

RIGHTEOUS riders with two grand to spend on a brand-new bike equally at home on the road, green lanes or through twin-shock trials sections, should now be heading for Appleyards at Keighley, singing 'Oh Lord our help from ages past'.

In these inflationary days, when a new dirt bike will set you back the 10 per cent deposit on a fully-furnished semi with all mod cons including mahogany toilet seat, the return of the TLR is to be greeted with prayers of gratitude to God, who, as we all know, is a cloth-capped Yorkshireman.

Just a few weeks ago the ultimate clerk of the course was listening to Colin Appleyard at prayer and God suddenly roared: "Ee by gum, let them have TLRs..."

And thus it came to pass, and once more TLRs were at large in the land.

If you want a less-colourful, unreligious version, Appleyards were offered a batch of 25 TLR200s which had been languishing for years in some continental warehouse, and snapped them up, with the option on a fair few more.

The Keighley dealership is a veteran of selling recent antiques, having disposed of hundreds of twin-shock TY250/175 Yamahas in the late 1980s. Clearly, they know a good thing when they see one.

And viewed as a true all-rounder, the TLR200 is very much a good thing indeed. The 195cc air-cooled four-stroke motor embodies all the Honda virtues of utter reliability -- I did a lot of miles on two TLRs in the mid-80s and work on the motor was confined to oil changes. This is absolutely vital, incidentally, on Honda's little cammy singles.

For the man who wants a minimum of mechanical complication, the TLR's specs look more pleasing than primitive. Air cooling -- no radiator, shrouds, hoses or pump. Drum brakes -- well, some don't like hydraulics hanging off the bars and prefer drums to discs. Twin shocks -- no complex linkages and expensive bearings to wear out.

But possibly above all, a twin-shock bike is the entree to twin-shock trials, which usually turn the clock back to the dear departed days when sections were unlethal and marking made sense.

On the road, the TLR is a lively little number with brilliant suspension, good handling and a surprising turn of speed. It will top 70mph, and ridden more sensibly the 6.5 litres in the petrol tank will take you almost 150 miles.

The motor develops a modest 13 bhp at 6,500 rpm and does so very quietly. It drives through a six-speed gearbox with well-chosen ratios for road or trail -- but somewhat less so for trials.

When the TLR first came out in late '83/early '84, Honda offered a trials conversion which consisted of a 225cc Power-Up kit and a close-ratio gear cluster. A contemporary trials rider could live without the extra zip, which was pronounced but actually made the bike harder to ride,



TLR RECALL

By BILL & SEAN LAWLESS

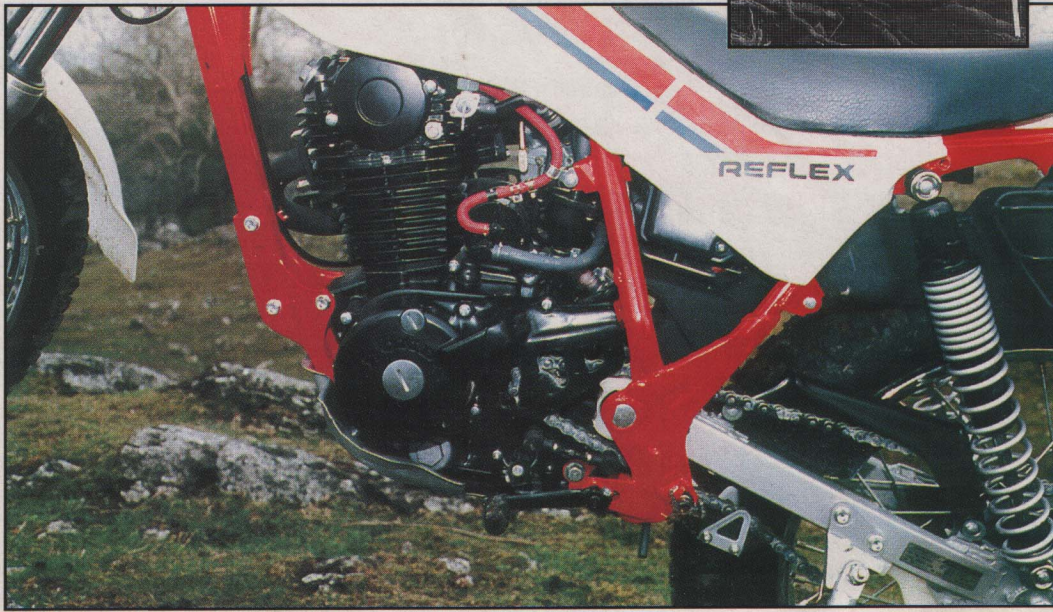
but the CR cluster was a vast improvement. Otherwise you stay down in first and second -- after, of course, you've fitted the nine-tooth gearbox sprocket.

Even so, it is an effective little bike in the sections, which means the power and plonk and the lovely suspension will add a new dimension to your trail riding. I can't think of a quieter, nicer bike for green-laning.

Seat height is a tad over 30 inches, which means that even the most vertically-challenged shortarse will encounter thin air only whilst extending a steadying boot.

For trials work you will also need to replace the standard Bridgestones with something with more comp-cred. Our test bike, supplied by Appleyards, had Dunlops fitted just for us. The Bridges' are fine for road and trail and grip well enough on both surfaces for normal purposes.

Oh, nearly forgot. The other thing you have to do for trials is to remove the gear change linkage and relocate the gear lever straight onto the shaft. It has to stick up almost vertically or else it fouls the clutch housing when selecting bottom gear, but it's something you get used to.



STRIP off the lighting kit, bolt on the new gearbox sprocket, wrestle the rear Dunlop into place, and what you've got is a tasty little trials machine, which is more than capable of carrying you into the twin-shock awards.

Start it up and there's something soothing about the low four-stroke purr, which rises to a smooth growl with a twist of the throttle -- after years on high-revving, single-shocked two-strokes, the TLR is like a breath of fresh air.

On long twisting sections over loose scree, the Honda handles surprisingly well. It's no lightweight --but this extra poundage helps to keep the front wheel on line.

Throw in a few greasy banks and the odd slimy root, and the TLR is in its element. For a 200 it has a lot of zip and its four-stroke power means that grip has never been easier to find -- simply fire it at a snotty bank, roll off the throttle halfway up, and then let momentum carry you over.

The superb gripping qualities also come in handy if you get into trouble. Whereas a big handful on a two-stroke more often than not ends with mega-wheelspin and a back end buried up to the axle, the TLR seems able to maintain an unbroken flow of traction.

The unfashionable drum brakes are gentle and effective -- just as power delivery is smooth, so is braking. Step on the back anchor and the wheel will lock (as it would with a disc) but be subtle and, with the minimum of clutching, your rate of knots will slow.

At the front end there's no harsh grabbing --as both discs and drums are sometimes liable to do-- and no danger of taking a sudden nose-dive over the bars.

Conceived at a time when upside-down forks were unheard of in trials, the front suspension has bags of travel and resists the temptation to bottom out, even with 14 and a half stones of rider crashing down on them!

There is also a surprising amount of movement at the back end-- obviously not as much as a monoshocker --which all goes to provide a smoother than expected ride over big rocks.

One mod which is essential is removing the strange gear-lever linkage designed for ease of use on the road. It's a fragile piece of equipment which isn't up to trials use, and failure to remove it can result in riding the latter half of a trial with only the use of first and second gears.

This is not a problem in the sections-- you shouldn't need to pull more than second gear in any hazard --but, with the Honda's comfy seat, it does tend to restrict those sit-down blasts across the moors.

Above all, what you must remember is it's a fun bike to ride. You're not going to be able to launch it at six-foot steps--well you can but you won't get up 'em! --or bounce the back end round 360 degrees, but what you will do is enjoy yourself...



four-stroke