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## 2012 Beta 350RR: First Ride

Beta teases us with a one-day ride on its revamped 350RR

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The Italian company Beta might be a small one (relatively speaking) but it sure has been making some big waves lately. In just the last few years, Beta, better known for producing championship-winning trials bikes than it is full-size off-road bikes, has been making some giant leaps forward in the off-road arena, thanks to many recent improvements to their RR (race replica) line of off-road motorcycles, which now stands at four: 350, 400, 450 and 498. The bikes recently got their very own Beta-built motors (no more using hand-me-down KTM motors) and substantial chassis upgrades, and the results are beginning to show. You might have seen names like Chris Bach and Cody Webb popping up regularly in race reports lately, as both riders are doing quite well in their respective sports - Bach in GNCC, and Webb in EnduroCross and extreme enduro events. After having ridden some of the latest Betas, we have a better understanding as to why.



The 2012 Beta 350RR got a lot more than just a color change.

*Cycle News* was very impressed with the last Beta we rode, the '11 450RR, and we're just as impressed, if not more, with the latest Beta we straddled, the 2012 350RR. I recently got the chance to spend a day aboard the bike on some of the tightest, not to mention steepest, trails we could find in sunny Southern California (yes, the 350RR is CA green-sticker legal), and came away extremely impressed by how well this bike performed in the diverse conditions we put it through.

The first Beta 350RR made its debut as an '11 limited-edition model, but it got a late start and didn't really make a dent in the U.S market. It wasn't until April of this year that the bike became available in the U.S., which is also about the time people start talking about next year's bikes. But, apparently, so did the folks at Beta who quickly went to work on the 2012 350RR, which got a fairly major overhaul, despite the '11 getting good reviews.

Here is the list of changes to the 2012 350RR:

- \* Redesigned cylinder head, reinforced camshaft bridge and valve retainers, and updated cam-chain tensioner (reduce engine noise).
- \* New clutch primary gear and springs (better engagement and clutch action).
- \* Updated counterbalance bearings (increased reliability).
- \* Stronger cam chain guides.
- \* Increased oil volume to the engine cam chain (reduced friction).
- \* New oil drain plug (easier oil changes).
- \* All new Sachs 48mm fork with TFX (anti-stiction) technology, developed by Sachs exclusively for Beta.
- \* New SKF fork seals and wipers with self-lubricating compounds (reduced stiction).



- \* New triple-clamp.
- \* Redesigned frame with extra gussets as well as an increased tube diameter on the lower tubes. (Less flex and improved stability).
- \* New front and rear brake rotors.
- \* New Brembo clutch master cylinder (better clutch feel and engagement).
- \* Redesigned S/A muffler (better flow, quieter exhaust note).
- \* Redesigned front headlight and front fender support.
- \* Red color.

You might be thinking - how in the heck did they make so many changes in such a short amount of time? Well, there are certain advantages of being a smaller company and one of them is being able to make things happen much quicker, since there are fewer corporate hoops to jump through. So, here you have it, a substantially updated Beta 350RR.

Quite simply, my one-day ride on the Beta left me wanting more - a lot more, but that's how it goes when you like something so much and have to give it back.

Unlike some of the other 350 off-road bikes on the market that are based on another model - KTM quickly comes to mind - the 350RR was purpose-built for enduro riding, which perhaps explains why it feels so natural on the trail.



**The Beta 350RR delivers smooth and controlable power.**

Part of this has to do with the 350's motor, which I found to be extremely adaptable to a variety of terrain and is just plain easy to manage. It has ample bottom-end for when things get tight, technical and slow-going. In one particular rocky section, the bike clawed and scratched its way up and over the boulders, plodding along without a worry. The motor refused to stall, but I managed to find a way once.

When the trails open up, so does the motor. Not only is the Beta capable of going slow, it's quite capable of going fast. It has impressive midrange and top-end power. Open up the throttle and the Beta immediately comes to life, pulling hard in the middle and continuing to do so until it's time to click into another gear. And it has decent over-rev in case you need to hang on to a gear a little longer. But, yes, the little Beta has some kick.

I was certainly convinced of this when climbing a series of ridiculously long and steep (not to mention soft) hills, one right after the other. We just kept going up and up and up. So much so, that the bike began feeling the effects of the thinner air, reminding me that - "oh yeah" - the Beta is still carbureted. Despite some slight bottom-end bogging as we gained altitude, the Beta just kept chugging its way up the mountain, eventually carrying me over the top, which I guess was around the 4500/5000-foot mark. The hydraulically operated clutch never missed a beat (or faded) and maintained its positive feel, but the well-worked motor did get a little hot and blew a few drips of coolant as it came to rest at the top of the last hill, but considering what the bike had just been through and on what was a very hot summer day, I certainly didn't hold a little radiator-girgling against the bike.

Starting was never an issue, hot or cold, but it would almost always take a few revolutions before it would light, maybe one or two additional spins while still in gear. (The bike is also fitted with a manual kick starter.) But, generally, the Beta is a good starter.



**We found the 350RR to be quite agile and maneuverable, making you want to try all kinds of stuff.**

I loved the Beta's six-speed wide-ratio transmission, which always seemed to have just the right gear for the right situation. Shifting action was also smooth and precise.

As mentioned, the Beta is carbureted, but the 39mm Keihin FCR-MX works extremely well; I was hard-pressed to tell the difference between it and FI at lower elevations. Still, a more versatile FI system would be nicer.

I found the Beta to be very quiet when it came to both exhaust and engine noise. And vibration was well within the acceptable limits.

The Beta is very comfortable. It has a narrow profile and a rather flat seat/tank contour, making it very easy to move around on. Seat height is somewhat high at 36.8 inches, but the bike did not feel overly tall for my 6'1" frame thanks to its trim profile. And everything - bars, levers, footpegs and pedals - are well placed. Overall, it doesn't feel much different than any of the always-comfortable Japanese-built off-landers.



**The combo Braking/Nissin disc brakes are ultra strong.**

Once in motion, the Beta feels very light and agile, and is very responsive. Beta claims it weighs 240 pounds without gas. In reality, the bike is pushing closer to 255 pounds with a full tank of gas, but it just doesn't feel that heavy. It definitely hides its weight well, until you have to lift it over a log or some obstacle. Then it feels...well, heavy.

Once I started getting accustomed to the bike, which didn't take long at all, my speed on the single-track switchbacks rapidly picked up. I quickly discovered that the bike tracked well and the front end stays planted, and you could crank the front wheel hard to the left or right and the back end would follow right along, and it didn't matter if you were standing or sitting. Both methods worked fine for me. Scooting your weight forward certainly helped, but having to sit on the gas cap to make the bike turn isn't necessary.



**The Beta's suspension can soak up both the smaller ripples and hard landings extremely well.**

Small bumps, ruts or rocks were no match for the Beta's Sachs suspension. Right out of the crate, both the shock and fork do an excellent job of soaking up the smaller hits, while still doing an admirable job of sucking up the larger bumps and whoops. At 175 pounds I was able to ride the bike all day without feeling the need to make any kind of adjustment to the suspension. Had I had more time on the bike, sure, I probably could have gotten things more finely tuned, but just being able to hop on the bike and go 40-plus miles on nothing but technical trails without reaching for my fannypack and a screwdriver, says a lot about the Beta's suspension.

The brakes, which are paired with Nissin master cylinders/calipers and Braking rotors, are ultra strong yet aren't grabby. One finger on the front brake lever is sufficient, and even a heavy right boot like mine could not get the back brake to fade. As they say, what goes up, must come down, and we certainly came down some gnarly hills, putting the Beta's back brake to the test, which it passed with flying colors. I could not get them to fade on this day.

Basically, I came away from our one-day ride on the 350RR extremely impressed and wouldn't hesitate one bit riding this bike in a local enduro, or even one far away. Plus, the 350RR is pretty much enduro ready as soon as you roll it off the showroom floor. It's fitted with an updated digital meter, which includes a tripmeter that can now be adjusted in 10ths for enduro resets, and has a push-button seat release, front and rear lights, an aluminum skid plate and built-in grab handles. It also comes with an O-ring chain, an 18-inch rear wheel, a quick-change clutch and an engine oil sight glass and a gearbox oil check plug. (The bike I rode had aftermarket plastic hand guards installed.)

Another advantage of being a "small" company is that Beta can build a custom model just for you through its Build-Your-Own-Beta program. In short, this means you can order your Beta 350RR (or any Beta off-roader for that matter) with select accessories and suspension settings. And this can all be done through Beta's website at [www.americanbeta.com](http://www.americanbeta.com).

You can, however, walk up and buy one off the showroom floor, too. A showroom 350RR carries a \$8899 MSRP, which is \$100 less than the Beta 450RR and the KTM 350 XCF-W.

If you're considering a midsize off-road four-stroke, the Beta 350RR is certainly deserves a closer look.