

MOTORCYCLE SPORT

The quality monthly

February 1982 50p



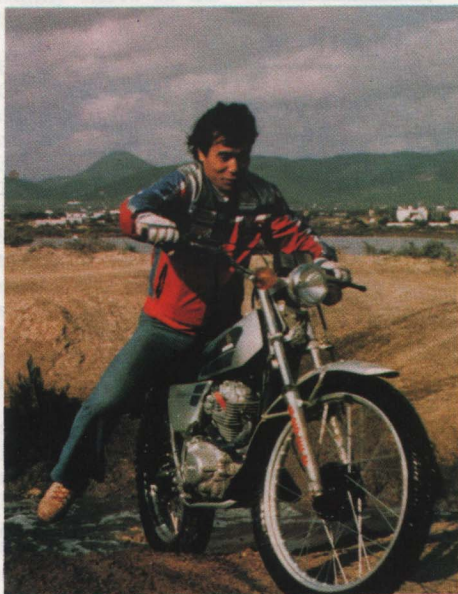


The new range of CR, XR and XL machines

Kiyo Hattori on the works 360 Honda



OFF-ROAD HONDAS IN IBIZA



Designer Kawano rides one of his own

I HAVE often pondered on what special qualifications one might require to become one of those 'lucky brand of men known in the business as road-testers. After all, the thought of being paid to try other people's motorcycles must put you at least part way to Heaven!

Unfortunately, being somewhat slow on the uptake, I have only recently appreciated, almost 22 years too late, that even I was in fact eminently qualified for the job all along . . . and that in not applying, I had sadly wasted all those years.

In fairness, Honda did invite me a few years back to sample their off-road machinery at Donington, I repaid their kindness by promptly bending both myself and a Graham Noyce CR replica, hospitalizing myself for almost seven months. At the time I thought as, ironically, both he and I coincidentally lay in plaster, well, if Graham Noyce can do it, why can't I? But somehow Honda seemed less amused or impressed with my off-road prowess.

My return from the testers' wilderness came with an invitation, coupled to a heavily unveiled threat, to join a similar caper, this time to be held on the Balearic island of Ibiza. Perhaps Honda thought that we intrepid Brits would benefit from a course of treatment from the Spanish National Health.

The event was nicely set up to a format in which works riders, such as world 500 cc moto-cross champion Andre Malherbe and Honda Britain stars Steve Beamish and Kevin Ruddock, ably assisted by world trials championship fourth-place-man Eddie Lejune, put on a thoroughly demoralising exhibition before we mere mortals were .

It was only then that the fateful penny finally dropped, so many years too late. Riding ability has nothing to do with the road-tester's qualifications. All that was needed was raw courage and plenty of fresh air between the



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ears. And while I was perhaps a little short of the former, there an abundance of the latter qualification . . .

Neither Steve Beamish nor Kevin Ruddock seemed to feel unduly threatened by our efforts — antics? — but Andre Malherbe, with his wrist in plaster, and his Belgian compatriot, Lejune, seemed to get bored with the circus and cleared off for a spot of gentle trials practice.

I watched fascinated for a while as they mucked about innocently riding up a gigantic

and sheer quarry rock face, or did back-wheel wheelies and mid-air turns; then, green with envy and writing them off as a pair of flash show-offs. I returned to the task of riding those red rockets.

Perhaps it should be said also that I used to ride in the TV scrambles of the late 1950s, along with such useful men as Jeff Smith and Arthur Lampkin, when it was a gentleman's sport before the foreigners had the audacity not only to nick it but to re-christen it, and then thrash us

in such typically unsporting manner.

Nowadays instead of having conveniently short races which rightly stopped on about the lap that people like me were becoming fatigued, the powers-that-be have gone off and built bikes with such enormous suspension movement that riders need to be 8 ft tall. Those long, fast races now require the stamina of an ox.

Of course it wouldn't do to mention that I twice fell off the CX500 while static and trying to dismount, with neither Morley leg long enough



to reach *terra firma* . . . so I shan't; but it was with some relief that I found that the hulking German, Dutch and Swedish journalists possessed obviously flawless qualifications and had therefore initially nicked all the big bikes on offer.

We were to ride Honda's new range of CR, XR, and XL off-road machines, in convoy with their champions, some over 10 kilometres of difficult rocky and sandy green lanes, from our hotel to the circuit, for the first day's testing, where we should be seen to be brave and butch in our session of rider — sorry, machine — testing.

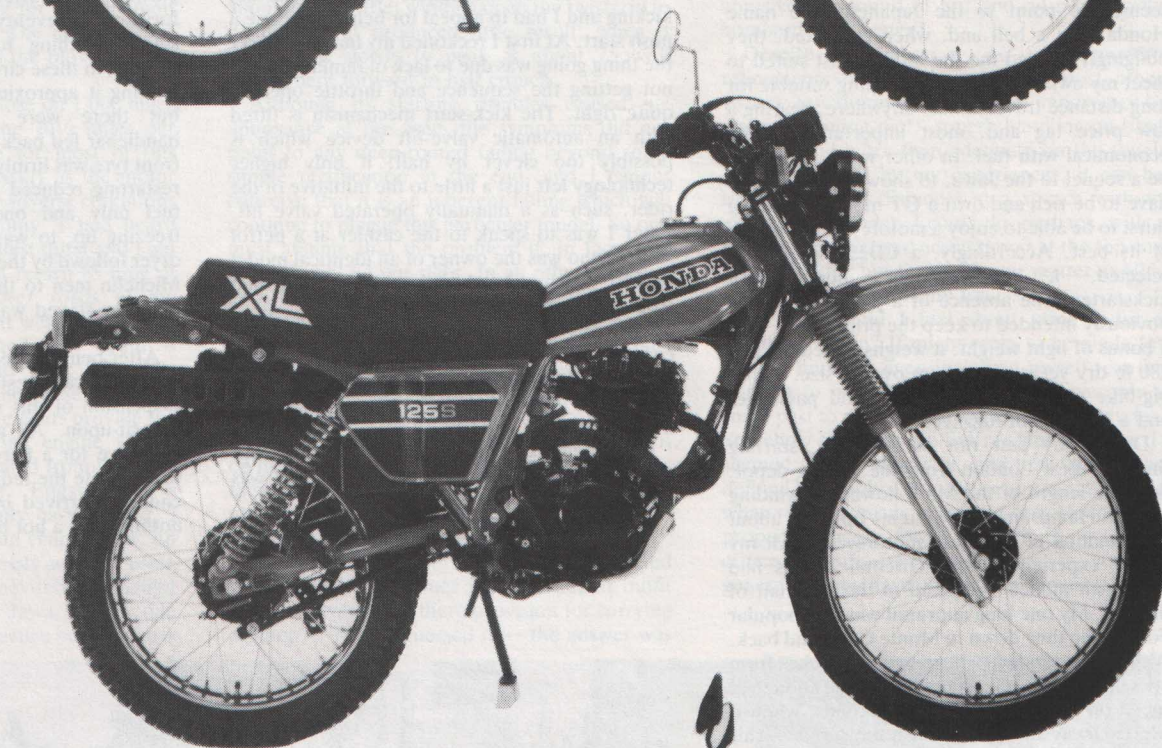
As the hulking Germans, Swedes and Dutch had annexed all the 500s from the park, Morley bitterly complained while inwardly breathing a great sigh of relief when allocated the smaller XR 200 enduro which is, incidentally, the only one of the XR models which will be imported into the UK.

Prior to that point it had been my general opinion that at 5ft 10½in tall I was perfect, indeed beautifully proportioned. Certainly getting the Morley leg over (over a motor-cycle, that is) had never previously been a problem — but there I was acting like a shrill-voiced three-legged kangaroo attempting to mount the 35in high saddle.

Under way through Ibiza's narrow streets and feeling apprehensive on a strange machine while locked into the middle of a pack of about 60, in which the foreigners were busily showing off and wheelying all around me, it came as some relief to reach the rough tracks on which I had a shrewd suspicion egos would be deflated.

The going got harder. After riding over, through or round a large number of fallen continental 500 cc riders, all apparently

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This is the 80 cc version



We thoroughly enjoyed swapping machines during some high-speed trials around that beautiful island



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uttering the password "Schistenhausen", I found myself near the front of the pack and revelling in the handling and pulling power of the little XR200R-C, and definitely lusting after something bigger.

Once at the scramble circuit the continentals, now suitably detuned, did it again. While we were watching messrs Beamish and Ruddock the Krauts nicked all the small-capacity machinery around, leaving a sea of CR480s and XR500s, plus one odd XL500, forlorn and rejected.

Still fancying the bigger model and hardly believing in my luck I bagged a CR500, only to find that its seat height was a full 2in higher than the 200's at 37in, unladen. I walked round it trying to find a way to board the beast, which resulted in my misjudging and landing again in a disgracefully untidy heap.

Honda must have thought they couldn't take me anywhere. But once under way, I at least had the good sense to clear off as far from public gaze as possible, to sort out whether or not I

could actually ride the thing. But it didn't take long to realize why the XR200s had vanished so quickly, for it was 10 times better than its big brothers.

Over the next days our continental friends seemed to fall out or fall off and disappear one by one as we thoroughly enjoyed swapping machines around during some high-speed trail riding around that beautiful island. Although I came to like the XR500, with its enormous power and torque, it just didn't handle.

The seat height remained an insoluble problem. Indeed all the 500s seemed to be nose heavy, and didn't steer, and it wasn't until I took one off on to a main road that I could see much in its favour.

How I would love to pick up one of those XR 500 cc engines, though, for a trials bike, for it plonked like a good 'un and revved and accelerated better than my Manx Norton on the road. Indeed it has a back-kicking punch right up to around an indicated 90 mph, and with time and opportunity would have probably nudged the ton.

Oddly, the XR250 neither went nor handled well (it shares the larger bike's frame and seat height) as the XR200 R, which grew and grew on me to the point where I have no hesitation in saying that it was the finest off road machine that I have ever ridden; and like the 500, it plonked too.

Having so recently completed a series of articles on the classic trials machines, including Triumph's smaller-capacity Cub, I thought it ironic that the XR200 is what the Cub and those British machines might have become with more development. The Honda, though





definitely a big machine, weighs much the same and even has a slightly smaller cubic capacity, at 195 cc against 19 cc. Unfortunately, the similarity ends there for the XR200 doesn't really need any of its six gears, for it pulls like a train, and goes like a rocket in any of them, no matter what the revs. Indeed it would out-perform any 500 cc Ariel or AJS despite its apparently meagre 19 brake horsepower (the sports Cub was rated at 10.6 bhp).

Its engine felt like a good 500 and placed unmodified into a trials bike would, in my opinion, be a winner; so powerful yet so forgiving was it that it would pull a beginner out of trouble.

I could and did tackle some of the local trials sections on it, held back only by the rotten Japanese tyres (common to the whole range), which made riding on dirt seem like crossing a sea of marbles. Yet I could still maintain 60 mph over the rough without feeling a bump, with this model's superb Pro-Link long-travel suspension.

Increasingly I found myself thinking that I had got to have one of these bikes — or perhaps I could find an engine unit for a trials bike. Never before have I had the privilege of riding such a well engineered, powerful and good-handling fun bike.

It did cross my suspicious mind that Honda personnel, intent on slightly detuning us, had deliberately left the tyres bone-hard, a thought borne out by watching one enormous Scandinavian mount his machine, which sank to rock bottom on the suspension, yet failed to flatten an inch at the tyres.

As a trials rider, being used to low tyre pressures, I surreptitiously let the air out of the bikes that I rode. Whilst this helped these Japanese tyres were, in my book, still pretty useless and it was with some satisfaction that I observed that both Lejune and Kiyō Hattori had Pirellis on their works trials machines, and that the development hack 200 trialster that happened to be around was similarly equipped.

At the risk of offending Honda, I must admit to defecting from the moto-cross circuit and scrounging an hour or so on both that development trials machine and Lejune's works 360 cc bog-wheel, the net result of which was to leave me crying in my beer.

The bike on which Lejune finished fourth in this year's world championship is basically the machine on which Rob Sheppard won the British championships, and of course as a four-stroke was right up my street.

Unfortunately, there is not much point in raving about it as I doubt if we shall be able to purchase such works exotica.

Suffice to say that I would go out and chuck my Enfields, AJSs, Nortons, Ariel and Triumph in the dustbin tomorrow in favour of the big Honda.

Prior to 1981 both Lejune and Hattori used the Honda Britain Seeley-framed bog-wheels before both switched to a development Japanese-built 197 cc machine and finally on to





the 360s; but that development 197 Honda was for me the most exciting machine on view.

This RS200T might well one day be on offer. Indeed Mr. Kawano, who is responsible for trials bike development at Honda in Tokyo, was quite forthcoming. He admitted that it is a production machine in Japan and has been so for three or four years.

So far, apparently, they have sold over 200 and the model has already won the Japanese trials championships, in which 60 per cent of the riders choose Honda, 35 per cent Yamaha, and the remainder are split among the Spanish machines and a few Kawasakis and Beamish Suzukis.

Weighing in at only 86 kg and with a short, 1,310mm wheelbase and lowly 724mm seat height, this little bike was magic. Indeed I actually preferred it to the works 360 as it was less fierce, more forgiving. I would say it is the best trials machine I have ever ridden (and I have got a garage full, including the moderns).

Mr Kawano told me that its maximum horse-power, incredibly, was a mere 10.2 at 6,000 rpm, a fact I found difficult to believe for this is less than that of the positively archaic trials Cub.

I just don't know, therefore, why it was apparently so powerful, certainly pulling like my 350 cc Royal Enfield; but I do know that with the front wheel jammed solidly against a rock face and the front brake hard on, it just kept plonking away spinning the back wheel like a threepenny bit with every cylinder beat. . . and I have never found a Cub that would do that.

The engine looked like an XR 200 unit to me but Mr Kawano assured me that it was developed from the TL125 but using an XR250 crankcase and a special flywheel assembly which gave a 66mm bore and 57.6mm stroke, obviously well over square, and with a compression ratio of 8.2:1, for an overall capacity of 197 cc.

The maximum torque of 1.46 kg-M is reached at a lowly 4,000 rpm, the engine breathing through a 20mm carburetor and coupled to

six-speed gearbox, seeming to give power in any gear. All this plus the handling, with long-travel suspension and 64° fork angle, made for a beautiful package which, unfortunately, we still can't buy — or can we?

Mr Kawano, as I said earlier, was quite forthcoming, admitting that his rider Kiyo Hattori had previously contested the world's Trials championship on the Seeley-framed Honda Britain trialster and that he had not been over-enamoured with it.

Would they, I asked, be marketing these machines elsewhere if they had already sold 200 in Japan? "Well, yes, we shall probably sell them in Belgium in 1982 and also, possibly, Switzerland."

Why not the UK? Mr Kawano unfortunately was suddenly busy, remembering a prior commitment and having to rush off. All I can suggest is that the reason that we shan't get this machine is political, in view of Honda Britain's tie up with Colin Seeley.

But given time, who knows? Meanwhile, I shall remember the XR200R and the RS2000T for a very long time.

To my surprise, the smaller XL semi-roadster machines were a lot better than I would have expected, but the Pro-Link XL500 was, to me, just an over-tall nose-heavy camel.

Mr Yoshimi was at pains to point out that the XR, XL and CR range now all received the same technology, suitably aided by competition development, and that Honda philosophy for 1982 had been to define the off-road models as being machines without gimmicks but full of potential.

As he so rightly said, superficial inventions mean nothing to the off-road rider who, at the end of the day, needs to save weight wherever possible. I certainly accept that since I last rode Honda's off-road products at Donington, internal and handling modifications, many as the result of Roger de Coster's practical assistance, have resulted in a range of machinery displaying fine potential despite apparent similarity to the previous year's models.

DON MORLEY

COMPULSORY FITTING OF DIRECTION INDICATORS NOT NECESSARY

THE BMF have come out strongly against the DoT proposals for the compulsory fitting of direction indicators but are in favour of certain aspects of the Department's consultation paper. In their submission to the DoT the BMF point out that the vast majority of new machines already have indicators fitted and any compulsion would therefore have negligible effect on road safety, especially as there is no evidence to suggest that machines so equipped are any safer.

Other points made against the proposals were:

- 1 That machines sold today without indicators are mainly low powered mopeds whose electrical capacity to effectively operate indicators is doubtful.
- 2 Learners on such machines are probably safer learning to hand signal properly than relying on weak indicators.
- 3 Certain types of competition machines, ie Trials and Enduro bikes, would subject indicators to probable damage and, if then used on public roads, could be said to be unroadworthy.

On the plus side, the BMF wholeheartedly support the proposals calling for standards regarding position and wattage, but point out that actual brightness, ie effectiveness in use taking into account generator output, has not been specified.

The consultation paper also proposed to ban indicator "bleepers" and while the BMF do not object to this, they stress the need for the Department to publicize their proposals as soon as possible. This is to save riders the expense of buying one as an after market accessory the use of which may be prohibited in a few months' time.