may decide to creep into the gate before it falls. Granted, a 500cc four-stroke doesn't need a lot of clutch on the trail, but we would like to see some updates, or even a hydraulic clutch.



If you're going to go the dual-sport route, then the new ATK 490 Enduro will get you to sign-up. If you're strictly dirt, opt for the stripped-down XC.



Improvements in suspension action help put the power to the ground. The Ohlins PDS shock does a pretty good job on square-edged hits and the small trail junk, as it moves freely in initial stages of travel. It becomes noticeably stiffer in later travel, but it still bottoms on big whoops and such. We didn't notice any bad habits from the rear end. This is a big change from the KTM PDS shock of '98, which was pretty harsh on the two-stroke Katooms we tested. We don't know whether ATK/Ohlins revised the blow-off circuit or the added weight of the ATKs overcame the stiff valving. Frankly, if it works, why think about it at all?

Up front, the Paioli conventional fork is a good mate to the shock. The 490 feels balanced and planted on the trail, and the front end doesn't deflect on big hits like softer-sprung models of the past have. The 490 tracks straight on hard-packed whoops and in sandwashes.

A SIDE ORDER OF HANDLING

While the suspension and engine work well together, weird science has some odd effects on handling. The bike corners pretty well in most situations. It's neutral feeling and sure footed on slick surfaces, but ruts make the ATK a real handful. It tries to climb out of every rut, and there doesn't seem to be any rhyme or reason as to which way it'll go next. It also has a tendency to stand up in

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The Paioli (pronounced pay-o-lee) fork may be Euro-made and conventional, but it has bona fide Kayaba internals. The ATK also has real stainless brake hoses, Talon hubs and Excel rims.

midturn. We can't quite put our finger on it, but it seems to be a frame thing. The single-sided frame loads and unloads in weird ways, but it's most noticeable in ruts and choppy sweepers.

Overall, the left-side frame takes some initiation time. It sticks out on the left side and gets hot as the engine oil does. ATK added a frame guard to alleviate the heat, but that makes your left leg bow out even more. When you look down on most dirt bike frame backbones, they go straight from the tank to the steering stem. The ATK comes in from the left, creating the optical illusion that you're turning when you're really going straight. Bizarre.

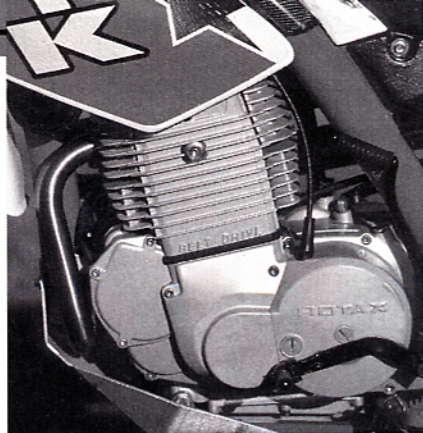
If this is your only bike, you won't even notice what we're talking about. But, if you have other dirt bikes in your stable, the ATK feels really weird for the first few miles. It's nothing bad (except for the rut thing), but it does feel funky.

BITS & PIECES

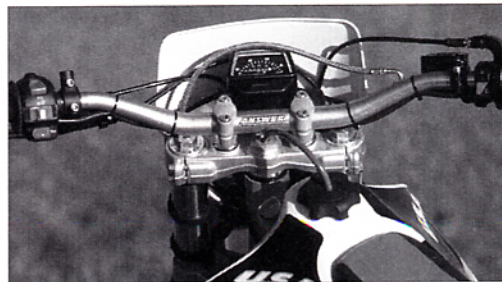
- Brakes are only average. The rear requires a lot of pressure, and it chatters during downhill braking. The front feels a bit spongy.

- Unlike the WP and Marzocchi conventional forks, the Paioli fork has its compression adjusters at the bottom of each leg and rebound (tension) clickers on each fork cap.

- The speedometer, control pads, horn and keyed ignition are excellent stuff. It seems a shame not to add turn signals and a mirror for dual-sport legality. Those wanting to go the other way



An 8mm smaller piston makes the 605 into a 494. The carb is 2mm smaller. Although the crank and rod are the same, the 490 vibrates much less than the 605.



ATK can't condone licensing the 490 Enduro for the street, but all of the dual-sport hardware is still there, except the mirror and turn signals. If you don't go the street-legal route, some strippage is in order, as it weighs 296 pounds!

(stripping it for lightness) should go for the Cross Country model instead.

- Be careful with your fuel planning on long trips. The reserve has so little range that it might as well not have any at all. When you go on reserve, you had better be less than five miles from the truck or the nearest gas.

- With billet hubs and triple clamps, Pro Taper bars, an Ohlins shock and SuperTrapp muffler, the ATK 490 is a full-on works bike in dual-sport trim. In fact, the trick aluminum airbox is welded to the subframe, making it a monocoque of sorts.

- DOT-approved K490 and K737 knobbies do a great job in the dirt and a decent job on pavement.

- The electric-start button is cool. Retaining the kick starter in case the battery runs down is even cooler.

RETURN OF THE 490

Where the 490s of old were violent, finicky beasts that caused a world-wide shortage of plaster, the new 490 is much more mellow and user friendly. ATK was smart to sleeve down the 605 to create this class of thumpers, as the 490 Enduro is fast without being a monster. It's like 605 Lite—it goes great without shaking out your fillings. The 490E is a real dirt bike, America's dirt bike. Think of it as a Trail-Glide. □

ATK 490 ENDURO

Engine typeSOHC, four-valve, air-cooled four-stroke

Displacement494cc

Bore and stroke89.0mm x 79.4mm

Carburetion38mm Dell'Orto

Fuel tank capacity3.6 gal. (13.6l)

Gearing15/48

Lighting coilYes

Spark arresterYes

EPA legalNo

Running weight w/ no fuel296 lb.

Wheelbase59.0" (1499mm)

Rake/trail27°/4.7"

Ground clearance13.0" (330mm)

Seat height36.5" (927mm)

Tire size and type:

Front80/100-21 Dunlop K490

Rear110/100-18 Dunlop K737

Suspension:

FrontPaioli 46mm cartridge, adj.

reb./comp., 11.8" (300mm) travel

RearOhlins PDS aluminum piggy-

back, adj. preld./reb./comp.,

13.2" (335mm) travel

Country of originUSA

Suggested retail price\$6995

Manufacturer/distributor:

ATK America, Inc.

1164 W. 805 N. Centerville, UT 84014;

(801) 298-8288