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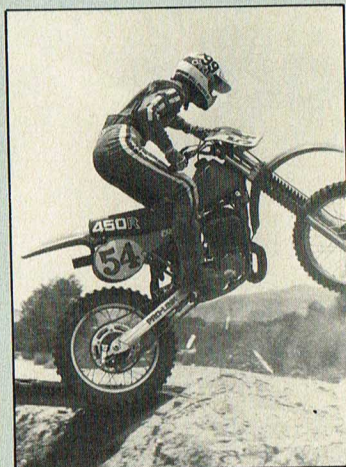
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HONDA CR450R



PROJECT XR500 — PART III



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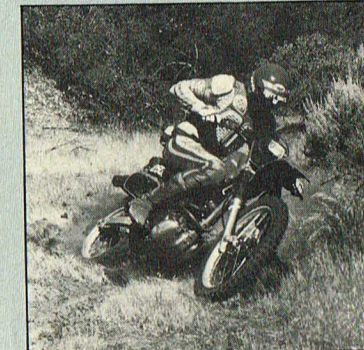
PIKE'S PEAK



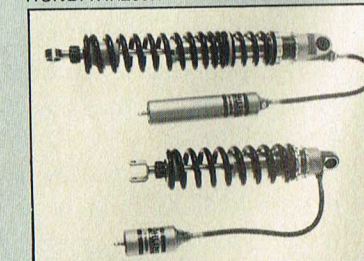
SUZUKI RM465X



SUPERBOWL



HONDA XR250R



THE SUPER SHOCKS

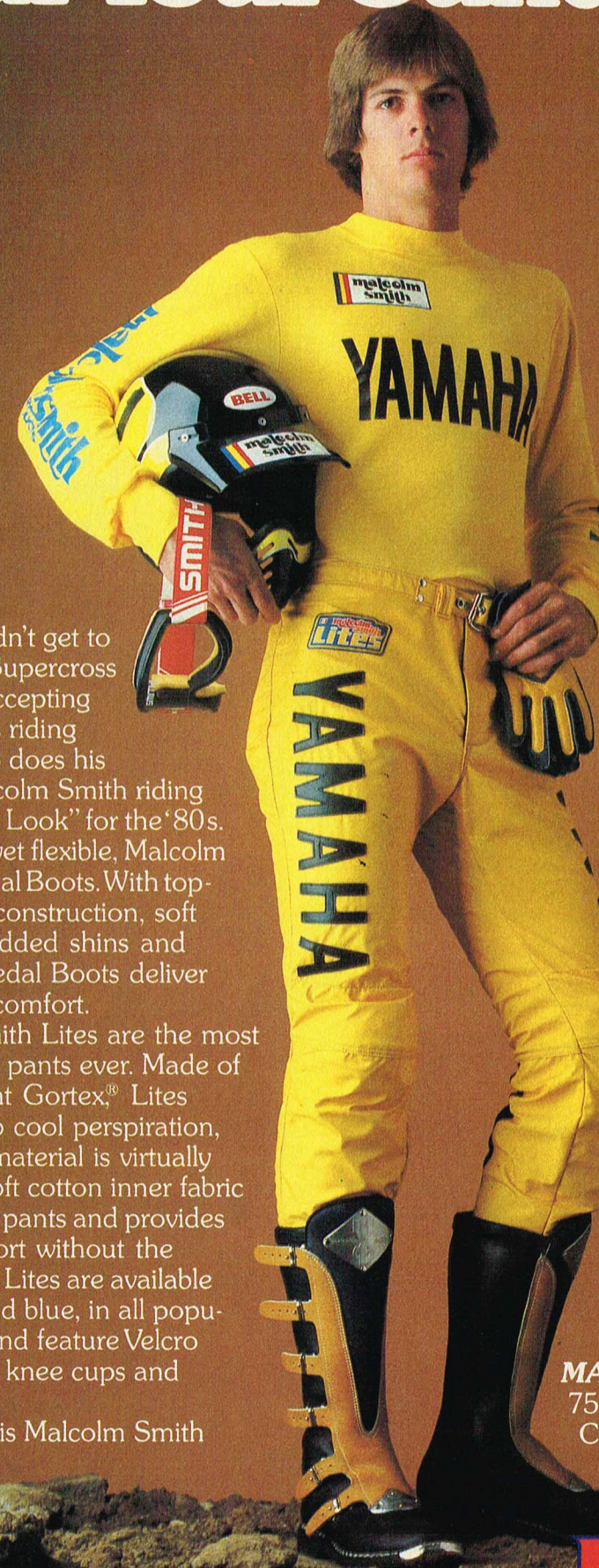
On the cover: Jon Miller, a close, old friend of the entire *Dirt Bike* staff, came out of his forced retirement to drag handlebars with us for a few days. Jon enjoyed it; the RM465 said it was good for him, too. Photo by Tom Webb.

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# Wear Your Sunday Best



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**HONDA XR250R**  
 Part 200, part 500,  
 all-new

A careful look at all the Honda spec sheets may be misleading to anyone thinking of buying an XR250. One of the first figures we all usually look for is "dry weight," which is a euphemism for "What kind of tonnage are we talking about having to haul out of the first grim mudhole?" Comparing the dry weights of the three XRs, we get: XR200—222.6 pounds; XR250—262.3 pounds; XR500—277.7 pounds.

**STUCK IN THE MIDDLE**

At this point, the sharp-eyed reader is going to recoil in horror. The XR500 is heavy... no two ways about that... but the XR250 is *only 15 pounds lighter!* What kind of dang deal is this? When you fill it up with fuel and oil and things, you're talking about 20 more pounds, and all this weight on a bike half the size of a 500? Who needs it?

**It ain't that heavy, friend**

We reacted the same way to the XR250, until the XR500 project convinced us of the One Great Truth: there's no such thing as a light four-stroke. Once we had consumed and digested this bit of information, we could test the 250 on a more rational basis. Forget about the weight, we told ourselves, it's part of the overall design. Just ride the bike and accept it on its own performance.

Even so, the first time we rode the XR250, we were pleasantly surprised. The weight—the one factor we were so concerned about—wasn't all that noticeable. The 250 not only *feels much lighter* than the 500, it is not nearly as top-heavy as the big-bore thumper. We suffered no discomfort flicking the 250 in and out of the bushes and trees. The handling actually seems closer to that of the nimble XR200, rather than the ponderous big brother of the family.

We hate to say it, but once underway, the feeling of heaviness disappears. The front end is light and predictable, and becomes *real* light when you nail the throttle. The back end skips over the bumps with an almost cheerful ease, and neither end ever

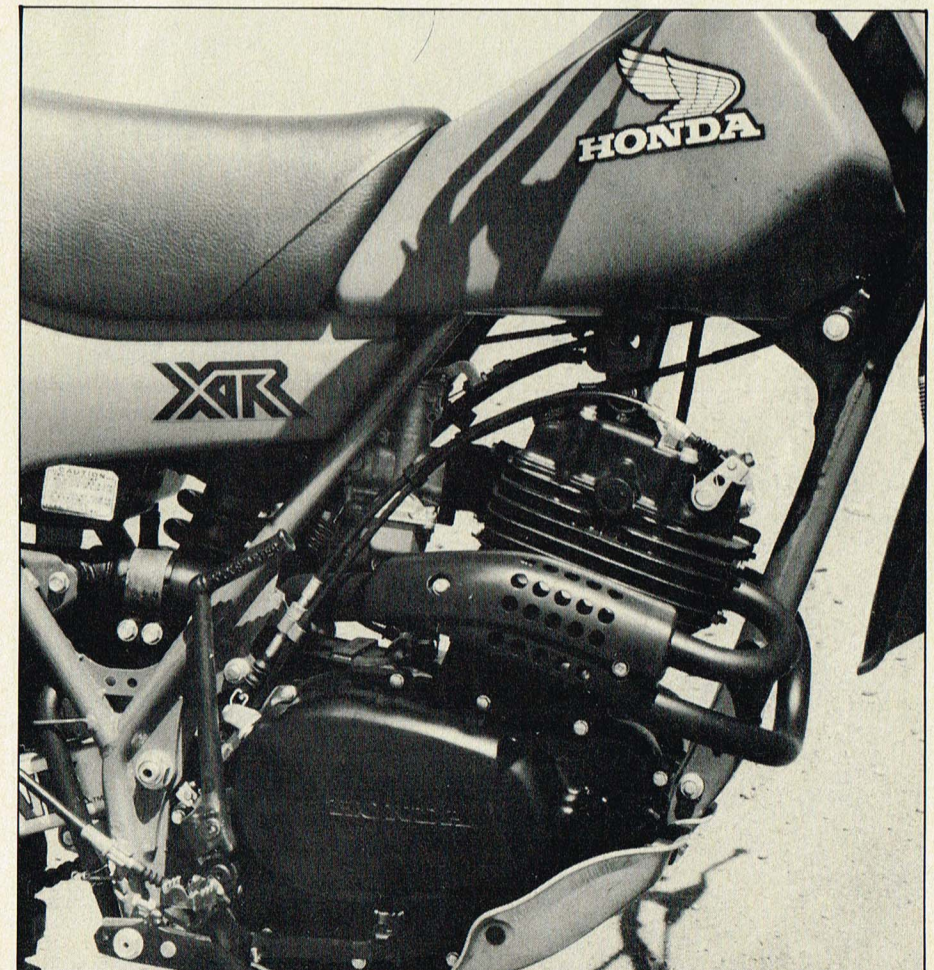


does anything vicious or frightening, like wash out or try to swap. It feels *light* and riding it is an absolute joy.

Until you crash.

And we all crash now and then. It's not the bike's fault—we would do it on

the best bike money could buy, given the chance. Just a stupid little crash... the kind where you try not to look embarrassed as you dust yourself off; and when you go to lift up the XR, you're reminded of the first thought



A close ratio six-speed transmission and a few minor engine improvements add up to make the XR250 a real charger for '81.

# STUCK IN THE MIDDLE

you had... my, my. This bike is a little heavy, isn't it? If you get into a situation where you're crashing quite a lot in a short amount of time, once you get hot and tired out you're going to dread having to lift it back up—one more time. And then, once again, you are going to have to kick it over carefully, against all that engine compression. And by this time, a nimble little two-stroke starts looking pretty good.

But, hey, if you'd wanted a two-stroke, you'd have bought one... right? There are plenty of good reasons for thumpers—don't jump ship yet.

## Linking it together

We have said it before, but it bears repeating one more time: the Pro-Link suspension is the single best thing that ever happened to the XR. We can't attribute all the improvement in the

250's manner to the rear suspension—it's the whole package, the new frame, the sturdy swingarm, the bigger forks—it all adds up to one big plus. The bike tracks through the whoops, rather than thrash through. Stutter bumps don't cause the front end to skip all over the trail anymore. Even the Bridgestone tires seem to hook up better than they used to—and they still aren't the best tires you can buy.

The Pro-Link rear consists of a shock and a couple of pivoting levers mounted between the swingarm and the frame. As with all of the new lever suspensions, it is necessary to keep the pivot points tight, clean and well-greased. Failure to do this will result in rapid wear and possible frame damage. It would be best to inspect and re-grease the pivots after the initial break-

in (300-400 miles), and then decide how often the type of riding you do will make it necessary to perform the service again. If you ride a lot in mud or water, the safest bet would be to do it after every long ride.

The shock is a little beauty—almost too nice to be on an enduro bike. The body is made out of aluminum for light weight and improved cooling, and there is an aluminum remote reservoir attached and riding on the left frame tube. Also, a small knob at the base of the shock allows you to tune in the rebound damping over a four step range. We found damping setting #3 to be the best choice for our type of riding.

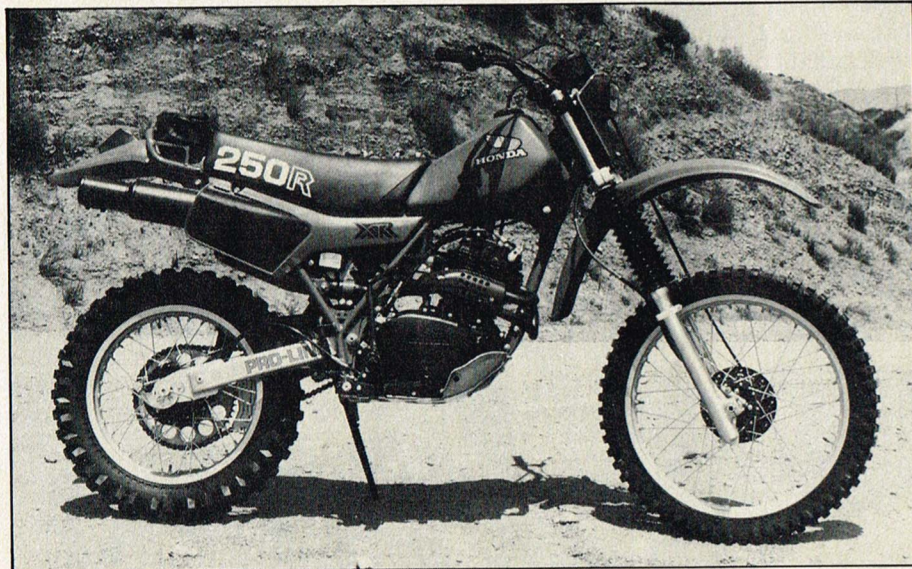
The forks are also new. The tubes have been enlarged to 37mm diameter, and they are air-assisted. In addition, the angle of the forks has been changed—the steering head was pulled back 1/2 degree, making the new rake angle an

from your dealer, and Honda offers another spring that's softer than stock—what they use it for is anybody's guess.

## Four-strokes to the wind

On top of all this good news about handling and suspension, we have to add one more plus: the XR250 is not a slow bike. There's a lot of technology inside those cases—six-speed transmission, four-valve head, dual exhaust pipes, electronic ignition—and all of the separate parts come together this year to make a good working package. The XR will lug down low, rev out to a mild shriek, and do everything in between. It's very efficient with its power.

Perhaps too efficient. There are buckets of torque available down low in the rev range, and when the clutch is disengaged, it all spills out in a rush. Honda clutches have always been grabby, and this one is no exception. It will



*Air/spring forks are new for this year; so is super-strong double-leading shoe brake system. So far, we've heard no complaints about the change to 21-inch front wheels.*

*The Pro-Link rear end is just about the best thing that could ever happen to the XR. We were happiest with the damping on the #3 setting.*

## HONDA XR250R

NAME AND MODEL	Honda XR250R
ENGINE TYPE	Four-stroke, single
BORE AND STROKE	74mmx57.8mm
DISPLACEMENT	249cc
CARBURETION	30.5mm Keihin
FACTORY RECOMMENDED JETTING:	
MAIN JET	130
NEEDLE JET	2.6
JET NEEDLE	85A
PILOT JET	40
SLIDE NUMBER	N/A
RECOMMENDED GASOLINE	Premium
FUEL TANK CAPACITY	9 liters (2.4 gallons)
FUEL TANK MATERIAL	Plastic
LUBRICATION	Wet sump
RECOMMENDED OIL	Honda
OIL CAPACITY, TRANS.	2 liters (2.1 quarts)
AIR FILTRATION	Oiled foam
CLUTCH TYPE	Wet, multi-plate
TRANSMISSION	Six-speed
GEARBOX RATIOS:	
1	3.000:1
2	2.111:1
3	1.591:1
4	1.280:1
5	1.074:1
6	0.867:1
GEARING, FRONT/REAR	13/53
IGNITION	CDI

PRIMARY KICK SYSTEM?	Yes
RECOMMENDED SPARK PLUG	NGK D8EA
SILENCER/SPARK ARRESTOR/QUALITY	Yes, yes, moderately loud
EXHAUST SYSTEM	Through-frame, right side
FRAME, TYPE	Single, downtube, diamond
WHEELBASE	1420mm (55.9 inches)
GROUND CLEARANCE	320mm (12.6 inches)
SEAT HEIGHT	945mm (37.2 inches)
STEERING HEAD ANGLE (RAKE)	28 degrees
TRAIL	112mm (4.4 inches)
WEIGHT WITH ONE GALLON GAS	274 pounds (approx.)
RIM MATERIAL	Aluminum alloy
TIRE SIZE AND TYPE:	
FRONT	3.00x21 Bridgestone
REAR	5.10x17 Bridgestone
SUSPENSION, TYPE AND TRAVEL:	
FRONT	Air/oil forks, 254mm (10 inches)
REAR	Pro-Link, 254mm (10 inches)
INTENDED USE	Off-road, enduro
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	Japan
RETAIL PRICE, APPROX.	\$1798

DISTRIBUTOR:  
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even 28 degrees. Both frong and rear suspension deliver a full 10 inches of travel.

And good travel it is, too. The only problem the XR250 suffers from is common in the XR series: too-soft suspension. With the forks, this is no big problem. We firmed them up by going to a heavier (15-weight) fork oil, and using a higher level than stock; if any more firmness was needed, we pumped in a little air pressure. The rear end is not so easy. Turning up the damping control helps out some, but if you ride very hard on the XR, it is going to need the stiffer Honda accessory spring. The stiffer spring should be available

take quite a while to get used to all the torque and the snappy clutch. We spent an afternoon in a tight canyon trying to ride the XR like a two-stroke, and still haven't healed from all the bruising. Once the rider learns how to be comfortable at zero rpm, everything becomes much easier.

Out in the open, the XR is a real thrill to punch through the gears. Naturally, it isn't as fast as the XR500, but it'll stay up with any other 250 enduro two-stroke that gets in its way. We were so impressed with the horsepower, that we entered the bike in the Dinosaur Run... a local annual four-stroke TT race, and actually scored a



*We took the XR out and raced it in the Dinosaur TT, where it did well enough for a first-place Novice finish.*

A double leading-shoe front brake is standard equipment, and believe us, it's a sure stopper. Go-fast crazies and Expert level riders will love it; trail riders may have to spend some time getting used to it. If it's too much for you to handle, the owner's manual explains how to adjust it a little looser.

The XR's kickstart system is fitted with a compression release for easy starting. Some people complain that XRs take a million kicks to start... this is because they're doing it wrong. When you go to kick an XR over, do not rest your foot on the kickstarter—by doing so you'll defeat the compression release. Just kick the bike over with the kickstarter at the very top of its stroke, and it'll fire every time.

For some reason, Honda decided to go with a 17-inch rear wheel this year, and we don't understand why. From our experience, the 17 inchers give a rougher ride and are more difficult to find decent tires for than an 18. The only positive purpose is to keep the seat height low, and that inch doesn't seem like much of a bargain.

## Summing up

The XR250 has plenty of good power, a decent but slightly soft suspension, and very good handling manners. All in all, Honda did an excellent job on the XR this year—the bike is well worth every penny. They'll have a hard time topping this one in '82. □

first in the Novice class. Any stock bike that can hold its own at Ascot has some good power trapped inside. This is a nice, strong 250 engine.

## Bits and pieces

The rear wheel on the XR is a true quick-change unit. Once the axle is loosened up and the chain pushed aside, the whole rear wheel assembly can be slipped off the back of the swingarm. This should make maintenance a little more tolerable.