

SPY 2008: YOUR FUTURE RIDE

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DIRT ROVER

WORLD'S LARGEST MX & OFF-ROAD MAGAZINE

KILLER KLX

STEALTH, DEADLY SERIOUS
AND READY TO RACE

ENDURO
CAMP
WITH THE CHAMP

ELECTRICROSS
THE SHOCKING TRUTH!

MINI
MADNESS
HONDA CRF150
GONE WILD



ART: KYLE WOODS



DR. DIRT DO-IT YOURSELF FCR CARB REBUILD



FIRST TEST!

ELECTRICROSS DRIFT-R

The Shocking Future

By Chris Denison • Photos by Justin Kosman

This is not a toy!

If you don't mind humoring me for a moment, I'd like to ask you to please turn off your cell phone. That's right, your beloved cell phone. Switch it off, now. Good. Next, please kill any radios, televisions or computers, and ask anyone in the room to leave, making sure that they close all windows and doors on their way out, so that you are sitting alone with this magazine. I'll give you a minute for that. Are you alone now? Excellent. OK, what I want you to do now is listen. Can you hear that? It should sound like the hollow, buzzing noise inside of your eardrums that is the result of the complete and utter silence surrounding you. That, my friends, is the inevitable sound of the future of off-road motorcycle riding.

Unless we decide to take immediate action, off-road motorcycle riding is going to be as loud as the inside of a coffin by the time my grandchildren are in diapers. We can preach and teach about the values of respectful riding and acceptable sound limits, but when it comes down to brass tacks, the mission to save our beloved dirt bikes is not going to be easy. Of course, we could continue to join together to make a bold statement against loud pipes and irresponsible OHV use, but it seems like that approach isn't really working out too well. Another option would be to just plain quit and join the environmentalists, though I am quick to dismiss this one on the basis that hell won't be freezing over anytime soon.

The Shocking Future

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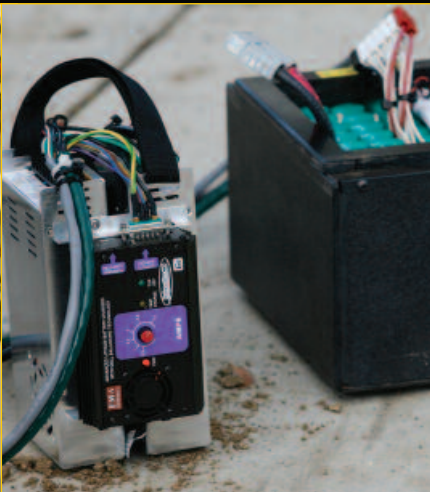
Another idea is to find a super-genius inventor who can come up with some sort of electric motorcycle that doesn't pollute or make any noise, and slowly start developing this dirt bike for when our two- and four-strokes are extinct. Now that is an idea! If we had machines that provided the thrill of off-road riding without stirring up the greenies, then we just might have a fighting chance. Fortunately, a man named Neal Saiki is more than a few steps ahead of us in this plan: He's already invented the Electriccross machine.

As a bright, motorcycle-loving inventor, Saiki has been working hard to make the widespread dream of a performance electric bike a reality. His Electriccross Drift-R is the result of several years of design and testing, and the amount of effort shows in the bike's uniqueness. Like many good innovations, the Drift-R is surprisingly simple in design. Aside from what is necessary, there are absolutely no extra components or parts to speak of. Nearly everything on the Electriccross had to be specially developed, as motorcycle parts weigh too much and most mountain bike components aren't setup to withstand heavy abuse. A long seat runs from the steering stem to the rear fender, while the fenders and graphics are plain and unassuming. Much of the Electriccross chassis—such as the handlebar, Fox suspension and disc brakes—has been borrowed from the mountain bike world. The pegs are motorcyclelike in nature, but there are no pedals, shifters or extra levers. Like many other modern dirt bikes, the Drift-R has an aluminum frame, but that is one of the few similarities that these bikes share. All of Saiki's Electriccross frames are made in the United States from genuine American-produced aluminum, which is said to be much stronger than foreign

aluminum. Housed inside of the main cradle in place of the internal-combustion motor is a suspicious little unit, which turns out to be the bike's engine and power source. A 14,400-watt motor is connected to the rear wheel, with a main battery unit providing the juice while the motor spins the custom-made chain, sprockets and wheel. As far as controls, only the two hand brakes and a throttle grace the bar, with a keylike toggle on the frame providing the on/off switch for the bike. There is also a half-power switch on the top tube that allows the rider to swap between full power and a much more mellow, street-legal mode that permits the bike to be ridden in the bike lane of many streets and roads.

When we finally hooked up with the Electriccross crew for a test of the Drift-R, we weren't sure what to expect. Before we

rode the bike, Saiki gave us a detailed tour of the machine, followed by one strong admonition to us: "This is not a toy!" As the bike retailed at more than \$9000, I didn't think it was. And just as soon as I twisted the throttle, this thought was strongly reinforced. Delivery is abrupt, like how a KTM 50 SX with an auto clutch hits, and the snap is instant and very untoylike. If you were to sit on the Electriccross and simply pin the throttle, it would easily put you on your back—it hits that hard. It can be pretty jolting until you get used to it. Beginning with the first lap aboard the Drift-R, the electric power is



Don't be fooled: The Drift-R flies when you ride it correctly.

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fairly astounding. The violent snap leads in to a smooth, steady increase in horsepower until the bike quietly lets you know that it is maxed out. With the absence of overrev and no decrease in power up top, the motor simply stops pulling when it gets to full speed. Being electric, there is plenty of steady torque to go around—this is what electric motors do best. The specific power curve that our test bike was set to allowed for hard acceleration and a decent top speed, both of which suited our secret minimize test track well. Obviously, one of the wildest aspects of the electric power is that it is literally silent—barely a hum exudes from the small motor, which makes the chain slap and suspension strokes much more noticeable.

With its purpose-built frame geometry, the Drift-R sits just a tad taller than a Honda CRF150F. Weighing in at approximately 140 pounds with the lithium power pack, the bike is fairly well suspended, courtesy of Fox, though we wouldn't have wanted to jump our test bike much higher than we did. Handling is solid, and though the machine turns a bit more like a mountain bike than a motorcycle (given the Drift-R's slightly rear wheel-led cornering tendency), it is easy to find a good flow on the bike. Manuals, power wheelies and decent-size bunnyhops are all possible aboard the Electriccross, and the brakes do a fine job at stopping the bike. The ergonomics are a bit strange, with a long seat and far-back pegs, but this bike is capable of fitting a wide variety of riders. Within minutes of cruising around on the Electriccross, we knew the bike was a serious invention.

After nearly an hour of hard riding, the battery was running out of juice—indicated by a colored gauge on the frame. The Drift-R was then plugged in for a recharge—which takes

from 50 minutes to 3 hours, depending on the charger and battery combination. The battery can also be quickly swapped for a fresh one in very little time, though replacement power packs aren't free. A long-range lithium power pack is also available. With a wide range of options, each Electriccross bike can be equipped with different charger, battery and power styles as well as suspension upgrades. As the Drift-R is semicustomizable, its price can be pretty high; the unit we tested, which includes the lithium power pack as well as a software program that can be used to alter the bike's power curve on an everyday computer, sells for \$9250.

Saiki's Electriccross bike takes a fresh and innovative approach to motorcycle technology. Rather than trying to produce a bike that smoked less or ran more quietly, he simply eliminated the engine and exhaust, following a much different path to performance. Is the Electriccross Drift-R a worthy machine? Most definitely, as there are a number of appropriate applications in our sport for an electric bike, and the performance of the Drift-R will satisfy some of the hungriest adrenaline appetites. Will it replace modern motorcycles? Honestly, I hope not. While the Electriccross bike truly has its place among current dirt bikes, there isn't enough voltage on earth to recreate the feeling of a third-gear power wheelie on a well-tuned two-stroke. We can and should be exploring the possibilities of alternative motorcycles, yet I think it is far too early to give up on the familiar *braaaps* and thumps of what we ride today. Unless we can get our butts in gear, though, the future of off-road riding will be all but gone. And I think we all know what that is going to sound like.

WHAT'S HOT

- It's electric! No smoke, no noise and no mess.
- Snappy power and good torque make the bike fun to ride.
- Suspension and brakes handle the mountain-bike-like chassis well.
- Fully customizable suspension, power and charging solutions are available.

WHAT'S NOT

- Abrupt power hits violently.
- Constant recharging is more difficult than just gassing up.
- Unproven reliability.
- Steep price.

SPECIFICATIONS

- Power pack: Lithium ion 120 cell
- Motor: Etek
- Rear shock: Fox
- Fork: Fox
- Wheelbase: 51.0 in.
- Seat height: 34.0 in. with tall seat
- Ground clearance: 11.5 in.
- Peg height: 12.8 in.
- Front suspension travel: 7.0–8.0 in. (8.0 in. tested)
- Rear suspension travel: 8.0 in.
- Front wheel: 16.0 in. (optional 19.0 in. available)
- Rear wheel outside diameter: 16.0 in.
- Head angle: 67 degrees with 7.0-in. fork, 66 degrees as tested
- Frame weight: 14.8 lb
- Weight of lithium power pack: 30 lb
- Power: 19.3 hp to rear wheel (14,400-watt motor)
- Range with lithium power packs: 20–40 miles per pack
- Top speed: 44 mph as geared
- Recharge time: 50 min.–3 hrs
- MSRP: \$6750 without battery, \$9250 as tested

CONTACT

- Electriccross Inc.
3111 Scotts Valley Dr.
Scotts Valley, CA 95066
831.438.3500; www.electriccross.com