



THE BAJA CHAMPION YFZ450R

We ride the factory machine that put Yamaha back in the running

By the staff of Dirt Wheels





Spider grips with ODI donuts grace the Fasst Co. Flex bar ends, as well as a plug for the communication system and a talk button for the radio.



We love the Trail Tech Endurance mount the team came up with.



The GPR stabilizer (behind the front bumper) helps keep steering kick down. Here you can see the start of the plastic GYTR frame skid plate and the GYTR bumper with number plate.



The Motoworks SR4 G2 exhaust is inexpensive, looks great, sounds phenomenal and produces great power. It's a winner in our books.

□ Mexico's Baja 500 is a famed and historic race that dates back to 1969, spanning nearly 500 miles across the Mexican desert. It starts and ends in Ensenada, one of the western off-road community's most famed locations. Vehicles start in town and run a long loop through various terrain types and temperature changes of up to 50 degrees Fahrenheit. This year, the Golden West Cycle/Yamaha Factory YFZ450R team of Josh Row, Dustin Nelson, DJ Noerr and Travis Dillon pulled out a first-place finish, headed by team manager and Baja legend Greg Row. We caught up with Josh and his mechanic Kevin Avina for a close look and a test ride of the YFZ450R out in Glen Helen on a private day. You can find a full-length ride video and interview on www.dirtwheelsmag.com!

BUILDING A CHAMPION

The key to getting a machine to finish in Baja is careful riding and lots of preparation. Teams will spend months dialing in and prepping the machine for race day, with a generous use of safety wire, tape and pit tricks to make the day as smooth as possible. It was no different for the Yamaha team, as mechanics Kevin Avina and John Nelson carefully built the machine from basically the frame up to be in perfect racing shape. Tons of tricks went into the build, such as bolting small bits of plastic to the seat mounts and subframe to keep the seat locked into place and to keep it

Here associate editor Cody Hooper squats down under Josh Row on a huge tabletop to get a shot. Check out the video at www.dirtwheelsmag.com.

from rubbing wires raw around the airbox. Holes were cut in the plastics for quick access to the radiator in the pits, and the thumb throttle was switched out for a twist to reduce fatigue and allow the riders to hang on longer.

Upon first look, you would never believe that the YFZ just did 500 miles in the rough Mexican desert. We rode it less than a week after it completed the race, giving them no time to tear it down and rebuild it—it got a quick wash, and we threw a leg over it. Starting the YFZ and revving it, you would think it has got a fully built, fire-breathing engine; however, the only internal modification performed on the YFZ's motor was a quick port cleanup by Pro Tec. No big cams, no oversized valves, no high-compression pistons—just a bone-stock bottom end and a slightly ported head with an air filter, Motoworks off-the-shelf exhaust, and an FMI fuel tuner. Surprising, right?

The same goes for the suspension. While the settings are proprietary, the Elka Stage 5 bodies are nearly identical to the ones on our project Raptor 734, and the Roll Design suspension kit is available to the public as well. In fact, every part on the Baja quad is readily available to the public. By big build standards, this YFZ is nowhere

BAJA YFZ450R



PARTS

Fasst Co. Flexx Bars: \$349.99
Fasst Co. Brake Clevice: \$39.99
Spider Grips: \$16.95
Powermadd Handguards: \$59.99
IMS 3.8 Gal. Tank w/ Dry Brake: \$274.95
Elka Stage 5 Shocks: \$1795 a pair (f) and \$1295 (r)
Roll Design LT Front End: \$1,395.95
Roll Design Steering Stem: \$299.95
DWT Wheels: \$451.95 a set
GYTR Nerf Bars: \$219.95
GYTR Frame Skid: \$110
PRM Products .250" Swingarm Skid Plate: \$124.95
Trail Tech Endurance II Computer: \$79.99
Racer X Race Radio: Call for price
Pro Tec Airbox Lid: \$85.95
Pro Tec Mild Porting: Call for price
Motoworks Full Exhaust: \$399.95
GYTR Air Filter: \$54.95
Motoworks FMI: \$199.95
GPR Steering Stabilizer: \$429.99
GYTR Clutch Cover: \$134.95

CONTACTS

DWT: (760) 758-5560 or www.dwtracing.com
Elka: (800) 557-0552 or www.elkasuspension.com
Fasst Co: (877) 306-1801 or www.fasstco.com
GPR: (619) 661-0101 or www.gprstabilizer.com
GYTR: Your local Yamaha dealership or www.yamaha-motor.com
IMS: (800) 237-9906 or www.imsproducts.com
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Racer X: (619) 258-RACE or www.racerxms.com
Roll Design: (760) 731-5920 or www.rolldesign.com
Spider Grips: www.spidergrips.com
Trail Tech: (360) 687-4530 or www.trailtech.net



The GYTR nerf bars are strong enough to hold up to the rigors of Baja, and feature huge heel nets for grip.



The YFZ handles relatively close to a stock machine—until you start to push it hard, where it rewards you by giving feedback that helps you read the terrain.

BAJA YFZ450R



The 5A bike is easy to flick around, and the suspension takes massive hits without flinching.

near the upper echelon of price; it's actually pretty modest. That says something about the YFZ450R!

Small bits and pieces come together to make a completely transformed machine—it feels little like a stock YFZ ergonomically, with much taller bars, lower footpegs and a slightly altered stance. You can tell a lot of tuning went into this machine, and the team says that their experience in WORCS racing led to a lot of the settings they use for Baja. The funny thing is, the Baja machine is almost identical to Josh's practice bike, which he rides for MX and WORCS.

THE RIDE

After taking care of our photo and video duties (and sitting under the flying YFZ for a close-up video clip), we geared up and threw a leg over the Baja machine. The twist throttle is a bit odd to get used to on the track; we ride a ton of quads, but very few ever have a twist conversion. It's amazing how different the level of control is with a twist throttle between a dirt bike and a quad. On the quad, there is a lot more bar movement, making it tougher to hang on and control the throttle effectively. After a few laps, we were a little more comfortable and able to really give the YFZ some

gas. The suspension is harsh initially if you aren't flying through the track, and the harder you hit stuff, the better it feels. Big landings were easy, whoops disappeared under the tires and cornering was as flat as you could imagine. The YFZ's motor has no problem pulling the big quad through the thick Glen Helen silt, even with its heavy 12-ply DWT tires. It's not going to win any motocross races, but in Baja, winning a race takes careful aim and consistency. The Flexx bars filter out a lot of hard-edged hits, and the GPR stabilizer cuts down on headshake on the high-speed sections.

During the shoot, Josh was skying every jump on the Glen Helen track with ease, tapping a foot on the brake to drop the front end for the landing and showing some real style. You can tell he's comfortable on the bike, which is why he and his teammates Dustin Nelson, Travis Dillon and DJ Noerr all blazed past the competition during the race. We watched the team come through the pits in person down in Baja, and their pace was incredible. With a finish time of 10:52:07, they edged out Brandon Brown's Honda mounted team by three minutes after suffering a two-



The 12-ply DWT tires are literally bullet-proof. The team tested the tire with no valve-stem cores (no air in the tires).



John Nelson and Kevin Avina do a ton to prep the YFZ, and that includes making sure nothing comes off, no matter how hard the riders beat the machine.



The Pro Tec lid repels water, filters dirt and allows more airflow. We have used them and they rock.

minute penalty for excessive speed in a metered zone near Ojos Negros.

The YFZ features an extended-range IMS tank with a dry-brake attachment, which is a large, quick-fill adapter used to quickly fill the tank in the pits. It also has a handlebar-mounted switch for the Racer X pit radio, which allows the pit crew to communicate with the riders from many miles away. If you've never been to Baja to experience the racing

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BAJA YFZ450R

scene, it's something you need to do at least once in your life. It's a whole different world down there, and racers are respected like royalty. We will be covering the Baja 1000 ATV race effort this November, so check www.dirtwheelsmag.com for updates!

A WORD FROM JOSH ROW

If you haven't watched the post-race interview videos on DirtWheelsMag.com, check them out for some behind-the-scenes information. When we caught up with Josh, here's what he had to say:

"I would like to thank our mechanics Kevin Avina and John Nelson [Dustin's dad] for the incredible job they did putting the bike together and running our pits. Also, the pit crew— Greg Row, Brett Callen, Rick, Everett, Dave Noerr [DJ's Dad], Wes, Roy Smith, Rhyan Williams and Dustin Schawia—we couldn't have done it without you guys. And last but not least, I want to thank my mom and dad for all the support and help over the years. Thanks, Dirt Wheels!" □

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