

HONDA'S OUTRAGEOUS XR250: WILL IT MAKE THE 2-STROKE OBSOLETE?!

DIRT BIKE

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JUNE 1986

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BIG-WHEEL SHOWDOWN: HONDA'S FAT CAT vs. YAMAHA'S BW!

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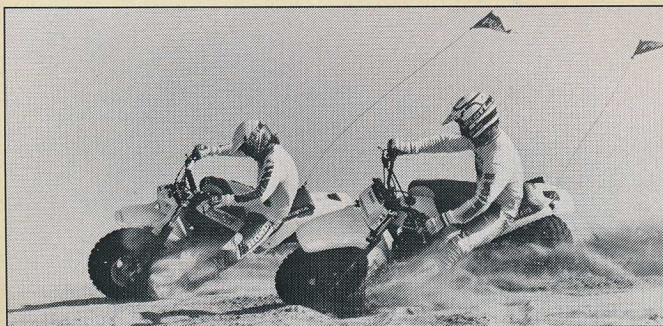
DAYTONA



HONDA XR250



WHEELIES



FAT CAT vs. BW200



KDX HOP-UP



SUZUKI RM125

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ON THE COVER:—are a bunch of tiny colored dots that started out as a piece of film in a camera. We took the piece of film, Honda's 1986 XR250, and test rider Steve Schmitz to a place with lots of green grass and trees. Mike and Tom found the place along with the KX500 and BW200/Fat Cat action, and Fran snapped the photo. What a life. Anyway, the piece of film went through the washer at Webb's and came out looking remarkably good, so the Boss put it on the cover. DeWest graciously DeSigned the whole thing, and there you have it—yet another issue of *Dirt Bike!*

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.



YAMAHA BW200ES vs. HONDA TR200 FAT CAT

Face to face

By the Staff of DIRT BIKE

This probably seems a little strange, doing a shootout between prehistoric-looking motorcycles that appear to be half dirt bike and half ATV. But consider this: The introduction of the BW200 in 1985 proved to be a giant success story for Yamaha. In fact, sales were so good that Yamaha added two new models to the BW (Big Wheel) lineup, and Honda decided to follow the leader in BW sales and introduce their own version, the Fat Cat.

The sales numbers behind the BW Yamaha prove there is a need for an entry-level motorcycle in the dirt bike market. Over the last few years, ATVs (three- and four-wheelers) have taken the place of beginner machines for the dirt crowd. Why? Simply put, no one sold an entry-level motorcycle designed for bigger kids and adults.

With that in mind, you can see why Honda quickly jumped into the big-wheel marketplace. Most of us are brand loyal, meaning we stick with one brand of car or motorcycle through the years. If Yamaha's BW200 was pulling in first-time buyers, and these riders became brand loyal, Honda would be the loser in the long run. So, enter the Fat Cat.

We could have tested each machine separately, but in the end you'd still want to know which machine is best for your needs. This is interesting since the two contestants look similar but are actually aimed at different people in the marketplace. Which bike is better for you? Only a shootout will tell. . . .

YAMAHA BW200ES

The BW200ES Yamaha is pretty much the same machine as the standard-issue 1985 BW200, except that it has an electric starter. A low-slung chassis is wrapped around a single-cylinder, SOHC, 196cc four-stroke engine. The electric starter is housed inside the left case, the crank modified to accept the unit, and the airbox revamped to make way for the battery. Yamaha uses counterbalancers in the engine to keep vibration down to a mere buzz, and transmission is a five-speed with a manual clutch. The use of a manual clutch may seem odd on an entry-level machine, but Yamaha feels that once the riders become accustomed to using it, it enhances the entire spectrum of fun for the BW pilot.

Up front, telescopic forks offer 6.3 inches of travel, and the rear end is set up with a double shock arrangement that has 6.3 inches of travel, too. With the extra-wide rear tire, Yamaha chose to run a jackshaft sprocket arrangement so that the chain would clear the rear rubber. The BW tilts the scales at 258 pounds, has a low 31.3-inch seat height, and the handlebars and controls are exactly the same as its motorcycle relatives. Clutch, throttle and front brake are on the bars; shifter and rear brake are mounted down below. Up front, the tire is fairly narrow and features a stiff sidewall. The rear rubber is more balloonish.

Starting the BW requires no more exercise than poking a button, and after ignition, the light exhaust note is inoffensive. Amazingly enough, it feels rather potent, and a stump-puller tranny will let the pilot conquer some serious terrain. The power is super-smooth and at no time does it shock the rider with a moon-ripping surge of adrenaline. With a manual clutch the entry-level folks will require some training to adapt to the hand lever. Plan on a few stalled engines, but once you're initiated, you can fan the clutch and lighten the front end to clear a rut or bounce over a log.

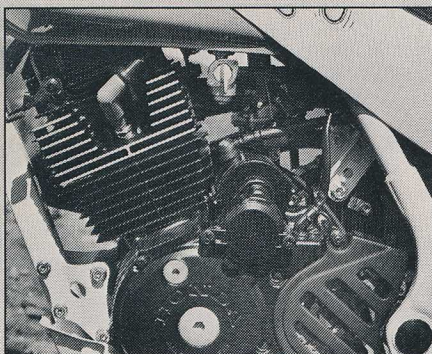
The narrow ATV-type front tire lends itself to easy turning, and the BW will hold a line with very little rider input. The wider tires cause the bike's weight to be spread out better than a standard dirt bike. The BW rides on top of surfaces rather than cutting a rut through the dirt. This translates into a stable feel at slower speeds. While both suspension ends are soft, they will soak up a decent hit before bottoming, and offer a plush ride over most terrain.

HONDA TR200 FAT CAT

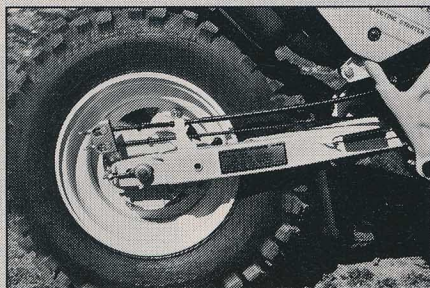
Motivation for the Fat Cat is provided via a five-speed transmission with automatic clutch, housed in a 199cc four-stroke engine



Both bikes jumped about the same. They're almost neutral in the air, and it's only on the landings that you find a big difference.



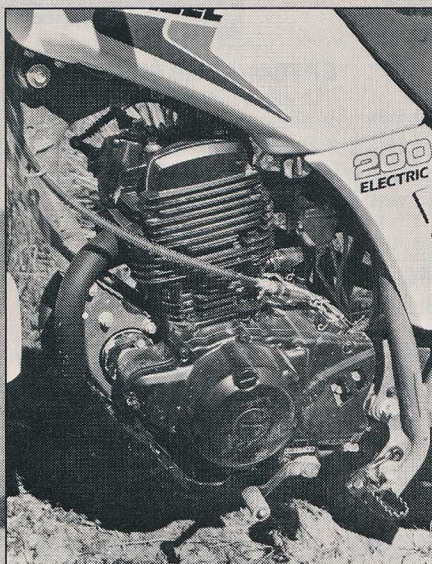
Honda's Fat Cat motor is a detuned version of the ATC200X. It features an electric start, automatic clutch, five-speed tranny and a rather spirited power throb.



A single shock handles the rear damping chores, and like the front end, is harsh and oversprung. Its damping abilities rate as marginal at best. One of those rear brake actuators goes to the Fat Cat's left-side handlebar, where the clutch would normally be on a motorcycle.



Archaic-looking rear dampers do a superb job of leveling out the nasties. Yamaha uses a jack-shaft arrangement in order for the drive chain to clear the big rear tire.



The Yamaha BW200ES comes equipped with an electric start, five-speed tranny and manual clutch. It features a good overall spread of power.

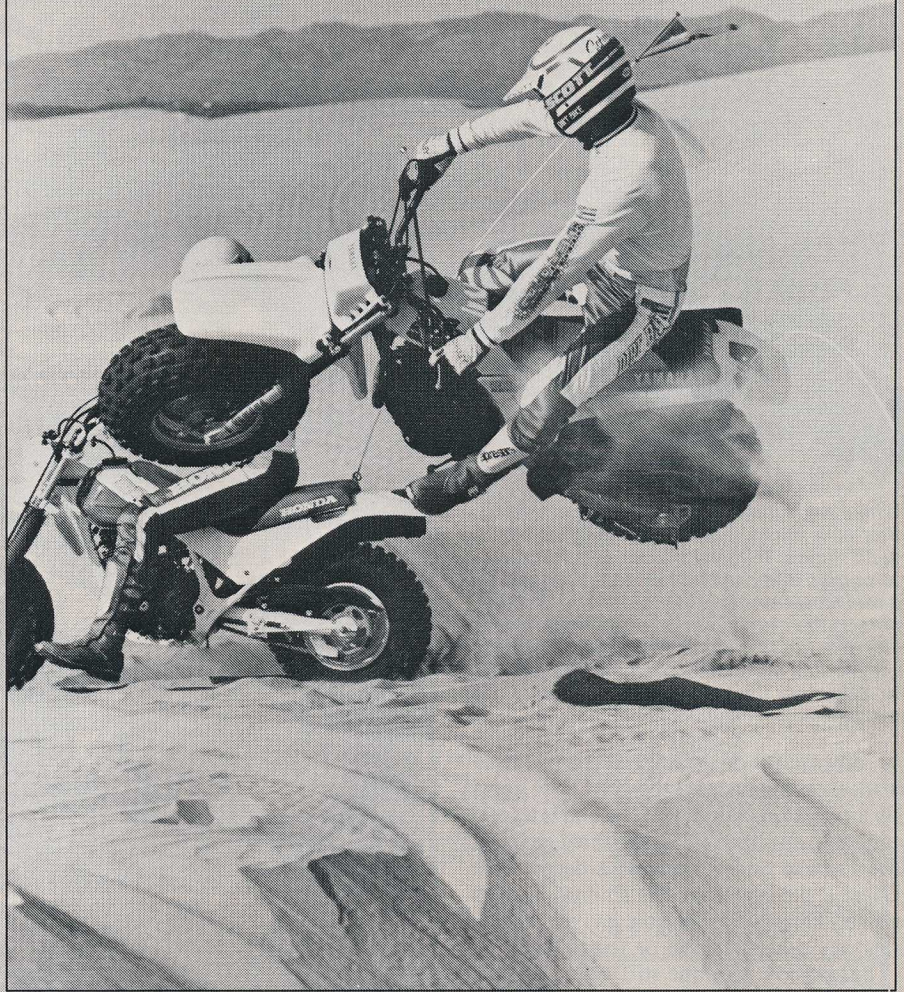


BIG SHOWDOWN

that features an automatic cam chain tensioner and externally adjustable valves. An electric starter and high-breather intake system are designed for easy starts and water-proofing. The Fat Cat shares the same engine design as the ATC200X but has a lower compression ratio and an automatic clutch.

A single downtube frame cradles the engine, and Honda opted for 31mm forks which provide 5.9 inches of travel. A single shock handles the rear damping chores and

Steve Schmitz clutches the BW and flips it sideways while Mike Webb and the "auto-cized" Fat Cat watch. Wild antics are more easily performed on the Yamaha. ▶



yields 4.7 inches of travel. The shock has no levers or gimmicks, and mounts directly to the frame and swingarm. It's preload adjustable only. Specially designed tires are incorporated for more sidewall rigidity, and the braking is handled by a drum arrangement both front and rear. The Fat Cat has a super-low saddle height at 29.7 inches, and it tips the scales at 264 pounds, a bit heavier than the BW.

The starting routine is a one-two operation: turn on the gas and stab the electric starter button. The Fat Cat hums to life immediately and, like the BW, meows rather than growls. Low-end power is more docile than the Yamaha, and coupled with the automatic clutch, it lends itself to the first-time rider. Just slap the shifter, prod it into gear, and then give it some gas. Shifting is also easy: back off the throttle and either upshift

Landings are a bit brutal on the Fat Cat. Neither suspension end is in the same league as the high-flying Yamaha BW200.

RATINGS	POWER	STABILITY	EASE OF RIDING	HANDLING	FRONT SUSPENSION	REAR SUSPENSION	BEST MACHINE FOR BEGINNER	BEST MACHINE FOR EXPERIENCED RIDER	PRICE	OVERALL RATING
HONDA FAT CAT	90	82	94	84	74	70	92	78	90	84
YAMAHA BW200ES	92	90	92	96	90	92	88	92	94	92

BIG SHOWDOWN

The Yamaha BW200ES has a snappier powerplant and requires much more rider involvement because of the manual clutch. It turns better and doesn't push nearly as much as the Fat Cat, and the longer-travel suspension will soak up nastier terrain. Overall, once you master the clutch, the Yamaha makes learning off-road techniques more fun, and lets the rider grow with the dirt world. □

While the Honda Fat Cat is better suited to first-time pilots, it does get along well in sand dunes. Without a clutch it's tougher to corner, and the chassis design keeps it a real slow-handling machine. The Yamaha shreds the dunes, and experienced riders will love the turning prowess coupled with the manual clutch. You can use the power to help steer the machine like a normal dirt bike.

or downshift, depending on the circumstances. Honda geared the Fat Cat to crawl up an elevator shaft in first; second is a good trail cog; and the remaining three gears let the Fat Cat cruise along at a decent clip. Overall, the powerband is smooth and extremely tame. Depending on your experience, this can either be good or frustrating.

Suspension is on the stiff side. The only time we ever got the Fat Cat to bottom was on pretty hairy jumps, but the initial travel is somewhat harsh. You can feel smaller bumps, as they transfer directly from the suspension ends to the rider's arms. Although the Fat Cat's wheelbase is shorter than the BW, it tends to be slower steering and is almost lazy through the turns. Again, we think this was designed into the machine so it won't alarm the first-time riders by doing anything too quickly. Most of the staff felt that the squarish tires helped to create this loafing feel through the turns. Maybe a rounder-profile front meat would enhance the cornering prowess of the machine.

Another big complaint with the Fat Cat is the weird ergonomics. The handlebars are late-generation J.N. Roberts models, very high and bizarre. Couple this with a low-sloping seat, and you feel like you're riding an ironing board and airing your armpits at the same time. This is exactly opposite of the Yamaha BW, which rides and sits like a real motorcycle.

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

Here's the skinny: Both machines are excellent entry-level dirt bikes. The Honda Fat Cat is targeted more toward the beginner with a broad, very tame powerband and an automatic clutch. Its suspension lacks the travel of the BW, and the damping is somewhat harsh at both ends. In the long run, however, it's a super-easy machine to learn to ride on...and have fun on. The big question is whether you'll outgrow it too quickly.



	HONDA TR200 FAT CAT	YAMAHA BW200ES
Engine type	Single-cylinder, air-cooled, SOHC 4-stroke	Single-cylinder, air-cooled, SOHC 4-stroke
Displacement	199 cc	196 cc
Bore and stroke	65mm x 60mm	67mm x 55.7mm
Carburetion	24mm Keihin	24mm TK Mikuni
Starting	Electric, kick	Electric, kick
Transmission	5-speed, automatic clutch	5-speed, manual clutch
Fuel tank capacity	1.9 gals.	1.7 gals.
Wheelbase	53.7 in.	54.3 in.
Overall length	79.5 in.	78.1 in.
Width	32.3 in.	32.7 in.
Ground clearance	9.1 in.	9.5 in.
Seat height	29.7 in.	31.3 in.
Weight claimed, dry	264 lbs.	258 lbs.
Suspension:		
Front	Telescopic forks, 5.9 in.	Telescopic forks, 6.3 in.
Rear	Single shock, 4.7 in.	2 shocks, 6.3 in.
Brakes	Front and rear drums	Front and rear drums
Intended use	Recreation	Recreation
Suggested retail price	\$1498	\$1399
Country of origin	Japan	Japan
Distributor/Manufacturer:	American Honda Motor Corp. 100 W. Alondra Blvd. Gardena, CA 90247	Yamaha Motor Corp. 6555 Katella Ave. Cypress, CA 90630

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HONDA 
FOLLOW THE LEADER



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