

EZ ADV Upgrades: Some of the Cheapest Insurance You Can Buy

Black Dog Cycle Works Ultimate Skid Plate



Ryan Adams | August 1, 2018

For this four-part series, we take a look at five easy bolt-on parts that will transform your ADV bike from a Starbucks-destined road queen, to a Dakar-ready desert blasting rally winner. Or something like that. This series is designed to show how much of a difference a few well-thought-out adventure bike upgrades can make to the off-road prowess of your big ADV bike.

Black Dog Cycle Works has a reputation. That reputation is for over-built long-lasting products that are, pardon my vulgarity, built like a brick shithouse. Kurt and Martha Forgét spend time in both the backwoods of Idaho, where the company is based, and in southern Baja, where the

couple has a home, rigorously testing their products and leaving a trail of broken bits where they can just to make sure they build the most rugged products on the market for enduros and mid-to-large adventure bikes.



The BDCW Ultimate Skid Plate 2.0 with integrated Side Stand Relocation.

The *Ultimate Skid Plate* is just one of the products the company offers but it's the one they have become known for around the world. For the KTM Adventure it also solves the issue of potentially cracking your engine case from a hard blow to the side stand, with its optional side stand relocation kit. **Black Dog** started out developing parts for KTMs exclusively but now manufactures parts for BMW, Honda, Husqvarna, and Triumph motorcycles.

The **BDCW** skid plates offer serious protection at a good value, yet some customers are reluctant to purchase an aftermarket skid plate when they're getting their feet wet off-road. Something we hear all too often when folks begin to take their adventure bikes off-road, is that they "don't need

something like that” or “I’m not going to get too crazy, I’m a beginner.” As a beginner, it’s even more important to make that investment because you’ll likely end up tipping over more often or picking a more treacherous line than is necessary, causing the potential for harm to your bike’s undercarriage to be greater than after you’ve got some dirt under your brow. In the grand scheme of things, it really is cheap insurance.

To fully appreciate **Black Dog Cycle Works’** hard work and dedication, it helps to understand where the company came from and to get a behind the scenes look from the owner’s point of view.

The Story



Black Dog Cycle Works was founded by Kurt Forgét in 2007 with the creation of a skid plate for the KTM 950 Adventure. As is the case with many inventions, the skid plate was developed out of necessity. The aftermarket for KTM adventure bikes at the time was nil compared to what it is today. Kurt found himself using his engineering background and time spent in the motorcycle industry to develop a skid plate for the big orange bikes.

Not long after Kurt’s first skid plate had begun to gain traction in the adventure market, his friend Ned Suesse (an off-road rally and enduro racer), reached out to him to create a skid plate for the 950 Super Enduro Ned planned to race in the Baja 1000. After a few prototypes, Ned and Kurt settled on a design that would keep the skid plate as snug as possible to the bike while still allowing for crush zones in case of an impact. The product took a beating only the Baja 1000 could dish out, but the bike came through unscathed. Having made it through the ultimate proving ground, Kurt added the Super Enduro skid plate to their product line shortly after. The KTM Super Enduro he purchased for prototyping at the time is still in his garage to this day.



BDCW skid plates are manufactured in Washington state and their footpegs in Arizona. The Forçét's find importance in keeping their products manufactured in the USA.

It's refreshing talking to someone like Kurt. He's proud of his product but not to the point of resting on his laurels or being deaf to constructive feedback. The ***Black Dog Cycle Works Ultimate Skid Plate*** for the 1190 is now in its third version, with each iteration addressing customer feedback as well as Kurt and Martha's own experience over time.

"I don't know of a lot of companies in our space that do that. Usually, they make a product, they put it out there, and move on to the next one. We're always learning and trying to improve, so if we see an opportunity to improve our product, we'll do so and release a new version," says Kurt, "We want our stuff to be the best in the world."



Martha and Kurt are avid adventure riders. Don't be surprised if you run into them out on the trail.

It's obvious that **Black Dog** is in it for the sport when looking at customer reviews and feedback. The company has gained a loyal following for its customer service and flexibility to help keep their customers happy and protected on the trail. When asked what was most rewarding for **Black Dog** in terms of business and what they take pride in, Kurt replied unequivocally:

"I would definitely have to say the feedback we get from our customers. It really humbles us and sometimes embarrasses us (in a good way) because people are just so over-the-top about our products. Everyone's lives are so busy these days that for someone to take the time out of their day to write us a really nice note or shoot us an email and give us a compliment on the parts they just got or installed and that they love them, to get that kind of feedback is really something special. We're all consumers," explains Kurt, "we all buy stuff every day and it's rare that I sit down and actually send an email to someone to say 'Hey, this product is amazing!' so for us to have that kind of effect on our customers, I mean, it makes our day and always puts a huge smile on our faces and furthermore, it keeps us driven to keep creating the best product we can. It's really a rewarding part of the business."

It's easy to see the Forgét's dedication to the sport and to their business when you realize that Kurt and Martha are the business. "We don't have a call center," explains Kurt, "There's two of us, Martha and I. We do everything from customer service to processing orders and managing inventory." It would be easy to tire from the grind of owning a business if it weren't for the passion Martha and Kurt have for the industry.

Let's take a look at the product that put **Black Dog** on the map.

The Ultimate Skid Plate



The **Black Dog Cycle Works** *Ultimate Skid Plate* is likely the last skid plate you'll ever need. It could become an heirloom item, one you could pass down to your kids and their kids and so on and so forth until some ungrateful twerp 10 generations down asks, "How am I going to fit this to my hoverbike?" Maybe not, but you get what I'm saying, right?

The *Ultimate Skid Plate* from **BDCW** is made from 3/16-inch 5052 aluminum right here in the good ol' U.S. of A. The choice of metal, thickness, and mounting was very important to the Forgés when designing their skid plate. The product needed to be thick and sturdy enough to protect a 540-pound adventure bike, but also still offer some flex and impact absorption to deaden the blows it might take. Many times in the aftermarket we've seen companies produce the mega-hardcore, drive-a-tractor-over-it (insert part here) only to find out that in an actual impact situation, they were right, the product stood up to the hit, but then transferred the force into the frame or engine case and ultimately broke parts that are much more expensive to replace. It's a fine line to tip toe.



This skid plate has, in fact, been used, and I've been able to hear the sound of large rocks bouncing off of it while trail riding. The two-stage powder coat, one textured and colored then a clear coat, makes for a resilient finish.

The **BDCW** skid plate is also built to provide substantial coverage to the soft underbelly of your bike. The **BDCW** unit not only does a thorough job of protecting your engine's sump, but also the headers along the side of the engine and behind the rear cylinder. Another example of **Black Dog's** attention to detail is the lip that comes out below the 1190's protruding clutch cover, a welcome additional bit of protection.

Version 2.0, which has now been redesigned and designated 3.0, included more cut-outs in the skid plate for venting as customers felt their bikes were running hot because of the lack of wind flowing around the bottom of the engine. Though Kurt felt the verdict was out on those claims due to the liquid-cooled nature of the bike, he was still able to add in a few vents on the sides and front with a steel mesh screen behind them so they won't let in much more than air.



The Ultimate Skid Plate 3.0 offers a slightly different design by coming up higher in the front and having large angled plates along the sides to better glance off of low-lying objects.

Version 3.0 is kind of a mash-up of version 1.0 and 2.0 says Kurt. From looking at the two side-by-side, the third iteration looks to come up a smidge higher in the front, and the sides are more angled to better glance off large objects and not get hung up on low-lying obstacles.



Despite the thorough full-color instructions with pictures, I still managed to spend more time than I needed to when installing the skid plate.

Installation took me longer than usual because I used the opportunity to clean the motorcycle thoroughly around its dirty nether-regions and over-thought a step in the instructions. Overall, it's a straightforward installation that most with little mechanical skill should have no problem with.



Removing the skid plate for maintenance is as easy as removing the two bolts seen here fore and aft and then repeating the procedure on the other side. Simple.

On the trail, listening to large rocks kicking up and bouncing off of the skid plate, I assumed I'd see some kind of little knicks or something, but the skid plate looks as new as it did when I installed it. Wipe the dust off and one would never know it was used. I haven't had the chance to smash it into any rock ledges or high side it on a passing boulder and that's mostly because I just don't really want to do that on my 1190. With that being said, the peace-of-mind having this robust protection on my big bike allows me to be a bit more careless when I'm hundreds of miles from home dropping down into a rocky washed-out trail.

The importance of protecting the bottom of a bike this heavy can't be understated. If you crash down onto a hard surface with 550 pounds of motorcycle without protection, you're gonna have a bad time. One need not look further than MO's last adventure bike shootout to see the kind of carnage that can ensue. RIP Super Ténéré oil pan. The **Black Dog Cycle Works** skid plate is built for the speeds and heft that current adventure bikes bring with them to the trailhead. If you're new to riding big bikes off-road, do yourself a favor, always use protection. It's not like you're going to use

it one night and throw it away when you're done. This thing will be with you for the life of the bike.

So, if you're thinking about a skid plate for your big adventure bike, consider **Black Dog Cycle Works** for one of the most robust and rugged skid plates on the market. Supporting small American businesses is also cool, and you'll be cool for doing so.

Pricing: *Ultimate Skid Plate 3.0* with integrated *Side Stand Relocation* \$590

Visit **Black Dog Cycle Works'** website for more information. **www.BlackDogCW.com**