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**THE BIG SHOWDOWN: HONDA CR250 vs. KX250**

MOTOCROSS ACTION

# MOTOCROSS

**SPECTACULAR  
SUPERCROSS  
OPENER:  
WHO'S HOT  
& WHO'S NOT**

**MAGOO!  
WHO SAYS  
I'M CRAZY**

**YZ250 HOP-UP:  
FACTORY  
SECRETS**

**ACTION**

MAY 1983

\$1.75  
UK £1.10



**ALL-NEW  
KAWASAKI  
KX250:  
CAN IT PART  
THE RED SEA?**



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## HONDA CR250R OR

Getting the



□ It wasn't until late 1975 that the Japanese made a deuce-and-a-half motocrosser that was superior in any way to the traditional European 'crossers. That first Suzuki RM250 caught everybody by surprise, and it stands as a landmark in the 250cc class because it wasn't until 1982 that a quarter-liter of equal significance came on the market—the Suzuki RM-250Z. From 1976 through 1981 the 250 class was an uninspiring mishmash of mediocre machines, albeit one model was always rated better than its competitors, but none was a truly awesome piece of equipment. By comparison, there were super 125s and stupendous Open class machines rocking the hierarchy every year.

It wasn't until the 1982 Suzuki RM250Z, a virtual works bike for the privateer, that the juices got flowing after a six-year drought in 250 masterpieces. Why did it take from 1976 till today to get great 250s? Probably because the 250 market has been gradually developing as former 125 kids got older and moved up, as prices climbed high enough to make more for your money a better buy, and because rider skill has increased rapidly enough to make a 250 rider today as wild as a tiddler pilot six years ago.

What's the point? Nineteen eighty-three is probably the greatest year ever for good, even great, deuces! Putting the Kawasaki KX250 and the

Honda CR250R to the test makes a motocrosser understand the changes that have transpired. Both bikes are impressive, but they are different. Which one will win? Read on.

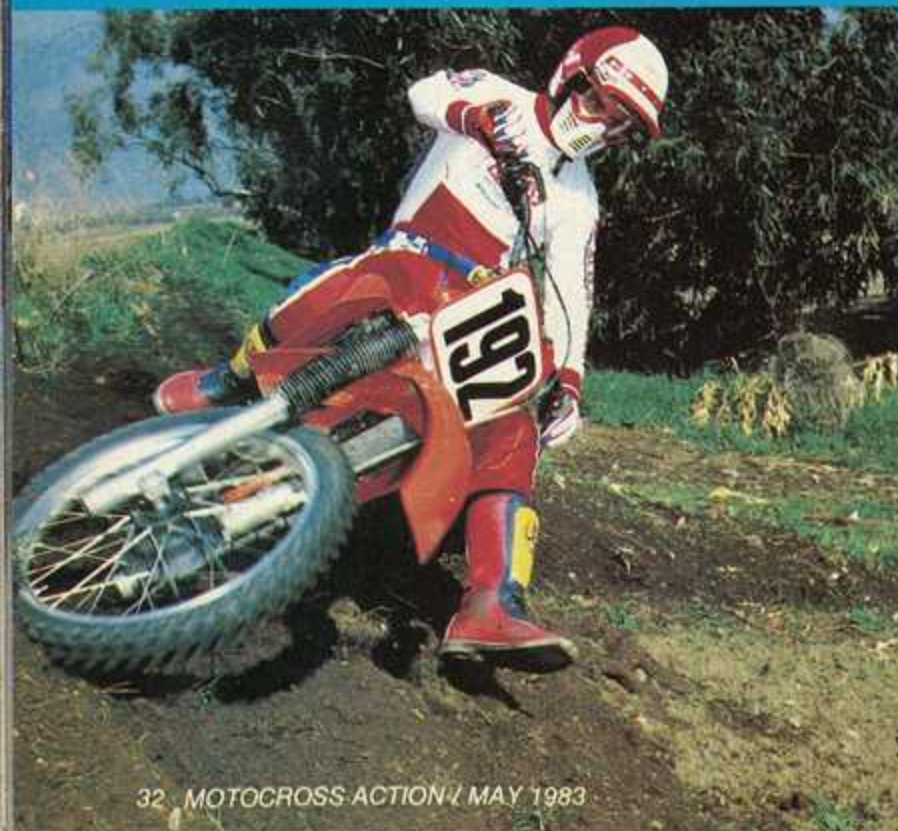
### BRUUPP VERSUS BURRAPP

Neither bike is faster than the other! In every drag race, start, and blast over the hill, the winner was always the bike with the rider who got the jump and kept it pegged. The struggle seesawed back and forth, but to the first turn the difference was nil.

This doesn't mean that the two bikes are identically fast, or that one *isn't* better than the other, but it does mean that neither will suck the elastic out of the other's shorts.

Kawasaki has built a hard-hitting, low-end, *burrapp* motor. The burst is instantaneous, impressive and mated to a decent top-end pull. By no means is the KX250 a top-end motor! It will rev higher than the Honda, but it makes its best vibes a mere crack of the throttle above idle. The power is situated in the low end to mid-range. The Kawasaki motor goes *burrapp* with a staccato like a jack hammer. It hits hard, chisels through cement, and then needs a new gear.

Honda has built a smooth, broad, mid-range motor that goes *bruupp*! Honda CR250R power is smooth, torquey, and spread out evenly over a plentiful plane. Power builds evenly off the bottom, makes no extreme surges as it transitions through the





## KAWASAKI KX250

juices flowing

mid-range, and then signs off with a quick death. When the CR250R is pulling, and it pulls over a softer range than the KX, it is so controllable, so torquey, so usable that it is like an Open class motor with the horsepower stunted. The motor goes *bruupp* with the churn of a chain saw cutting through saplings. It hits easily and stays on. The Honda will always pull the next highest gear, even if you are in too high of a gear already.

Which motor is best? Making good drives out of turns, keeping the chassis rocketing around the track and raking in trophies is best done with the Honda CR250 motor.

### DOWN AND IN OR UP AND OUT

Handling on both bikes is close, but is not the same kind of tossup as in the power department. The *MXA* test crew chose the Honda motor over an almost equal Kwacker mill because the red machine was easier to ride at identical speeds. Handling is rated under the same standards. The Honda is easier to handle at identical speeds than the KX. Why?

Kawasaki got the KX out of canter in the balance department. Seat height is a phenomenal 39 inches, compared with Honda's svelte 38 inches, and as a result the KX throws the rider headlong down the barrel of the bike. To compensate, we originally lowered the front forks to try to achieve a more balanced riding position. Wrong choice. The KX then tended to pop out

of berms and push out on flat turns. Riding the KX with its skyscraper height became more work than necessary. Bringing the forks down to the point that allowed the bike to turn with precision aggravated a slight headshake, and kept the rider perched at a downhill rake. With a strong burst motor, the KX likes to stand up under acceleration, and due to its height that snap in the frame (caused by the motor's impressive *burrapp*) throws the rider slightly off center at the wrong moment. As a footnote, the KX's footpegs are 18 inches off the ground, while the CR's are only at 17 inches, but the distance from the footpeg to seat is identical.

In comparison, the Honda nestles the rider down and in on the bike, instead of pitching him up and out. Honda's smoother power makes things happen in a more controlled manner. Keeping the red bike going in the right direction, breaking a line, or changing an angle is easy with the power on. The only time the Honda dices around is at the end of rough straights with the power off; then it wiggles. The rake and trail on the Honda aren't designed for stability, but rather for frighteningly efficient cuts inside of proven lines. The instability in a straight line is so minute that Honda's checks and balances are worth it.

Which chassis handles best? With a comfortable seating position, electric







Honda's spot-on seating, slightly tall bars and excellent levers make the CR250R the hot bike to style on in 1983.

carving knife handling and predictable response, the Honda is the best handling of the two *two-five-ohs*.

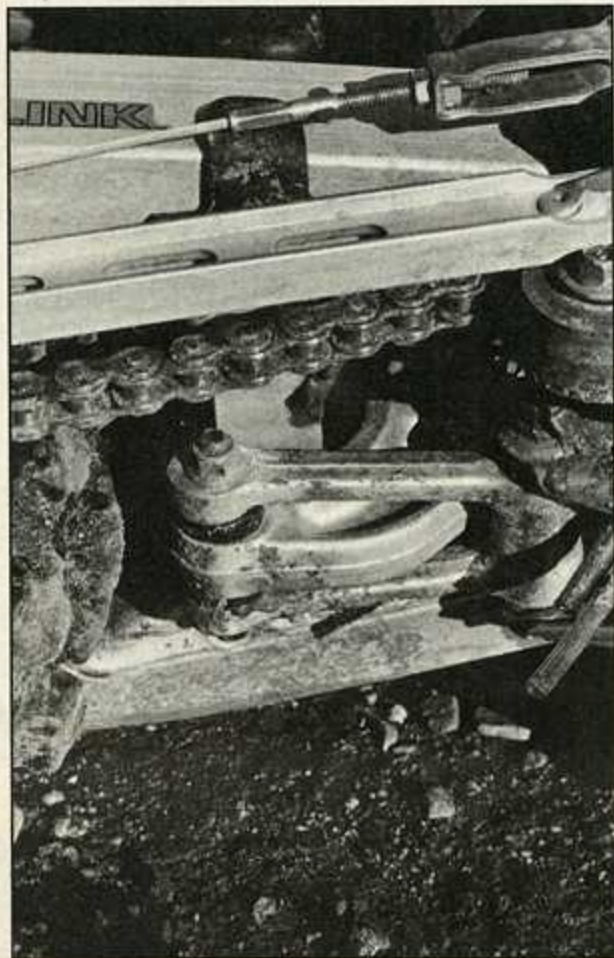
### THAR SHE BLOWS!

Honda has the best front forks, and the flaws in the units, which are manufactured by Showa, are so slight that an oil change (we preferred ten-weight to five-weight) and a quick turn of the compression adjuster screw (backed all the way out and then clockwise six clicks) make these forks spot-on for anybody but the most finicky rider. Optional stiff springs are available for the hard hitters and big strokers among us.

Kawasaki uses Kayaba forks with adjustable compression damping, but they aren't as good as the buttery-soft Showa legs. A tad more stiction, a tendency towards a slightly harsher feel, and a more critical damping setting make the KX good, but a notch below the Honda. We ran the KX250 compression clicker five turns in (clockwise) with ten-weight oil.

Rear suspension was close, and on first impression the *MXA* test crew favored the Honda unit (Showa), but as we dialed in the KX forks better and finer, we began to appreciate the Kawasaki rear end. It is plush. And when all the quibbling was over we gave the nod to the KX because of its utter resistance to harsh bottoming or cavitation over small bumps.

Honda really got the shock together on the CR250R and we liked it, but



All-aluminum linkages help save weight on the CR and keep it tracking through whoops and power loops. Good rear suspension, except for one potential flaw.



Honda CR250R—You got the look! Honda's design department hasn't made major changes in the traditional CR styling, but the racy red rocket is sharp and functional.





backed it down a notch from the KX unit because of a tendency to fade quicker than the Kayaba unit and for a common shock hose failure. The stock external hose to the remote reservoir has a chronic tendency to blow at the juncture to the shock body. A stronger hose, especially at the crimped fitting, is needed, and accessory manufacturers are busy selling these to the public.

Which bike has the best suspension? Everybody wants to say Honda, but the KX's fork problems can be more easily solved than the potential of a shock failure on the CR250. All things equal, and these two machines are hairline close, the Kawasaki suspension has the possibility of being superior, even though the shock does not have adjustable compression damping. Stock, it's the Honda, potentialwise, the KX.

### HIT AND MISSES

Nobody comes close to touching the Kawasaki disc brake on stopping power, and more surprisingly on feel. Honda is no slouch when it comes to braking, but the KX disc has more progressive power. Honda did tuck the rear brake arm inside the swingarm to keep it out of harm's way, and this necessitated an odd in-cable brake adjuster behind the brake pedal.

For good, tight and gritty motocross racing, the KX is geared a modicum too high, and we found that adding two teeth to the rear of the drive train gave more *oomph*, tighter gearing

Although not as cramped as a KX125, the tall footpegs on the KX keep your knees bent more than on the CR.



Kawasaki's single dog-bone rear strut is mated to a Kayaba shock. Excellent feel isn't hampered by the lack of adjustability in compression stroke.



Kawasaki KX250— With its tall and airy look, the Kawasaki maintains a very spacey appearance that reminds lots of riders of a spaceship from a green planet.





While both bikes are ballpark in the weight category, the Honda has that graceful ease of movement that makes it a joy to flick and click.



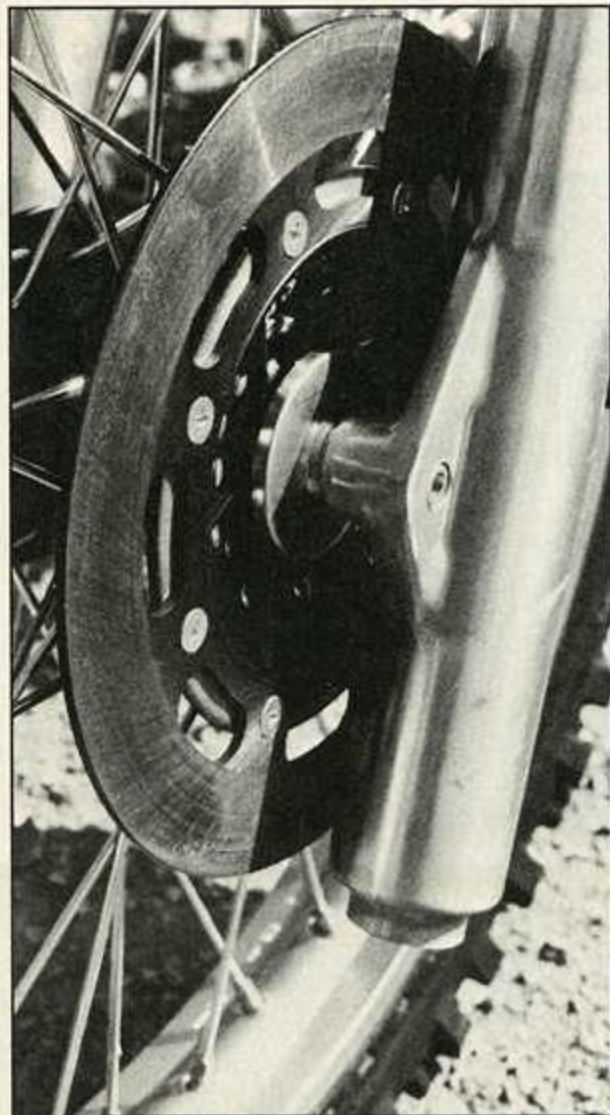
With a tendency to pop out of the berms the KX doesn't turn as well as the CR, but its excellent burst motor makes it the hot ticket on the tight line.

spacing and that extra punch. Kawasaki needs to work on its shifting. The KX refuses to shift under full throttle, and has a slightly sticky gap between gears.

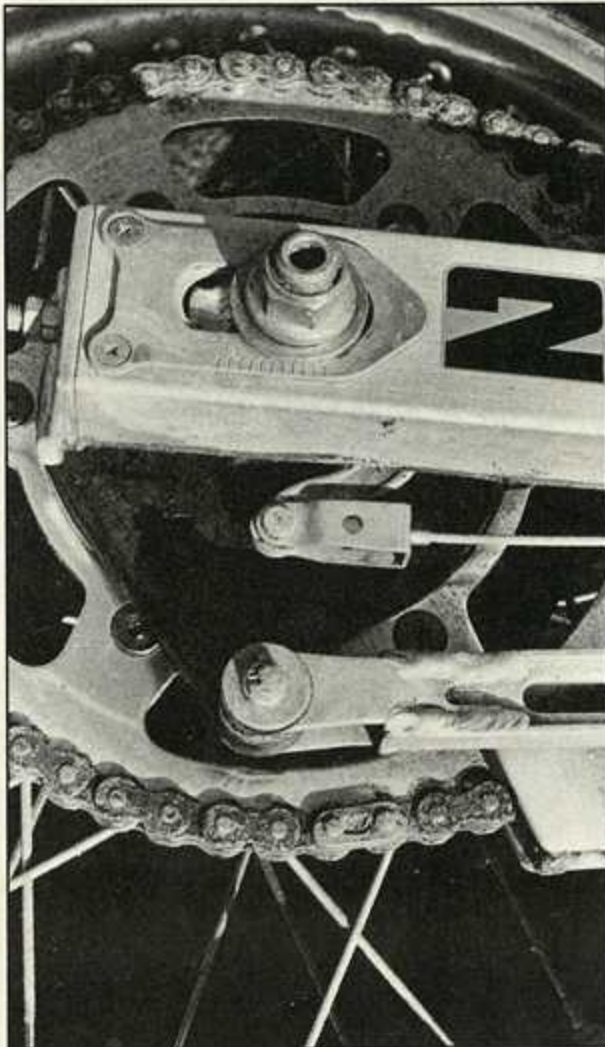
Honda has a pipe that hangs down, out, and off to the right, and the result

is often a crunched chamber. The stock CR250R silencer is a very neat oval design, but it is paper thin. A good crash means a useless silencer. Luckily, the retail price is cheaper than accessory units. Honda put a little hole in the brake pedal to make it

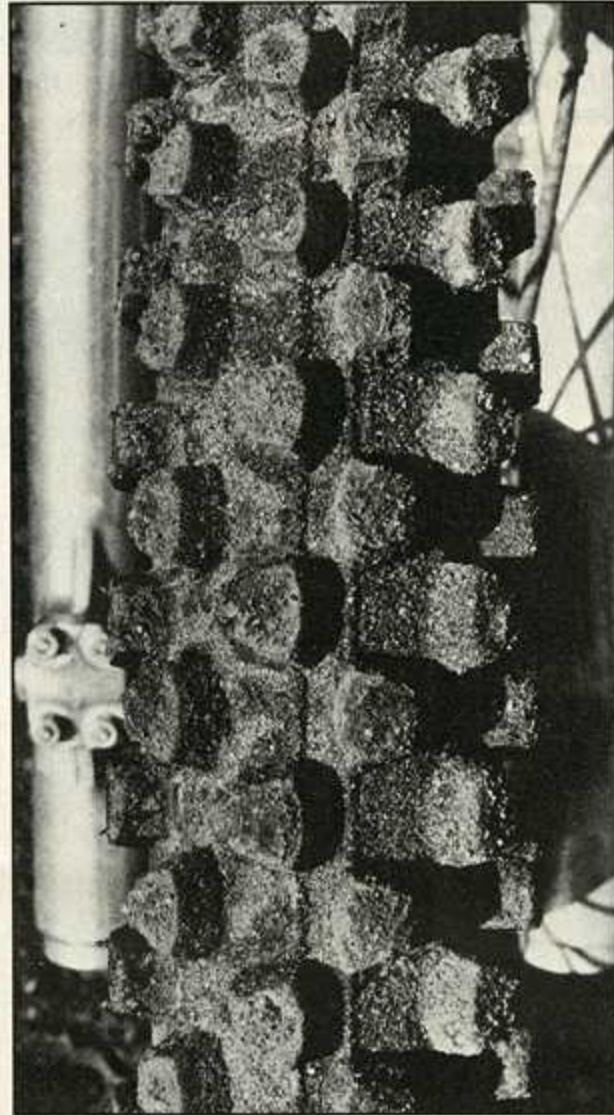
handy to run a cable to the frame to protect the pedal from bending. This sort of design thought shows contact between the racing and engineering departments. The new Bridgestone M32/33 tires aren't as good on either bike as the previous M22/23 tires. The front



Honda's double-leading shoe brake can pucker your pores as well as the KX disc, but not with the ease of feel or progressivity.



Honda tucked the rear brake arm so far behind the swingarm that it is totally out of harm's way. It must be adjusted up front with a wrench. We like the protection aspect, but can't find the wrench on the starting line.



This front tire doesn't work very well. The original Bridgestone M23 was a better tire than the new M33 that comes on both bikes.





**Honda dynoed the CR250R out with a very soft powerband. It is a manageable motor that makes racing easy. Power is broad, flat and plentiful.**

**Gobs of power right on the money make the KX a joy to roost through the gears. Although the KX revs out, it makes its best power down low and dirty.**

porcupine-knobbed Bridgestone is all but horrible in mud, sand or soft dirt. Replace it on both the KX and CR.

Remember how bad tank decals used to be? Well, Kawasaki allows you to keep on remembering. The KX decals chip off in no time. This is not to say the Honda decals would stay on, but they put them up on the radiator

wings and out of harm's way.

### GREEN OR RED, STOP OR GO

No kidding around, the Honda CR-250R is better than the Kawasaki KX250. With the *MXA* test crew careening around race tracks for a couple of months, we came to appreciate both bikes. There were no mechanical failures on either bike, the

power was equal in total output, suspension ratings were close (and confusing), and the tie-breaker narrowed down to the Honda's superior edge in handling. Each category stands by itself, both bikes are good racers, and good riders would win on either one . . . but the red one has something special about it. □

## COMPARATIVE POWERBAND CHART

*(Relative horsepower placement—not a dyno chart)*

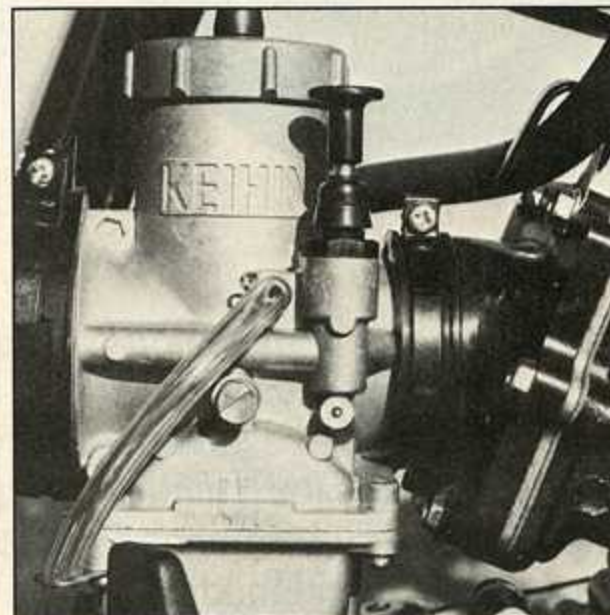
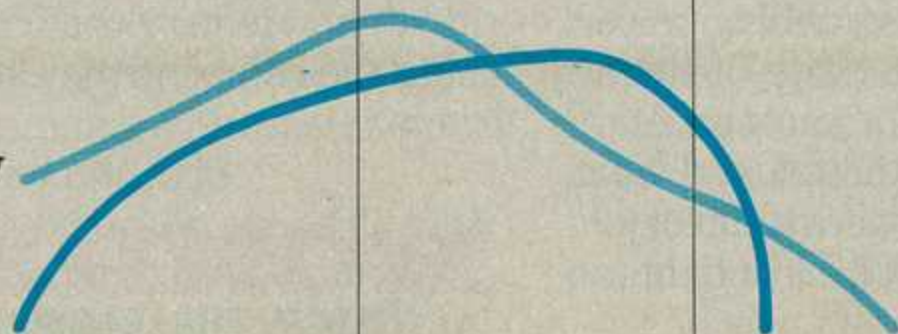
LOW END

MID-RANGE

TOP END

KAWASAKI  
KX250

HONDA  
CR250R



**This carb works okay, but it is just a Mikuni copy without the accessibility of Mikuni jets and parts. Kawasaki should have known better. Honda we'll forgive because they own Keihin.**