

WHAT'S UP WITH CANNONDALE?

The saga continues

By the staff of Dirt Bike

► You couldn't have two more different motorcycle companies than ATK and Cannondale. Both were aiming at the American dirt bike market, but went about it in wildly different ways. ATK borrowed parts and technology from different parts of the world to make limited runs of high-end motorcycles. Cannondale made a machine from scratch with the goal of selling tens of thousands of units.

Whose philosophy was better? The bottom line is that Cannondale went bankrupt and dragged a highly successful bicycle business down with it. ATK continues in its less-than-grandiose way. In fact, ATK purchased the entire inventory of Cannondale bikes, quads and parts for pennies on the dollar and is now picking up where the bicycle conglomerate left off. It gets a little confusing, because an Asian corporation named Denli also purchased a piece of the Cannondale puzzle. That company has the tooling and the rights to manufacture quads overseas. But ATK's right to produce and sell American-made motorcycles and ATVs is unaffected.





When is a Cannondale not a Cannondale? Never. Even the ATK feels just like a Cannondale.



This is the bike that Cannondale would have eventually built if a bankruptcy judge hadn't so rudely locked the doors.

If you want options, the ATK has them. An automatic clutch is offered for \$1000 and a GPR Stabilizer is \$375. An adjustable ignition, a dual-sport kit and a super-moto kit will be available soon.



JUST ANOTHER CANNONDALE?

ATK isn't just selling more of the underdeveloped '03 Cannondale 430MXs. When the original company was stopped in its tracks, it was working on solving a number of problems. The new bikes that will come out of the Utah ATK plant will mix those cures in with a variety of other changes. ATK hired BMW engineer Wade Wilcox to design a number of new parts.

- First of all, there's a new piston that brings the displacement to 450cc. The old piston had a service life of about 100 hours. The new version is expected to go three times that far.
- ATK is remanufacturing the crankshafts with a different balance factor. The old cranks would basically vibrate the engines into pieces.
- The transmission will now have several new gears for greater durability.
- The existing shifting mechanism was reworked for better shifting and an easier-to-find neutral.
- New fasteners are designed to keep the transmission cartridge from coming loose.
- Engine noise has been reduced with a new clutch hub.
- The ATKs have larger radiator shrouds than the Cannondales.



The new piston and the old one. The new version is bigger, but weighs less and is expected to last about three times as long.

- The Ohlins suspension is revalved.
- ATK will be using many of its existing vendors for parts. As a result, the bike will have Pro Taper bars, Talon hubs, an X-ring chain and Wave rotors.
- The fuel injection/ignition has been re-mapped by the fuel-injection whizzes at Optimum Power Technology.

A LITTLE REVIEW

The bike is still 90 percent Cannondale. For those of you who don't know what that means, a little history is in order. The bike was originally designed by people who thought they were much smarter than anyone in the motorcycle industry. At first, they ignored all advice from the people who *really* knew what they were doing. As a result, they built a machine that was over-complicated, overweight and underpowered. Eventually they began to listen to the right people, but the bike still defies convention. The engine is run by a CPU that coordinates the electronic fuel injection and the ignition. There is no kickstarter; it's a push-button-only machine. The cylinder is backwards compared to a normal engine—that is, the intake is in front, drawing from a filter that's under the tank, and the exhaust is in back. The frame is aluminum and the Ohlins shock is mounted at a steep angle without linkage.

Cannondale recalled virtually all of its original bikes, but there are still about 2000 motorcycles out there. Additionally, there are 4000 quads, and a number of unsold units sitting in showrooms. Part of ATK's new deal is to offer some support to those owners. If you have an original Cannondale and you would like it updated with the new parts, ATK has packages that start around \$1100. If you want all the changes, you should call them up and negotiate a price.



So does ATK have the ability to sell motorcycles after the old inventory is gone? Apparently so, as most of the parts are made by small companies in the U.S.

THE NEW BIKE

We got a chance to ride a new ATK 450 for a day in the Southern California desert. The model we had was the Enduro, which is the same as the XC with the addition of an off-road gear and a new ignition curve. We liked it. Not surprisingly, it was just like the last Cannondale we rode. Yes, it was a little faster and vibrated less, but it brought back overwhelming memories. It's a very distinctive bike. The engine has a long, smooth powerband and decent rev. When you open the throttle, there's a distinctive noise coming from between your legs. Don't be alarmed; that's just where the intake is.

Cannondales were the most stable machines on earth. So is the ATK. It seems like a two-wheel locomotive. It's also as big as a locomotive, so this isn't a bike for a little man. Right now, the suspension probably needs some more development for off-road use. The



The prices will be \$7595 for the enduro, \$7295 for the XC and \$6995 for the MX. The biggest differences will be ignition curves, headlights, kickstands and things like that.

Cannondale people were obsessed with motocross. Frankly, it makes a much better desert machine, but the rear end is a little harsh in rocks.

Some of the annoying Cannondale traits are back for a return engagement. The engine stalls easily, is finicky about starting and has erratic throttle response at low rpm. All those are EFI issues that will likely be dealt with. Remember, this is just the first generation of re-born ATKs. Now that its evolution can continue, the bike stands a good chance of becoming the machine that the Cannondale people always hoped it would be. It will just do it on a much smaller scale. □