

# SUZUKI RM125X: MAGIC SHOCK

# DIRT BIKE

JULY 1981  
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**YAMAHA YZ250H:**  
IS THERE LIFE AFTER MONO?

**EASTERN KNUCKLE  
BUSTER ENDURO:**  
FORKED RIVER  
NATIONAL



**THREE  
WHEEL  
THUNDER:  
HONDA  
ATC250R**



**HONDA  
CR80:  
MAXI  
MINI**







SUZUKI RM125X



HONDA ATC 250R



SUZUKI PE175



FORKED RIVER NATIONAL ENDURO

On the cover: Steve Schmitz explodes the YZ250H out of a sandy berm at Indian Dunes; and Dirk Vandenberg does the same thing at Dumont Dunes, on the ATC 250R. Both photos by Paul Clipper, who's still shaking the sand out of his shoes.

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## STRETCHING THE LIMIT

# HONDA ATC250R

## The maximum ATC

**I**n the past, we've tested nearly every three-wheeler made, and it wasn't a difficult job to categorize them. To us, they were fun things to play with, but not to be taken seriously. Running up and down sand dunes, riding on the beach, doing wheelies and playing in the water was fine, but there's not much else we would choose to do with them.

True, other folks are racing them, but not without spending big bucks making them produce more horsepower. Even the Honda ATC185S, which was their four-stroke racer last year, needed more slimming down and hopping up before it was truly fast. Any way we looked at it, all the three-wheelers started life out as a mild-mannered plaything, and most would end it in the same condition. That's what they were made for, and that's the way it was. Pure and simple.

Or is it now? Late last year, when the manufacturers were introducing their new models, we found out about the ATC250R. It would be a two-stroke, but not a little sissy two-stroke popper. It had an engine based on the CR250 shorttrack motor, and was said to be truly frightening when riding it for the first time.

Frightening, eh? Now this was starting to look interesting. If it's that fast, you can be sure it's not aimed at the family putt-putt market.

When we got over the initial shock of the first reports and had most of our questions answered, they hit us be-

tween the eyes with the second barrel: The ATC250 would also have a full suspension. Front and rear. It would also have a conventional five-speed transmission and a manual clutch. Would you believe a hydraulic disc brake on the front? Yep, it's got one of those, too.

While our minds are still reeling from all this weirdness, we saw a few scenes of the ATC in the 1981 Honda dealer intro movie. In one of the scenes, there was a dude riding the ATC250 through very enduro-y looking woods, chasing a guy on an old Husky. When the two of them came to a swamp, the poor fool on the Husky crashed, and the wildman on the ATC *used him for traction!*

This couldn't be true. It had all the look of a bad dream: showing up at the starting line of an enduro and finding yourself completely crowded by snickering lunatics on fire-breathing ATCs; you *know* if you're unlucky enough to crash, one of these monsters would make hamburger out of your poor, broken flesh. The thought alone is enough to give you the creeps.

Well, as it turned out, reality was nothing like our first impression. They are not taking over the world as we know it. But the effect of this first meeting did get our interest stirred up enough to want to test one. No, not in an enduro! We may be crazy, but we're not nuts. We took it straight out to the desert, to the biggest sand dunes we could find. The perfect place to test an ATC.

The first thing we found out was that the ATC250 is *fast*. The CR-type engine puts out plenty of power. And with the manual-clutch transmission, there is no lag in the system when you put your thumb into it. We would suggest that any new owner should spend a few minutes getting used to the throttle response by putting around in the lower gears; a full-throttle blast in first gear is a real thrill, but the following wide-open shift into second can put you right on your back, if you're not ready. That's right, even with a 47-inch wheelbase and 300-pound dry weight, the ATC250 will flip right over if it gets traction at the wrong time.

### Frightening? Yes. Fun? You bet!

Once we got used to the power, we started blasting around checking things out. Shifting and clutch action is just as smooth as anything Honda's ever built. The gears seem evenly spaced for the kind of use the ATC will get. First gear is pretty much a stump-puller, and was plenty low for the steepest hills we would climb—before we would run out of grunt, we'd bury both back wheels. Fifth gear feels like it should propel the ATC along at about 65 mph, if you have the nerve or need to ride it that fast.

At those speeds, you need brakes, and thankfully, the 250's are up to the job. The back brake is nothing special; an internal expanding drum-type, just like a motorcycle. But it will lock up the rear wheel whenever it's necessary. The real stopper is in the front, where Honda's installed a zoot little front



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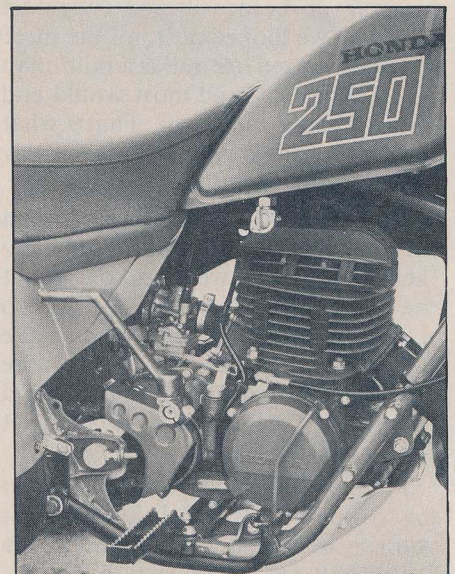


disc assembly. The action is smooth and progressive, and it's a big help in hauling the 250 down to a stop. After riding all the earlier four-strokes without front brakes, this system is a definite plus.

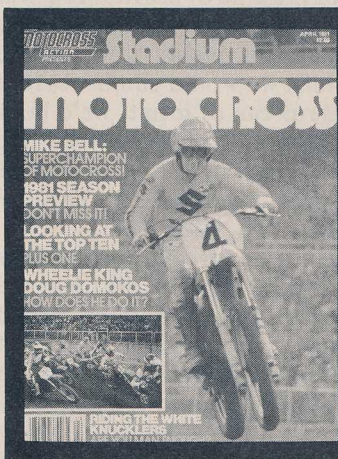
Speaking of pluses, add suspension to the list. We've often wondered what an ATC would feel like with a good set of suspenders, and the answer is—great! At 6.7 in the front, and 4.3 in the rear, wheel travel isn't up to what we've come to expect on the latest dirt bikes, but there's plenty available to soak up most of the bone rattling bumps that would give the smaller ATCs fits. Over normal terrain, the ride is smooth and controllable; over rough ground, it's better than nothing, but it will still be necessary to slow down for the really gnarly stuff.

The forks are CR80-type units and are air adjustable. They are set in the widest pair of triple clamps we've seen yet. The whole front end seems strong and tight. The rear end consists of a single, large shock mounted to the frame under the seat, and the inside of a swingarm at the rear axle. The shock seems to be a quality unit, looking much like a Pro-Link shock, complete with a remote reservoir mounted to the upper frame rail.

Being that the ATC250's suspension system is the industry's first, we have nothing at all to compare it to, but it is easily the best thing to ever happen to this type of vehicle. The improvement



*Kickstarter is booted forward to get things rolling, usually one or two kicks do it. Swingarm pivot moves for chain adjustment.*



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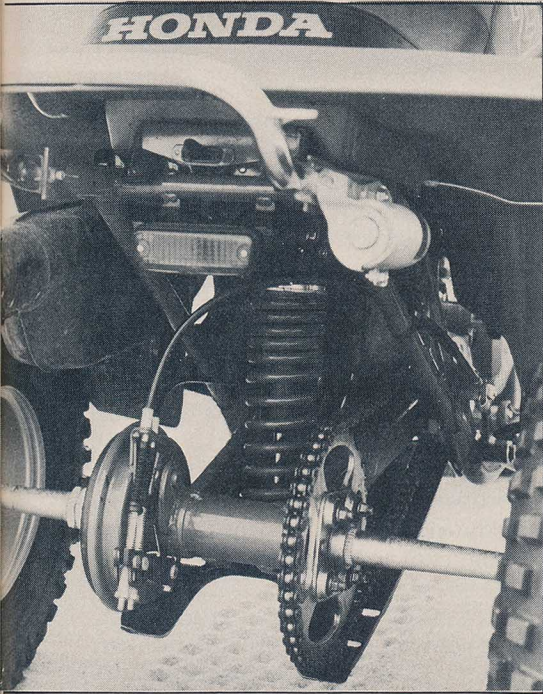
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DB7-1

Dave R.



# HONDA ATC250R



The ATC250's rear suspension features a single, gas-charged shock absorber with remote reservoir. Rear brake is a simple drum unit; one cable is for the parking brake.



Front forks deliver 6.7 inches of wheel travel. Hydraulic disc brake is a sure stopper—with this kind of power, you need it.

in tracking ability and handling is fantastic, and well worth the added complexity and expense.

### Bits and pieces

The chain supplied with the ATC250 is a type of a sealed O-ring and should last a long time. Chain adjustment is at the swingarm pivot; about a two-minute job.

If you're into night riding, the headlight is a 12-volt, 60-watt unit that is brighter than most motorcycle lights, and a real eye-opener in the dark.

The ATC's engine is a full 250, yet it only has a 27mm carburetor—and you know what that means. By the time this story hits the newsstands, there'll be any number of big carb kits available. Also, the reed cage should be the same size as a CR250, so there will be Boyesen reeds that'll fit. The big ATC might not need it, but more power is available for anyone that wants it.

Seating position and layout of controls are very comfortable; footpegs are cleated motorcycle-type; feet don't slip off when they're wet.

Muffler is a combination silencer-

spark arrestor, and is surprisingly quiet. Of course, by now someone is selling an aluminum silencer for the ATC, so you can make it as loud as you want...

### The bottom line

If three-wheeling is your thing, the answer is pure and simple: The ATC-250R is the fastest, plushiest, and best handling rig you can buy. It's not a farm implement or a toy; it's not cheap, either. But, if you won't sleep until you own one, better take a number and get in line, because Honda is going to sell every one they can build.

*For the final word in three-wheeled fun, keep an eye out for the next issue of Dirt Wheels, coming to a newsstand near you, on or around June 30. Inside you'll find a test on the Honda ATC250R, the latest in performance modifications, a sneak peak at the new Suzuki three-wheeler, racing tips and much more. Dirt Wheels—Excellence in journalism in the tradition of Dirt Bike Magazine! □*



## HONDA ATC250R

Engine type ..... Reed-valve, two-stroke  
 Bore and stroke ..... 70mm x 64.4mm  
 Displacement ..... 248cc  
 Horsepower (claimed) ..... N/A  
 Carburetion ..... 27mm Keihin  
 Ignition ..... CDI  
 Transmission ..... Five-speed  
 Fuel tank capacity ..... 8.4 liters (2.2 gallons)  
 Wheelbase ..... 1197mm (47.1 inches)  
 Ground clearance ..... 115mm (4.5 inches)

Seat height ..... 710mm (28 inches)  
 Weight (claimed) ..... 302.1 pounds  
 Suspension:  
 Front ..... Showa forks, air-assisted, 6.7 inches  
 Rear ..... Single, gas shock, 4.3 inches  
 Tires:  
 Front ..... 22x11—8 Dunlop ATV  
 Rear ..... 22x11—8 Dunlop ATV  
 Intended use ..... Off-road  
 Approx. retail price ..... \$1748