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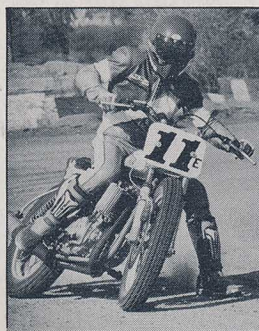
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HONDA XR200R



HUSKY XC250



FACTORY HONDA 500

On the cover: John Wheelchel jumps the YZ125 over the littlest YZ, while little Shela tries to keep low. Photo by Tom Webb.

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FIRST TEST!

HONDA XR200R

Enduro Testing the Pro-link Four-Stroke



If you're a regular reader of *Dirt Bike*, you know that we've had a lot of experience with the basic XR200. By "basic," we mean the '79 and '80 model. We went the full route with the '79, punching out the motor, improving the forks and the rear suspension; we wound up with a nice working play bike that wasn't unmanageable in the occasional enduro. The original bike's main problem was an unexciting suspension; it could be improved with the careful application of a few hundred bucks.

The new XR200R, with its Pro-Link suspension, makes all that history now. Honda made an all-out effort this year, to provide the market with a four-stroke enduro bike, and, after riding it, we'd have to say that they really did their homework this time.

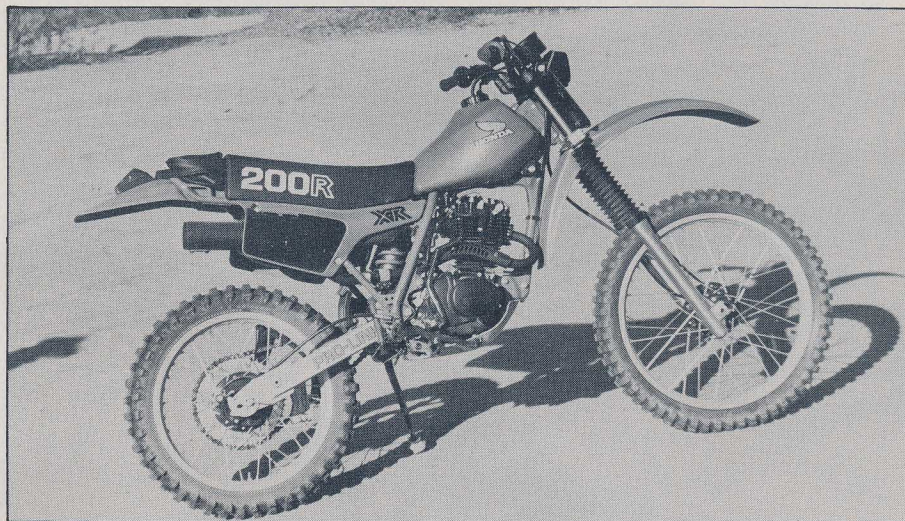
How Does It Work?

It's a very simple job to compare the 200R to last year's XR: with the exception of an improved shifting mechanism, the engine is exactly the same. Oh, if you want to be a nit-picker, *yes*, they did paint it black. The black color is supposed to improve heat dissipation, but we all know that they did it to make the bike look zoot, right?

The frame, of course, is entirely different. It is still a diamond configuration, using the engine as a stressed member, but all the tubing has been rearranged to compliment the Pro-Link rear end. For all you minor-detail freaks, the engine location and swing-arm position is slightly different, and the steering head has been raked out a few fractions of a degree.

The top mount of the Pro-Link shock is right at the base of the frame backbone, right under the seat/tank junction. The shock runs down very close to the engine and is connected to the swingarm with a moveable linkage arm. This linkage is the key to the whole Pro-Link system (PROgressive LINKage; get it?).

In the simplest terms, that linkage at the bottom shock mount is used to vary the piston speed of the shock when the swingarm is traveling its arc. During the first half of the total swing-arm travel, the relationship of piston speed to axle movement is relatively constant. As the axle gets nearer to full travel, the linkage takes over and piston speed increases dramatically. This altering in the speed of the shock pis-



ton creates a true progressive damping effect—the faster the shock piston moves through the oil, the greater the damping force.

What this means to us is a suspension that will give an amazingly plush ride at slow speeds, while still being able to handle the giant whoops at *mach 9*. It's difficult to understand the technical explanation, but riding is believing. After setting the spring preload and damping to suit our weight and riding style, we tried it out. It works.

As a matter of fact, it works damn good, and this is surprising when a few other minor details on the bike are taken into consideration. More about this later; let's finish up talking about the rear end, right now.

The shock can be adjusted to four different rebound damping rates. There is a ring at the base of the shock which can be turned to select between position #1 - the softest, and #4 - the stiffest. The adjuster is turned counterclockwise to increase the rebound damping—each setting is held by a ball detent, and you feel very carefully for the click as the ball snaps into place. The adjuster uses a rubber seal, so it's very difficult to feel the ball's drop into the detent.

There are two other methods you can use to make sure you're in the right spot: If it's very quiet, you can quite plainly hear the balls click home; also, the adjusting ring has flat edges on either side of the shock eye—make sure these flats line up; then you know you're in the right spot. It's a lot more difficult to explain than it is in practice.

Spring preload is also adjustable. There is a locknut and adjusting nut on the top of the shock, and the adjusting nut is tightened or loosened to increase or decrease preload. Each full turn of the adjusting nut is worth 33 pounds of preload. The nut can be cranked down to a minimum spring length of 7.6 inches. The tightening range seems to be adequate for a good spread of rider weights and terrain demands. At the time of this writing, Honda will be offering accessory springs for the bike.

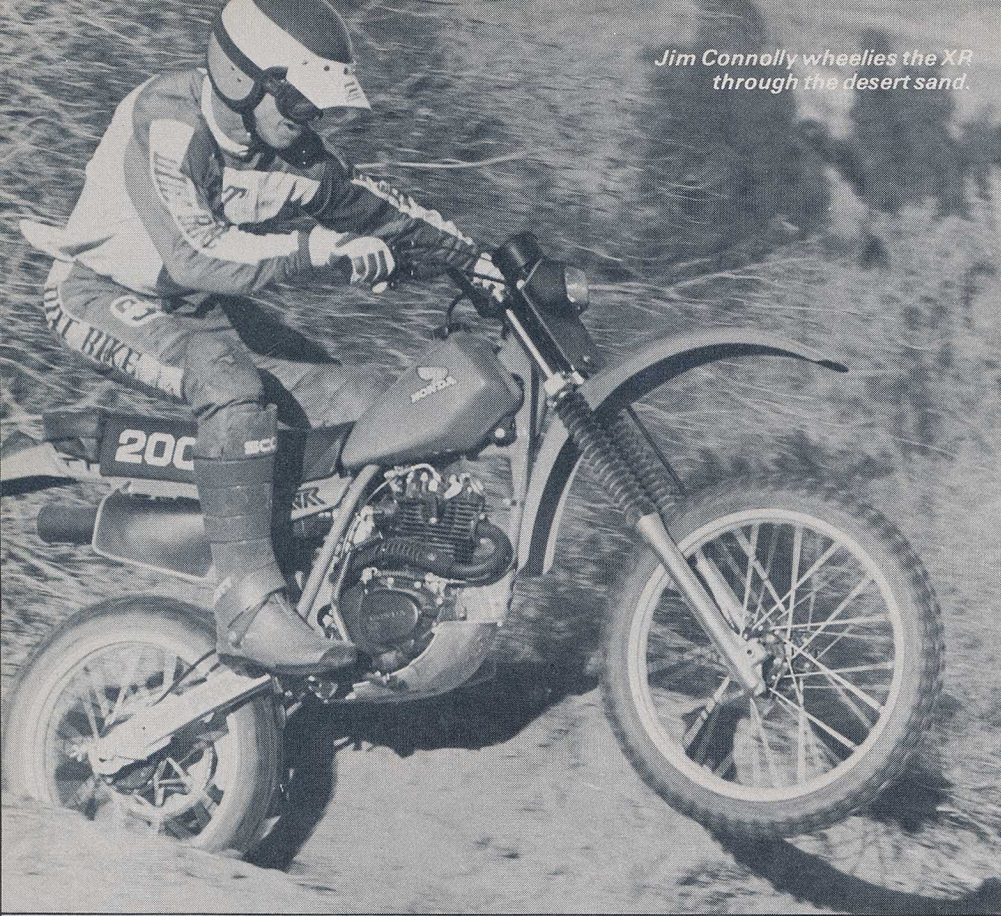
The Pro-Link shock also features a remote reservoir to help keep things cool and manageable, and it seems to do a reasonable job. Throughout our 125-mile enduro test, we had no problems with fading damping. Nitrogen pressure within the unit is not adjustable—the owner's manual will instruct you to fight off the urge to tamper with it. Good advice.

All The Other Parts

Up front, the XR is using 35mm Showa forks. They deliver 9.8 inches of travel, balancing out the rear's 9.7 inches. They come complete with air caps this year, and standard air pressure is right in the neighborhood of 4 psi. During our desert running, we pumped them up to 7 psi and had no complaints. We found no stock oil weight recommendation for the forks, but Showa forks have been using ATF ever since they first appeared on the market. We used 10W PJ-1 fork oil at the stock level of 6.4 in from the top of the tubes, and they felt fine.

The aluminum alloy, triple clamps are stronger and wider than last year's offering, and the steering head bear-

Jim Connolly wheelies the XR through the desert sand.



ings are the tapered-roller type. All the ingredients of a strong front end. Though we felt a little bit of flex over rough ground, it was nothing uncontrollable—the front end feels worlds better than the '80 XR.

As we said earlier, the engine is virtually the same as the powerplant on last year's bike: 195cc, six-speed, four-stroke, plenty of torque and still able to buzz out some. Very easy to pull wheelies. It's difficult to compare the XR's power delivery to its two-stroke competition, as the XR would probably be beaten in a drag race by any 175 two-stroke in all but the worst traction conditions. The difference is two completely different kinds of power: The two-stroke is most comfortable high-revving over rough ground at a high rate of speed; a four-stroke does its best in a situation that requires finesse—torqueing up, over and around the worst obstacles, in any situation where just a little more torque will make the difference between making it and winding up on your face.

Carburetion on the XR is the same 26mm Keihin as last year but now wearing a new air box. The new box is not as easy to get into as the old one, but it's better protected and is housing a much larger filter. A metal strap and a wingnut hold the filter in. The filter is easy to service after the side panel

and air box cover are removed.

The XR's exhaust pipe is a two-piece unit, using the same head pipe as last year and a new, lighter tail section and silencer. According to the powers at Honda, the new pipe doesn't make any more horsepower that last year's model, but the compact shape was necessary to clear the shock. Exhaust note on the XR can best be described as "loud," but we are told that each customer will be supplied with a baffle plate for the silencer, which brings the noise level down to a much more agreeable 86 decibels. If you do receive one of these plates with your bike, hold on to it. You *will* need it to pass the sound test at nearly any enduro.

Riding Impression

The end of the enduro season is a bad time to be testing new bikes, especially here at *Dirt Bike*. About this time of the year, everyone on the staff has his mind filled with thoughts of year-end District points, and the thought of riding a brand new bike—and possibly not finishing the run—is enough to make any of us cringe. Nonetheless, we felt a moral obligation to test the first real enduro-oriented XR in its new element, come what may.

We had a variety of trick parts of XRs laying around, left over from the Project XR and could have easily tuned the new Pro-Linker into a fire

breather, but we felt that modifying the bike would be bad for the test. As it was, we only made one change from stock—we removed the stock inner tubes and replaced them with HiPoint heavy-duty ISDT tubes. The Hi-Point tubes are about three times thicker than a normal tube and absolutely necessary for riding in rocks. It's almost impossible to get a flat with these tubes. We set the suspension up with 7 pounds of air in the forks, two turns up from stock on rear spring preload, and the Pro-Link damping was set on setting #3.

We knew that the suspension would work well, as we'd ridden the bike a couple of times before the event. We also knew that the handling would be okay, but we had one nagging doubt which could effect both handling and suspension considerably: the short wheelbase.

Stock wheelbase on the XR200R is 53.3 inches. Throughout the test, we couldn't help but compare the XR to its obvious competitor, the KDX175. The KDX has proven itself an excellent enduro mount, by virtue of its fantastic motor, a fine suspension, and its uncanny stability at highs. This stability is one of the secrets of a successful bike—the more stable it is, the less work you have to do to keep it going in the right direction. The KDX's stability is mostly due to its 59-inch wheelbase, and this is where the Honda worried us. The XR is nearly *six inches* shorter, so how in the world would we be able to keep such a short bike from doing tankslappers all day long?

As it turned out, fears were all for naught. By some miracle or another, the XR blasted through the whoopedos without ever trying to get sideways. The rear suspension did such a remarkable job of keeping the front end in line that we never had to think about finding a soft spot to land on. This is surprising, because the ride at slow speeds almost seems *toosoft*, yet we only bottomed the suspension in the worst bumps and holes. This must be what they mean by progressive damping.

The XR doesn't have the explosive power of a two-stroke, but it still managed to get along through most of the run. The torque was most useful on the hard surfaced hills where a couple of "maybe" situations were turned into a last gasp chug over the

top. Normal speed averages (12-24 mph) were no problem to maintain over the rough terrain, but when the speeds got up into the 30-36 mph range (normal in a desert enduro), the shortcomings of the stock motor started appearing. When speeds get this fast, the only thing that works well is massive horsepower in a 12-inch suspended chassis. We expect this, and would have to say that for average enduro and trailriding conditions, the stock XR200 engine would work fine for all but the most competitive "A" rider.

Aside from the high speeds, we also had a problem with traction. There were a few sand hills out on the course that the XR had to take a couple of runs at before they were conquered, and there was one that the XR *could not* climb. This problem should only pertain to the Southern California desert, because conditions are truly horrible; all the sub-250 bikes were having trouble with these hills. To correct the bike for our use, we would replace the rear tire with one that has some meat on it. Let's face it, the Japanese tire manufacturers have been lying to us for years, and the XR's stock 4.10x18 Bridgestone is about the same size as a small 3.50. A 4.00x18 Metzeler absolutely dwarfs it, and the European tire would be the way we would go.

The forks soaked up all the bumps the rear did, although not quite as smoothly. Fork action was occasionally harsh over the square-edged holes, but they never became uncontrollable. Fine tuning with different types of oil would probably help ease the minor irritations, and you *know* that soon someone will be coming out with a kit for the forks.

Handling was close to excellent on the XR. In the hard-packed sections of the course, the XR would blaze right through, cutting a line across wherever the front wheel was pointed, without a hint of wash-out. In the loose, tractionless stuff, the front end would get a little squirrelish, but this could be attributed to the stock, six-ply tires and the heavy-duty tubes. When you set up a bike to stay flatproof in the rocks, you have to accept whatever happens in the soft stuff. Softer tires and tubes, with lower air pressure, would have handled the loose stuff nicely.

Despite our minor problems, the XR finished the run in one piece. If we

were interested in setting up one to work well in the desert, we'd preload the suspension a little higher, change to bigger rims and modify the engine for more horsepower. Outside of the desert, any changes will be more personal preference than necessity. In good traction conditions at less than warp speed, the XR should be a pure joy to ride.

Bits and Pieces

The speedometer is the same unit as in the past, with the exception that they now come with a flexible odometer reset knob, making it much more difficult to break off. Our odometer was accurate to within a tenth every ten miles—just about the best you can expect.

All of the pivot points on the Pro-Link come with grease fittings installed, making maintenance a simple chore. We'd suggest loosening up the bolts when lubing, though, so the grease can get right out to the seals.

Throttle assembly is a Honda straight-pull item, and it works very smoothly. Levers are the reverse ball type that were introduced last year. Nice levers.

Both brakes worked well on our bike, what little we used them. Four-stroke engine compression is one of the best braking systems ever—let off the gas and you're slowing down, right then!

Shift lever is a folder, and it's mounted too low for our tastes. Trouble is, it can't be raised up any higher without it hitting the engine cases. This is a shame. Whenever we ride in rocks or stumps, we spend all day in fear for our left toes.

Fuel tank is plastic and will not dent

like the old ones. It holds two gallons of straight gas and should take you about 90 miles.

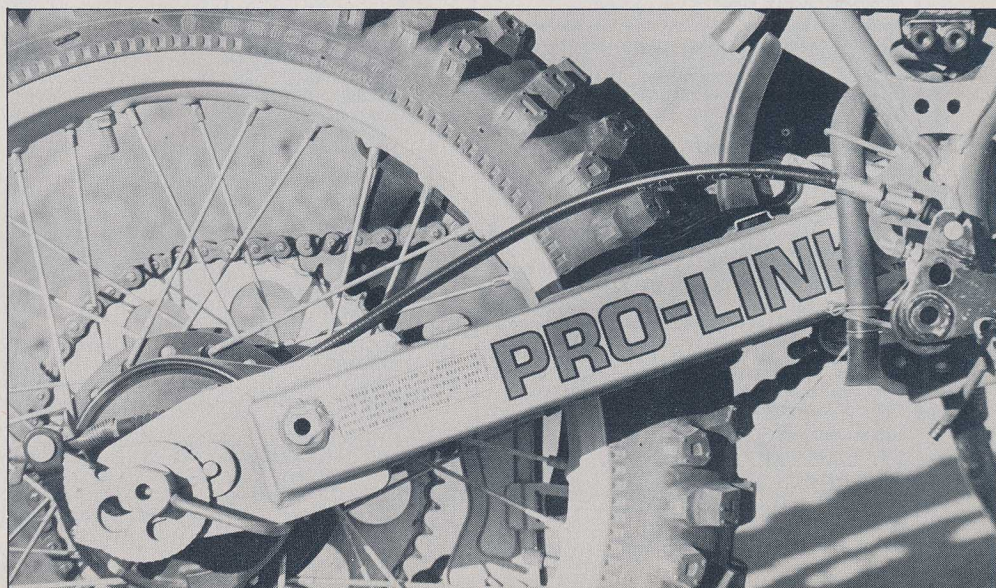
The rear wheel is a true, quick-change item. Loosen the axle, shove it forward and pull the chain off the sprocket, snap off the brake rod, and the wheel and backing plate are lying on the ground.

We had problems with the pegs not returning after being folded up on rocks—they'd stick in the *up* position. There must be something we can grind off to make them work right . . .

The kickstand stuck way out in the breeze when we were riding the bike, and it looks like a real ankle grabber. We took it off before the enduro.



Front forks will still flex some when pushed but still work much better than last year's model. The XR's swingarm is painted chrome moly and will stand up to a lot of abuse. Tire is too small for marginal traction conditions.





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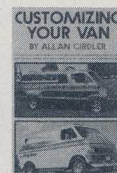
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HONDA XR200R

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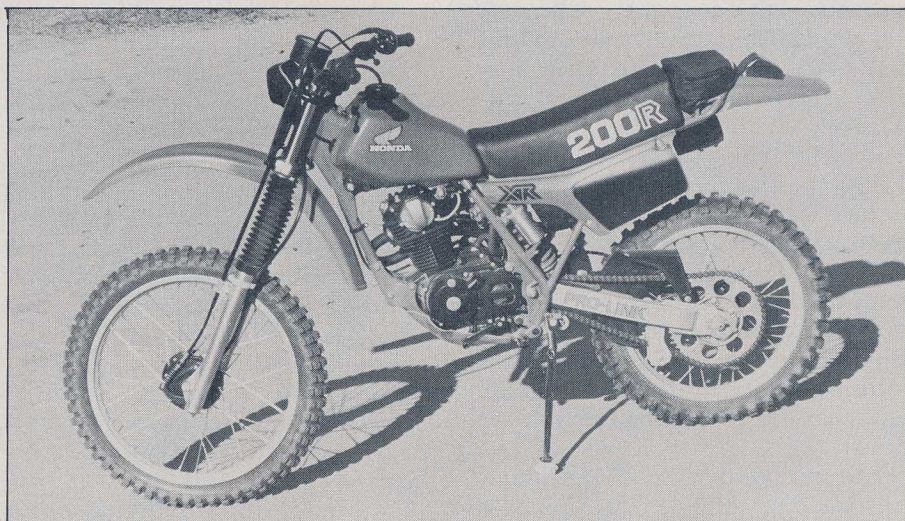
The Bottom Line

This test wouldn't be complete if we didn't say a few words comparing the XR with the KDX175. The KDX is an excellent enduro bike. It has a very fine rear suspension, excellent forks, and is, without a doubt, the fastest two-stroke 175 money can buy. The long wheelbase makes it very stable at high speed, yet it still can turn around on a dime in tight woods. From what we've seen so far, it's also reliable.

The XR, on the other hand, is also reliable, although we won't know about the Pro-Link until we've racked up some time on it. The forks are okay, compared to the KDX, but the

rear suspension is better—it just flat works better in the bumps... not a lot better, but you can feel it. The only places you notice the short wheelbase is coming down hills or in endless fields of whoopdies; but, it turns quicker than the KDX. And, it *can* be made to go very fast.

But, will it make a good enduro bike? We think so and won't be surprised to see XRs winning enduros over the next year, although a stock XR won't be a serious threat to a good KDX rider. Perhaps the question to ask is... Is it a good four-stroke enduro bike? And in that case, the answer is an emphatic yes, the best four-stroke enduro bike we've tested yet. No argument there. □



HONDA XR200

NAME AND MODEL	Honda XR200R
ENGINE TYPE	SOHC four-stroke
BORE AND STROKE	65.5mm x 57.8mm
DISPLACEMENT	195cc
HORSEPOWER (CLAIMED)	N/A
CARBURETION	26mm Keihin
RECOMMENDED GASOLINE	Premium
FUEL TANK CAPACITY	7.5 liter (2.0 gals)
FUEL TANK MATERIAL	Plastic
LUBRICATION	Wet sump
RECOMMENDED OIL	10W 40 motor oil
OIL CAPACITY	0.9 liter (.95 qt.)
AIR FILTRATION	Oiled foam
CLUTCH TYPE	Wet, multi-plate
TRANSMISSION	Six-speed
GEARBOX RATIOS:	

1	2.769:1
2	1.941:1
3	1.450:1
4	1.130:1
5	0.923:1
6	0.785

GEARING, FRONT/REAR	13/50
IGNITION	CDI
PRIMARY KICK SYSTEM?	Yes
RECOMMENDED SPARK PLUG	NGK D8EA
SILENCER/SPARK ARRESTOR/QUALITY	Yes/yes/moderately loud
EXHAUST SYSTEM	Right side, through frame
FRAME, TYPE	Diamond
WHEELBASE	1355mm (53.3 inches)
GROUND CLEARANCE	340mm (13.4 inches)
SEAT HEIGHT	890mm (35.0 inches)
STEERING HEAD ANGLE (RAKE)	28° 40'

TRAIL	125mm (4.9 inches)
WEIGHT WITH ONE GALLON GAS	234 lbs.
RIM MATERIAL	DID alloy
TIRE SIZE AND TYPE:	
FRONT	3.00x21 Bridgestone 6 ply
REAR	4.10x18 Bridgestone 6 ply
SUSPENSION, TYPE AND TRAVEL:	
FRONT	Showa air/spring, 9.8 inches
REAR	Pro-Link, 9.7 inches
INTENDED USE	Off-road, enduro
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	Japan
RETAIL PRICE, APPROX.	\$1500
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