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NEW STREET LEGALS

COULD *HUSQVARNA'S* NEW STREET LEGAL *350* & *501 FE-S* BE *ADVMOTO'S* SMALL AND MID-SIZED DUAL-SPORT BIKES OF THE YEAR?

The resurgent *Husky* brand is leveraging its rich motocross pedigree in launching their 2015 line of off-road bikes. In order to appreciate their latest offering and what it means to you, let's break it down to industry economics and the history of the brand. *KTM* and *Husqvarna* are now under one global roof and the new *Huskies* are basically white *KTMs* with solid engineering refinements by a team of North Americans determined to rebuild *Husky* into a premiere brand.

The *FE-S* bikes are based on *Husky's* popular *FE Enduro* models and virtually identical to their ultra-high performance cousins, the *KTM EXCs*, save emission control and recessed mapping. On the surface they seem identical except for color, but the *Huskies* are the more refined bike in this family.

The polyamide composite sub-frame is a three-piece modular unit with "tools-free" access to the air filter. The essentially plastic sub-frame won't bend like aluminum in a crash. Instead, it either flexes back to shape or breaks. Replacing a piece or two of this sub-frame is easier and cheaper than dealing with aluminum. The *FE-S's WP* suspension is also unique and refined beyond the *KTMs* with the rear shock using linkage and the forks employing on-the-fly damping and rebound clickers.

While the latest U.S. adventure bikes are being engineered with an ever-increasing bias toward street (*Super Ténéré, GS, 1190, Tiger, KLR,* etc.), the dual-sport segment is traveling in the opposite direction, as evidenced by *Husky's* latest 50-state, street legal *FE-S* models. Some riders can do more than others with one bike. In balancing the trade-offs of a decision like this, the *501* compromises only sparingly while gaining many versatility points.

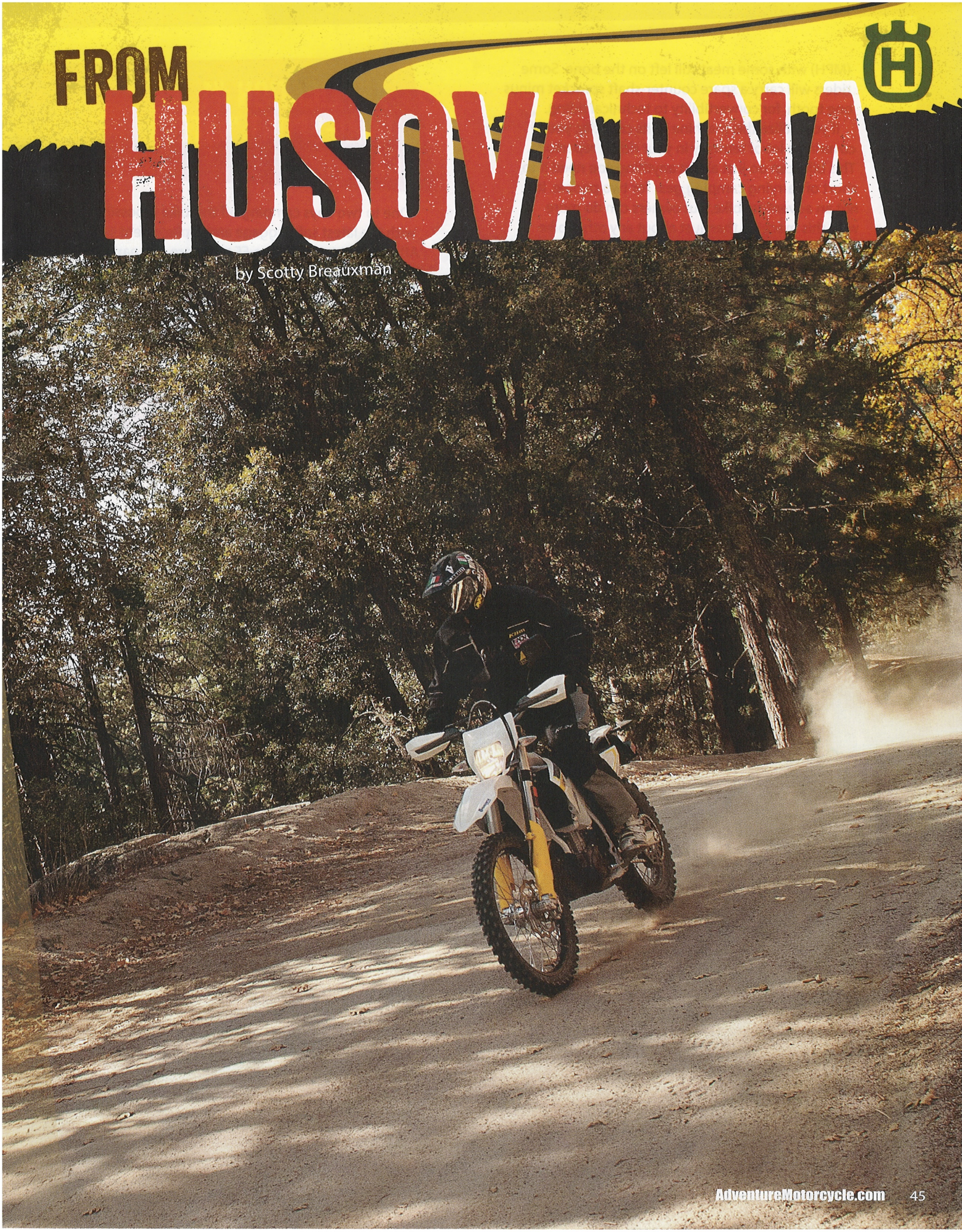
The old world view of dual-sport gets tossed out the window in 2015 with the *Husky's* zippy fuel injection, hydraulic clutch, *Brembo* brakes, CNC-machined triple clamps and six-speed tranny. This is not your old *DRZ* or *KLR*. Everything on this bike is engineered for off-road racing.

It's electric start only, but buyers can order an optional kick-starter as an accessory. The stock foot pegs resemble the typical aftermarket type you'd see at the start line of any off-road race.

The stock gearing leans tall and that's great for dual-sport as the bike easily cruised the tarmac in the high 70s

FROM HUSQVARNA

by Scotty Breauxman



(MPH) with some meat still left on the bone. Some riders will carry a spare counter-shaft sprocket minus one tooth, for convertibility to technical riding.

If you utilize this machine to its capacity, you're covering a lot of territory in your riding repertoire. This bike can do just about anything you need it to, short of carrying camping gear for two people. It's not an adventure bike, but owners can do more with this machine than just about any other bike out there. It could race in the *Baja 1000* or the *Baja Rally* and still be used for a daily commuter or trail bike. The *350* model is a great starter bike for those with the means.

Styling is top of class with a white/blue/gold motif that's "neo retro modern" with a line of matching soft-goods, called "Husky," that include licensed *Moose Racing* gear and in-house designed riding gear along with a very sharp collection of Swedish-styled casual gear called "Husky Style."

The one and only Achilles heel for this bike is the race seat and it hurts the bike's prospects for ADV uses. Thankfully the manufacturer assures us that a dual-sport seat will be available as an accessory. Just the same, we'd replace the seat with a custom unit from *Renazco Racing* before riding it again.

APPLICATION #1: DUAL-SPORT "LITE" CAMPING:

One to two days camping off this bike is possible with the latest soft luggage and replacement seat. Aftermarket tanks for the *FE* series are due early 2015 and will fit the *FE-S*. With added fuel capacity, a week of camping or hotel-hopping in Baja California is very doable.

APPLICATION #2: HIS AND HERS ADV LITE

Let's say you have to clear your new *501 FE-S* purchase with your better half. Surprise her with a matching *350* decked out with ADV essentials. The *350* is a great choice for those wanting to ditch passenger life in favor of finally grabbing their own bars. Yet this machine is not "too much" for a new rider, except maybe the price tag.

APPLICATION #3: TRIPLE SPORT

The unrestricted *FE* models come ready to race and we'd argue the emissions and mapping on the *S* models are noticeable but not stifling for high performance trail riding. Not that you would need or want to race this bike, but the mere fact that it's capable of dashing through the woods and over rocks speaks volumes, and simply means it can outperform any of its peers on the trail. One could easily purchase the bike on Friday, break it in on Saturday with a suspension check, and then go straight to the start line of an enduro or hare scramble on Sunday morn.

SUMMARY

From all directions here you have a winner. And it's tough to complain about anything on this beauty other than the torturous saddle.

Husqvarna Motorcycles' legacy is a long and storied drama spanning 100 years, yet this latest chapter is about the fabled brand "reclaiming" the name that pioneered the sport of motocross. This, especially after the failed Italian initiative, sets the brand on a new path. The newly charged North America staff is in full effect making a huge push to be independent of their big brother (*KTM*) next door. And it appears *Husky* has recovered from its lost decade with a *ROCK STARR Energy Supercross Team, ISDE Medals* and is leveraging the legacy of the brand's golden years. The absolute validation of a bike test is whether or not the tester would actually spend their own money to buy the subject bike. We haven't pulled the trigger yet, but the *Husky FE-S 501* is on our radar screen for 2015. ADV

Husqvarna.com