

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Dirt Rider's
Top Picks Of 2011

By The DR Staff • Photos By Jean-Paul Van Swae



Each year, companies put gigantic amounts of time, energy and money into developing goodies that riders and racers will just *have* to buy. From hard parts and helmets to tools and tires, no stone is left unturned when it comes to developing a better, stronger or more cost-effective product to meet a market's needs. Because of this, innovation is everywhere and riders have an enormous range of options for any given product category.

This year saw several new innovations and ideas, many of which focused on achieving a lighter weight, higher strength and lower price than last year's goodies. And while you, the target customer and core of the industry, were trying to decide which of these companies deserved your hard-earned dough the most, *Dirt Rider* was busy testing everything we could get our hands on in an effort to bring you the straight scoop on how it all performs.

After hundreds of hours and thousands of miles of rigorous testing, here's our take on the most durable, innovative and high-performing products of 2011.



Product Of The Year: Lithium Ion Batteries

Shorai Motorcycle Battery: \$109–\$154

www.shoraipower.com

OK, a battery is a battery, and how can a battery be such a big deal? Well, for starters, you have to pick one of these babies up; yes, light like you can't believe! (Sorry, you'll have to wait till you can do this on your own to get a true feel for it.) On most dirt bikes, the weight reduction is easily three pounds and often more, depending on the specific battery you choose. These are high-placed and handling-affecting pounds, we might add. Yet while lightweight lithium batteries are nothing new, only recently have they become ready for prime time. Early versions could not be charged by the motorcycle's charging system, were made from less stable concoctions of lithium, packaged poorly and, worst of all, semi-explosive. Now, companies like Shorai and Super B have better packaging, internal circuitry

and safe and stable lithium blends that produce plenty of power to crank over your starter and run your lights—all with a longer expected life span and a much better resistance to discharging when not in use. All this at a cost that is only 30 to 100 percent higher priced than a standard lead-acid battery. You cannot lose weight any cheaper than this even at the higher price levels.

Are there any drawbacks? Sure, lithium ion batteries don't like to be stored in a discharged state and will not work with chargers that have desulfate cycles (or poorly regulated motorcycle charging systems) since they cannot withstand charging at over 14.4 volts. Yet with so many dirt bikes being battery equipped, this is an easy pick for Product Of The Year based on performance and mostly weight loss.

