

EXCLUSIVE: YAMAHA'S MONO-SHOCKING IT250

# DIRT BIKE

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MAY 1977

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125 MXers  
SHOT OUT:

YAMAHA  
vs. HONDA  
vs. SUZUKI

CRASHIN'  
IN FASHION:  
GIANT COLOR  
RIDING GEAR  
SECTION

Retailers: See Page 85 for Special  
Display Allowance Plan

HONDA'S MR175: TEST AND TIPS

DESERT BLASTIN' AND SHORT TRACKIN':  
PARKER DAM 400 AND HOUSTON'S ASTRODOME



# DIRT BIKE

VOLUME SEVEN NUMBER FIVE MAY 1977

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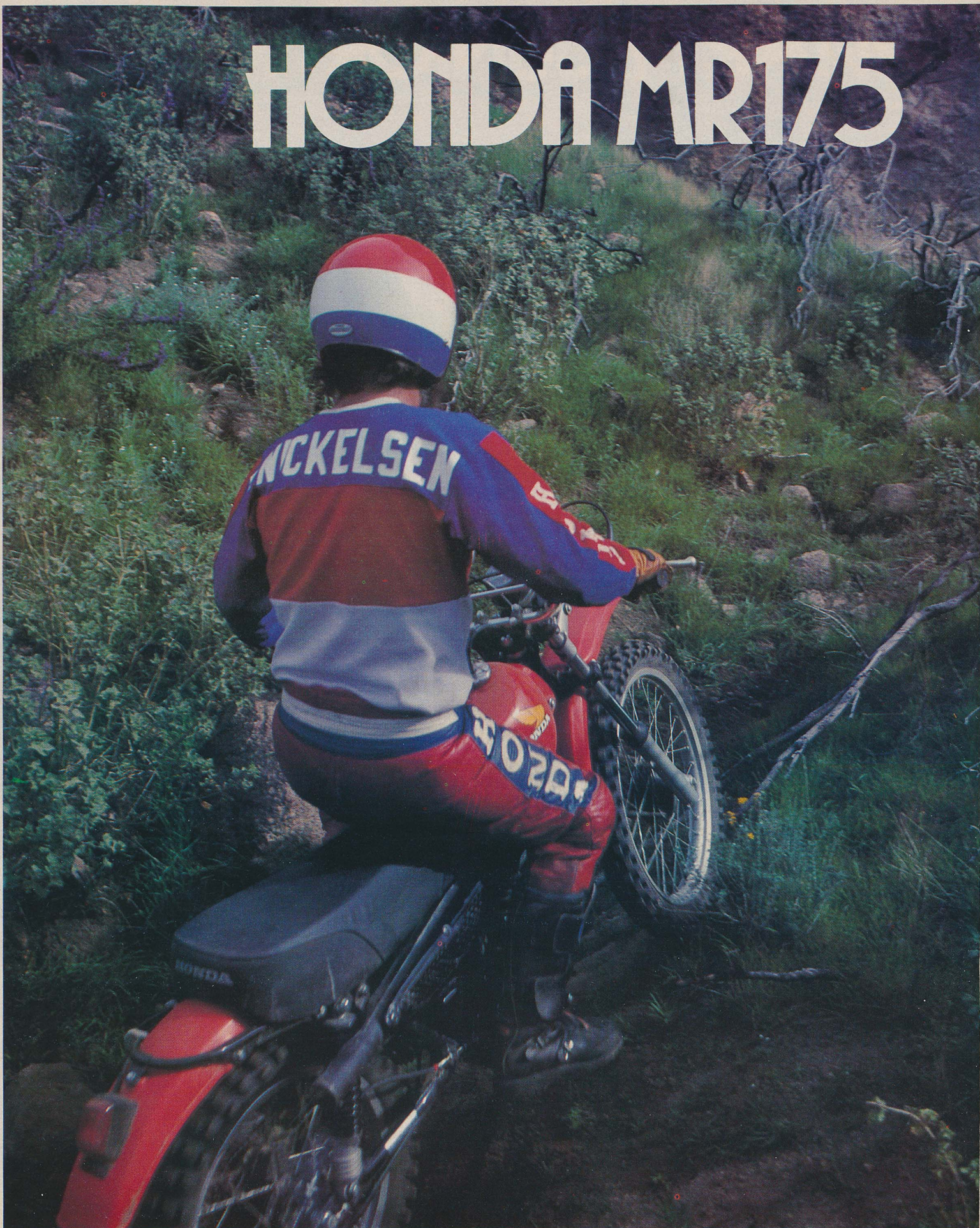


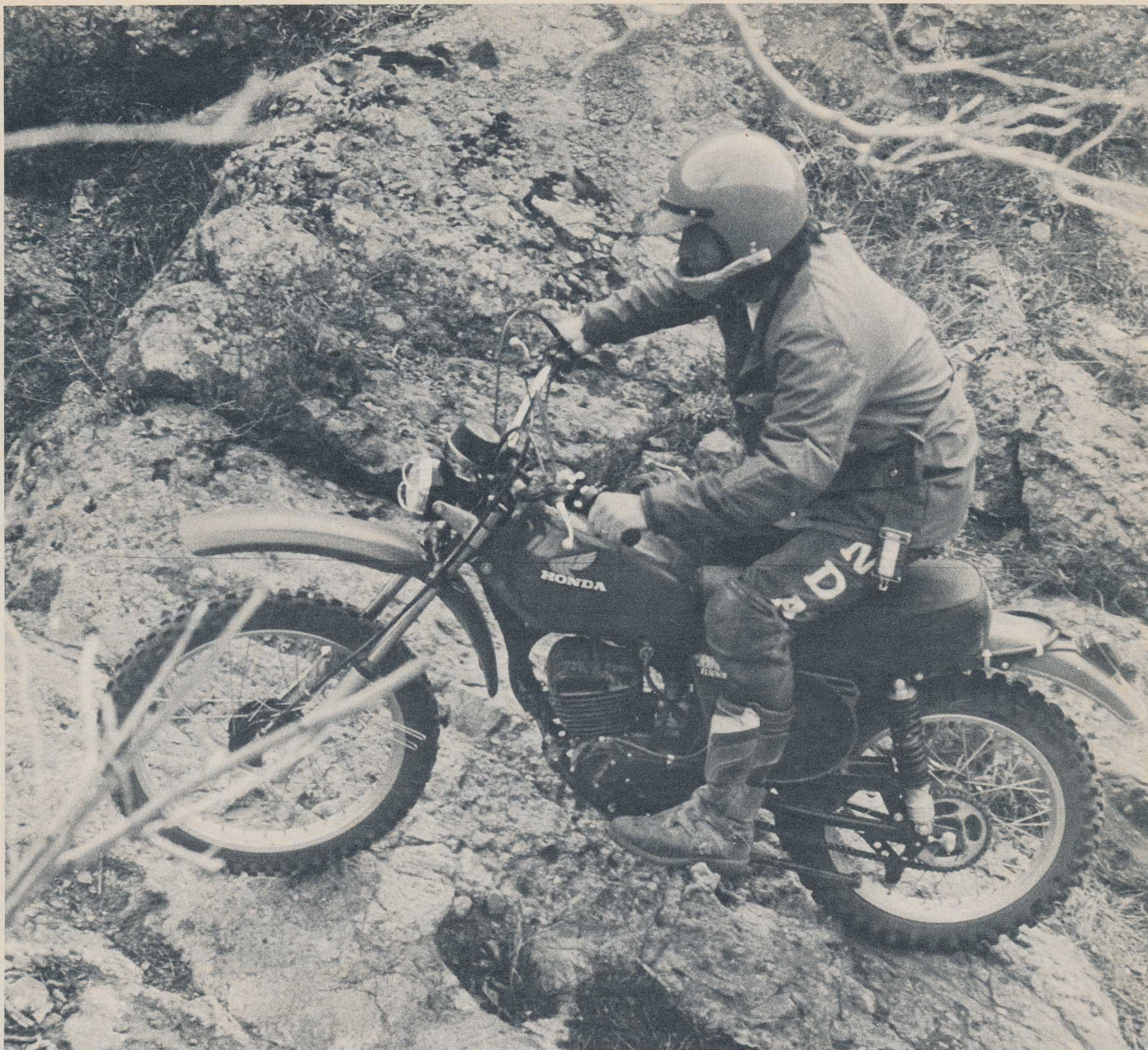
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ON THE COVER: Yamaha ISDT Gold Medalist John Fero baptizes the DIRT BIKE IT250. Woods got the wet lens.

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# HONDA MR175



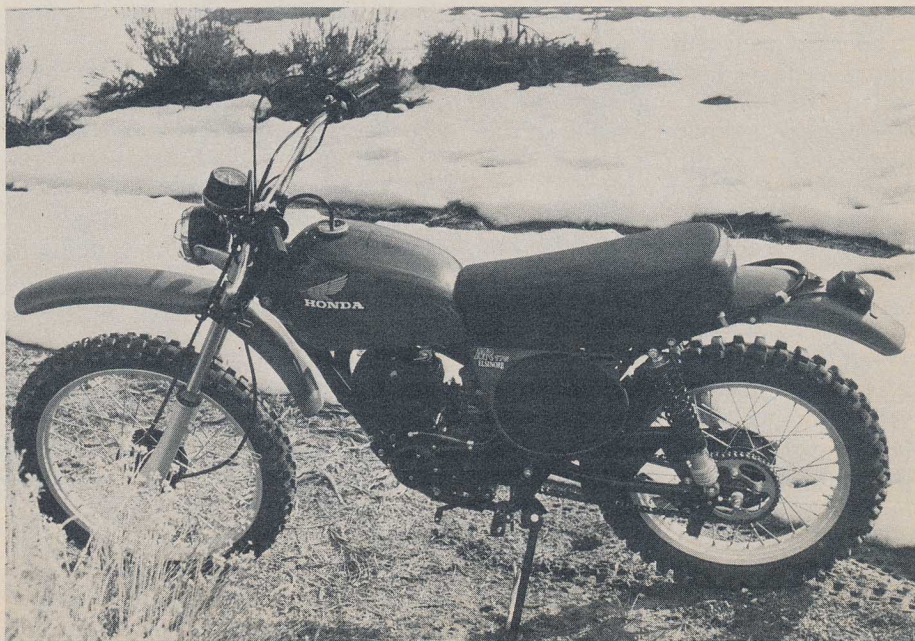


## *Establishing a new class — the trailbike*

by the Staff of DIRT BIKE

In a day and age where specialization ad infinitum may be more bane than boon, an effort to establish definitive boundaries for a new class of motorcycle is most likely the height of absurdity. Only the most pressing of circumstances would lead this magazine to pursue such an approach, but believe us, the 1977 Honda MR175 has presented such circumstances.

MR175 — motorcycle without a class. Neither enduro competitor nor street-trailer. Limited on one end by dollars invested and on the other by decals declaring it an off-road vehicle. The MR can go



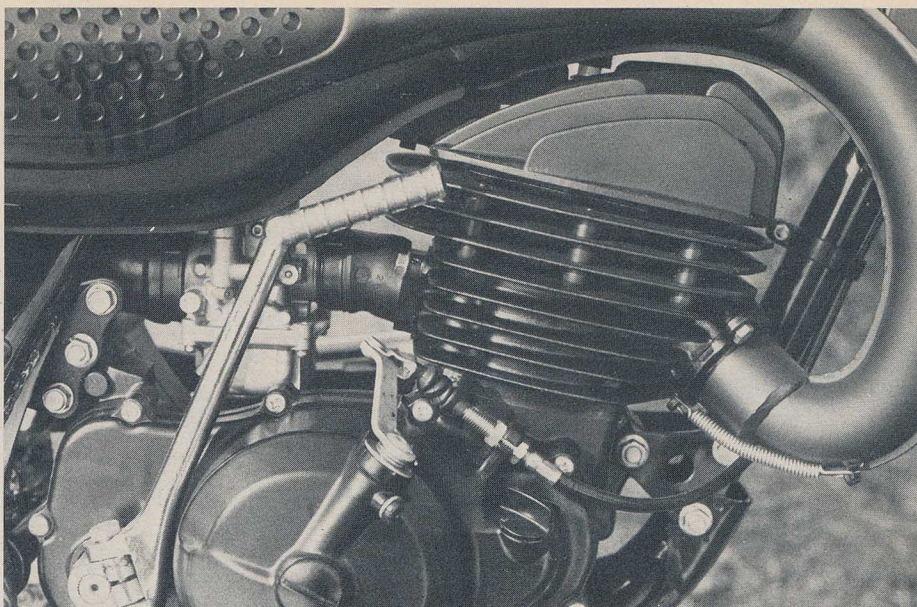
neither direction and be a success.

Yet the MR175 is a motorcycle with a purpose, one it serves admirably, if not perfectly. The MR is none other than a trailbike. In times when it is easy to forget that the motorcycle might be meant for more diverse purposes than competition or cheap thrills, the MR is a breath of fresh air (once jetted correctly).

Trailbiking would be mightily difficult to apply an absolute definition to, but we can easily number some of its primary characteristics. Trailbiking is something we want to do with utmost silence, since the noise of a motorcycle interferes with the experience. While we trailbike we hope to see some attractive things, maybe an animal or two — a hawk soaring on a ridge or a deer grazing. While we trailbike we negotiate whatever natural obstacles present themselves along the way. We may not care to negotiate them quickly, but we hope to do so with finesse and minimal strain. In a sense trailbiking is moving, going somewhere.

Honda's MR is headed down our trail. In the face of the increasing technical sophistication of off-road competition machinery over the past few years, the MR remains much as it was originally conceived, with refinements to the original concept. Simply because it lacks the speed, suspension and handling of that current crop of enduro/ISDT rigs, it fills a category that the more advanced machines cannot. Which is not to say that the MR175 cannot be successfully campaigned or that it does not have certain advantages in specific competition situations or that Honda won't advertise it as a serious off-road competitor. The MR just slows down better than the hyper-enduro equipment of today. It can be putted with ease.

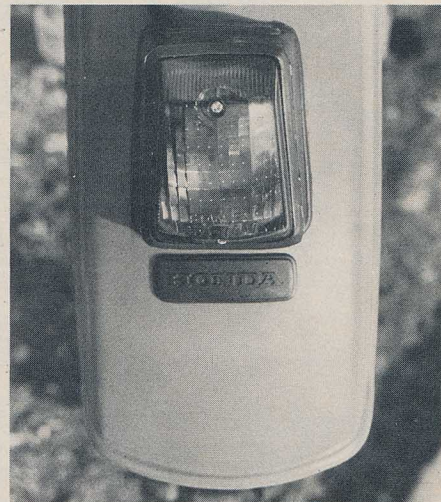
Prospective MR owners will be happy to know that Honda has chosen new gear ratios for the MR. Second is now closer to first, making it usable in tight situations. A reduction to a 12-tooth countershaft from the stock 13 helps the MR pull each of its upward ratios with more vigor yet. In a trail-riding situation the MR will now move along at a moderate pace without unseemly engine screaming. As a trailbike the current MR five-speed presents a useful set of ratios. A six-speed would keep the



Keihin carb came jetted fat. We dropped the needle a notch below mid-point for our clime.



Wide fender shields the rider better than the motor from the onslaught.



piston-port engine aspirating in its optimum range, but would most likely be a hindrance to the trail rider.

Front forks have also been improved, providing an additional  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch of travel and less tendency to bottom rudely. Fortunately, the MR's suspension has not been stiffened to accommodate WFO riding, but still remains compliant, allowing the front wheel to climb rather than bound over the rocks. Few trail-riding situations arise that will overtax them. The rear shocks are the long-familiar finned aluminum Shoei units, with two springs, one soft and one stiffer. The shocks work in excellent harmony with the forks over everyday trail bumps and rocks. Were the springs heavier they would not tend to become quite so nonplused in high-speed situations,

but the tractive abilities they give the rear wheel in gnarly terrain would be sacrificed. Because the front suspenders provide only six inches of travel and the rear four inches, the MR has less tendency to become wallowy in rocky streams than long-legged rivals. At the same time its seat is an accommodating 31 inches high while maintaining adequate ground clearance under engine and pegs. The MR provides exception to the presumption that most manufacturers must think the average rider is at least six feet tall.

Heavy-duty D.I.D rims should retain their form nigh on to forever. Though we were not aware of inadequacies in the rims found on previous MRs, a little more strength is always welcome.

And that about rounds out the changes you'll find on the 1977 Honda MR175 currently gracing



your local dealer's showroom floor. For those of you not fully apprised of the nature of the MR over the past two years of its existence, here's a synopsis of what it does:

On the trail the MR feels quite light and nimble. Low seat height and low overall weight let the rider personhandle the bike through touchy situations. Its steering is actually quite hard to define, since the rider can easily overcome any inherent tendencies the geometry may imply. For example, through tight switchbacks the MR tends to plow the front wheel some, but a dab of the foot and a squirt of throttle easily sticks everything back in line.

Acceleration and torque are less than overwhelming on any 175, but the MR's tend to be softer than the norm. The MR's grunt is exclusively in the mid-range. In the lower revs

it will die away under minimal flywheels and use of high revs won't produce a lot more than noise. But in its roughly 4000 rpm mid-range the MR provides an excellent combination of response and tractability. A handful will get the front wheel light while a small twist will be enough for the MR to hold its own in rocks.

Up a hill? The two previous model years of MR175s had some problems. Not even gearing down would let them pull the gap between first and second on a climb. It was purely first gear and plenty of revs to keep the rear spinning. Our stock bike wasn't about to pull any serious hill in second, even with the narrowing of the gap, but another new bike we rode with a tooth less on the countershaft could pull second on most hills. Still, basic hillclimbing

#### MR175

|                                     |                                      |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Price (approx. retail, West Coast): | \$923                                |
| Engine                              | Two-stroke, piston port              |
| Displacement                        | 171cc                                |
| Bore & Stroke                       | 66mmx50mm                            |
| Compression Ratio                   | 6.8:1                                |
| Standard Jetting                    | .28mm Keihin                         |
| Horsepower                          | N/A                                  |
| Clutch                              | Wet, multi-plate                     |
| Primary Drive                       | 4.00:1                               |
| Transmission Ratios:                |                                      |
| 1.                                  | 2.357                                |
| 2.                                  | 1.611                                |
| 3.                                  | 1.190                                |
| 4.                                  | .916                                 |
| 5.                                  | .741                                 |
| Final Drive                         | 3.071:1                              |
|                                     | 14-tooth countershaft                |
|                                     | 43-tooth rear sprocket               |
| Air Filtration                      | Oiled foam                           |
| Electrics                           | Magneto                              |
| Lubrication                         | Pre-mix                              |
| Recommended Fuel                    | Premium                              |
| Recommended Oil                     | N/A                                  |
| Fuel Tank Capacity                  | 2.9 gallons                          |
| Frame                               | Mild steel, single downtube          |
| Suspension:                         |                                      |
| Front:                              | 5.7-inch (17.3cm)                    |
| Rear:                               | 4.1-inch (10.4cm)                    |
| Starting                            | Kick it                              |
| Wheels & Spokes                     | D.I.D Alloy HD                       |
| Tires                               | 3.00x21 & 3.50x18 Bridgestone        |
| Dimensions:                         |                                      |
| Wheelbase                           | 53.7 inches (136.4cm)                |
| Swingarm length                     | 17.0 inches (43.3cm)                 |
| Ground clearance                    | 9.8 inches (24.9cm)                  |
| Bars, width                         | 33.5 inches (85.1cm)                 |
| Pegs, height                        | 11.5 inches (29.3cm)                 |
|                                     | width 17.5 inches (52.3cm)           |
| Seat height                         | 31.0 inches (81.0cm)                 |
| Weight:                             |                                      |
|                                     | 208 pounds (96.2 kg)                 |
|                                     | Distribution: 44.9% front/55.1% rear |
| Brakes:                             |                                      |
| Front:                              | Cable                                |
| Rear:                               | Cable                                |
| Instruments:                        |                                      |
|                                     | Speedo, resettable in tenths         |
| Lights                              | Yep                                  |
| Silencer                            | Yep                                  |
| Spark Arrestor                      | Yep                                  |
| Warranty                            | 90 days                              |

approach involves lots of rpm and adroit clutch work to keep the MR's front wheel near the ground.

The MR is not a large person's motorcycle. Though there is a certain pleasure to nearly equaling the mass of the machine, riders in the six-foot and over-170-pound range will find the handling a bit indeterminate and the suspension flaccid. Rider comfort will also be best for smaller individuals, since they will find the controls pleasantly close to hand and toe and the seat padding adequate in the places they want to be. Tank profile is a little wide but not objectionable, and provides a good 60 miles' worth of sipping for the motor.

All the little niceties we've come  
*Continued on page 82*



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**HONDA**

Continued from page 57

to take for granted on Hondas are present. An enduro lighting kit consists of a small taillight and a small headlight with rock guard. Though the MR theoretically does not constitute a street machine, in many states it will prove to be an adequate pizza-fetcher with the addition of a stop light switch. An on/off switch graces the handlebar and should either be spring-loaded or relocated to a position where the rider won't encounter it in those tight, sticky and potentially embarrassing situations. Bash protection is provided but will not stand up under the aggressive rider. Rubber parts, from grips to tires, are all of good quality.

Had we approached the '77 MR175 as a serious enduro competition machine, in its stock form its most competitive aspect would have been its price. It is, as delivered, hundreds of dollars cheaper than Yamaha's IT or the high price spread presented by Penton/KTM or Hercules. And as you can find out in the Champs' Bikes article elsewhere in this issue, the MR is hundreds of dollars from competing with them in performance. As a serious competition machine the MR has some serious limitations.

But as the trailbike we have set out to test it as, the MR comes under only minor criticism. A little broader powerband might be nice and it could certainly stand to be quieter. The Honda XL series sets some attractive standards of silence for the MR to pursue. If you're one of the lucky few who know just what it is you want and need, then you may be able to pin down an MR to suit your heart's desires at a price you can afford.

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