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vs. HUSKY 510 vs. HUSABERG 501!

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ON THE COVER: Damon Bradshaw flies into controversy at the Axton, Virginia, 250/125 National. Photo by Chris Hultner. Cover design by DeWest; color separations by 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 aftermarket accessories we use.

VALVE FLOAT IN THE FOREST

*Suzuki's DR250
takes on the
Honda XR250R*

By the DIRT BIKE Staff

Simply put, Honda hasn't had any competition in the 250cc four-stroke class for so long, their XR had become dormant. Our '89 XR250 sat in the shed so long it was wrapped in spider webs—showing gross lack of interest from Honda's end as builder and our end as enthusiasts. From '87 on, only the color had changed, but the price grew steadily. Yawn.

Then Suzuki jumped back into the off-road thumper business, hiring Al Baker and Drew Smith to develop a new DR and DR-based dual-sport line of high-performance four-strokes. This got Honda's attention. They decided that, just maybe, they'd neglected the XR250R and that cartridge forks, shock mods, a rear disc brake and a new silencer might be a good idea for 1990.

We received our XR250 several months ago but tucked it away in storage so that we could test it against the DR on equal footing, since it takes quite a while to break in a thumper thoroughly, and we didn't want to give the Honda an unfair advantage. Suzuki delayed releasing the DR250 because of a mysterious midrange hesitation, so we had to bide our time before shooting out the quarter-liter thumpers. Almost religiously, we would stop by the shed every other week to wipe the cobwebs off of the XR250.

Finally, we got our hands on a production DR250, then set out to see which is the most awesome 250cc thumper of 1990, the all-new DR or the refitted XR. We compared the bikes stone stock, then pumped up the suspension a tad to unlock untapped potential and uncover chassis limitations, if any. Let's get to it!

FOUR-VALVE FUNTASIA

Neither one of these bikes will rip your arms out of their sockets, but they will propel you forward at a good clip, as long as you keep them in the right gear. The Suzuki has a bit more low-end torque and will chug through sections where the XR pilot has to slip the clutch to prevent bogging. In drag races, the DR jumps ahead out of the hole, then the XR walks away on top-end. Exhaust and airbox baffles are removable on the XR for even more power on top, but sound output jumps drastically. We put ours back in after drag testing. Strange. The DR has a 3mm larger carb than the XR but has more low-end and less top-end power than the Honda (bore and stroke being equal). Clearly, the Suzuki is more choked, and the restrictions are not easily removed.

LIFE WITH THE MOTORS

We rode the bikes hard and put them away wet. Neither bike overheated or broke, no matter how hard we over-revved them. We did, however, uncover some shortcomings. The Honda doesn't shift as easily as the DR, but the DR has gaps between the upper gears and falls on its face when upshifting in soft terrain. A smaller countershaft sprocket is the cheapest way to fix this annoyance. Also, the DR sometimes balked at hot starting.

uate the handling, we had to pump up the suspension a bit, with springs and oil. Bizarre, especially considering the fact that Suzuki's DR250 and 350 share identical suspension parts. Suzuki should have used the 350's springs and settings, which are much better.

MODIFIED SUSPENSION ACTION

We installed Progressive Suspension's 20/30 fork springs in both bikes and slowed the DR's rebound by switching to 10-weight oil set at six inches. Be sure to back off of the DR's compression adjusters to retain initial plushness. Progressive springs also replaced the rear stockers, with a 300/350 going on the Suzuki and a 600/700 for the Honda.

We couldn't believe these were the same bikes that wallowed through whoops before. The Honda no longer wants to nose in and is much more stable in all situations, although it won't rail turns quite as quickly as it did with more fork diving. It's still plush, too. The DR showed the most improvement, as the stiffer shock spring is mated perfectly to the heavy rebound of the KYB shock. Up front, the DR's adjustable preload allows you to dial initial plushness and ride height for turning, and the 20/30 springs and 10-weight oil eliminate bottoming. With the suspension dialed for around

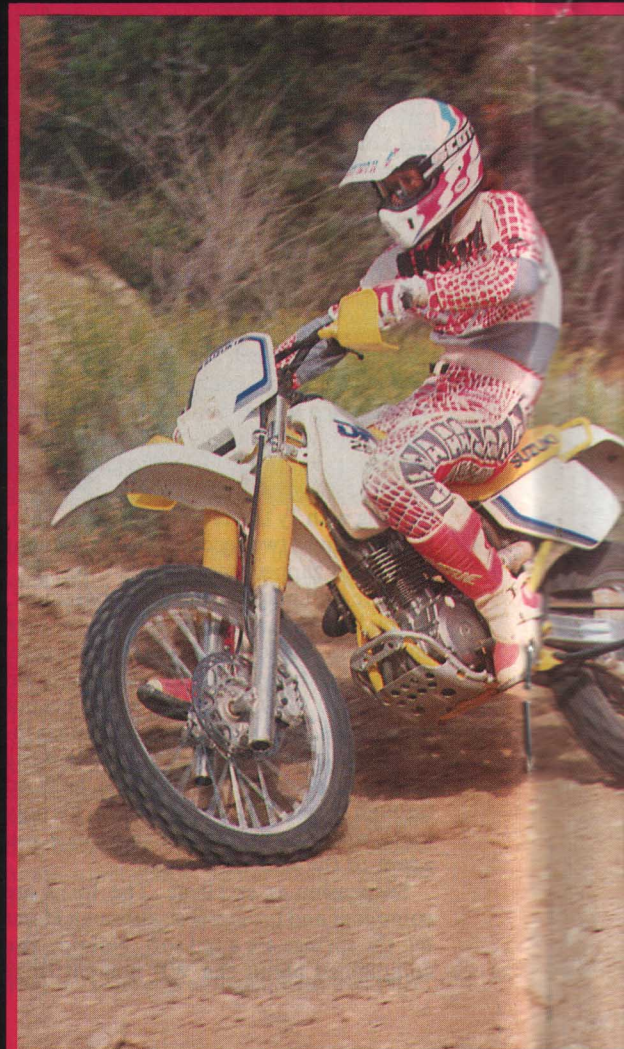
The pumper carb floods the bike if you touch the throttle when starting. It would usually crank first kick but would sometimes not start at all until we held the throttle wide open to clear it out. Honda's air filter is almost twice the size of the DR's, so the Suzuki clogs up faster and restricts more. The Suzuki may have better torque and shifting, but we rate the Honda better, overall.

STOCK SUSPENSION RATINGS

Honda has their spring and damping rates more dialed for spirited trail riding, while the Suzuki is too plush and confused for fast riding. The XR has an excellent shock with valving and spring rates for the average 160-pound rider, but the new cartridge forks are too softly sprung and don't feature compression damping adjustments like the old conventional units. Both ends are plush, but the front wants to dive in the whoops.

Something must have been garbled in translation with the Suzuki, because the stock suspension is totally confused. The forks bottom horribly when pushed and rebound too quickly, while the rear packs and bottoms. Plushness turns to seasickness when you try to go fast, and it wants to wallow in turns. Before we could even begin to eval-

Tortoise vs. the hare: East Coast riders will prefer the XR's carving prowess over the longer DR, but the DR has more low-end torque. Keep the XR singing and it'll hide from the DR on tight trails or wide-open fire roads. ►





Crash landing: Both bikes bottom severely after major air with the stock springs. The Suzuki needs thicker fork oil as well, but it offers compression and preload adjustments. With stiffer springs on both bikes, the Suzuki edges ahead.



1990 HONDA XR250R

1990 SUZUKI DR250

Engine type	4-valve, SOHC, air-cooled 4-stroke 249cc	4-valve, SOHC, air-cooled 4-stroke 249cc
Displacement	73mm×59.5mm	73mm×59.6mm
Bore and stroke	30mm Keihin	33mm pumper Mikuni
Carburetion	2.8 gals.	2.5 gals.
Fuel tank capacity	253 lbs.	267 lbs.
Running weight w/no fuel	93 dB	92 dB
Sound output (MIC 20" test)	13/48	14/47
Gearing	Yes	Yes
Lighting coil	Yes	Yes
Spark arrester	Yes	Yes
Green sticker legal in stock trim	56.0 in. (1422mm)	56.5 in. (1435mm)
Wheelbase	26°/4.1 in.	27.8°/4.6 in.
Rake/trail	12.8 in. (325mm)	12 in. (305mm)
Ground clearance	36.4 in. (914mm)	36.2 in. (920mm)
Seat height	Tire size and type:	
Front	80/100×21 IRC VE-35F	80/100×21 Bridgestone ED-11
Rear	110/100×18 IRC VE-33	100/100×18 Bridgestone ED-12
Suspension:		
Front	41mm cartridge Showa, 11.0 in. (279mm) travel	43mm Showa, adj. comp./prel., 11.0 in. (279mm) travel
Rear	Pro-Link, Showa remote res., adj. comp./reb., 11.0 in. (279mm) travel	Full-Floater, Showa remote res., adj. comp./reb., 11.0 in. (279mm) travel
Replacement parts cost:		
Piston	\$39.00	\$50.14
Rings	18.67	38.11
Clutch plate (f)	5.57 (6)	12.54 (7)
Clutch plate (m)	5.38 (5)	5.02 (6)
Countershaft sprocket	8.88	10.59
Rear sprocket	56.58	100.53
Front brake pads	22.86	37.70
Rear brake pads	20.96	24.29
Country of origin	Japan	Japan
Suggested retail price	\$2998	\$2999
Distributor/Manufacturer	American Honda Motor Corp. 100 W. Alondra Blvd. Gardena, CA 90247	American Suzuki Motor Corp. 3251 Imperial Hwy. Brea, CA 92621





\$150, these bikes turned from poodles to panthers. We liked the action on both bikes but give the nod to the Suzuki for more fork adjustability.

CARVING THE TWISTIES

Stock or modified, there is no comparison in turning prowess. The XR250 blows the DR into the weeds with a steeper rake (1.8 degrees) and shorter wheelbase (half-inch). It sticks like a bug on flypaper in sand or on hardpack, and it brake-slides with abandon. The Suzuki, even with the suspension firmed up, wants to push the front end through corners, and it brake-slides about as precisely as the *Exxon Valdez*. It simply doesn't want to change directions like the nimble XR250R.

HIGH-SPEED STABILITY

Stock, the XR is more stable than the undersprung DR. Modified, the DR blows by the Honda in high-speed whoops, as the shorter XR reaches its limitations in the chassis sooner. The Suzuki also handles choppy sweepers with much more precision than the busy XR250. In deep sand whoops, the XR is a definite handful, while the DR tracks through like a motocross bike.

TIRES & BRAKES

Both bikes have excellent, inexpensive tires. We rode a DR with the XR's IRC tires, and it still pushed, showing that the sluggishness in turns isn't related to rubber. The DR's

ED-11 offers better flat protection, but the XR gets the nod for superior rear tire longevity. Both bikes offer excellent braking power, but the XR chatters more under braking and has a comparatively cobby front brake lever. Call this category a tie.

DETAILS & RELIABILITY

We never broke anything of importance on either bike, despite numerous crashes and days of wide-open riding. Both bikes have zerk fittings on the linkages, and the shock can be removed by unfastening the linkage and dropping the shock through the swing-arm. In general, Honda's plastic is sturdier and more durable than the DR plastic, including the hand protectors. Honda also has easier air filter access, as the DR has three wing-headed fasteners holding the airbox side cover in place, and working room is more ample on the XR. An altitude adjustment circuit on the XR carb is another nice touch, as is the removable restrictors for closed-course competition. The Honda tool-bag holds more than the DR's plastic tool case, but both are prone to damage. All in all, the XR has better detailing than the DR.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Which is the best 250cc thumper? Stone stock, the agility and top-end power of the XR250R edge out the DR's torquey motor. Pump \$150 into the bikes and the DR will run with the XR, although the DR rider will have to work harder in twisty trails. If money wasn't really a factor, we'd pick the DR because it has more potential locked up in that new-generation motor and motocross-bred chassis. In other words, if you spent an equal amount of money, say \$500, on both bikes, the DR would be the better bike. One thing is certain: neither one of these thumpers is going to be a haven for spiders in 1990! □

