

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR:

AirCell Engineering Fork Air Bottles

A simple idea that makes a ton of sense—this little baby is just that: Similar to systems available only to works riders just a short time ago, now it's a simple bolt-on item. The bottle will change the way your fork is tuned, adding a whole new dimension to front end feel. We wouldn't be surprised if there were about 10 million copy-cat products on the market soon.



AIRCELL ENGINEERING

AIR CELLS

Universally improving suspension is a tough task. But a consumer can't go wrong with a money-back guarantee, especially for something as personal as suspension. In about a half-hour in the garage, I'd installed the \$269 to \$289 Air Cells bottles to the fork on a Honda CRF250X. I used the optional billet clamps (\$64.95–\$69.95) instead of the zip-tie system provided with the kit, which made it much easier to swap the Air Cells from bike to bike. With the bottles mounted, the fork's air bleed screws are replaced by caps that quick-connect to plastic

tubing which runs to the stainless steel bottles. The tubing, once cut to length, quick-connects to the Air Compression Dampening Valve (ACD) atop the bottle. These valves allow an adjustment of 10 turns and double as a push-button air bleed for your fork. Installation on

bikes with a headset-mounted ignition black box or an odometer requires a little fiddling.

The air bleeding alone is a great feature, but one ride on these babies had me sold. Initially, I rode them wide open and could tell the bike rode lower in the stroke, giving the front wheel a dead feel and a softer ride. With the valves adjusted back in five turns, the bike still offered a very plush ride but with more feel on the front and no deflection to speak of. Three more turns in and the fork began to bounce off stuff; the front end became lighter and was staying higher in the stroke. Shut closed, or at zero turns, the CRF-X rode just like stock, which in general is a very nice ride. But this setup seemed to transmit more of the chop (stones), and the front wheel wasn't as planted. Set between six to eight turns open for the tight and rocky trails I was riding on, the CRF-X worked well. On smoother and faster trails, the fork preferred less, in the four to five range.

The adjustment provided by the Air Cells gives additional and different tuning to the fork compared to compression adjusters. It affects ride height and the initial movement of the fork,

HARD PARTS

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INSTALLATION	19/20
FUNCTION	49/50
DURABILITY	10/10
DESIGN	9/10
PRICE	8/10

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whereas the compression adjuster deals with the speed the fork moves once in motion. This allowed me to run a bit more compression damping in the fork.

On the motocross track aboard a KTM 250 SXF, the bottles were less noticeable but still effective, especially on slap-down landings. Again, ride height was notable; it was as if we were playing with spring preload.

By design, the bottles are zero maintenance, returning all of the oil blown out of the fork back in. And I didn't feel any additional weight through the handlebar. The only downsides were the lack of a detent on the adjuster and that the Air Cells can't be adjusted easily on the fly. In the future, the company hopes to sell the billet clamp in the kit, bringing the total cost to about \$300.

—Jimmy Lewis

