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DIRT BIKE

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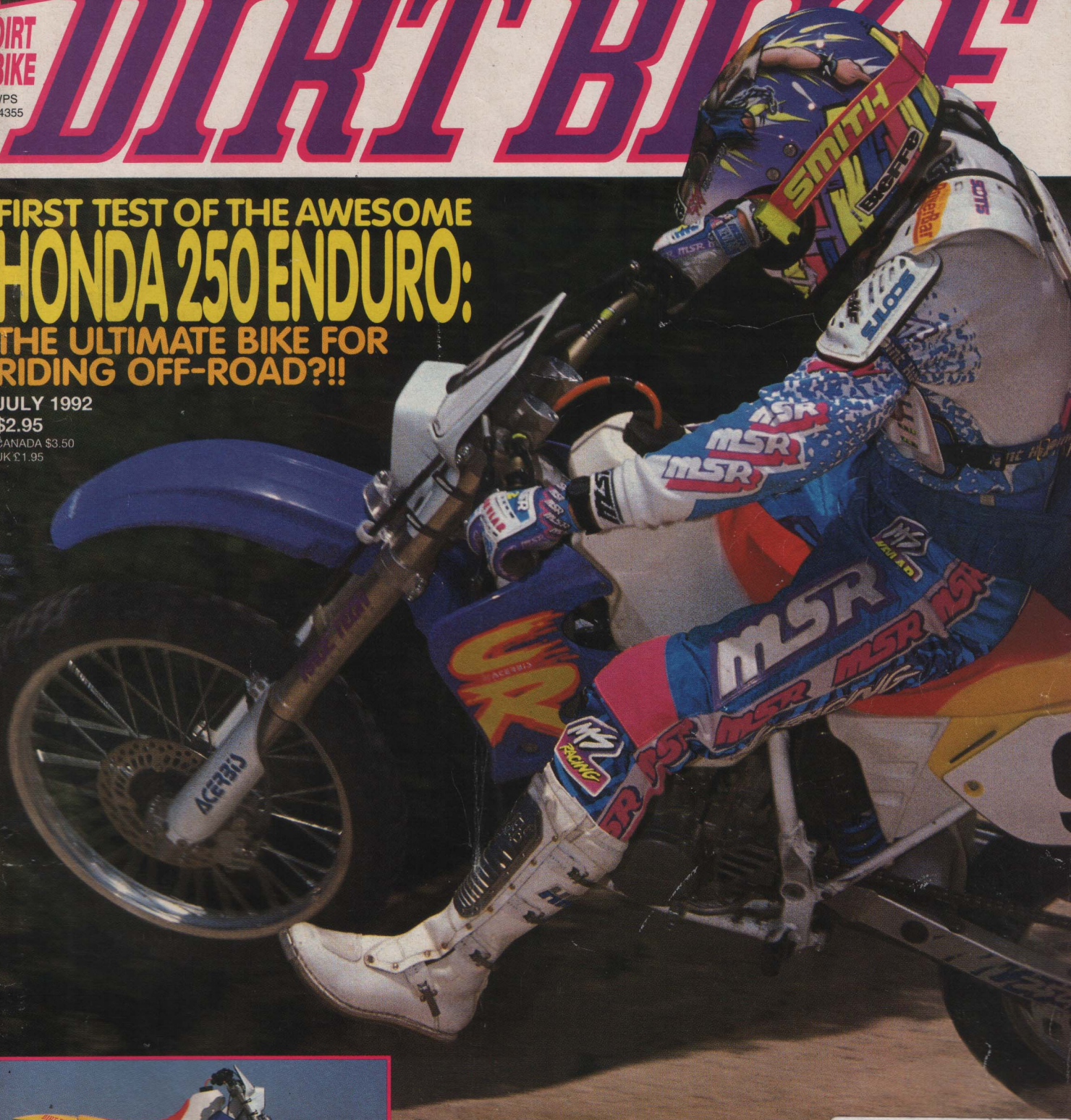
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ON THE COVER: The big picture is the bike that Honda won't build: the wide-ratio CR250. The little picture is the bike that Suzuki will build: the 1993 RM125. Riding by Jimmy Lewis, photos by Ron Lawson and Naoyuki Shibata, design by DeWest, color by D.I.S.C.

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DIRT BIKE Magazine (ISSN 0364-1546; Canada GST #R125009266), July '92, is published monthly by Daisy/Hi-Torque Publishing Company, Inc., with editorial offices at 10600 Sepulveda Blvd., Mission Hills, CA 91345. Subscriptions \$18.98 for 12 issues (one year), Canada and foreign add \$6 additional postage for one year, \$12 for two years. Copyright ©1992 by Daisy/Hi-Torque Publishing Company, Inc. All rights reserved. Nothing in this magazine may be reprinted in whole or in part, by mimeograph or any other means, without the express permission of the publisher. Contributors: Photographic submissions must be 5x7 or 8x10 glossy black and white, or 35mm and larger color slides. Please mark each photo with owner's name and address. Manuscripts should be typewritten. Unsolicited contributions, manuscripts, photographs and illustrations must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Unless special arrangements are made in advance, all published material becomes the sole property of Daisy/Hi-Torque Publishing Company, Inc. The publisher does not assume responsibility for unsolicited material. Second class postage paid at San Fernando, CA 91340, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Dirt Bike* Magazine, P.O. Box 9501, Mission Hills, CA 91395-9501. Printed in USA.

I don't have any problem understanding how the first desert race took place. A bunch of guys probably got together 100 miles east of absolutely nothing and decided to race until they were 200 miles from absolutely nothing. That's how all forms of racing get started.

What I don't understand is how the second desert race took place. You would think that everyone would have gotten about a mile into that first race and then just quit: "Naw, it's too dusty, too fast, too scary. Flawed concept. Good idea, it just didn't work out."

Desert racing is brutal, tiring, hazardous and dirty—at least, when it's done right. I love it. Why I love it, I can't figure out, and I'd rather not even try to explain it to my analyst. Over the years I have just learned how to minimize the pain. There's one hardcore rule that I try to never break: *Always ride an Open bike.* It makes the pain that much easier to take. Open bikes give you a better start, making the dust more bearable. Open bikes make it easier to pass, making your results that much less dismal. Open bikes let you go a zillion miles per hour on dry lakes and roads, giving you a chance to rest. Everything about big Open bikes makes desert racing less miserable.

WHY BREAK THE RULE?

I confess. I'm breaking my own rule. I just had to try to make the Honda CR250 into a desert machine. That's not an easy task, considering that the CR might well be the twitchiest, most unstable motorcycle you can buy. Why bother?

The motor, that's why. The Honda has the most powerful motor available in the 250 class. It makes Open-class power, yet you get to race in the 250 class. You still can horsepower your way in front of all the dust and pass any bike you can see, but the Honda can eat any Open bike made in the tight stuff. There are just a few problems to overcome first.

PROBLEM ONE: GEAR RATIOS

If you show up at a desert race with a stock CR250, you will go like stink until the first straight, 100-mph trail. Then you will hit about 75 mph and watch an endless stream of KX500s fly by. At first I tried taller final-drive gearing. The front sprocket grew from a 13 to a 14 and the rear went from a 49 to a 46. That's a 15 percent taller final gear ratio, which means the bike would now top out at about 86 mph. So the Open bikes still would edge by, but not so radically. The 250 had plenty of beans on top to pull those ratios.

The real problem was at the other end of the transmission. First gear on the CR became so tall that the CR was unmanageable in tight canyons. The bike already had an abrupt hit off the bottom that made it hard to control. Now it became worse. Clutch abuse only got me



Jimmy Lewis thought that the CR was twitchier than his KX250. We think he was jealous.

so far—after two races I needed a new set of plates.

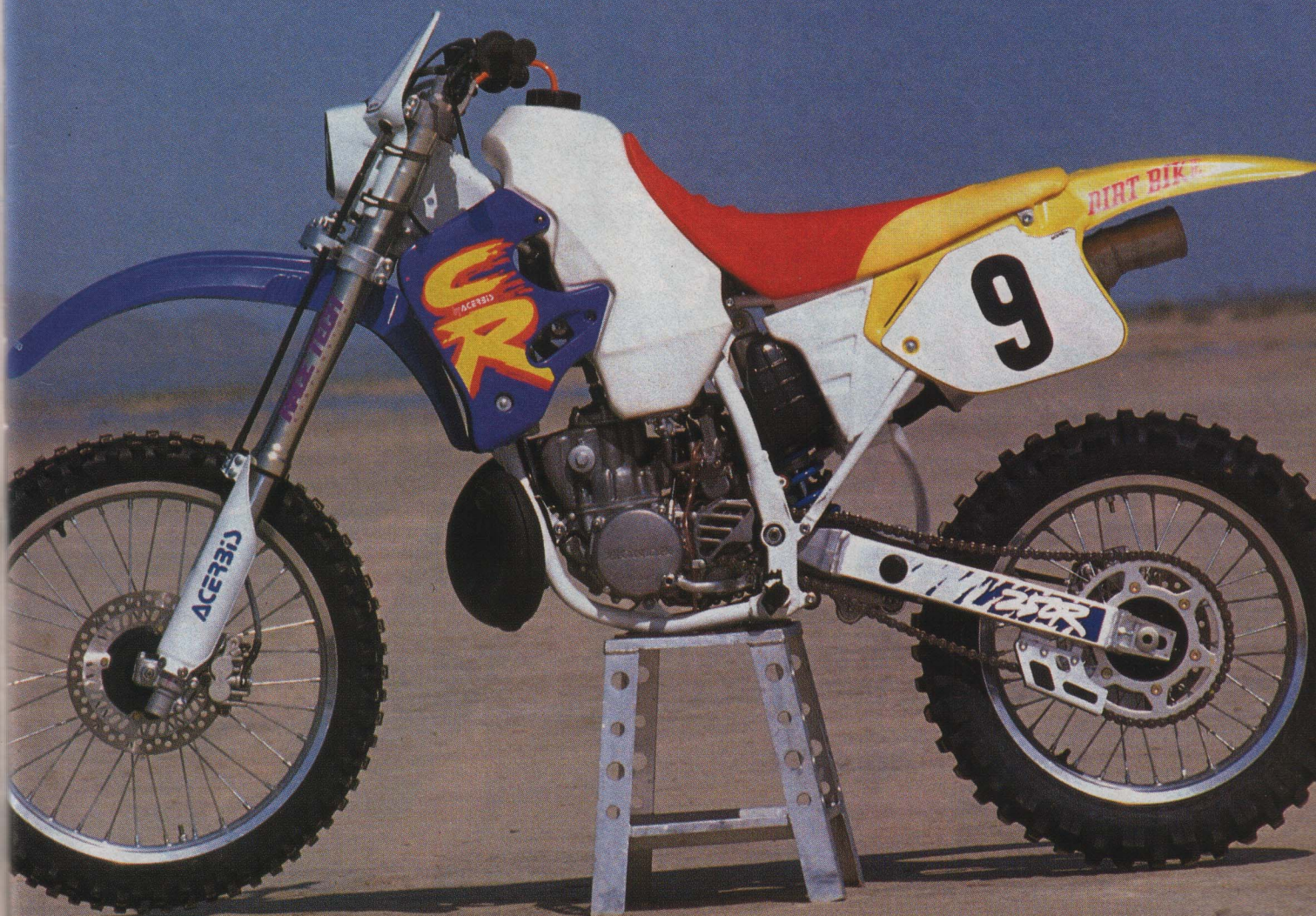
International Motorsports and Moose Racing had the solution. The two companies got together to develop a wide-ratio transmission kit for the CR250 and the CR500. The 250's kit consists of five gears that give the bike new ratios for third, fourth and fifth. Why an odd number of gears? In the case of third gear, the kit only replaces the countershaft's gear, letting it mate with the stock gear on the mainshaft. We could never figure out how you could make one gear larger without making its corresponding gear smaller. I guess that's why we aren't engineers; the transmission bolted together just fine and third was noticeably taller than stock.

The new tranny gives the CR a 17 percent taller overall top-gear ratio without affecting first gear. No more burnt clutches. With a modest drop to a 47-tooth rear sprocket, the CR tops out at 91 mph. The

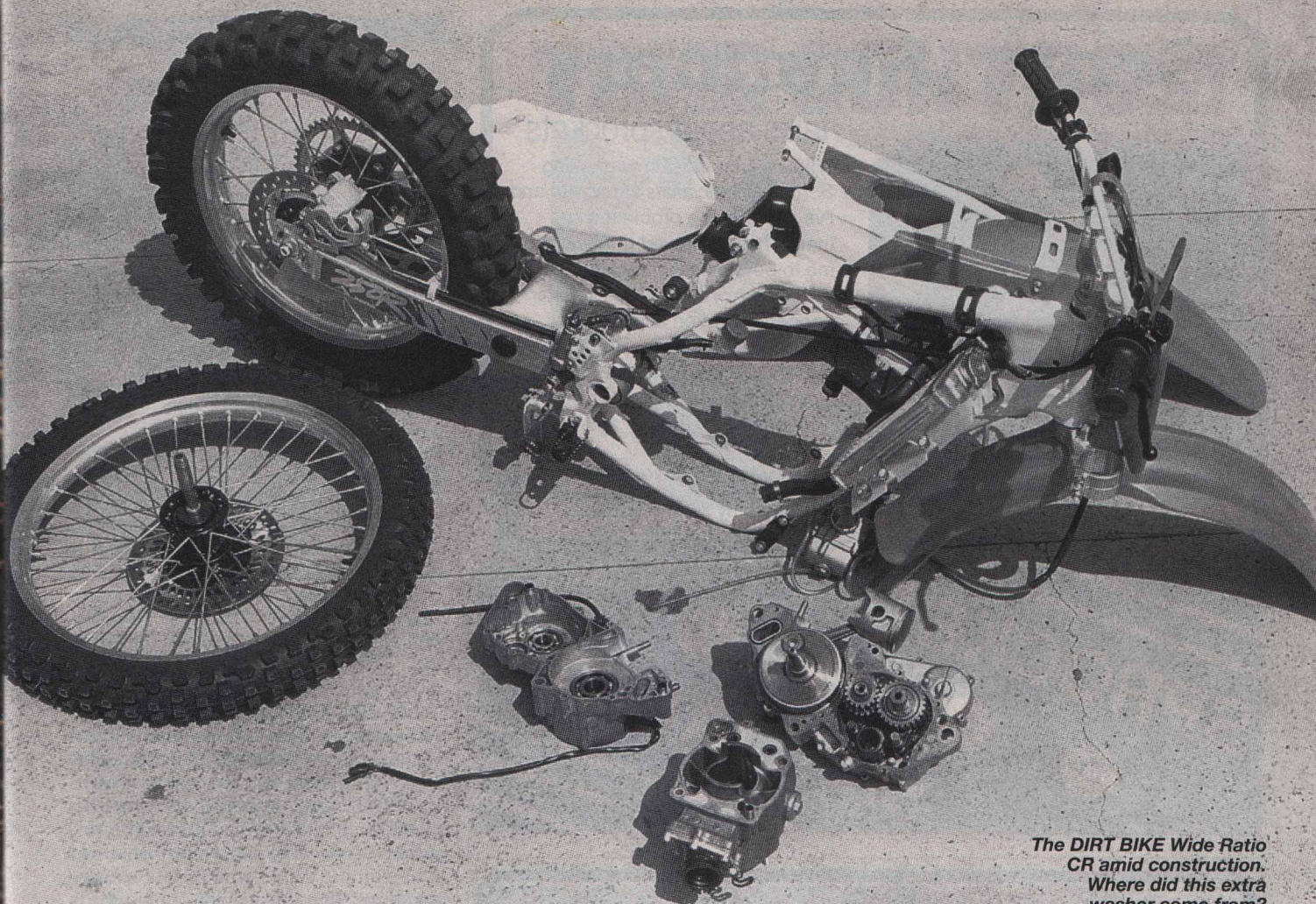
PROJECT SOW'S EAR

Can the CR be made into an off-road bike? Should you try?

By Ron Lawson







The DIRT BIKE Wide Ratio CR amid construction. Where did this extra washer come from?

IMS CR250

Moose's wide-ratio kit consists of five new cogs to replace third, fourth and fifth ratios. ►

only Open bikes that will pass you at that speed are either the really dumb ones or the guys you can't beat anyway.

With the transmission in place, the jumps between the top three gears all are fairly large. Interestingly enough, the jumps became more noticeable when we bolted on a Steahly flywheel addition—the bike seemed to have a harder time getting back on the pipe after a shift. We still considered the flywheel weight a must to smooth out the bike's gnarly hit. The Steahly addition can be removed for races where traction is good. With the new tranny, you just have to remember to rev each gear a little higher before shifting. It's okay—the Honda can take it. Here's what we've invested in the Honda so far:

IMS/Moose WR kit\$449.00

(Moose Racing, [800] 666-7348)

Flywheel kit\$85.00

(Steahly Products, [800] 800-2363)

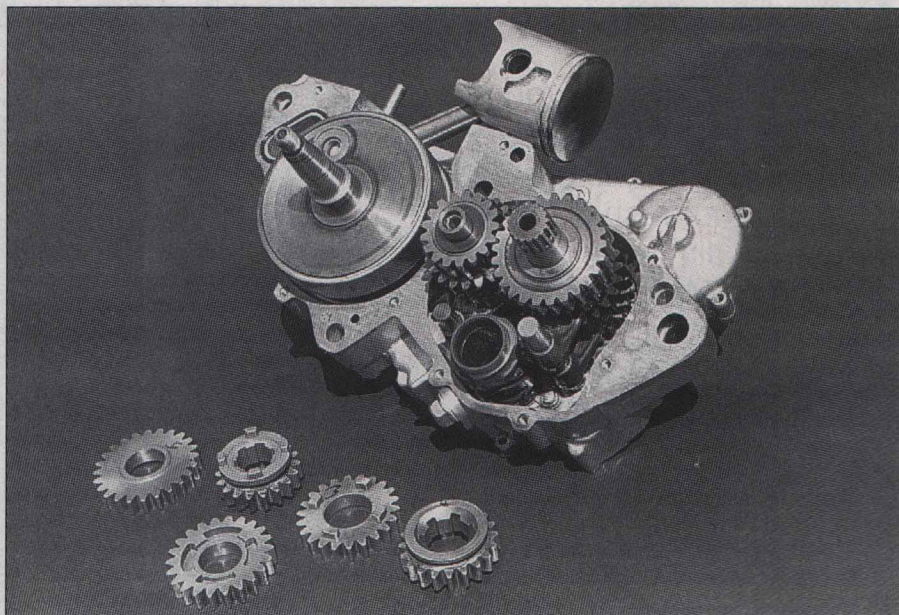
Motoman 47-tooth Works

Sprocket\$49.95

(Motoman Dist. [714] 391-3278)

PROBLEM TWO: SUSPENSION

Now we have a Honda that will go fast enough to scare the daylight out of us.



That makes another problem worse. The stock Honda suspension will give you high blood pressure at motocross speed. At desert speed, it will cause heart palpitations.

At last count, there were one zillion companies that revalve suspension components, so it was just a matter of choos-

ing one that understood Hondas and understood desert racing. We went to Race Tech because we knew that if we didn't like it, they would revalve it until they ran out of valves.

Race Tech did a great job of making the suspension work in the rough stuff. The front end felt soft in the slow-speed

Scott Summers

talks about sprockets

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IMS CR250

sections, although it would bottom when things got fast and rough. A couple of clicks to provide more compression damping (Race Tech delivered the fork with the adjuster on its lightest setting) made things better. The real problem was that the infamous Honda headshake was still there. It was, perhaps, worse after the suspension revalving—when we had the CR set up for motocross, we had Honda's optional stiffer fork springs installed. With the Race Tech setup, we went back to the stock spring, which made the headshake a little more intense. Not a good characteristic for a desert bike. Cost update:

Shock modification.....\$175.00

Fork modification.....150.00

(Race Tech [714] 594-7755)

PROBLEM THREE: HEADSHAKE

We needed a steering damper. At first it seemed logical to use the Scott's unit, because virtually every top rider in the desert is using one. The price, however, scared us away. We already had the most expensive CR250 on record, and we didn't want to add \$400 to the bill.

Instead, we mounted a Prototype Services damper. This is a new product that is similar to the Scott's unit, but not quite as well-finished and much less expensive. The biggest technical difference between the PS damper and the Scott is that it doesn't have a bypass valve that allows it to return to center with greatly reduced damping. The PS provides damping in both directions—away from dead straight and then back to dead straight. Once the handlebar goes more than several degrees away from straight, damping is greatly reduced on both the PS and the Scott's.

The PS unit mounts on the front fender. It's a little obtrusive there, and requires butchering of the front numberplate or the headlight, but it's still much easier to mount than the Scott's. At first, we rode with the adjuster one and a half turns out. The headshake didn't go away. Then we turned the adjuster all the way in—full force. That clearly was too much. The headshake went away, but so did the Honda's ability to turn. Not good.

Finally, it was apparent that one-quarter turn out (counterclockwise from bottom out) was the proper adjustment. The headshake was gone, and the bike's handling in turns was unaffected. That's not a very good working range; within a quarter-turn the bike went from unridable to perfect, but once set, the damper shouldn't have to be adjusted. As far as the missing bypass valve was concerned, we didn't notice any related handling shortcomings.

PS Steering Damper\$280.00

(Fredette Racing Products [815] 469-4011)

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The wide-ratio tranny doesn't hurt the CR's MX ability. We would recommend using stock flywheel weight for MX, then bolting on the Steahly Superfly for off-road.

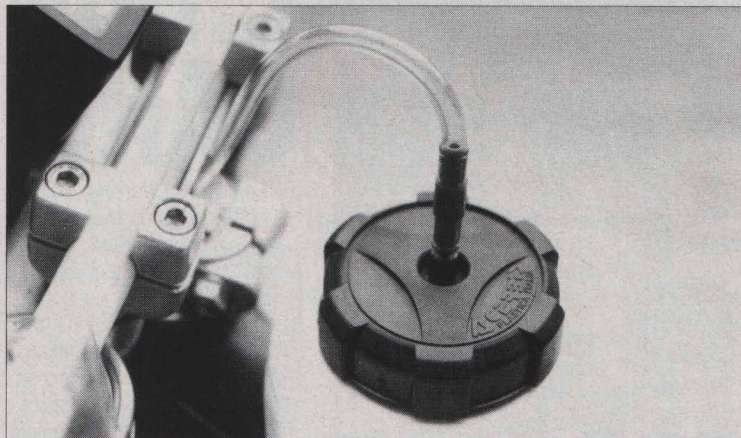
DESERT READINESS

International Motorsports is the only company that makes a big gas tank for the CR so far. It's mandatory. The Honda makes a lot of horsepower and drinks a lot of gas. The tank is a little tall and it wrinkles the seat a little, but what's a mother to do?

We didn't know quite what to do with the chain. The stocker is the worst chain made. Normally we would pitch it as far as possible and replace it with an O-ring chain, but the chainguide is too narrow. We didn't want to replace it, too, so we looked for the strongest non-O-ring chain around. DID's Works ERT has a reputation for being unbreakable, so we bolted one on. Its only problem was that it used a funky pressed-on master link that we just didn't trust. We used a conventional master link.

Of all the accessories we used, probably the worst-fitting was the Answer Pro-Taper handlebar. Since the Honda is one of the few bikes that uses a one-piece handlebar mount and triple clamp, the entire upper clamp has to be replaced in order to mount the larger-diameter bars. Answer makes the upper clamp, but it's not an easy fit. It requires a little filing here and there to make things work. Worse was that we couldn't figure out why the steering head kept coming loose when we were testing. We finally realized that the new upper clamp wouldn't butt up against the steering head lock ring because of a slight taper in the steering stem. The stock upper clamp has a tapered hole to accommodate this; the Answer clamp doesn't. Anyway, a shim between the lock ring and the upper clamp fixed it, and Answer currently is correcting the problem for future production.

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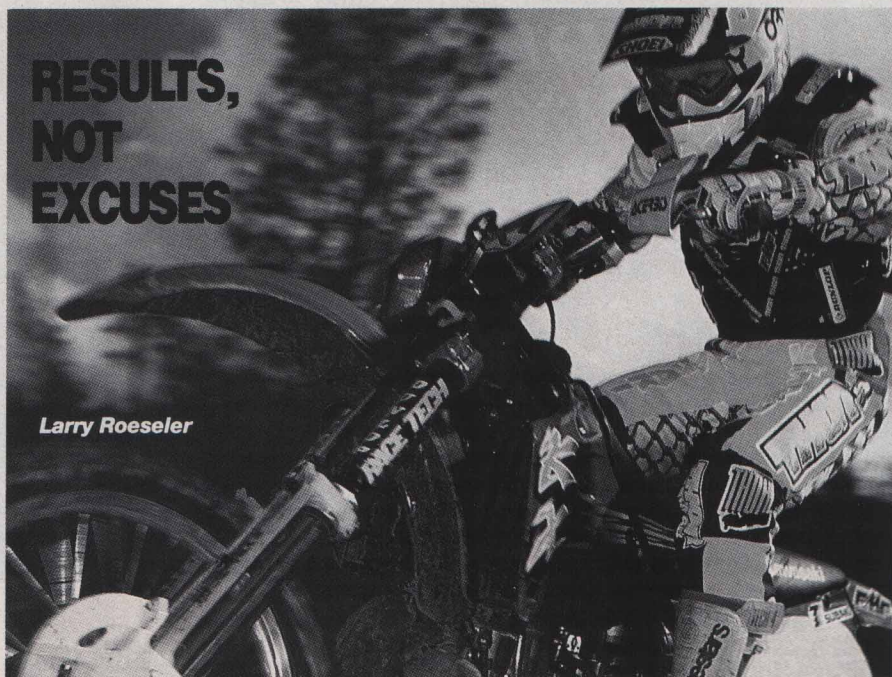
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IMS CR250



The PS steering damper isn't as sophisticated as the Scott's, but is much less expensive and gets the job done. Consider a steering damper mandatory if you are riding the CR in the desert.

Why go through all that trouble and expense? Because we really believe in the Pro Taper bars. They are stronger than anything else and they transmit less shock to the rider than anything else. We can't wait for the day when these kinds of bars are stock on race bikes.

All that was left was replacing all the plastic. If you ride in the desert, then you already know this is an ongoing process. Acerbis makes duplicate plastic for the CR and all of it is much cheaper than stock. Price update:

Answer Pro Taper bars\$99.95

Answer upper clamp29.96

(Answer [805] 257-4411)

DID 520 ERT chain89.98

(Motoman Distributing [714] 391-3278)

Large gas tank174.95

(IMS [800] 237-9906)

Fenders, numberplates, radiator shrouds.....\$35-\$45/pr.

(Acerbis [619] 562-1440)

IT WORKS

The finished WR CR is a desert rocket. It's still a very responsive, fast-handling bike that requires a lot of attention, but compared to the stock CR, it's a virtual monorail of stability.

We could have started off with a more stable machine like the KX and ported until it was as fast as the CR, but history has proven that a stock Honda is the most reliable thing on earth. Plus, there's no one making a wide-ratio KX kit. In the end, we are certain that the WR CR is the ultimate 250 for off-road racing. It might even be the ultimate bike for off-road racing. Period. □

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