

2013 SHERCO SE 300iR

CREDIBLE CONTENDER

By John Nick

If Japan is seen to be growing cold in the enduro market, Europe is certainly not and Sherco is a case in point. The part-Spanish part-French company that has its roots in the trials bike arena, is becoming equally passionate about enduro.

Sherco recently added the all-new, long-stroke SE 300iR to complement their existing 250, 450 and 510 four stroke enduros. Sherco's entry to the enduro field has been progressive, starting with the 450 back in 2005. Later this year some innovative looking 250 and 300cc two strokes will make their debut, along with all-new big-bore four strokes to replace the 450 and 510 models.

I have to confess, the last Sherco enduro bike I rode was the 2005 450. I found this a beautifully made combination of fine components blended in effective harmony - a remarkably good, if slightly conservative, first enduro design.

Sherco's 2013 creation, the SE 300iR, can easily shrug off any accusation of being conservative. This bike makes a strong, definite statement, and shows how much confidence the company has gained in a few short years. Contrary to paddock rumour, the Sherco SE 300iR is not based on a Yamaha or a KTM, but stands alone as a unique design.

In true European tradition, this bike owes nothing to the world of motocross, it is pure enduro design - a mix of sharp handling frame, and torquey but responsive engine, with a full complement of six gears. Everything about the 300iR is targeted at getting this bike through the forest in the fastest way possible.

AGILITY PLUS

First impressions are of a superbly slim cockpit. Sherco have done a stunning job in making the fuel tank and radiator shrouds low and narrow, despite the useful 8.5 litres of fuel carried. The seat has just the right profile and angle, with a small dip in the centre that helps keep your bum planted in the right spot on muddy days. Any rider under about 1.8m (6 feet) will appreciate the lower than average 950 mm seat height that helps get a boot on the ground (perhaps on both sides) when needed. A taller seat is also available for really big boys.

Combined with quick-turning steering geometry and the best combined standing or sitting riding position I have yet experienced, the Sherco delivers outstanding steering accuracy on single-track trails. Dodging tree roots, rocks or stumps at any speed feels more a matter of thought than physical correction.

Yet for all this precision and obvious bias towards genuine enduro riding, I did not find the Sherco unstable, or to demonstrate any headshake. The SE 300iR will rail a berm just as easily as it will carve tightly into the apex of a turn.

As said, I found the riding position after a few simple adjustments to be ideal for standing for extended periods, as I tend to do. However I must add that on this bike you don't have to stand way forward over the bars to knife through single track. In fact I found myself sitting more than usual, as the Sherco steering and seat set-up works well sitting through berms and turning into tight corners.

RACE MOTIVATOR

The Sherco engine has no kick-start, (shaft, gears or lever) and is therefore very compact. For all the lack of bulk, it packs a punch. The exhaust note is muted, as an enduro bike should be, and the SE 300iR is genuinely quick. The long-stroke engine has healthy bottom-end power, noticeably more than a 250 four stroke, especially when slamming into power-sapping soft berms, or faced with a sudden climb. It then builds power quickly and cleanly into a wide midrange that seamlessly extends into a long-revving top end.

The SE 300iR is equipped with two engine maps, chosen via a switch near the right thumb. The high traction map delivers very linear power that is ideal in slippery conditions and over rocks and tree roots, yet in this mode the engine still feels to rev out completely.

Unlike some dual maps I have tested, the Sherco's two options are noticeably different. In the more aggressive mode the power comes on far more quickly from the lower mid range. This is the ideal set up for more open and more power-sapping conditions.

When it comes to extreme enduro conditions the Sherco copes better than most four strokes. Despite the motor's free-revving nature it seldom stalls when tackling logs, uphill steps, or slippery tree roots. The light clutch pull is also appreciated in these conditions. Occasionally the motor would cough and die when trailing the throttle in snotty going, say across a downhill tree root. This is something I suspect that might be cured with some fiddling with the mapping programme.

Mated to the engine is a feather-light hydraulic clutch and six-speed gearbox. The gear ratios are not as wide-spaced as you would expect on a 450, rather they come quite close together in 250F style, meaning that there is a gear for any enduro racing situation, given that you can rev the motor happily in top gear to achieve startling top speeds on forest gavel roads.

SUM OF THE TOTAL

The SE 300iR uses White Power suspension front and rear. Both the linkage-equipped shock and the 48 mm single-chamber forks provide true enduro focused performance. In gnarly terrain, like rocks and tree roots, the forks soak up the obstacles rather than jarring and deflecting. At higher speeds and in open terrain they remain confidence inspiring. Sherco have nicely balanced the need for tough terrain compliance and high speed control. For those outside the 70-80kg design weight, or genuine pro-level racers, stiffer fork springs may be on the shopping list, especially if you race fast cross country.

Braking is ably handled by 280 and 230 mm Brembos that pull up the SE 300iR effortlessly and with pinpoint control. The test bike was equipped with a few parts from the extensive Sherco optional range, including tough radiator guards, electric fan cooling kit, fork bleeders and puncture proof rear tyre Mousse. There are a whole bunch of other extras that the hard-core riders might also find attractive in the Sherco parts book, perhaps the girl modeling the blue Sherco T shirt?

It's hard not to be impressed by the quality of detailing on the Sherco. Overall, the bike is an obvious looker, with all elements nicely balanced. The attention to detail goes well beyond styling, confirmed as you check through the components, and the fit and finish. From paint to alloy, nuts and fasteners, plastic moulding, the DID rims, right up to the custom-adjustable Brembo control levers, the Sherco SE 300iR is a quality act.

TRAIL- FRIENDLY

Though the Sherco SE 300iR is presented as race package, the bike is none the less a very good trail weapon for the serious trail rider. The bike comes equipped with lightweight lights and an odometer to check fuel range. You won't need to sweat too much on longer rides however, as the tank conspires to hide away 8.5 litres of fuel. When you stop to admire the views, there's a neat and strong-looking alloy side stand to prop the bike up on. Best of all for the non-competition rider is the strong seamless engine power, stall-free engine, and real-world suspension. It is likely that you will have an all day ear-to-ear grin, rather than nightmare arm-pump.

CREDIBLE CONTENDER

Without doubt I would rate the Sherco SE 300iR as a hot contender amongst the best of the European enduro four strokes. Sherco have produced a model

that is as good, possibly even better in some respects, than the best competing 250 to 350 four strokes.

In very neatly settling in that new middle ground, Sherco have come up with a motor that is strong, yet very easily managed in tough going. More unique however is Sherco's interpretation of a modern specialist enduro - a combination of willing engine, light weight, and agile chassis that has, to me, closed the gap between two and four stroke enduro bikes in uncompromising terrain.

The bottom line as an ex-racer and avid trail rider, was that I simply enjoyed riding the Sherco so much. Each time I took out the SE 300iR I simply did not want to stop. For a rider who has been at this game as long as I have, that's saying something.

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SPECIFICATIONS

Engine 4 stroke DOHC, 4 valve Sherco technology

Engine size 303,68 cc

Bore & Stroke 84 x 54,8 mm

Fuel system Magnetti Marelli digital electronic fuel injection

Battery 12 V / 5Ah

Cooling Liquid system with forced circulation

Start Electric starting only

Exhaust Stainless steel header pipe, aluminum muffler

Transmission 6 speed sequential gearbox, primary gear drive chain secondary drive

Clutch Hydraulic, multidisc in oil bath

Ignition Magnetti Marelli digital, dual engine maps

Frame Half perimeter frame Chrome-Molybdenum

Fuel Tank 8.5 Litre fuel tank

Brakes Brembo 260 mm (front) 220 mm (rear)

Front suspension 48 mm WP telescopic fork, rebound and compression adjustable 300 mm of travel

Rear suspension WP progressive, multi-adjustable rebound and compression adjustable 320 mm of travel

Front wheel 1.60 x 21" aluminum rim, steel spokes and Michelin Enduro Competition tube type tyres

Rear wheel 2.15 x 18" aluminum rim, steel spokes and Michelin Enduro Competition tube type tyres

Weight 102 kg dry

Wheelbase 1322 mm

Ground clearance 355 mm

Seat height 950 mm