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SA, THE LAND OF STEERING DAMPERS

Hi all you guys and gals out there. I am very happy as I have just received my new Yamaha 2010 YZ250F. I am having a great time riding and developing the suspension to pass on set up to customers out there. Special thanks to Yamaha for their support. I think the results of my development starts to show now by the results achieved this year by the Yamaha race team. Good suspension mods are a key factor in making an MX bike into a successful enduro mount.

I am always amazed by the number of bikes that arrive at my workshop with steering dampers. Especially because most the bikes are enduro bikes and most riders claim to like very technical riding! While developing in Europe I hardly ever saw bikes with steering dampers fitted. In fact if one came along it was a surprise.

It is not that I am against steering dampers or discourage their use, it is more a case of why so many people see the need for one.

I recommend that, before you bolt on your damper, test your bike without one first. Why I say this is because a modern enduro bike when set up correctly should not need a steering damper to function properly. If you ride without the damper (or turn it off) and experience headshake, oversteer understeer or stability problems, then something is wrong with your basic set up (wrong springs, incorrect click setting, wrong sag, ect.) It is vital to first set up the bike properly as masking these problems by using a damper is a bad idea. Once your bike handles like it should and is stable at all speeds only then should you consider a steering damper.

Certainly a damper can help in situations such as de Wildt river beds where lurkers are under the sand and are hit unexpectedly at high speeds. Also for high speed desert type races dampers can be good, especially on heavier bikes with large fuel tanks with very variable fuel loads. (e.g. Dakar bikes) As fuel empties so the bikes balance changes and stability problems can occur.

My advice is to get your bike to work first without a damper. Once this is done then you will find a damper can help in certain situations if used correctly.

For technical enduro riding use the damper on its weakest damping setting. If you enter a fast straight line section only then turn the damping up to aid straight line stability.

Remember a damper is not designed to fix or solve handling issues. It is purely a tool to aid the stability of an already properly set up bike. In this situation it can work to your advantage and only then can it improve handling.

A badly set up bike that uses a steering damper to help mask the handling problems is much worse than a correctly set up bike without any damper at all!

The ideal is a good set up in combination with an easily adjustable damper.