



## 2002 ATK Motard 600

### 'round town scorcher

It is sometimes easy for Americans to ignore some of Europe's stranger sports. After all, with their itty bitty coffee cups, \$5-a-gallon gasoline and Toyota Tercel rally racing, it might even be easy for us to make fun of them a little. Not macho enough for our tastes. But I think we Americans are missing the boat on something. In the early '80's, right here in the States, a very strange form of racing was started called superbikers. It was popular for a very short time but then faded and was taken up by our friends with the small coffee cups, mainly the French, who renamed it Supermotard racing.

To quickly summarize the Superbikers/Supermotard style of competition, it is basically road racing a motocross bike that has big brakes and street tires on it. The genius here is the safety, fun and affordability of this sport. Single cylinder bikes will rarely hit even 100 mph on the longest of straights, so by today's road racing standards, you can't have a high speed accident. Supermotard tracks are more or less like our American go kart tracks, very tight and self-contained which makes it great for the spectators and fun for the riders since the element of life-and-death fear really doesn't enter into game as it does in American flat track racing or any kind of large displacement road racing. Most racing is done in the 40 to 70 mph bracket. Finally, a \$3000 used KX500 Kawasaki dirt bike with slicks and a large front rotor puts you in the game. Carbon fiber and titanium add ons aren't necessary when you start out at around 250 lbs wet weight.

That brings us to the subject of this article, the 2002 ATK Motard 600. Powered by the 598cc Austrian single overhead cam Rotax air-cooled single four stroke, this dirt bike with lights shares motors with the American flattracker's 600cc class Harleys. In fact, ATK makes a flattracker for this class and it just won the national championship. The five speed tranny brings about 50 crank-

shaft horsepower to the rear wheel through a who's who list of top shelf chassis and suspension components: Talon wheels, Excel rims, Brembo brakes, Ohlins shock, WP forks, etc, etc. Only the best parts available are considered for this low production, hand-made piece of art. When the bike is wheeled in front of you, it looks like a very expensive watch: everything in the right proportion but with quite a bit more glitter than average.

Putting these parts into a whole is the work of a small Utah-based company called ATK, which is a German acronym for an ingenious chain tension/detensioning device invented by company founder Horst Leitner and used on the first few models in the early '80's. The company mainly made desert racing big singles that charted wins in several off road venues. Chris Crandall won the Barstow-to-Vegas race in 1987 on an ATK and Ty Davis won the White Brothers World Four Stroke Motocross Championship on one in 1991. The company went through a couple of owners but is now in the hands of Frank White. The big four stroke single is still the star of the line up, but watercooled two stroke 250cc/260cc enduro models and a small 50cc now stand along side their large sibling in the lineup.

The ATK has been powered by one version or another of the Rotax four stroke single since 1985. ATK stuck to this formula of a high end, innovative chassis with a big single because they knew they had a winner. It would take the rest of the world a little time to recognize this. Eventually, many other manufacturers in Europe made similar bikes and the European Supermotard series is now on the brink of major spectator success, since many factories now have a financial stake in the game. Husqvarna, VOR, Gas Gas, Husaberg, CCM, Highland, and others all sell Motards in their lineups while customers take dirt bikes from KTM, Yamaha, Honda, Suzuki, Kawasaki, and Aprilia and convert them to Motards. All of a sudden, a



convert them to Motards. All of a sudden, a sport is born with over 8 manufacturers having a chance to win - this is more than any other motorsport I can think of. Most sports end up dominated by just three or four brands.

So where do big singles fit in in the American scene and how does the ATK stack up? Unlike Europe, where singles are used for transportation, in the USA the single streetbike is usually a second bike, used on weekends for quick trips when backing the dresser out of the garage is too much of a pain. I commuted for two months on a single four stroke and pretty much found it to be the quickest mount available between any two inner city points. Abrupt acceleration and nimbleness make darting around and between cars a breeze and if curb hopping is ever necessary, the 13" of ground clearance means slowing down is more or less optional.

Other manufactures have added watercooling and gained about 7 or 8 horsepower on the air cooled singles. ATK has taken the direction of continuous refinement and simplicity. The Rotax 600 has a counterbalancer in the engine and transmits very few vibes to the rider, way fewer than the comparable watercooled, higher tech KTM Duke. The ATK comes with a 40mm carb and SuperTrapp pipe so no upgrading is necessary. Flattrack racers get about 20 additional horsepower on top of the ATK's 50 or so. This shows that the Rotax design is robust and well-developed. It should go thousands of miles between rebuilds and the aftermarket is well stocked with go fast goodies since the engine has been the staple of juniors and seniors in the AMA lineup for years. The other advantage of sticking to the Rotax air cooled single is reliability. This engine has been in service for years. The U.S. military uses the 500cc variant in its bikes, though it detunes them down to 26 horsepower to keep the recruits from wheelying.



Only the long of inseam need apply, as the

motocross suspension raises the bike to tiptoe status even for six footers. The rear Ohlins shock absorbs every single thing you can throw at it. It feels like it has zero stiction. Every crack, crevice, pothole, braking rut, and driveway rise is completely and silently absorbed. The forks were almost as good and probably needed a few more hundred miles to rival the rear end. The electric start Motard fires up easily, warms up quickly and sounds healthy. The EPA and DOT are much less strict on small manufacturers so you really get a race bike with lights including carburetor jets with big holes in them.

As I coasted down my driveway to begin this test, snicking the bike into first revealed the only problem I would find with the bike. The gearing is a little too low for the street, I'd spring for a one or two tooth larger countershaft sprocket. That was to be the extent of my criticism of the ATK. The bike was smooth and powerful for its displacement and compared to its competition. Getting a hopped up single not to vibrate takes both science and art. The ATK seems several notches above its competition in this area. The expensive parts mentioned above work together to give the rider a feeling usually reserved only for racers; the feeling that each part on the bike is as strong and light as possible, that each functional item is the best available. This high end parts shopping and super high quality feel brought back racing memories since the ATK has no compromises and that is very rare for a street legal vehicle.

I predict that the USA will reim-port Supermotard racing in the next few years. The series in Europe has its first major television contract this year and the first few races have been hugely entertaining for the crowds. You don't have to be in world class physical shape as you do for motocross so older guys have a chance. No tracks would have to be built in the USA since go kart tracks are perfect and most cities have them already. If the racing shows up, the \$7595 ATK will be race ready. Add a lumpier cam, smooth out the ports a little and head out to the track. If the racing doesn't make it here or that's not your cup of tea, the 600 Motard can be used as a super effective inner city commuter. Or, by simply changing tires on the back and the front wheel over to a 21" model, you can have a world class, 284 lb. offroad bike in about an hour and half. There is no fat on the ATK. Chucking the lights only takes off about three pounds. Drink two less beers the night before, skip the nachos and leave the lights on.

For the dealer nearest you, check out [www.atkusa.com](http://www.atkusa.com). There are several Harley dealers that have taken on the ATK dealership, the tie in with AMA dirt track racing has helped ATK here. We are considering the franchise here at Barnett H-D.

- Mark Barnett