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STORY & PHOTOGRAPHY
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OUR THOUGHTS AFTER A COUPLE
OF DAYS ON THE **2015 SHERCO
300 SE-R** WERE THAT WE'D
RIDDEN A BIKE YOU NEED TO RIDE
TOO, AS SOON AS POSSIBLE





There was a time when KTM was a fringe manufacturer. We had the big four Japanese and beyond that anything with a Euro name was largely ridden by dudes with names like Sven Svendsen or Thor Thorsen. The big four is now a five, with KTM every bit as present in our thoughts as a Honda or a Yamaha.

Actually, KTM is like Metallica. Guys who listened to the early stuff were apart from those who listened to the popular rock of the time, like Mötley Crüe. But eventually Metallica became mainstream as sales grew — just like KTM. In fact, I could go further here and point out that KTM went bankrupt in 1991, the year Metallica hit it massive with the self-titled “black” album. KTM was resurrected as KTM Sportmotorcycle GmbH in 1992 and went on to become stronger than it ever was.

But back to the story. With KTM now a major player, that leaves a hole in the marketplace. The bike a bloke chose when he didn't want to follow the crowd was a Kato, but what is it now?

The answer is Sherco. The answer wasn't Sherco a few short years ago, but it is now. It's the best outside player on the market and the 2015 bikes will blow people away.

We took the 2015-model 300SE-R two-stroke to the Watagan Trail Bike Rally and, after two days of trail bashing, this is what we came away with.

THE LITTLE, BIG BIKE

The 300SE-R feels small to sit on — in fact, not far removed from the KTM 200EXC. This will remain a pervasive thought throughout our time on the Sherco. It feels small and light and nimble, more so than any other 300 we've ever ridden.

The pegs are perhaps a little further back than you expect and the brake and gear levers are too short but, that aside, the package is comfortable,

with a semi-firm seat and nothing in the bodywork that catches boots or pants.

There's no kickstarter at all on the SE-R, so obviously there's a button in its place. It worked every time without dramas.

The engine note — via a big pipe (fed by an FMF pipe) — is quiet for a two-banger and not as meaty as the KTM 300EXC. In fact, the Sherco doesn't really give you any indication of what it can do until you get moving.



The chassis, in combination with the WP suspension, is superb. Just friggin' awesome. I don't know of another big-bore two-stroke that carves like the Sherco. The front end is planted and tracks beautifully and, while the back end steps out as a 300 should, it's so easy to pull it back into line and in fact it more often than not does it itself.

On a single trail, the Sherco is a killer. It sticks and turns bend after bend as you get faster and faster with growing confidence. The handling is backed up by excellent brakes and a sweet engine that has two distinct personalities.

DR JEKYLL IS FUN

At the flick of the ignition switch, the Sherco goes from a bike that feels like a 250 to a screaming beast. The switch, which comes stock, sits on the right side of the 'bars and is ready to spin your beanie or make life easier in snotty conditions. We've all seen the switches that weren't worth a chicken's nipple (think older Huskys) but this is the real deal.

The 300 runs an electronic power valve, which some of you may remember Honda messed with



many moons ago. The red guys didn't quite get it right but the French have. The result is a measured output that rolls on smoothly and builds quickly while maintaining a beefy bottom end. The bike is happy to chug along at low revs and doesn't feel like stalling, which makes slow-speed and technical riding much more fun.

Flick the switch to "nut-buster" and grab a fistful and the 300 will bolt in a scream of revs and a hail of roost. It likes to rev and, while it doesn't feel as musclebound as the 300EXC at high speed, it's a blast all the same. There isn't a big top end and some might find it signs off a little early but, honestly, on anything but a dirt road this isn't going to be a hindrance. If you have concerns, there's room to gear the bike down a little for some extra top speed.

Sherco has an injection system ready to go and in fact the tank has a moulded recess for it to slot straight in just like on the four-stroke; we expect that will appear some time in the next two years. The clutch isn't as light as the DDS on the KTM but it has a good feel and isn't going to fatigue you on a ride — unless you have arms like Mr Burns.

THE CONTENDER

Is this the best two-stroke on the market right now? This question kept coming up during our ride. It's definitely on the short list and that list includes the Sherco 250SE-R as well. It's the best bike to throw up any resistance to KTM domination and in certain ways it's a straight-up better bike to ride. It feels lighter, nimbler and more fun but less daunting than a 300EXC. That's a massive claim.

Gas Gas nearly had the Kato in its sights once upon a time but very few bikes have ever managed to truly challenge the orange king. The Sherco will challenge and it will be a mighty fight for supremacy.

And to close this out the way it began, we think that the new Sherco is better than the new Metallica (can you ever top Master Of Puppets?). Nice. **DA**



SNEDDO'S TAKE

We let trail rider and *DIRT ACTION* friend Paul "Sneddo" Sneddon take a blast on the 300SE-R to get the reaction from a bloke who's unfamiliar with the brand but might be up for a new bike soon ...

"At first glance the 300 looked really nice. It's loaded with high-quality parts and the fit and finish couldn't be faulted. It looked very slim as well, which gets a big tick from me. Even though I'm a reasonably big guy, I've always preferred a light and agile bike to get through the single trail.

"Once we got going, I was pretty underwhelmed, to be honest. The engine felt more like a 200 in the bottom end — really mellow and quite soft in its delivery of power for a big two-stroke. After a while, though, I started to get what this bike is about. It is tractable and smooth off the bottom but, when you get into it, it has a gradual hit of big 300 power in the top end. It doesn't rip your arms out but you definitely know that you are on a larger-capacity bike when you give it some.

"Once I gave the bike back, Damo told me about the ignition map switch and as it turns out I had it on the 'dull' setting the whole time I was riding it. Given this, I can't comment on how the engine performs in its more aggressive setting, but to be honest the moderate power delivery really suited my riding style. I've always been faster on mid-sized bikes and with two-strokes I typically prefer a 250 over a 300.

"As good as the engine and drive train are, the thing that really stood out to me was the way the bike handled. Through the tight stuff it

went everywhere I pointed it. Standing or seated, I'd say it handled better than any stock suspended two-stroke I've been on. We rode some relatively rough terrain and the Sherco was stable and balanced everywhere. It felt planted all the time and really didn't feel like a two-stroke in that sense at all. The only time it got a bit sketchy in the front end was at high speed on an open fire trail that was very loose and dusty — and we were travelling at over 90km/h.

"A couple of little things that bugged me were that the gear and brake levers were tough to get used to as they were too short and too close to the cases for my size 11s. Really, though, that's a pretty easy fix. Another thing was that the fuel filler cap seemed to leak a little bit on the bike we had and the side stand didn't retract, which was a bit annoying. Also, I'm not sure how the plastics will wear. They seemed to be a bit more rigid than the other brands; it would be interesting to see how they hold up after a few months.

"Overall, in the category, I reckon the Sherco is really hard to beat. The way it handles for a two-stroke out of the box is genuinely pretty incredible. Its suspension, steering and overall handling are confidence inspiring everywhere, which kind of goes against my experience on big-bore smokers. On top of this, the engine is really impressive in that it can be putted around and lugged up snotty hills; but I also reckon fast blokes, who'd spend a lot more time in the top end than me, would love it.

"All in all, this is a great package that's very hard to beat. I haven't ridden a better big-bore two-stroke."