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YAMAHA 250 EXCLUSIVE,
YZWR500 & YZWR200 FIRST TESTS!**

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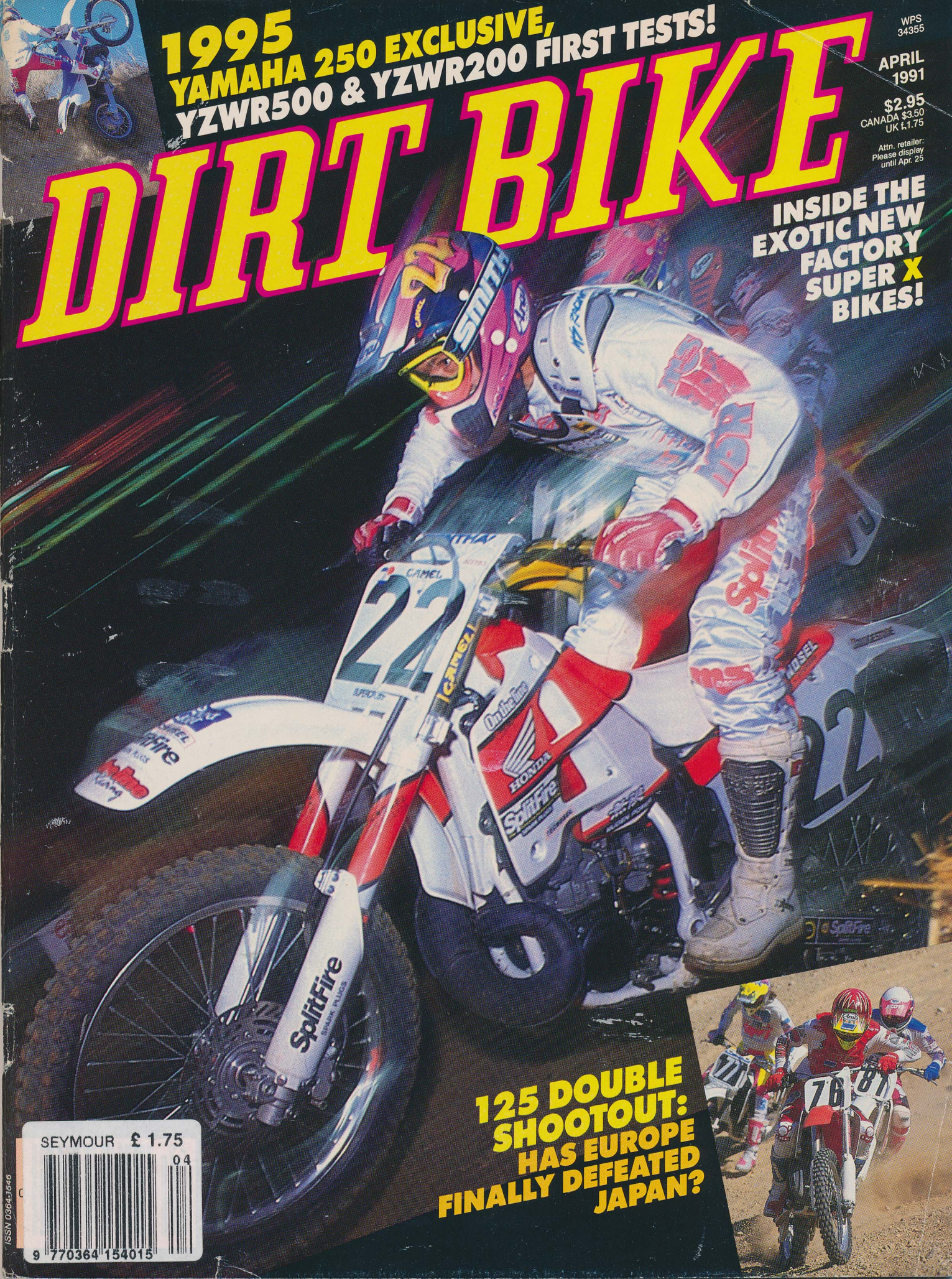
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125 SHOOTOUT SPECTACULAR

- 24 BEASTS OF THE EAST
Honda vs. Kawasaki vs.
Suzuki vs. Yamaha
- 32 BEST OF THE WEST
Husqvarna vs. KTM
- 40 THE FINAL CONFLICT
Europe vs. Japan

BIKES

- 70 YAMAHA WR500
Remember the 490? Yamaha did
- 76 YAMAHA WR200
Extension cord not included

COMPETITION

- 82 PARIS-DAKAR 1991
See Africa on \$20,000 a day
- 84 SUPERCROSS TIMES THREE
Orlando, Dallas and Anaheim

FEATURES

- 42 101 TECH TIPS
Service secrets
- 60 YOU CAN RACE!
Winning . . . well, that comes later
- 66 STARS OF TOMORROW
Future shockers
- 91 INSIDE THE WORKS 250s
Five ways to stadium stardom
- 98 WARD WINNERS
A gallery of green
- 100 FIRST TEST: 1995 YAMAHA 250
Coming to your dealer on April 1

DEPARTMENTS

- 10 FROM THE SADDLE
- 15 RIDERS WRITE
- 16 CHECKPOINT
- 18 NEW PRODUCTS
- 19 10 RIDES AFTER
- 20 BITS & PIECES
- 106 VIDEOCROSS
- 107 MR. KNOW-IT-ALL
- 111 CRASH & BURN

DIRT BIKE

APRIL 1991
VOLUME 21, NO. 4

ON THE COVER: "Zip" Ty Davis streaks on an On The Line CR while Jim Holley free-falls on a WR200. In the meantime, the 125 MXers line up to be fed to the *Dirt Bike* crusher. Photos, cover design and color separations were tag-teamed by Chris Hultner, Ron Lawson, Tim Tolleson, DeWest and Valley Film.

WARNING: Much of the action depicted in this magazine is potentially dangerous. Virtually all of the riders seen in our photos are experienced experts or professionals. Do not attempt to duplicate any stunts that are beyond your own capabilities. Always wear the appropriate safety gear. *Dirt Bike* does all of its testing and photography legally on public land, or private land with permission from the owner(s), and we abide by the local laws concerning vehicle registration and muffler/spark arrester requirements. We are not responsible for quality of after-market accessories we use.



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SMOOTH OPERATOR

Where quick & dirty becomes fast & nasty

By The DIRT BIKE Staff



It's mathematically impossible. At least it should be impossible. When you throw a bunch of old motorcycle parts into a cement mixer and shake things up, what comes out should be just that—a bunch of old motorcycle parts shaken up. Math says the whole can't be any more than the sum of the parts.

Yamaha just proved math wrong. The 1992 WR200 is here now. Never mind that it's not 1992 and won't be for a long time; Yamaha executives want to call the new 200 a '92 model and there's no rule that says they can't. For all we care, they could say this is a motorcycle from the year 4002 and we would still be impressed. That's right, we're impressed with a puny little 200cc enduro bike and not afraid to admit it.

WHAT'S SO TRICK?

Why are we impressed? The parts that went into making the new bike certainly are not that impressive. About three years ago, some guys in a room with tools at Yamaha were bored, so they started bolting parts together. They had a DT200 sitting in a corner and a YZ125 sitting in another corner, and wondered what they would look like merged into one. If you don't know what a DT200 is, don't be ashamed. It's a model Yamaha built for domestic use—that is, sold only in Japan (we tested one in our July '89 issue). If you don't know what a YZ125 is, put this magazine down at once (you probably only picked it up by accident when you were looking for *Leaf Blower Quarterly* anyway).

In Japan, the DT200 is a street-legal descendant of the original DT-1 enduro that started the dirt bike boom in America. We can't have large two-stroke motorcycles in this country anymore because of EPA restrictions, but things are different on the other side of the Pacific. The DT200 has been around since the early '80s and is fairly high-tech for a dual-purpose bike. It is liquid-cooled, has an electronically controlled power valve, a counterbalancer and, for all intents and purposes, every trick that any modern motocrosser has.

So the folks in the back room at Yamaha got out a hacksaw and a blowtorch and put the DT motor in the YZ frame. They sent the cobby prototype off to Japan and then

◀ **Crazy man:** We wanted Jim Holley to enter the WR200 in an ultracross. He scared us when he thought about it for a while.







got a green light on the project. Yamaha wanted a bike to compete with Kawasaki's popular KDX200 and this seemed like a quick and dirty way to build it.

IS QUICK & DIRTY NECESSARILY BAD?

Over the next three years, prototypes kept on being improved and whittled into a real live production motorcycle. What you see here is the end result. The WR 200 should, by all rights, perform no better than a 125 motocrosser with a dual-purpose motor stuffed into it. The bike, however, is much better than that. We only got to try the bike for one full day of testing in the mountains north of Los Angeles, but that was enough

◀ **Remember the IT200? The new WR200 has nothing in common with its ancestor. Instead, it borrows from the DT200 and the YZ125.**

to convince us the whole *can* be greater than the sum of the parts. The first impression of the bike is that it has an electric motor—no internal combustion engine could possibly be that smooth. The WR just goes forward when you open the throttle with no shakes or surges. It still has plenty of snap right off the bottom and delivers a strong midrange punch.

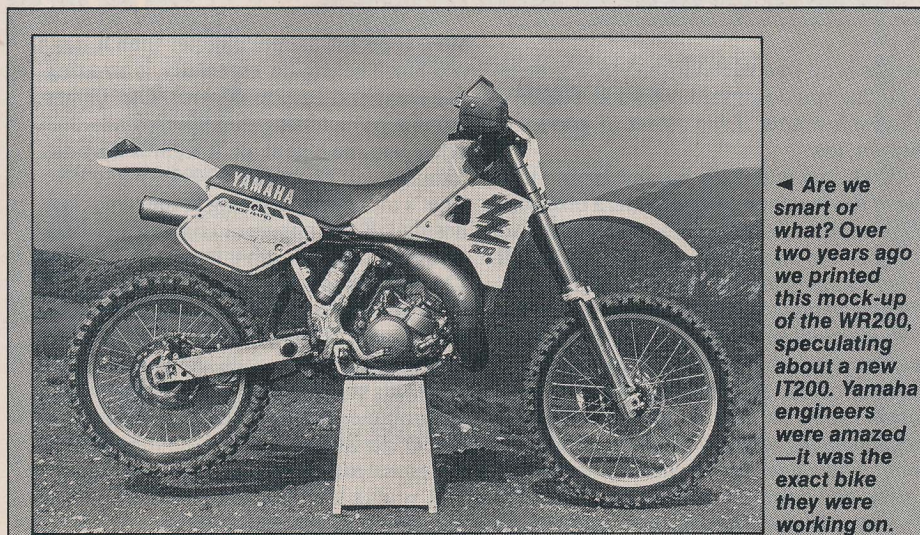
No, it's not as fast as a 125 motocrosser, but we wouldn't want it that way. The WR's smooth power delivery opens up doors to new riding techniques. You can lug it down to zero rpm and bring it back onto the pipe without worrying about stalling it, or even losing traction when it hits the powerband. In fact, fanning the clutch is almost a waste of time on the WR. The motorcycle usually will pull itself through the Rs with no outside help.

As it turns out, using the DT motor was

Yamaha's WR200 is aiming directly at Kawasaki's KDX market. At this point, we're not sure if it's a direct hit.

a stroke of genius on Yamaha's part. If the company had designed an all-new motor, it doubtlessly would have been a garden-variety motocross-style powerplant. It probably would have been an enlarged version of the YZ125, and it would have run like an enlarged version of the 125. Using the DT motor forced Yamaha to try a completely different approach, so now we have an enduro bike with some fresh ideas. One is the electronic power valve. On MXers, the power valve is opened by centrifugal force—when the engine reaches a certain speed, the valve suddenly opens. On the DT and some other street bikes (with batteries), the power valve is opened by an electric motor. The advantage in this design is that the valve can open gradually instead of all at once. That makes for a smoother power delivery. In adapting the street design to a dirt bike, Yamaha just had to run the power valve off the ignition instead of the battery—easy work for big-shot engineers with lots of degrees hanging on the shop wall.

Another fresh approach is the use of the counterbalancer. This is nothing more than a rotating shaft that is just off balance enough to counteract the power pulses. Yamaha thought about yanking the balancer out of the DT engine to save weight, but then reconsidered. That's another reason the bike feels like it has an electric motor. The counterbalancer makes it hard to tell if there's a piston in there at all. As a side effect, the balancer increases flywheel weight. That isn't necessarily a good thing on some small motors, because it can keep the bike from climbing onto its powerband easily, but the



◀ **Are we smart or what? Over two years ago we printed this mock-up of the WR200, speculating about a new IT200. Yamaha engineers were amazed—it was the exact bike they were working on.**



YAMAHA WR200

Engine type	Case-reed, liquid-cooled 2-stroke
Displacement	199.8cc
Bore and stroke	66.8mm x 57.0mm
Carburetion	30mm Mikuni
Fuel tank capacity	2.6 gal.
Gearing	13/44
Lighting coil	Yes
Spark arrester	Yes
Green sticker legal in stock form	Yes
Running weight with no fuel	246 lb.
Wheelbase	57.7 in. (1465mm)
Rake/trail	27.6°/122mm
Ground clearance	14.2 in. (360mm)
Seat height	38.9 in. (990mm)
Tire size and type:	
Front	80/100 x 21 Dunlop K490
Rear	100/100 x 18 Dunlop K695
Suspension:	
Front	Kayaba inverted cartridge, adj. comp., 11.8 in. travel
Rear	Showa piggyback, adj. comp./reb., 12.2 in. travel
Country of origin	Japan
Suggested retail price	\$3499
Distributor/manufacturer:	
Yamaha Motors Corp. 6555 Katella Ave. Cypress, CA 90650	

WR motor climbs into the fat part of its power so smoothly and easily that the additional flywheel weight is nothing but beneficial.

ENOUGH MOTOR, WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

What came back from Japan isn't exactly what went there in prototype form. The production bike doesn't have a YZ chassis. It's plain to see that financial corners have been cut. The WR has a steel swingarm, a steel kickstarter, a steel rear brake lever and a steel shifter, too. On top of that, the engine is no featherweight. It was designed for oil injection, so there is a lot of unneeded room where the oil pump was supposed to go. The bottom line is that the WR200 is a porker. We just happened to have the legendary *Dirt Bike* scale in the back of the truck when we met the Yamaha guys to go riding, so we weighed the WR on the spot. With no gas (but full of radiator fluid and oil), the Yamaha weighs 246 pounds. That's heavy. Under the same conditions, the Kawasaki KDX200 weighs 12 pounds less, and is *still* considered heavy. A typical 125 tips the scale at 207 pounds, and we don't think that a headlight and taillight can account for 40 pounds.

Guess what? The WR handles its weight very well. Under most conditions, you would swear (okay, don't swear if you don't want to) that the bike is the same weight as a 125 MXer. The Yamaha feels like it has the world's lowest center of gravity, so it is, in fact, easy to flick around. The only time the WR lets you know exactly how much it

weighs is on steep downhills. When gravity is pulling you downward, weight is weight—it doesn't matter if the center of gravity is high or low.

In whoops and really bumpy terrain, too, the WR is less than perfect. Sure, a bike with a low center of gravity turns well, but it also is less stable than a bike with a high CG (all other things being the same). At high speed, the bike tends to be tough to hold on course. Soft suspension at both ends doesn't help matters much in that department. The fork is state-of-the-art inverted Kayaba with 41mm tubes, but it is set up more with the beginning (or at least very light) rider in mind. Same goes for the Showa shock. The spring and damping rates are rather light. That's great for low-speed trails with lots

of rocks, roots and holes; the WR just sucks everything up and keeps going. Michigan, Florida and California riders have exactly seven billion high-speed whoops for every tight, slow trail, though, and the WR is simply undersuspended for that kind of riding.

THE BEST OF THE REST

Braking on the WR isn't all that impressive. The rear end chatters a lot and at times it can be hard to find because of a bulge in the case. The front brake feels a little mushy and weak. The brakes aren't the same as those of a YZ125, so we suspect that they are another cost-cutting measure. On the other hand, Yamaha did put grease fittings on the swingarm and shock linkage, so budget fever wasn't a total priority.

As we said, we are impressed with the WR. It performs much better than it has a right to. The engine, especially, is amazingly potent and easy to control. Our biggest complaint regarding the bike actually does not regard the bike at all. It regards the price. Yamaha will be asking \$3499 for the bike. That's more than anything in the same class, despite all the apparent cost-cutting measures; in fact, it's more than some full-on 125 motocross bikes. Yamaha calls the WR a '92 model, so we suppose that makes it the cheapest '92 bike available, but that's not really saying much. Still, the WR is a great bike—it's super-easy to ride and has enough performance potential that even A-level riders can get kicks out of it. Everyone will like it—except maybe mathematicians. Alas, the WR proves that the whole *can be* greater than the sum of the parts. □