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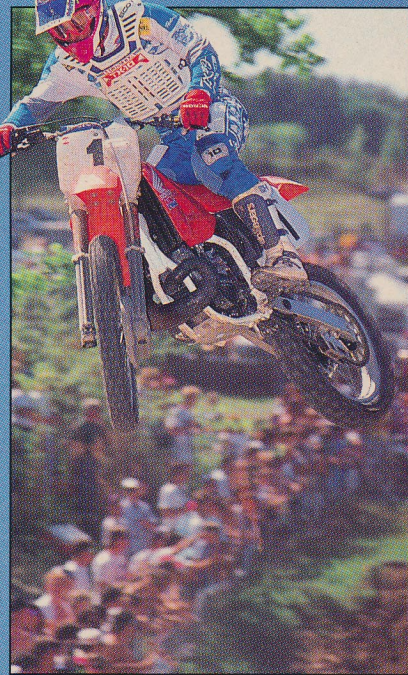
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ON THE COVER: Shane Trittler gets vertical on the Race Tech/AMP Research CR125 project bike for the lens of Torquin' Tim, and Jeff Stanton catches big air on his way to a two-one Florida working vacation. Race shot by Chris Hultner; cover design by DeWest and color separations by Valley Film.

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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. *Dirt Bike* does all of its testing and photography legally on public land, or private land with permission from the owner(s), and we abide by the local laws concerning vehicle registration and muffler/spark arrester requirements. We are not responsible for quality of aftermarket accessories we use.

1991 HONDA CUB EZ90

Looks are everything

By the Staff of Dirt Bike

Honda has had great success selling motorcycles that don't look like motorcycles. Models like the bizarre CT70 Minitrail (it looked like a sewing machine with wheels because of its massive pressed steel frame) the stocky Minitrail 50 (Honda's biggest seller at more than 450,000 units for 21 years) and even the original Cub (a scooter-like 50cc four-stroke street bike) slipped through the resistance many buyers might have had to a conventional bike.

Another big factor in Honda's success with these models was that they didn't act like regular motorcycles, either. They were pleasantly quiet, ran with little or no service and were simple to start and operate. Honda is applying the same formula again with the futuristic Cub EZ90. It certainly doesn't look like a motorcycle, not as we know them today. Does it have what it takes to lure legions of non-riders into the sport of motorcycling? Read on and find out.

MORE POWER TO YOU

One of the best and worst things about Honda's past entry-level minis was that they were slow, a great feature to keep first-time riders out of trouble but a source of some disappointment once the basic skills were mastered and trail obstacles were sought out to be conquered. The Cub is different. It's got plenty of power. In fact, most experienced riders who hop on are impressed by the way it squirts forward, pulling a little wheelie when the throttle is twisted. An 89.7cc reed valve two-stroke engine is the reason. You have to twist the throttle wide open to make it wheelie but at least it's pos-

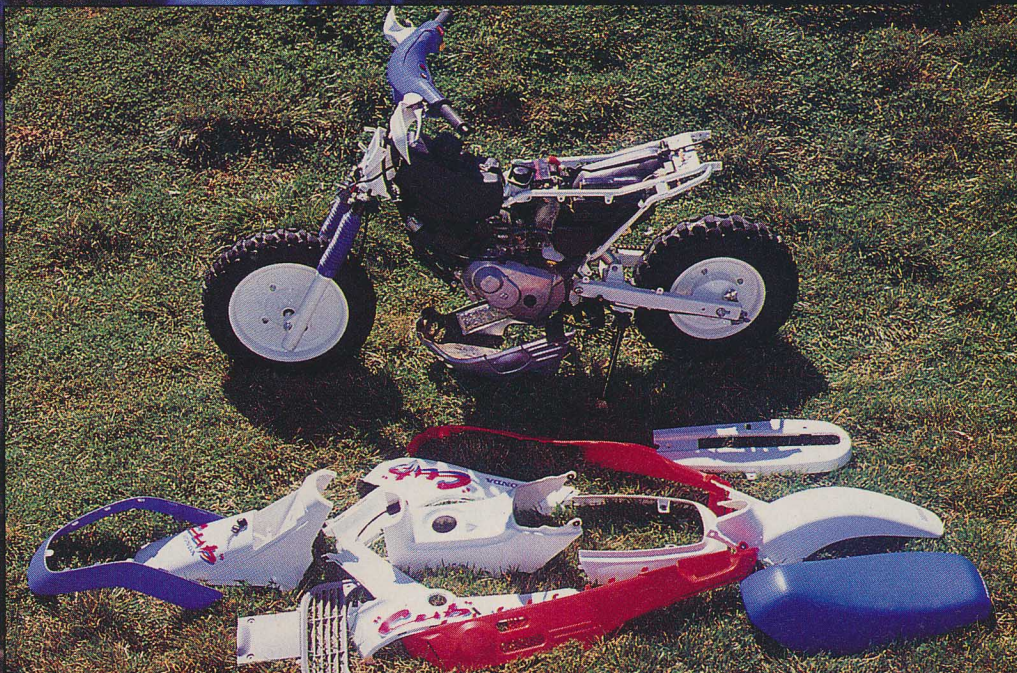
sible. It's doubtful that anyone will be offended what little noise the Cub makes. At idle it sounds like a tiny outboard. Wide open, it's more like an Open-class weed eater.

What about those nervous first-time riders? The Cub takes care of them, too. An electric starter cranks the motor to life with a cheerful (if not terribly rugged-sounding) jingle as the starter clutch disengages. You've got to have the keyed ignition switch turned

on, the sidestand up and the rear hand brake lever pulled in all the way or the starter won't crank. Such is life in the lawsuit-crazed '90s. A continuously variable transmission, like a snowmobile has, makes getting underway as smooth and unthreatening as it could be. Just twist the throttle and you're rolling. There's no worrying about being in the wrong gear or shifting of any kind, for that matter. Together, the Cub's ease-of-use fea-



Honda's easy-to-ride Cub gets you into the fun of dirt biking quickly by eliminating most of the effort involved in learning to ride, and its powerful 89cc two-stroke engine makes it entertaining for the more experienced.



A bare Cub: Beneath the seat and under the 12 pieces of bodywork, the EZ90 looks like the engine compartment of a modern car. There's a maintenance-free battery, an electric starter, a carb with an automatic choke, ducts to cool the engine and muffler, an emergency kickstarter and, yes, even an engine under there.

Part of the Cub's purpose is upholding Honda's entry-level machine reputation for durability beyond the call of duty. We tried to make it fail and couldn't. ▶



tures take the anxiety and frustration out of learning to ride. No one will ever be discouraged because they can't get it started or feel foolish because they picked the wrong throttle/clutch/gear combination and bogged or stalled the machine.

DOWN THE (DIRT) ROAD

It looks wild and it's easy to get underway, no arguing that, but what's it like to ride and can the plastic-shrouded Cub up-

hold the Honda tradition of near-indestructibility in the hands of children?

Despite the Cub's futuristic styling, it's a fairly conventional small motorcycle beneath the bodywork. Its engine is in the center of the frame, which uses the cases as a stressed member, eliminating the need for a large down tube or engine cradle. The fuel tank rests atop the main frame tube which is lower than normal because of the clear-

ance created by the forward-canted cylinder. As a result, there's nothing immediately forward of the seat to slide into. A telescopic fork and a single, linkageless rear shock provide the suspension. This makes it handle like a regular motorcycle, or perhaps a bit better since the weight is lower than it could be with a conventional frame. Riders from just over four feet to six feet tall fit comfortably on the Cub.

1991 HONDA CUB EZ90

Engine type..... Fan air-cooled, reed-valved two-stroke
 Displacement..... 89.7cc
 Bore and stroke..... 48mm x 49.6mm
 Carburetion..... 15mm Keihin
 Fuel tank capacity..... .95 gals. (3.6L)
 Gearing..... 13/40
 Lighting coil..... No
 Spark arrester..... Yes

Green sticker legal in stock trim..... Yes
 Claimed dry weight..... 176 lbs.
 Actual running weight w/no fuel..... 181 lbs.
 Sound output..... .88 dB
 Wheelbase..... 47.2 in. (1200mm)
 Ground clearance..... 8.3 in. (210mm)
 Seat height..... 29.5 in. (74.9cm)
 Tire size and type:
 Front..... 100/90-12 Dunlop K690
 Rear..... 130/90-10 Dunlop K690

Suspension:

Front..... Showa fork, 3.9 (99 mm)
 Rear..... Showa shock, 4.3 (109mm)
 Country of origin..... Japan
 Suggested retail price..... \$1498
 Distributor/Manufacturer:
 American Honda Motors Corp.
 100 W. Alondra Blvd.
 Gardena, CA 90247



WILL THE 1991 CR LOOK LIKE THE CUB?

• Honda has brought more than futuristic, motorcycle-show styling to the market with the Cub. The machine presents some engineering ideas that could do much to improve current motocross bikes. For years motocross bikes have been locked into a fairly traditional styling mold, partly because of the mechanical features of the machines. Styling plays a greater role in motorcycle sales, even in the case of pure racing machines, than we realize, so it's entirely possible Honda will use Cub-like technology to out-perform its competitors' machines. More importantly, they may make all others look outdated.

At the heart of the Cub's styling/engineering concept is its engine, which has the cylinder canted forward 45 degrees as opposed to the 15 or 20 degrees common on today's motocrossers. The engine unit has a fairly flat profile as a result, allowing the top frame tube to run close. This draws the engine and fuel weight lower and closer together. The cases act as part of the frame, elim-

inating the need for a front down tube and engine cradle, allowing more room to move the engine lower without using up valuable ground clearance. The handling advantages of having the heavier components centralized and mounted low are obvious when riding the Cub. It turns easily and feels lighter than it is because you don't have to move weight at the top of the bike.

Full bodywork is another Cub idea that we can expect on future motocross machines. Besides the obvious styling benefits and options it would offer, bodywork could do much to make racing machines safer by containing hot or irregularly shaped components. The overall effect would be quieter machines which are easier to move around on and provide wide "billboard" panels for sponsors' logos.

We doubt if we will see a flat-engined motocross bike with full bodywork from Honda or any other major manufacturer for 1991, but we'd be shocked if they're not common by the year 2000. •

The Cub's tires—wide, aggressive knobies—put as much rubber in the dirt as you'd have riding an Open-class motocrosser. You are never hurting for traction and the Cub is capable of climbing hills as well as manual-transmission bikes its size. Entertaining slides are possible, too, due to the engine's even power delivery and the predictable nature of the tires.

When you decide to stop the EZ90 you'll have a number of ways to do it. There's a front brake operated by the right handlebar lever and the rear brake may be operated by either the left handlebar lever or a foot pedal forward of the right footpeg. Powerful drums at both wheels offer enough stopping power for any situation. If the manual brakes don't seem appropriate, you can simply chop the throttle and a mild automatic brake cuts your speed. The automatic brake is no foot-foo feature, either. A continuously variable transmission disengages on deceleration, providing almost no engine braking. The deceleration brake adds an extra measure of control on downhills and makes the Cub respond a bit more like a regular motorcycle. Its only drawback is that it makes the Cub a chore to push around.

CUB

Unfortunately, the Cub's suspension does not absorb bumps well, though it's on a par with most entry-level minis. With an adult aboard, both ends, especially the rear, bottom frequently long before the engine is tapped out. Short travel, (about four inches at each wheel), soft springs and the Cub's 181-pound weight are to blame.

We were nervous about riding the Cub hard after we discovered its fork has no top triple clamp. Defending Mickey Thompson Ultracross champion Jim Holley, at 180 pounds, wasn't. He rode the thing around the Langtown backyard supercross track harder than we'd ever want to, even if we could do some of the things he did. The suspension made some frightening metallic banging noises as Jim double-jumped and table-topped the Cub but the 35mm fork tubes and the steel triple clamp didn't bend, nor did any other part of the bike. The steel wheels could probably support a small car. It's tough! If some of the paint hadn't worn off the wraparound steel belly pan it would be hard to tell the bike had been ridden at all. Even the decals survived.

Three types of plastic are used for the body panels, which we also failed to damage. Red panels, next to the steel pan and the blue leading edge of the front fender, are soft, like motocross bike fenders. Glossy white areas and the blue handlebar shroud pieces are a harder material, like automotive-grade body plastic. The pebbly white area around the gas cap falls somewhere in between. In addition to making the Cub look sleek, the body prevents the rider from getting caught or burned on the machine. Body parts near the exhaust system are insulated and the muffler has its own duct for forced-air cooling from the engine fan.

If we wanted to pick at the Cub's weak points, and we do, we'd say it's heavy for a 90 and its mushy suspension keeps this fun bike from being an absolute riot. Heavy as it is, new riders large enough to ride it probably won't notice since the weight and the bike itself is low and easily handled. It's also a shame it's not street-legal. If it were it wouldn't be as good-looking, or as fast or as inexpensive as it is, so we'll forgive that, too.

Honda has created a motorcycle that is exciting without being intimidating. It's as easy to ride as a motorized vehicle could be. It's durable and dependable and great-looking. At \$1498, it's even competitively priced with other entry-level bikes in its class. Everyone who rides dirt bikes has probably wondered why more people aren't out enjoying the sport. Part of the reason may be that many people who would enjoy the experience of riding a dirt bike can't picture themselves on one. A dirt bike that can deliver all the fun the sport has to offer but doesn't look like a dirt bike is a great solution. It's a concept that hasn't failed yet. □

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