

Elka Stage 4 Shocks

Story & Photos | Brad Harris

Elka is creating a name for itself in the snowmobile industry as one of the major aftermarket suspension players and as such Elka continues to provide more options for an increasing number of customers. New for the 2016 season were the Elka Stage 4 shocks which we had installed on our 2016 ZR 6000 Sno Pro 137.

Elka's Stage 2 and Stage 5 shock models have been available for quite a few seasons; however, they represent the two extremes of shocks, as far as adjustability and tuning go. The Stage 2s don't offer external compression adjustment, only rebound, while the Stage 5s offer both high and low speed compression adjustment as well as rebound. To provide more options for those that don't require the adjustment features of the Stage 5s but still want some adjustment, the new Stage 3 and Stage 4 shock models were introduced. They also appeal to a wider range of riders based on their pricing.

The new Stage 4s offer compression adjustment as well as rebound adjustment. The main difference between the Stage 4 and 5 models is that the 4s have a single compression adjustment clicker, not individual high and low speed compression clickers like the 5s. The Stage 4s are comparable in adjustability to the shocks that come on most of the high-end big bumps sleds like the XRS, Pro-X, RR, and R-TX LE.

One feature of the Stage 4s that takes them a step above the OEM offerings is the tuneable dual rate springs on the front and centre shocks. This allows for comfort and compliance in the small stuff while improving bottoming protection in the rough stuff vs. the stock springs.

We worked with John Sharrard at Accelerated Technologies who supplied and installed the shocks as well as performing the initial set-up of the suspension. We wanted a direct replacement for the stock shocks and had the suspension initially set-up exactly the same as stock. Keep in mind that when you order a set of Elka shocks, either through a supplier like Accelerated Technologies or directly from Elka, they take some time to discuss exactly what you are looking for and how you ride in order to provide a shock that's valved in order to perform to your expectations. In our experience, working with a supplier allows more one on one time with the suspension tech which leads to a better knowledge of the shocks as well as getting the most out of your sled through improved suspension set-ups.

During the initial 1100 km we were able to ride the ZR 6000 Sno Pro 137 alongside our XF 6000 CrossTrek which shares the same suspension calibrations from the



factory. This was ideal to get a direct comparison to the stock set-up.

The compression clicker is easy to use with gloves and provides a noticeable difference when you adjust with 2 clicks at a time. Adjusting by one click can be used when you know you're close to where you want it. The clickers on the rear shocks will get covered with ice, but that's the nature of the beast with most adjustable rear shocks.

We didn't use the rebound adjustment very much after the initial set-up as this isn't the type of adjustment a rider would typically play with through a day of riding,

but having the option is important when making other suspension adjustments. After the first day of riding we had John Sharrard make some changes to improve the handling, and having the ability to go back and check the rebound and make any necessary adjustment is a great feature.

To be honest, the Stage 4s performed exactly like we thought they would. They provide much more adjustment and tune-ability than the stock shocks and allowed us to make adjustments through each ride to find the right setting. I found they were firmer in small bumps and at lower speeds than the stock Fox Float 3 front and Arctic Cat IFP rear shocks; however, during higher speed or aggressive riding the Stage 4s were far more superior and we were able to adjust them to absorb the big hits with ease. While we may have lost some lower speed comfort, the gains in performance when pounding through 1-2 ft.



Test Rider: Mike Van Muyen

The Arctic Cat ZR 6000 Sno Pro 137 is my kind of ride - built from the factory to please an aggressive trail rider who doesn't care that the trail is choppy or whooped out. The Fox Float 3s do a good job at handling the rough stuff... for a while, so we had a complete set of Elka Stage 4 shocks installed on our ZR.

What an awesome set-up. My first ride was a relatively short one on some local trails. My first thought was that it was a little stiff as I had not even looked at any of Brad's settings before that ride. Once back in my shop I did a little research on the proper set-up and how to dial them in. Being a relatively light rider the springs were set too stiff for me. Once the springs were adjusted the next step was to go out on a ride to dial in the compression and rebound adjustments. Follow the instructions, as they are very helpful, even if you think you are a veteran shock tuner. Starting from full soft and adjusting to where I wanted it was the answer. The ride was now excellent; fast, slow, smooth or rough, I was a happy sledder. Even my wife commented on her time on the sled how much she enjoyed riding it. She said it was comfortable, nimble and very easy to control. The only complaint she had with the ZR was the low windshield. Too bad honey, I love low windshields!

At one point on our ride, we were on the main trail which had not been groomed in a very long time. I decided to put the Stage 4s to the test. As a former racer I tried my hardest to make these shocks fade. A five mile stretch... back and forth I went. Never was there a high side or bottoming experience as I rode like a banshee working up a sweat in the -30 weather. Once again I was a happy sledder. These shocks just flat out performed beyond expectations.

Later in the season I unfortunately had to remove the Elkas and reinstall the stock shocks thinking the season was over. The Stage 4s went back to John at Accelerated Technologies for evaluation. Then I got a call from a friend for one last ride in April in Mont Valin, Quebec. When we hit the trails it appeared that the Quebec clubs had parked their groomers for the season even though there was a ton of snow. There was me on the ZR with the stock shocks, wishing I had left the Stage 4 Elkas on, but that is a story for another time.

bumps was significant. Keep in mind our shocks were valved as direct replacements for a wide range of rider weights. Lower speed comfort won't likely be sacrificed when you order a set that are calibrated exactly for your weight and riding style. Other test riders noted they were able to dial in the shocks to provide a smooth ride at lower speeds without sacrificing big bump performance.

Overall we were impressed with the Stage 4s and believe they are a great upgrade. The quality is unmatched in the industry.

