



HONDA CR125R

EVOLUTION OF THE ELSINORE

Full circle . . . almost

By the Editors of Dirt Bike

Surely the 125 class is the most vicious technological battleground conceivable. It's impossible for a bike to rest on its laurels for more than the market year. Try to bring out the same old product with a few cosmetic changes for the new year and it gets slaughtered in the marketplace, if not the track.

Every new concept that has a shred of a chance at making a bike better is tried on the 125 class machines first.

Why?

Mostly because small improvements in horsepower or handling mean big results on the track. Give a 125 rider a simple two-horsepower advantage over the other 125s on the track and—all other things being equal—that rider will smoke the traffic. This is not so in the other classes, where most of the riders have more horsepower than they can comfortably use, most of the time. Especially in the open class.

Also, there are more 125 racers sold than any other size bike. The 125 racers invariably move up a class or two as they gain in

years and size, and they tend to stay with the brand they started with. Therefore, if you wear a rider on Brand X, and he's happy, he'll probably stay with Brand X.

No one is more aware of this than Honda. After all, it got an entire nation used to the idea of riding some sort of motorized two-wheeled thing with its cute and harmless (?) little 50s back in the 60's.

Why is it, then, that Honda has such a great deal of difficulty getting its 125 to the top of the motocross heap? Especially when one considers the brilliant first-effort 125 Elsinore in 1973.

Since that first phenomenal small racer, Honda has had a string of failures. One year the bike would be fast but handle like a falling safe. The next year it would handle fine, but would have to slip the clutch to climb over a dead squirrel. Then, it'd have a decent chassis and motor, but have the suspension qualities of a cold burrito. Remember the 23-inch front-wheel model? Or the one that was so slow you wore out more boots than rear tires?

Yup. Quite a checkered history.

WELL, THEN, WHERE IS THIS ALL LEADING?

To 1982, mostly. You see, this Honda CR125, like all those in recent memory, has been once again "radically revised." Unlike the others, though, this is by far Honda's most *together* effort since 1973.

This does not mean the Honda is perfect, or that it'll blow the competition into the weeds; it just means more hard work and thoughtful engineering has been put into this pocket racer than any other in recent memory.

AREAS OF GENUINE IMPROVEMENT

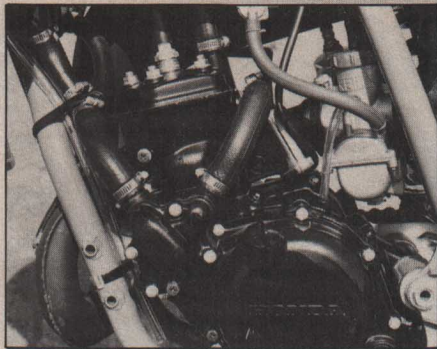
We'd have to rate this as a good, solid engine, with the right kind of 125 power to get the job done. It's not the fastest of the 1982 bikes, but will run about a length behind the YZ125 in a drag race. Considering that the YZ is the missile of 1982, the acceleration qualities of the Honda are excellent.

Almost as important, the new Honda

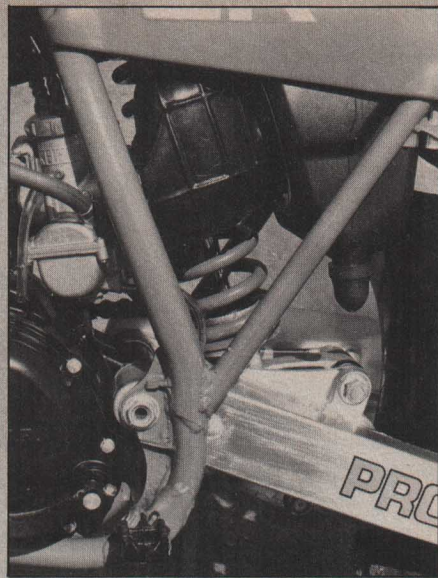
HONDA CR125R



Phil Breckman churns through the wet stuff on the CR125.



Tidy engine is surrounded by neatly routed hoses.



Grim welds mar an otherwise excellent frame. Air boot wraps around hefty-sized Pro-Link shock.

While the forks are better than anything ever offered by Honda, they still aren't as supple as the rest of the front ends of the competition. We still question the choice of having adjustable compression on the forks and the shock, rather than adjustable rebound. Consider: It's fairly easy to

change the oil to alter compression damping, but not having an easy-to-reach external rebound damping adjustment is a hassle. On the Honda, the lightest setting (front and rear) felt a bit much for us. The *Dirt Bike* staffers and test riders tended to like bikes with the compression set up as light as possible to prevent harsh spikes from square-bump impacts.

The layout of the bike feels a bit odd, with the high pegs and funky-shaped bars, but you can get used to it. The bike is tall—perhaps too tall for the average 125 rider. Also, the saddle is a bit on the squarish side near the tank, making it difficult to settle the thighs cleanly at the tank/seat juncture (sort of like a 1981 PE saddle, but not quite as bad).

THROUGH THE GEARS

As is with all of the CR Hondas, the shifting is a bit notchy and the bike simply will not shift without using the clutch. The shifter also feels a bit on the short side.

Ratios seem to be spaced properly, but first gear must be used for charging out of the gate. Second just won't do the job unless everything is done exactly perfectly. Adding a few teeth to the rear sprocket would let the rider make second-gear starts comfortably under many circumstances and would not hurt the useable top speed of the bike. It's geared a bit on the tall side as delivered.

Shifting down is easy...no need to

turns well. The steering head has been pulled back quite a bit this year and you no longer have to look for berms in order to get the Honda to change direction.

Genuine improvements have been made in frame strength and at both ends in the suspension department. Some weight has been shed and a bit of weight has been lowered to improve the center of gravity.

AREAS OF POSSIBLE CONFUSION

The CR125 is a tall bike with a pronounced slouch in the front end, and, as such, is not happy in soft stuff (especially deep sand). Here, the front end has very little self-steering effect and it takes a great deal of rider concentration to keep from darting off in a random direction.

The Honda displayed good manners in the air; Phil Beckstein aviates.



HONDA CR125R

worry about using the clutch here. Just bang it as you blip the throttle.

NICE POWER

Like we said, good, but not overwhelming. There's no pronounced surge anywhere special. Low-end is decent for a 125, the mid-range solid and the peak power respectable—an all-around solid 125 motor. Not as punchy as the YZ125, as previously stated, but useable, peppy and responsive.

This year the CR has fiber reeds instead of the dimpled-pattern steel reeds; a welcome change that surely had a lot to do with superior response at low- and mid-range rpm. If you want to get even more response and a marked increase at the low-end and mid-range, slip in a pair of Boyesen dual-stage reeds. They're still the best dollar-for-dollar improvement available.



G-forces at work! Here, Phil Blinkman bottoms out the test bike.

Last year we had to send the barrel for a flow-bench porting job to make it run competitively. This is not necessary this year, to run with the pack. It still might be needed to run at the head of the pack, though.

BITS AND PIECES

A massive new swingarm (rectangular) is connected to the revised Pro-Link shock. There's a long adjustment slot at the rear, allowing an additional inch of wheelbase, should the rider need it. The rear brake is a floater and the actuation is via a straight-pull cable running neatly under the swingarm. The brake pedal is a finely crafted piece of aluminum.

The radiators have been lowered and hoses have been rerouted to give a more even distribution to both coolers. Last year, one radiator ran hot and the other cool, creating internal pressures and weird fluctuations in engine operating temperatures.

Lots of attention has been paid to trimming the weight off the new bike. Magnesium bits here and there, aluminum nuts and bolts, and even the wheels received a careful reduction in weight.

Excellent rollers and nicely shaped guides keep the chain in the proper neighborhood.

Lots of changes have been made internally. A new clutch promises longer life... it has an additional plate and stronger springs. Porting has been completely re-

thought and a new ignition curve was created to match the fresh holes in the barrel.

Welds on the frame look as sloppy as anything we've seen come out of Japan in the last decade. Unbelievable! It looks as if someone threw up on the welding rod while they were laying the beads.

Weight of the Honda is better this year, but could still use more work in that direction, as the undeniably accurate and well-oiled *Dirt Bike* scales (plus or minus .0001257 neccos per wafer) show, clear as the morning light.

Brakes on the Honda are typically powerful, with the rear being overly sensitive. We stalled the bike quite often when diving into corners.

Starting proved easy, with little more than a half-hearted prod at the shortish kickstarter required to get things buzzing. Waterproofing on the CR is poor. One

trip through some water got things spluttering, and three trips sent us back to the pits for a fresh plug and some contact cleaner.

Servicing the bike is a bit on the complicated side. More so than need be.

THE PART EVERYONE READS FIRST, BUT SHOULDN'T

How does it stack up? It's a huge improvement over the 1981 CR125... no doubt about that. Still, the bike could use a bit more power at peak revs and, while the handling is good on hard-packed ground, it flounders in soft stuff.

Stock, a novice or an intermediate rider could do well on the bike. An expert will want more power and a more sophisticated suspension system. While the CR125 may not be the best 125 racer, it's surely the best Honda 125 in the last eight years. Finally, after years of abuse, the CR125 is once again a good, solid racer worthy of consideration. □



HONDA CR125R

Engine type	Water-cooled, reed-valve, two-stroke, single
Bore and stroke	55.5mm x 50.7mm
Displacement	122cc
Carburetion	34mm Keihin
Factory recommended jetting:	
Main jet	150
Jet needle	28C
Pilot jet	68
Slide number	4.0
Recommended gasoline	Premium, 92 octane
Fuel tank capacity	1.7 gallons
Fuel tank material	Plastic
Lubrication	Oil in gas, premix
Recommended oil	Hondaline injector oil at 20:1
Oil capacity, gearbox	.700cc
Air filtration	Oiled foam
Clutch type	Wet, multi-plate
Transmission	Six-speed
Gearbox ratios:	
1	2.417:1
2	2.000:1
3	1.611:1
4	1.350:1
5	1.136:1
6	1.000:1
Gearing, front/rear	13/51
Ignition	CDI pointless
Primary kick system?	Yes
Recommended spark plug	NGK BR9-EG, Champion, QN-84, ND-W27-ESR-V
Silencer/spark arrester/quality	
Exhaust system	High-pipe, right side
Frame, type	Single downtube, split cradle
Wheelbase	56.1 inches (1425mm)
Ground clearance	14.6 inches (370mm)

Seat height	38.6 inches (980mm)
Steering head angle (rake)	26 degrees
Trail	3.9 inches (98mm)
Weight with one gallon gas	214.5 pounds
Rim material	Aluminum alloy
Tire size and type:	
Front	3.00 x 21 knobby, Bridgestone, M-21
Rear	4.00 x 18 knobby, Bridgestone, M-22
Suspension, type and travel:	
Front	Air/oil 38mm, adjust. compr. damping, 11.6 inches travel
Rear	Pro-Link, rising rate, single-shock, adj. compr. damping, 12.2 inches travel
Intended use	Motocross
Country of origin	Japan
Retail price, approx.	\$1598

Distributor:

American Honda Motor Company, Inc.
100 West Alondra Boulevard
Gardena, California 90247
(213)321-8680

Parts prices, high-wear items:

Piston assembly, complete	\$33.90
Rings only	9.90
Cylinder	133.60
Shift lever	13.20
Brake pedal	17.10
Front sprocket	10.50

Overall rating, 0 to 100, various categories, keeping intended use of machine in mind:

Handling	95
Suspension	95—rear/92—front
Power	94
Cost	90
Attention to detail	97
Effectiveness, stone stock	95