

# Honda XR200A

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ALTHOUGH I WAS very fond of this smallest Honda thumper, I must confess to being surprised at how well it was received by the enduro riding public at large. Honda were very soon sold out of their year's allocation and the bike's popularity was underlined by the high second-hand prices it commanded.

I think that the reason for the 200's success was that, despite its diminutive size, it had the amiable nature of a traditional four-stroke and yet its weight and handling characteristics were very similar to a two-stroke. Thus a rider could make the transition from a conventional two-stroke comp bike to the XR without facing too much of a 'culture shock'.

The other factor which helped the bike's sales was that it was very competitive in a way which I found quite surprising. XRs were found very high up in the results sheets on numerous occasions – not only beating all the other four-stroke competition, but showing the majority of two-strokes the way home too! Of course, when it came to outright wins the XR had neither the handling nor the speed to put up special test times against the thoroughbred ISDT bikes, but this consideration is not of major concern to the bulk of riders, since they lack the ability to ride these exotica well.

Naturally, Honda looked at the sales of the XR and were obviously aghast. A bike selling as well as this and with so few mechanical problems could not be allowed to go on, so importation was stopped for 1981. In truth, I am being rather hard on Honda, since a company this size has to be ultra-cautious about not selling a bike which is in the grey area of legality.

The 1981 XR had a plastic petrol tank and

borderline lighting, which made the bike – in the strictest legal sense – illegal. It also had Pro-Link suspension and a further gain in power, so was even more desirable than previously.

I still cannot fully understand Honda's stance since every other manufacturer, including Honda's Japanese compatriots, brought enduro bikes into Britain for 'off-road use only' and no one seemed very bothered about their activities. However, I suppose that being 'number one' does pose problems for anyone.

Not that prospective XR owners need have worried, for no sooner had Honda announced their intention to import the XR range than the specialist press was filled with a rash of advertisements from dealers who were arranging their own supplies of XRs – 200s and 500s – from America: a classic case of demand being met by supply.

The most interesting thing was that the 1981 XR was probably an indication of the way enduro bikes of the future might develop, with the proposed introduction of 'trials' type tyres for 1982. Certainly the little XR – Pro-Link *et al* – looks to be one of the few enduro bikes which will be rideable with the new code enforced.

If Honda have managed to do one single thing better than any other manufacturer in the world, it is to give value for money. Hardened enduro experts might criticize the Honda XR200 on any number of counts, but when one examines the complete package, and remembers the retail selling price of £799, the little XR is way out on its own. No other bike on sale at present comes near to it for sheer value for money.

The worst possible thing to do with the XR is – to look at the specification on paper. In black and





Although slower than its two-stroke opposition, the XR was no slouch.

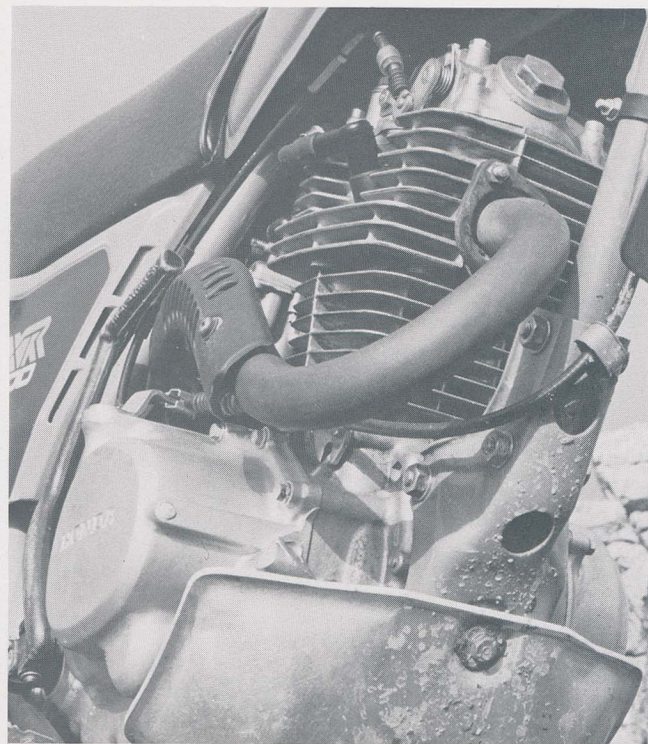




**Despite their apparently dated design, the Honda front forks suited the XR perfectly. The front brake, too, complemented the bike admirably.**

white the facts are depressing. A maximum power of 28bhp, an apparently disastrously short 52.2in wheelbase and suspension travel of only 8.5in at the front and 7.5in at the rear look far from impressive in terms of a 1980 model enduro machine.

Once the bike appears in the flesh any rider with an eye for a successful comp bike begins to have second thoughts. The XR is a delightfully manageable little bike. Physically small in terms of overall dimensions, I managed to find plenty of room for my 5ft 11in frame. Best of all, the bike looks right. The thing is sensibly proportioned with 11.2in of ground clearance and footrests and handlebars which are just about right for racing. Also (with a thousand thanks from me personally), Honda have not fitted the dreaded 23in hula hoop to this bike, which means, amongst many other advantages, that the steering head can be lower



**Although diminutive in capacity, the XR was a thoroughbred 'big banger', in the old tradition.**

and the frame more compact.

In practice the XR turns out to be even better than it looks. I liked the bike immensely, not just as a bargain-priced clubman's enduro mount but as an exceptionally fine off-road motorcycle.

The good things began with starting. Full choke is applied to the tiny 24mm Keihin carburettor and one or two prods fires up the XR from either hot or cold. Matters are helped by an automatic decompressor linked to the kickstarter, but the key to the ease with which the motor can be started is the high kickstart ratio, which enables the motor to be spun fast enough to carry it over compression on the first cycle – always the weak point on any four-stroke.

Once on the move the XR behaves just like a big four-stroke single. Riders who have had experience of the insipid XL series motors just won't believe the way this little 200cc engine will









**A functional but cobby appearance.**

**The XR was very stable on downhill runs – the tougher the better!**

pull. In fact, it is by far the best of all the small-capacity enduro engines in this respect.

On the medium to tight going, where a fairly constant speed is maintained, the XR is competitive with anything in its class. Not only is it competitive but it is also very pleasant to ride, with a

gentle power delivery which off-road novices are going to love.

Where it loses out is in acceleration. In corner-to-corner races the XR just doesn't have enough urge to keep up with modern 175cc two-strokes and, obviously, a 250 will waltz past it. The XR can be made to go at respectable speeds, but it has to be revved very hard. Maximum power is produced at 9000rpm and, if I am any judge of motors, it can be revved well beyond this without any harm.

On a downhill run I saw 70mph with the bike







still accelerating, but this was an artificial speed in that the bike took an eternity, in racing terms, to reach this velocity. A practical top speed for competition purposes is going to be about 65mph.

What makes this bike so attractive is that the motor complements the chassis so very well. I would acknowledge that the bike doesn't handle like an SWM; one can hardly expect it to in view of its wheelbase and suspension package. Rather, it has a curious hipperty-hopperty style not unlike a trials bike. At first this feels rather disconcerting and then one realizes that, although the XR hops about a bit and nods its head over rough going, nothing untoward happens. The motor keeps chuffing along and the momentum can be maintained, which is really the name of the game in enduros.

When something does occur which pushes the bike beyond its limit, the XR is still amiable. I misjudged one jump and finished up with a motocross-style leap down a six-foot-high ledge – not a manoeuvre I would deliberately have undertaken on such a modest machine. The suspension bottomed out hard but steadily, the front end reared in warning and we were on our way. A most meritorious way for a clubman's racing bike to behave.

The bike itself is beautifully made. The exhaust makes a delightful woofing noise, which is just loud enough to be attractive to the rider but well within the bounds of decency. Both brakes are superb and the XR can be stopped dead in a matter of feet with judicious use of the anchors and the excellent engine braking. Overall, for the bike's intended use, it is just about perfect.

I also feel that the XR should be a true economy machine to race. Petrol consumption is almost nil. In one session we rode the bike flat out for three hours and there appeared to be more in the tank when we finished than when we started! The ignition is pointless and that only leaves the tappets, which are easily adjustable, to constitute anything amounting to a chore.

For me the saddle was a trifle too soft, the bars 1in too low and the gear lever about  $\frac{3}{4}$ in too short. I honestly have to get down to that level of

criticism about the bike.

The pundits say the XR is fit only for the clubman's schedule in closed-to-club events. We ran the XR against a PE175 and there was precious little difference in the two: XRs are going to do an awful lot of winning! The majority of the medals will be Bronze awards for clubmen, but put a decent rider on one of these little bikes and I feel sure there could be some very surprising results.

If you are just starting racing look no further – this is the bike for you. And it is completely street legal!

#### **Honda XR200A**

Engine: Air-cooled four-stroke SOHC  
Cylinder arrangement: Single cylinder 15° inclined from vertical  
Capacity: 195cc (65.5 × 57.8mm)  
Compression ratio: 10.0:1  
Max. horsepower: 19bhp at 9000rpm  
Maximum torque: 1.65kg-m at 7000rpm  
Oil capacity: 1.1 litres  
Clutch: Wet multi-plate type  
Transmission: Six-speed constant mesh  
Primary reduction: 3.833; 1 – 2.769; 2 – 1.941; 3 – 1.450; 4 – 1.130  
Final reduction: 3.846 (drive sprocket 13T; driven sprocket 50T)  
Ignition: CDI  
Starting system: Kickstart  
Alternator: 0.045kW at 5000rpm  
Headlight: Low 25W; High 25W  
Tail stoplight: Tail 3W; stop 21W  
Wheelbase: 81.1in  
Overall width: 32.3in  
Wheelbase: 52.2in  
Saddle height: 33.9in  
Ground clearance: 11.2in  
Dry weight: 215.9lb  
Curb weight: 231.3lb  
Frame: Diamond  
Rear suspension travel: Swing arm 7.5in  
Front suspension travel: Telescopic fork 8.5in  
Tyres: 2.75 – 21-6PR front; 4.10 – 18-6PR rear  
Fuel capacity: 7 litres (1.5 imp gal)  
Fuel reserve capacity: 1.5 litres (0.8 imp gal)  
Trail length: 122mm (4.8in)  
Castor angle: 61 degrees 30 minutes