

# YAMAHA WR250F

## BUYER'S GUIDE

By John Nick

Take a long look at the bikes lined up at any Kiwi trail ride and you will see more than a sprinkling of Yamaha WR250F four strokes. Yes, the striking blue Yamahas are popular the length and breadth of the country and justifiably so, since it's introduction here in 2001 the WR250F has done sterling service in the hands of both trail riders and serious enduro racers.

In 2013, at the time of writing, the WR250F is still a current model, but make no mistake there have been many detail changes to the 250 and two major re-designs. Along the way Yamaha have grabbed more than a few NZ titles with the little 250 four stroke - and who can forget Stephan Merriman's magnificent effort to win the 2004 World Enduro Title on a WR250 F.

Yamaha led the modern four stroke revival in the late 90s, with their pioneering ultra short-stroke engine, patented five valve head and titanium valve technology. The WR engine and chassis trace their lineage back to the those new generation YZ four stroke motocrossers and these Yamahas have arguably been the most durable of the new generation four strokes.

Initially, the competition found Yamaha's five-valve technology hard to match, especially in the small capacities. However time and progress marches on and it's obvious that while there have been no recent major upgrades to the WR250F, the likes of KTM, Husaberg, Sherco, Beta and Husqvarna etc are getting better outcomes from their six speed 250 engines. As Yamaha developed the engine through the noughties they managed to massage more mid range and low end, but this hasn't been enough to stay on top. To compound matters Yamaha failed to add that a sixth gear the gearbox to match the competition.

While arguably the WR250F still has sufficient performance to match the Euro bikes it is also fighting a battle of perception, based largely on such a long model run. Even more importantly the Euros have made great gains by splitting the gaps between the 250 and 450 segments, creating dynamic and interesting options for riders looking for the ultimate enduro bike experience.

## THE RIDE

As is often the case with stable mates WR250F models feel smaller than the bigger 400/426 and 450 models. The 250 not only feels lighter, but turns and changes direction more readily and it's more fun to ride in tighter more technical going. Like most small four strokes the WR 250F is easy to ride and easy to hang on to, be it for an hour or a day, or longer. The WR250F for many years punched out class leading top end power with sufficient mid and low range to keep most riders content, if not ecstatic. If the WR250F has had a limitation it is the five speed gearbox. Rugged as it is the five speed box does present gaps that a 6 speed would easily fill, especially in steep or power sapping terrain.

In terms of suspension all the WR models are set up for the more serious end of the trail spectrum or enduro racing. Suspension action however is far plusher and more forgiving than any MX bike. When it comes to steering the WR250F is quite conservative by modern standards, some might even say slow steering, but I have never had a buttock-clenching tank-slapper on a WR either.

## MODEL HISTORY

That the WRs are so well targeted for our conditions is no accident. Several Western markets, Europe, USA, Australia and even NZ, have had input to the WR design process. Kiwis have generally received the Australian model, but beware reading too much into Euro and USA literature, they are quite different bikes! Changes, be they small or large, have been over time from feedback drawn from a wide variety of trail riders, racers and even farmers.

The WR in NZ has been optioned as a purely enduro off road model, or fitted with a minimalist road legal kit. In Kiwi terms road legality is only essential for one day Adventure Rides, but if this is your intention the WR makes a good multi-day adventure trail bike.

The WR 250F has shared major components with the motocross models, albeit often six to twelve months adrift of YZF developments. Frame, wheels, and engine are essentially YZF components, but the WR has many detail and some more major differences as well, including:

- Wide ratio 5 speed transmissions
- Quieter exhausts
- 18-inch enduro rear wheel
- More durable chain and sprockets
- Plusher suspension valving
- Basic lighting, speedo, side stand etc
- Optional minimal road kit
- Increased engine durability

2001-2002: Blue steel frame, kick start only, stainless muffler. Solid reliable bikes but with no electric start or automatic decompressor early models can be slow to start when hot, after a tumble. It can take several kicks to ignite and you need to know the hot start/decompressor drill to perfection. Early WR fuel tanks hold whopping 12 litres, but they are noticeably high and intrude on the seat.

2003-2004: Blue steel frame, stainless muffler. Electric start, automatic decompressor and handlebar hot start ended all the WRs starting woes. Smaller 10 litre tank is noticeably more compact. Improved frame delivers better steering accuracy.

2005-2006: Same blue steel frame but with larger alloy muffler.

2007-2013: Alloy frame and sub frame introduced. Grey plastic bash plate with sub oil tank below crankcase. Changes to engine mapping, carburettor, gear ratios, plus many other details. Slimmest 8 litre tank.

## BUYING A USED WR250F

WR250s have proved remarkably durable, even with hard use. From their inception they have been built to a specification more than a price. Where some brands of four strokes have attracted criticism for high wear rates on pistons and valve trains Yamaha WRs have proved almost bulletproof. Fed clean, good quality oil and oil filters and with regular air filter cleaning, WRs have clocked up amazing hours, even though they are a competition bike. Low hour, or well looked after WRs, are in my view the safest second four stroke enduro purchase you could make - and there are some great bargain WR250F buys to be had.

If you don't know dirt bikes well try and find someone who is experienced, or pay a shop to check it out for you. Four stroke dirt bikes can cost a lot to repair, so an hour or two of workshop time can pay off in the long run. Look for all the obvious signs of wear and abuse, rust, squeaking linkages, bucked radiators, worn chain and sprockets and blown fork seals. Check the engine oil – it should be clean and golden, not black. Is the air filter clean, filter well seated, and so on?

#### BEST BUYS?

I rate the 2005-2006 steel framed alloy muffler WR250F as one of the best of the bunch. This model was a good performer and easy starter. The 10 litre tank gives good fuel range, but doesn't get in the way. The well-crafted combination of black skid plate and alloy case savers is better looking than the later bucket-like plastic bashplate. I also suspect that the steel frame gives just a little more rut clearance.

Early model kickstart only WRs are getting long in the tooth but if well looked after can still give good trail riding service, just allow a little time to fire it up if you drop it!

Later alloy framed models have a slight edge in terms of engine performance and being newer, it is here that you are most likely to find those highly desirable low hour examples.

Of course you could be in the market for a new 2013 model. The WR250R might now be hard-pushed by the Euros for sheer race performance, but I would lay good odds that for a trail rider who counts the cost of ownership, the WR will give more years of reliable satisfaction.