

CHINESE BURN

Puzey's new offering goes a long way to repairing the reputation of the dreaded Chinese bike

WORDS // **ANT LYON** PHOTOGRAPHY // **iKAPTURE**

To think that a Chinese bike could not only stand up to an afternoon's abuse but also leave three *ADB* testers grinning like school kids at the end seems inconceivable. And yet, there we were, sitting in the back of the *ADB* van at the Lakes motocross track (NSW), swapping stories of plunging down treacherous hills, laying into berms and jumping doubles while the fading echo of the Puzey XTR2 250 reverberated in our ears.

Up until now, China hasn't been known as a nation that produces great motorcycles. In fact, the reality has been quite the opposite. Riding on the tide of economic opportunity, a million poorly

constructed, badly supported Chinese bikes have flooded the country in recent years, souring the taste of any consumer unfortunate enough to have opened their wallets. The reputation has become so bad in fact, that we're told the Dalby motocross track even has a sign on the gate that says "No Chinese bikes"!

The brain-child of South African inventor Mike Puzey, the XTR2 250 is set to erase the stereotypes associated with Chinese-made full-size motorcycles as it brings with it a level of performance, build-quality and after-sales support rarely seen to this point. With a range of top-shelf brands under their roof, national distributor, Stoney Creek Powersports has a reputation to uphold

and has taken every possible step to launch Puzey as a quality brand.

And the XTR2 250 is just the beginning. An enduro and a supermoto version are also in the pipeline, as well as a high-performance competition 450.

"There's a lot of Asian stuff on the market that looks good but doesn't go good," explained Stoney Creek's Dale Schmidtchen. "Whatever we can do to differentiate Puzey from other Chinese bikes, we'll do, as we want this to be the first Chinese entry you can seriously take off-road."

That's a claim we're happy to put to the test, so join us as we swap our chopsticks for bike grips and enter the "fun cha" zone.



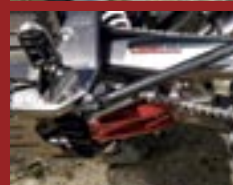


Cradled within the strong looking frame, the two-valve, electric start Loncin engine boasts a slick 5-speed gearbox and 25 shetland ponies on tap

With modern styling, tapered bars and a slim feel, the XTR2's cockpit means business

Quality billet alloy SPX hubs put the polish on an already visually impressive package

The unique billet linkage not only looks trick but provides good progressive action at the rear



DALE SCHMIDTCHEN
Stoney Creek Powersports

"I've been a major critic of a lot of the companies that bring in Chinese stuff. But what's amazing about China is they can pump out crap but they can also make Boeing jet engines if they get told how. By offering a six-month warranty, by making it look like a real motorbike and going to a level of performance that the owner will be happy with, we've entered the mainstream market with the first serious Chinese-built dirt bike."

A SECOND CHANCE AT A FIRST IMPRESSION

As the XTR2 was wheeled out like a pork dumpling, the first thing that struck me was just how good it looks. Its KTM-inspired plastics are aggressively styled and the billet-alloy bling gives the bike a factory look. As with a lot of Asian-made products, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery and there's plenty here that harks back to the trusted brands we're familiar with. The SPX hubs look awesome, the levers are tougher than a temple full of Shaolin monks, and the frame looks incredibly strong thanks to a chunky alloy section that connects the top of the frame to the subframe, swingarm and engine cradle.

On closer inspection, there's also a number of cheaper parts, such as a chrome-plated pipe, flimsy key lock holder, an antique-looking kickstart lever with rubber grip (that later melted against the pipe guard!) and a \$10 jerry can-

quality fuel cap, but overall (and considering the \$3690 price tag) we weren't disappointed.

TRIAL BY FIRE

If a bike had ever been set up to fail an *ADB* test this was it. Honestly, what could be more unfair than turning a pack of power-hungry testers, including an ex-factory Pro, loose on one of the most gruelling MX tracks in the country with a sub-\$4K Chinese bike? That's right, nothing.

After dialling in the suspension clickers, it was time for Broomy to hit the track. A few "feeler" laps later, Broomy began to dig in while the rest of us watched, holding our breath on the sidelines just waiting for something to fall off. With a Chinese-burn grip, Broomy wrung every last ounce of power out of the two-valve Loncin engine as he rewed his way through the 5-speed gearbox.

With a claimed 25hp, the Puze certainly won't rip your arms out, but for this bike the

lower output is actually a good thing. The mild delivery means beginner riders and keen youngsters can instantly get on and have fun without worrying about taming the violent surge of power typical of high-performance machines.

The combination of acceleration bumps and the skatey hardpack surface at Lakes made it hard for the 450s to maintain traction, however, the low-intensity Puze easily tracted the largest of our riders to the top without complaint.

While it's certainly not a race bike in standard trim, there's a lot of hidden potential within the engine – much of which could be unlocked simply by improving the intake and exhaust system to let it breathe better.

Back in the pits, Dale explained their engine philosophy some more. "There's plenty more horsepower in it but I'd rather the customer develops the last 5 or 10, as we've got a warranty that says it can give 25 reliable horses. We don't

→ RIDE IMPRESSION
PUZEY XTR2 250

Heavier spring rates are a must if you want to grab some air but that won't stop you trying!



want to release this thing on the market with 38hp and have it blowing up every third race meeting. At the end of a year, I want people to say, 'I would've liked 10 more horsepower but nothing went wrong with it – beautiful'."

A known power freak, everyone expected the worst when Broomy returned to the pits and handed it over to fast Vet Garry Blizzard. Would he like it or rip it to shreds?

After pulling off his helmet, he surprised us as much as the bike had just surprised him. "It was good!" he beamed. "It didn't have the power that I thought it would but it didn't really matter. The gearbox is really good – you can flat change under load and bang it through the gears really easily with a slip of the clutch, which was surprising!"

With that last tidbit, Dale breathed an audible sigh of relief, having hastily assembled the eight-plate clutch just that morning. In typical spare-no-expense fashion, Stoney Creek had flown the bike in just days before and had raced to assemble it in time. With a serial number that read "003" the pre-production XTR2 250 is only the third one made and is still very much in the development stage.

As Blizzard roared down the main straight, the Puze made an annoying chain clatter, due largely to a chain guide (which we would remove) and a slightly loose chain. Ignoring that, the only other mechanical noises came from the substantial clunk every time he felt

SPECS '09 Puze XTR2 250	
ENGINE	
Engine type	2-valve, 4-stroke
Capacity	249cc
Starting	Electric with kickstart backup
Fuel system	Carby
Transmission	5-speed
Fuel capacity	9L
DIMENSIONS	
Weight (measured)	123.5kg
Seat Height	920mm
SPARES	
ETA	Available now
Distributor	Stoney Creek Powersports
Warranty	6 months unlimited km
RRP (incl GST, excl pre-delivery)	\$3690

adventurous enough to fly off a jump and bottom the soft suspension. Although the range of adjustment in both the front and rear suspension is nothing short of impressive, riders over 80kg will definitely need to get heavier springs.

Both ends feel very balanced and give a confidence-inspiring stability to the Puze that entices you to push hard, brake late and attack sections of the track at speed. And that's where the fun-factor kicks in. On a competition MXer, finding and pushing the limits, especially around a national-caliber circuit like Lakes, is potentially hazardous to your health. While on the Puze, finding and



GARRY BLIZZARD

Fast Vet

38, 172cm, 84kg
"Fun-factor-10 for me! When I was doing the berm, it was so much fun. Putting a larger rear sprocket to shorten the gap between the gears would make a huge amount of difference. Obviously its slower than other bikes and I expected a bit more out of it for a 250, but once you got into it and held your cornerspeed the fun-factor was unbelievable! The fact that nothing fell off it was good ... and we flogged it!"

ANT LYON

Clubman

32, 188cm, 102kg
"Like the other guys, I was impressed by just how much bang the Puze offers for your buck. It's a blast to ride and allows you to twist the throttle to the stops without fear of consequences. Stronger suspension would elevate the bike to the next level of fun. For the beginner rider, it's a great choice and the only thing that remains to be seen is its long-term reliability."



PAUL BROOMFIELD

MX Pro

31, 179cm, 95kg
"It's a good-looking bike for the price and for the market that it's aimed at it's perfect. It's designed for someone starting out in the sport to go out and have a ball and I think they've achieved that. It's a really fun bike, it's really well balanced and I was surprised at how well it handled the track. You can challenge yourself without the speed and the danger factor of a bigger bike, so it's interesting even for us."

pushing the limits is about as dangerous as a blind date – sure you might suffer a slap or two in the process but you'll live to laugh about it and brag to your mates when it's over.

After hours of merciless flogging, the Puze held up admirably. The bike is fun in its purest form. It's not as fast, as well suspended or as well made as a Japanese machine, but, for a third of the price, it more than makes up for any shortfall with plain affordability. Best of all, with Stoney Creek Powersports commitment to Puze matched by their back-up service and support, no longer do riders need to cower in fear at the three most terrifying words in the English language: "Made in China". **ADB**