



Snow Goer Canada Exclusive: A Tour of Elka Suspension

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Sales Representative John Ilkiw being interviewed by Snowmobiler TV's Phil Molto.

In early December, Snow Goer Canada and Snowmobiler TV were invited to take a tour of Elka Suspension's head office and manufacturing facility in Boucherville, Quebec. We jumped at the opportunity to take a look behind the scenes at the snowmobile industry's fastest growing aftermarket shock manufacturer and supplier.

When we arrived we were greeted by Patrick Tellier, Elka's Director of Marketing & OEM Coordination, and were soon introduced to many of the staff in the front office including Sales Representative John Ilkiw, Cynthia Prefontaine in Public Relations, and two of the three owners; Jean-François Lamoureux, Vice-President (Procurement), and Marc-André Kingsley, Vice-President (Operations). The third owner, and President, Martin Lamoureux, was away testing with Yamaha's Cross Country racing team.

When speaking with the various members of the staff, we quickly realized that pretty much everyone at Elka rides or races sleds, motocross bikes, street bikes, or ATV's. They are power sports enthusiasts who are dedicated to providing the best quality shocks for pro's and amateurs alike. The company began when brothers Martin and Jean-François, were racing motocross and became dissatisfied with the products offered by the large shock companies at the time. After building shocks for themselves they quickly received interest from other racers and eventually from ATV racers as well. From there the company grew strictly by word of mouth. The origins of the company combined with the experienced staff of power sports enthusiasts results in a grass-roots business that is very in tune with their customers.

While still relatively new in the snowmobile industry, Elka has been the leader in aftermarket shocks in the ATV market for quite some time. They are also very successful in

the UTV industry as well as motorcycle and off-road racing. The same philosophy that enables their success in those markets is employed for the snowmobile market. Having tested their shocks previously, Snow Goer Canada believes they make a high quality product and back it up with excellent customer support.

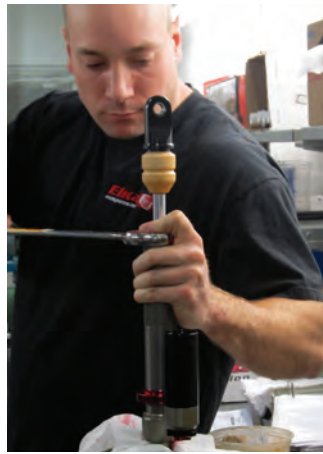
Quality has been the focus since day one and both in the office, and on the manufacturing floor, it was quite obvious that Elka's commitment to quality is very high. For that reason, the critical components are sourced from local suppliers, and for the components coming from more distant suppliers, each shipment goes through a tight quality control process before the parts can even reach inventory. In addition to the high level of quality, it's their customer support and knowledge behind their product that sets Elka apart from their competitors. In our opinion, no other shock supplier will take the amount of time that Elka does to ensure you are buying the product that suits your needs the best. To our knowledge, no other supplier will go through the same process Elka does to ensure that the shocks are shipped to you, calibrated just right for your sled and riding style. They even set the pre-load and compression adjustments at the factory based on your info so you can literally bolt them on and ride.

Assembly line

Elka has two assembly lines in operation, one for OEM production and one for aftermarket production, both following the same process. After the parts pass the quality control inspections, they are added to the inventory. From inventory, the parts are collected based on a customer's order sheet. Certain sub-assemblies are pre-assembled before moving on



Two shock shafts with valve installed awaiting final assembly.



A technician tightens the shock after final assembly.



Each shock gets a serial number engraved once it passes all the tests.

to the main shock assembly workstations. At these stations, the technicians select and install the appropriate valving shimstacks based on the shock configuration that was determined by Elka's R&D staff. There are thousands of "recipes" for tuning that the customer support experts reference when determining the correct setup for a customer.

Once the valving is installed on the shaft, the assembly is slid into the shock body and tightened. At this point the shock goes through a proprietary process to fill the shocks with oil and ensure all the air is removed.



A technician testing a shock on the dyno to ensure it's operating within their specs.

Once this process is complete, each shock gets tested on a shock dyno and adjusted to ensure the shock performs as intended within the specified parameters. Once the shock passes the dyno test, a serial number is engraved and the shock gets packaged and ready to ship to the customer. Elka's aftermarket assembly line is capable of producing hundreds of shocks a day.

R&D department

Away from the assembly lines, Elka has a research and development shop that tests the stock suspension of late model sleds to find the areas that need improvement. Typically each model will have specific areas that could use



Shock components in inventory and ready for the production line.

improvement. Sometimes they know exactly where to start looking, based on the feedback they receive from new customers complaining about their sled's ride quality or handling. With most sleds though, they have to methodically go through the suspension's operation to find flaws or potential issues. They look at every aspect of the stock suspension's stroke as well as the calibrations of the shocks and springs. In the end, this allows them to offer a product that actually corrects any flaws or issues they may find in an OE's calibration. Their intent is not only to improve the ride quality, but to bring the suspension's performance to its peak.

Earlier in 2014, Elka reached a partnership with Yamaha to support their factory Cross Country and Hill Climb race teams with Elka shocks and technical support. Reaching a deal with one of the four OEM's is a major accomplishment of which Elka is very proud, and so they should be. However, they cautioned us that they have no intentions to compromise the level of quality and craftsmanship of their products in order to mass-produce OEM shocks for the big manufacturers.

If your sled's shocks are getting tired and in need of replacement, or you think your stock shocks just aren't allowing the sled to perform to its potential, check out Elka Suspension online or give them a call and talk to one of their knowledgeable sales reps. You will absolutely be impressed with the product and the level of support. We've been impressed with Elka since running a set of their Stage 5 shocks on the front end of our 2013 Yamaha FX Nytro a couple seasons ago and highly recommend checking them out and seeing how they can improve your ride.