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Beta 250RR

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BETA

250RR 2T

Suddenly, it's a new game

It was a ghost town, as if the whole population of two-strokeville had been abducted, leaving the lights on and the doors unlocked. The last message on the answering machine was when KTM added electric start, dated 2009.

Now all that has changed, with a completely new player and a completely new bike. Beta just delivered its first 250RR 2T off-road bike to the U.S. This is a hard-core, off-road motorcycle with a two-stroke powerplant at the core of its very being. Beta? Yup, Beta. This tiny Italian firm is currently the most aggressive and progressive company in the off-road world. Just nine years ago, it used to be an old-world trials company that offered little for mainstream American riders. In 2004, Beta started making off-road bikes with KTM motors, which gave way to Beta's own in-house four-stroke in 2009. Now that a two-stroke has been added, Beta has one of the most complete lines of off-road motorcycles in the world.

NEW OLD-SCHOOL MOTOR

The new motor is clean and modern, but it does look kind of familiar. Before its release, there were rumors that it was made by someone else. Not true; it's a Beta motor, new from the cases in. It bears a superficial

Beta nailed the target. The 250RR is an awesome off-road bike for the toughest conditions.



OFF-ROAD TEST

BETA

250RR 2T

Sachs suspension components are used on both ends. The ride is soft and cushy.



resemblance to the powerplant in the Spanish-built Gas Gas, mostly due to its perfectly upright cylinder placement with the large chamber on the left side. This is part of the powervalve mechanism, which is run by a traditional ball-ramp mechanism. The actuation of the power valve, by the way, is easily adjustable and requires no additional parts, springs or spacers.

Beta uses die-cast cases to hold a six-speed transmission and a case-reed motor. It's fed by a 36mm Keihin carb through a Moto Tassinari V-Force 4 reed, and the exhaust is carried out through an FMF pipe and silencer. Even though this is a new motor, it houses no new technology, like electronic power valves or fuel injection. At its core, Beta is a very conservative company, even shying away from EFI on its four-strokes. That's probably a good thing. There's nothing experimental on this bike. All the designs are established, and all the components are at the peak of their evolution. The one thing that is somewhat innovative is the placement of the electric starter. It's under the motor and invisibly incorporated into the cases, not glued on the side like an afterthought.

Around the motor is essentially the same chassis that Beta uses to house its four-stroke enduro bikes. Again, this is a good thing. Everyone likes the way Beta's four-

strokes handle, and the new version of the steel frame said to be 2 pounds lighter this year. The rear suspension uses linkage with a very high-tech-looking aluminum swingarm. Our test bike came with a Sachs shock and Sachs fork. The brakes are Nissin, the bars are oversized and the ignition is a Kokusan. It actually has a working headlight, which is very unusual these days. Like all two-strokes, the Beta is imported as a closed-course competition vehicle because it can't meet the emissions standards to be classified as an off-road bike. Bigger companies don't like putting a headlight on a two-stroke because it calls attention to the fact that it might be used off-road—and the less government attention the better.

Beta put it all together in a reasonably light package. On our scale, the bike weighed 237 pounds without fuel. That's within a few pounds of the KTM 250XCW and much lighter than the Gas Gas.

BUT HOW DOES IT RUN?

We're stunned. The Beta 250 seems like a super-refined machine that has had years of development, not some first-year bike from the Italian cottage industry. The Beta runs clean from the bottom without any coughing, burping or even a hint of detonation. It took KTM about 30 years of building two-stroke enduro bikes before they got this good. There are absolutely no jetting issues, a

the powerband is as sweet as they come.

It's clear that the engineers at Beta know exactly who buys two-strokes. There's a group of riders, much too large to be called a cult, that stays with premix burners for super-tight, low-speed trails. In situations where most four-strokes are in danger of coughing and flaming out, a good-running two-stroke can be unstoppable. But, the key phrase is "good-running," meaning one that's jetted perfectly and designed to run at low rpm. Beta's background is trials, and that influence is obvious. The 250RR almost can't be stalled, as long as you keep the throttle open at least partially. You can drop down to idle-level rpm and still stay alive, even with a load on the motor. Then the motor willingly climbs into the meat of its power.

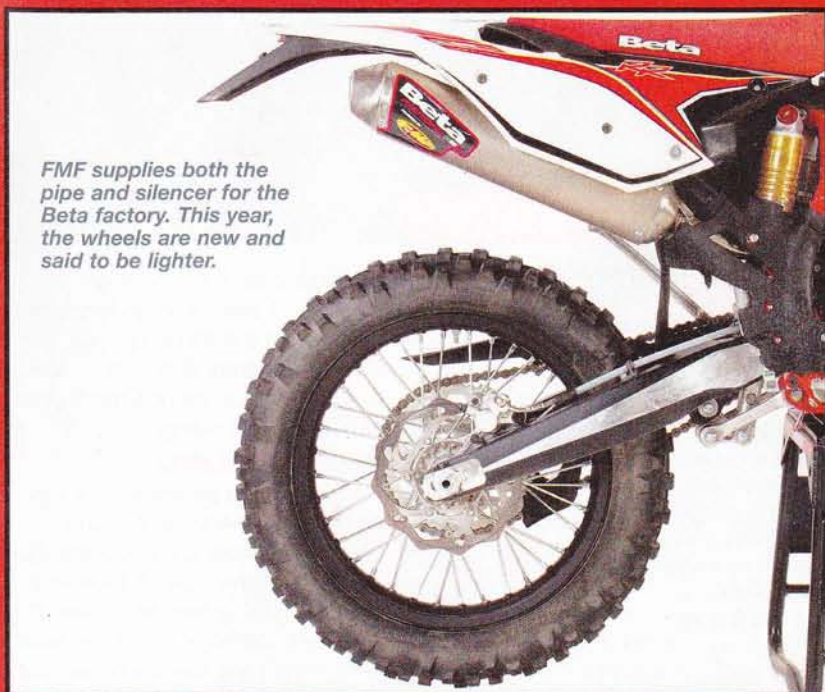
How fast is it? The 250 produces exactly what it should produce, horsepower-wise. It's similar to a Yamaha YZ250 and more powerful than most 250 four-strokes. It surrenders power on top to a KTM 250 two-stroke, mostly because the Beta isn't a revver. The powerband tops out early, and you have to shift quickly. Overall, the gearing is slightly taller than that of a KTM 250XCW, but you would never know that until you compared gear ratios directly. The Beta's powerband simply starts and ends at comparatively low rpm.

Even in its handling manners, the Beta likes tight, tough trails. It feels very light and compact. It's easy to manhandle. The Beta isn't a physically large machine, even for a two-stroke, and it feels much, much lighter than a four-stroke of the same exact weight—a KTM 250SXF, for example. Its geometry, on the other hand, leans toward the stable side of the ledger. The front end is very planted, and as speeds increase, it never gets nervous or has headshake.

More praise goes to the fork; it's surprisingly good. Frankly, we didn't know what to expect from it; our experience with Sachs forks is pretty minimal. We probably expected a Marzocchi, which means we weren't expecting much. The 250RR's front



The motor might look somewhat familiar, but it's all new, with the electric-starter motor hidden under the gearbox.



FMF supplies both the pipe and silencer for the Beta factory. This year, the wheels are new and said to be lighter.



The multifunction odometer comes to life as soon as you move the wheels.

BETA

250RR 2T



*We love two-strokes!
Bikes like this make
it an easy affair.*

BETA 250RR 2T

Engine type	.....Liquid-cooled, electric-start two-stroke
Displacement	.....249cc
Bore & stroke	.....66.4mm x 72.0mm
Fuel delivery	.....36mm Keihin
Fuel tank capacity	.....2.0 gal.
Lighting coil	.....Yes
Spark arrester	.....No
EPA legal	.....No
Running weight, no fuel	.....237 lb.
Wheelbase	.....58.3"
Ground clearance	.....12.6"
Seat height	.....36.6"
Tire size & type:	
Front	.....80/100-21 Michelin Enduro
Rear	.....110/100-18 Michelin Enduro
Suspension:	
Front	.....Sachs inverted cartridge, adj. reb, comp./11.4" (290mm) travel.
Rear	.....Sachs aluminum piggyback, adj. hsc, lsc, reb./11.4" (290mm) travel
Country of origin	.....Italy
MSRP	.....\$7999
Importer	.....www.americanbeta.com

end sucks up rocks and rarely deflects. It's rather soft overall, as it should be for a bike with a tight-trail mission. It will bottom hard if you land hard. That's the nature of the beast. Likewise, the rear end is soft initially. The linkage ramps up quickly in the rear, though, so bottoming

the shock isn't as common. In whoops, it seems to go through the first half of the travel quickly and then gets harsh. But overall, Beta hit the suspension mark almost dead center for trail riding.

CHIPS FALLING

We're still in shock after a few weeks with the bike. We don't understand how it can be this good right out of the gate. It took time to notice *anything* we didn't like. But if we must complain—and we must—here's what we can complain about: First, it doesn't have handguards. Tilley's hand still has an ugly scar. The two-gallon tank is only good for about 35 miles. Pete Murray had to wait at mile 36 for someone to notice he wasn't there anymore. The engine is a little buzzy, and the handlebar isn't rubber-mounted. The steering stops don't allow enough range, it has no spark arrester, the stock rear tire is crummy, and the overall riding position is a little cramped, especially from seat to pegs. It's not a very impressive whine list, but we can't help it. Riding the Beta puts us in good a mood. In its first year, the 250RR is

already in the same league as one of the greatest trail bikes of all time, the KTM 250 two-stroke. Who could complain about that?

The real test for the Beta will come in a year or two. We know that two-stroke town will have some new inhabitants, and they'll bring new technology. For now, this bike has set the bar very high. Anything better will have to be outright amazing. □

THE GOOD STUFF

- Great low-end power
- Perfect jetting
- Feels light
- Plush suspension
- Push-button starting
- Easy clutch pull
- Good bars, levers, rims, sprockets

THE REST

- No handguards
- No spark arrester
- Not green-sticker legal
- Brakes just okay
- Goofy kickstand