

# TWO FOR ONE

## 2011 Gas Gas EC300 CC. This time they get it all right - well nearly

Story and photos John Nick

**While some still think of Gas Gas as brash newcomers it was over 15 years ago when I first rode a Gas Gas. That first EC 250 I rode was an unswerving no-compromise enduro bike and the 2011 edition of Gas Gas's EC300 CC shows no deviation from the concept; this remains very enduro focussed bike, designed not only to win fast special tests, but to tackle the most extreme trails you can imagine.**

This 2011 Gas Gas is faster and easier to ride than it's predecessors and the detailing is (with one notable exception) significantly improved, there is even an electric start option. Also notable is the look of the bike, not a performance attribute in itself, but who wants an ugly ride? With new red frame, black rims and more finely sculpted side panels, shrouds, headlight and guards this bike is also a visual attention getter. This year Gas Gas only offer the off-road only enduro version in NZ. This bike comes only with basic lights and wiring and is in all respects ready to race out of the box.

### MOTOR MAGIC

For most the headline news will be the electric start option, but in my mind the best feature of the 2011 bike is the way the engine makes its power. The reason for my excitement is the variable ignition mapping. Set the switch to the 'rain' setting and you get a gloriously broad seamless spread of low-end and midrange power. The motor also feels very smooth which contributes to the controlled surge effect of the power. Tweak the throttle above the wide mid-range and you get a bonus surge of top end. This setting provides the ultimate hook-up potential for slippery technical conditions. Climbing gnarly hills was a revelation. The 300 gets so much drive that often at that critical point where you would expect to be struggling for grip and momentum, you realise that you can coast up the rest of the climb!

Not simply a trail rider's setting 'rain' mode will, in low traction situations, get you and keep you moving faster than the more aggressive ignition map. The rise of Extreme Enduro in Europe has thrown more focus on the ability of light and torquey two strokes in very tough terrain and there's no doubt the latest EC300 is built with difficult trails in mind.

Re-start the engine in 'sunshine' mode, and feel the difference. Its almost as if you have changed motors: the 300 now barks off the bottom end, snarls through the mid range, and just when you thought I was going to mix my metaphors, growls into a healthy top end. Your engine has been transformed into a special test tool, just the thing to launch out of rutted corners, or deep sand or loam and the way FMF muffler changes to a deeper note as the revs rise is very satisfying. I've heard Gas Gas enduro bikes called slow revving in the past. While all the EC series including this bike spin large flywheels in the European style, the EC300 is not slow to accelerate in either ignition mode.

All this magic comes with only minor outward change: yes, there's an electric starter tacked onto the flywheel side of the engine, the latest version of Keihin's PWK carb, and a large bodied FMF Q Stealth muffler. Less obvious are detail tweaks to induction and power valve operation. Once again Gas Gas have proved that their rugged and simple two stroke engine is seemingly capable of endless development. Mated to the never-say-die

engine is a tough but finger-light hydraulic clutch and well-spaced six-speed transmission that gives a choice (at times it seems a surplus) of ratios.

#### WELCOME TO E START

Following KTM's lead, Gas Gas grafted a starter motor and reduction gear to a revamped ignition cover. Under the seat above the air filter is a large 7 amp battery. The addition of electric start has come with a weight penalty – 5 kg to be exact. With 5 litres of fuel on board the 2011 electric start weighs 113kg against the 108kg for the previous kick-start version. Though the EC300 is a very easy starting bike, it's hard to go back to kicking. During the course of the photo shoot we must have started the bike sixty times for a distance of 3 km made good. At no time did the engine fail to fire instantly. How much effort you will save depends on where and how you ride, but it does add up.

#### CHASSIS UPGRADED

While the engine got attention so did the chassis. Following on from recent big changes to the construction of the chrome steel frame, Gas Gas have reinforced and streamlined the foot peg area, redesigned the brake pedal, and fitted new brake callipers (all brake hydraulics are Nissin) and wave rotors plus extra engine skid protection. A new seat proved far more comfortable than earlier models and though slightly taller, still leaves the EC300 with one of the lowest effective seat heights on a competition bike. Stock tyres are Metzeler Enduro Extreme.

A new Ohlins rear shock is now two-way compression adjustable while up front there are 45 mm Marzocchi Shiver forks with revised damping settings. The rear shock felt very plush on choppy bumps and tree roots, significantly more so than previous models, but could be bottomed on a flat landing off a big jump. We subsequently found that our test bike was running a lighter 5.0 spring instead of the stock 5.2, so not surprising. The forks however are if anything more firm, though still very controlled the only harshness being felt on tree roots and rocks by lighter riders. However as a consequence of this set up the 2011 EC300 feels more comfortable at higher speeds over rough farmland and when charging downhill than its predecessors.

The new frame continues the Gas Gas neutral steering tradition. With almost 55/58 kg front to rear weight bias the EC300 will just as easily drift mid corner, square off inside, or track high on a berm. The bike feels very light and fairly agile, though not as quick steering as the KTM 300, but always planted and reassuringly stable. Lofting the front wheel is always easy and balance and control in slippery conditions are noticeably good.

#### LIFTING THE GAME

I was pleased to see that Gas Gas have continued to lift their game when it comes to minor detailing. While the main components of the bike have long been rugged and effective there has been room for improvement in areas of detail. Notable new upgrades include captive brass nuts in the fuel tank for radiator shrouds, conventional chain guide, thermostat for faster warm-up and one-piece clear fuel tank; though someone went out to a very long lunch the day they signed off the air box access. As delivered the filter is a fiddle and a minor modification to the left side cover is necessary to make filter changing easier and more reliable. Otherwise the EC300 is as simple as you can get, the forged Wisco piston and rings have a good reputation for longevity, as do the gearbox, clutch Nippon Denso electrics, rugged wheels and Nissin brakes. A set of radiator guards, Barkbusters and a simpler one-button starter switch and separate kill button are all I would add for hard use.

## VERSATILITY PLUS

The EC 300 is a pure enduro racer, unashamedly built for conquering tough trails and shaving seconds off twisty special tests, the dual personality of the remarkable engine means it is equally good in either role.

Previous EC models may have fallen short of the expectations of Kiwi cross country racers bred on open tracks that generally suit out and out motocross machines. The latest version of the EC300 CC by virtue of its more authoritative full power curve and firmer forks is more at home in these faster conditions.

More important perhaps, this is a bike that can appeal to serious trail riders as well as competition riders. As long as you don't mind mixing fuel, the EC300 is also a superb tool for tough trail rides. The light weight, ease of riding, stall-proof engine and broad seamless spread of power need to be experienced to be appreciated. This is, by a good margin, the best Gas Gas I have ridden