

Christini KTM 250 XC-W(e) AWD

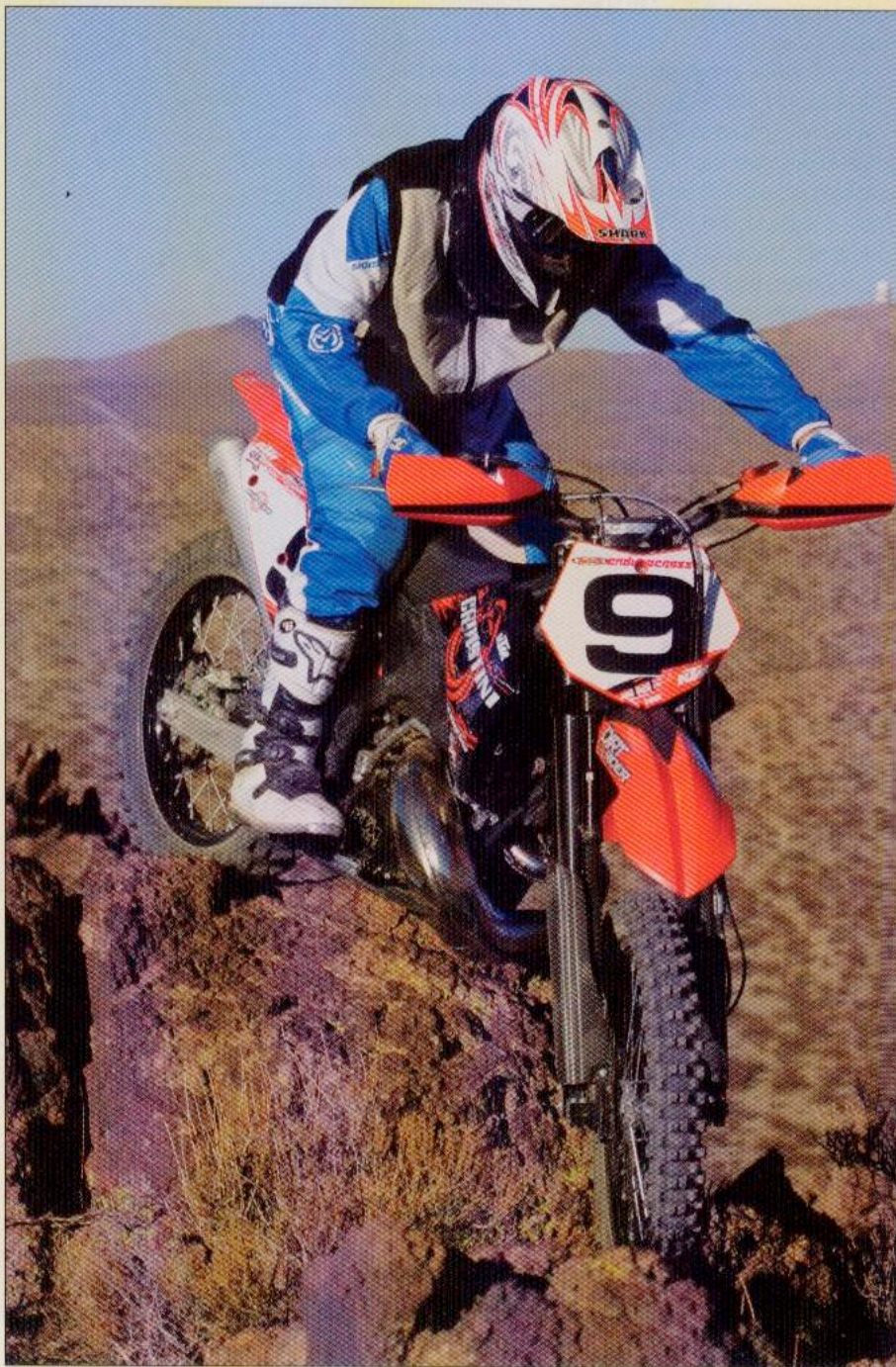
Double Your Pleasure, Double Your Fun

Story and photos by Karel Kramer

Everything we said about the KTM 300 in the accompanying test applies to this Christini AWD KTM 250 XC-W(e): it has the ergonomics and the goodness of the engine only with a little less torque and more of a hit. Even the handling mimics the 300. Basically, Christini started with a great off-road bike and added power to the front wheel. Through a modified frame and chains, shafts and gears, power from the engine is routed to the front end. It's undergeared compared to the rear, so when the rear wheel is hooked up, there's no drive to the front wheel. It just coasts like a normal bike. When the rear wheel starts to spin, the drive catches up with the front wheel's speed, and the front wheel pulls the bike as the rear pushes it. It seems pretty amazing and defies logic that it works, but it does.

In addition to the cost of the conversion (approximately \$4000 as of press time) and the additional moving parts and bearings to maintain, there's also a weight penalty of just over 20 pounds. Our test unit tipped the scales at 247 pounds with an empty tank while our 300 production bike was 227. Is that a negative? Well, none of our riders thought the bike weighed anything close to 250; they felt it was more like 235 pounds. But as long as we are talking about negatives, some riders felt the front end was too heavy and they could feel the torque steer in the bar. It made a few riders' hands tired as well. Also, since our bike had a prototype tank it ran out of gas while there was still fuel inside. We had to stop and lean the bike over to get trapped fuel to the petcock. The reduced capacity gave the 250 a range of about 30 miles. Christini is working on a better design in fuel routing and trying to squeeze more capacity out of it as well. The rotating parts of the AWD system, which are turning any time the rear wheel turns, act like a heavier flywheel and that changes (actually tames) the KTM's engine character.

That's it for the negatives. If you haven't



ridden an AWD bike, you would think that low-speed, stair-step climbs would be where the bike works best. It's great in those conditions. When you end up with the front and rear wheels smacking against logs or rocks on a steep climb, just be careful with the clutch and ride right away. Without AWD you would sit and spin. Sand, loose dirt and even skittery rocks are no problem. When the front tire is driving, it's almost like having a perfect steering damper. The bike just goes straight. One rider clipped a rock with the rear wheel; the bike kicked completely sideways and the front wheel pulled the bike straight before the rear wheel even hit the ground! You feel the same thing in whoops. When the rear wheel is off the ground, you feel the front wheel take over and pull. The driving front wheel helps initiate turns and it even works like anti-lock braking for the front wheel when grabbing a handful of front binder.

Soft hills make you laugh. You can mess up, blow momentum and still go right up. Jimmy Lewis didn't think the AWD was as impressive at higher speeds, but I did. The problem here is that my "fast" pace is more like Jimmy's medium pace. For sure, the more weaknesses your riding has, the more the Christini will be



Straight off the Las Vegas EnduroCross course and onto the trails, the Christini can handle it all.



a helpmate. We've seen novice riders instantly ride better, of course not realizing what was causing it. Thumper Racing's Gary Hazel is a Christini owner, and he described the feeling of riding with AWD as well as anyone: "The bike feels pretty good until you get in trouble, and then it feels like the hand of God reaches down and sets you on the other side of the nasty place." Humans use all sorts of tools, and the Christini AWD system is a tool that makes what you thought was impossible possible. The Honda CRF250X-based bike is impressive, but you feel the weight more and it feels like it takes the steam out of the little four-stroke more than most riders liked. That bike doesn't have enough power to really let you feel the advantages of the AWD system. But the KTM makes a lot of power, and it lets the advantages shine like a searchlight. And though it feels like it slows the bike, the opposite is typically true. If the rear wheel spins, the motor picks up the load from the front wheel, so it doesn't spin up like it typically would, making the motor feel and sound a little slower to the rider. But while it's making these "slow" noises the bike is hooking up and moving faster. Riders who "feel" speed and don't "hear" speed really noticed this. If you can afford to ride as good as the Christini allows you to ride, we say go for it.