

WHY "LITES" ARE REALLY LESS FILLING

I'm seeing a trend that isn't too healthy. It has to do with the Motocross Lites and Supercross Lites classes; they aren't doing what they are supposed to do. The smaller-displacement class has traditionally been for the younger and less-experienced pro riders. A place to enter into the serious professional ranks and see if you have what it takes to make the big time. When it was the 125cc two-stroke class, before, and even during the infancy of, the 250F, it was still a class where the new guys proved their mettle, save for the few older racers who returned to win championship plaques for their teams and brand.

The problem I'm seeing has a lot to do with the four-strokes we are riding and the exponential cost of getting these things up to the power levels necessary to run anywhere near the front of the Lites class. It has to do with the expense of the ensuing maintenance—would you believe these teams only get about three hours, maximum, out of a front-line race motor? And when they break, not only is it catastrophic, but you'd better have a small fortune to get a replacement. It has been a long time since top riders and factory bikes suffered mechanical DNFs as they are now. And with so few shops able to coax the needed horsepower from these machines even the best and brightest are having a hard time finding good deals. Factory support teams are willing to pay top dollar for the power if those few who know how to make it will sell the good stuff!

That's why a lot of true privateers are moving up to the Motocross class. There they at least have enough power to play, and their bike isn't going to blow up every other weekend. Thus less-experienced riders are in a jam-packed class and are constantly wrestling their machines, making it hard to qualify for the show—none of which is exactly giving them stepping stones to advance their careers. These guys skipped a grade by default. The AMA wants to limit the entries at

Nationals and SX and doesn't see what's going on as a problem, saying such racers need to spend more time at lesser series, working their way up to the big time. Well, there isn't much of a way to support a full-time racing lifestyle in these lesser series for all but the home-schooled, wealthy-parent, lucky-sperm-club few. These are series that at best pop out one or two hopefuls a year. At this pace, it isn't looking too good for our sport ever having more than two or four fast guys capable of winning on any given weekend. How many guys are going to dedicate their lives to be a sixth-place guy? Or is that a lapper at today's Nationals or SX races? I don't know—I didn't pay attention to the guy in sixth.

Sure, there was some unobtainable equipment in the 125cc days, but the gap was much smaller—and a lot less expensive. Just look at the number of parts inside the motor and you can already cut costs in half. And 125s were slower, not the 43–46 horsepower Lites monsters of today, and therefore were a better learning tool. The old class acted as an equalizer based on a rider's weight, making the class more attractive for younger, lighter riders. I won't say that Lites racing isn't exciting, but pull a few energy drink sponsorships off the table and how many super-fast riders will be on the starting line? One or two...

I don't think 125s will come back, nor do I think there is an easy solution to this issue. I just hate to see the most affordable form of professional motorsports racing getting out of touch with some of the very reasons it is so popular: It's a sport where you could start late, get good and make a name for yourself by working hard, all at a reasonable cost. A true way to get your foot in the door, with a hope at being competitive at the sport's highest level.

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