



2012 Christini AWD 300

Technical Knockout

Story By Chris Denison • Photos By Drew Ruiz And Jack Lawless

The all-new Christini AWD 300 is just that: A Christini. This complete machine is not a Honda or a KTM, but rather a blend of components that make the bike uniquely Christini-like. Sure, the AWD utilizes a 300cc Gas Gas two-stroke engine, but that doesn't mean it has much in common with anything you've seen on dealer floors. The frame is unique to Christini, with all of the AWD features fully integrated. A hydraulic clutch, Paioli front suspension, six-speed transmission and optional electric start are some of the main features of the AWD 300, not to mention the fact that power is delivered to the front wheel when the rear loses traction via the same all-mechanical system that *Dirt Rider* has tested the snot out of for years—and with great success, I might add. This time, the beating occurred at the inaugural Tennessee Knockout Enduro, a brutally fun, technical event with more rocks than the Colorado River and some of the best trails in Tennessee.

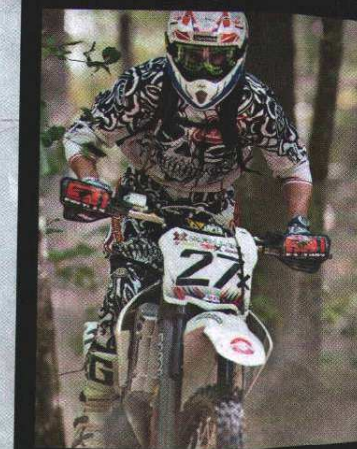
If you haven't ridden the AWD setup before, here's a bit of background: The Christini system feels very different on the trail compared to a rear-wheel-drive bike. Due to the unfamiliar handling, some riders click with the Christini while others struggle to get used to it. Personally, I think it is awesome off-road so long as you know how to ride it and don't fight the front end. The biggest downside I notice is that the Christini's front wheel will try to crawl out of ruts when the shoulder knobs of the tire grab traction, and this—along with a feeling of the front end "pulling"—means the bike will sometimes just go where it wants, much like a normal bike feels in sand. Minor unweighting of the front end and continually bringing it back down with the wheel slightly cocked are responsible for a huge part of this sensation. This is not a big deal on a traditional bike but can be very consequential on the AWD as the front will grab and send you off in whatever direction the handlebar is pointing. Additionally, the added weight of the AWD components make it more difficult to get the front wheel off the ground, which leads to a tendency to slam into obstacles rather than pop over them.

With that said, the benefits of the system far outweigh the negatives. In loose rocks, tough hills and overall nasty terrain, the Christini is

magic. It truly is like having a motivated minder pulling you over obstacles with a tugger strap. You need to be aware of how you're modulating the power and the clutch in order to find the best blend of traction and rpm, but overall the Christini does an excellent job of hooking up and getting going. The 300 that I raced was an extremely well-tuned setup with zero slop in the AWD components. When you factor in the fact that we tossed in a Rekluse EXP clutch for the race, this made for one easy-to-ride machine. A simple actuation lever on the handlebar engages the front-wheel drive, which I left on full-time.

If there is one thing about the 300 AWD that makes it stand above other iterations of the Christini, it's that the frame is not at all rigid and promotes a balanced overall handling feel. The chassis obviously carries the extra weight of the system near the front of the frame, but it doesn't feel like this weight is in front of the stem (like one of those awkwardly heavy auxiliary number plate fuel tanks). Instead, the weight feels forward but lower than expected, and there aren't any odd leaning or turning issues except for those mentioned above. The suspension setup was tuned fairly well for my 155 pounds, though a heavier rider would surely need more resistance out of the Paioli fork when hitting obstacles hard. Even with a bulkier fuel tank (to accommodate the internal gears of the AWD), the ergonomics were comfortable and easy to get used to.

As an avid two-stroke-lover, I found the 300cc Gas Gas powerplant to be a great complement to the function of the AWD. Easy to roll on and packed with torque, the engine does best in the low-to-mid-rpm range and can easily be short-shifted to maintain great traction. The biggest downside I felt is that vibration got a bit heavy when the revs went too high. Starting and jetting were both where they needed to be, and the exhaust was not overly noisy. Of course, four-stroke lovers can also get a taste of Christini technology through the new AWD 450, which features an engine that is similar in appearance to a 450cc Honda and has an identical bottom end. The Christini 450 does not have a UniCam design, though, so the decompression system is simpler and lighter. Also, the 450 AWD sports a lower compression ratio and slightly less horsepower.





The drive chain is well-hidden for a unique look.



Sleek components are a Christini trademark.



The AWD 300 is a blend of the Christini chassis and a Gas Gas powerplant.



While everyone is complaining about prices, Christini is doing something about it.

Perhaps the coolest part of the AWD 300 is the price: \$8,995 for the complete bike. Most riders are under the impression that a Christini costs an arm and a leg, but the reality is that riders can now get a hard enduro-ready all-wheel-drive 300 for less than the cost of a new KTM. The AWD 450 is even cheaper at an astonishing \$6,895. For something this advanced, the complete package is great. As a race bike it's a sweet

setup—especially on really nasty terrain like what we rode at TKO—and for a trailbike the AWD 300 is a very awesome option for the average rider. And for \$600 more, you can even get electric start! It used to be that riders would buy Christinis as a second bike, but given how far the technology has come this bike definitely deserves consideration as a primary machine.

Specifications: 2012 Christini AWD 300

MSRP: \$8,995, includes one-year AWD warranty

Seat height: 37.5 in.

Claimed dry weight: 239 lb

Ground clearance: 14.0 in.

Fuel capacity: 2.6 gal.

Contact: www.christini.com

www.tennesseeknockoutenduro.com