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Supermoto: To go fast on asphalt, start with a dirtbike

Ryan Dudek

Photos by Jay McNally

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My watch indicated I was 15 minutes early pulling into Grange Motor Circuit, though it appeared I was 15 minutes late. I was meeting Ken Vreeke to get a ride on his retro-styled supermoto bike. Vreeke was already there with his bike unloaded and leathers halfway on. I wasn't late; Vreeke was just early and anxious to get riding.

It was morning and Vreeke's silver Honda CRF450R glistened in the rising sun. The Elsinore-replica graphics produced a time warp in my mind, harking back to the engineering marvels Honda's first two-stroke MXers had been 30 years ago. While ace photographer Jay McNally shot statics in the early-morning glory light, Vreeke filled me in on the details of his bike.

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It started simply enough as a supermoto playbike, just a stock CRF motocrosser with 17-inch rims and tires, and a large front brake. Then Baja racer Steve Hengeveld borrowed the bike to race the X-Games Supermoto event. Shortly after, it went through a total re-do. Vreeke sent the CRF off to Tokyomods, a performance engine shop that Ken says "builds bikes that are fast and that last." Fork and shock were re-done by MB1 Suspension. To further improve handling and turning, Vreeke chose to use BRP 22mm-offset triple-clamps. Extra tid-bits include Cycra Proband handguards, and from White

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My motocrosser the roadracer: Ken Vreeke's Honda CRF450R supermoto bike shows off its 1970s-style Elsinore graphics.

Brothers an exhaust and carbon-fiber clutch cover. For even better stopping, a 320mm FPR front rotor is squeezed by a Moto-Master caliper. Almost overnight

Vreeke's CRF became a factory-level supermoto bike. The Throttle Jockey graphics package is just icing on the cake.

"This is a bike you can experiment with," says Vreeke. "I can go out and try new things, and I've even started racing again after 18 years off!" He explained how supermoto is similar to road racing, just on a smaller scale. "You have to be strategic and focus ahead; it is more mentally challenging than physical," he says.

When riding time came, Vreeke went out first—after all, he was suited up and ready to go. Ken is no stranger to the motorcycle world. A former editor at *Motorcyclist*, *Cycle* and *Cycle World*, he now runs Vreeke & Associates, a successful advertising/PR agency that claims American Honda and Dunlop among its clients.



CW's Off- (and sometimes On-) Road Editor Dudek hangs it out a bit going into one of Grange's paved corners.



With experience comes age, and his 48 years means that Ken can no longer go motocrossing without suffering aches and pains. That is where supermoto is a bonus. "I'm too old to pound laps on a motocross track, but with this bike I can ride all day," he says. "At my age, motocross is more punishment than fun."

I can vouch for Vreeke being able to ride all day; I literally had to lay across the track to get him off his bike so I could get a try. This was only my second go at supermoto, but Vreeke's 450 felt so natural, it was an absolute blast to ride. Now I know what Canet and Cernicky have been foaming about all these years!

Vreeke may have found a good outlet for creaky old motocrossers and roadracers, but supermoto is more than that. It's like road racing with fewer consequences. Just like the MotoGP boys, you can back it into corners, drag your knee, wheelie at will, grind foot pegs, push the front end, etc. It's just that you're not going 150 mph. Nor do you need Repsol or Gauloises sponsorship. Most of all, it's flat-out fun! Next time I'll be the one with my leathers on first.

How fun is that?! Slides and wheelies at sane speeds are a big part of Supermoto's attraction. Well, that and no need for an extensive workout regimen...

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