

GEAR & GADGETS



DIRT DON'T HURT
Honda's knobby-tired Talon can tear up any terrain. Just don't get it stalled atop a dune.

version of Honda's CRF1000L Africa Twin adventure motorcycle. They share the 999-cc, 8-valve SOHC parallel-twin engine (104 hp in the Talon), with a 270-degree phased crankshaft and uneven firing order; and thus share the blatty, torque-hucking note and the ballistic hardening of the enduro engine.

The Talon, which comes in wide-track R (desert, open ground) and narrower X (track and trail) variants, has a top speed of about 74 mph; for me maxxing out in third gear felt like going over the falls is a dirt-filled barrel.

The Talon and African Twin also share a six-speed, dual-clutch

Taking cues from Baja style buggies, side-by-sides are affordable, mindless toys, not to put too fine a point on it.

transmission (DCT), as compared with the competitive set that almost all use a centrifugal, continuously variable transmission (CVT), a "stepless" transmission.

That brings us back to my sandy predicament. Unlike a CVT, the Talon's DCT creates a solid linkage between engine and wheels through the gears. This arrangement has two advantages: right-now throttle response from low rpm; and what's called engine-braking effect.

It works like this: you, the driver piloting the Honda approach a turn in second gear, let's say; you relent on the gas, and the buggy slows up, fast and hard, without benefit of the friction brakes. The sudden forward weight transfer and springy front suspension make the Honda's back end go light. You let the tail pitch around and once you're pointed where you want to go, you blast the throttle. Up comes the nose and the machine wiggles itself straight, fulminating sand. Awesome.

The Talon's connectedness, its motorsports feel, its happy squirreliness, all stem from the presence of the DCT. And indeed in all but perhaps one scenario—breathing the throttle while nearing the crest a sand dune, alas—the engine-braking is a distinct pleasure, a real reason to buy.

The Talon does have four-wheel drive, after a fashion. The I-4WD function, engaged by cockpit switch, sends power to the front differential. Shared with the company's Pioneer utility ATV, the system avoids the crabbing and limited steering angle that comes with a conventional locking front differential by using instead a brake-based, torque-directing design, like an automobile's. There is also a low-speed, high-torque mode brought about by something Honda calls a "subtransmission."

I threw all the switches, but in the most extreme moments, the Talon's fancy front diff only kicked sand in my face.

Sure, the Talon 1000X can get you through almost anything. But as Bishop Sheil used to say about faith moving mountains: "Bring a shovel."

RUMBLE SEAT / DAN NEIL



Toys of Summer: Kicking Up Dust in Honda's Talon 1000X

OUTBACK ATV PARK, near Laurinburg, N.C., and the tick-filled pines of Fort Bragg, offers enthusiasts some of the deepest, dampest, most flavorful sand to be found anywhere. Among the amenities: 600-plus acres of bush-hogged trails and fire roads; a motocross track blazed into a field by knobby tires; and sand bowls—pits where riders on dirt bikes and all-terrain vehicles can roostertail round and round, exorcising their demons until they are at last consumed in sand tornadoes of their own making.

The sign out by the road proclaims that Outback is "The People's Park," which struck me as an intriguing bit of backwoods Bolshevism. Most days, the place is on the honor system: \$5 per person, \$10 with a machine, all day. Yes, OK, in the breeze you may catch a whiff like the south end of a northbound chicken. Clouds of gnats do tend to gather convivially in one's eyelashes. But otherwise, it's paradise.

I was halfway to China aboard Honda's new Talon 1000X side-by-side (SXS)—steering hard over, throttle pinned, engine bawling—when I decided I'd eaten my fill. I aimed the machine skyward, but a

photographer was too close to my landing zone, so I had to get out of throttle. The Talon immediately lost momentum, settling on its tube-frame belly, its four wheels spinning, vainly flatulating horsepower.

It is actually quite difficult to immobilize an ATV with 12.7 inches of ground clearance and 15.1 inches of rear suspension travel. It takes teamwork and split-second timing. But if there is one thing I've learned in motorsports, it's *always* blame the shooter.

The category, Alex, is sport side-by-sides (referring to the seating

arrangement). This non-DOT approved phenotype evolved out of utility side-by-sides, for farm and work, in the 2000s; they take their design-engineering cues from Baja-style buggies (tube-frame, long-travel, coil-over suspension and open wheels). They are relatively affordable, mindless toys, not to put too fine a point on it.

The big players in funzies SXS are Polaris, with a line of two- and four-seat gadgets with turbo engines, the RZR XP family, ranging in price from \$18,599-\$28,399; and Can-Am, with the Maverick X3 se-

ries, which start at \$18,999 and escalate to \$29,999 for the X3 Max X RS Turbo RR, a turnkey rock-crawler with 16 inches of ground clearance, wearing 14-inch cast aluminum bead-lock rims and 30-inch knobbies. This summer, drive across the faces of Mount Rushmore.

Despite Honda's diverse portfolio—from private jets to snowblowers—its Powersports division took a while to join the sport SXS fray. Yet sitting in the Talon, it's easy to see the longer-to-market was spent baking in familiar Honda-ness. In key respects, the Talon is a four-wheeled



2019 HONDA TALON 1000X SXS

Base Price \$19,999

Powertrain 999cc longitudinally mounted parallel-twin four-stroke with direct front/rear drive shafts; six-speed dual-clutch automatic transmission with three shift modes; two- or four-wheel drive modes with high- and low-speed sub-transmission.

Suspension Front double-

wishbone with coil-over Fox shocks; rear three-link with anti-roll bar
Suspension Travel 14.6/15.1 inches (f/r)
Horsepower 104 hp
Top Speed 74 mph
Length/Width/Height/Wheelbase 123.9/64.0/75.3/87.6 inches
Weight 1,490 pounds
Ground Clearance 12.7 inches

The Vest You Can Do

For summer runners, staying cool and looking cool can be incompatible goals. Achieve both with these hydration packs

IT'S 91 DEGREES, the humidity is topping 80% and you've somewhat stupidly decided now is the perfect time for an hour-long training run. What could go wrong?

For starters, humans tend to be a tad dehydrated on average, as a 2018 study in the journal *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise* suggests, and working out while low on water can lead to dizziness, headaches and decreased cognitive function—not ideal for dodging city traffic.

To stay hydrated while exercising outdoors, you need to drink a minimum of 24 ounces of water per hour, according to the American College of Sports Medicine. Unless you live in a town that's strangely cluttered with drinking fountains, you're best off securing a couple bottles to your chest, or strapping on a wearable water bladder in backpack or vest form, said Juan Delgado, a biomechanist at the NY Sports Science Lab.

Running vests often look supremely dorky but can be a literal lifesaver when it comes to carrying that 1.5 pounds of water. Patagonia's relatively stylish new Slope Runner Vest 4L conveniently stores two 17-ounce soft flasks in accessible chest pockets; CamelBak's Zephyr Vest, which will retail for \$150 when it launches in 2020, has a similarity capacity plus room for an additional 68-ounce bladder (\$33, camelbak.com) at the back.

Why not just carry water bottles? "Holding things in your hands changes your running biomechanics," said Mr. Delgado. Not only does it affect your arm swing, it can shift your hips out of alignment because of the excess weight on one side. Water belts have their own flaws, he added. That extra heft can negatively affect your hip rotation and flexion, said Mr. Delgado: "You're actually impeding the way your upper and lower body move."

Vests efficiently situate that weight in the middle of the chest or back. And with compressive fabrics and adjustable straps helping the water stay tightly bound to your body, you barely notice it sloshing.

Those vests that incorporate bladders tend to be the best option, because you can often just drink hands-free from a long attached straw. Take Lululemon's Enlite Hydraraffinity Vest—a rather chic women's vest designed to balance movement and prevent chafing. It's so comfortable, you forget you're effectively sipping from your sports bra. The Nike Trail Kiger Running Vest accommodates two bottles and a bladder, with extra pockets for storing energy bars and rain shells.

Your chances of becoming dehydrated jump up 20% in the dog days of summer, said Mr. Delgado. When you're parched at mile five, it's nice to have your own snazzy oasis strapped to your chest. —Ashley Mateo



RUN FROM DEHYDRATION Clockwise from top-left: Vest, \$139, patagonia.com; Vest, \$150, available spring 2020, camelbak.com; Vest, \$178, lululemon.com; Vest, \$185, nike.com