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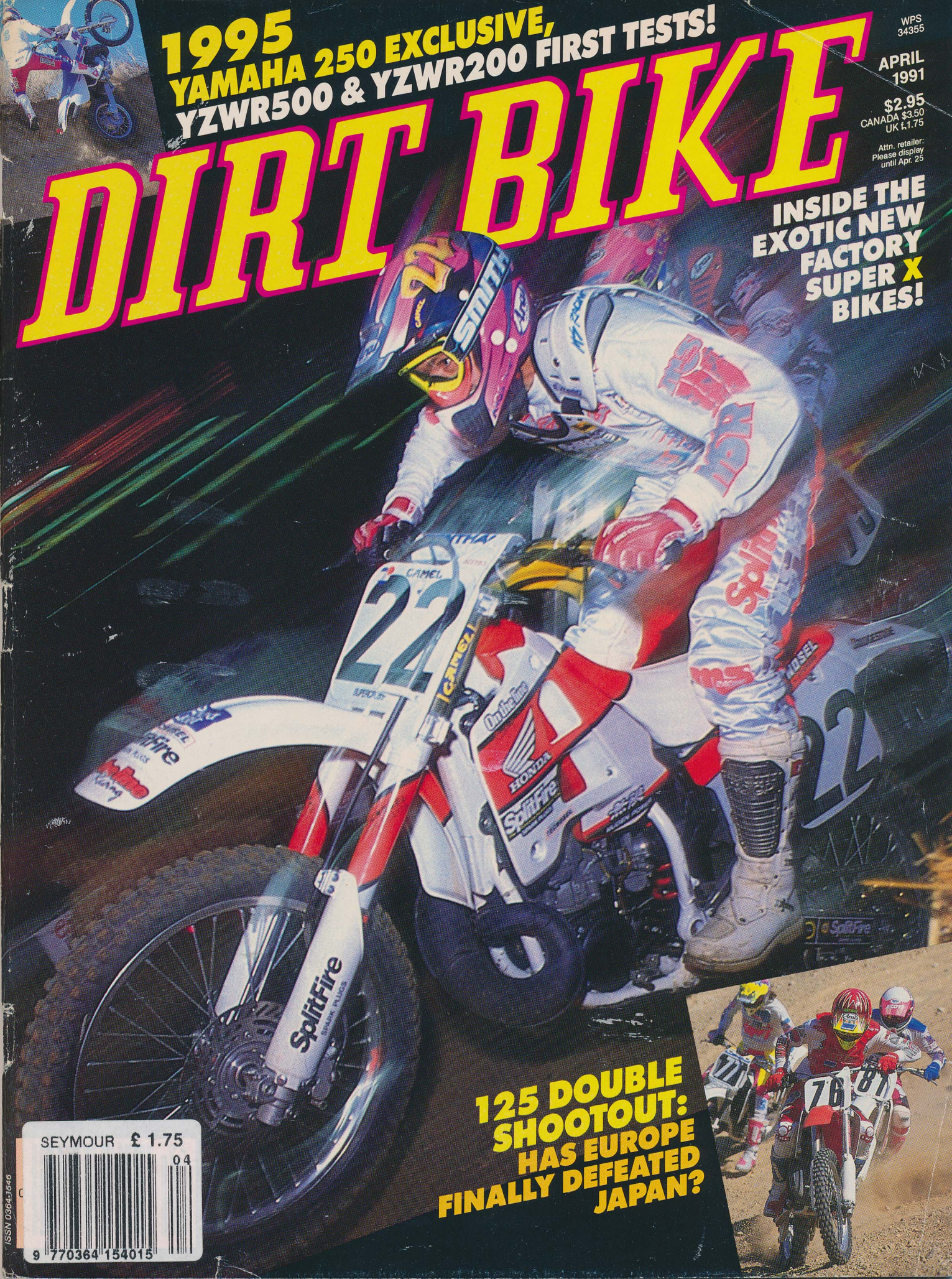
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# DIRT BIKE

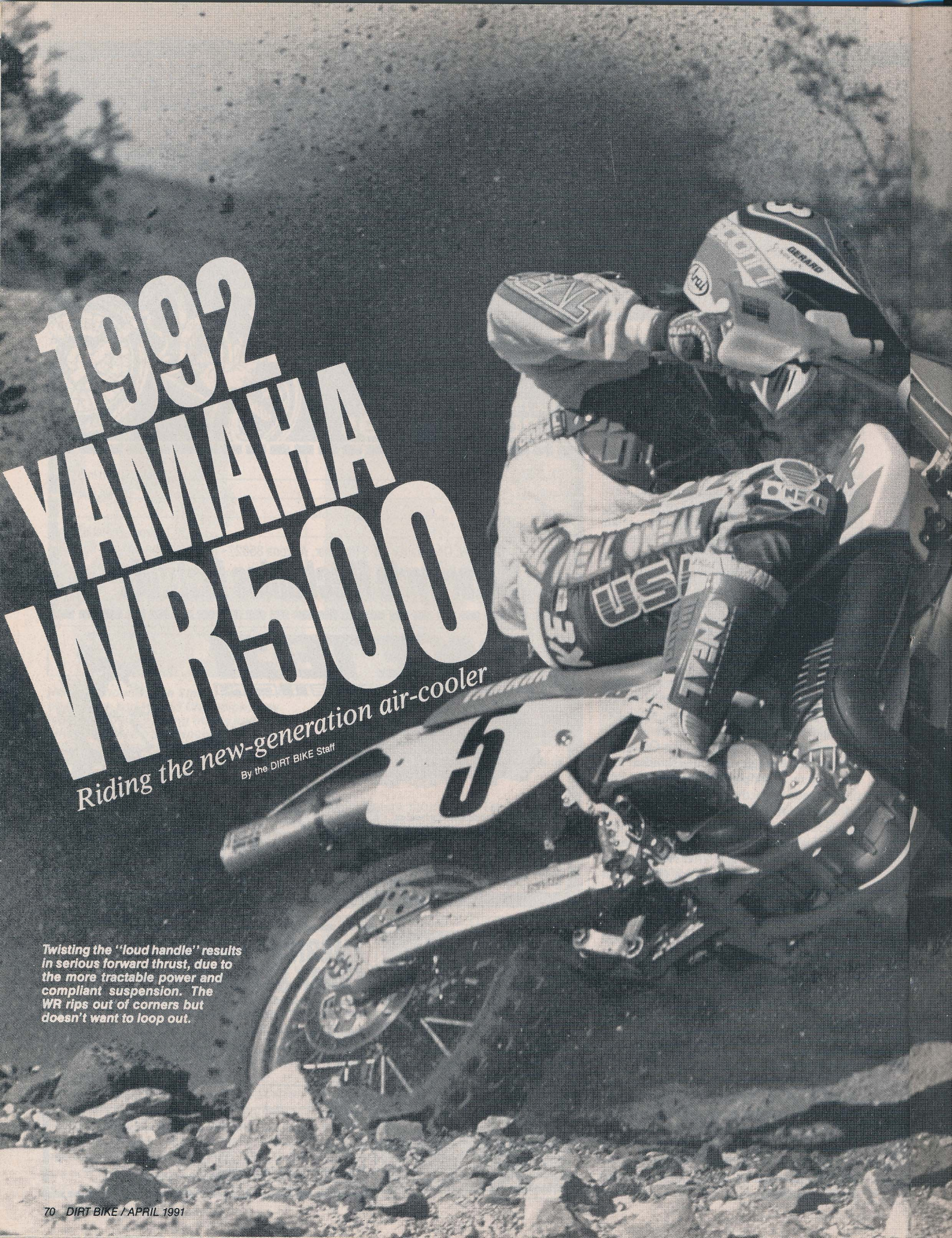
APRIL 1991  
VOLUME 21, NO. 4

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.

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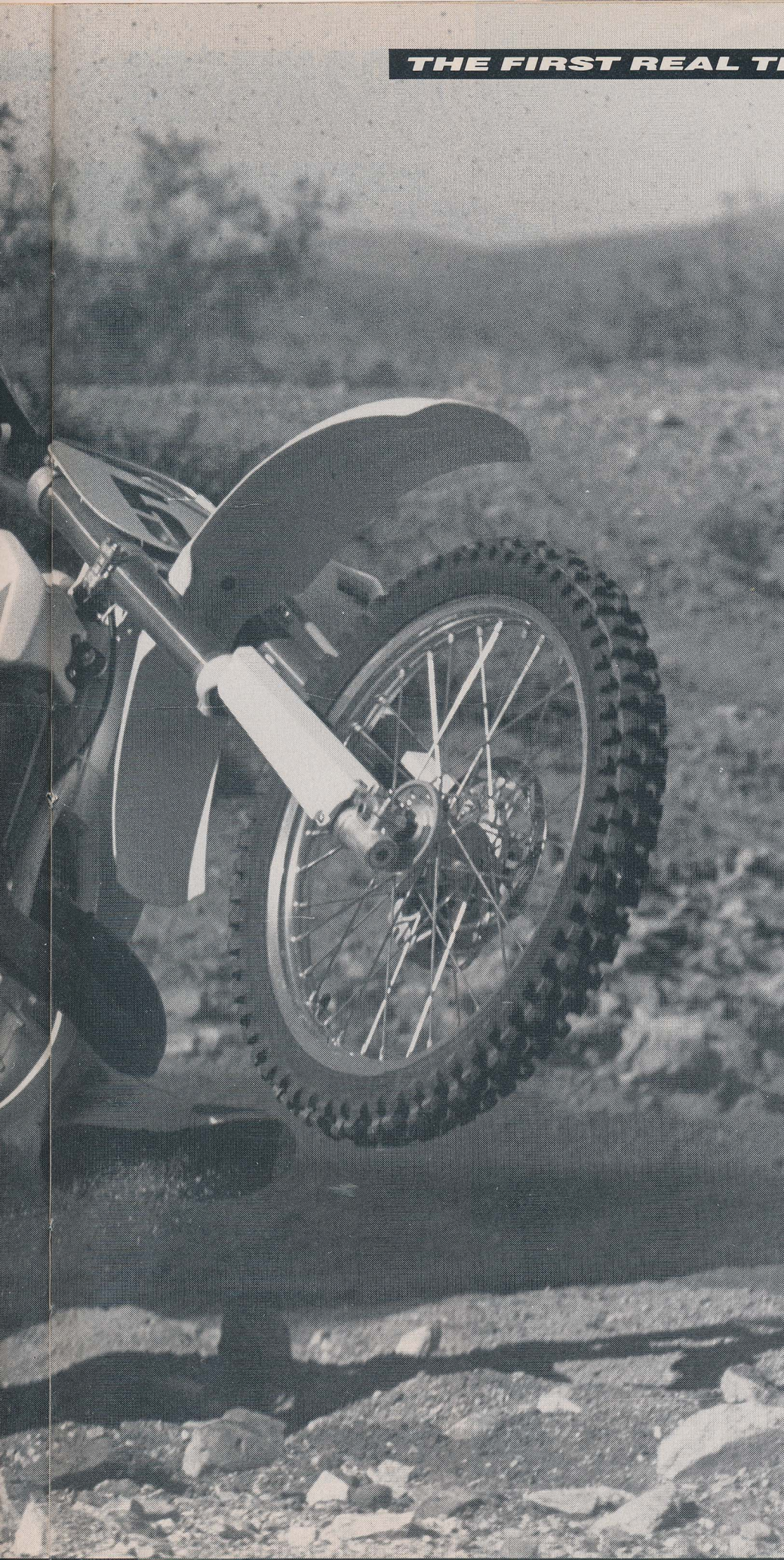
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# 1992 YAMAHA WR500

Riding the new-generation air-cooler  
By the DIRT BIKE Staff

Twisting the "loud handle" results in serious forward thrust, due to the more tractable power and compliant suspension. The WR rips out of corners but doesn't want to loop out.



**E**ver had a recurring nightmare? Sure you have—especially if you are an Open-class motocrosser who wants to ride a Yamaha. The YZ490 was a nightmare that would not go away. It just kept recurring—same engine, same frame, same suspension. Yamaha just would not change the big YZ, despite the fact that it kept getting more and more dated. Oh, you could make it competitive, but it was a lot easier to just uncrate a Kawasaki or Honda, or ride the 250 class. Eventually, the YZ just faded away.

Now it's back—only it's not a nightmare anymore. To be truthful, Yamaha's new Open-classer isn't even a motocrosser anymore. Now it's much more. This is the first real test ride on the new WR500, a bike we previewed in our November '90 issue. This is just an impression, mind you. We'll present a thorough race test of the machine at a later time, after we have had several months on the beast.

#### **LIFE WITH THE MOTOR**

To refresh your memory or, as Hunky puts it, clear out the cobwebs, the WR500 engine is the same mill that powered the defunct YZ490. The black 490 mill was violent, vibrated like a cement mixer and pinged like a diesel tractor. Savvy 490 tuners tossed the 40mm Mikuni in favor of a 38, reshaped the head, played with the ignition timing, slapped an aftermarket pipe on it, then went racin'.

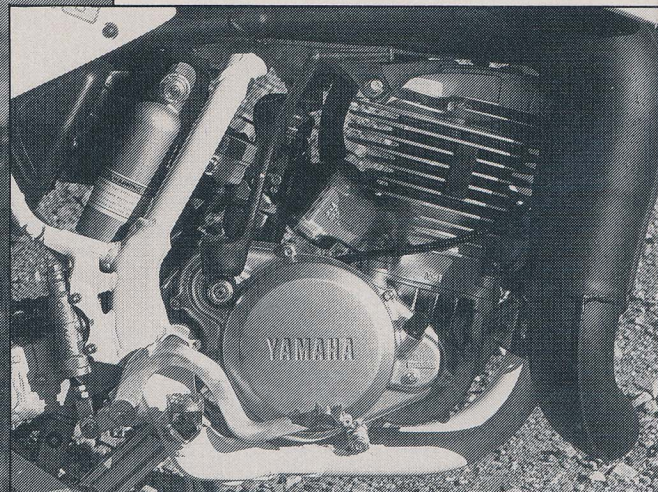
Yamaha did that for the masses. The WR mill is painted silver and unchanged except for the ignition stator, 38mm round-slide Mikuni, new combustion chamber, pipe and silencer. The ignition features a lighting coil (35-watt), less advance (1.7mm from 2.0) and the same flywheel as the 490. The Boost Bottle is still with us, to smooth out the low-end. Also, there is a new lower engine mount to cut vibration.

It still takes a healthy boot to get the motor to light off when cold. The start lever is very long, for mechanical advantage, so you need to find something tall to stand on. Once it fires, it takes a long time to warm up and clear out. Once warm, the WR starts in one or two half-hearted kicks. Clutch pull is heavy, compared to a CR or KX500, and the transmission is a bit notchy—but, hey, we expected that, right? The clutch and tranny are unchanged.

Where the 490 was violent, the WR500 is sweet. It'll chug down until you can count the firing strokes, then smoothly climb the rev scale. At about three-quarter throttle, it really comes on strong and winds out to an insane top-end rush, just like a modified YZ490. No violent hit and wildly spinning rear tire, just forward thrust. Yamaha did a great job of taming the low-end, so much so that we thought it gained flywheel mass. Nope, same as the 490. In fact, some of our test riders wanted a bit more snap off of the bottom.

We did get the WR to ping, but nowhere near as violently as the old 490 would. Dur-

# 1992 WR500



*From state-of-the-dark to state-of-the-art: The WR500 bristles with simplistic trickiness like a rear disc, zerk fittings on the linkage pivots, top-notch suspension and a motor that's harder to break than a claw hammer.*



*The WR500's turning falls between the YZ250 and YZ490. It isn't a scalpel, like the 250, but it isn't a boat anchor, like the obsolete YZ490. The Bridgestone "Gritty" ED-series tires do a good job, too.*

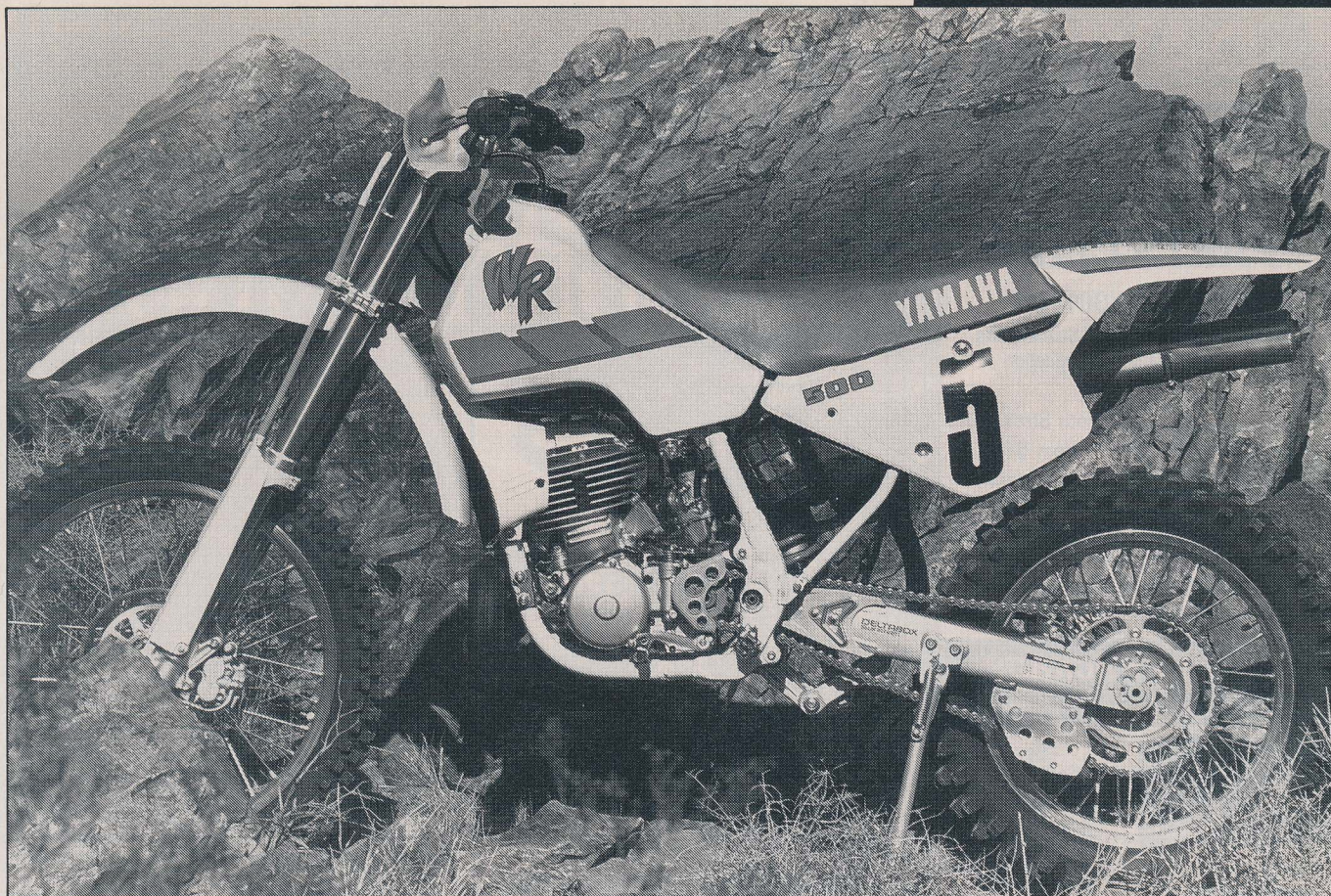
ing a photo session in deep, wet sand, it would ping slightly at about half-throttle with unleaded premium fuel. This was at very low speeds and high loads. We also got it to ping on the high-speed sections of the Adelanto GP.

The exhaust note is more quiet and throaty than the YZ490, but there is still a lot of noise from the cylinder fins. Vibration is on a par with the KX500. The overall gearing is a tad taller than the 490, giving it a top-end of around 85 mph. Our only snivel with the motor is that the shifting is a bit notchy.

## CHECKING OUT THE CHASSIS

Basically, what we have here is a '91 YZ250 chassis, modified to accept the larger engine

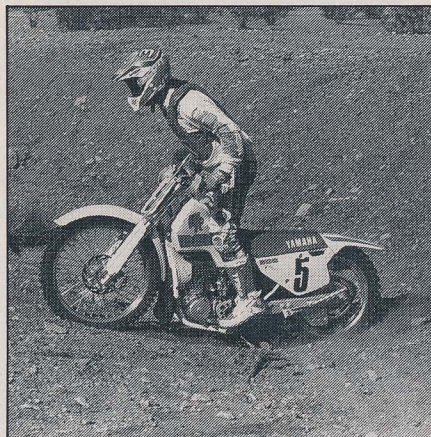
*Having a different internal design than the WR250 and YZ250, the 500 fork is more plush on high-speed impacts. Suspension balance allows you to hammer through whoops.*



**Yamaha's new WR500 isn't really a wide-ratio. It has the same gearbox as the latest YZ490, but with taller overall gearing. The 500 is so flickable we think "WR" stands for "Wild Ride."**

and strengthened to deal with the added power. Weight bias is different from the 250, and the head angle is kicked out three-quarters of a degree (from 27.5 to 28.25). Shock angle and linkage rates are identical to the 250. Also, you can remove all of the sub-frame or just the left side, like the 250.

Where the 490 felt like a boat anchor, the WR500 feels almost as nimble as the WR250. It turns fairly well in tight sections and does not feel much heavier than the 250 over jumps. It loves to be flicked around, while the 490 needed a tugboat for directional changes or cross-ups. There is absolutely no headshake and the bike is a rocket in fast



**One or two clicks on the suspension makes a big difference. Jim Holley felt the fork was too soft for jumps and G-outs, so we cranked in the compression two clicks. End of softness.**

sand washes. Sure, the 500 doesn't carve like the WR200, but it is rock-solid in whoops and high-speed chop. No complaints here.

Much of this can be attributed to the suspension. Instead of having both adjusters at the top of the fork, like the WR250, the 500 has rebound on the top and compression on the bottom. The shock is almost identical to the 250, except for spring rate and valving. The 500 is stiffer at both ends, and the Deltabox swingarm is different. It's longer and has snail adjusters, but it isn't slotted for quick-release capabilities. We like the fork better than the WR250's. It responds to high-speed hits better and draws

## 1992 YAMAHA WR500

Engine type	Reed-valve, air-cooled 2-stroke
Displacement	487cc
Bore and stroke	87.0mm x 82.0mm
Carburetion	38mm Mikuni round slide
Fuel tank capacity	3.4 gal. (13L)
Gearing	14/48
Lighting coil	Yes (35W)
Spark arrester	Optional
Green sticker legal in stock form	No
Claimed dry weight	N/A
Running weight with no fuel	233 lb.
Wheelbase	59.3 in. (1505mm)
Rake/trail	28.25°/5.04 in.
Ground clearance	14.6 in. (370mm)
Seat height	38.8 in. (985mm)
<b>Tire size and type:</b>	
Front	80/100 x 21 Bridgestone ED11
Rear	120/90 x 18 Bridgestone ED12
<b>Suspension:</b>	
Front	KYB inverted 43mm fork, adj. comp./reb./prel., 12.0 in. (305mm) travel
Rear	Monocross, KYB piggyback shock, adj. comp./reb./prel., 12.2 in. (310mm) travel
Country of origin	Japan
Suggested retail price	\$4299
<b>Distributor/manufacturer:</b>	
Yamaha Motor Corp.	
6555 Katella Ave.	
Cypress, CA 90650	
(714) 761-7300	

no complaints, even from resident leapers. The shock is balanced very well with the fork, and the bike stays straight and level in deep whoops. Jim Holley likes the suspension best at 5/5 (compression/rebound; 7/5 is standard) front and 10/5 back.

Ergonomics and brakes are great. The gas tank looks very wide, but you don't notice it when sliding up for corners. However, just like the 250, the bulging right number plate requires some initiation time. The midsec-

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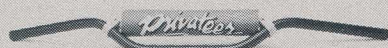
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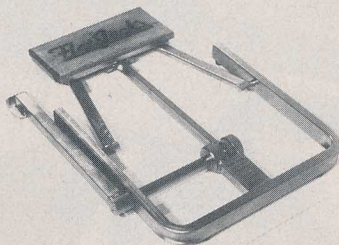
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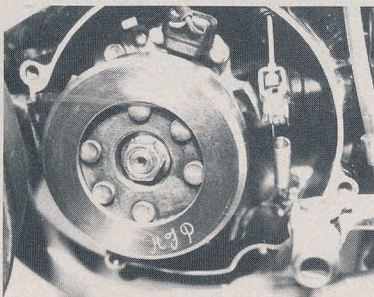


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# 1992 WR500

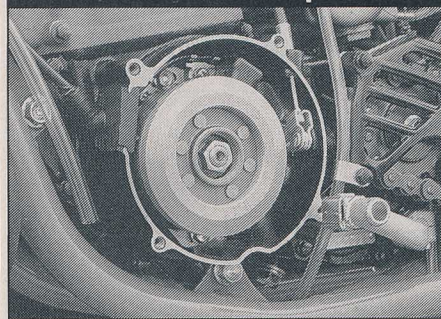
tion is much narrower than the 490. Both brakes are strong and progressive. Brake-sliding is much easier and more predictable with the 220mm rear disc, so you can back it into corners like a dirttracker. Overall, the WR500 is light years ahead of the YZ490 in the handling department.

## GOODBYE, BOAT ANCHOR

Yes, the WR500 is everything we expected it to be, and more. It turns reasonably well—but not MX quick—and goes straight really well. The motor is much more controllable in its present state, and the new chassis and suspension put more power to the ground. It feels 20 pounds lighter than the 490 and likes to be flicked like a 250. Vibration no longer dictates the length of your ride; the slim gas tank does (40-55 miles). There are no radiators or coolant hoses to break, but the motor is still dated.

The WR500 is an almost perfect package. As you read this, the first batch of 1992 500s (actually 1991-1/2) are being snatched off of showroom floors. The whole production run will be sold out quickly, despite a \$4300 price tag. Yamaha R&D whiz Ed Scheidler, the father of the WR500, says that the next production run may have a redesigned clutch. Regardless, the machines will sell faster than Desert Storm T-shirts, and rightly so. □

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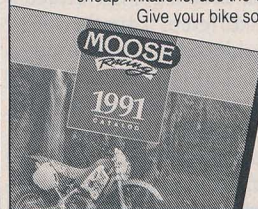


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