

**250 SHOOTOUT** HONDA XR250 vs. YAMAHA WR250F vs. TTR250 vs. YZ125  
vs. SUZUKI DRZ250 vs. KAWASAKI KDX220 vs. KTM 200EXC

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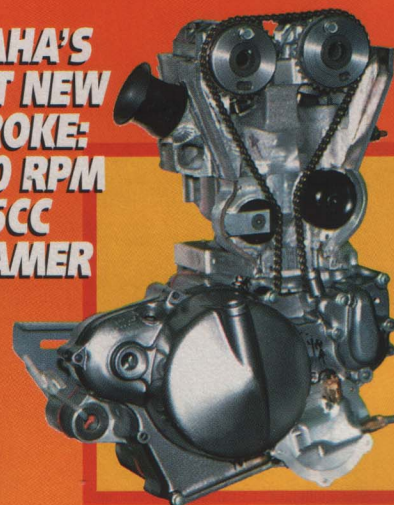


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# WOODS WONDERS

DRZ250 vs. TTR250 vs.  
XR250R and the WR250F!





By the rock-jumping Dirt Bike staff

**L**et's face it, when the trail gets tight and gnarly enough, when the speeds get so slow you wish you had a gear lower than first, too much power is a bad thing. So are too much seat height, too much spring preload and too much wheel travel. Nope, you want something low, slow and sure-footed; something that has the pleasant personality of a lapdog. YZ250s and KX500s need not apply, as they'll wear you to a nub long before the trail ends. That's why Honda redesigned its XR250R for 1996, and that's why Yamaha and now Suzuki offer 250cc four-stroke trail bikes. Not everyone blazes through the forest like Mike Lafferty or Steve Hatch, and these machines are built to be more mule-train than fast-lane. The thing is, which is the best at tackling tight trail? Which is the most reliable and gives the best bang for the buck?



*It's hard to make a really powerful bike handle well, but none of the factories had that problem with these bikes. They're built to be mellow, soft and cuddly when the trail gets wicked.*





# SUZUKI DRZ250

*New to you, but not  
Australians*

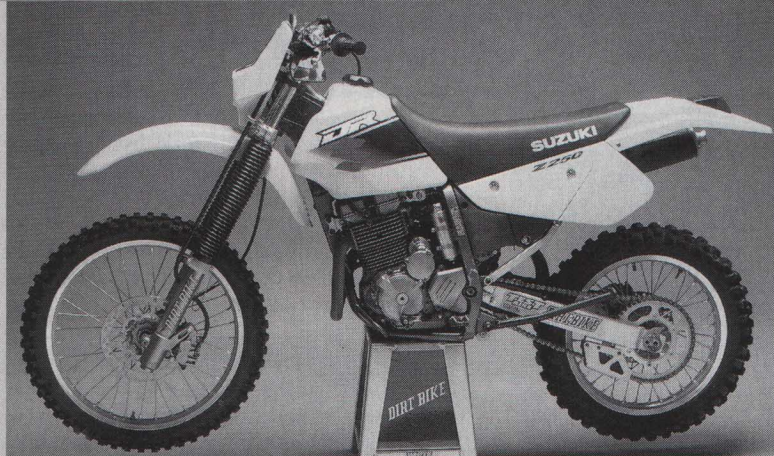
● Suzuki swiped the engine out of its Asian/Australian dual-sport DRR to produce a stateside DRZ250. Unlike the TTR250, the DRZ has a kickstarter to back up the electric-start system, so you can get it lit if the battery gets low. However, the DC-CDI ignition needs at least eight volts of juice for the engine to start and run, so you can't remove the electric starter or battery for lightness. Also, the DRZ250 comes in 49-state and California versions; the normal DRZ has a 28mm pumper Mikuni, while the CA sled has a 32mm constant-velocity Mikuni to meet the CARB and EPA standards.

Engineers designed a quick-steering frame for the dual-sport motor, one with a left-side-removable subframe and aluminum swingarm. The steep-fork, long-chassis design is Husky-esque and yields decent turning without compromising stability. Suspension comes from the old parts bin, but the plastic 2.8-gallon tank is new. Wheels and brakes are RM stuff, and the DRZ is fitted with all of the necessary enduro gadgetry. The thing is, although it's eligible for Suzuki's off-road contingency program, Suzuki aimed this machine at the casual trail rider and does not offer a kick-start-only DRZ250.

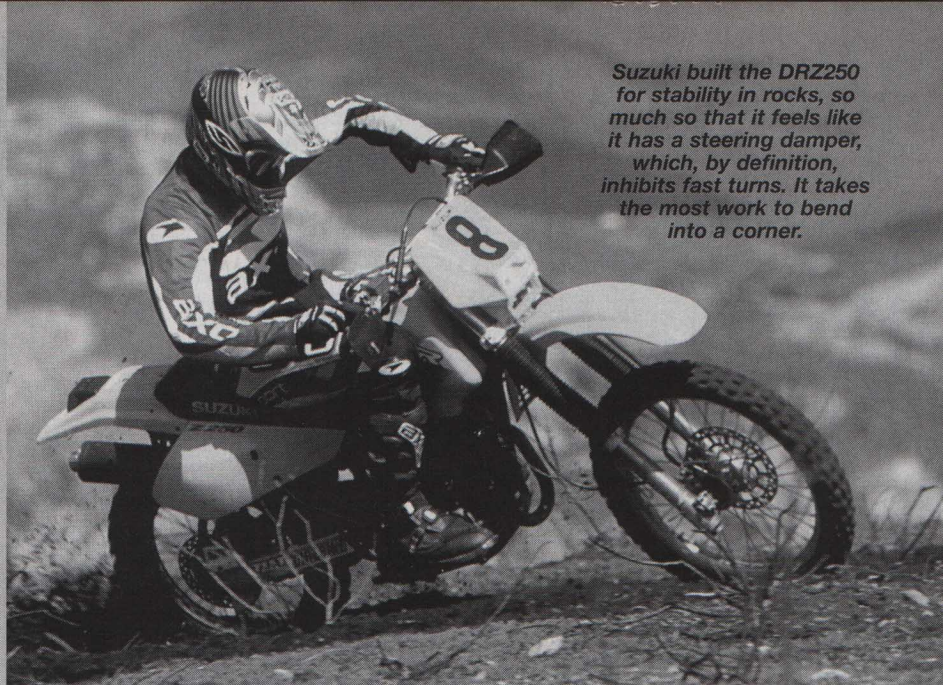
**Engine:** Once you get past the heavy clutch and throttle pull, the engine is in the hunt. It's jetted perfectly and has seamless delivery, but can't be uncorked. Comparable to the TTR, the DRZ has good low-end response and a meaty midrange but is choked off on top. It shifts way better than the TTR, too.

## DRZ DOES

- Easy-starting, user-friendly motor
- Low vibration and noise levels
- Good shifting, decent clutch feel
- Good stability with decent turning
- Excellent fork, especially for rocks



With RM-grade brakes, swingarm linkage and fork, the DRZ250 has a lot of ground control. Like with past RMs, only the left subframe is removeable. The other offerings come with handguards, but not the DRZ.

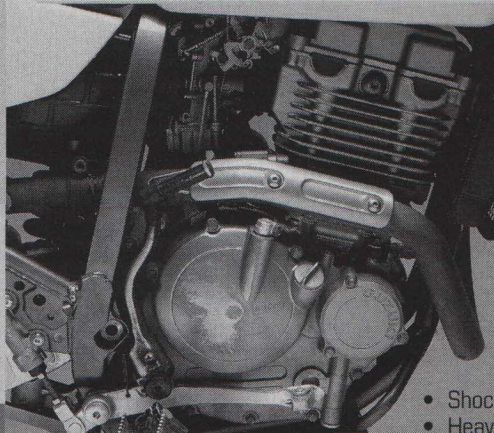


*Suzuki built the DRZ250 for stability in rocks, so much so that it feels like it has a steering damper, which, by definition, inhibits fast turns. It takes the most work to bend into a corner.*

## DRZ250 TECH INSPECTION

- Four-valve, DOHC engine from Japanese D-S
- Electric starter plus backup kick-lever
- DC-CDI ignition requires charged battery
- Wet-sump engine with external oil cooler
- Pre-TwinChamber RM fork, remote-reservoir shock
- California (32mm CV carb) and 49-state (28mm) versions
- Suspension travel 11.0 inches, front/rear

WOODS  
WONDERS



*Suzuki spent extra money to give the DRZ a back-up kick-starter, so that you won't be stranded at the bottom of a ravine if the battery gets low. It makes good, seamless power and is the best-shifting bike of the three.*

## DRZ DOESN'T

- Shock comes with compression adjuster maxed
- Heavy steering compared to XR/TTR
- A drained battery means a stranded rider
- Hard to twist throttle
- Needs revalve and springs for whoops

**Fork:** Coming off of the early-'90s RM250W, the DRZ fork is the most modern. It's a little stiffer than the XR fork, but not much. It soaks up most everything without a whimper or a twitch. Good stuff.

**Shock:** Can we rave about the fork some more? The shock is hideously soft and comes with the compression adjuster almost maxed out. It doesn't do a lot of damping, but it huffs and puffs with every stroke.

**Handling:** Its weight and long chassis combine to make the DRZ handle like it has a steering damper set on high. Tight trails work you, but the DRZ handles like it's on rails in rocks.

**Brakes:** With the same components as the DRZ400, the 250 has good binders, although the rear does chatter on downhills a lot.





*If you're looking for an XR250 with electric starting, then the Yamaha TTR250 is your bike. It combines the effortless controls and handling of the Honda with the pumper-carbed power of the Suzuki.*

#### TTR250 TECH INSPECTION

- DOHC, wet-sump engine
- Electric starting, optional back-up
- Conventional fork, 11.2 inches of travel
- Remote res. shock, 11.2 inches of travel
- YZ-grade brake components, wheels
- Aluminum swingarm, steel muffler

GYT-R department is offering a kick-start conversion for \$299, along with an aluminum muffler/spark arrester that saves four pounds and costs \$299, a high-compression piston (\$129.47) and airfilter (\$28.26). Or you can get the whole GYT-R hop-up kit (pipe, filter, piston) for \$453.25. We tested the TTR stock, though.

**Engine:** Its pumper carb delivers excellent low-to-mid power with all the restrictors in place, but you have to re-jet to correct a too-lean condition when you remove the airbox and muffler baffles. Over-rev is choked off by the pipe, and throttle response isn't as crisp as the Honda's. In overall power and delivery, the TTR is in the hunt, but the motor is held back by very notchy shifting when compared to the XR and DRZ.

**Fork:** In a word, grim! The damping and spring rate are so soft that the fork tucks, deflects, flops and flexes, and that's just in first gear. Going from 10 clicks out on the adjuster to six out helps a bunch, especially in whoops, and so does raising the oil level, but it really needs a heavier spring. The DRZ and XR both have a better fork, stock.

**Shocks:** Matching the fork, the shock is also too soft. The remote-reservoir's compression adjuster should be turned in four clicks (to six out) for faster trails, but

no amount of adjustments will make the TTR shock as good as the Honda's.

#### Handling:

Even though the TTR and the DRZ are the same weight, the TTR feels lighter on the trail, due to its

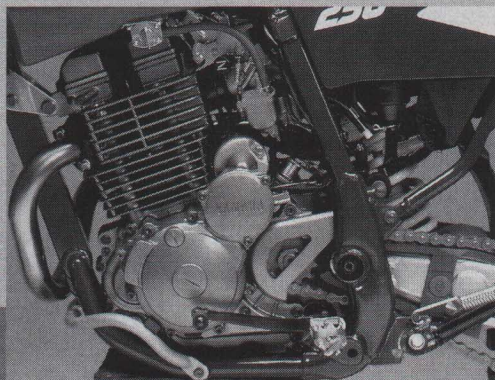
quicker geometry. Some of the Yamaha's agility comes from the fork diving into the travel, effectively giving it a steeper rake. It's pretty stable in rocks, too.

**Brakes:** Other than the tendency to chatter on downhills, the rear brake is fine, but the front brake is weak and requires a lot of pressure.

#### TTR TANTALIZERS

- Easy starting, excellent carburetion
- Soft suspension gobbles trail junk
- Light steering for a 264-pound bike
- Decent clutch and throttle feel
- Good low-speed, gnarly-trail bike

*Back-up kickstarting is a \$299 option on the TTR. If you find the suspension so soft that the fork tucks, crank in the compression damper. If you opt for stiffer springs, rebound isn't adjustable and may force revalving.*



## YAMAHA TTR250

### E-ticket trail ride

• In the midst of its four-stroke motocross revolution, Yamaha shifted gears with its TTR250 (and 225) in early 1999. The TTR250 was meant to take sales away from Honda's XR250R, so Yamaha upped the ante with electric starting. The TTR engine came from a Japanese-market dual-sport, and the engineers designed the chassis to work with existing parts, like the fork, aluminum swingarm and linkage from past YZs. The TTR remains unchanged for 2001, which means it had no major problem areas to mitigate. However, Yamaha's



#### TTR TANKSLAPS

- Front brake is weak, heavy pull
- Needs rejetting to run uncorked
- Very heavy, notchy shifting
- Back-up kicker optional, stock on DRZ
- Weight adversely affects handling



## HONDA XR250R

*Has it been five years?*

● Honda redesigned the XR250R in 1996, when the XR400R was introduced. Its engine was downsized slightly and chassis slimmed down accordingly, so the air-cooled machine could better tackle tight trail. Its fork had a combination of cast and machined parts to provide long travel with minimal underhang, and the shock was the state-of-the-art for playbikes. This make-over gave the XR250R a new race face, for a while, but then Yamaha aimed its TTR at the XR and pulled the trigger.

**Engine:** Despite not having a pumper carb, the XR250R has excellent throttle response off of the very bottom. It's also jetted perfectly once you remove the muffler and airbox stuffers. Power is decent as long as you ride it like a 125 two-stroke, although the pipe chokes off the engine on top.

**Fork:** It's soft for stadium whoops, but the XR fork is superb at soaking up trail junk and rock gardens. We've even seen it cut some impressive laps around High Point Raceway, aka Mt. Morris, bottoming on every jump. It's not quite as effective as the DRZ Showa, but it outshines the TTR fork.

**Shock:** Neither remote-reservoir shock can hold a candle to the XR's piggyback Showa. Matched perfectly with the fork, the shock soaks up most everything, right until the point the bottoming bumper takes over. It's also the most widely-adjustable.

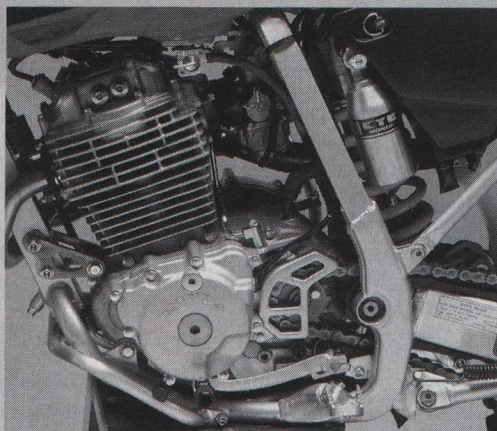
**Handling:** Agility is the XR's strong point, but the XR is also stable in rocks and on high-speed trail. It turns incredibly quick and doesn't require a lot of effort to bend between trees. Its short wheelbase makes it a little wheelie-prone on steep hills, though.

**Brakes:** With CR-grade brakes, front and rear, the Honda is head and shoulders above the TTR and DRZ in braking power and feel at the lever. They're great!

*Honda managed to get incredible throttle response without going to a pumper carb, and the XR250R has the best shock of the bunch. It's the most race-worthy, being some 18 pounds lighter than the DRZ and TTR.*

### XR EXPLETIVES

- Suspension too soft for western whoops
- It's hard to get muffler insert out!
- Wheelie-prone on hills
- No hot-start system or e-button
- Brush guards not very effective



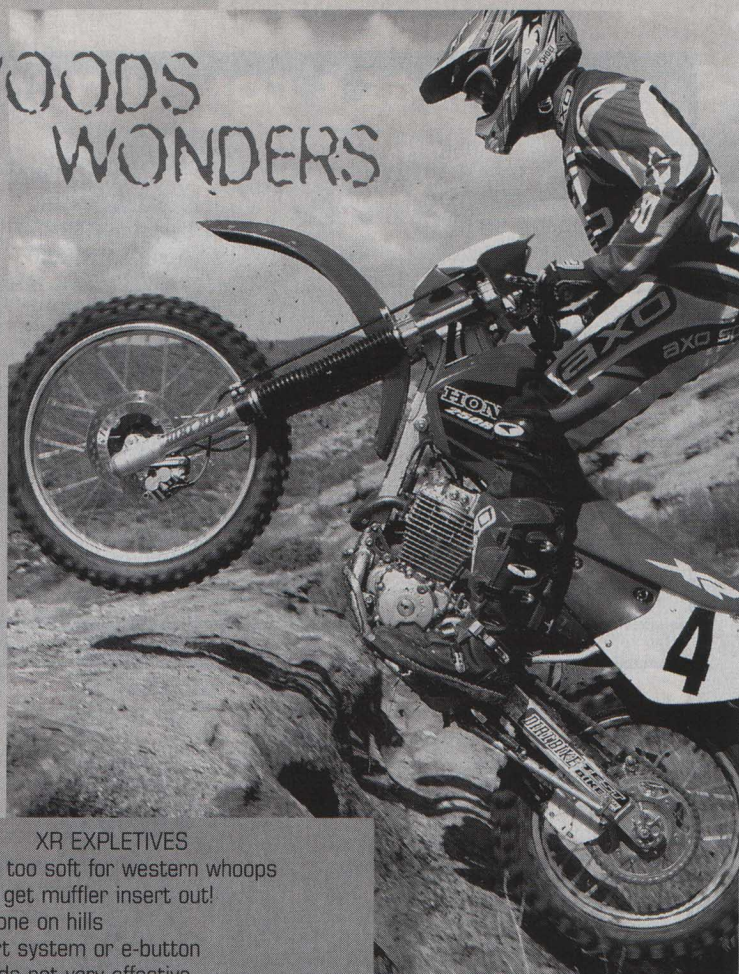
*Scott Summers raced a 280cc XR in the GNCCs last year, and he reworked the oil lines to include an XR400 oil cooler. The 250R comes jetted perfectly once you figure out how to remove the muffler insert.*

*Although we like DRZ fork better, its compression adjuster is maxed, stock. The XR250R does everything except whoops well and is at its best when plonking over gnarly trail.*

### XR EXTRAPOLATIONS

- Snappy throttle response, great jetting
- Light handling complements light weight (246 pounds)
- Excellent control package, light feel
- Strong brakes with excellent feel at levers
- Nothing lacking in total package, stock
- Awesome for first- and second-gear trail

# WOODS WONDERS



### XR250R TECH INSPECTION

- Air-cooled, dry-sump, SOHC engine
- Kick-start only, auto-decompression
- Full-on CR-grade brake components
- 41mm conventional KYB fork, shock
- Steel subframe, aluminum swingarm
- Full enduro-ready componentry





## RATINGS & CONCLUSIONS

### PEAK POWER

1. Honda XR250R
2. Yamaha TTR250
3. Suzuki DRZ250

### STARTING EASE

1. Yamaha TTR250
2. Suzuki DRZ250
3. Honda XR250R

### OVERALL ENGINE

1. Honda XR250R
2. Yamaha TTR250
3. Suzuki DRZ250

### FORK RATINGS

1. Suzuki DRZ250
2. Honda XR250R
3. Yamaha TTR250

### SHOCK RATINGS

1. Honda XR250R
2. Yamaha TTR250
3. Suzuki DRZ250

### OVERALL HANDLING

1. Honda XR250R
2. Yamaha TTR250
3. Suzuki DRZ250

### ERGONOMICS

1. Honda XR250R
2. Yamaha TTR250
3. Suzuki DRZ250

### OVERALL PACKAGE

1. Honda XR250R
2. Yamaha TTR250
3. Suzuki DRZ250

## WHAT ABOUT THE WR250F?

*Comparing an apple with watermelons*

● What a difference one valve makes! While the four-valve TTR and DRZ share a strong resemblance with real race bikes, and the XR250 is a raceable trail bike, the WR250F was built from the ground up to be a real racer. At 240 pounds ready to gas and go, the WR250F is six pounds lighter than the Honda and 24 pounds lighter than the electric-start Suzuki and Yamaha. It also boasts a high-compression engine (12.5:1 vs. 10.4:1), liquid cooling, titanium valves and a rolling chassis lifted from a YZ125. Clearly, the WR250F is as race-ready as a Japanese four-stroke gets. All it really needs to be deep-woods ready is guards, especially handguards.

So, how much more effective is it in the woods than the best of the four-valvers, the XR250R? To find out, we tackled our regular trails with the WRF and XR250. These include skinny ridges, steep hills, goat trails, abandoned and overgrown jeep trails, sand-washes, cliff climbs, streambeds (in use!), a few tree sections, and skidplate-bashing rock gardens.

**Engine:** Amazingly, the XR250 has better snap off of the very bottom, but then the WRF takes over and is still reaching for peak revs when the XR falls flat on its face and demands an upshift. Up to that point, the Honda does a decent job of keeping the WRF in sight. The XR also has a better clutch and is easier to start than the Yamaha.

We also compared the two after changing the WRF's cam timing to YZF spec. The change gave better low-end response, but the WRF still couldn't snap to attention like the XR. Also, our

	XR250R	DRZ250	TTR250
<b>Bore &amp; stroke</b> .....	73mm x 59.5mm	73mm x 62.6mm	73mm x 59.6mm
<b>Carburetion</b> .....	30mm Keihin	28mm Mikuni	30mm Tekei
<b>Transmission</b> .....	Six-speed	Six-speed	Six-speed
<b>Wheelbase</b> .....	55.1"	57.3"	56.4"
<b>Rake angle</b> .....	24.8°	26.5°	27.1°
<b>Seat height*</b> .....	37.25"	37"	37.5"
<b>Weight**</b> .....	246 lb	264 lb	264 lb
<b>Retail price</b> .....	\$4699	\$4699	\$4699

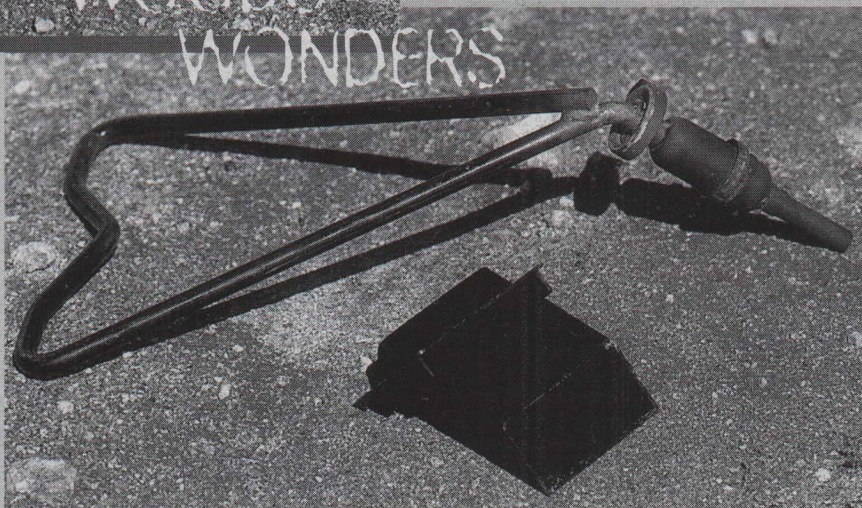
\* With the suspension fully extended

\*\* With all fluids except gasoline



Yamaha's inserts are easier to remove, but the jetting goes out the window, and brass is harder to find.

**Most ridiculous feature:** To remove the Honda muffler insert, remove one TORX bolt, spot-weld a like-sized rod into the end (we used an old Suzuki triangle) and beat on the triangle until blue in the face.





WRF (with the cam timing changed) is still slower than the YZF250F. Even with a YZF pipe installed. We'll let you know when we find out where that power went.

**Forks:** For gnarly, slow-speed trail, the XR Showa fork is super-compliant and does a better job than the stiffer WRF Kayabas, but the Yamaha is more race-worthy in faster conditions and light-years ahead in the whoops. Where the XR is bottoming and deflecting, the WRF fork simply soaks. If it does bottom, you won't feel it, due to the works bottoming bumpers.

**Shock:** As with the fork, the XR is plush and compliant on small stuff and too soft for big hits. Conversely, the WRF shock is magic on high-speed terrain and needs to be softened for trail junk. With high-speed and low-speed compression adjusters, that's easily accomplished. Overall, the Yamaha has more effective and more adjustable suspension at both ends.

**Handling:** The XR250R, with its light steering and quick-handling frame, actually feels lighter than the WRF on really gnarly trail. Its suspension also settles more into the travel, giving the pilot a lower seat height and more weight transfer for turning. But its short wheelbase and snappy low-end make the XR wheelie-happy on steep hills and less stable than the WRF at speed. Overall, the XR is better in first-gear and second-gear sections, while the WRF takes over in all of the higher gears.

**Brakes:** As good as the Honda's brakes are, the WRF's are better. They offer more power with less lever pressure.

**Conclusion:** If you're an adventure rider who spends hours and days in first- and second-gear gnarliness, the Honda XR250R is your best choice. Its aircooled simplicity, agility and friendly power keep you moving forward, where the WRF will buck, boil and stall. If you spend most of your time in the upper gears or occasionally enter a motocross or desert race, the WRF is the weapon of choice. The WRF costs \$1000 more than the XR, though. A west-coast rider could easily sink \$1000 into the Honda and still not have an advantage on the WRF. An east-coast guy could have an extra \$1000 for gear and entries and be competitive on the XR. ●

*Due mostly to geometry, the XR actually feels lighter and more nimble than the WR250F. Landings from jumps are a different story, though, because the WRF's suspension is much stiffer.*



*On the WR250F, you'll find the only titanium valves, liquid-cooling, waterpump and ignition guards, rear master-cylinder guard, stainless-steel pipe, SX-grade bottoming bumpers and shock with adjustable high- and low-speed compression in its class.*





# WOODS WONDERS



Yamaha gets the Smart Marketing Award for selling the TTR250 in wife-bike tune but offering GYT-R hop-up kits for better performance.







*Honda gets the Big Air Award, as its XR250R is the lightest and the most fun to jump of the four-valves.*

*Suzuki gets the Big Boulders Award, as the DRZ250 is the most plush, stable and comfortable in rock gardens. J*

