

RACE TEST

HONDA CR500R

Aimed toward another championship

□ **COUNTRY OF ORIGIN:** Japan
MOTOR UPDATES: Honda big-bores have proven to be too much motorcycle for most riders (whether they admit it or not) during the last two years. Even 1986 500

National Champion David Bailey's works production CR500R was modified to run smoother through a broader powerband. So, in an effort to mellow out horsepower, Honda increased the rod length 5mm (im-

proving mechanical advantage for more torque), lowered compression (6.8-to-1 compared with last year's 7-to-1 ratio), improved the ignition (similar to Bailey's HRC factory unit) and revised the pipe to fit the taller

Whip it? You can play games on the '87 CR500R, but it's a game of wits. The rider who uses smart, precise moves on the slightly heavy-feeling Honda big-bore will come out a winner.



CR500R

Flight time: Air time is neutral and easy to monitor, making tough jumps child's play. Since the inception of the original water-cooled CR500R, Honda has been struggling in an effort to detune the monster and make it more rideable.



cylinder and new chassis. The rest of the motor (including porting) is identical to the '86 CR500R.

POWERBAND: Pure gold! Calmly release the clutch in third gear and you'll rocket out of the gate like a guided missile. If you can't holeshot, don't blame it on the bike. Granted, all the power in the world won't help if it's uncontrollable. That's where the '87 Honda CR500R's real charm lies—it's finally rideable. Run it woy down on the pipe, and the big jug plugs away, spurting out useful torque that transmits into rapid-fire forward motion. Roll the throttle on, and you'll discover the true meaning of warp speed. That's the secret to successfully riding the '87 Honda CR500R—respect its power and use prudent throttle control. Rev out this bike (it *will* rev) and you'll find yourself on the ground. Compared with the '86 powerband, the 1987 CR pulls much more smoothly down low (most of the tendency to stall has disappeared), rockets through a mellower and longer mid-range and features the same amount of revability. It's also slightly easier to start (no Open bikes are easy starters).

CARBURETION: Keihin's 38mm oval-slide carburetor (same as the '86) is a flawless performer. The *MXA* wrecking crew ran a feather 162 main jet and never missed a beat. It has to be one of the simplest carburetors ever designed.

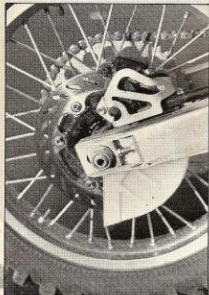
SHIFTING: Why ask? Typical Honda precision—solid and consistent operation, time after time. It's the same transmission as last year's superb unit.

CLUTCH: The clutch hub's rubber dampers are angled to withstand increased abuse. Other than that, this unit is identical to last year's. Operation is perfect—the proper amount of lever feel and clutch-plate control. Expect reasonable life since the fantastic power output requires minimal clutch action. When it comes to service, it's a 13-minute job, thanks to the easy-access clutch cover.

HANDLING: Perfection! When ridden properly, the '87 CR500R pilot will be able to maneuver inside and around anything on the track. Except for a mild case of front-end shake, it does everything right. Use the powerful torque to drive the chassis through the rough, and headshake will be minimal for motocross use. Desert riders—beware! For some reason, the CR500R feels heavy, though it weighs the same as last year's. It's nothing that'll tire you out, but it will remind you that you're straddling a big-bore machine.

FRONT BRAKE: Honda lightened the dual-piston caliper (100 grams) on the 1987 CR500R. It still offers the predictable stopping power CRs are famous for. This brake will last the lifetime of the bike with no maintenance.

REAR BRAKE: Rear disc brakes make the most sense on Open class machines. Their heavier flywheel mass lessens the instant braking power a rear disc is capable of. Pay careful attention to pedal-height adjustment



Matching set: Rear discs are most manageable on Open machines. Riders should be able to adapt to the improved clamping abilities and diminished lever feel. The attractive disc guards show Honda's true lust for detail.



Mystery marvel: Showa's new hard-anodized piggyback shock threw in a surprise performance—it worked! Although rebound damping is on the tight side, it has enough control to satisfy all but the most demanding riders. Service the shock regularly to maintain consistent absorption.



David's baby: For all practical purposes, this is the same bike that clinched the 1986 500 National Championship title. How can you beat that? It also placed second.

CR500R



Trouble-free: And lighter too! When it comes to pucker power, it's hard to fault the smaller '87 dual-piston disc calliper. It's a brake that can last the life of the machine without any servicing.

so you don't accidentally apply the brake when landing from jumps, etc. Once you become accustomed to the rear disc you'll appreciate its potential. A rider needs all the artillery he can get to slow down the rapid Open CR.

FORKS: Increased high-speed compression damping is the only change made to the Showa cartridge units. Spring rate is identical to last year's (21 lbs./in.) and suits the heavier compression much better. Most riders will be able to use the forks as delivered. Rebound is still on the light side but doesn't seem to affect overall performance as on last year's CR500R units (which is odd since the rebound valving is identical).

SHOCK: It works! Showa's hard-anodized piggyback reservoir body holds almost identical valving to last year's CR. Spring rate has also been upped to 313.6 lbs./in. (from 280 lbs./in.). The well-selected damping (for the new shock body) and spring choice provide a very controlled ride in all situations. Once the shock has some hours on it, it'll be necessary to run the rebound stiffer (it's already on the light side) to retain adequate damping. No noticeable fade was felt, although suspension experts question the high-mounted piggyback reservoir (in front of the airbox top and out of airflow). It's strange that the same Showa shock doesn't work on the CR250R.



Destruction: Pick a spot and the Honda CR500R will hold the line like it's on rails. It's important that you use prudent throttle control to run the potent 500 in the heart of the powerband. Revving the bike will throw you off and chopping the throttle can induce headshake.

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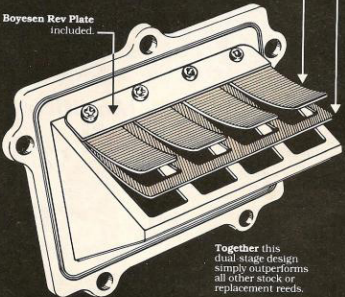
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CR500R

AIR FILTER: A new flat-sided filter (to eliminate rotation) and a better-vented airbox assembly increase intake potential to the potent Open mill. Filter material is clean and access is adequate. No complaints here.

TIRES: It's good to see the Bridgestone M22-23 tires back on the CR. They are excellent hard-track performers that grip on a wide variety of soil conditions. Harder rear sprocket material decreases wear.

ERGONOMICS: Honda redesigned the seat/tank junction in an attempt to improve feel. The tank is still wide and makes moving forward on the bike awkward. A molded-in tank pocket conforms around the extended tongue of the safety seat. Sharp corners on the edge of the pocket offset the benefits of the safety seat. Other than that, the overall rider fit of the 1987 CR500R is first-rate. Attention to detail is perfect—everything on the bike is designed to be as simple and functional as possible.

COMMENTS: How do you sum up the new 1987 CR500R? For all practical purposes, it's the same bike David Bailey raced to clinch the 1986 500 National Championship title (we know, we rode his bike). For the first time in two years the average Joe can jump aboard a CR500 and faithfully attack a course. It's a machine which reinforces the idea that Open bikes are the kings of motocross. The 1987 Honda CR500R will make a believer out of you. □

TUNING UP GUIDE TO CR500R OPTIONAL EXTRAS

• When Honda set out to build the 1987 CR500R, it had an ideal rider and a specific set of circumstances in mind. However, these may not be the same conditions you had in mind. Thus, Honda produces a wide range of optional parts to help you dial in your CR. •

1987 HONDA CR500R FORK SPRING OPTIONS

Light	19.88 lbs./in.
Standard	21 lbs./in.
Heavy	22.12 lbs./in.

SHOCK SPRING OPTIONS

Light	291.2 lbs./in.
Standard	313.6 lbs./in.
Heavy	336 lbs./in.

GEARING OPTIONS

Higher final drive	49T
Standard	51T
Optional standard	(steel) 51T
Lower final drive	53T

SEAT OPTIONS

Low height	3.1 in.
Low height	3.7 in.
Standard	4.6 in.