



Compared with the heavier XLs, the 250 is a pleasure off road. Lighter weight makes for better manners once you exit the pavement.



Dick Arnold navigates a stream aboard the XL. It's waterproof, easy to ride, has decent suspension and an excellent motor.

WHEN THE PAVEMENT STOPS, THE FUN BEGINS

Not just a foo-foo bike

We were pleasantly surprised the first time we peeled off the pavement and onto a cobby two-track road. Our expectations weren't high. These little foo-foo street/trail bikes usually prove to be underpowered, undersuspended and more than a handful in the dirt. Honda's XL250R was a bike we *had* to test, yet it put a smile on our faces once we pointed it toward the mountains. It has some punch, and considering the limitations of the tires, is a *gas* in off-road conditions.

After a one-year hiatus, Honda brought the XL250 back for 1984. The bike resembles the '82 version only in color. A new motor, frame and suspension, plus some serious dirt tech, have gone into the machine.

A shorty tank and comfortable safety seat aid in the cornering manners. It has also

gone on an 11-pound diet, and the chassis is more off-road oriented. So, what you have is a peppy, lighter, easier-to-ride bike. That's what gave us the smile once we hit the dirt.

IT'S A REVVVER

Honda based the 250 engine on the 200 powerplant. It's a radial valved, twin-carbureted design like the rest of Honda's four-strokes. Compared with the '82 XL, the compression is up, and so is the horsepower. This little bike has a healthy blast off the bottom, smacks into a trail-ridable mid-range, then revs to a melt-down point. At first we thought we were on a 350—the power is that impressive.

One of the few glitches we found was in starting the bike. When it's cold, open the handlebar-mounted choke all the way.

Then, give it *no* throttle as you kick it through. Once it starts, let it idle until it thoroughly warms up. That's the drill.

We found that the gearing has been perfectly matched to the power attitudes of the bike. It's a six-speeder that has a top end of just about 80 mph. The street rider needs are filled just fine.

We're more concerned with the trail side, and Honda has put some effort here. First though third gears are low enough and rev so far that you can handle just about anything that comes up.

Actually, the 250 is much more at home off-road than its bigger brother, the XL600. With the 600, you really notice the shortcomings of the semi-knob tires. The lighter, smaller 250 likes to skid on the fire roads and doesn't really object to tighter trails, either. There are limitations, but for a street/trailer it's pretty complete.

POUNDING ON

By carving 11 pounds off the XL, Honda has taken a lot of the fear out of off-roading. Suspension gains are slight in terms of travel, but not in sophistication. With one rider aboard it's plush, taking to fire roading like it was made for it. Rutted cross bumps and bigger G-outs tax the limits of your spine, though. It's set up light and not meant to take the mondo crushers.

Cornering has been enhanced with the smart seat/tank design. You can get forward easily and work the turns rather than hunt and hope. Although the front brake is a drum design, it performs just fine. The street rider and canyon racer could probably do with a front disc.

There are buddy pegs mounted on the swingarm for the doubles riders. Serious buddy-uppers will need some more horsepower, though. The handlebar-mounted turn signals feature a push-button cancel switch.

PAY DIRT

You could say that if we had a choice between an XL250 or the 600 for dirt-only use, the smaller 250R would get all the first-place votes. Because it's lighter, nimbler and has *good, balanced* power, the little Honda is not a foo-foo bike. It gets the job done on the pavement and is a ball once the blacktop ends and you get into the dirt aspect of riding. □

HONDA XL250R

Engine type	Air-cooled, OHC, 4-stroke
Bore and stroke	75.0mm x 56.5mm
Displacement	249.6cc
Carburetion	(2) Piston valve type, Keihin: 22mm/24mm
Gas/oil ratio	Straight gas
Fuel tank capacity	10.5 L (2.8 gals.)
Transmission	6-speed
Gearing, front/rear	13/40
Ignition	CDI
Suspension:	
Front	220mm (8.7 in.)
Rear	195mm (7.7 in.)
Wheelbase	1380mm (54.3 in.)
Ground clearance	290mm (11.4 in.)
Seat height	855mm (33.7 in.)
Weight	260 lbs.
Retail price	\$1798
Country of origin	Japan
Distributor/Manufacturer:	
Honda Motor Corp. 100 W. Alondra Gardena, CA 90247	