

A mechanical checklist for buying a used dirt bike.

OK, you've found a used dirt bike that looks pretty promising. Here's a list of checks you can make before committing yourself.

- With the bike on a stand and the rear wheel off the ground, grab the swingarm and move it from side to side to check the swingarm bearings. There should be about 5mm of play, any more than that and there's at least one worn bearing that will need replacing. Swingarm bearings can be expensive so beware.
- Repeat the process with the front wheel, hold the fork legs and try move them backwards and forwards, too much movement and the headstem bearings may be shot too. The bargain price you paid for your used dirt bike will quickly become expensive if you have to fork out \$300 or \$400 dollars for swingarm and headstem bearings.
- With the bike running, crouch down and have a good listen to the motor. Pay attention to any top end and timing chain noise in four strokes and listen for any bottom end rattles.
Kick the bike over to feel how much compression it has. You're probably not going to be able to do a leakdown or compression test but try to gauge how tight the motor feels. A piston and ring is relatively straight forward for a two stroke but can be a much bigger and more expensive job in a four stroke.
- Have a look for any oil or coolant leaks. A leaking countershaft sprocket or kickstarter seal may require the cases to be split to be repaired. Have a look at the radiators for damage to the fins and bent or dented top and bottom tanks.
- Have a feel of the brake discs. The ad may say barely used dirt bike but if the discs have a fairly noticeable groove where the pads grip then you'll know the bike's done some work.
- Lay the bike on its side and have a good look underneath. Inspect the swingarm linkages and have a good look at the frame. Look for cracks around the welds and also for past repairs to the frame.
- If the bike has had work done to the motor, ask what has been done and by who. The owner may be telling you what a weapon the bike is but if it's got a peaky unrideable motor then it's not going to be a whole lot of good to you unless you're a gun 'A' grade rider.