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Cat announces '06 lineup

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by AmSnow staff

Arctic Cat may do well to change its name to Efficient Cat for next season. Certainly its message for 2006 is, as snowmobile product manager Joey Hallstrom says, "The days of high-horsepower, big cc engines is done." Efficiency (in the clean air sense) is Job 1.

To that end, the Cat engineers are pressing forward with cleaner, more efficient engines for next season. But don't think they've buried the fun in their saddlebags. There's plenty, plus Arctic Cat's electronics wizards have created new items to put a charge in your saddle, not to mention your helmet!

High Performance + Engine Efficiency

First, the engine story!

It's no secret that 600cc engines lead the sales parade each year, so its natural that Cat is pumping a lot of thought and technology into its 600cc units. This year it adds the 600cc EFI II engine to its F6 mainstay.



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The 600 helps Cat meet 2006 emissions standards by using an exhaust pipe sensor to cut carbon monoxide emissions by 25%. From a corporate standpoint that's great, but Hallstrom says it also offers additional benefits to riders. First, it helps prevent cold drive-away hesitation, an annoyance when the mercury has slipped into those single and negative digits. In addition, the new system also boosts engine acceleration, making for smoother, quicker starts – always a plus in a performance sled.

Cat's addition of the 600 EFI II, plus its decision to offer only the 900 EFI on its ZR900 in '06, means that among its high-performance sleds only the F7 and F5 have carburetors, as well as EFI, engine options. Don't expect that to last for long!

Also aiding the high-performance lineup of the F5, F6, F7 and ZR9, Cat has worked on the suspensions, lowering the center of gravity and recalibrating the standard models for groomed trail riding. Most important, though, is a new, lighter weight, Hacksaw track with 1-inch lugs that was jointly developed with Camoplast.

For its Sno Pro models, Cat gives the sleds more ground clearance, Fox Float shocks with a more aggressive calibration to absorb the bumps and a 2-inch rear



arm shock designed into the skid frame. The track this season will feature a 1 3/8-inch lug, and all Sno Pro models will come with matching color hoods and pans, giving them a more unified, aggressive appearance.

Note too that Firecat EFI R models will use the chain and sprocket style reverse gear and feature the standard suspension package. Also, fans of red Firecats will have to wait. For now that color has been dropped from the lineup.

Crossovers growing

While the engine news is important, Cat's move into the hybrid market with the new Crossfire (Crossover mixed with Firecat, get it?) may generate the most excitement among riders.

Crossfire is based on Cat's popular M-series mountain sled and features a rider-forward design. Crossfire also hooks the rider up with a 136-inch Ripsaw track with 1.25-inch lugs to give the sled more off-trail powder pounding ability.

Folks get two engine choices here with the Suzuki 600cc EFI or 700cc EFI, to give the sled plenty of oomph (up to 140 hp) when you press the throttle.

Crossfire comes in black or orange. (See our First Ride review, p. 37, for more details!)

Trail performance



Certainly Crossfire is a hottie, but there's plenty of fun for us 45- to 55-year-olds who enjoy good trail performance. That's where the Sabercat lineup comes in. All Sabercats will be LX models this year, featuring electric start and reverse, with one exception. The new Sabercat 500 EFI will be available as a standard model, too. Cat upgrades the sleds' 80-horse 500cc engine with EFI to get better fuel economy and cut emissions. Plus Cat says customers have been requesting this package for several years. So this one should sell well.

In addition, Cat has reworked the throttle lever to give it a lighter feel, making this Sabercat more fun on the trails. A romp near Cat's headquarters proved this one will ditch bang with the best of them and certainly can get some air too. Note that electric start and reverse are optional on the 500 EFI.

Since it's offering the new 600 EFI II on its performance sleds, you can be sure Cat is upgrading the EFI system on the Sabercat 600 LX for the 2006 model year too, again boosting gas mileage and cutting emissions.

Family and utility

Arctic Cat's family sled segment mainly sees color changes, with the F120 and Z570 models being available in green



and orange, while the Z370 and 440 are only available in green for 2006. More substantive changes include hooked handlebars on the 570 models and the addition of a quieter track.

Cat also replaces the old blow-molded skis on the Z series sleds with saddleless skis to help cut weight and improve performance.

The bigger news comes on the utility sled portion of the lineup. Cat introduces a ground-up new Bearcat with higher front-end ride height, plus a new model. The new W/T (wide-track) Turbo uses the T660's engine, a turbocharged Suzuki 4-stroke triple.

Bearcats also will feature a track with 1.25-inch lugs to help it float better in deep powder; electronic gauges; a heavy-duty hitch; new tunnel; redesigned hood and headlights; dual-runner skis; revamped handlebars; a removable passenger's seat; and hinged under-seat storage. Plus, it has a straight-rail, 8-inch rear wheel skidframe for better towing and ride.

Remote start also will be available on the Turbo and Bearcat W/T, and Cat's Multi Rack Platform will be offered as an accessory to increase the sled's hauling ability. Cat also adds electric start to the Bearcat 570. Colors? All Bearcats are blue!

Touring sleds/electronics

Two-up riders have a lot to think about this year, too.

First, Pantera is being dropped, so Cat is adding a new Panther 4-stroke as its two-up price leader. The Panther, which features the 660cc 4-stroke that generates 110 horsepower, starts at \$6,999, a price that's slightly more than the former Pantera 550 but well below the former Pantera 600.

Available on all the Panthers is Cat's Quiet Track that reduces noise and vibration, new saddleless skis and wrap-around rear racks. The Panther 570 also offers reverse, mirrors, a high windshield, two-passenger seat with backrest, heated handgrips and an accessory outlet. Remote electric start also is being offered for the first time on the touring models.

Cat's not done there. It's adding a T660 Touring LE and Touring Turbo LE, too. The hot news here is heated seats with separate driver and passenger controls. Plus the seats have three heat settings and are quick to warm. In fact, in a brief test ride we had to turn the heat to low because it got so toasty. The driver's control knob is just to the right and above the 12-volt power outlet.

The switches for hand and thumb warmers also have been relocated to the left handlebar, at customers' request, Cat says. And the handlebars themselves were redesigned and cleaned up. Buttons are large enough to be used by a gloved hand and controls are backlit, including the e-stop button, for better night use. Cat also adds a bar pad to protect riders.

However, there's more to get amped up about ... Cat has developed a cool communications system with AM/FM and satellite radio, that allows driver-to-driver, or driver-to-passenger communications. It's available on the T660 Turbo Touring LE and Turbo LE models. Cat hopes the system will

encourage more family and group rides.

The system offers 15 channels and is operated by a push-to-talk switch just below the hand and thumb warmer controls. Plus there's the radio, including satellite radio, so you can dial in a ton of stations, or you can adapt it to include an MP3 player or iPod.

There's a tiny antenna by the sled's left mirror and the radio control panel is right next to the speedometer on the dash. It's quite easy to adjust the station and sound level there.

Gary Gustafson, Cat's group leader for electrical engineering on snowmobiles, says the goal is to make any new electronics "part of the sled's central nervous system," so that it's easy to use and becomes second nature to the rider.

His team seems to have succeeded with the communications system. Running in a large group near Thief River Falls, the system worked flawlessly with the sleds spread out for easily a half mile. Just be careful if you tune in to some really fast-paced music. You'll find yourself hurrying to keep up with it!

Didn't get to test the talk to passenger portion, but this is an intercom type system like you see on motorcycles and there's no need to press any buttons to talk to the other person. Could be fun if you enjoy chatting while on the trail!

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