

# MOVING VIOLATION

Remember that the asphalt trails have speed limits

By the DIRT BIKE Staff

Remember the original XR500? It was a big, heavy bike, but it had horsepower that was hard to beat—plenty of torque and a mid-range that wouldn't quit. If you wanted a street/trailer, you'd take the XR and fiddle around for a few weeks trying to make it street legal, or you'd go out and get an XL500 and try to make it lighter.

Well, times do change. If you woke up this morning and decided that you wanted a four-stroke dual-purpose bike with the same kind of power, you wouldn't want to look at the 600. Honda has been working on horsepower ever since the new series of XR/XLs were introduced, and the current 600 feels as if it will rip both your arms off and wheelie away from every stoplight if you don't go easy on the throttle. No, nowadays you'd go out and test ride an XL350—it's smaller and lighter than the 600, and you can pick up just as many moving violations if you don't make a conscious effort to behave.

## THE MEANING OF TORQUE

The most notable feature of the XL350 is the powerband—it is wide, wide, wide.

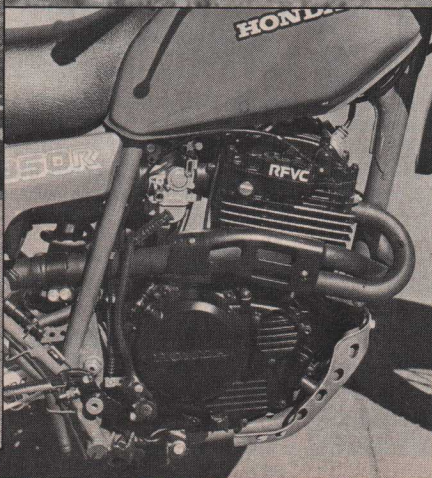
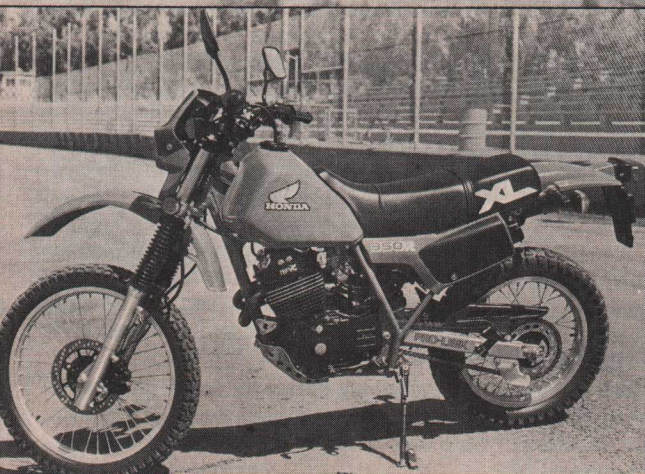
*What is it about a four-stroke street/trail bike that makes you want to put it sideways? The Honda even comes supplied with bar protectors if you drop it.*

Most of our testers expected a much wimpier powerband. Just rolling on the throttle causes the XL to chug forward with authority, and when the mid-range takes over, it will snap your arms straight and lift the front wheel if you don't watch what you're do-

**At 271 pounds, the XL350 is not the lightest four-stroke on the market, but jumping was still easy and controlled.**

ing. The 350 doesn't seem to rev quite as high as the 250 we tested last month, but having all the 350's torque on hand means you won't miss the extra revs.

The only hitch we noted with the powerband was a tendency to bog when the throt-



The XL350 shares its lightweight componentry with the XR350. If a 250 isn't enough and a 500 is frightening, the 350 should be just right—there's plenty of oomph in that engine.

tle was snapped open at low revs/speeds. It felt exactly like an overcarbureted two-stroke—snap the throttle and all we got was a low *buuuuhhh*. It was most pronounced when the engine was cool, but it happened often enough to train us to go easy on the twist.

### TURNING THE CORNERS

Being just ten pounds heavier than the XL250, the 350 is about as much fun in the dirt. There's no getting around the fact that the 350 is bigger, and the extra size and weight means you won't be attacking quite as hard on the 350, but this machine will take to the dirt with style. The front end sticks well on the fire roads, and smooth trails are a cruise. As the trail difficulty factor goes up, you will begin to feel the need for better tires. Although the stock rubber works very well on the street and in good dirt, anything steep, muddy or bone dry will have you wishing for a set of Metzlers.

The suspension, of course, is set up soft. It feels great out on the road, but when the trail gets rough, you will find yourself limited by the amount of punishment you can take. For really serious trail work we would suggest stiffer spring on both ends and some serious tuning on the damping units. For occasional off-road use, tuning on the rear preload and rebound damping, as well as setting up the forks, will allow you to dial it in fine.

Seating position, comfort and attention to detail is all typically Honda—you can just climb aboard an XL and feel comfortable. The 350 starts easily, just as long as you follow the manual, and the action of all the controls is excellent.

### CRUISING THE RIBBON

This may just be the perfect-sized street/trailer. In the past, people have claimed that you need a 500 for highway horsepower, and we all know you need something small and light to remain nimble in the dirt. Well, the 350 comes really close in both categories. There's plenty of power for the road, and not a whole lot of weight to fight back in the boonies. It looks like a serious effort, and one that's definitely worth a serious look. □

## HONDA XL350R

Engine type	Air-cooled 4-stroke
Bore and stroke	84.0mm x 61.3mm
Displacement	339cc
Carburetion	(2) 22/24 Keihin
Ignition	CDI
Fuel tank capacity	2.9 gals.
Transmission	6-speed
Gearing, front/rear	14/40
Brakes, front/rear	Hydraulic disc/mech. drum
<b>Suspension:</b>	
Front	39mm Showa forks, 8.7 in.
Rear	Honda Pro-Link, 8.1 in.
Wheelbase	1415mm (55.7 in.)
Ground clearance	260mm (10.2 in.)
Seat height	840mm (33.1 in.)
Weight	271 lbs.
Retail price	\$2098
Country of origin	Japan
<b>Distributor/Manufacturer:</b>	
American Honda Motor Corp. 100 W. Alondra Blvd. Gardena, CA 90247	

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