

Jim Lindsay caught gold fever at an advanced age and bought an XR200. Can this be true? A magazine editor parting with money for a bike? Explain yourself, Lindsay . . .



BIKE
TEST

**HONDA
OFF-ROAD'83**

GOLD DIGGERS

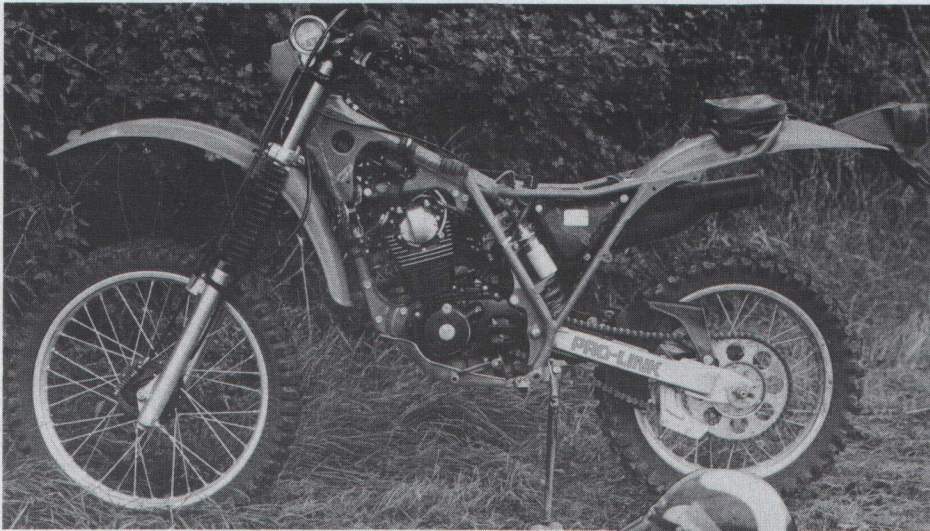
I don't know what it is about the approach of a 30th birthday (only two years to go), but it made me start to think about doing some of the things that I'd always wanted to do but never quite found the time or the money for.

Top of the list was some form of competitive motorcycle sport. So I ran through the options: road racing — too pricey; motocross — I'm too old; trials — not fast enough. It really had to be enduros. "There's a sport you can take at your own pace," I thought. "Sounds about right for an old man like me. Plodding across the countryside watching the guys with the talent come flying by."

So then, there had to be a bike. And after riding the XR200R, it had to be *that* bike. I didn't fancy the idea of a peaky two-stroke much. Fine at the start of the day when you're fresh, but tiring after several hours in the saddle, when a rider like me needs a bike that takes care of itself, while he copes with the problems caused by a monumental lack of fitness.

Several practise sessions at local off-road venues helped me on the way to thinking that I had made the right choice.

The use of a relatively heavy four-stroke powerplant has not made the



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whole machine overweight. In fact, at a touch over 220lb, it compares very favourably with two-stroke bikes in the same capacity class. The result, of course, is that it doesn't require great physical effort to throw about.

Compared with most other bikes in its class, the XR has a good low seat which makes the whole plot feel more stable and is also a great advantage for those numerous occasions where a dirt novice like me has to resort to footing it.

But best of all is the smooth, easily controllable power delivery. It's so civilised compared with a howling, sharp-edged two-stroke. The power comes in strong at the bottom of the rev range, so the engine does not seem at all fussy about what gear it happens to be in.

It stays strong in the midrange, probably the most important engine speed for the relatively inexperienced campaigner, and it tapers off gradually at the top end, unlike the abrupt cut-off experienced on a two-stroke once it revs its way out of the power band.

The handling I found to be precise with the quick steering being an advantage through tight sections. And you really have to try hard to get the suspension to bottom out off jumps, severe drop-offs and bomb holes.

By the way, the fuel economy is quite amazing too.

The bike's first real test came in a seven-hour comparison bash with



five other machines from different manufacturers. I didn't get to ride my own machine until the fifth hour, when I was starting to feel very tired, having already used up my third and fourth winds. As I had suspected, the XR was a great bike to ride in this state, being easy to control and therefore no slower than the two-strokes.

So now I'm waiting for my first real event. The bike is sitting in the workshop all ready to roll and I'm

feverishly gathering all the advice I can get. I'm sure it's going to be a good season.

If I find I can cope with more performance, I think I'll see about laying my hands on one of the new XR350s, due here in March 1983. Only 20lb heavier but producing 12 brake more than the 19 hp 200, it should be a real flyer.

You can check out the specifications here for both models, but keep your eyes peeled for the first tests of that mouthwatering XR350 . . .

