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JULY 1985

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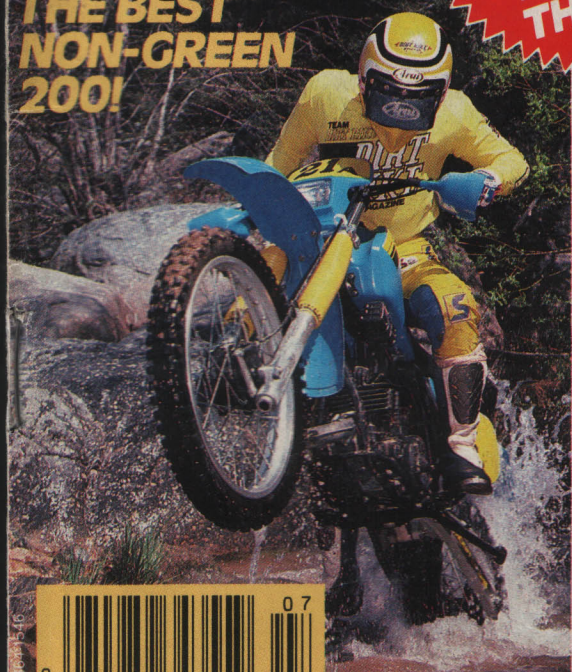


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HONDA XR600R

By the Staff of DIRT BIKE

First impressions can be very misleading. And it's a good thing we take the time to push a bike hard to find out just what it can or cannot do.

Take the new Honda XR600, for example. When we unloaded the handsome red mount in the foothills of the Hungry Valley ORV riding area, it appeared to be the ideal mount for the terrain.

Surprisingly, the big four-stroke started easily on the first kick and settled down to a contented idle after only a minute with the choke on. Any big four-stroke can be a real bear to get lit, but this was a pleasant way to start the day.

After arming ourselves with fanny packs, cameras and such, we headed off down the hard-packed trails and fire roads to the foreboding mountains a few miles away. Here the Honda was a delight, with its smooth four-stroke power making it easy to drift and slide around the tractionless turns.

It had plenty of the right kind of power and appeared to have none of the low-speed carburetion glitches of previous XRs. The suspension felt ultra-plush on the odd bump we hit, and the steering seemed as sharp as any full-blown motocrosser. The two-stroke enduro bike riding alongside the XR was hard-pressed to keep up with Big Red.

IS THERE GOLD IN THEM THAR HILLS?

When the fire roads ended, the hills began. At first, it was mild switchbacks, then some easy rutted climbs... no problem for the Honda. It was when we encountered rocks on uphill turns, combined with ruts, tree roots and slippery no-traction baked-adobe surface, that we started to worry.

Here the Honda became more than a handful. In these truly tough enduro conditions, the key to riding the Honda at any speed was eluding us. Even though the bike would pull the tight and gnarly sections in second gear, the power pulses were so jerky that the front end would lurch up and the rear end would snap off to one side or another when clambering over a rock.

The only answer was to go to low gear and bring the engine rpm up to smooth out the power delivery, not the best way to ride an Open class bike with lots of power.

This allowed us more control over most of the rough stuff, but occasionally the rear wheel would deliver too much power, and the big XR would dart off the intended line, bringing a rather advanced state of fear to the pilot.

As we climbed higher and higher, the trails got tougher and tighter, and the Honda became more of a liability than friendly.

HEAVY METAL!

Easy Rider

On hard-packed trails the good steering manners and smooth power make for predictable cornering.



On more than one occasion it was necessary to slip the clutch into low gear and literally creep over the narrow rocky trails. The utterly terrifying dropoffs on the side of the mountain goat trails drove the point home.

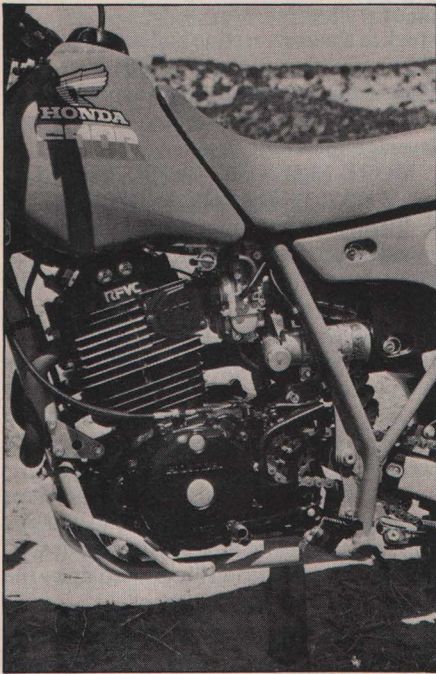
By the time the summit of the mountain range was reached, the Honda rider was exhausted and drenched with sweat, while the rider on the IT200 was relatively fresh. A discussion during the rest period brought out some thoughts on the XR.

- The shape of the saddle is totally wrong for anyone under six feet tall. Even though the tank has been moved forward in an attempt to improve the seating position, the front part of the saddle is an awkward bulge that prevents the proper forward position for cornering.

◀ Looking for all the world like a 1984 XR500, the big 600 is distinguishable by a squashed tank shape and fresh decals; externally, that is.



HONDA XR600R



Taking the side panel off to get to the air-box couldn't be easier. Dzus snaps mean it will take less than a minute of your time to get to the air filter.

- The XR600 is simply too tall and too wide for tight trail work with an average-sized rider.

- At speeds above 15 miles per hour, the power delivery over genuinely rough ground is controllable in second gear. At speeds under ten mph, low gear and generous clutch slipping is the only way to semi-control the big bike over rocks and such.

- It appears that the XR600 hates to deal with rocks at slower speeds. The front wheel will clang into a small rock and dart off violently without much in the way of warning.

- At higher speeds over whoops, the weight of the bike lets itself be known, and the shortcomings of the soft suspension become painfully apparent.

- The forks are worlds better than the shock.

- Downhills are no fun, and the rougher they are, the more care the rider must take.

- On uphill the XR appears to shine, as long as the speed is above that 15 mph mark during the climb. A nose-high attitude suits the Honda well.

- The clutch will not take much abuse before the handle starts to creep back to the grip. Periodic stops to let the clutch cool down are needed after a hard ride through a rocky narrow canyon.

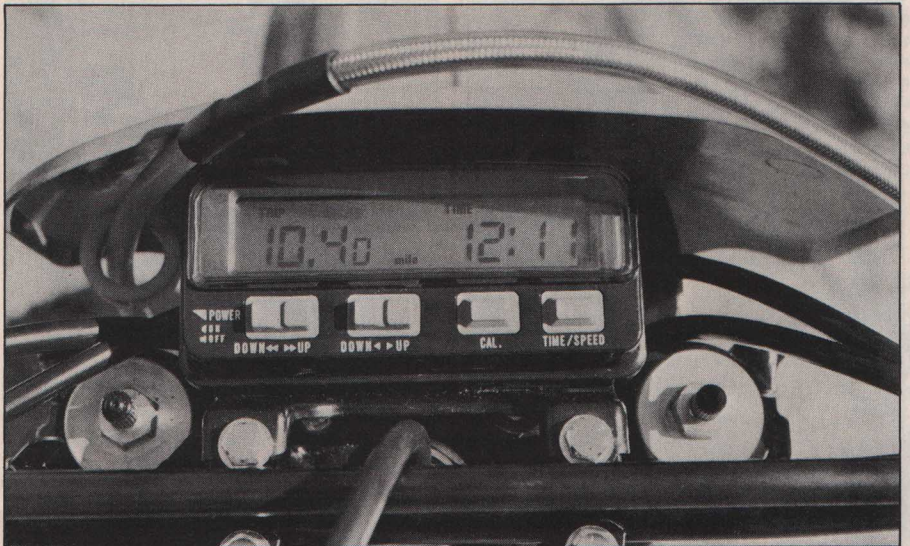
- When the XR is dropped and the engine is hot, the ease of starting (or restarting) goes out the window. You can then count on a frustrating number of tiring kicks to get the bike relit.

- When hot, it's virtually impossible to start the XR in gear with the clutch held in.

- In order to start the Honda, you must get a full kick at the kickstarter. When you're

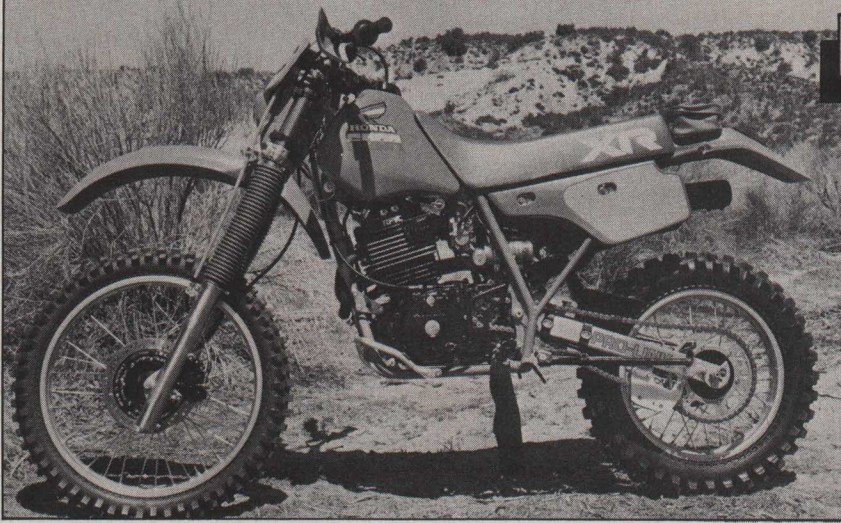


Land too hard from a serious jump, and the rear end will protest. The forks, however, are superior to the shock.



The spiffiest clock/speedo/odometer combo ever to grace a stock bike can be found on the XR350 and 600 models only.

HONDA XR600R



HONDA XR600R

Engine type	Air-cooled, 4-stroke, single, SOHC
Bore and stroke	97mm x 80mm
Displacement	591cc
Carburetion	(2) 28mm Keihin
Factory recommended jetting:	
Main jet	135
Jet needle	N/A
Pilot jet	45
Slide number	N/A
Fuel tank capacity	10.5 L (2.8 gals.)
Lubrication	Dry sump
Gearbox ratios:	
1	2.384:1
2	1.647:1
3	1.250:1
4	1.000:1
5	0.840:1
Gearing, front/rear	14/48
Ignition	CDI
Recommended spark plug	NGK BPR8EA-0 or ND X24EPR-U9
Silencer/spark arrester	Yes/yes
Wheelbase	1450mm (57.2 in.)
Ground clearance	320mm (12.7 in.)
Seat height	940mm (37.0 in.)
Rake/trail	28°/118mm (4.5 in.)
Wet weight, no fuel	282.5 lbs.

Tire size and type:	
Front	3.00 x 21 IRC 4PR
Rear	5.10 x 17 IRC 4PR
Suspension, type and travel:	
Front	43mm Showa telescopic, adj. comp., 280mm (11.0 in.)
Rear	Pro-Link, single Showa shock, adj. comp./reb., 295mm (11.6 in.)
Intended use	Enduro, off-road, desert, cross-country, trail
Country of origin	Japan
Retail price, approx.	\$2498
Distributor/Manufacturer:	
American Honda Motor Co., Inc. 100 W. Alondra Blvd. Gardena, CA 90247	
Overall rating of bike, keeping intended use in mind:	
Handling	Good
Front suspension	Very good
Rear suspension	Fair
Power	Very good
Cost	Good
Attention to detail	Excellent
Effectiveness, stone stock	Good
This rating system is included to aid in comparison of bikes in the same displacement and intended-use categories. Comparing the ratings of two dissimilar machines is a meaningless exercise in futility.	

stuck in a narrow section and utterly stalled, this is not always possible. The bike must then be tugged and pushed to a more-or-less level spot where the rider can get the proper leverage for a full stroke.

MORE FRIENDLY TERRAIN AND WHAT THE XR600 DOES BEST

When we left the mountains after a thoroughly frustrating day of struggling with the 600, a mental note was made to ride the bike again in its element.

A trip to the desert showed that at medium and higher speeds, the 600 was very happy. Long, deep and power-sapping sand washes were taken comfortably with the torquey Honda. Climbs up steep sandy hills were not only easy, but lots of fun.

Fast blasts around twisting fire roads were a pure joy. Mild rolling bumps and whoops showed decent stability. Anything but serious bumps could readily be soaked up by the Cadillac-soft forks and shock.

For casual trailriding and play racing, the 600 was tons of fun. It was only when the 600 was taken into the hostile territory of real enduro-type terrain that all the fun went on strike.

WHAT IT CAN AND CANNOT DO

You could ride an enduro on the XR600 in stock trim, but certainly not a serious enduro. The limits of competition capability would be reached and possibly exceeded in a family-type enduro. A real Eastern woods run would be out of the question. Here the XR200 would leave the XR600 easily.

For Baja-type riding, the 600 would be a stellar choice, as long as the pace was cruising rather than frenzied. With the stock tank (slightly smaller this year) the range is still excellent, and the Honda seems to run comfortably on regular gas.

Mellow trailriding is another place where the 600 would be ideal. And if you're into climbing big hills, the power of the XR is more than enough to conquer intimidating grades.

For four-stroke racing the bike would be competitive in the beginner and novice classes. On a long and relatively flat Grand Prix track it would be fun and competitive in the less demanding classes.

CHANGES FROM 1984 TO 1985

Not much is held over from the older XR500. This is truly a dramatically changed bike. Consider:

- The '84 bike had a wet-sump oiling system, while the '85 has a dry sump.
- A new frame graces the 1985 model, but the rake and trail are the same.
- You won't find a mud-trapping skid plate on the new bike, as the case protection is accomplished by a sano aluminum tubing structure.
- Really neat quick-disconnect side panels make getting to the airbox a one-minute job at most.
- A classy-looking aluminum swingarm replaces the steel unit of the old 500s.



On rough ground the heavy weight will let itself be known. Care must be taken, or Big Red will dart off at random.



An aluminum swingarm replaces the steel unit of years past. A revised shock has easier-to-reach rebound adjuster and grease fittings on the linkage. The powerplant shows no external changes. But inside you'll find a bigger hole, more torque and a changed oiling system.

- Suspension ratios have been revised once again, and the rebound damping knob is easier to reach. Also, neat grease fittings are on the linkage.

- The spec sheet says the saddle is 10mm, and so are the pegs.

- Tank capacity on the '84 was 12.8 liters, and the new bike carries 10.5 liters—plenty for most needs.

- Engine size is up to 591cc, compared with 498cc on the 500 model.

- You'll note that the pipe is slightly changed, mostly for cosmetic reasons. As with older XRs, you'll experience a performance gain with a SuperTrapp silencer and save some weight high up on the bike.

- You'll pay more for the new bike, as the retail price is now \$2498, about 200 bucks more than the smaller 500.

- Don't look for a weight savings on the 600, as it hits the scales at 282.5 pounds, with no gas in the tank. Still heavy metal.

- You'll still find two 28mm carbs on the 600, but the jetting has been revised, and carburetion is definitely improved. All flat spots are gone once the bike is properly warmed up.

- The clutch has allegedly been improved, but our field testing showed that it still would not tolerate abuse.

- Shifting is slightly better, but when the clutch starts to protest from heavy use, it reverts back to being notchy and impossible to shift up under full power.

- Although brakes at both ends look like the old hardware, they work great, with the front brake being just about perfect in feel and power for the dirt.

- A truly great clock/speedo/odometer can be found on the bars. This unit is digital, with large, easy-to-read numbers and easily resettable controls. You can switch from speedo to odometer by pushing a button, and there's even a function that will calibrate the odometer to whatever deviation you might find in a real enduro situation. This slick unit retails for around \$150, we are told, and will adapt to any conventional odometer drive. No doubt many of them will find their way onto serious enduro bikes, with the only drawback being the sheer physical size of the item, and, of course, the hefty price tag. However, you get it free with your XR.

IS BIGGER BETTER?

Logical comparisons will be made to the older XR500. We'll tell you right up front that the 600 will not smoke the 500 in a drag race. Through the gears they're pretty much even. But the superior low-end and mid-range torque of the 600 will let the rider shift less, and perhaps climb a few hills that might have stopped a 500 rider.

The increased displacement means fewer engine revs to cruise, and possibly this translates into better reliability and longer life on the trail.

Still, with all the changes and improvements, the Honda XR600 remains a play bike and cannot, in the wildest stretch of the imagination, be considered a serious enduro bike.

Play bike supreme, to be sure. Baja cruiser extraordinaire. Enduro bike? Not a chance. □

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