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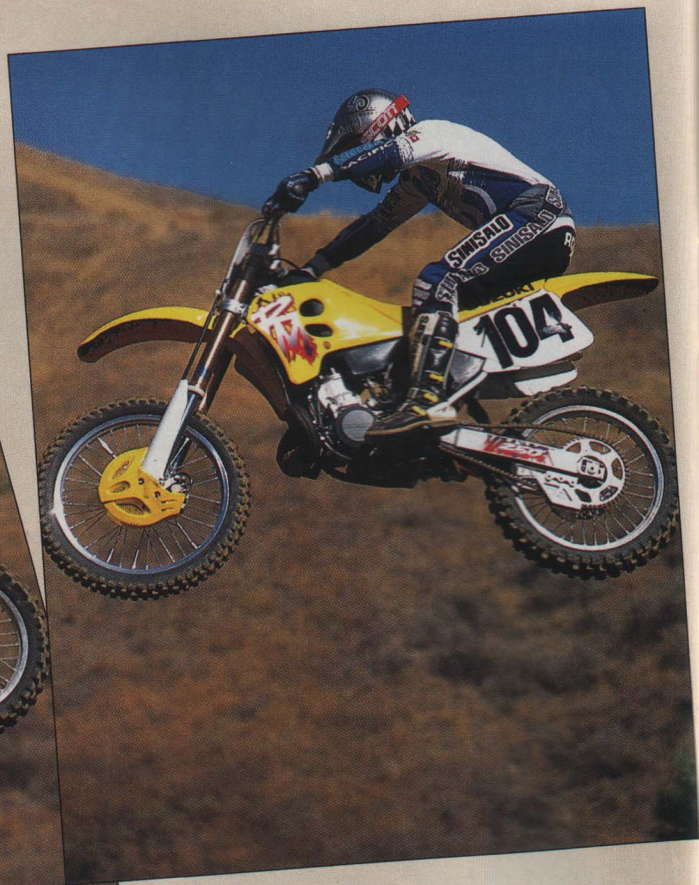
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# DeCOSTER vs. THE 1995 250s

*CR vs. KX vs. RM vs. YZ vs. SX vs. R.D.*

**By Roger DeCoster**

**F**or several model years now, a good rider can win races on any of the motocross brands represented in this shootout. As a result of many successive years of comparison testing of each others' products and racing against one another, each manufacturer's end product is becoming more similar to its competition. Yet even as they become more alike, one machine still fits certain riders or different types of tracks better than the others. This comparison should help you determine the

strong and weak points of each bike and help you choose the brand that best fits your style and needs.

To do that, we directly compared the five '95 250s at four tracks of very different character—Sunrise Cycle Park, a sandy to hardpacked track with lots of jumps, holes and square-edged bumps; Castaic Motocross Park, a supercross-style outdoor track with a clay to sandy surface; and two tracks near Phelan, one being hardpacked with lots of hills, whoops and G-outs, and the other a natu-

ral sand track with huge rolling whoops and bermed turns. We also did some partial test sessions at Carlsbad, Glen Helen, Perris and a track near Beaumont. We fitted each bike with identical Dunlop K490 and D737 tires and performed suspension setup ourselves. Testers consisted of myself (5'9" and 170 pounds), Managing Editor Tim Tolleson (a vet intermediate, 5'9" and 210 pounds), Associate Editor Joe Kosch (Novice, 6'0" and 160 pounds) and test rider/photo model Shane Trittler (Expert, 5'10" and 135 pounds).





*Which is the best 250cc motocrosser? All four Japanese 250s have moved closer to each other than ever for '95, especially in engine performance. But suspension and chassis characteristics give each machine its own personality. The KTM moves closer as well.*

## ERGONOMICS & CONTROLS

### FIT & FEEL LEADS TO CONFIDENCE

● How things look, feel and fit on a bike have always been important to me. If it feels and looks right, the chances I will like it on the track have already increased. I can't be the only one who has this characteristic. The fierce competition among manufacturers has forced them to improve not only the performance of their products but also the feel of their brakes, clutch, riding position and so on to the point where they actually fit like a glove. Where you needed a lot of strength to pull the brake or clutch lever a few years ago, today the same can be accomplished with a finger or two. When a pipe burned your leg in the old days, you put asbestos on your boot, but today they redesign the frame for a tighter routing of the exhaust.

**CR250R:** For a few years the CR had a lead in this field, but the competition is getting closer and closer—in some cases, better. Last year, the rider compartment got cramped when Honda laid the fork back half a degree in search of stability. This year the CR got new stadium pegs. They are very nice, except that all of the

extra width was added to the front, which adds to the cramped feel. This makes me feel like I'm constantly hanging off the back of the bike. A couple of other areas could be improved as well—a lack of clearance between the tank and head leads to a hassle in changing the spark plug, and a lack of clearance around the carb makes it hard to change jets. It's a real knuckle-buster to even change the needle position, but the other bikes are just as cramped, with the Suzuki being the worst.

**RM250:** Most riders find everything well-positioned on the RM, and the Suzuki has a lighter clutch and throttle pull than the others. The levers are shaped very well and have a first-class feel, but some riders catch their boots on the rear of the tank shrouds. The return spring on the rear brake pedal is too long for those who like to adjust the pedal even with the footpeg. This spoils the feel somewhat. I also don't like the slotted rear axle nut and cotter pin arrangement, which is inferior to the self-locking axle nuts of the CR, YZ and KTM.

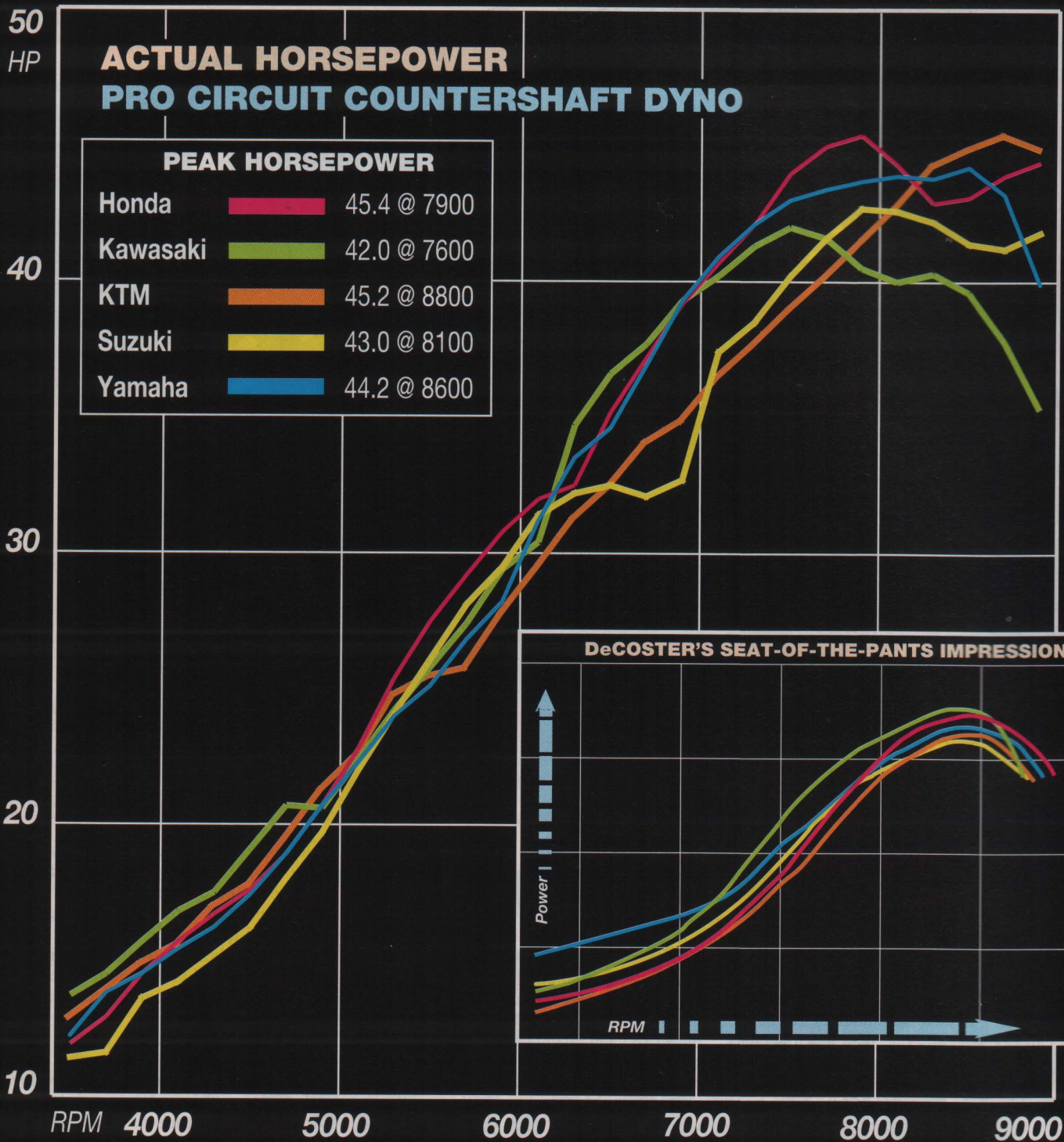
**YZ250:** Although the tank is wider than the RM and CR, the YZ's rider compartment is fine. It has improved a lot in the feel of brakes, although the shape of the levers and grips are small things that

could be better. This year the bars are actually usable. My biggest complaint is with the shape of the kickstarter, which brings the top of your foot in contact with the back of the footpeg at the end of the stroke. One other small complaint is that, when the rear end kicks, the thin seat and raised edges on the rear fender can be a real pain in the rear!

**KX250:** You feel more on top of the KX than when straddling the other bikes, maybe because the handlebars were lowered this year. This isn't necessarily negative; it just takes time to adjust. Upshifting is still a little notchy on the KX, and, like the Yamaha, when the rear end kicks up there's a ridge on the KX fender that reminds the rider that motocross is not a comfort sport. Kawasaki has also improved front brake feel, but the KX uses the same slotted axle nut as the RM.

**250SX:** KTM is really proud of the new dual-density seat foam, but I feel the hard side has the density of steel and the soft side is like very dry wood! Other than the hard seat, the Austrian bike feels more and more like a bike made in Japan. Handlebar shape could be improved, but the KTM gives the rider more room than the Japanese bikes. Tall riders will feel most comfortable on the 250SX. ●





### DYNOS & DB RATINGS ENGINES vs. THE DYNAMOMETER & DB

● Dynos are great at crunching out numbers and neat charts, but they don't tell the whole story with motocross bikes. Why? Dyno runs are made with the throttle wide open, and external brakes limit engine speeds so that readings can be made throughout the rev range. Besides being

very hard on the engine, it doesn't tell you how your bike works on the track, because you never hold the bike wide open and use your brakes to control rpm—at least we hope you don't. Dynos can't measure throttle response or flywheel effect either, which are critical on a track with doubles and such. So, we give you the official '95 250cc dyno charts, courtesy of the Team SplitFire/Pro Circuit dyno, along with our real-world, seat-of-the-

pants power curves, courtesy of DeCoster and a cast of thousands.

#### **DIRT BIKE'S MOTOR AWARDS**

Low-end response .....YZ250  
 Low-end to mid .....RM250  
 Strongest mid .....KX250  
 Strongest top .....KX250  
 Overall best feel .....CR/YZ  
 Overall strongest feel .....KX250  
 Least vibration .....CR/YZ  
 Most vibration .....RM250 ●



# 250s vs. DeCOSTER



All of the 250s require some setup for various tracks and conditions, with the Yamaha requiring less than the others. The KX250 suspension excels in sand whoops and hardpack but is soft for supercross.



The Austrian KTM feels more like its Japanese counterparts than it ever has, despite a switch to a conventional Marzocchi fork and Ohlins shock. Its roomy layout makes it a good choice for taller riders.

## OBSTACLE RATINGS WHICH BIKE DOES BEST IN SPECIFIC OBSTACLES?

● Some bikes work best in turns, some are straight-line bullets. Some work so-so everywhere. Here is a summary of the strong points and weaknesses of the bikes in this group.

### TIGHT TURNS

1) **RM250:** This is undoubtedly the quickest-turning of all '95 250s, and the RM turns even better than last year because of the stronger low-end power. It's king whether it's soft, hard, smooth or rutted.

2) **KX250:** Pretty strong in turns last year, the '95 is even better because of more low-end and a stiffer chassis.

3) **CR250:** Honda used to be king of corners but decided lately to sacrifice some agility for more stability. In '95, it's midpack in tight turns.

4) **YZ250:** Here is the area where Yamaha did not succeed. Geometry changes make cornering even more difficult, but great low-end power and response save the YZ from a last-place finish in tight stuff.

5) **250SX:** Tight turns are the area of

any track that will give the KTM the most trouble, so hunt for berms and plan on making up time on other parts of the track. This is as much due to poor throttle response as anything else.

### WIDE, FAST TURNS

1) **KX250:** Kawasaki has the only 250 that will hold the line you want in fast, bumpy turns without fighting the bike to keep it from drifting wide.

2) **Tie—RM, CR, YZ & KTM:** None of the bikes are clearly superior here, except that the RM could hold a slight advantage on smooth, slippery corners.

### BRAKING BUMPS

1) **250SX:** Compromising turning abilities paid off in stability, and the KTM refuses to headshake.

2) **YZ250:** This year's increase in trail created some headshake in some braking situations, but the YZ is still one of the most stable bikes around.

3) **Tie—CR & RM:** Honda's sacrifice of turning ability helped stability, especially up front. Suzuki's attention to frame stiffness has improved front stability for '95; considering its turning prowess, stability is pretty good.

5) **KX250:** The Kawasaki is a special case this year. On one hand, it's very stable under power and at high speeds; on the other, it sporadically shakes violently under braking.

### WHERE DO THEY FEEL BEST?

**CR250R:** The Honda likes soft ground, sand, faster/bigger tracks and big downhills.

**RM250:** Suzuki aimed its 250 at supercross and SX-style outdoor tracks, with lots of tight turns, short straights and jumps.

**KX250:** With buckets of midrange, the KX benefits from good traction and conditions with a lot of rolling resistance (sand, mud), and it shines in turns. The suspension is good for hardpack, too, if you have a smooth throttle hand.

**YZ250:** Yamaha's 250 is most versatile and will make the rider look better and better as the track conditions get worse, especially on hard, rutted-out sections. The worse the track gets, the better the YZ will look.

**250SX:** The KTM is good on square edges and is stable in high-speed stuff. GP courses are best suited for the KTM. ●



# 250s vs. DeCOSTER

## OVERALL PERFORMANCE ENGINE, CHASSIS & SUSPENSION

● Every year all of the companies try hard to improve their products and, like most years, they succeeded for '95, mainly in the engine department. There are usually some small steps backwards in some areas, and this year is no different. It's too bad that we have to put up with it, but nobody is perfect. Here are my opinions of the performance characteristics of the '95 250s.

**CR250R:** I feel that Honda took a step backwards by switching suspension makes without assuring any real improvement in performance. It seems that Honda switched from Showa to Kayaba to get the same reviews that Kawasaki and Yamaha have received in the last few years for their forks, and they did this without accepting any blame for their past suspension problems. In other words, it was the suspension maker's fault! Unfortunately, with the advances made by the others for '95, Honda's fork isn't any closer in performance to the competition, and Suzuki's Showa fork works very well. The last time I asked a Honda Japan representative about this ongoing problem, he replied in frustration, "We [Honda] are a *motor* company!"

This switch to KYB proves that the front fork that works well on one machine does not necessarily perform well when bolted to another. A lot of things come into play: rigidity of the frame and components, rear suspension, geometry, etc.

Fortunately, the CR has other assets to save face. Like always, it has a great engine with excellent power, a transmission and clutch that can withstand the worst abuse, the best brakes and outstanding reliability. It's amazing that Honda can keep improving a great engine year after year while being unable to handle suspension

problems that have existed since '87. The other manufacturers made a big push in the motor department this year, thinking maybe Honda would do nothing and they could surpass the CR, but Honda fooled them. The '95 found a little more response in bottom-end while keeping the excellent midrange and top-end.

Handling on past CRs felt light, and you could cut corners like a knife. This isn't as true for '95. In an effort to get more stability, Honda has given up some cornering ability, and now the CR feels midpack in both domains. On the way, the CR250R picked up a heavy feel. Overall, the CR is a top contender, though. It has a great engine with good power and a wide spread, a great tranny and clutch, unbeatable brakes and unmatched reliability.

**KX250:** Kawasaki's '95 engine clearly has more low-end and midrange than the '94, and the midrange hit can be too much for some riders, especially on hard surfaces. The KX is the strongest and most aggressive motocrosser of '95, and it requires some respect to stay on-line. Top-end isn't weak, either. The KX won't be outrun by anyone this year. Luckily, front brake performance has been improved this year, too.

Suspension, the traditional forté of the green machine, is different this year. The fork is still good, but it's not the leader anymore. On hardpacked surfaces, the KX KYB transmits a lot of impact to your hands, especially when hitting things laterally, like when diving into hardpacked, rutted turns. The rear end is great on big obstacles, rollers and softer surfaces, yet it feels harsh and does not follow the ground well on lower-speed acceleration bumps, especially on hardpacked, square-edged stuff. I'm only going by feel, but it seems the new KX chassis has become so rigid that it doesn't feel comfortable with today's suspension performance, at least on harder tracks and in ruts.

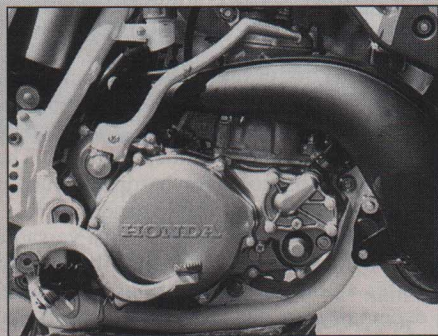
One gain the KX has made is in corners. Only the RM does better in tight turns, and no bike keeps an intended line through fast, bumpy turns like the '95

KX. However, the KX can surprise you because it feels so stable in most situations, but it sometimes headshakes where you least expect it. Its hit can surprise you, too. The KX feels light and likes to jump. It is a fun bike to ride but requires a lot of concentration, so it's best suited for a top rider and may intimidate less skilled pilots.

**YZ250:** Actually, the YZ and CR made a step closer to each other in '95, the CR by improving low-end response and the YZ by smoothing midrange and improving the brakes, especially the front. Yamaha's brakes are not equal to the CR, but are very close. Like last year, the '95 YZ's biggest asset is that it's very easy to ride in any condition. While the YZ does not feel exceptionally fast, if you put the stopwatch to it, you will notice that it's just as fast and more consistent than the other '95s. That really pays off at the end of the race.

One area where Yamaha took a step back is in frame geometry. The '94 was not the best in turns, but was clearly the most stable motocross bike made. This year Yamaha extended the steering head 5mm and reduced offset of the triple clamps the same amount to keep the wheelbase the same as '94. The goal was to improve turning and stability, but the changes hurt both! Fortunately, the YZ has a great engine with the best low-end throttle response in the field, which compensates for a big portion of the geometry shortcoming and allows the YZ to turn fairly well.

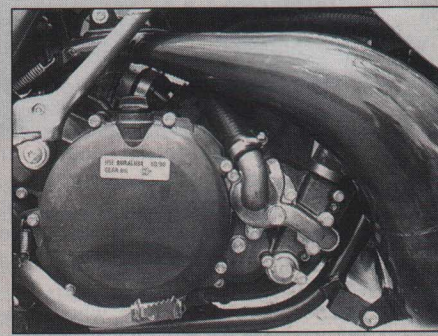
Front suspension is excellent. It feels plush and absorbs most impacts very well. The only fault I could find was the quality of the bottoming system. It would bottom hard, with a metal-to-metal feel, but this seldom happened. Rear suspension is average. It bottoms a little too often on bumps combined with G-forces and has a tendency to squat under acceleration in bumps. Faster riders would benefit from a stiffer rear spring. I liked the YZ best with the fork raised 5mm in the clamps and the sag set at 90mm.



It doesn't feel strongest anywhere in its power range, but the CR250R engine makes the most power on the dyno and has a seamless delivery. It has the least vibration and the best overall feel.



The KX250 engine is reminiscent of Stefan Everts' '94 works bike. No production 250 feels as strong or makes as much mid-range as the KX. If the production bike only shifted like Everts'.



Last year, the KTM made all of its power in the low-end and midrange. KTM moved the band up this year, putting it at a disadvantage on tracks with lots of tight turns.





*The KTM Marzocchi fork offers an excellent feel on repetitive bumps and resists bottoming, but it sometimes tops out severely, like oil isn't where it's supposed to be on rebound.*

*Kawasaki's (shown) and Yamaha's "mid-valve" is little more than adding a spring to a bleed shim. The KX fork is somewhat harsh and the rear doesn't follow the ground well on low-speed acceleration bumps.*

*Honda's switch to Kayaba suspension isn't much of an improvement, because the fork's damping curve is much the same as in '94. Heavier riders will benefit from the '95's standard fork spring.*

*Suzuki's Twin Chamber fork is much improved over last year, and it rates first or second at all tracks tested. We raised fork oil level 10mm rather than go to a stiffer spring.*

*Yamaha's "midvalve" fork performs as well as the works-like Suzuki Showa, but it bottoms with a metal-to-metal clunk. It works well, everywhere, with minimal fuss.*

Overall, the YZ is the easiest 250 to ride, and the engine has a very pleasant power delivery, sound and feel. It requires the least effort to go fast and is the most user-friendly of all the '95 250s.

**RM250:** A lack of low-end was a problem in '94, so Suzuki really improved low-end and midrange this year. The '95 RM's low-end is the strongest of the bunch. Mid and top are pretty good, too, but the RM does not feel happy being revved out. It vibrates more than previous Suzukis. Shifting is excellent, and the RM is the only bike you can upshift without backing out of the throttle. This and the low-end will be a benefit out of the gate. Clutch pull is the lightest in the field, but the clutch drags when cold. Also, the RM comes with fat, safe jetting, so you have to lean it out to get maximum power.

Suzuki chose to use a lot of bleed on the '95 shock in an attempt to give the

rear wheel more traction, but it went a little overboard. Now you have to close the adjuster almost all the way to keep the bike from squatting too much under acceleration in bumps or on the face of jumps. The standard shock spring is definitely too soft for this shock damping, so we went to the 5.4-kg spring. If you weigh more than 150 pounds, you will benefit from the stiffer spring as well.

Suzuki is the only manufacturer to use the Twin Chamber fork on production machinery. This system is used by factory teams because it gives better control of the oil, which is very important for the top racers who use stiffer settings than the average racer likes. Last year was the first year for this fork, and the standard setting was not as good as it could have been. For '95, standard settings and the bottoming system are good for most conditions, and I rated the RM fork first or second on all test tracks, trading places with the YZ.

Overall, the RM250 is fun to ride. All of the controls are exceptionally smooth. It has a good fork, a strong low-to-mid-range engine, unequaled turning abilities, and it loves to jump. The shock works pretty good, although it needs to be run almost closed on the compression side.

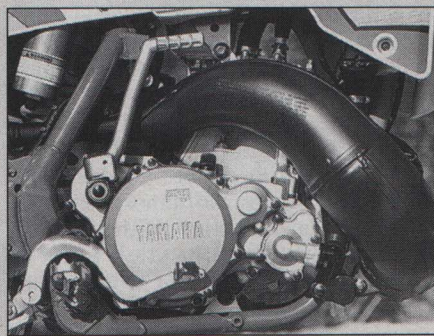
**250SX:** There has been a lot of talk, but KTM is now the first manufacturer to switch back to a conventional fork. I think this was a good move for KTM because the White Power fork they formerly used had an unfixable bottoming problem. The new Marzocchis work very well in many conditions but suffer somewhat from directional imprecision on some tracks (mostly hardpacked); riders who do not like the typical harsh-on-the-wrist feel of today's inverted forks will really appreciate the plush feel of the Marzocchis. On the rear, KTM switched to a quality Ohlins shock, and the setting is geared for high-speed, square-edged impacts. KTM bests the competition in these conditions, but the Ohlins has too much blow-off for sand rollers and other conditions where you need high-speed resistance.

Last year the KTM had a torque engine. This year, to quiet complaints about a lack of revs, KTM shifted the powerband upwards and lost the good low-end of '94. I prefer last year's motor, but if you don't plan to race on really tight tracks, you should be fine with the higher-revving '95 motor. Clutch operation requires the same force as most Japanese bikes, but it drags a little; shifting is fine.

Overall, the loss of low-end hurt turning capabilities somewhat; however, the suspension is much better. Its settings and character make the KTM feel best on high-speed tracks. ●



*Suzuki is the only manufacturer to richen its jetting for break-in. Go to a 172 main, 48 pilot and drop the needle. For '95, the RM has the strongest midrange and a good mid and top.*



*Yamaha increased the low-end power and throttle response while smoothing out the midrange. Overall feel is much like the CR, but it's easier to control the YZ engine.*



# 250s vs. DeCOSTER

## THE SKILL FACTOR

### HOW MUCH DO YOU NEED FOR EACH BIKE?

● Face it—not everybody is a five-time world motocross champion. What works for DeCoster may not necessarily work for you, so we are including the ratings of resident Expert, Intermediate and Novice riders.

#### SHANE TRITTLER

(135 lb., 5'10", Expert)

**RM250:** I like the RM250 best because it has a really good fork and a great engine. I never noticed the fork bottoming and it picks up the small stuff well. The motor pulls really well in the mid and top, plus it has decent bottom. It's a good Intermediate/Expert motor. The RM turns really well and is fairly stable. It has good brakes and a good shock, and it feels really good in the air. I can go fastest on the RM.

**YZ250:** I like the Yamaha second best, because I can jump on it and feel comfortable right away. Nothing really feels phenomenal, but everything works well and works together. The YZ sort of feels bulky for me and kind of heavy, but it jumps well. It would be a great novice bike, because you can get away with so much on it. The YZ turns okay but not like the RM and CR. It's so smooth you can just roll around the corner quickly. The fork, shock, motor and brakes make the YZ really easy to ride.

**CR250R:** I like the Honda third best. It has a really strong bottom, but the mid-range is too flat for me. It's really electric but doesn't pull hard like the RM, so I have to short-shift it. The CR jumps really well, but the fork doesn't feel that good. It doesn't track as well as the RM and YZ, and it tends to wash when turning into stutty bumps. Like the CR125, I can go really fast on the CR250, but I make a lot of mistakes on it. I can make the same mistakes on the other bikes and it doesn't matter. It matters on the CR. It's jetted really well and has great brakes. The shock is pretty good, and it turns well. The bike feels light and thin, but not like the Suzuki.

**KTM250:** The KTM and Kawasaki are actually pretty close for me. It feels like the KTM could use some more bottom, but it has a cold, smooth, outdoor powerband. It's good for a novice or play rider, but an intermediate or expert wants more hit. The fork is good, but the RM is better. A weird thing happened when I first jumped on the SX. It topped out really badly, like there was no oil in the fork or it was in the wrong place. Then it went away. The KTM has good shifting and

brakes, and it turns pretty well. It would turn better with more bottom, though. It's really stable, but it just doesn't hit good enough for a fast guy.

**KX250:** The Kawasaki was the only bike that I jumped on and hated. It shifts so poorly that I was afraid I would miss a shift and kill myself on a jump. I got used to it and started going faster on it but never really felt comfortable on the KX. The transmission is just awful—really notchy. Otherwise, the motor feels good, but it's not awesome, compared to the Suzuki. The RM builds revs faster, so I can clear more jumps on it than the KX. The KX fork feels too soft, compared to the shock, so it dives a lot into corners. It turns well, but not as well as the RM and CR. The KX is really stable, though.

#### TIM TOLLESON

(210 lb., 5'10", Vet/Intermediate)

• Although I'm a 38-year-old, 210-pound magazine editor, I'm in half-decent shape and I can do most of the doubles at most tracks. I usually prefer the compression adjusters set a couple of clicks tighter than what DeCoster runs, because I outweigh him by 40 pounds. He's way, way faster than me, though. Here are my ratings, which should work for most heavy guys and vet racers.

**YZ250:** Even though the springs are on the soft side for my weight and speed, I really felt most comfortable with the YZ250's suspension. I could bottom the fork easily if my timing was a bit off, and it did feel a bit harsh on G-outs and slappers, but the overall ride quality and balance were exceptional. The suspension never got me in trouble, nor did the smooth motor. Yamaha really improved the brakes, too. The YZ was by far the easiest bike for me to go fast on, regardless of the type of track, soil or obstacles. It inspired confidence and let me get away with big mistakes. I hated the grips, but the YZ was the most fun to ride. I would choose it first, no matter where I raced.

**CR250R:** Honda made a great move by going to heavier springs on the CR250R. Past CRs would bottom so badly under my heft that they would deflect, but the '95 felt well-balanced and delivered a predictable ride. Going into this deal, I never would have guessed that the CR would have a better suspension package (for big guys, at least) than the KX and RM, but it did. The new motor also made me feel hero, sort of like a detuned McGrath works bike. Power was almost seamless, so it was easy to dial in the perfect amount of throttle for slick turns or whoops. It didn't turn quite as well as the RM or KX, but the new CR was stable enough to let me get away with mistakes. I actually could go faster on the CR than the YZ, but it took more effort, so I couldn't go fast as long.

Overall, I liked the CR second-best for

its ease of riding, awesome motor, unmatched brakes and improved suspension. Compared to the CR and YZ, the rest of the 250s pretty much tied for third place on the Lump moto scale.

**KX250:** Kawasaki built a real Jekyll and Hyde for '95. Our first day of testing was at the Phelan hardtrack, where the KX felt pretty good. The fork would bottom, then tuck in some of the worst G-outs (set at two clicks from fully closed!), which was kind of scary, but the handling and motor felt pretty good. I had to be careful of the midrange hit in slick corners, but I cut some decent laps on the KX. At Castaic, the KX was very scary. The suspension was way too soft at both ends and the chassis felt too stiff. It was deflecting all over the place and tucking the fork in sandy turns. The explosive motor and relative lack of brakes compounded the problem. At Castaic SX, I rated the KX last in ease of riding, suspension, handling and controls (mostly brakes and shifting).

**RM250:** Where the KX was borderline soft at Phelan hardpack, the RM was unrideably soft at both ends. Roger switched to a 5.4-kilogram rear spring and raised the fork oil level 10mm, and this made the RM250 better, but I never really felt comfortable on the machine. The shrouds caught my boots, the fork would tuck in bumpy sweepers and the motor had too little flywheel. I stalled it a few times, and none of the other bikes ever stalled. It also vibrated so much that my hands went numb. It turned well and jumped predictably, but I did not enjoy riding the RM. If it were the only bike available for me to ride, I would join the Sierra Club.

**250SX:** Overall, I liked the KTM Marzocchi fork best. It soaked up G-outs and slapper landings without hurting the wrists and rarely bottomed. The Ohlins shock worked well for me at Phelan's hard and sand tracks, but the rear of the KTM was pretty busy on square-edged and supercross stuff. I didn't have much confidence in the offset on hardpack, but the KTM felt pretty good at Castaic's supercross track, where I rated it third overall. The motor was a step backward from '94, and I caught my boots on the tank shrouds, but the SX was fun to ride. I simply couldn't go as fast on it as the YZ or the CR.

#### JOE KOSCH

(160 lb., 6'0", Beginner)

Let me start by stating what I hope is obvious. Pro-class motocrossers are the only riders who actually use as much performance as the bikes in this shootout offer. While I was riding the five '95 250s I felt like I was using a Formula 1 car to run to the store for a gallon of milk most of the time. The amount of performance I couldn't use was embarrassing. Does that mean it wasn't fun? No way! If you are





◀ **Tim Tolleson binges but does not purge. Big'uns like the Lumpster will like the KTM, CR and YZ suspension over the RM and KX.**

**Shane Trittler is an expert at catching big air. He should be, because Shane weighs less than a dirty airfilter. ▶**



going to embarrass yourself, embarrass yourself with riches. Having more than you need is a blast. I also discovered, as I have in years past, that beginner-class riders like me have strong reasons for liking or not liking certain characteristics of bikes that are generally astoundingly good in every respect. Pros have their preferences and so do I. Sometimes we actually like the same things.

Based on my vast experience as a beginner (which is frighteningly vast due to the many years I have been trapped in the beginner class), these are the things that beginner-class racers are likely to find impressive and unimpressive about the '95 250 motocrossers.

- The Honda's engine amazed me time and time again with its butter-smooth tractability and astounding, quick-building power. Lots of people will tell you that one engine can't deliver both. The Honda does it. Even more amazing is the fact that everything about the engine is as remarkable as its too-good-to-be-true power delivery. The transmission works so well it makes you want to shift just for the pleasure of operating such a wonderfully

smooth, precise shift mechanism. Once it's warm, it starts incredibly easily. I could go on and on.

- The rest of the Honda is nearly as glorious as the engine. The way it feels whether you are sitting or standing, the effortless way it turns, the awesome brakes, even the perfect density of the seat. Every time I pulled in after a session on the Honda I found myself thinking, "Man, that thing is good!"

The Honda's strong showing in every performance category made it the initial winner in my personal shootout.

- From the very first time we had the five bikes together, the Yamaha struck me as the Honda's only real challenger for the shootout win. The engine does everything the Honda's does, but it seems a touch weaker on the bottom and more so on top. That small difference means almost nothing to me. Both bikes have more power than I could possibly use. Just like the Honda, the YZ is super-easy to ride and frighteningly fast. Hey, I like a good fourth-gear wheelie on a smooth dirt road just as much as the next goober. The transmission is genuinely good, too—not quite as slick as the Honda's but very, very good. That's something new for Yamaha.

- The Yamaha chassis is worthy of such an impressive engine. It doesn't turn quite as easily as the Honda, but the YZ has an extra measure of stability the Honda lacks. To me, the brakes feel and work as well as the Honda's. The levers and layout are natural-feeling and comfortable. The suspension is a level above the Honda's and the Kawasaki's and the Suzuki's. It has an uncanny ability to drink up small impacts even when both ends are well into their strokes. The YZ's excellent engine, the bike's good overall feel and the suspension's incredible ride quality were enough to make me declare a tie for first between the YZ and the CR. I'd be equally happy with either bike.

For a number of reasons that have to do with my personal preferences and my skill level, the three other bikes were easier to rank.

- The RM is an exciting bike to ride but too focused on supercross-type use for

me. It turns effortlessly, but feels nervous on the fast parts of an outdoor track or when I'm doing some high-speed trail riding. That makes me nervous. Then I slow down, which I don't like to because I'm not going that fast to begin with. The power builds a bit too quickly for my beginner-class reflexes. The brakes and the general feel of the bike are excellent, but I feel more relaxed and at home—and a bit faster—on the Yamaha or Honda. I have to rank it third, mostly because it's just too intense for the way I ride.

The Kawasaki has the same intense/nervous personality as the Suzuki but without the sophistication that makes the other bikes so enjoyable. The Suzuki's layout makes me feel connected to the bike and I feel like I'm always at an efficient point to operate it. The Kawasaki makes me feel like a kid trying dad's 250 for the first time. It feels big and the power is intimidating, especially when the track calls for smart throttle control or precise timing. It feels a little hollow on the bottom and then it booms into a powerful rush that seems to go on forever. It's easily as fast as any of the bikes, but not as controllable as some. The transmission and brakes aren't nearly as cooperative as the Honda, Suzuki or Yamaha, either.

- Lack of sophistication and, I'm surprised to say, performance forced the KTM to the bottom of my personal standings. The transmission, controls and brakes are just a touch below the high level of sensitivity the other bikes have. The KTM has more than enough power for anything I would care to try on or off a motocross track, but the power delivery is so even that I wind up going slower because the bike doesn't respond forcefully to small doses of throttle. It's tough for a very good bike to stand out in a group of excellent bikes. ●



**Joe Kosch isn't known for stretching the throttle cable, but he definitely stretches the envelope on having fun on a bike.**



# 250s vs. DeCOSTER



	Honda CR250R	Kawasaki KX250	Suzuki RM250	Yamaha YZ250G1	KTM 250SX
Engine type	Reed- and power-valved, liquid-cooled 2-stroke	Reed- and power-valved, liquid-cooled 2-stroke	Liquid-cooled, power-valve, case-reed two-stroke	Reed- and power-valved, liquid-cooled 2-stroke	Liquid-cooled, power-valve, case-reed two-stroke
Displacement	249cc	249cc	249cc	249cc	248cc
Bore & stroke	66.4mm x 72.0mm	66.4mm x 72.0mm	67.0mm x 70.8mm	68.0mm x 68.8mm	67.5mm x 69.5mm
Carburetion	40mm PJ Keihin	38mm Keihin PWK	38mm Keihin	38mm PWK Keihin	38mm Keihin PJ
Fuel tank capacity	2.0 gals.	2.2 gal.	2.0 gal.	2.0 gal.	2.4 gal.
Gearing	13/49	14/49	13/49	14/49	13/50
Lighting coil	No	No	No	No	No
Spark arrester	No	No	No	No	No
EPA-legal in stock form	No	No	No	No	No
Running weight w/o fuel	227 lb.	236 lb.	227 lb.	229 lb.	232 lb.
Wheelbase	58.4" (1481mm)	57.5" (1460mm)	57.7" (1465mm)	58.9" (1496mm)	58.4" (1483mm)
Rake/trail	27.3°/4.4"	26.0°/4.3"	27.2°/4.3"	27.5°/5.0"	27.0°/NA
Ground clearance	13.6" (345mm)	15.2" (385mm)	14.2" (360mm)	15.0" (382mm)	15.2" (385mm)
Seat height	37.7" (958mm)	37.6" (955mm)	37.8" (960mm)	39.9" (1013mm)	37.8" (960mm)
Tire size and type:					
Front	80/100-21 Dunlop K490	80/100-21 Bridgestone	80/100-21 Bridgestone	80/100-21 Dunlop K490	80/100-21 Dunlop 701
Rear	110/90-19 Dunlop K695	110/100-19 Bridgestone	110/90-19 Bridgestone	110/90-19 Dunlop K695	110/90-19 Dunlop 701
Suspension:					
Front	Kayaba 43mm inverted cartridge fork, adj. comp./reb., 12.2" (310mm) travel	Kayaba inverted cartridge, adj. reb./comp., 12.2" (310mm) travel	Showa, inverted twin chamber, adj. comp./reb., 12.2" (310mm) travel	Kayaba inverted cartridge fork, adj. comp./reb., 11.8" (300mm) travel	Marzocchi conventional cartridge, adj. reb./comp., 11.8" (300mm) travel
Rear	Pro-Link, KYB aluminum piggyback shock, adj. comp./reb./prel., 12.6" (320mm) travel	Kayaba aluminum piggyback, adj. prel./reb./comp., 13.0" (330mm) travel	Showa, aluminum piggyback, adj. prel./comp./reb., 12.8" (324mm) travel	Monocross, KYB aluminum piggyback shock, adj. comp./reb./prel., 12.4" (315mm)	Ohlins aluminum piggyback, adj. prel./reb./comp., 13.6" (346mm) travel
Country of origin	Japan	Japan	Japan	Japan	Austria
Suggested retail price	\$5099	\$5249	\$4999	\$5149	\$4998
Distributor/manufacturer	American Honda 1919 Torrance Blvd. Torrance, CA 90501-2746 (310) 783-2000	Kawasaki Motors Corp. 9950 Jeronimo Rd. Irvine, CA 92718; (714) 770-0400.	American Suzuki Motors P.O. Box 1100 Brea, CA 92621-1100; (714) 996-7040	Yamaha Motor Corp. 6555 Katella Ave. Cypress, CA 90630 (714) 761-7300	KTM Sportsmotorcycle, USA 1906 Broadway Lorain, OH 44052; (216) 246-1060
REPLACEMENT PARTS COST:					
Piston	\$71.25	\$69.00	\$112.05(kit, including rings)	\$43.00	\$186.88(kit, including rings)
Ring(s)	30.62	25.40	14.15	39.00	66.92
Air filter	29.55	11.72 (8)	7.98	55.15	31.70
Clutch plate (drive)	8.42(8)	7.34 (7)	3.71	9.40(8)	8.92(8)
Clutch plate (driven)	8.19(5), 9.62(2)	25.50	30.56	9.80(7)	15.88(9)
Front sprocket	18.85	79.00	48.14	21.50	26.18
Rear sprocket	62.52	56.40	135.45	59.60	69.88
Front brake pads	27.01	53.02	48.14	73.50	36.37
Rear brake pads	27.01	49.36	53.98	56.15	45.89

## '95 250 SHOOTOUT CHART

TRACK	CR				KTM				KX				RM				YZ			
	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
Rear susp.	••	•	••	•	••	•	•	••	•	•	•••	•	•	••	••	••	•	••	••	•
Front susp.	•	•	••	••	•••	••	•	••	••	•••	••	••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••
Head shake	••	••	•••	•••	••••	••••	••••	••••	•	•	•••	•••	••	•••	•••	•••	•	••	••	•••
Directional stability	•••	•••	•••	•••	••••	••••	••••	••••	•	•	••	••	••	••	••	••	•	•	••	••
Tight turns	••	••	••	••	•	••	•	•	•••	•••	•••	•••	••••	••••	••••	••••	•	••	••	••
Wide turns	•••	••	•••	•••	••••	••	••	••	••••	••	••••	••••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	••
Low rpm power	•••	••	••	••	•	•	•	•	••	•••	••	•••	•••	•••	••	•••	••••	••••	••••	••••
Mid rpm power	•••	•••	•••	•••	••	••	••	••	•••	••••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••
High rpm power	•••	••••	••••	••••	•••	•••	••	•••	•••	••••	•••	••••	••	•••	••	••	•••	•••	•••	•••
Over rev	••••	••••	••••	••••	••	•••	•••	•••	•••	••••	••	•••	••	••	••	••	•••	•••	•••	•••
Front brake	••••	••••	••••	••••	•••	•••	•••	•••	••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••
Rear brake	••••	••••	••••	••••	•••	••	••	••	•••	••	••	••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••

**KEY>** Track A—Phelan: Hardpack, whoops; Track B—Castaic: Hardpack, supercross; Track C—Desert: Sand, whoops; Track D—Sunrise: Mixed soil, choppy •••• excellent ••• very good •• good • fair

In this shootout, it was clear that different bikes worked differently on different tracks. For you math wizards, don't waste your time adding polka dots to determine the winner. We didn't do it that way—"overrev" doesn't deserve the same weight as "headshake."



## MAINTENANCE MANIFESTOS

### WHICH REQUIRE THE MOST WRENCHING TO WIN?

- All machines could use more grease in the steering head, wheel, swingarm and linkage bearings, as the factory tends to speed over these areas.
- KTM has the best chain, while the Japanese bikes stretch quickly and require replacement within a few races.
- The CR has traditionally taken the most abuse without requiring frequent maintenance.
- During testing, the CR, RM and KX fouled plugs, while the YZ and SX didn't. Of the five, the YZ has easiest plug access

and the RM has the worst.

- KTM has a lame oil drain plug location, on the side of the tranny. Oil drools onto the frame and drips onto the floor from several spots. The drain plug is magnetic, though, which helps motor bearing life. All of the Japanese bikes could use a magnetic plug (Moose Racing sells them).
- Our KX filter came apart at the seam. All OEM filters are more expensive than Twin-Air or UNI aftermarket ones. Also, you should silicone the airbox/boot junction and grease the lip of all bikes.
- Also silicone the muffler seams on all bikes. The KTM got the loudest, and it did it very quickly.
- The RM comes jetted horribly rich.

Go to a 172 or even 170, and drop the needle one notch. The CR is jetted best out of the crate, although it does still cold-foul.

- Of the five, the KX requires the most brake work. Change the fluid often for optimum braking, and you can get more power from Braking oversized discs.
- The Kawasaki also had the most loose fasteners during testing. Keep your toolbox handy. All the 250s should have the rear sprocket bolts and kickstarter fasteners treated with thread lock.
- The KTM eats reed valve petals. Expect to replace them every few rides, or the bike will pop and run poorly on top. Even Boyesen petals fray quickly in the SX motor. ●



◀ Suzuki pumped more midrange and a better fork bottoming system on the '95 RM250, but the shock changes are a small step backwards. If you weigh more than 150 lb., you will need a 5.4-kg shock spring.

◀ Past KXs have been midrange monsters, but the '95 makes them all seem like kittens. The new KX demands respect, especially on hard or slick surfaces. The KX250 has a better front brake and tighter turning, but it has fallen behind in suspension.

#### DETAILS

	CR	KTM	KX	RM	YZ
Riding position	●●●	●●●●	●●●	●●●	●●●
Ergonomics	●●	●●	●●●	●●●	●●●
Clutch	●●●	●●	●●●	●●●	●●
Shifting	●●●	●●	●●	●●●	●●
Vibration	●●●●	●●●	●●	●	●●●
Ease of riding	●●	●●	●●	●●●	●●●●

●●●● excellent ●●● very good ●● good ● fair

## CONCLUSIONS THE WINNER IS . . .

- Assuming you will be riding in many types of conditions, the YZ250 is your best choice, because it's the only bike that fits a wide variety of conditions in stock form, and it's always easy to ride. Although each of the other machines could outperform the Yamaha in a given situation, each would need work to feel comfortable on a diversity of tracks. With the YZ you can set the sag and compression clickers, have fun and do well no matter where you race. You won't pass any competitors on the inside, but the great forks, combined with the smooth motor and good brakes, should give you enough assets to make the winner's circle often.
- The Honda 250 doesn't shine in as many areas of performance as the Yama-

ha, but there is no ignoring its remarkable engine. No rider—fast or slow—should be disappointed by the type or amount of power it makes. This bike finishes second behind the Yamaha mainly because its front suspension and steering feel was good rather than outstanding.

For me, choosing the RM or KX comes down to the type of tracks you find yourself racing on. The RM is fun and responsive and lends itself to tracks with tight turns, short straights and supercross-type obstacles. The KX is preferable on high-speed tracks where stability is important.

The KTM's performance is at a level where it is a realistic alternative to a Japanese machine. For the rider who races motocross and off-road events and play rides with his race bike, the KTM is a very good choice. The suspension is capable of delivering a smooth, non-punishing ride

on a wide variety of terrains at a wide variety of speeds. The power is controllable. The handling is good and doesn't require intense concentration or high effort. The stability is particularly good for fast tracks or off-road conditions.

After criticizing all of the new 250s, I looked back at my notes and felt like a first-class sniveler, but, when writing a comparison, this is something we have to do. The things mentioned are real, but I was impressed with the power and overall feel of these box-stock machines. Each of these machines can win, and I find strong assets on each. I would base my choice on what type of tracks I plan to race on mostly and pick a bike that works best in those conditions. I would also take into consideration what kind of dealer is in my area. Regardless, the YZ250 would be at or near the top of the list. □