HONDA XR200R

The evolution grinds to a halt

When it comes to the evolution of motorcycles, Honda is one of the brands thought of first. Everyone but the most casual (or new) observer remembers the tremendous impact of the original CR125 Elsinore. In 1973, the CR was so much better than everything else on the market that its competitors were blown away and the result was chaos.

Manufacturers have been forced to update their product more and more each year. Progress does not stand still. In many ways, 1983 has been just like 1973. The Honda CR line is very impressive. Radical changes in engine layout, frame geometry, lightness and power have infused yet another jolt of "improve or die" into the motorcycle industry. Chaos reigns again.

This year, Honda not only renovated their CR line, but they completely redesigned their four-stroke XR line with the immensely popular XR350R and the killer XR500R. The 350R more than just filled the gap left by the discontinued XR250R, it helped to create a whole new segment of riders who have turned to four-strokes. And the XR500R is vastly superior to the 500cc four-strokes that Honda has offered in the past.

But the XR200R is...well, it is exactly the same as it was last year. With all the radical changes going on in the Honda motorcycle line, you'd think they would change at least a *few* things. Well, sorry folks. Not even a bolt. A couple of *stickers,* maybe, but no bolts.

That leaves us with but two questions. Is the Honda slowly finding itself outdated? Or is it so much better than anything else that it didn't need to be updated? The answer, as you can probably figure out for yourself, is somewhere in between.

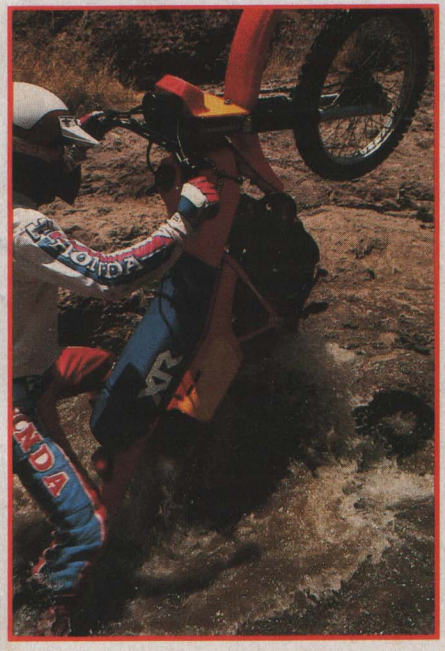
TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

The Honda's SOHC, four-stroke, single cylinder engine still shows a 195cc displacement with a bore and stroke of 65.5 x 57.8mm. The compression ratio of 10.1:1 remains the same, too.

The six-speed, constant mesh gearbox keeps the whole package moving down the trail. The countershaft sprocket is a 13-tooth, while the rear sprocket has 50 teeth.

The XR200R features a sealed O-ring chain for durability which we can attest to. After the 200R was run through an impromptu lake and drowned several times,

PHOTO: PAUL MARTINEZ



we put it in the garage for a couple of days. Now, we don't recommend that you *ever* put a bike away without first washing it and oiling the chain—especially if you've dunked it in three feet of water. But, after all that, the chain on the Honda was still in great shape. In fact, there isn't any reason why the chain shouldn't last for the life of the bike.

The swingarm on the 200, as in the past, is box-section steel with a coat of silver paint to make it look like the genuine aluminum swingarms on the other XRs. Cam-type adjusters keep the wheel and chain running true. The XR200R has a grab handle on the rear axle to speed wheel removal. It also has Honda's "tongue" on the back of the swingarm. This allows you to put the wheel on the back of the swingarm with all the necessary washers and spacers in place on the axle. After you've gotten it all lined up, it's an easy job to slide it all up into the slot. One nut on the left side of the bike tightens the whole setup and the grab bar on the right keeps the axle from turning while you're tightening it.

The rear hub remains the same as last year, as does the cable-operated rear brake. The rear brake is a quick-detachable unit that makes repairs on the trail a lot easier.

The frame is tubular (again, same as last year's) and features the design that Honda calls "Diamond." The motor is used as an integral part of the frame structure. Since no tubes go under the frame, a skid plate is used. The plate is held on by one 12mm bolt at the front and two 10mm bolts at the rear. Why, we ask ourselves, do they use two different size bolts to hold the skid plate on? If you're at all human, you probably will never remember to grab two wrenches when you want to take it off. There's no reason why all three can't be the same size.

The frame and plastic (fenders, side plates and tank) are a deeper orange for 1983, just like all the XRs this year.

Other cosmetic changes include the blue seat (although it isn't of the safety-seat type), a blue tool bag and other subtle marketing-type changes. The seat used to say "200R" on it; now it simple says "XR." The side plates used to have a sticker on them that said "XR." No more. The color of the number plate area itself has changed from white to yellow. Last year's swingarm sticker said "Pro-Link," while this year's screams out "200R Pro-Link." So much for radical improvements.

In 1982, one of the changes that made life a lot easier was the switch from chain rollers to a chain slider. In 1983, the slider continues to perform flawlessly.

The suspension hasn't been changed for '83 either, but that actually isn't all that bad. The Pro-Link's shock spring tested out to be 561 lbs./in., about 20 pounds heavier than the 1982 version. Because of the slightly heavier spring and a different preload setting, the 1983 version

PHOTOS: RICH COX

DIRT RIDER SPECIFICATIONS

HONDA XR200R

Serial number ..... Frame: JH2ME0404DK209756
Engine: ME04E-5210188
Price $1,575
Number of dealers (U.S.) 1,800
Warranty ..... None
Customer service ..... American Honda Motor Co.
100 W. Alondra Blvd.
Gardena, CA 90247
213/327-8280

ENGINE

Type ..... Four-stroke, air-cooled SOHC, single cylinder
Displacement 195cc
Bore x stroke ..... 65.5 x 57.8mm
Compression ratio 10.1:1
Horsepower/rpm (measured) ..... 14.7 @ 8,500
Torque/rpm (measured) ..... 10.2 @ 7,000
Carburetion ..... Single Keihin
Exhaust ..... Single steel exhaust into steel spark arrester/silencer
Ignition ..... CDI
Lubrication ..... Wet sump, one quart capacity
Air filtration ..... Oiled polyurethane foam

CHASSIS

Frame ..... Steel, diamond design
Rake/trail ..... 28.8°/4.9 in.
Front suspension ..... Showa leading axle air/spring fork, 35mm stanchion tubes, 9.4 in. travel (measured)
Rear suspension ..... Pro-Link with Showa gas/oil shock, four-way adjustable rebound damping
9 in. travel (measured)
Brakes ..... Front: Single-leading shoe drum
Rear: Single-leading shoe drum
Wheels ..... Front: 1.60-21 D.I.D
Rear: 1.85-18 D.I.D
Tires ..... Front: 3.00-21 IRC Volcanduro VE-31
Rear: 4.10-18 IRC Volcanduro VE-31

DRIVE TRAIN

Transmission ..... Six-speed
Primary drive ..... 3.33:1 (gear)
Final drive 3.85:1 (13/50)
Gear ratios 1st 2.77:1
2nd 1.94:1
3rd 1.45:1
4th 1.13:1
5th 0.92:1
6th 0.79:1

MEASUREMENTS

Weight (wet, no fuel) ..... 230 lbs.
Weight (wet, tank full) ..... 244 lbs.
Weight distribution ..... 103/127 lbs. (45/55%) (Fr/rr, wet, no fuel)
Weight distribution ..... 111/133 lbs. (45/55%) (Fr/rr, wet, tank full)
Wheelbase ..... 53.3 in.
Fuel capacity ..... 2.4 gal. total
Reserve capacity ..... No reserve
Sound test ..... 98 dbA
Ground clearance ..... 13.4 in.
Seat height ..... 35 in.
Swingarm length ..... 19.8 in.
Swingarm pivot to center of countershaft ..... 3.4 in.

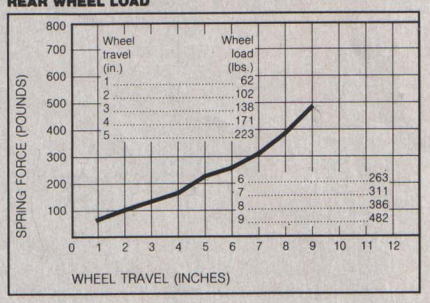
PARTS/COST

Maintenance manual $1.50
Carburetor jets ..... Main—3.53
Pilot—NA
Needle—NA
Needle jet set—$12.20
Sprockets ..... Front—$13.08
Rear—$69.22
Handlebar levers ..... Brake—$9.43
Clutch—$9.43
Shift lever $18.60
Piston kit (complete) $32.50
Rings only $8.43
Cylinder $97.66
Head $146.43
Clutch plates ..... Friction (5)—$4.15 ea.
Steel (4)—$1.75 ea.
Air filter $5.57
Brake shoes ..... Front—$2.53 ea.
Rear—$2.53 ea.
Chain $61.67
Seat $87.26
Fenders ..... Front—$43.35
Rear—$33.45
Fuel tank $115.05

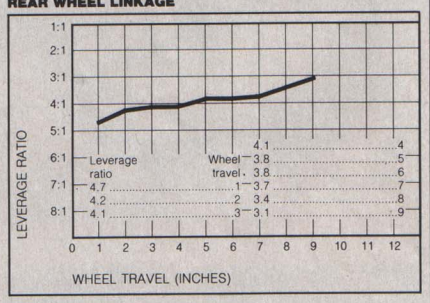
OPTIONS

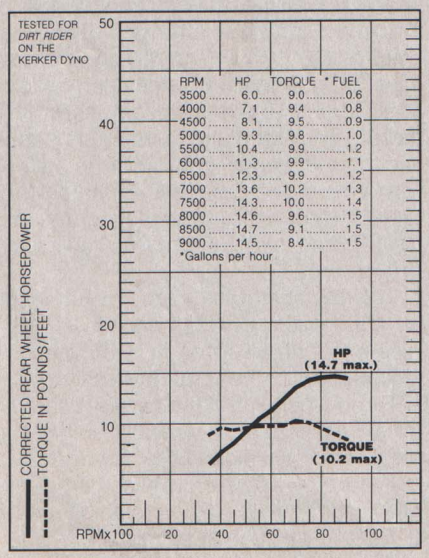
None

REAR WHEEL LOAD

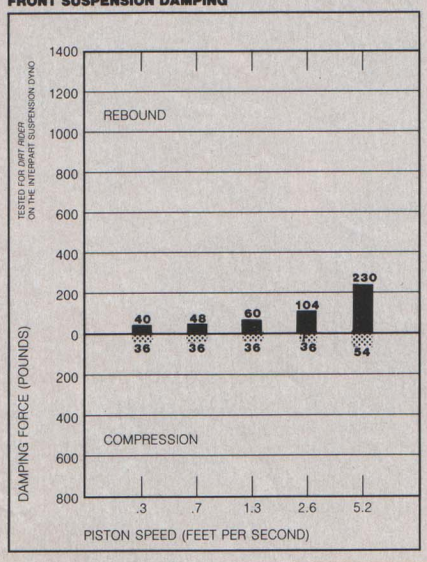


REAR WHEEL LINKAGE

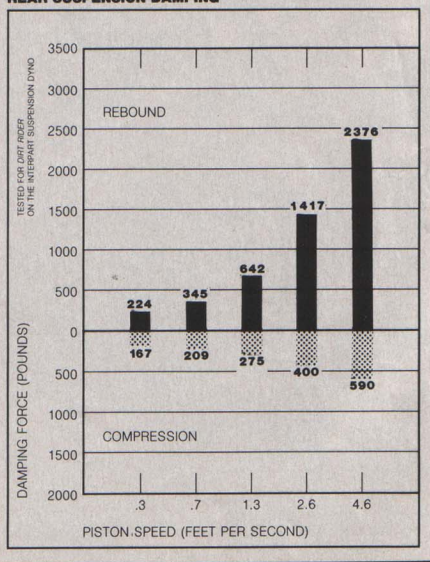


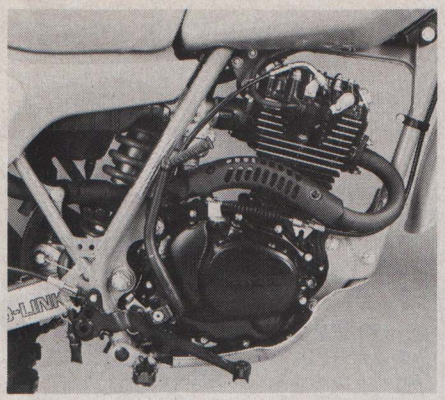


FRONT SUSPENSION DAMPING

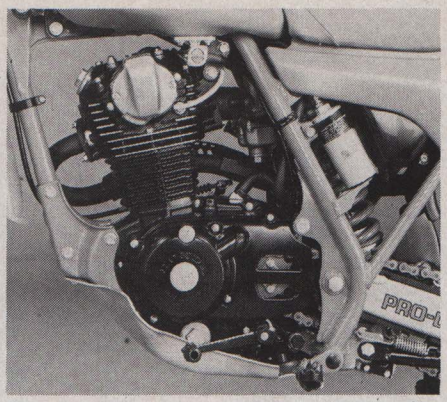


REAR SUSPENSION DAMPING



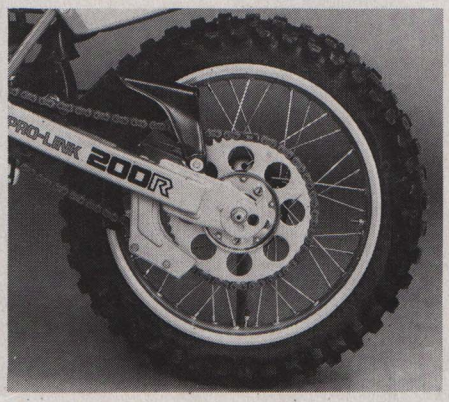


The motor on the 200 hasn't changed from last year; it's still wimpy and it's still good.



A whopping 14.7 horsepower is tucked into the XR's four-stroke motor.

An effective spark arrester/silencer combo keeps the noise down to 98 dbA.



A sturdy chain guide, chain guard and slider keep the XR sailing smoothly.

Front fork, Showa of course, works fine for medium-speed trails.

The XR200R remains narrow where it counts: where the rider sits.

A quick-release brake cable and an axle puller welded onto the axle speed repairs.

PHOTOS: PAUL MARTINEZ

shows a slightly different wheel load curve than the '82. Our '83 model starts out at 62 pounds of force at the first inch of travel, while the '82 was softer at 49 pounds at the same travel. Throughout the rest of the travel, the curves look almost identical, with the '83 model staying about 10 to 20 pounds heavier.

Rear suspension damping proved to be stiffer, too—especially the rebound. At Interpart's first dyno speed of 0.3 feet per second, the '82 XR200R showed 205 pounds of rebound force while the '83 bike showed 224 pounds. That 19 pound difference jumped to 41 pounds at the second dyno speed of 0.7 feet per second. The '82 showed 304 pounds while the '83 was up to 345 pounds. At the third dyno speed, 1.3 feet per second, the '83 had 110 pounds more force than the '82. At 2.5 feet per second, the gap widened even further with the '83 XR200R showing 284 pounds more damping force. At the final dyno speed, 4.6 feet per second, the '83 had 262 pounds more force.

Compression damping ranged from 35 pounds to 117 pounds heavier on the 1983 model. Since in our December 1982 test of the 1982 XR200R we determined that faster riders would want more damping out of the shock, especially the rebound, we have to assume that this is a step in the right direction. Except that no one knows why the shock has stiffer damping characteristics than the 1982 model, since the shock is supposed to be unchanged. No accessory springs will be offered this year.

The 35mm Showa fork on the 1983 XR200R is identical to what was on the '82. Dual Syntallic bushings help give the XR a very plush feel. Compression damping stayed at 36 pounds for every dyno setting except the fastest, 5.2 feet per second, where it "jumped" to 54 pounds. This is so soft (only 18 pounds per fork tube) that about the only thing that is restricting the movement of the fork—besides the fork springs—is friction. Rebound, on the other hand, actually does something. At the slowest dyno setting, 0.3 feet per second, the '83 XR showed 40 pounds of damping force. At the next speed, 0.7 feet per second, it increased slightly to 48 pounds. By 1.3 feet per second, the fork had gotten up to 60 pounds of force. At 2.6 feet per second, the 200's rebound damping got up to 104 pounds. At the fastest dyno setting, 5.2 feet per second, the fork showed 230 pounds of force, over 50 pounds more than the 1982 version of the same fork.

The fork uses a 21-lb./in. spring (measured at Interpart) with a 1.4-inch spacer on top of the spring. The spring's outside diameter is just slightly over one inch.

Rake and trail stay the same at 28.8°/4.9 in. as do the brakes' (both) swept area of 13.4 square inches. The front wheel is a quick-release unit also. The front hub is no longer a two-piece affair as it is now a one-piece conical job.

All in all, the 1983 XR200R hasn't changed much. But the 1982 model was loved by so many, how can the 1983 XR be bad?

ON THE GAS

The answer is that the bike isn't *bad*. Just about everybody who threw a leg over the XR200 liked it. Some didn't exactly *love* it, but they at least *liked* it. The seat height, 35 inches, is low enough to make the greenest beginner feel at ease. The low seat height, combined with the short (53. in.) wheelbase, gives an overall feeling of small.

All controls fit all of our testers without exception. One of the most noticeable things about the Honda XR200R is that it is comfortable. Everything is within easy reach for even small (you can read that "female" if you want to) hands.

The short wheelbase and fairly steep steering head angle make for quick turning in the woods. In fact, the woods are the best place to ride an XR200R, simply because that is where it performs at its best. The 200 will zip down trails at a good clip, and the second you're ready to change your direction of travel, the XR is ready too. The XR is a quick-handling motorcycle. In fact, it is so quick that it suffers from a lack of high-speed stability. On fast fire roads or wide-open trails, the 200 has a tendency to hunt and swish. You probably won't fall because of it—you probably won't even get scared because of it. You will, however, *notice* it. Just think of it as the XR's way of letting you know that it would rather be turning.

In our December test of the 1982 Honda XR200R, we stated that the foam in the seat was too soft. It still is. After a good, long (say, two hours) ride, your attention is distracted to down yonder.

In the same December test, one of our testers complained that there wasn't enough rebound damping in the rear shock. Since he didn't complain this time, we assume that the slight increase in damping on the 1983 model is enough. With a total of four settings on rebound (we left ours at the second setting), there is even more room to bump up the damping.

By now, you should have figured out that the new XR200 is just about the same bike as the old XR200. That's okay for this year, we suppose, because the 1982 XR200R was such a neat bike.

The only area we still want to complain about is the lack of horsepower. The '83 XR200R put out a maximum horsepower of 14.7 at 8,500 rpm. We're not exactly impressed. One of its competitors, the Suzuki PE175D, puts out 21.3 horses at 9,000 rpm and another competitor, the Kawasaki KDX200A1, puts out 22.4 horsepower at 7,500 rpm.

Yeah, but the XR has got torque up the ying-yang, right? Well, sort of. It does have a lot of torque, compared to its horsepower. The Kawasaki KDX200 actually has more torque than the XR. The only place the XR can compete is at 3,500 rpm where the XR is already slightly ahead.

So what is it that makes the XR200R such a great bike? Actually, it's pretty hard to say. A combination of light weight, low seat height, quick handling and a four-stroke motor make the XR200R the kind of bike you *want* to ride. It's definitely not the kind of bike that will get left in the garage. In fact, it might do better in some circumstances than a serious two-stroke enduro bike.

So, just because the 1983 XR200R isn't any better than last year's model doesn't mean it isn't worth its weight in smiles. **DR**

PHOTO: BOB CARPENTER

OPINIONS

The XR200R was unquestionably my favorite motorcycle this month because it was simply the most fun. I didn't take it seriously, though I suppose you could, and, as a result, I had a blast on it.

Few bikes feel as short and agile as the XR on the trails; you feel like you can make it do anything you want. There isn't enough power to overwhelm a halfway experienced rider, just enough to keep it moving most of the time.

Besides the so-so power output, I'd vote to give the XR beefier fork tubes...and just maybe a slightly longer swingarm. But that's it. I like the XR's non-serious aspect.

—Mark Kariya

Age/Ht./Wt.: 26/5'10"/160 lbs.
Motorcycle(s) currently raced/ridden:
Jawa DT500, Yamaha RD350H,
Yamaha TT600K
Riding ability: Intermediate motocrosser

The Honda XR200R has got to be the funnest bike in the world. I used to own a 1982 version, so I understand that they aren't exactly power demons or anything. But they are so light that you can throw them around all day long without ever getting tired.

The power that it does produce comes down low—really torquey.

The suspension on the XR200R is fine for what it is intended to cope with. I don't know if it's just because the bike is new, but the suspension feels a little bit better than last year's model.

—John Drury

Age/Ht./Wt.: 22/5'10"/145 lbs.
Motorcycle(s) currently raced/ridden:
Yamaha YZ125K
Riding ability: Junior pro motocrosser

I didn't get to ride the 1982 Honda XR200R very much, so is it okay if I go on and on about how much fun it is to ride the 1983 XR200R?

Sure, I know *everybody* always says what fun they are, but I just found out! It seems to bring back memories of the old Honda ads—"Light, lean and lickety-split."

The XR200R has got to be the ultimate "other" bike, the one that sits in the garage for a couple of weeks and then gets taken out for a real thrashing.

But then reality sinks in and the other bikes get better, so the 1984 XR200R will hopefully have some new tricks up its sleeve.

—Bob Carpenter

Age/Ht./Wt.: 23/5'9"/185 lbs.
Motorcycle(s) currently raced/ridden:
Yamaha YZ490K, Honda CR480R
Riding ability: Intermediate motocrosser