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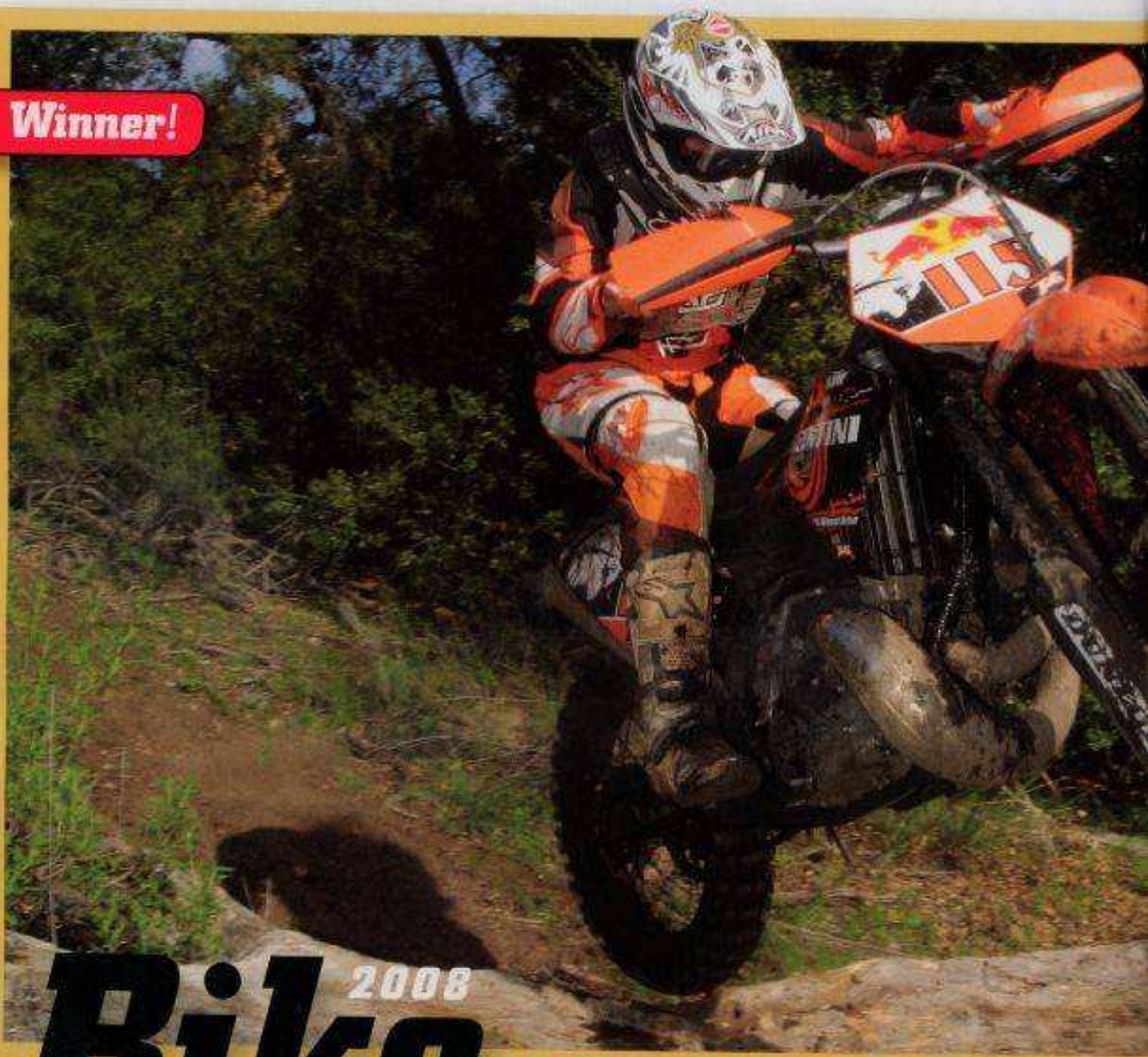


A SOURCE INTERLINK MEDIA PUBLICATION

KTM'S SINGLE BEAST
THE 690 HITS THE DIRT

DR. DIRT: GET YOUR HANDLEBARS DIALED IN

Winner!



2008 **Bike** of the

We were careful on this one. Sure, the tech heads wanted to crown the Christini AWD as Bike of the Year based on innovation alone the minute they saw it, but the hard-core riders demanded to ride it. And ride it. And ride it. Because that's what we all do, and jumping to conclusions has gotten us into trouble before. No, we don't seem to recall that, did you mutter, "Cannondale"?

Year

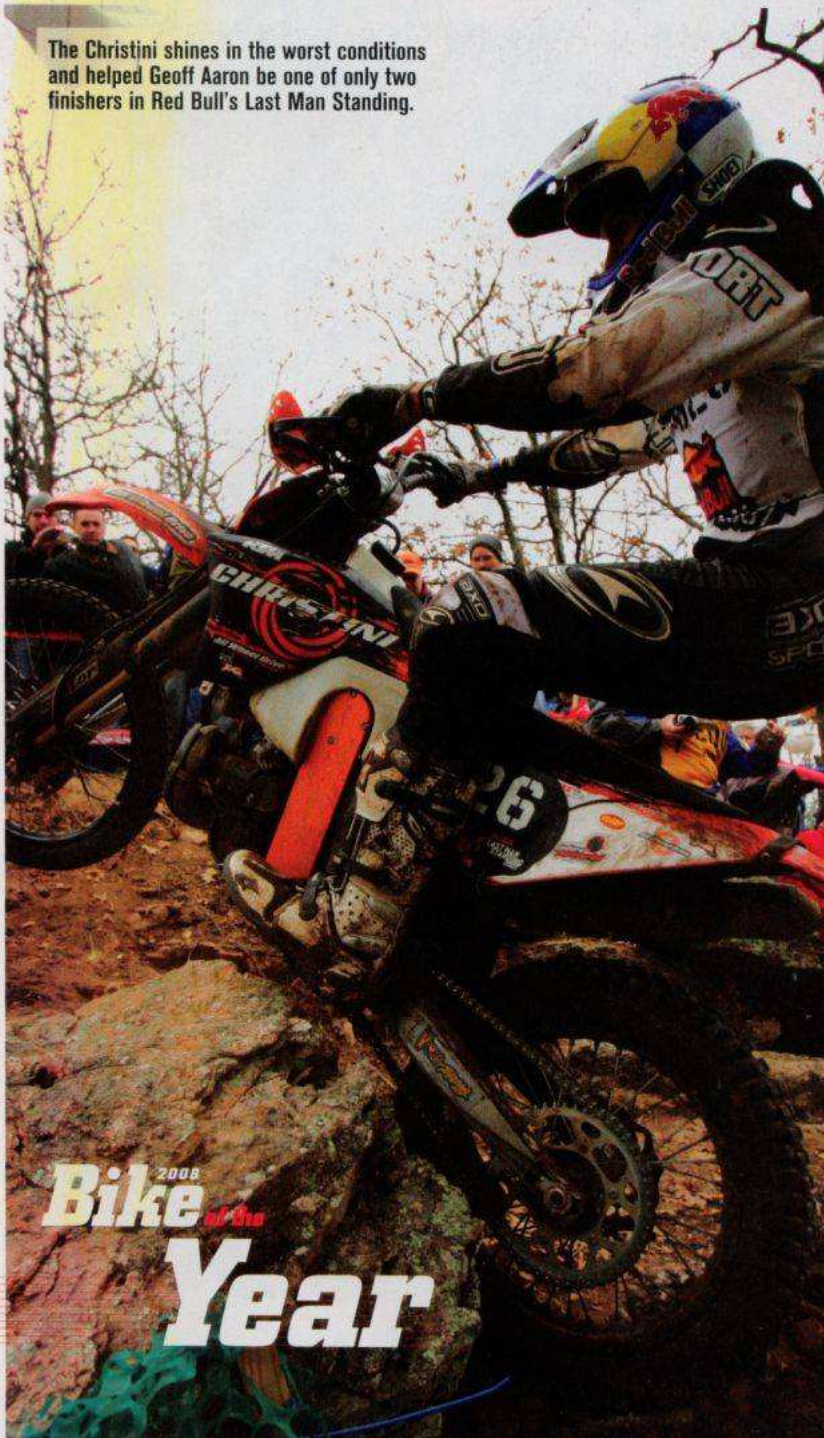
Christini All-Wheel-Drive

By the DR staff • Photos by Karel Kramer, Jonty Edmunds, Adam Campbell and Drew Ruiz



With an introduction into the motorcycle business more than five years ago, Steve Christini has patiently and diligently worked on his concept, improving the weak links and learning a lot about motorcycles in the process. He was looking to have his heavily patented system gobbled up by a manufacturer, but that didn't happen. So he took already existing bikes, like Honda CRFs and KTMs, and created frame and fork kits, complete with gas tanks and pushed on. We've ridden all the bikes, from test mule No. 1, and actually got the first "production" CRF250X. We still have it and ride it weekly as part of our Long Haul testing. We got one of the first AWD-equipped KTM electric-start two-strokes, right after it was broken in at EnduroCross, and we continue to ride it all over the place. Literally over anything we can point it at. It redefined what effects extra power has on an all-wheel-drive system. And we like it. We like it a lot. Adding AWD to the bike, an electric-start KTM two-stroke that would've likely taken the BOTY award on its own accord, didn't hurt our judges' feelings, either.

The Christini shines in the worst conditions and helped Geoff Aaron be one of only two finishers in Red Bull's Last Man Standing.



2008
Bike of the
Year

EDITORS' PERSONAL AWARDS

Jimmy Lewis



Best Moto Bike: KTM 250 SX

Maybe I'm too late or it was just time to switch. Either way, I'm convinced that I like the 250cc two-stroke as the right size, right power, right weight for me and motocross. I've always liked to hold bikes wide-open, a skill embedded in my wrist from my 125cc days. With the power and ferocity of 450cc four-strokes this isn't possible for me, but because of them I've progressed and can almost do it on a 250cc two-stroke. I like the KTM a lot because of its smooth power and great front-end traction. This is my track bike.

Best Bike For The Sport: Suzuki DR-Z70

We all got started on something. An XR50, a CT70, a mini-enduro or maybe even a PW50. The bike that I'd send any first-timer kid and his parents to is the Suzuki DR-Z70. With electric starting and a little more power to grow with, it seems the best bet and a durable package that will keep on giving for a long time. How do I know? Thirty years of motorcycling experience and I'm still riding one.

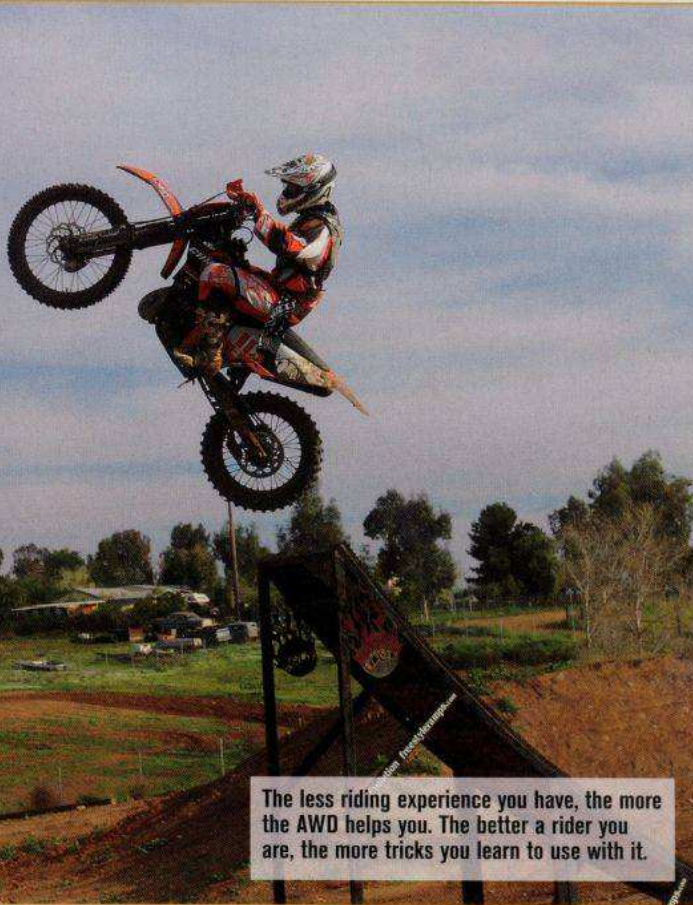
Best Extinct Bike: All Honda XRs

With the uncelebrated departure of the Honda XR650R, there really aren't any more XR dirt bikes from Honda. Sure there's the XR650L but it's a streetbike. My first "real" bike was an XR60R and I've done everything from trail riding the wheels off of them (still do, I own seven full-size XRs and more than 10 minis) to winning Gold Medals and Baja 1000s on these things. And now they're gone. Sure, Honda's marketing plan of CRF (R, X, F, L) unification may appeal to buyers, but where's the ultra-high-durability, low-maintenance, moderate-performance four-stroke? I'm still looking for an air-cooled, well-suspended electric-start dirt bike. Until then I'll kick my old ones, they still run fine.

-Jimmy Lewis/Editor

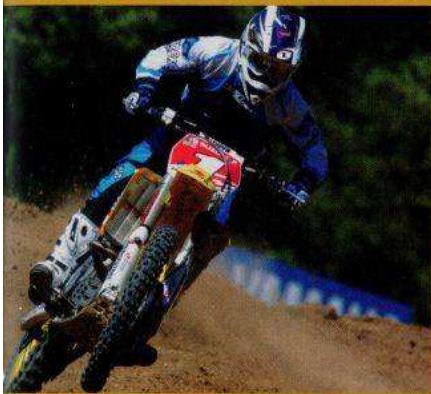
Preferred Riding Mix: 60 percent off-road/30 percent motocross/10 percent indescribable

Sure, it has some drawbacks, but doesn't everything? Four-strokes are harder to start. Liquid-cooling comes with fragile radiators. Power valves will gum up and put too much drag on the motor. Disc brakes are too exposed. Even the naysayers couldn't stop a good thing no matter how hard they tried, especially when it was new. The Christini AWD isn't for everyone, nor is it for everyone, just like last year's BOTY, the Honda CRF150R. The Christini is potent at trail riding and in difficult situations. It seems, in our testing, to work better the lower the skill level of the rider. It can catapult people by some strange, almost magical way into being better riders, especially in trying or difficult sections. And when advanced riders spend a lot of time on these bikes, they learn the advantages and exploit what the bike is capable of. There's a price tag attached, but it's reasonable considering the complex nature of the kit. There are more moving parts and that means more maintenance. But you're getting a distinct and sometimes incredible performance enhancement that rightly deserves Bike of the Year. If you get a chance, by all means, ride one.



The less riding experience you have, the more the AWD helps you. The better a rider you are, the more tricks you learn to use with it.

Jesse Ziegler



Best Memory: Ricky Carmichael's Factory Suzuki RM-Z450

I was the last person in the world, except for longtime mechanic Mike Gosselaar, to ride Ricky Carmichael's factory Suzuki RM-Z450 (see the test in the Feb. '08 issue). It was the luck of the draw since the attending journalists' names were randomly pulled from a hat to determine what order we'd ride his bike. I was last. More importantly than how it performed, Ricky's ride is my personal Bike of the Year because of the memory and the memories it brought back.

It all started when I met Ricky Carmichael at an Outback Steakhouse in Rochester, Minnesota, in 1997 before the Millville National. RC was riding Pro Circuit 125s and I was an eager fan who jumped a Northwest flight from Missoula, Montana, to catch the race action. I had a girlfriend at the time whose dad lived in Rochester so it was a great two-for-one: I got to see another National round and introduce a nonriding, ex-sheriff's deputy and current high school principal to my sport. As I sipped a Foster's with my ex-girlfriend's father at dinner I worked up the nerve to ask Ricky for his autograph. He signed a beer coaster for me. Ten years later, I tested his bike on the same Budds Creek track where he, just one day before, helped win the Motocross of Nations for Team USA for his last time. Ricky still probably doesn't know my name, and doesn't need to. After all, I'm still the guy who would ask for his autograph.

Best Ego Booster: David Knight's Factory KTM 450 XC

David Knight's factory GNCC bike was amazing: so much so that I had very attractive women text messaging me directly after, actually wanting to hang out with me. In truth, I didn't ride his factory GNCC bike; I rode his factory EnduroCross bike which was the same with softer springs. If I'd ridden his actual GNCC bike in the amateur class before his pro race, the mechanics would've been scrambling! I broke a lot of stuff on Knight's ride (check out the test in the May '08 issue). Not intention-

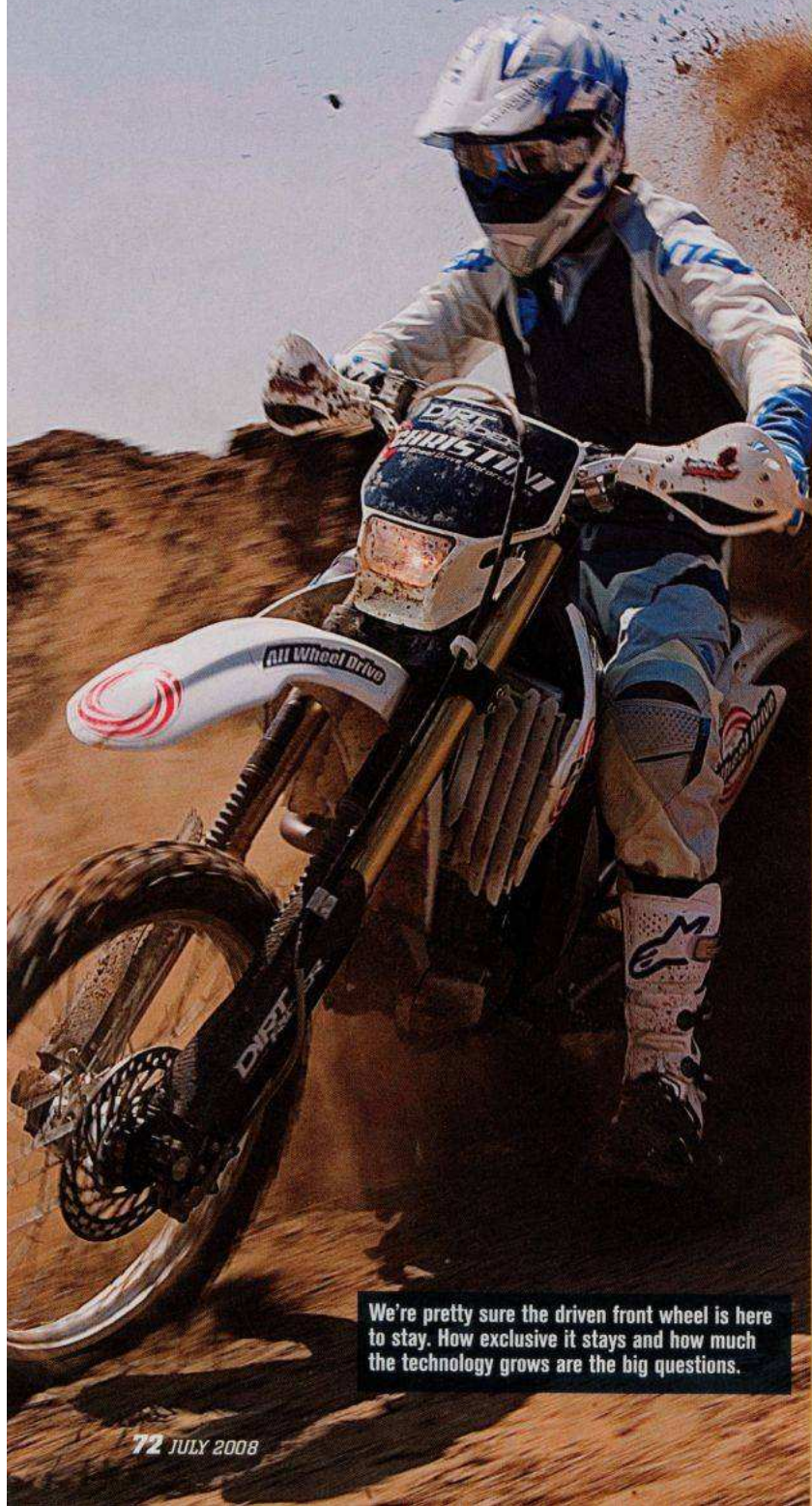
ally, though. The bike was more at fault than it leads on. The 450 was so easy to go fast on that my own ability was pushed, deflated and left at the side of the trail somewhere in Indiana. I rode most of the two hours on instinct. And DK's ride loved pushing me. When I wasn't running over trees the bike was dancing through them like the big Brit was aboard. When I wasn't sitting down and resting in the open cornfields, the bike charged me into the attack position and gobbled up competitors.

Best Loaner: Jimmy Lewis' Honda XR400

After looking at my first two picks for Bike of the Year, you must be confused with this off-the-wall choice. Even though Jimmy is a well-decorated racer and a natural freak on a motorcycle, putting his old, stock, beat-up XR400 in the same class as these is a bit off, I must admit. However, on fun factor and when accounting for the sheer silly places I've been, his Honda XR400 (any of them) is an easy in. Why? Mostly for the same reasons he mentioned the entire XR line in his personal picks, but more so because I don't technically own it so it's like borrowing a toy that gives you nothing but joy. And every time I go out with Jimmy and his crazy friends I end up returning the XR in a condition only a heavy mallet can straighten and he doesn't hate me.

—Jesse Ziegler/Executive Editor
Preferred Riding Mix: 60 percent motocross/30 percent off-road/10 percent sitting down and coasting

2008 Bike of the Year



We're pretty sure the driven front wheel is here to stay. How exclusive it stays and how much the technology grows are the big questions.

Pete Peterson



Saddest Farewell: Suzuki RM250

This is also my MX bike of the year, and it's a tragedy that the bike will probably not return for 2009. Nothing feels like an RM250. The two-stroke naturally has a lighter and lower feel than any four-stroke, 250Fs included. The snappy power and perfect throttle response let me control the bike with the throttle, while four-strokes feel like the back end only pushes and all turning must be done with the handlebar. The Suzuki particularly rewards proper riding position and lets you know when you're in the wrong place. So it really makes you a better rider. But most importantly this bike has that one thing I haven't found in any other 2008 bike—magic. Nothing lets you tune more into it than a late-model RM250. Those who “get” the RM250 know what I'm talking about, those who haven't ridden one... this might be your last chance.

Best Track Thumper: Kawasaki KX250F

250Fs are fun to ride and the KX-F is the best of the bunch. From the 2006 model on, this is the only four-stroke I feel comfortable pushing my limits on. The bike's agility lets me save mistakes that would leave me on the ground on other bikes, the engine revs up fast which makes the bike feel light, and the thing jumps so neutrally the only thing I'm concentrating on when I leave the ground is getting back on the power when I touch back down. I'm not a natural flyer, but this bike is. It's a good time to jump on a Kawasaki.

Best First Impression: Suzuki RM-Z450

I can't believe I'm the only one throwing an award to this bike since I'm not a 450 MX bike rider. I only got about 45 minutes on this bike on a GP course, but it made a believer out of me. Fuel injection looks like the next step in MX thumper evolution, and the Suzuki's throttle response gives me hope it's in the right direction. The best thing about this bike is that it didn't wear me out like a 450 normally does. Yes, I felt the weight when the back end kicked out unexpectedly, but when things were going right the bike hid its weight well. The RM-Z is late to the party this year, way late, and unfortunately a lot of 450 pilots may have strayed to other brands for the season. They'll be back.

Pete Peterson/Associate Editor

Preferred Riding Mix: 90 percent track/10 percent off-road/0 percent freestyle