

THE

BY CHRIS JONNUM

Gavin Trippe's F450 project has evolved to the point where it's really starting to make sense. Will it find a home?

POINT



Chances are, this isn't the first time you've seen Gavin Trippe's 450cc motocross/road race conversions. Hopefully, it won't be the last. Dreamed up several years ago, the Formula 450 concept (previously known as "Super Singles") was an attempt to utilize popular 450cc single-cylinder four-stroke dirt bikes as a basis for introducing an entry-level platform to American road racing. The theory is simple enough: add bodywork, 17-inch wheels, and road race brakes, shorten suspension, and go racing.

Since then, the class has been included by WERA and at Mid-Ohio's AMA Sports Road Race Grand Championships, but with only limited participation, Trippe is still trying to push his concept to the tipping point. Convinced of its legitimacy, he was displaying the latest iteration of his F450 bikes at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca's AMA Superbike finale, for what he described as a "last hurrah"—a final attempt to gain traction for the concept.



WHEELER

In getting the project off the ground, Trippe originally enlisted help from custom-bike builder Roland Sands and Supermoto team owner Troy Lee, but as he strove to simplify the concept even further, he eventually struck out on his own. (The Kawasaki on page 76 was built by AFM racer Max Capps.) The new bodywork is more affordable, modified production suspension is recommended, and stock exhaust routing is now utilized. New 450Fs can be had for around \$6,500, with the other biggest expenses being \$1,000 for bodywork; \$1,800 for Race Tech triple clamp and fork modifications (shortening, plus new springs and valving); \$600 for Race Tech shock mods; \$1,000 for wheels; and \$1,000 for a front brake. That's not cheap, but it compares favorably with race-prepping a 600cc sport bike.

"You don't have to deconstruct them to reconstruct them," says Trippe, who would like to see rules requiring stock swingarms, cylinders, heads, and gearboxes, "because they're already a race bike, with no alternators and lights."

Where Trippe's numbers really start to make sense, however, is with operating expenses. Maintenance of a single is easier and cheaper than of a four-cylinder 600, and for a typical race weekend, all that's needed is three gallons of fuel and a set of tires—about the same as a motocross race. With less reciprocating weight during a hard fall, making crash repairs is bound to be less daunting as well. Trippe estimates there are 100,000 450Fs being used for everything from supercross to Supermoto to dirt track to the Baja 1000. Manufacturers include BMW, Honda, Husqvarna, Kawasaki, KTM, Suzuki, Yamaha, and Aprilia (though that last one is a twin), and many of those are fuel-injected. The aftermarket for these bikes is also thriving.

Fine, so F450 has some strong arguments from a participant's point of view, but why should clubs embrace it?

Trippe—a veteran race promoter himself—is quick to point out that this platform has the potential to bring in new riders who race these bikes in other disciplines—people with talent who nevertheless wouldn't think of touching a 600. Countless dealerships have built teams around these bikes in motocross and Supermoto, and Trippe sees no reason why that couldn't happen in road racing, especially if they have a realistic chance to win. "Supermoto and motocross are so competitive," he emphasizes. "If you've got the talent, the bike's not going to hold you back."

If that's the case, it should make for a good show, since the similarity of the different models would theoretically result in close racing. As Trippe sees it, the minimal variances in geometry and horsepower could also potentially make for a battle-of-the-brands scenario, or a spec class that's not a spec class, with fresh contingency participation. Granted, motocross bikes weren't designed for road racing, but neither were they designed for

Supermoto. Besides, as Trippe reasons, "lawnmowers weren't meant to race, but people race them."

All this is for naught, however, if the concept doesn't catch on, and no matter what possibilities F450 may hold (Trippe dreams of a Grand National Championship-type scenario in which the same bikes are campaigned in road racing, motocross, dirt track, and Supermoto), racing options are still limited for fans of the platform.

Incidentally, during the same Laguna race at which we spoke with Trippe, Daytona Motorsports Group announced its intention to start a new, age-limited class called Sportbike, to serve as a stepping-stone between the Red Bull AMA U.S. Rookies Cup and the 600cc pro division. That series is music to Trippe's ears: he thinks his class would perfectly fill the gap between the Rookies Cup's 125s and the middleweight class' 600s.

"It's almost like the old dirt track days when I ran Ascot Park," he enthuses. "Kenny Roberts and Gary Scott ran Suzuki and



Tyler Odom tried out the F450 platform at Mid-Ohio's Grand Nationals.

Yamaha 250 twins as Novices, then the next year ran 650 twins as Amateurs, and the third year were qualified to be Experts—a three-year graduation."

Trippe has a point. The 450s would be a true stepping-stone in terms of horsepower and weight (approximately 60 horsepower and 235 lbs.), while offering a noticeably different look and sound from the other classes. DMG, however, committed to 600cc four-cylinders after our interview, citing the lack of a F450 grassroots scene.

Does that mean this particular visionary's F450 dream is dead? Not necessarily, and don't count on Trippe following through on his threat to stop pushing it. A born promoter, Gavin had taken DMG's advice to heart as we went to press, and he was busy working on addressing the grassroots issue. **X**

For more information about the Formula 450 concept, visit www.450moto.com.