

YZ250L: SIZZLING SUPER STOCKER!

DIRT BIKE

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DIRT BIKE

FEBRUARY 1984
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**KAWASAKI KX80:
FASTER THAN
A 125?!!**

**NATIONAL ENDURO
CHASE: "SNAKE"
RATTLES & ROLLS**

**HONDA
CR500R:
IT SCARES
MAGOO!**

MIKE BELL

**HONDA
XR250R:
MORE TORQUE,
LESS PORQUE!**

**BAILEY'S HOT TIPS:
"BURN THAT CLUTCH!"**



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FEBRUARY 1984

VOLUME 14, NO. 2



KAWASAKI KX250



SAN DIEGO SUPERCROSS HONDA CR500



KAWASAKI KX80

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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.

ON THE COVER:—"Too Tall" Mike Bell styles for the ever-alert DB cameras. Aboard the YZ250, Mike gets aggressive on the production/works Yamaha. Photo captured by Paul Clipper. Inset photo of Clipper getting muddy on the XR250R by R. Sieman, who, incidentally, didn't shoot last month's cover, as previously credited. Stating that "A cover credit is the only thing I live for!" Clipper wants you to know that the January YZ shot was actually his. Valley Film gets the credit for transposing the dots into a real picture.

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CLONED FROM THE XR200

Honda rewrites the book on 250cc four-strokes

By the Staff of Dirt Bike

In the past, the best word to describe the Honda XR250 was "vanilla." It was pretty much accepted as the sleeper in Honda's XR lineup, suffering from all the drawbacks classically attributed to the 250cc four-stroke: namely too little power and too much weight.

Look at the choices faced by a prospective XR buyer: If horsepower was your thing, the XR500 was all you could ask for: a big, strong machine that carried the title of best Open class four-stroke for many years. On the other hand, if light weight was more important, the XR200 was nearly as feathery as its two-stroke competition, and it had enough engine to make it a fun bike to poke around on. The 250 fell right in the middle, selling sluggishly until Honda finally took it out of the lineup for 1983.

THE TRIUMPHANT RETURN

So naturally, when Honda whipped the sheet off an XR250 at this year's introduction, our immediate reaction was, "So what else is new?" Only when they wheeled it next to a 200 did we begin to understand what was going on.

It *is* new. The '84 XR250R has been moved into the right ballpark by being based totally on the XR200. Yes, the frame is the same as the new 200, but look closer—the engine is also a dead ringer for the smaller bike. The 250 is now little more than a complete XR200 with an 8mm larger bore and a different cylinder head. Using this design, Honda was able to build a 250 that weighs in at nearly 20 pounds less than the old bike, and if the horsepower was in the same ballpark, well, it started looking very good indeed. . . .

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The 250 starts in the usual XR manner—turn on the choke and the gas, don't touch the throttle, and slap at the kickstarter with your right foot. Anyone who has ever tried to start an XR with the throttle open, or with a lazy right leg, is convinced that the Hondas are hard starters. Not true. You only have to know The Drill, and you can fire them up nearly every time.

Once running, the XR emits a good four-stroke bark, just the right kind of noise for a thumper. When the throttle is opened further than idle, the bark turns into a subdued roar that may be a little too loud for

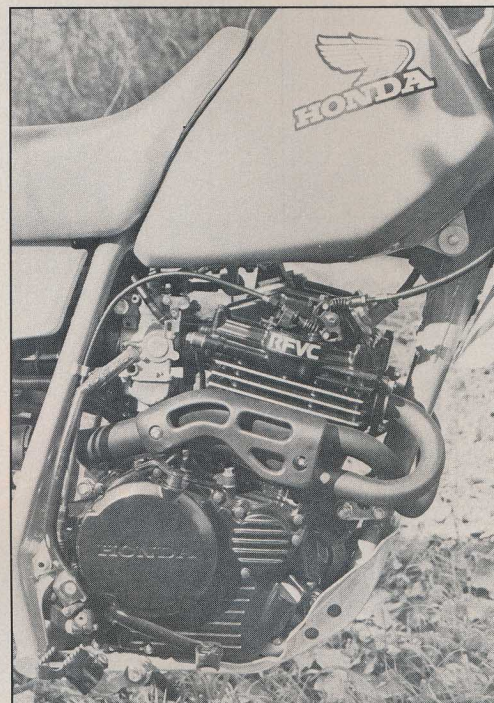


A wide spread of power makes the XR a fun bike to poke around on. Short wheelbase is nice in tight stuff, but nasty at high speeds.

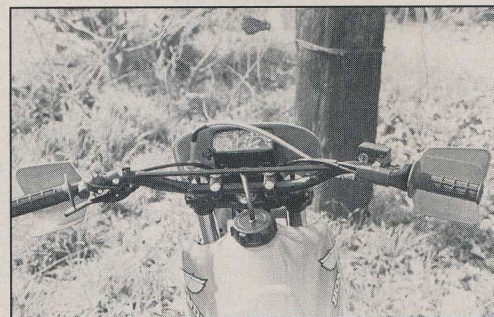




Soft rear suspension was primary cause of front-end washout. A stiffer rear spring should be the XR owner's first purchase.



The new XR250 engine is one of the best 250 four-stroke mills in existence, comparable to a hopped-up machine.



Handguards are good protection from bushes and flying rocks. Speedo is handy for fire-riding.

some enduros or sensitive ears. To cure either of these cases, Honda has seen fit to include an optional silencing kit with each bike, which will mellow this down to a much more sociable level.

The first trip through the gears reveals a number of pleasant surprises. First, it's not necessary to back off the throttle to complete a shift, either up or down. This cures one of the most irritating glitches of the old four-strokes—backing off for an uphill shift would cause you to lose momentum, and blipping the throttle to downshift on a downhill was occasionally unnerving. Both conditions are now cured.

Next point: The new XR250 engine is one of the best 250 four-stroke engines we've ever ridden, including a number of hopped-up scoots we've slung a leg over. There is plenty of low-end power to grunt you up hills, as we would suspect, yet Honda hasn't forgotten the fire riders among us. The XR keeps building power above the

HONDA XR250R



Speedo and front brake setup is well designed and well protected. Disc brake is the best enduro stopper we've ever used.



The front of the bike is very uncluttered, a refreshing change on the XR's. Headlight/numberplate weighs mere ounces, and can be fitted with a quartz halogen bulb.

HONDA XR250R

Engine type	4-stroke	Trail	104mm (4.1 in.)
Bore and stroke	75.0mm x 56.5mm	Weight w/one gallon gas	241.4 lbs.
Displacement	249cc	Rim material	Aluminum alloy
Horsepower (claimed)	27.7 at 9500 rpm	Tire size and type:	
Carburetion	24mm Keihin x 2	Front	3.00 x 21 IRC VE-32
Factory recommended jetting:		Rear	4.60 x 17 IRC VE-32
		Suspension, type and travel:	
		Front	38mm oil/spring forks, 254.0mm (10.0 in.)
		Rear	Pro-Link, adj. comp. & reb., 243.8mm (9.6 in.)
		Intended use	Trail, enduro
		Country of origin	Japan
		Retail price, approx.	\$1825
		Distributor/Manufacturer:	
			American Honda Motor Corp. 100 W. Alondra Blvd. Gardena, CA 90247
		Parts prices, high-wear items:	
		Piston assembly, complete	\$40.80
		Piston rings only	13.34
		Cylinder	130.78
		Shift lever	19.51
		Brake pedal	25.99
		Front sprocket	13.08
		Overall rating of bike, keeping intended use of machine in mind:	
		Handling	Good
		Front suspension	Very good
		Rear suspension	Poor
		Power	Excellent
		Cost	Very good
		Attention to detail	Very good
		Effectiveness, stone stock	Good
		This rating system is included to aid in comparison of bikes in the same displacement and intended-use categories. Comparing the ratings of two dissimilar machines (four-stroke vs. MXer, 175 enduro vs. 80cc mini) is a meaningless exercise in futility.	
Recommended gasoline	Premium		
Fuel tank capacity	9.0 L (2.4 gals.)		
Fuel tank material	Plastic		
Lubrication	Wet sump		
Recommended oil	SAE 10W-40		
Oil capacity	1.3 L (1.4 qt.)		
Air filtration	Oiled foam		
Clutch type	Wet, multi-plate		
Transmission	6-speed		
Gearbox ratios:			
1.	2.769:1		
2.	1.941:1		
3.	1.450:1		
4.	1.130:1		
5.	0.923:1		
6.	0.785:1		
Gearing, front/rear	13/50		
Ignition	CDI		
Primary kick system?	Yes		
Recommended spark plug	NGK DPR 9Z		
Silencer/spark arrester/quality	Yes/yes/good		
Exhaust system	Through-frame, right side		
Frame, type	Single downtube, cradle		
Wheelbase	1360mm (53.5 in.)		
Ground clearance	314.9mm (12.4 in.)		
Seat height	904.2mm (35.6 in.)		
Steering head angle (rake)	26.5°		

enjoyable low-rpm torque, and at peak revs, the bike is humming along at an engine rpm usually reserved for custom-built hyperbikes.

It really is a sweet engine. There are no flat spots through the entire powerband, just a steady building of power from idle upward. It does not rev up quickly, like a two-stroke, but it revs out as far as most two-strokes, which means you don't have to scramble for a gear every other second.

GOING IN DEEPER

If the XR's engine was connected to a perfect chassis and suspension, this would be the four-stroke of the year. But, alas,

it is not to be. True, the 250's chassis is much smaller, lighter and stronger than the old model, but two basic flaws make it less than perfect.

The greatest problem is the lack of a proper rear suspension, out of the crate. The shock is adjustable for both rebound and compression damping, and it should be possible to dial it in; but you'll never be able to do it if you weigh more than 85 pounds or so.

How many years have we been crying the same tune to those nice people at Honda? *The rear suspension is too soft... give us a firmer spring...* all to no avail. The

XR250 is more of the same thing. In stock form, the bike is very comfortable tooling down a paved road, but in the dirt, it is a handful. The rear end bottoms over anything harder than a fresh mushroom, and the wheel wallows imprecisely as the mushy spring wages its losing battle with the pull of gravity.

Add all this to the short wheelbase, and the rear end constantly wants to swap places with the front. And besides that... well, there's no reason to go on. You get the message. If you buy an XR250 for its wonderful motor, plan on spending a few bucks on a stiffer rear shock spring.

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HONDA XR250R

You'll be sorely disappointed if you don't. Also muddling the handling somewhat is the rather skinny 17-inch rear wheel. A taller-profile tire would boost up the rear and help load the forks, but the best solution would be an 18-inch rim and tire. There is a much better selection of 18-inch rubber out there, and you would have a better chance of finding a meat to suit your local terrain.

The front end, on the other hand, is in a totally different realm. The fork action is very good—the springing is set up properly, and the damping action is nearly flawless. It does a great job of soaking up bumps to the limit of the stroke, and the 38mm tubes and new axle attachment method has eliminated the flexing problems of the past.

Even more exciting is the new front disc brake. The whole assembly is light and compact, well protected from dirt and rocks, and removing the wheel to replace a tire is a snap. On top of all this, the braking action is superb. A light touch on the lever slows you down, and the harder you squeeze it the quicker the response. It is extremely progressive, and we would honestly like to see this brake on every bike made.

The steering action was a little difficult to evaluate—with the back end so soft, the front end did not want to track as well as you would expect from a 26-degree head angle. Even so, if we kept our weight forward on firm ground, the front tire would bite and track in the approximate direction we intended. In sand and tractionless surfaces the XR was a handful. A stiffer rear spring is the only cure.

BITS AND PIECES

The XR comes equipped with a set of six-ply IRC Vulcanduro tires. They don't like sand at all, but in loam or on firm ground, they are more than acceptable. With the six plies, these meats are real flat-fighters in the rocks.

A bright red set of handguards come stock on the XRs this year. Unlike the handguards supplied on the Yamaha IT, these are sculpted for a space-age look and are actually quite rigid. And, if they drive you crazy, you can remove them.

The headlight and front fender are also more than simply plastic stampings. The fender is the most bizarre looking of the two, but they were both made this way to help channel cooling air to the engine.

Four rubber straps hold the headlight in place, making it very easy to remove for bulb service or to get at the forks. The whole unit is extremely lightweight. If night enduros, or simply blinding people, is part of what you call fun, Honda also makes available a quartz headlight as an optional accessory.

Behind the headlight is a nifty odometer that is resettable by tenths and should be a good unit for enduro riding. For all you trail riders/fire roaders out there, Honda



Wheelies were no problem on hard surfaces, but on anything soft the six-ply tires would simply dig a hole.

has also thoughtfully provided a mini speedometer so you don't have to lie about how fast you were going.

In case you're wondering what Honda did to make the XR200 into a 250, wonder no more. The stroke is exactly the same as the 200, while the bore is 8mm larger. The cylinder head is completely different, with larger valves, different port shapes, and revised valve timing.

Both brake and shift levers fold on impact, just as long as you hit them in the right place. If you smack the very end of the lever, you will bend it.

The rear wheel assembly is set up to make flat-fixing a snap, although you will have to put the bike up on a box to take advantage of the quick-change feature. Maybe Honda should offer a center stand as an option?

THE BOTTOM LINE

Honda has finally produced a desirable 250cc four-stroke. The XR250 is relatively light and fast, nimble, and very comfortable in a package that gives a whole new meaning to the phrase "attention to detail."

The only fault on this bike is the wimpy rear suspension. It is curious that Honda would take a bike that is advertised as serious competition to the two-strokes and drop the ball so completely on something as simple as a rear spring/shock.

Still, that's not too great a price to pay for a good four-stroke. Once dialed in, the XR will be ready for any enduro. You won't have Mike Melton or Johnny Martin worried when you show up at the line, but the leaders of the four-stroke class will soon be shaking in their boots. Or maybe just riding an XR250! □