

EVALUATION ELKA STAGE 4 ON A RZR4

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ELKA STAGE 4 SHOCK ABSORBERS FOR SIDE X SIDES

TWO MONTHS AGO, ALAIN ASSAD AND I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO VISIT THE ELKA SUSPENSION SHOPS. DURING OUR VISIT, VICE-PRESIDENT MARC-ANDRÉ KINGSLEY TOLD US THAT HE WOULD PUT ELKA STAGE 4 SHOCKS FOR SIDE X SIDE VEHICLES AT OUR DISPOSAL, SO THAT WE COULD TRY THEM OUT. A FEW WEEKS LATER, WE RECEIVED A CALL FROM THEIR OFFICES IN BOUCHERVILLE, QUE. INDICATING THAT THE SHOCK ABSORBERS WERE READY!



Here's a summary of our test results. Although the shock absorbers were installed on the Polaris RZR4 800cc only a few weeks ago, I can say that what we have so far experienced with these, felt really impressive. Even a passenger with little experience could feel the difference between the original stock Fox shocks and the Elka stage 4.

In fact, these two shocks cannot be compared. Polaris put in a good effort by equipping the RZR 4 with high quality stock shocks. The Fox shocks offer two adjustments, preload and compression. The Elka Stage 4 shocks allow many more adjustments, such as preload, rebound, and compression at high and low speed, a true luxury!

When unpacking these little marvels, we quickly noticed the presence of quality manufacturing, a beautiful finish, and I admit that the label Made in Canada added a plus, another high-end product made here. Something to be proud of, you'll surely agree! They are a bit heavier than the stock shocks, but the difference isn't enough to be of any significance.

INSTALLATION

This subject will not require many explanations. If you are not equipped with tools at all, entrust the work to professionals; otherwise, nothing complicated here. We lift our Side x Side using the proper tools, freeing the load on the shocks to facilitate dismantling. Remove one screw at the bottom and one at the top holding each shock absorber and install the Elka Stage 4. It's as simple as that. You should be done within half an hour. These shocks are very well identified, so we know immediately which one goes in front and at the rear. A label is affixed to each pair, indicating what adjustments have been made and the name of the technician who checked the shocks. In addition, the small pamphlet supplied will allow you to quickly familiarize yourself with these new shocks. Now with our four Elka Stage 4 shock absorbers installed, we were ready for testing.

INITIAL SETTINGS

It is important to mention that any and all Elka shocks are assembled according to each client's profile, which is your first step in the process of upgrading to a set of Elka shocks. Even if the basic settings are satisfactory, when you buy such a high-end product, it is because it allows you a multitude of adjustments that will enable you to reach a perfect combination. For Side x Side racers this is no luxury, but for the common trail rider, I guess



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TOO STIFF THE REAR WILL SLIDE OUT TOO EASILY AND TOO SOFT WILL CAUSE BODY ROLL FOX FOUND THE SWEET SPOT IN BETWEEN



YOU WILL COME TO LOVE THE LOW AND HIGH SPEED COMPRESSION ADJUSTMENTS KNOBS FOR QUICK CHANGES ACCORDING TO RIDING CONDITIONS



you could call it that. To obtain full satisfaction from your shock absorbers, you should take the time to adjust them. This could mean a few weeks or a few months, depending on the number of hours of riding and how much off-road experience you have. I'm quite familiar with suspension systems, but I still take note of each modification and of how the vehicle reacted afterwards. The first principle to respect is working on only one setting at a time. Avoid modifying all the adjustments at the same time; you could make mistakes that could prove harmful. The second principle is not to be too drastic on setting changes. For example, if you decide to adjust the rebound, go with one or two clicks at a time and then go to experiment and take note of your observations.

PRELOAD

The preload setting is the force applied on the spring. It will affect the height, behavior and comfort of the vehicle. If you apply too much preload, the vehicle will be high but very stiff, causing discomfort, and also making it more unstable in cornering. On the other hand, if you decrease preload too much the vehicle will be lower and shock absorbers will tend to work up to their limit. They will bottom-out, as they say, in addition to making the vehicle uncomfortable in bumps, while also possibly damaging the shock absorbers. Shock adjustments on a four passenger Side x Side should be on an intermediate setting, because you can be riding alone or with 3 additional passengers. It is important to adjust the preload so the ground clearance is well-balanced between the front and rear. Ideally, the front should be slightly higher (1,5 cm / 0.6 in maximum). The preload setting is very easily done with Elka shocks, and more so, necessary tools are provided.

REBOUND

It is not uncommon when riding on trails to come up to whoops, a series of small bumps. Have you ever felt the pitching effect, as on a boat at sea, when you ride at moderate speeds on this type of trail? With increased speeds, your Side x Side can quickly go out of control while going through bumpy sections, bouncing from right to left. On an Elka Stage 4 suspension shock system, this is the kind of situation where one will appreciate the efficiency of the rebound adjustment. Rebound is the setting that controls the speed at which your shock returns to its initial position after being compressed. With a good rebound adjustment, the wheels return more quickly to contact with the ground after an impact. On bumpy terrain,



FOX PERFORMS THE ULTIMATE TEST OF LOW SPEED COMPRESSION WITH THIS AGGRESSIVE TURN WHILE IN A DIP



grip will also be better, so it's important to take the time to adjust the rebound, and not hesitate to change the settings according to where you ride. With time, you will change your settings according to needs, eyes closed. On the Elka Stage 4, rebound adjustment is easily accessible and is done using a flat screwdriver. As for other settings, go 2 clicks at a time and then run a trial session.

HIGH AND LOW SPEED COMPRESSION

Compression hardens or softens the shock absorber effect by modifying its hydraulic resistance. One can adjust a shock in a more flexible or tight way, without having to change the preload setting. In addition, with the Elka Stage 4 you have a choice of 2 different compression adjustments. One for when the shock is compressed fast, in a quick shot, like when landing from a jump or hitting a sharp obstacle, which is commonly known as high speed compression. The other is to control the slower motions of the shock like during weight transfers in turns or under braking and acceleration, the low speed compression. The adjustment knobs are located near the shock absorber tank and are easy to use. However, the high speed compression knob is difficult to adjust, with less perceptible setting clicks, so some practice is needed to get it right.

COMFORT

Now our Polaris RZR4 is ready for the first outing. I immediately notice that the vehicle is a little higher, after installing the Elka Stage 4 shocks, approximately 1,9 cm / 0.75 in. more. I decide not to decrease preload for the moment and try a run immediately. My first outing is more family-oriented, I want to see if the Elka stage 4 improves comfort during family-type rides. My wife and my son are with me for this first test. We go in the Lanaudière region on a path that we know and have ridden on several times. It is a beautiful but very rocky area, which makes it rather uncomfortable at certain times. As of the first kilometers I felt a major change, not just a slight improvement, I mean a major difference. In rocky parts, the Polaris RZR4's original



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shocks stayed rigid. The Stage 4 shocks were simply much more comfortable through the same trails.

I would like to mention that the comparison between the two types of shocks is not a negative comment on the quality of the original shocks, but just a way of evaluating the efficiency of the Elka Stage 4 shocks. Some rough sections at 30 km/h and even at 50 km/h seemed to be flattened by the new shock absorbers and were passed with a lot more comfort. We made a stop near Notre-Dame de la Mercie and I asked my wife and my son their opinion, just to know whether someone with less experience would feel the improvement. The answer was unanimous; the Polaris RZR4 is more comfortable with the Elka4 shocks.

For long trek-type riders, the investment is worth it. Another difference that immediately caught my attention concerned the transfer of weight to the front in braking, especially when you must stop in a series of bumps. The vehicle held a straight line and did not tend to plunge forward, allowing greater braking capacity and control. This first day of trial with the family was a good experience, especially in those magnificent trails. The next test of the Elka Stage 4 shocks, which allow sporty driving, should be on a controlled track circuit.

TRACK TESTS

Now for the rough stuff, I phone the people at Elka to see if they can provide me with some information on proper adjustments. I speak with Yann, who like a cooking chef, replied immediately, add a little here, one or two clicks there....he knew the recipe. As I already said, adjusting shock absorbers takes time, so a little advice once in a while can avoid a day of tests and adjustments. For this test, we will be 4 people aboard the Polaris RZR4. We will test it with one, two, three and four people aboard, to see if the shock absorbers work well in all situations. I'm with our Editor Alain Assad, collaborator Steve Dumaine and my friend Geoff, owner of the Wide Open Crew freestyle team. When alone in the vehicle, the fact of setting the suspension for 4 adult people makes the ride a bit rigid. However, it is always as predictable and effective in control, but comfort is somewhat

diminished. When I run the same trail with 2 or 3 passengers, the feeling remains the same, but it's when we traveled the same path with 3 and 4 people aboard the Polaris RZR that the Elka shocks showed their effectiveness. We were on a private track and we pushed the vehicle without hesitation, whether in turns, over bumps and in rocky rugged parts. At the end of the day, we all agreed, the Elka Stage 4 shocks really deliver and perform exactly the way they are designed for. It is important for everyone to tighten their belt low at the waist first, sliding your rump as far back as possible in the seat. I must admit that we really abused these shock absorbers, in order to determine their efficiency, tackling very rough sections at high speeds. We had so much fun that some painful body effects will be quickly forgotten.

VERDICT

I want to be clear, objective, and truly honest with you. Elka Stage 4 shocks are the best I've tried so far on a Side x Side, but they are also a major expense. At my driving level, I love modifying my ATVs, and my first priority is always to start with making them more comfortable and effective before thinking of adding power or purchasing additional accessories. If your budget allows and you occasionally like sport-type driving, Stage 4 shocks are for you, while Stage 2 shocks with rebound are a good alternative if you are more focused on the promenade-type ride and want to improve the comfort of your Side x Side. In fact, the only problem with such an advanced suspension is that it is imperative to spend the time to get the perfect setting. It may seem complex, but in fact if you're patient, you'll get the most out of your investment, and if you want tips, the Customer service at Elka will gladly help you out.

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