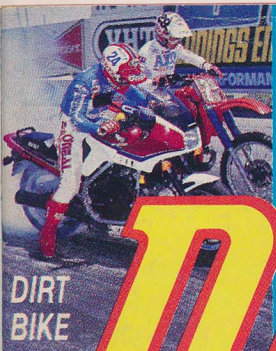


**DIRT BIKES vs. STREET BIKES SHOOTOUT:
WHICH IS FASTER? WE BURN RUBBER TO FIND OUT!**



DIRT BIKE

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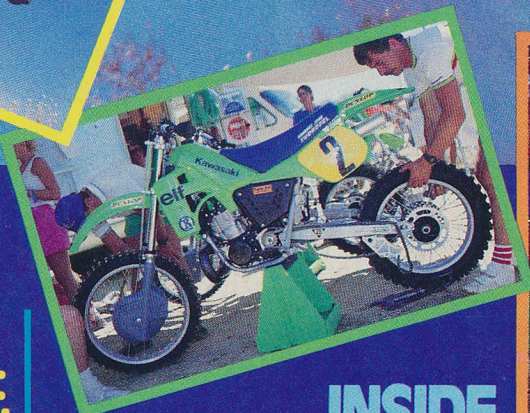
OCTOBER 1985

**XR FEVER:
CLIFF JUMPING
WITH HONDA'S
WILD
350!!**

**XR THUNDER:
EARTH-
RIPPING
600CC
HOP-
UP!**



'86 YZ125



**INSIDE
THE FACTORY
WORKS BIKES!**



250
USGP

**TOTALLY NEW YZ125:
TRICK & QUICK FOR '86!**

**POLARIS 250
TRAIL BOSS:
A SNOWMOBILE
FOR THE DIRT?**

**CR-YZ-KX-RM
80cc HOP-UP!**

**KAWASAKI'S HOT
NEW WATER-COOLED
250 4-STROKE!**

**HANNAH GOES CRAZY
AT UNADILLA USGP:
MOST EXCITING RACE
OF THE YEAR...~~DECADE~~!!**



DIRT BIKE

OCTOBER 1985 • VOLUME 15, NO. 10



FACTORY EXOTICS



CARLSBAD 500 USGP



HONDA XR350R



1986 YZ80 & YZ125



CR500 VS. VF500

ON THE COVER:—Jim Holley and Steve Schmitz ignite 1000cc of Honda horsepower for Fran Kuhn's camera and our first annual street versus dirt shootout. Guess who won. Our dynamic duo then jumped aboard a pair of Honda XR's (350 and 600) for a session of aerial lunacy. Photos by Tom Webb and Fran Kuhn. The first look at Yamaha's potent '86 YZ125 was scooped by Eddie Arnet. Georges Jobe's killer KX500 works weapon by DeWest, and Johnny O'Mara in action at Unadilla by Fran Kuhn. Color seps by Valley Film and cover DeSign by DeWest.

INTERIOR COLOR PHOTOGRAPHY:—Pages 22, 24, 25, 26, 37, 41, 51, 56, Fran Kuhn.

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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.

**EVERYTHING YOU'VE ALWAYS
WANTED IN A THUMPER—
AND LESS!**

HONDA XR 350R

*The other Open class XR
gets the test*

By the weight-watching DIRT BIKE test crew

“Your assets are your liabilities.” Whoever conjured up that statement must have known a few things about dirt bikes, because nowhere is it more valid than in the realm of off-road motorcycling.

Honda understands these things: While a lot of riders like the power of their bigger XR600 Open classer, many aren't ready to pay the premium of added weight that comes with it. The XR600 is a large, fast, open-terrain vehicle that's most comfortable in the expanse of the desert or up on the winding fire roads. In this element the 600 will blast around with the best of them, but unless you're as big as the Wolfman, you'll probably be more comfortable on something smaller when hitting the tight stuff. For this group of riders, Honda offers the XR350: Open class power, but in a smaller, lighter, more manageable package.

WHY LESS IS MORE

Join us, if you will, mid-test, bounding about the rock-infested trails and fire roads of the Angeles National Forest.

The XR's ride started at the foot of the mountains, in a dry, dusty basin, along trails crowded with small trees and over ground littered with loose rocks. The going is slow here: The rocks keep us busy trying to avoid front-end washouts while dodging the largest of the low-slung fir branches.

In the slow-moving situation, the Honda exhibits surprising agility: It turns quickly and accurately. Throttle response is clean



The Honda does extremely well in tight terrain, where its short wheelbase and quick manners let the rider flick the machine around like a lightweight enduro racer.



The XR350 is probably one of the best “go out and have fun” machines you can buy. Plenty of controllable power and a superior suspension package make the cruiser-weight thumper a real pleasure to ride.

from just above idle, a marked improvement over last year's dual-carb-equipped unit.

Though we abused the clutch, it performed without complaint, and such abuse became unnecessary as the trail rose from the dusty basin onto the open fire roads above. The Honda climbed quickly and rapidly to the first of many plateaus. The power is good; though not as awesome as the larger 600, it still packs a considerable Open class punch. The rocks are larger now, and the biggest ones are firmly anchored in the sun-baked ground. Wind and water have eroded much of the dirt surrounding the rocks, leaving a slippery surface of small shale-like remnants. It's impossible to cover this kind of terrain without occasionally smacking one of the boulders, and when it happens, there's an unexpected surprise: the 350 just rolls over the obstacles with little more than a subdued jolt at the bars, and even less reaction from the rear. Initial impressions started coming—the XR is as plush as an El Dorado on balloon tires. A few more encounters and fear of flying vanishes completely, ground speeds increase considerably, and confidence levels go higher than the surrounding mountains.



XR350R

WHAT'S NEW FOR '85

Actually, there have been a lot of changes since last year's production run. The motor's received a lot of attention, starting with the carburetion system.

As previously mentioned, Honda scrapped 1984's dual-carb setup in favor of a single 35mm Keihin mixer. Throttle response is greatly improved—only a slight amount of stumbling is evident when the throttle is cracked at idle.

Displacement and horsepower are both up in '85. The engine went from 339cc to 353cc by virtue of a longer stroke, and it picked up two additional ponies in the process.

One of last year's major complaints was the 350's tendency to overheat under heavy loads and tough riding conditions. Honda went to work and rectified the problem with a new dry sump lubrication system. The oil is pumped from the engine and gearbox to the top of a frame tube reservoir, where it runs down the backbone on its return to the motor. Although overall oil capacity hasn't been increased, all this additional traveling allows it to cool more effectively, keeping the engine's temperature within acceptable limits. It never gave a hint of overheating during our testing.

A new tubular metal case guard replaces last year's aluminum skid plate. Access to the oil drain plug no longer demands the rock guard's removal—something that was a required nuisance in '84. There's an easy-to-replace paper oil filter, and the air filter benefits from the new quick-access airbox design. Even the slowest backyard mechanics can remove and replace the unit in less than a minute, while the best can get the job done in half that time.

ANYTHING ELSE?

The tranny is a six-speed unit. It features good ratios for everything from trials-type plonking to high-speed desert work. The 350 will pull over 70 mph with the stock gearing, though we rarely had a chance to go that fast on it. At high speeds the short wheelbase and relatively steep trail that were such a help on the tight trails started becoming a liability. The bike hopped a bit, not enough to cause great alarm, but rather a bit of caution on the rider's part.

Suspension is excellent for all but the fastest riders. The rear bump-absorbing chores are handled by a multi-adjustable, single-shock Showa Pro-Link. We pushed the unit hard, and it didn't exhibit much in the way of fade. It's easily dialed in to suit a wide range of rider weights and abilities.

The front forks work more smoothly than the nearly identical units that graced the '84 XR, and the overall frame geometry worked with the suspension, allowing the Honda to turn like a weasel in a drainpipe.

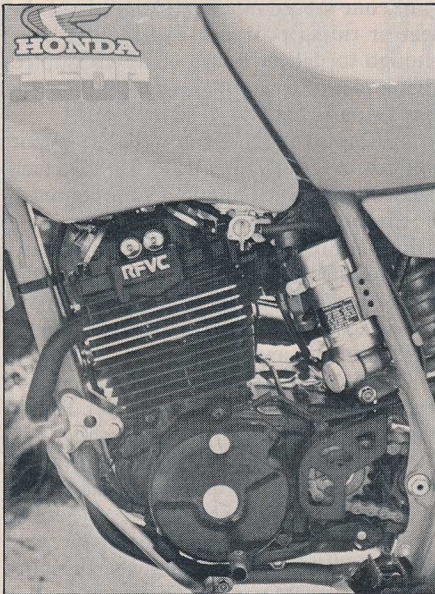
The XR is an easy and natural fire road slider, where it works as well, albeit slightly slower, than its bigger 600 stablemate.



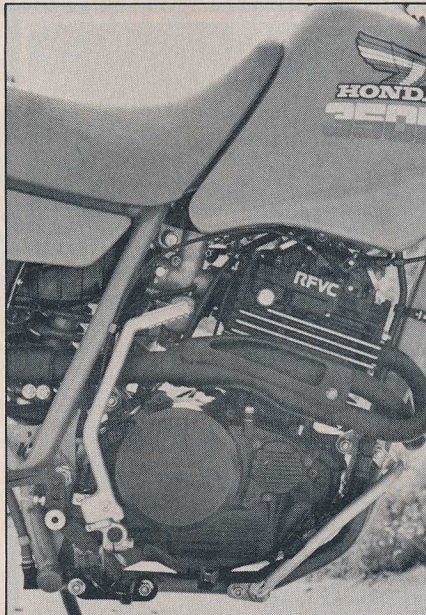
Test rider Steve Schmitz had a ball flyin' the Honda around. He pulled off this maneuver when we asked him for a photo of the XR's skid bars.



Nose landing the 350 didn't bother us at all. The Showa forks should be registered at Tiffany's: They worked superbly and forgave us our worst mistakes.



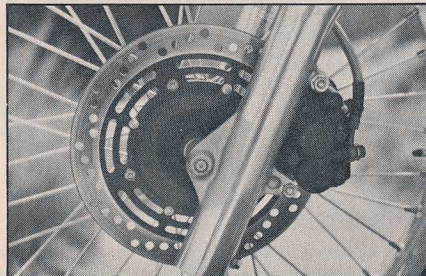
The Honda is immaculately detailed in every respect. The RFVC engine churns out plenty of easy-to-use power and is practically bulletproof.



This year's 350 went to a single-carburetor system. It started easier and performed better than the older, dual-carbed 350s.



The big thumper comes stock with nifty, knuckle-saving brush guards.

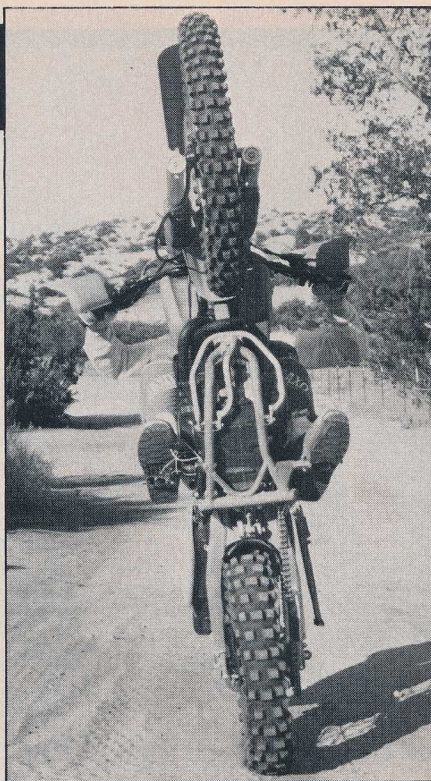


The front disc brake is excellent, with easy progression and plenty of stopping power.

XR350R



While this is no full-blown MX machine, getting radical on the XR350 is possible and fun, once the suspension is properly dialed in.



We weren't thrilled with the stock IRC tires. They don't work well in dry dirt, sand, or desert surfaces. The stock meats are better suited for wet, verdant conditions.



Honda's odometer/clock combo is sophisticated piece of enduro equipment that's easy to set and adjust, and can even be calibrated to mileage markers used in enduros.

MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS, IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER

Stock tire performance was grim in the hardest and dustiest of trail conditions, though they should prove more than adequate for the soft, moist stuff found outside Southern California. The rear tire showed signs of wear after only a few miles of travel over the jagged rock sections.

No one voiced any complaint about the seat or riding position. The tank is large enough to deliver hours of uninterrupted riding pleasure, and its newer, slimmer design imparts an overall slender feel.

Starting proved difficult when the engine was hot, especially after a fall. Honda's tech department suggested fanning the compression release for the first few kicks when attempting a restart. XR expert Al Baker advised us to hold the throttle wide open at the same time, give the beast about five or six boots, close the throttle and compression release, and fire away.

The '85's swingarm is aluminum, replacing the steel unit on the last model. Riders who want a lighter spring for the shock can fit the 350 with the standard XR600 items. New footpegs are stronger than last year's. Shifting is notchy; it takes a deliberate effort to move the bike from one gear to the next. The stickiness is most obvious when upshifting, and the XR lever won't budge under full power.

Seat height is 20mm shorter this season, and the handlebars feature a new design that allows them to be cut down and still leaves room for controls.

AND THE VERDICT IS IN

Honda has a winner here. We can say it without reservation—this is one of the best machines we've ever ridden when it comes to motoring through the great outdoors. It's reasonably light, very maneuverable, and has the kind of power that shines when the terrain opens up. Or closes down.

And—more often than not—its assets are without the liabilities we've come to expect from Open class thumpers. Proving once again that less can really be more. □



HONDA XR350

Engine type	Single-cylinder SOHC, RFVC 4-stroke	Silencer/spark arrester	Yes/yes
Bore and stroke	84mm×63.8mm	Wheelbase	1430mm (56.3 in.)
Displacement	353cc	Ground clearance	320mm (12.6 in.)
Carburetion	34mm Keihin	Seat height	920mm (32.3 in.)
Factory jetting:		Rake/trail	26.5°/116mm
Main jet	148	Wet weight, no fuel	265 lbs.
Needle jet	N/A	Tire size and type:	
Jet needle	65D	Front	3.00×21 IRC
Pilot jet	150	Rear	5.10×17 IRC
Slide number	96B	Suspension, type and travel:	
Fuel tank capacity	2.5 gals.	Front	41mm Showa leading-axle telescopic, air/oil, 11.0 in. travel
Lubrication	Dry sump, 2-qt. capacity	Rear	Pro-Link with Showa, gas/oil, adj. reb., comp. and preload, 11.0 in. travel
Gearbox ratios:		Intended use	Enduro/off-road
1	2.714:1	Country of origin	Japan
2	2.000:1	Retail price, approx.	\$2198
3	1.556:1	Distributor/Manufacturer:	
4	1.273:1	American Honda Motor Corp.	
5	1.080:1	100 W. Alondra Blvd.	
6	0.926:1	Gardena, CA 90247	
Gearing, front/rear	14/42		
Ignition	CDI		
Recommended spark plug	NGK DPR8EA-9 or ND X24EPR-U9		