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ADVENTURE

# REAL WORLD RALLY

A reality-based rally bike







A real Dakar Rally bike might as well be a spaceship. You know they exist. You see photos, read stories and imagine what they must be like, but almost no one actually rides one. They're factory-level creations built for elite riders who jet-set around the world. They're vessels for virtual astronauts who are either paid professionals or wealthy space tourists... most of the time. But not this bike.

The machine shown here might look like something assembled in a race shop for Cyril Despres or Marc Coma to sail across a continent, but it was put together on a real budget in the real world by a real person. Okay, that's not quite accurate. It was assembled by Charles Jirsa, who is a professional tuner and works for Husqvarna—almost a real person. Charles is a freakishly detail-oriented mechanic who has turned wrenches for some of the best riders in the world, including Nate Woods and Kurt Caselli. And, he's a good rider himself; not pro by any means, but a real-world enthusiast who works hard through the week so he can buy the bikes and parts to support his riding habit.

*Charles Jirsa usually watches races from the mechanics' corner. Not this time.*



ADVENTURE

# REAL WORLD RALLY



If Charles is a real-world version of Cyril Despres, then the Baja Rally is the real-world version of Dakar. It's a four-day race that requires navigation skills, speed and mechanical ability. It can be done on a shoestring, as opposed to Dakar, which can cost a cool million for a top-shelf effort. Charles built his bike for the Baja Rally, but it was put together to the


same standards as a real Dakar effort. "The whole reason I did the rally was because my friend and mentor Dave Simpson threw down the challenge right after Christmas in 2013," says Charles. "He knew I had a huge fascination with rally racing, and since I navigate in off-road cars with him, he knew I could do it. He said if I signed up for the rally before the new

year, he would cover the entry fee. I couldn't turn that down."

## START PARTS

Underneath the exotic bodywork is actually a very ordinary motorcycle. It is a street-legal 2008 KTM 450EXC. Jirsa had owned it for years but had not ridden it for a long time, so it needed work anyway. The '08 KTM was a great machine. That was





*The bike started life as a 2008 KTM 450EXC. Charles works for Husqvarna, so we'll claim that's what it is.*

bureted, because it is easy to work on when you're in the middle of nowhere and all you have is your fanny pack and your creativity if something goes wrong."

Jirsa rebuilt the motor using mostly OE parts. The stock bike is, understandably, somewhat bottled up. He took off the stock 39mm carb and replaced it with a Keihin FCR41. The exhaust became an FMF Factory 4.1. Many of the less exotic accessories were easy to find—things like the 6.3-gallon Acerbis fuel tank, Renthal Fatbars and the GPR damper. When you get into the highly specialized world of navigation and rally-specific accessories, however, you have to search a little harder and expect to pay a little more. The fairing kit was made by Rally Moto in England. The company doesn't make the kits anymore, and Charles was lucky to get one of the last ones. Navigation is done by a giant roll chart that you generally put together from something called a road book. Most of the pros use an electric-advance roll-chart holder made by Free-to-Ride. The thumb-advance switch alone is over \$300, and the chart holder is almost \$400.

For the main GPS, Charles broke

tradition. Instead of going with the usual Garmin, he installed a Lowrance Elite 4, which can generally be had for under \$400. He installed an ICO odometer and a Trail Tech GPS as back-up. Navigation is an art form in itself, but Charles learned from some of the best. "As the rally got closer I started riding desert a lot more, and my good friend Quinn Cody let me use some of his training routes that he uses to prepare for his rallies. Training with Quinn was priceless and a lot of fun!"

Most of the preparation was old-fashioned wrench work. Charles is a world-class mechanic, and he approached the build as if he were assembling the bike for a pro rider. He re-valved the suspension himself, relocated the footpegs further rearward, and went over every nut and bolt. What could go wrong?

### **RALLY TIME**

"Once it was time to go, my good friends Dave and Dennis, along with my girlfriend Aileen, said they would chase me," said Charles. "They helped work on the bike, set up camp, and had meals ready over the four days of racing. I could not have had a better crew. Dave and Dennis have 100 years of Baja experience between

*This is a standard cockpit for a rally bike. There are back-ups for everything.*



the second year that KTM offered dual-sport bikes that were based on real dirt bikes. This particular engine was brand new in '08, and, frankly, it doesn't give anything away to the current version. It has a carburetor and a six-speed gearbox, but it was one of the very first dual-sport bikes that was dirt-worthy right off the showroom floor. "I liked the fact that it was car-



# ADVENTURE



The engine exhales through an FMF Factory 4.1 exhaust and inhales through an old-fashioned carburetor. Charles installed a 41mm Keihin FCR.



Charles didn't sneak any parts out the backdoor of the race shop. Everything is available to the public.



There's a 30-pound difference between a full tank and an empty tank, so you don't want to carry any more fuel than you need. The problem is that you need it all.



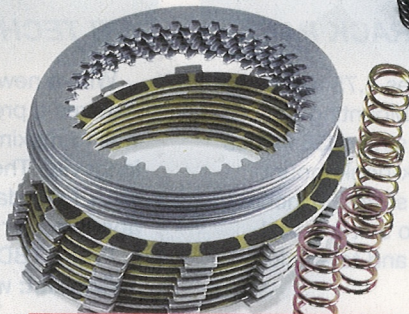
them. My girlfriend Aileen was huge as my nutritionist and supporter."

After so many years of watching big races unfold from mechanic's row, it must have been strange for Charles to find himself in the middle of the action. On the second day, he was in the top five overall, riding against the likes of men like Steve Hengeveld. "My absolute favorite stage in the rally was on the third day from Gonzaga Bay to Coco's Corner. I just fell into a grove and had so much fun with the way the course flowed. It showed in the results. It was my best stage of the whole rally; I finished second on that test only four minutes behind Steve Hengeveld. Throughout the whole rally I had zero bike problems and was able to just ride and enjoy the experience. I would do another rally in a heartbeat. It was a great new challenge and I love riding in Baja." □

## PARTS LIST

- Maxxis front tire: SI 80/100-21
- Maxxis rear tire: STD IT 110/100-18
- Acerbis 6.3-gal. tank
- GPR 24mm offset triple clamps (stock is 20mm)
- Renthal Fatbars 604 bend
- Lowrance Elite 4M Primary GPS
- Trail Tech back-up GPS
- ICO odometer
- Free-to-Ride road book and thumb switch
- Rigid Industries headlights
- Dually Hyperspot top light
- Dually Driving beam bottom light
- Rally Moto Kit fairing
- 41mm carb (stock is 39mm)
- Zip Ty Racing fuel screw
- Zip Ty Racing magnetic drain plug
- Renthal sprockets: 14/52 gearing
- Zip Ty Racing quick change rear axle,
- Zip Ty chain-adjuster blocks
- Zip Ty shark fin
- FMF Factory 4.1 exhaust
- Trail Tech high-output stator and DC conversion kit
- PG Graphics
- Footpegs I modified: 5mm back
- Murdock navigation
- A'ME grips

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